

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

Department of History

**'X' Marks the Spot: The History and Historiography of Coleshill House,  
Berkshire**

by

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Doctor of Philosophy

'X' MARKS THE SPOT: THE HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF COLESHILL  
HOUSE, BERKSHIRE

by Karen Fielder

Coleshill House was a much admired seventeenth-century country house which the architectural historian John Summerson referred to as 'a statement of the utmost value to British architecture'. Following a disastrous fire in September 1952 the remains of the house were demolished amidst much controversy shortly before the Coleshill estate including the house were due to pass to the National Trust. The editor of *The Connoisseur*, L.G.G. Ramsey, published a piece in the magazine in 1953 lamenting the loss of what he described as 'the most important and significant single house in England'. 'Now', he wrote, 'only X marks the spot where Coleshill once stood'.

Visiting the site of the house today on the Trust's Coleshill estate there remains a palpable sense of the absent building. This thesis engages with the house that continues to exist in the realm of the imagination, and asks how Coleshill is brought to mind not simply through the visual signals that remain on the estate, but also through the mental reckoning resulting from what we know and understand of the house. In particular, this project explores the complexities of how the idea of Coleshill as a canonical work in British architectural histories was created and sustained over time.

By considering how past owners of Coleshill subscribed to the notion of the canonical house this thesis contributes new knowledge about architectural ideology and practice in the long eighteenth century. Furthermore an examination of the pivotal moment when the house was lost in the mid-twentieth century sheds new light on how approaches to historic architecture impacted on ideas of national heritage at the time. This allows us not only to become more cognizant of the absent house, but the practice of formulating architectural histories is itself exposed to scrutiny.



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# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Karen Fielder

declare that the thesis entitled

'X' Marks the Spot: The History and Historiography of Coleshill House, Berkshire

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed: .....

Date:.....



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My fellow postgraduate students at Southampton, particularly Christopher Warleigh-Lack, have been a most congenial and well-informed group with whom to share this experience.

Finally, considerable thanks go to my family and to Simon Cooper for their patience and support through this endeavour.





# Definitions and abbreviations

BRO	Berkshire Record Office, Reading
MofHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
NA	National Archives, Kew
NMR	National Monuments Record
NTPL	National Trust Picture Library
NTCA	National Trust Central Archives, Heelis, Swindon
NTCE	National Trust Coleshill Estate Archives, Coleshill, Oxon
NTRA	National Trust Regional Archives, Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe, Bucks
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
SPAB	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
WSA	Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, Chippenham, Wilts

(Note that some of the archives from this repository which were recently deposited by the Earl of Radnor were in the process of being catalogued during the course of preparing this thesis. Therefore exact references have not always been given.)



## INTRODUCTION: 'X' Marks the Spot

This thesis is a collaborative doctoral studentship conducted in partnership with the National Trust. It concerns one of the Trust's properties, the Coleshill estate, which is a country house estate set in the Oxfordshire countryside. Coleshill House was a much admired seventeenth-century country house in the former county of Berkshire which the architectural historian John Summerson referred to as 'a statement of the utmost value to British architecture'.<sup>1</sup> Following a disastrous fire in September 1952 the remains of the house were demolished amidst much controversy shortly before the Coleshill estate including the house were due to pass to the National Trust. The editor of *The Connoisseur*, L.G.G. Ramsey, published a piece in the magazine in 1953 lamenting the loss of what he described as 'the most important and significant single house in England'. 'Now', he wrote, 'only X marks the spot where Coleshill once stood'.<sup>2</sup>

Alongside the piece, Ramsey published a photograph of the empty terrace from which the house looked out across the Vale of the White Horse. Standing at that place today on the Trust's Coleshill estate there is a palpable sense of the absent house, which prompts the visitor to seek out the lost building through a kind of reverie. This thesis engages with the house that exists in the realm of the imagination, and asks how Coleshill today is brought to mind not simply through the visual signals that remain on the estate, but also through the mental reckoning resulting from what we know and understand of the house. In particular, I wish to explore the complexities of how the idea of Coleshill as a canonical work in British architectural histories is created and sustained over time. In this way not only do we become more cognizant of the absent house, but the practice of formulating architectural histories is itself exposed to scrutiny.

