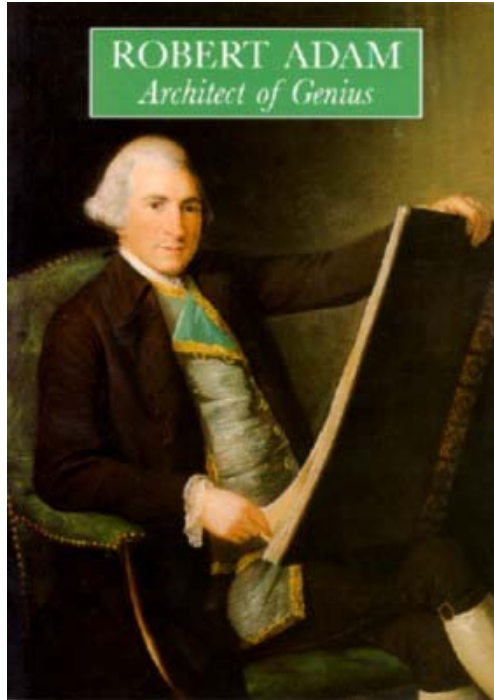


## Robert Adam (1728-1792)

Year	Event	Commentary
1728	Robert is born to William Adam and Mary Robertson, Mrs. William Adam; Robert has an older brother, John, and will have two younger brothers, James and William, as well as "a flock of sisters": Janet (Jenny), Elizabeth (Betty), Helen (Nelly), Mary, Susannah (who married John Clerk of Eldin — who was companion to both Robert Adam and James Hutton), and Margaret (Peggy).	William Adam is himself an accomplished architect and builder; his ancestors were masons, and William lived and worked at a time when the profession of architect was emerging from the builder's craft of masonry; as a result, William as well as his sons were well grounded not only in the principles of design, but in the principles of construction.
c. 1738	Robert attends the High School of Edinburgh.	Robert evidently experienced a family life rich with stimulation, affection, and opportunity (e.g., family discussions about artistic and/or architectural matters); like Watt, Adam loved to build things, but Robert also loved painting; he had a forceful personality, and was the leader of the family (and later the business) after his father's death and his brother's marriage — Robert Adam is a good example of the importance of early stimulation, precociousness, and opportunity in the development of creative genius (see Ochse, ch. 4, and Simonton, ch. 4).
1748	William Adam dies, when Robert is age 20.	John, seven years older than Robert, had been helping run the family business for several years, and Robert also was involved; after their father's death, they ran the business as a partnership, with John providing the business sense, and Robert the artistic sense — once again we see the common pattern of a creative genius losing a parent early in life, although not as early with Robert Adam as with Hume or Smith, for example (see Ochse, ch. 4, and Simonton, ch. 4).
1748– 69	John and Robert Adam are responsible for the design and construction of <i>Fort George</i> , in the Highlands.	Fort George, east of Inverness on the Moray Firth, was built, at enormous expense, to house British troops assigned to police the Highlands after the Jacobite uprising of 1745.
1750	John marries, leaving Robert as head of the Adam household.	The Adams were attractive, intelligent, and sociable, and hence were popular with the Edinburgh <i>literati</i> ; their friends and acquaintances included Adam Smith, David Hume, William Robertson, John Clerk, and Adam Ferguson — it is hard to imagine a more cordial or stimulating group of friends and acquaintances (see Ochse, ch. 3, and Simonton, ch. 6).
1750–	Robert carries on the work of his father,	

57 William, on *Hopetoun House*.

1754– Robert's Grand Tour in Italy (Rome)  
57



Robert spent three years studying classical architecture in Rome and outlying areas of the ancient Roman Empire; three aspects of this experience are especially noteworthy for the student of creative genius:

