

CHAPTER FOUR

GARDENERS AND ARCHITECTS

'DO YOUR PLEASURE! I MATTER NOT YOUR FETTERS'

THE FOUNDING OF PENNSYLVANIA

A NEW HOUSE

HUMPHRY REPTON

JAMES WYATT

'DO YOUR PLEASURE! I MATTER NOT YOUR FETTERS'

When Lady Cobham died in 1760 there was no obvious heir, and Stoke Park was sold to Thomas Penn, Lord Proprietor of the province of Pennsylvania, then a British colony in North America. He was the second son of William Penn, the Quaker who founded the colony of Pennsylvania.

William Penn was a truly remarkable man, and his strong character can be seen in this fascinating anecdote told by F. McDermott in his *William Penn, Thomas Gray* about his being arrested in Gracechurch Street in the City of London in 1670, four years after Londoners' nerves had been frayed, not once but twice, first by the Plague of 1665 and then by the

Fire of 1666. The Quakers were being blamed by many for the fire. This was how McDermott created the atmosphere:

One of the soldiers pulling an official-looking document from his pocket, began to read:

William Penn and William Mead, in the King's name we arrest you on the charge of having preached to an unlawful assembly that was met together with force of arms, and has caused terror and disturbance to many of his Majesty's liege subjects.

The tall young man who had been addressed as 'William Penn' turned to his companion with a smile. 'The only arms present are their own,' he said. 'But it is obviously a prepared charge, since they have the warrant written out ready.'

Without offering resistance, the two men were led away, and shortly afterwards the crowd dispersed.

A historian of the period, describing the persecution and imprisonment of the Quakers, says: 'Several poor, innocent tradesmen had been so suffocated by the closeness of Newgate, that they had been taken out sick of a malignant fever, and had died in a few days.'

It was into this same Newgate that Penn and Mead were cast, there to await the next session of the Old Bailey.

This took place on September 1st, but it was not until the third of that month that the prisoners finally stood trial. From the very beginning it was obvious what the result of that trial was intended to be. The Quakers

had to be thrown into gaol by fair means or foul. One of their tenets was that, since all men were equal, respect in matters of outward form must only be shown to the Deity Himself, and hence they entered the court with their heads covered.

A court officer thereupon stepped forward and removed their hats, but at once the Lord Mayor's face became convulsed with rage. His pre-arranged plans were being defeated.

'Put them on again!' he roared. 'And you' – pointing at the prisoners – 'are fined forty marks each for having them on.'

The witnesses called against Penn and Mead could only swear that they had both addressed the crowd. And on this the whole case for the prosecution rested.

Penn admitted that Mead and he had been present at Gracechurch Street, but contended that it was only for the purpose of worshipping God, and asked what law they were stated to have broken.

The Recorder replied, 'The common law,' but on being pressed to state what the common law was, answered testily that he did not propose to go over all the cases of the past thirty or forty years, which constituted common law, just to satisfy the prisoner's curiosity. Penn quickly parried that if the law were common, it should not be so difficult to produce, and quoted the Institutes of Lord Coke as saying that common law is common right, and that common right is the great Charter privileges confirmed.

By now the Recorder was beginning to realise that he had up against him a man who, although only twenty-five years of age, was already learned in the law, and completely lost his temper.

'Take him away!' he stormed; then, remembering that he was not supreme in the court, 'My Lord, if you take not some course with this pestilent fellow to stop his mouth, we shall not be able to do anything to-night.'

'Yes, take him away' agreed the Mayor. 'Turn him into the bale-dock.'

Young Penn's eyes gleamed. 'These are but so many vain exclamations!'



William Penn was a strongly religious man, and his father, a distinguished admiral, sent him to France to cool his fervour. Later, he would go to America to found the state of Pennsylvania.

he said. 'Is this justice or true judgement? Must I then be taken away because I plead for the fundamental laws of England?' Then, turning to the jury, he harangued them passionately, telling them that their wives, their children, even the coats upon their backs would not be safe if they allowed justice to be mocked.

Before he could finish he and Mead were hurried away to the baledock, a particularly filthy dungeon, but not before he had hurled his Parthian shot at the court by pointing out that their action in charging the jury during the absence of the prisoners was entirely contrary to law.

Whether or not it was Penn's impassioned speaking or the love of fair play which reigns in most Englishmen's hearts which caused them to do it, we do not know, but the jury, to the consternation of the magistrates, returned a verdict of 'Guilty of speaking in Gracechurch Street.' This, of course, constituted no crime at all.

They were promptly sent back to reconsider their verdict, but returned with the same words.