### Coleshill House

Coleshill House was a relatively modest country house built on a south-west facing slope with pleasing views across the Vale of the White Horse. The village of Coleshill is located between Faringdon and Highworth, with the River Cole passing to the west marking the county boundary between the old county of Berkshire and Wiltshire (Figure

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<sup>1</sup> John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, 9<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> L.G.G. Ramsey, 'X Marks the Spot', *The Connoisseur*, August 1953, p. 3.

1). The house was constructed with plain ashlar limestone façades, and was laid out on an oblong 'double pile' plan with the main entrance on the north-east front. The horizontality of the house was balanced by the bold upward thrust of eight massive chimneys. Coleshill's exterior façades were admired for their restrained classicism and striking symmetry, with subtly varied window spacing that gave central emphasis (Figure 2). The steeply hipped roof was a dominant feature with its deep cornice and balustraded platform topped with a cupola which commanded splendid prospects across the landscape. The house was raised on a semi-basement which accommodated service rooms including the servants' hall and the kitchen. The double-height entrance hall featured an ornate grand staircase giving access to the first floor rooms, above which the attic provided further accommodation. The principal rooms – the entrance hall, the ground floor saloon and the first floor dining room – were axially arranged at the centre of the building, and were notable for their elaborately decorated and heavily beamed ceilings. A spinal corridor on each floor provided easy access to the rooms, and the house was amply provided with service stairs. In its plan, Coleshill brought together features which, although not new, when used together provided an innovative and functional arrangement that was thought to be unprecedented in country house design.

Coleshill's building chronology is contentious and is the focus of fierce scholarly debate. The traditional view is that the house was begun in the years around 1650 for Sir George Pratt (d. 1673). Sir George was the son of a City alderman, Sir Henry Pratt (d. 1647), who acquired the Coleshill estate in 1626. The interiors of the house were completed around 1662. According to tradition recorded by a later owner of the house, Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell (1692-1768), Sir George began to build a new house in the 'cucumber garden' at Coleshill around 1647, but when his cousin and future architect Roger Pratt (1620-1685) returned home from Italy in 1649 he was persuaded to abandon this and start again on another site nearby with a fresh design. Significantly, this occurred under the advice of the celebrated architect Inigo Jones (1573-1652), but the extent of the relative contributions of Jones and Roger Pratt to the design of the house remains unresolved.

For over two hundred years Coleshill was considered unquestionably to exemplify the work of Jones, the hero of British architectural history who introduced a refined form of continental classicism to national architecture in the seventeenth century. Coleshill was widely celebrated in architectural texts as a remarkably unaltered monument to Jones's genius. In the early twentieth century, following the discovery of fresh evidence, Roger Pratt was assigned the greater role at Coleshill, and from then until the fire of 1952 the house was considered by many to be the first and only surviving intact example of his

work. Together with Hugh May (1621—1684), Pratt was credited with establishing the archetypal plan and form of the double-pile classical country house which became the norm in Restoration England.<sup>3</sup> Coleshill's interiors too were greatly admired for the rich decoration said to be in a Jonesian style even if not by Jones himself. Despite the reattribution to Pratt, the association with the luminary of British architecture, Inigo Jones, has particularly shaped the mythical allure of the building, and the challenge of its unresolved building chronology contributes to the appeal of Coleshill to architectural historians.

