Discerning and interpreting the organisation of space in the royal palaces during the civil war and commonwealth is not an easy task. Much of the reliable and fulsome documentation that we have for the 1630s from the royal wardrobe and the office of works simply cease to exist after 1641. For Oliver Cromwell the situation is worse; there are no household accounts and virtually no repair or building accounts. Despite this there is enough information - just to say something about Cromwell’s living arrangements and the palaces which he inhabited.

Five months after the King’s death, it was decided by parliament to liquidise his assets and on the 4 July 1649 an Act was passed for the sale of the king’s possessions. A little over a fortnight later another Act made provision for the sale of all Crown lands and buildings. However, it was decided to exempt the main buildings in and around London from the Bill. Thus Windsor Castle, Richmond Palace, Hampton Court, St. James’s, The Tower of London, Somerset House and Whitehall were, for the moment, retained by the state.

There then ensued a long debate. The Republican government was chronically short of cash and needed to sell land fast, but it was also realised that whoever was going to be in charge would need somewhere to live. By the end of 1653 some big decisions had been taken. The first and most important, of course was that Oliver Cromwell, captain-general of the army should be made ‘Lord protector of the Commonwealth’. Let us not beat about the bush... This effectively made Cromwell King in everything but a royal title.

It was also decided that Windsor and the Tower of London would be kept for the Army. Somerset House would become a sort of general HQ for the army, That Richmond would be sold and that Hampton Court and Whitehall would be retained for the Protector and his family.

By Easter 1654, Cromwell was settled at Whitehall as his principal residence. For him, as for the king before him, Whitehall was both residence and seat of government containing many of the offices of state necessary for the governance of the realm. Cromwell and his family lived at the palace till his death in 1658 and then, in the following year, as the financial crisis reached a crescendo, Whitehall itself was put on the market. Of course, Charles II restored it before a buyer was found.

Seventeenth-century rulers, like those of today, also required a country retreat, and Cromwell decided to make Hampton Court his. The reasons for his choice were never made explicit. He could have chosen Greenwich, or Windsor, but Hampton Court was still probably the most lavishly furnished and most beautiful of the royal residences. Cromwell spent most weekends at Hampton Court, uprooting his family, court and officials from Whitehall each Friday and moving as discretely as possible in a heavily guarded barge or coach to the country.

We know little of how Whitehall was used by Cromwell. The period between 1649 and 1654 saw it functioning as a vast complex of parliamentary offices. The old royal council chamber was allocated to the Committee of Trade and the much larger queen's presence chamber became the Council chamber and the guard chamber next door the ante room. A new way was made through to the council rooms from the shield gallery giving direct access from the river. Most other rooms in the palace were allocated to different parliamentary committees, the Committee of Examinations met in the rooms outside the chapel and in the queen's withdrawing room, the chair house in the Holbein gate was the meeting room for the Committee for Scotch and Irish Affairs and the Committee for Jamaica sat in the stone gallery.

In December 1653, the office of works started to prepare Whitehall as a residence for the Lord Protector and his family and the old royal council chamber was refurbished and put back into use. The following spring it was reported that 'The Privy Lodgings for his Highness the Lord Protector in Whitehall, are now in a readiness, as also the Lodgings for his Lady Protecorress; and likewise the privy kitchen, and other kitchens, Butteries, and Offices, and it is conceived the whole family will be settled there before Easter'. The privy gallery which had been used by committees for and ambassadorial receptions during the previous years was cleared and Oliver...
Cromwell moved from the cockpit and took up residence there just as Charles I had done.

We know nothing of the furnishing or use of the former royal rooms under Cromwell. We do know that in 1660 they required major alteration to make them suitable for Charles II. And we should note that there seems to have been no squeamishness about occupying the very same rooms that Charles did. But here at Hampton Court we know more. In 1659, after Cromwell's death a detailed inventory was taken of the palace. The compilers made a distinction between those goods belonging to the state (in other words former ‘reserved’ royal goods) and goods belonging personally to Cromwell. It shows that Cromwell in five short years amassed a considerable wardrobe of fine furnishings and works of art at Hampton Court.