Now the Recorder seems veritably to have frothed at the mouth. 'Gentlemen', he is reported as saying, 'you shall not be dismissed till we have a verdict such as the court will accept; and you shall be locked up without meat, drink, fire and tobacco; we will have a verdict, by the help of God, or you shall starve for it!'

Penn, who by this time was again in court, protested against this abuse of the jury. And just as amongst that other twelve, sixteen hundred years before, there had been one who allowed the weakness of the flesh to overcome the spirit, so here one of the jurymen, foreseeing the trouble that was in store for them, pleaded indisposition.

His request for release was not allowed, however, and it is to his undying credit that he appears later to have been just as resolute as his fellows. For, although they were kept all night without refreshment or accommodation, and brought into court at seven next morning, they still returned the same verdict.

When Penn chose his moment to protest once more against the treatment the jury were receiving, it was too much for the Lord Mayor, and he positively screamed out the instruction to 'Stop his mouth, jailer. Bring fetters and bind him to the ground!' while the Recorder observed that until now he had not understood the necessity for the Spanish

Inquisition, but it would certainly never be well for them till something of the sort were introduced into England.

Penn's only reply was one of intense dignity: 'Do your pleasure! I matter not your fetters.'

The jury, upon refusing to reconsider their verdict further, were forced away and kept without food, drink or comfort until the 5th September, when they were again brought into court and made to reply to the question as to whether the prisoners were guilty or not guilty.

Weak from starvation, the foreman rose slowly to his feet. Then, staring the Lord Mayor straight in the eyes, he said firmly:

'Not guilty, my Lord.'

Each of the other eleven arose and in their turn confirmed the verdict.

Thereupon came the final act of this appalling travesty of justice. Each individual in the jury was fined forty marks for refusing to give the verdict required, and since neither they nor the prisoners would pay the fines, accused and the jury who had so nobly stood by them were together thrust into the noisome horror that was then Newgate Prison.

Penn and Mead, though probably able to do so, could not conscientiously pay the fines which had been imposed upon them. But Penn's father, hearing of his son's plight, sent the money privately, and both William Penn and Mead had to be released.

Just what happened to the gallant jury, however, is not known. But the staunchness of their attitude, their refusal to be intimidated and their readiness to suffer even starvation and incarceration rather than send one of their fellows unjustly into prison are such typically British attributes that even to-day we cannot read of their heroism without a glow of sympathy and pride.

William Penn had been born in the parish of St Catherine on Tower Hill, London, in 1644. His father was one of the most distinguished admirals of the day – he captured Jamaica to make it one of the most important outposts of the Empire – and his mother the daughter of a respected Amsterdam merchant. (The fact, as we know from Pepys, that the Dutch kept

attacking London in the 17th century obviously did not deter the admiral.) Admiral Sir William's country residence was at Wanstead in Essex, and William junior was sent to the grammar school in Chigwell. After a short time under a private tutor he went up to Christ Church College, Oxford.

He was already showing signs of religious fervour, and he was 'sent down' for tearing surplices from their wearers. His furious father sent him to France where he hoped other interests (girls, perhaps?) would divert his interest away from religion. He returned to become a student reading law at Lincoln's Inn and then saw service in both the Dutch War and in suppressing a mutiny in Ireland.

THE FOUNDING OF PENNSYLVANIA

After various scrapes with the authorities similar to the one seen above, he married and settled in Rickmansworth. However, his life was to change dramatically when he was asked to be a trustee for the creditors of one Edward Byllinge who had been left some land in New Jersey. Following the death of his father, he learned that he was due £16,000

(£1.75 million in today's money) from the government, and asked if he could receive it in land. This was eventually agreed, and land west of Delaware was given to him and named, in honour of his father, Pensilvania (as it was originally spelt).

As Niall Ferguson put it in his magnificent *Empire – How Britain Made the Modern World*:

Overnight this made William Penn junior the largest individual landowner in British history, with an estate well over the size of Ireland. It also gave him the opportunity to show what the combination of religious fervour and the profit motive could achieve. Like the Pilgrim Fathers, Penn was a member of a radical religious sect: since 1667 he had been a Quaker, and had been imprisoned in the Tower of London on account of his faith. But unlike the Plymouth colonists, Penn's 'Holy Experiment' was to create a 'tolerance settlement' not just for Quakers but for any religious sect (provided it was monotheistic). In October 1682 his ship, the *Welcome*, sailed up the Delaware River and, clutching his royal charter, he stepped ashore to found the city of Philadelphia, the Ancient Greek word for 'brotherly love'.