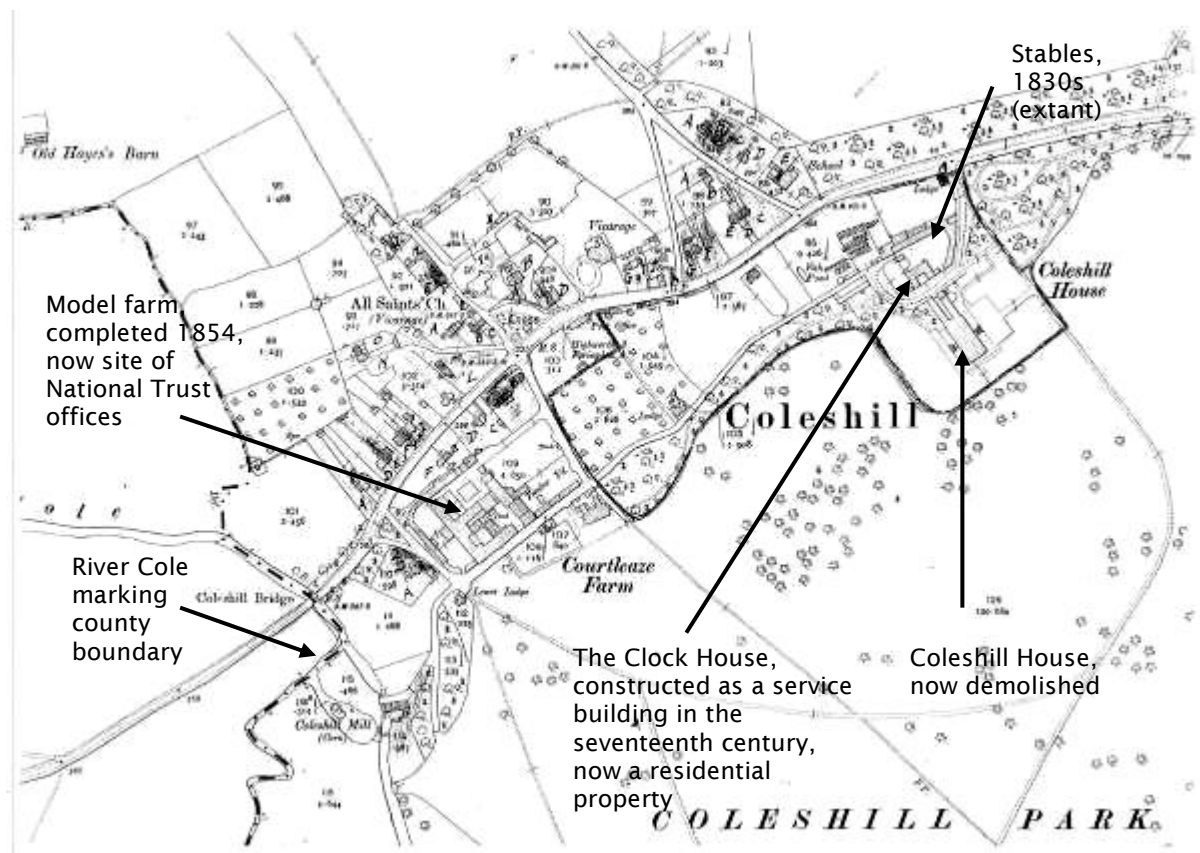


Figure 1 Coleshill, annotated 3rd edition Ordnance Survey map, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> On Coleshill's plan, see Nicholas Cooper, *House of the Gentry 1480-1680* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), esp. p. 306.



Figure 2 Coleshill House, c. 1919. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

## The Site of the House

The National Trust own and manage the Coleshill estate which includes the site of the mansion house. It is a working estate where public access is limited to paths which are rights of way. The site of the house lies within the garden of a tenanted property called the Clock House, which was once the laundry and brewhouse for the mansion (Figure 3). It is not accessible to the public although it is visible from public footpaths across the park. The footprint of the house is marked out by a box hedge garden laid out by the tenants of the Clock House in 1989. Below-ground remains survive in the form of well-preserved cellars, some of which are partially back-filled with rubble from the demolished building. Fragments of the house are scattered around the estate and beyond, including piles of loose masonry and architectural remnants stored in farm buildings. Some masonry pieces were incorporated into other buildings and gardens around the village and its environs. The park and wider estate retain many historic features, such as the ha-ha, a gothic 'eye-catcher' called Strattenborough Castle, lodges, gates and gate piers. An ornamental set of seventeenth-century piers once framed a view to the house from the road, but now gaze across pasture towards the empty site (Figure 4). There is a walled kitchen garden originating from around 1800,