It also tells us much about Cromwell's use of Hampton Court. Here the protector had decided not to use Charles I's state rooms or privy lodgings himself, and they were left as offices and lodgings. The king's dressing room, empty of furniture, was set aside for the lord president, John Bradshaw, and the closet next door set up as a bedroom for his servant; Charles's bedchamber itself was left empty and its closet became the bedroom of another menial servant. Several of the protectoral officers occupied the same rooms as their royal predecessors. Cromwell's son-in-law John Claypole was assigned the same lodgings as Charles I's master of the Horse. Claypole's children had, as their nursery, part of the archbishop of Canterbury's former lodging below. The comptroller of Cromwell's household, Colonel Philip Jones, was assigned the former lord chamberlain's lodgings and the conferrer, John Maidstone, was granted the lodgings of the royal captain of the guard. The chapel vestry was converted into a servant's dining room; the king's oratory was set aside as a lodging for one of Cromwell's court preachers, and the queen's made into a lodging for a Mrs Blowfield. Mr How, another minister, was lodged in the former rooms of Sir Francis Windebank, Charles I's Secretary of State.

Cromwell himself moved into the queen's lodgings and the east front privy lodgings. The 1659 inventory describes these rooms in some detail starting in the queen's guard chamber on the north side of cloister green court. This room was Cromwell's outer chamber, his 'great presence chamber'; the next room, the queen's former presence chamber was Cromwell's privy chamber, and the queen's old privy chamber became Cromwell's supping or withdrawing chamber. Then came the balcony room, the queen's former withdrawing room which had a balcony looking out into the courtyard. This room contained a couch and elbow chairs and so was presumably the functional drawing room. Beyond this came a closet, and then the queen's great bedchamber overlooking the course. This room was Cromwell's 'rich bedchamber' or state bedchamber; it led into the former queen's dressing room, Cromwell's study, which contained a single elbow chair and a 'fine Counterfeit Ebony Table'. Next door was Cromwell's little bedchamber, with his dressing room beyond.

This might all seem simple enough, but I think that the fact that Cromwell opted for these rooms is significant. This afternoon I want to set out to contextualise this choice and make a suggestion about what it tells us of Cromwell's court.

The story I want to tell actually starts in the reign of James I with the major rebuilding of Somerset House undertaken by Anna of Denmark. Anna introduced an innovation that had not been seen before in an English royal palace. This was the arrangement of a great bedchamber and a little bedchamber next to each other in a formal plan. Of course, previous monarchs had had more than one bedroom; but never before built in a single building campaign to an architecturally coherent plan. I have suggested that this indicated that Anna used her great bedchamber for formal public events in the French fashion, again a radical innovation for England. Tudor royal bedchambers were very private places without a role to play in public court ceremonial. I do not know whether I am right about Anne's usage. The documentation is very thin, just a single reference to a public event in her great bedchamber at Somerset House. But what is certain is that a new arrangement of rooms was adopted in the queen's principal palace that was not replicated in any of James I residences.

While Anne of Denmark created the architectural layout of a new sort of bedchamber it was left to her successor to transform its use and decoration on a French model. The interdenominational marriage of Charles and Henrietta was a unique international occasion, and for the history of architecture and decoration in England it opened a conduit between France and England at the very highest level. Henrietta Maria's role in introducing up-to-the-moment French fashions has often been commented upon. She moved quickly and decisively to bring French fashions into her court reflected rapidly in court entertainments.

But more importantly still, Henrietta, like Anne before her was the daughter of a reigning monarch of Europe,
Henrietta Maria arrived in England with an enormous trousseau at the heart of which was a complete set of French bedchamber furnishings of red velvet with gold and silver trimmings. The bed itself was magnificent affair sitting on a red covered dais crowned with four great plumes of white ostrich feather. Three chairs, and six coffers of matching velvet and three large Turkish carpets were also provided as was ‘Une grande Toilette de velours en broderie d’or et d’argent’. This bedroom suite was similar to that which her mother, Marie de Medici, had in her great bedchamber at the Louvre sited behind a great silvered rail. In the French court, the bedchamber occupied a central position in the ceremonial life of the monarch, it was the room in which the most important audiences would be held, treaties signed and proclamations made; the monarch standing by the bed, frequently behind a gilded or silvered balustrade. Thus the bed and its furniture had a vitally important role and symbolic value quite unlike the bedchamber furnishings of the English court.