Penn understood that if his colony was to succeed it would have to be profitable. As he put it candidly: 'Though I desire to extend religious freedom yet I want some recompense for my trouble.' To that end, he became a real estate salesman on a grand scale, selling off huge tracts of land at knockdown prices: £100 bought 5,000 acres. Penn was also a visionary town planner, who wanted his capital to be the antithesis of overcrowded, fire-prone London; hence the now familiar American grid system of streets. Above all, he was a marketing man who knew that even the American dream had to be sold. Not content with encouraging English, Welsh and Irish settlers, he promoted emigration from continental Europe by having his prospectus translated into German and other languages. It worked, and between 1689 and 1815 well over a million continental Europeans moved to mainland North America and the British West Indies, mainly German and Swiss.



On 8 November 1682, at the confluence of the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers, Penn marked out what would become the city of Philadelphia. He returned to England to settle a dispute with Lord Baltimore over the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland, but returned to Pennsylvania in 1699. His first wife died and he married a second time. The three sons of his second marriage who survived infancy, John, Thomas and Richard, succeeded to the joint proprietorship and government of Pennsylvania.

John Penn (the grandson of William), in his account of the history of Stoke Poges written in 1813, goes into considerable detail on the years that his father Thomas lived in the house at Stoke Park:

In this same year, 1750, likewise, a plan for modernizing Stoke was drawn by another genius, the celebrated Brown, who had long lived with Lord Cobham, assisting him in the improvements of Stow. This plan, having remained at the old house when purchased, is in the possession of the present owner; and had, in common with that afterwards adopted, the object of producing the appearance of a natural river, by uniting five quadrangular pieces of water, more suited to the taste of former times. Brown was born in 1716 (the same year with the poet of Stoke) at a house, now no longer in existence, of the old village, in Kirkharle parish, Northumberland. He was the first employed in the garden of Sir Charles Lorraine, in that parish. He left the North in 1739; and it has been said, that the first piece of water which he formed, was at Lady Mostyn's in Oxfordshire. It was, however, in consequence of an enquiry made near this time by Lord Cobham, from a nurseryman, whether he knew of any

John Penn was responsible for many alterations to the Manor House in Stoke Park, though he was at pains to point out in his *Historical and Descriptive Account* that he was not destroying an important and significant historical building.

one who could continue with him at Stow, able to converse instructively on his favourite pursuit, but free from vanity and conceit which had rendered his former assistants disinclined to alterations upon which he had determined, that Brown, already a landscape gardener, became an inmate of the princely mansion. So that, though Lord Cobham zealously patronized him, he there allowed him no opportunity for substituting any designs of his own to those of others. At the same time we may imagine, that, both at Stow and at Stoke, he met with some persons, congenitally jealous of the encroachments of formal art on irregular nature, to compensate by their valuable praise for this restraint on his talents.

Shortly after Lady Cobham died on 29 March 1760, Brown moved to Hampton Court when he was appointed Royal Gardener by King George III. When in London, he lived with his daughter in Hertford Street in Mayfair, and it was outside the door of the Earl of Sandwich's house in Hertford Street that he collapsed and died in 1783 when he was returning from a party at the house of the Earl of Coventry.

In 1771 Brown had been invited back to Stoke Park. In John Penn's words:

A design taking down the old house, and of building a new one, had become a topic of country conversation, about the period when the grounds were undergoing alteration. But Mr Penn, at length, contented himself with employing Mr Leadbeter only to repair the principal suite of rooms, called the Great Apartments; restoring and preserving their ancient character. Before this time, therefore, all the works ceased at Stoke Park.

Juliana Penn was the fourth daughter of Thomas, first Earl of Pomfret, whose house was at Easton Neston in Northamptonshire. She married Thomas Penn in August 1751.





An urn commemorating Juliana Penn. On 30 June 1798 the painter Joseph Farington wrote in his diary: 'In 1702 father of the present Mr Penn was born, did not marry till he was 48 years of age, when he married Lady Juliana Fermor. Thus Mr Penn, is grandson to William Penn, a remarkable circumstance; only 3 generations in 158 years.'

Mr Penn, in making his decision between the alternatives of repairing and rebuilding, might have looked forward to a more advanced state of the art to which those undertakings belong; and to a superior excellence in its professors. And the structure of the Pantheon, which was erected in this very year, might, if he had not laboured under the illness which at length terminated in his decease, have given him the satisfaction of thinking; that there now existed an architect, (the same who has eventually been employed,) worthy of executing the task, the expediency of which had already been made a subject of deliberation.

Thomas Penn also had a London town house where he kept all his papers relevant to the family estates in Pennsylvania and where he spent £3,000 (£330,000 in today's money) constructing a strong room to keep those papers safe. According to Nicholas Wainwright in *The Penn Collection*:

Although the Penn papers were never kept at Stoke, it furnished a magnificent setting for an accumulating collection of family portraits by England's best-known artists, and of busts, pastels and miniatures of various Penns and their marital connections.