and additional below-ground remains including a system of water mines created by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell in the 1740s. There are historic planting schemes including the Long Shrubbery. Many functional buildings and structures remain that were associated with the house, such as nineteenth-century stables, the Clock House, a dovecot, a foal house, the model farm and estate yard. The village itself owes much of its present appearance to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Radnor's estate improvements. In addition there are features in the environs of the site of the house and the park dating from the 1940s which relate to Coleshill's role as the HQ for the Home Forces Auxiliary Units.<sup>4</sup> Of the contents of the house, most were removed in 1945 when the house was sold. Most of the remaining contents were salvaged after the fire, and some items were subsequently distributed to other National Trust properties.



Figure 3 Site of Coleshill House marked with a box hedge looking towards the Clock House, 2008. *Karen Fielder*.

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.coleshillhouse.com](http://www.coleshillhouse.com) for the history of the auxiliary units and information about current research carried out by the Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART).



Figure 4 View from the roadside gate piers towards the site of the house, 2011. *Karen Fielder.*

This thesis is influenced by an awareness of the National Trust's institutional intent to preserve special places for the benefit of the nation, to promote public engagement with those places and to actively campaign for their preservation. The Trust is specifically concerned to address the challenge of encouraging greater public awareness and understanding of Coleshill, and they recognise a need to establish a purpose or perspective for the site in relation to the surviving associated historic features. Whilst stopping short of offering an interpretation or conservation management plan for the site my research nonetheless contributes towards unlocking the unique experience that Coleshill has to offer. It addresses the unusualness of what is, to use a concept borrowed from David Littlefield, an 'estranged' place which lies, both literally and conceptually, outside of the normal public domain of heritage. By consigning the site of the house to a private garden it has been marginalised by the Trust, despite the fact that so much of its original context survives and indeed owes its existence to the now absent house.<sup>5</sup> Coleshill turns the traditional idea of the National

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<sup>5</sup> David Littlefield, 'Estranged Space: A Study at the Roman Baths, Bath', unpublished paper given at 'Narrative Space' conference, University of Leicester 21 April 2010. I am grateful to David for



Trust country house experience on its head. Yet such is the perceived importance of the house in directing British architecture towards ‘true classicism’ that it demands not to be forgotten.

## The Research Method

Despite the importance attached to Coleshill in accounts of the development of British architectural history it remains surprisingly under researched. Whilst references to the house in architectural histories are many, accounts which specifically address the life of the house are few. Henry Avray-Tipping’s articles in *Country Life* magazine of 1919 remain valuable sources, particularly for their superb interior photographs.<sup>6</sup> Dr Bryan Lawton wrote an essay on the history of the house for the Highworth Historical Society in 1992, and Gemma Fox and Verity Manners’s millennium history of the village, *Coleshill 2000*, contains interesting first hand recollections of the house.<sup>7</sup> In the controversial attribution debate, Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw’s provocative 1995 volume *Architecture Without Kings* offers an account of the early development of the house which reviews the archival evidence, and more recently Sally Jeffery reinvigorated the controversy with her article ‘The House in the Cucumber Garden’ of 2007.<sup>8</sup> There are also some unpublished reports which draw on Coleshill’s documentary archives. Abigail Harrap compiled a report entitled ‘Coleshill House 1650-1952: A History of the House and Family’ in 1995, which is perhaps the only account which has returned to the extensive archives of the house in order to provide a chronological history of it.<sup>9</sup> There is a typescript account of Coleshill by Derek Pedley who lived in the house from 1946 when he was twelve years old until the time of the

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supplying me with a copy of his paper. See also his book edited with Saskia Lewis *Architectural Voices* (Chichester: Wiley, 2001), which includes an essay on the Clock House.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Avray Tipping, ‘Coleshill House I’, *Country Life*, 26 July, 1919, pp. 108-116; Coleshill II’, *Country Life*, 2 August, 1919, pp. 138-146.