1. First, Robert's letters and activities reveal a person who is self-directed, focused, and energetic in the pursuit of his professional goals; furthermore, while in Italy he developed his basic ideas about a revolutionary style, based on classical art and architecture, that he would bring back to Britain (see Ochse, ch. 8).
2. Second, Robert had two great teachers, and the sense to devote himself completely as their pupil, while in Italy: Charles Louise Clérissseau and Giovanni Battista Piranesi (see Ochse, ch. 5, and Simonton, ch. 6).
3. Third, while in Italy Robert literally assembled the components of his later compositions, putting a team of artists to work sketching numerous architectural designs, elements, and features; in this way he developed the repertoire of knowledge from which he would construct his later designs, much as Robert Burns acquired a storehouse of folk songs, tales, and poems from his mother and other relatives, that would later make up the stuff of his poetry (see Simonton, chs. 2 & 3).

1758 Robert sets up shop in London, and although it is difficult acquiring customers at first, by 1766 he is the "most fashionable London-based architect" and he is awash in business; his younger brother James is on his own Grand Tour in Italy, and so Robert must run the London branch of the family business alone (John is in Edinburgh).

Robert succeeds by virtue of his talents, his vision, and his family's reputation; his career completes its first phase, located in Scotland and Italy, which is basically a long apprenticeship, and begins its second phase, where he makes a name for himself and develops "the Adams style".

1760– Robert designs and builds *Kedleston Hall*,  
68 Derbyshire.

1761 Death of Mrs. Adam; with the exception of John, the family begins to gravitate towards London.

1761– The Adams brothers work on the *Syon House*,  
69 in Middlesex, England.

1761– Robert Adam redesigns the *Osterley Park*  
80 House, Osterley, London.

- 1763 John becomes a director of the Carron Iron Works — an association that benefits both Carron and Adam.
- 1764 Publication of Robert's *The Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian of Spalatro*.
- 1764–73 *Kenwood House*, London, is remodeled by Robert Adam.
- 1765–69 Robert designs the interiors for *Harewood House*, in Yorkshire.
- 1767–76 Robert designs and builds *Newby Hall*, North Yorkshire.
- 1768 Robert is elected MP for Kinross-shire; "William Adam and Company" begins work on the Adelphi Project, which was the first of a series of overly ambitious projects which would nearly bankrupt the family firm, and cause the formerly closeknit family to splinter.
- 1768–74 Robert Adam builds *Pulteney Bridge*, Bath, Avon.
- 1770–78 The Adams brothers continue the work of their father, William Adam, on *Mellerstain House*.
- 1771–75 Robert Adam designs and builds *Apsley House*, Piccadilly, London
- c. 1775–85 The second phase of Robert's career, with contracts mainly in London, is winding down, and the third phase is slowly coming on; this transition is accompanied by a downturn in his architectural work: "... emerging competition and change in taste, difficult economic circumstances during the American War years, the preoccupation with financial affairs and business deals which must have left Robert and James with less time for strictly architectural work all contributed to bring about a trough in Robert's hitherto ascendant architectural fortunes, a period lasted from the later 1770s to the mid-1780s" (Sanderson, 1992, p. 74).
- 1777–90 Robert's grandest Scottish castle is *Culzean Castle*, Ayrshire
- 1785–93 Robert designs his best known public building, *University of Edinburgh* (Old College)
- 1791–94 Robert's last design is for *Charlotte Square*, New Town, Edinburgh
- 1792 Robert dies on March 3; John dies in June.
- Robert shows a familiar pattern of civil service among the "magnificent seven" of the Scottish Enlightenment; however, Robert Adam performed his civil service as a member of parliament in parallel with his creative work as an architect; the others, including Adam Smith or David Hume, performed their civil service in serial, completing their creative work before going on to careers of primarily service.
- Apsley House was sold to the Duke of Wellington in 1817, and is now home to the Wellington Museum.
- About this time also there is a gradual shift in projects from mainly in England to projects mainly in Scotland (due in part to John's retiring from architectural work); Robert developed a unique castle style for many of his Scottish projects, that was based not on antiquity, but on Scottish and Italian castles and forts (see Tait, 1993); by 1789 his "second career" in Scotland was well underway.