A NEW HOUSE

In 1775 Thomas Penn died, and the estate passed to his eldest son John, at fifteen years of age still a minor. Nevertheless, he began to think about building a house in another part of the park. In John Penn's words:

During his early years, the new possessor often contemplated with pleasure a part of the park, which, it appears, many of the neighbours had regarded as an eligible situation for a house. Though ignorant at the time that the subject had even been under discussion, Mr Penn frequently expressed an intention, to take advantage of that position in a maturer period of his life; if ever any such necessity, should appear, as afterwards occurred, for building from the ground.

However, any developments on the estate were postponed by the American War of Independence. John Penn went to both Europe and America.

Following the War of Independence and the establishment of the United States of America in 1776, the Pennsylvania Legislature took away the Penn family's proprietorial rights, though it allowed them to keep their personal lands. John Penn later calculated that the family, with its 75 per cent share of the rights, lost no less than 21 million acres. The compensation voted by the Commonwealth was £130,000 (nearly £15 million in today's money) and the English Parliament voted a £4,000 (£450,000) annual pension in recognition of the family's American losses. John Penn received 75 per cent of these sums.

On returning to Stoke Park from Geneva in 1789, Penn felt that the Mansion had begun 'to demand very extensive repairs (chiefly, from the destructive consequence of damp in the principal rooms)' and 'it was judged advisable to take it down'.

In his *Historical and Descriptive Account*, John Penn wanted to make it clear that he was not destroying an important and significant historical building. He wrote:

The style of architecture was not of a kind the most likely to dissuade him from this undertaking. Most of the great buildings of Queen Elizabeth's reign (observes Mr Warton) have a style peculiar to themselves, both in form and finishing; where, though much of the old Gothic is retained, and great part of the new taste is adopted, yet neither predominates; while both, thus indiscriminately blended, compose a fantastic species hardly reducible to any class or name. One of its characteristics is the affectation of large and lofty windows; where, says Bacon, 'you shall have sometimes faire houses so full of glass, that one cannot tell where to become to be out of the sun.' *Essay on Goth. Archit.* It is true that high antiquity alone gives, in the eye of taste, a continually encreasing value to specimens of all kinds of architecture; but besides that the superiority of the new situation was very manifest, the principal rooms of the old mansion, at Stoke (where the windows admitted the light from both the opposite sides) were instances, peculiarly exemplifying the remark of Bacon, and countenancing the design to lessen the number of the bad and encrease that of the good, examples of architecture in this country.

One wing was retained 'as a memorial harmonizing with the surrounding scenery, and to form, with the rustic offices and fruit-gardens annexed, the *villa rustica*, and *fructuaria* of the place'.

So, in 1789, the foundations were laid for another 'spacious structure' in another part of the park, the situation chosen years before by a young John Penn, and originally suggested to his father in 1765 by Field Marshal Sir George Howard and Capability Brown. The architect was 'Mr Naismith, an architect of good character'. However, Robert Naismith, though a pupil of Adam, was virtually unknown.

During the 1780s and 90s, Penn became friendly with the painter Joseph Farington, who was not only an accomplished artist but also an assiduous diarist. On 5 June 1799,

Farington wrote in his diary:

It was determined this evening, 5 June 1799, that a pillar in commemoration of Sir Edward Coke shall be erected in Stoke Park, and not a monument.

Later Penn showed Farington a drawing of the pillar intended for Coke. This had clearly not met with unanimous approval because, on 5 July 1799, Farington wrote:

Mr Penn is a little hurt at the King saying to him on the Terrace on Sunday last, 'What a pillar to Sir Edward Coke too?' as if there was an impropriety in erecting one.

And, on the subject of the Coke monument, on 6 October he followed up with:

Rossi called. I asked him price of a statue of 8 feet high, in artificial stone, of Sir Edward Coke, to be placed on Mr Penn's pillar. He said it would amount to £100 [about £12,000 in today's money].

And on 15 October:

Rossi called and told me he would execute a statue of Sir Edward Coke for Mr Penn's pillar for 80 guineas [about £10,800 today] – also that he would model and cast from it a Head of Sir Isaac Newton for 12 guineas [about £150].

And finally, and happily, Farington was able to record on 20 November 1799: 'Mr Penn called, daily more in love with his house etc at Stoke.'

HUMPHRY REPTON

It is at this point that the great gardener Humphry Repton appears on the scene. Born in 1752, Repton tried a number of careers – textile merchant, country squire, private secretary, art critic, essayist, transport entrepreneur – none of them with much success, before embarking in 1788, at the age of 36, on the career in which he definitely did achieve success and fame.