<sup>7</sup> Dr B. Lawton, ‘Coleshill House’ in *A History of Highworth*, vol. 3 (Highworth: Highworth Historical Society, 1992), pp. 364-396; Gemma Fox and Verity Manners, *Coleshill 2000* (privately published: Adrian Buratta, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *Architecture Without Kings: The Rise of Puritan Classicism Under Cromwell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Sally Jeffery, ‘The House in the Cucumber Garden’, *The National Trust Historic Houses and Collections Annual 2007* (London: Apollo), pp. 24-29. In response to this see John Harris, ‘Extracting Sunbeams from Cucumbers’, *The National Trust Historic Houses and Collections Annual 2008* (London: Apollo), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Abigail Harrap, ‘Coleshill House 1650-1952: A History of the House and Family’, unpublished report, 1995. A copy of this report can be found at the National Trust’s Coleshill Estate Office and at the Regional Office at Hughenden Manor, near High Wycombe.

fire, which was written around 1995.<sup>10</sup> Other useful reports include a survey of the park and gardens at Coleshill carried out by J.A.B. Heslop and others in 1991.<sup>11</sup> The Trust commissioned a Vernacular Building Survey of the Clock House in 1991, and in 2010 they commissioned a conservation management plan for the nineteenth-century model farm from the Drury McPherson Partnership.<sup>12</sup>

This thesis does not attempt to write an entirely new history of Coleshill House. Rather it addresses the shortfall in knowledge about the house by focusing on key moments in its history and historiography that shed light on the differing ways in which Coleshill has been construed. In particular it is concerned with how the idea of the canonical house came about, and how this specific way of construing the house was sustained over time. The task is approached in three ways. Firstly, this thesis examines how discourses of architecture and architectural history since the eighteenth century have come to shape our understanding of Coleshill, and how disciplinary practices and conventions have been instrumental in reconstructing the house as a canonical work. The framing of the house in these exalted terms is considered to have a bearing upon approaches to its alteration and preservation which are also themes addressed in this thesis. The construction of the canon typically relies on art historical concepts such as creative author, authorial intent, period, authenticity, and style, despite the fact that works of architecture differ significantly from works of art.<sup>13</sup> However such concepts provide frameworks by which Coleshill House has been reconstructed in its histories.

My second line of enquiry responds to canonical preoccupations with the seventeenth-century house by addressing later alterations. This challenges the notion of the house as a largely unaltered work of the seventeenth century which underpins its historiographic renderings. It asks how far later owners of Coleshill, specifically during the long eighteenth century, subscribed and contributed to the same disciplinary preoccupations that frame the house as a canonical work. This will be done by examining how owners made choices about their architectural interventions which influenced and were influenced by the old building with which they engaged. By

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<sup>10</sup> This can be found at the Coleshill Estate Office.

<sup>11</sup> J.A.B. Heslop, N.J. Crounshaw and K.A. Fretwell, 'The National Trust Coleshill Park and Garden Survey 1990/91', unpublished report. A copy of this can be found at the Trust's Regional Office as before.

<sup>12</sup> 'The Clock House, Coleshill', Vernacular Buildings Survey No. 61, The National Trust Thames and Chilterns Region, unpublished report, 1991. A copy of this is at the Trust's Coleshill Estate Office.

<sup>13</sup> See Eric C. Fernie, 'Art History and Architectural History', in *Rethinking Architectural Historiography*, ed. by Dana Arnold and others (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 17-23.

documenting some of these alterations, this thesis contributes new knowledge about an aspect of Coleshill's history which has been largely overlooked up to now. More broadly, there has been little research into the practice of making alterations to existing houses in the long eighteenth century, and this thesis therefore sheds fresh light on architectural practice at the time.