For Henrietta Maria, the bedchamber and its furnishings were of the utmost importance in establishing her status; while for the English the royal bedchamber was a rich and comfortable but private room. Although the memoirs of the queen’s attendants are often biased and sometimes malicious they reveal that the queen’s bedchamber was a matter of great concern. Two separate French observers describe the queen’s eventual arrival at Denmark House where she was presented with the apartments of Anna of Denmark in which she expected to see a suitably regal bed but ‘she found as her ceremonial bed (lit de parade) one from the reign of Queen Elizabeth, which was so ancient that not even the oldest people could remember ever having seen one in that style in their lives.’

There is no doubt that Henrietta would have liked to redecorate and refurnish Anne of Denmark’s bedchamber along French lines immediately. But the King’s appalling financial situation coupled with the painful dispute over the size and composition of Henrietta’s household meant that little or nothing was done in the bedchamber or in any of her other apartments. Yet within the very modest means at her disposal she did begin to make some changes. Her first task was to appoint a new upholsterer. The man she chose for the task was Ralph Grynder and he immediately began to supply the queen with furnishings in the French style. A bedroom suite was an enormously expensive commission and there was no way in her first years in England that Henrietta could order the sort of bed that she wanted. So at first, the queen made do with the re-hanging of a pre-existing green damask bed. In 1627 this ‘faire field bed of green velvet’ was ‘translated into the French Fashion by order of the queen’s majesty’. What this meant is that by re-upholstering this ten year old bed it resembled a French bed. In other words, a bed with a box-like silhouette with its wooden structure completely concealed by rich hangings. Across Europe this was the most fashionable type of bed and one that entirely relied on textiles as a vehicle of magnificence.

This was clearly only a temporary solution and the fitting up of the bed chamber properly had to wait until 1632. In March that year, a 10ft square platform 6” high was built in the queen’s great bedchamber and a remarkable green and white satin bed delivered. The ‘large rich French Bed of satinate richly embroydered’ was accompanied by ‘A Rayle and Ballaster to incompare round ye bedd silvered and varnished over’. The ensemble also included a second bed, a lit de ange known in the later seventeenth century as an angel bed as the canopy was suspended from above by chains rather than by posts at the feet. This too was of green without and white within. Both the French bed and the angel bed had matching embroidered counterpanes. Finally there was also a pallet bed, a small bed designed for use at the foot of a state bed by body servants. Matching the beds were two very rich carpets for them to stand on ‘embroydered suitable of ye French Fashion’ and two matching window curtains.

Payments for this fantastically expensive suite do not appear either in the accounts of her Treasurer Sir Richard Wynne or in the Queen’s wardrobe bills both of which cover 1632. So it seems very likely that it was sent from France as a gift and was, in fact, the first truly French style bedchamber in England and the magnificent furnishings the first of their kind in London. In 1649 the Parliamentary surveyors valued the suite at £1,000 the most expensive in the kingdom. But perhaps more important than the nature of the decoration was the fact that the queen was equipping her great bedchamber as a room enabling her to receive either from by great bed...
behind a rail or more intimately, reclining on a canopied day bed, in the French manner.

It is very unlikely that any of Charles I’s bedrooms was arranged along these lines by the end of the reign let alone in 1632. What we do know is that he moved his bedroom at Whitehall so as to create a great bedchamber and little bedchamber and that the new great bedchamber was closer to the rooms of estate. I have yet to come across evidence that Charles had a French bed in his bedchamber or that it lay behind a rail. Certainly the Whitehall bed in the parliamentary inventory was only valued at £80, less than a tenth of the value of the queen’s ensemble. What appears to be the King’s bed at Greenwich, where we know nothing of his bedchamber, although valued at £500 is certainly not French - its knobs and posts being prominently mentioned. At neither house is there mention of a rail.

But, of course, do know that Charles re-established a more dignified regime at court. Charles deliberately turned his back on the Jacobean use of the royal bedchamber and re-established Henrician etiquette, dressing in his bedchamber in the same way that Henry VIII had done served only by his bedchamber gentlemen and grooms. Ambassadors and others engaged in state business would not have had their audience in there. The reason he moved his bedroom was almost certainly to expand the territory of the bedchamber providing more extensive private accommodation - not to make space for public receptions. In these areas, the parliamentary inventories show that he displayed his art collection. Charles, as far as we know, continued to use the privy chamber and drawing room for occasions of state.