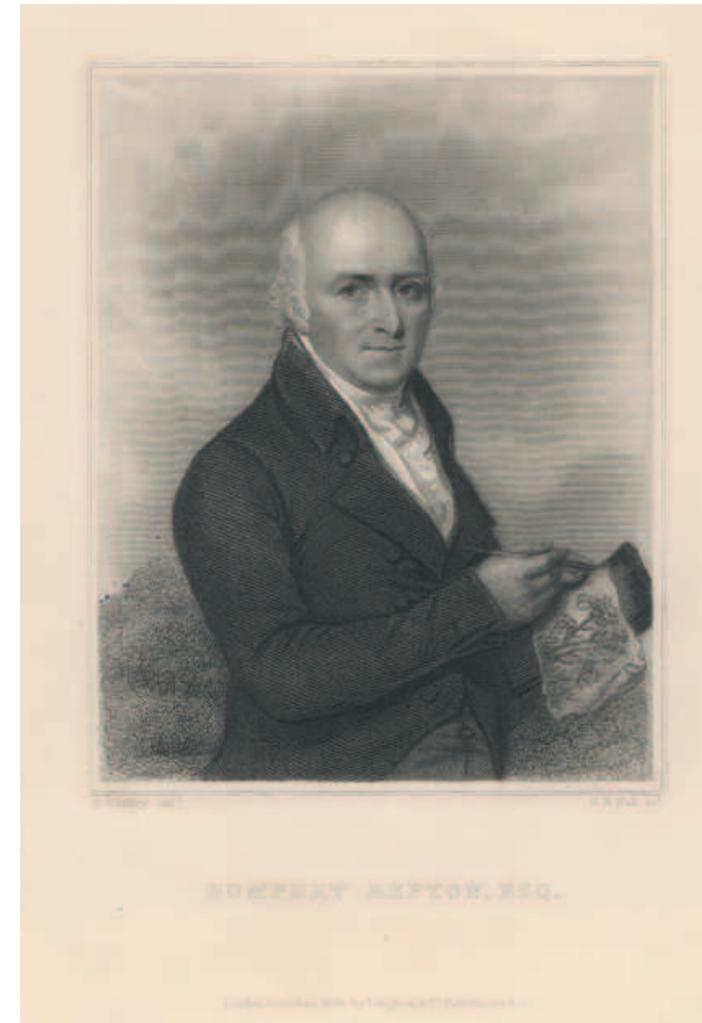
Repton inherited the mantle of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown but, unlike Brown, hived off the contracting side of the business to concentrate on consultancy. Whereas Brown had drawn up large-scale plans, Repton gave his clients watercolour drawings and detailed written instructions, often bound in morocco leather. They became known as Red Books. The texts often went into the theoretical as well as the practical, as he tried to raise the status of landscape gardening. As Stephen Daniels put it in his *Humphry Repton, Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England*:

Landscape gardening for Repton was never merely a business about the grounds, or a vocation concerned with portraying and improving the countryside. It was a profession that gave him an entrée to the company of the best circles, and the opportunity to frame their cultural concerns in terms of art.

Repton soon established himself and, in a career spanning nearly 30 years, carried out more than 400 commissions. (By coincidence, his second commission was at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, owned by the Coke family, descendants of Sir Edward Coke, who, as we saw, had owned Stoke Park from 1603 until his death in 1634.) His career, taken in the round, established Repton, quite rightly, as one of the country's leading landscape gardeners. However, it was not without relative failures and controversy, and indeed John Penn hints at some setbacks in the work he did at Stoke Park:

Mr Repton, at the same time, gave the general plan for the plantations which the new situation of the house required; and though, in proceeding to execute this plan, unforeseen improvements appeared practicable, which occasioned a departure from it in other parts of the ground, yet the mode in which the water terminates at its two extremities, being well adapted to the situation of the new house, remains a proof of his skill. The precise spot also where the sarcophagus stands, was chosen with his assistance; and the bridge was placed and planned wholly by his judgement in the year 1798.

The Red Book (although now recovered in green leather) relevant to Stoke Park is still in existence and shows that the initial designs of 1792 were constantly reworked. The only



The great landscape architect, Humphry Repton, born in 1752, tried many other careers – textile merchant, country squire, private secretary, art critic, essayist, transport entrepreneur – before finding his true calling, in gardens, at the age of 36.

features of Capability Brown's design to survive the Repton changes were the two lakes and the cascade which are still in place today.

Within a few years, John Penn, not entirely happy with everything, was writing:

But the distributions of the interior parts of the house, and all the elevations, have since been entirely altered.

JAMES WYATT

Penn was advised to find a new architect, and after seeing the fine interior architecture of 'the late Pantheon', while illuminated for the entertainment given by the Club at White's in celebration of His Majesty's happy recovery in 1789, he appointed James Wyatt.

Wyatt had designed the Pantheon in 1770. It consisted of a large central apartment and gallery under a cupola, and was surrounded by several small rooms. Underneath was an underground storey with a tea-room of the same area as the

The Repton lakes were a joint effort. Devised by Capability Brown, Repton retained and improved them.

cupola room and a few small apartments. The opening was on 27 January 1772, when *The Gentleman's Magazine* wrote:

Was opened for the first time the much talked of Pantheon to a crowded company of between fifteen hundred and two thousand people. Imagination cannot well surpass the elegance and magnificence of the apartments, the boldness of the paintings, or the disposition of the lights, which last are reflected from gilt vases, suspended by gilt chains.

Edward Gibbon wrote:

The Pantheon, in point of ennu and magnificence is the wonder of the eighteenth century, and the British Empire.

According to Antony Dale, who wrote a biography of Wyatt:

All the fashionable world rushed to see and to admire the magnificence of the building. The early seventies were probably the gayest and most care-free period of the eighteenth century in England, and the fêtes and masquerades, for which the Pantheon had been reconstructed, at first took the town by storm. The King and Queen attended, and admission was regulated by persons of distinguished rank, and reputation. One would gather from a satirical poem called 'The Pantheon Rupture' written on this subject in 1772, that more emphasis was placed upon the rank than on the reputation, and a title was a better recommendation for admission than a spotless character. But in any case, the company was selected, if not select, the suppers hot and sumptuous, and the wines choice and abundant. 'People of the first fashion of both sexes went in character and many eminent wits also, in appropriate costume, sustained their assumed parts with that spirit and vigour which may vainly be sought in a modern masquerade.'

While he was working on the house, Wyatt also finished his

commemorative sarcophagus of Thomas Gray; and in 1800, the Doric column supporting a statue of Sir Edward Coke, by Rossi, was also finished.

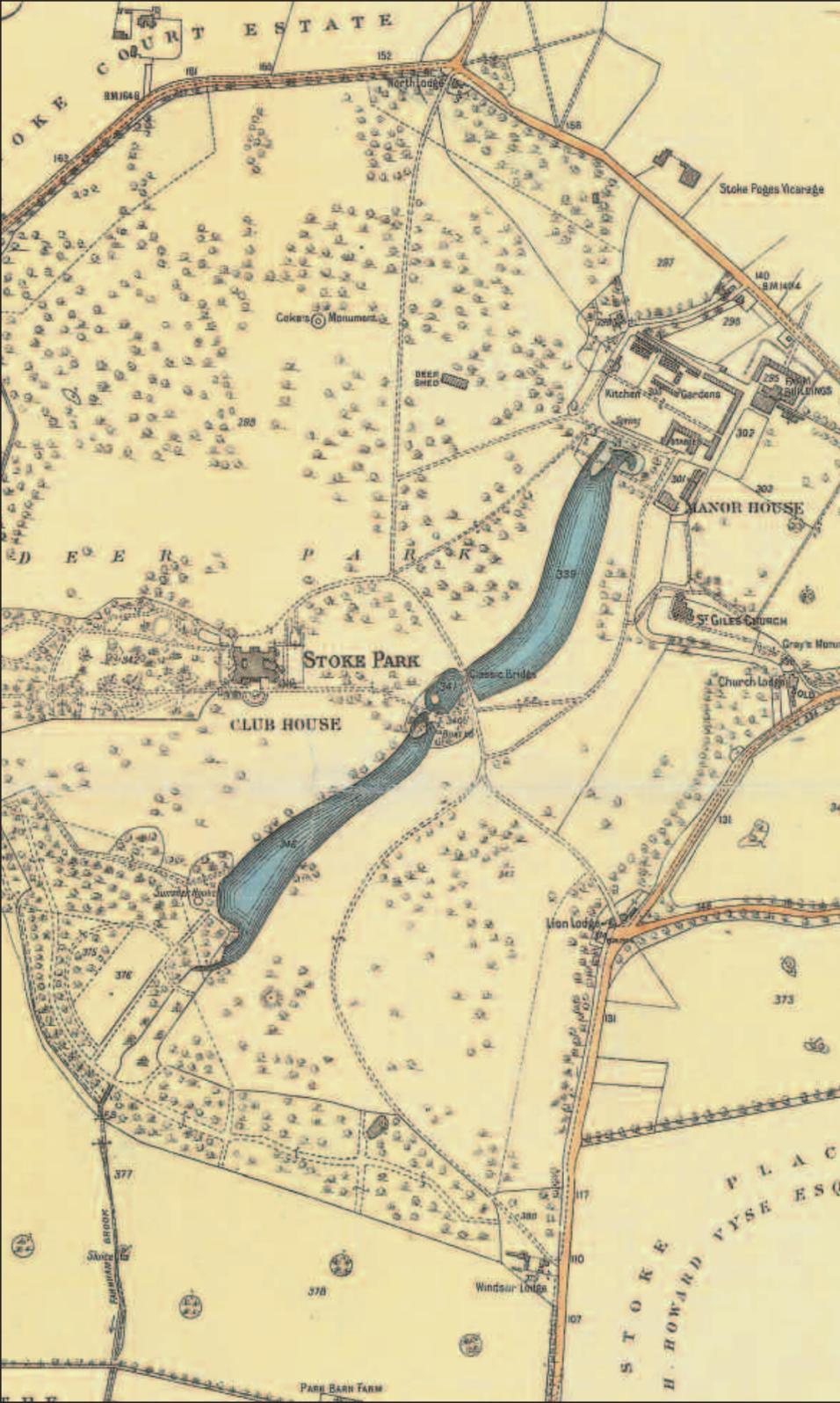
John Penn did not stop at the house in improving both Stoke Park and its surroundings. In 1802 the Vicarage House was pulled down (one advantage was an improvement in his view) and a more elegant house built nearby to replace it over the following two years. James Wyatt designed this house, one of the few small houses he worked on. Following that:

The mansion-house having been much enlarged, by the addition of the two south wings; the library, which before was 80 feet, was portionably lengthened by taking in parts of those wings, so as to extend it to its present dimensions. This whole space began to be inhabited as one room in the year 1808.

It was clearly not all plain sailing, as can be seen from this entry in his diary on 22 August 1797 by the painter Joseph Farington (see his paintings of the Mansion on the jacket of the book and on pages 90 and 92):

Penn's House (Stoke Park) was begun by Naismith, a person who had been under Adam, and was recommended by Sir George Howard – owing to the bad design it cost Mr Penn £10,000 [about £1.2 million in today's money] more than it ought to have done. Wyatt would not have placed a Colonnade to the aspect which it is but did it from necessity in order to join its wings – The Library was 3 rooms.

Although relations between Penn and Wyatt became a little strained – 'Penn, he thinks has been cool towards him' – Penn was still taking Wyatt's advice, even if he was doing it



through Farington, who wrote on 25 June 1798:

Mr Penn called to desire me to write to Wyatt for his opinion whether a design for finishing a Billiard room at Stoke given by Paine is such as Wyatt approves of.

From Farington we learn of Penn's daily routine. On 1 July 1798 he wrote:

Mr Penn told me his habit is, to set up every night till about 2 o'clock reading etc and that he rises about 10 o'clock.

Farington himself was obviously used as a sounding-board by Penn, as this entry in his diary of 3 August 1798 makes clear:

Mr Penn and I called Smirke this morning. Smirke carried his designs for the Chiaro oscuro pictures intended for the Library, which Mr Penn approved.

And Penn continued to consult Wyatt. Here is Farington's entry in his diary on 8 December 1798:

Mr Penn consulted Wyatt about a monument to the memory of Sir Edward Coke. Wyatt thinks it ought to be designed agreeable to the Architecture of that day, something like the designs of Inigo Jones before he went to Italy, a mixture of Gothic and Roman manners.

Where did Penn find the money for all this construction and furnishing? Farington wrote on 24 February 1795:

Wyatt, I called on. Mr Penn, the representative of that family came in.

Wyatt says he is a remarkably shy man. He has £4,000 [about £480,000 today] a year from the British Government and large estates in Pennsylvania. The Government of that province gave him £100,000 [about £12 million] for the Royalties he held.

Nikolaus Pevsner wrote:

[James Wyatt], by additions and alterations, probably c. 1800–8, made Stoke Park the most impressive of all late Georgian houses in Buckinghamshire.

Penn also employed a librarian to look after the books. The panels above the bookcases incorporated twelve grisailles (a grisaille is a painting executed entirely in monochrome in a series of greys) by Robert Smirke. A marble bas-relief by John Deare was also built above the fireplace. It had been commissioned from Deare in Rome along with a bust of Penn himself. (The bas-relief, representing a scene from Caesar's invasion of Britain, is now in the Manor House and the bust is in Eton College library.)