So why did Henrietta Maria transform her bedchamber at Somerset House in 1632? The Queen’s apartments had been shabby beyond belief until early 1632 - we have seen that by then her bed was over twenty years old. According to the Venetian Ambassador, Henrietta was too ashamed to receive the Duchesse de Tremouille in her bedchamber unless the curtains were drawn and the room was in nocturnal gloom because she was so ashamed of the furniture. In the Summer of 1633, Charles left London for Scotland where he was to be crowned. Henrietta remained in London and while not granted any formal powers of regency was at least nominally in charge and responsible for state ceremonial during the king’s absence. She also held a formal weekly audience with the Privy Council. Somerset House therefore took on the role that Whitehall would have had for Charles and I believe that the queen resolved to use etiquette appropriate to a queen of England who was also a princess of France.

This theory is perhaps supported by the events of 1641. In September that year, Charles resolved to go to Edinburgh again, this time to open the Scots parliament leaving the Queen at Oatlands. Insofar as was possible, she was to act in Charles’s name in executing laws. Henrietta Maria, already the focus of anti-Catholic sentiment had a hard time there arguing with parliament over the education of Prince Charles and facing enormous hostility from the local populace. In the end, she decided to move to Hampton Court where she could be closer to her children (who were at Richmond) and where she would be safer from the ill wishers at large in Oatlands Park. For her arrival, the Queen ordered that her bedchamber be re-configured. Unfortunately it is not clear what the alterations achieved, though we do know they were quite significant. A wall was moved, a door blocked and a new chimney inserted. Later a rich suite of tapestry hangings was moved to Hampton Court from the Tower to adorn the completed room. The motivation for these works can again be explained, I think. The King was away and the queen was once again forced to deal with state business herself. Her bedchamber, the room for the most important consultations, required enlarging and beautifying for the role she had to play.

Now I would dearly like to be able to cite half a dozen occasions on which the Queen was recorded as using these new great bedchambers at Somerset House and Hampton Court for public functions. But I am afraid I cannot. Worse still one of Henrietta’s catholic advisors wrote in a letter to the pope that ‘no one is admitted in her bedrooms except ladies’. But surely this is pious communication. Her little bedchamber was certainly a female preserve but the whole point of a great bedchamber, decorated with the arms of France, and with a bed raised on a lavishly covered dais behind a rail was that it should be a public room. Why else did the Queen spend what little money she had on transforming Anne’s bedchamber at Somerset House and the Queen’s bedchamber at Hampton Court?

So Cromwell moved into suite of rooms on the east front of Hampton Court that had been remodelled by Henrietta Maria after the French fashion to provide a great and little bedchamber. In the ‘rich bedchamber’, Cromwell’s state bedchamber, the 1659 inventory tells us, the trappings of the Stuart monarchy were still in place, but he refurnished the room with fashionable new furniture. A pier table and pier glass flanked by torchers stood between the windows. Although the state bed in here was a former royal bed, the wardrobe contained
two great new standing beds with lavish hangings, one hung with newly imported Indian silk. Another great bed was in the Prince of Wales’s former bedchamber – this one was covered in embroidery and had been brought by Cromwell from Scotland.

These rooms were also still home to the cream of the royal tapestry collection: the Esther series hung in Cromwell’s presence chamber; the Old and New Law in the privy chamber, the fabulous set of Tobias in the withdrawing room, and the Triumph of the Gods in the state bedroom. The set depicting the Morians hung in his supping room, and in his private bedchamber was Vulcan and Venus. In the long gallery remained Andrea Mantegna’s Triumphs of Caesar.

So there we are. Cromwell has a great state bedchamber with a Stuart state bed and walls hung with a Henrician set of tapestries The Triumph of the Gods. Beyond this, was Cromwell’s study and then came his private quarters. The great bedchamber was thus in precisely the same place that William III had it in the 1690s. The study beyond was where the privileged were taken for intimate business. Beyond this were the private rooms with restricted access. At Hampton court in the 1650s, it is likely that the private rooms beyond the study were shared with Mrs Cromwell. The inventory does not suggest any discernible separate suite for her use, and we must assume that they lived together, a departure from royal etiquette.

Now, I would like to be able to show you a picture of Cromwell’s bedchamber at Hampton Court, but I cannot. However I can show you something that adds a lot of weight to what I have been saying. Let me turn attention back to Somerset House. As the Commonwealth became more established it started to need more of the apparatus of a normal European monarchical court. Amongst these things was a place to lodge foreign ambassadors. So from 1655, it was decided to set aside a fine suite of rooms for putting up these important visitors. It was these rooms that were chosen, in 1658 for Cromwell’s lying in state.