And in 1808:

About the time that the elevation of the structure was assuming its present appearance, by means of the alterations which the enlarged plan rendered necessary; and which varied the form of the south front, and added height to the observatory; a plan for giving a more distinguishing character to the dressed part of the grounds (divided off from the park, long before, under the direction and after the design of Repton,) had begun to be executed, by an unusual mode of interspersing urns, busts, and garden-seats, among the trees and shrubs. It occurred, at the same time, that an opportunity was thus afforded, for making 'images reflect from art to art,' or realizing such a fancied scene as that presented to the

reader of poetry by Mason, (in the 4th book of his *English Garden*,) by a garden founded on the same principles of art. This work, begun in 1810, has now made a considerable progress towards its ultimate effect.

Penn then turned his attention to the parish of Stoke Poges. A plan for the 'General Enclosure' was recommended and, after discussion, unanimously approved by the land-holders. Nevertheless, it still required sanction by Act of Parliament, which it received in 1812. A material part of the plan was the reservation of 200 acres, or about two-fifths of the waste-land, which was allotted to the cottage-owners 'in satisfaction of their ancient claims'.

John Penn died in 1834, and for the next ten years his brother Granville lived at Stoke Park; but Granville's son, Granville John, inherited the estate in 1844 when Granville died – exactly 200 years after his grandfather had been born. It was a nearly incredible story of longevity: father, son and grandson spanning 200 years.

Lionel Rigby noted that an American, John Jay Smith, stayed at Stoke Park House in 1845, and these were his reminiscences:

The family of Stoke Park then [1845] consisted of the widow of Granville Penn – her husband then very recently deceased – a very old lady, Granville John (son of Granville), three unmarried sisters, and the youngest brother William, who was educated at the bar. The mother, three daughters and the three sons are now [1867] all deceased but a more happy and united family than they formed twenty five years ago it would be difficult to describe.

Their surroundings were of the very first class, as regards a truly noble



James Wyatt, an architect most famous for his work on the Pantheon, was recruited by John Penn to help complete the design begun by Robert Naismith on his new Mansion at Stoke Park.

residence, an extensive and perfectly kept park, abounding in deer and other game, a library of great size and value, liveried servants, fine horses and coaches, with everything that could make life desirable.

The picturesque park that has seen so many successive generations come and go, as we rambled amongst its beautiful and ancient trees, was as silent as any scene in our own native forests. The servants had mown the extensive lawns, the hot-house gardeners had set out the Italian portico with newly flowered plants, covering the pots with lycopodiums and mosses, and the attendants had all disappeared before breakfast was announced; every sound was stilled and the place was all one's own.

The deer silently wandered amongst the ferns half as tall as themselves; the librarian, himself a learned man and an author of merit, was at his post to hand the guests any book they required.

One felt assured on passing the great entrance hall beneath a funeral hatchment of the late proprietor, that he was not entering the house of consistent Quakers, for one of the first objects was a pair of brass cannon, taken by Admiral Penn in his Dutch wars, elegantly mounted and polished; and near by, opening on the left, was a fine billiard room. Family prayers were not neglected; the numerous servants were regularly assembled, as is the usual custom in England; the service of the day is reverently read, and all, from the head of the house to the humblest individual, on their knees to give thanks for mercies received.

The house was not wanting in memorials to Pennsylvania, a large portion of the Treaty Tree, sent by some members of the Historical Society, with a silver label on it, ornamenting the grand drawing room of the second storey which was reached by a long, and rather fatiguing marble staircase. The birds of Pennsylvania too were represented in elegant glass cases, together with Indian relics, and a finely preserved beaver which animal was once the annual tribute of the Penns to the Crown.

In spite of the money granted to John Penn after the losses of their American estates, by the time Granville John inherited Stoke Park he could not afford to maintain it, and he moved to West End House, the former home of Thomas Gray. At

least he was able to enlarge it and, when he had done so, renamed it Stoke Court. Stoke Park itself was offered for rent and then, in 1848, sold to Henry Labouchere, a Cabinet minister later created Baron Taunton.

Nevertheless, Granville John's financial woes continued and, in 1851, he not only sold Stoke Court but also, in a six-day sale at Sotheby's, sold off half the Stoke Park library assembled by John Penn. In the following month, he sold a large number of the family's paintings, including West's historic picture of William Penn's treaty with the Indians. Furthermore, a number of Thomas Gray's items, including his manuscripts and editions of his books with his own notations, were also sold. And again in 1854 more Gray manuscripts were sold.

In 1867, Granville John Penn, in straitened circumstances, died. He was survived by his brother, the Reverend Thomas Penn, but he had been declared insane and his affairs placed in the hands of his cousins. He died in 1869. A sad end to a family that had contributed so much.

CHAPTER FIVE

WEALTHY VICTORIANS

LABBY

EDWARD COLEMAN

SIR EDWIN LANDSEER

SIR WILBERFORCE BRYANT