Here is a remarkable picture of the Lord Protector lying in state at Somerset House. The bed, though stripped of its foot curtains to provide a better view of the dead ruler, is clearly a French bed. Look at its feathery finials and the boxy canopy adorned with his arms. The room is hung with black cloth – this is what happened when a monarch died; and the rails round the bed are also hung with black cloth. These rails cannot be interpreted as bed rails like the ones that I have been talking of as there are other examples of rails being erected round bodies lying in state. However these are rails round a bed and the impression we have here is of a very regal bedroom which is basically set up in the French style.

Of course what I would really like is to turn up in some foreign archive a brilliant ambassador’s description of being received in the Protector’s bedroom, with Cromwell sitting behind a rail. But sadly no evidence has yet come to light to show how Cromwell actually used the great state bedchamber. Yet we do know that he tended not to use Hampton Court for state business.

When King Charles X of Sweden’s ambassador Christer Bonde let Cromwell know that he ‘should not be averse to visiting him at Hampton Court when he went out there’ so that he ‘might be able to use the opportunity to get upon more familiar terms with him’ he was surprised to be issued with an invitation. Indeed he wrote to King Charles X explaining that ‘It has never before happened that a public minister has been able to visit him in the country’. Although this was not strictly correct (I have found at least two other visits) it was certainly unusual. When he got there he found a very relaxed atmosphere. In his diary, Bonde recorded that he ‘heard music; walked in the park, killed a stag; then to bowling green and played bowls; then kissed the hand of Cromwell’s wife, and his daughter’s cheek; then drank a glass of Spanish wine, and returned to London’. These privileges were rarely granted and a royalist observer reported that Cromwell was ‘exceedingly intimate’ with Bonde. The visit was thus atypical, but the description of one of Bonde’s entourage, Johan Ekeblad, suggests that the presentation to Mrs Cromwell and her daughter may have been in a formalised setting.

Hearing music, playing bowls, drinking wine and kissing people does not accord with the traditional idea of Cromwell. Indeed it might be that one of the reasons for his extreme seclusion and privacy at Hampton Court was that his tastes generated hostility amongst the more puritan sections of society. We know that Cromwell had a taste for classical sculpture. In 1651, a dozen classical statues from Charles I collection were retained by the state for their ‘antiquity and rarity’. These were erected in the privy gardens at Whitehall and Hampton Court. These were full-on naked figures – Venus, Adonis, Cleopatra and others. Sir Henry Wooton expressed a view that was widely held amongst Cromwell’s godly supporters when he thought these statues would be put to
both superstitious as well as lascivious uses.

In 1653, Cromwell received a letter asking him to demolish the statues in the privy garden at Hampton Court because these pagan gods were monsters full of evil. The correspondent thought the wrath of God would descend on the Protector as long as these idols remained in his garden. Six years later, a Quaker cook climbed into the garden with a sledge hammer and started to smash Venus, Adonis and Apollo to prices. By the time he had been dragged away a lot of damage had been done. Imagine what this enraged cook would have done if he had known that Mrs and Mr Cromwell were sleeping in a bedroom adorned by writing naked classical gods and goddesses.

So perhaps this is one of the reasons why we do not get much of a glimpse of private life and the court of Cromwell. His tastes, whilst perhaps understandable for a man of his wealth and education, and certainly expected for a man of his position, were not understood by the more radical element of the population. For them the absolutely expected requirements of a ruler to impress and overawe with architecture and decoration – with fine paintings and tapestry, with rich furniture and plate where incomprehensible. Perhaps for Cromwell, there was a realisation that as he had to assume the powers of a King, he had to conform to the international norms of monarchical etiquette and display.

So although I cannot prove that Cromwell was the first head of state in England to have a state bedchamber reserved for ceremonial and private lodgings beyond that where he slept it looks very much as if this is what he did. We are pretty sure that Henrietta Maria did and that her modernised rooms at Hampton court were deliberately chosen by Cromwell to be his apartments. If indeed Cromwell was using these rooms in such a manner, he was adopting a French form of etiquette that we currently only have a record of being common after 1660. Etiquette and architecture at the Cromwellian Court would have thus been much more in the mainstream of court development rather than being an interruption of it. And Charles II supposed ‘introduction’ of a French style bedchamber into Whitehall in 1660 would not be a novelty, but a recasting of a situation that already existed.

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