Finally, the critical period in the mid-twentieth century when the house was articulated as an object of national heritage intended to be preserved in perpetuity only to be lost will be examined. The impact of the demolition of the ruins on the idea of the house will be explored through an analysis of the documentary archives. The circumstances of the loss of the house, it will be argued, initiated a shift in Coleshill's historiography and a cultural repositioning of the house that continues to resonate as the building is summoned to mind at the empty terrace today.

## The Historiographic Archive

My investigation begins with the notion of the canonical work that is represented in published architectural and historical accounts produced by experts and scholars. It explores the problematic relationship between the building and its historiographic texts, recognizing that these texts constitute a rich archive in their own right. This acknowledges the legitimising authority of the expert viewpoint, but does not seek to pursue the Foucauldian approach by specifically addressing the nature of disciplinary power and ideology.<sup>14</sup> Rather it views scholarly histories of the house as representing one sphere of perception, of which others might include the experience of visitors to the site, or the perceptions of the village community. Studies of these groups would have been equally worthwhile, and certainly of value to the National Trust for broadening engagement opportunities, but would require alternative methodologies which fall outside the scope of this thesis.

Amongst scholars, Coleshill has achieved an iconic status which is widely accepted but largely unexplored. Its status rests primarily on conceptions of its classical style, its creative author and its role as an architectural progenitor in accounts of the development of British architecture. Whilst it has been consistently admired broadly on

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<sup>14</sup> Exemplified by Michel Foucault's classic work on disciplinary authority, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979). For a discussion of disciplinary power in relation to buildings and language see Thomas A. Markus and Deborah Cameron, *The Words Between Spaces: Buildings and Language* (London: Routledge, 2002), esp. pp. 93-96.

these terms, on closer examination its place in these histories is slippery and difficult to pin down. Its contribution to narratives of the development of British classicism is complex and contentious, and its authorship remains unresolved. This thesis confronts the complexities of the historiographic representations of Coleshill that promote particular ways of understanding the house by undertaking a deeper reading of its histories. It allows us to consider how the house has been re-imagined in these texts according to the shifting social and cultural contexts in which architecture is understood. In this way, texts and images serve as primary sources for considering how Coleshill's canonical status has been assigned.

This study provides a timely critique of established practice in the disciplinary field of architectural history, which has become increasingly self-critical.<sup>15</sup> It contributes to a growing body of scholarship advocating new approaches to thinking and writing about architectural history which has emerged in a climate of professional anxiety about the future of the discipline. By offering a micro-historical approach to examining the processes by which histories of architecture are constructed and how they inscribe cultural meaning into architectural works this thesis makes a fresh contribution to such disciplinary debates. It suggests new ways of drawing on architectural histories as a means of exploring the architectural consciousness of the past, bringing into focus the ways in which canonical traditions shape perceptions of architecture.

## The Documentary Archive

The National Trust has provided privileged access to its own archives which have been essential to this study, as well as to their in-house specialist curatorial expertise. Relevant Trust records are held at the Coleshill Estate Office, at the former Regional Office at Hughenden Manor, and also at the Trust's Central Office at Heelis in Swindon. These records have been a particularly rich source for unraveling the events around the proposed acquisition of the house by the Trust and the efforts to prevent the demolition of the standing remains following the fire of 1952. This material is complemented by records of the relevant government departments concerned with the demolition which are held by the National Archives at Kew. The principal archives

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the special issue of the *Journal of Society of Architectural Historians* 58(1999/2000); John Cattell and Adam Menuge, 'Applied Architectural History: Challenges and Opportunities', *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain Newsletter*, 93 (Spring 2008), 1-3; Judi Loach and Zeynep Kezer, 'Architectural History at a Crossroads: Research Challenges and Opportunities', *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain Newsletter*, 96 (Winter 2008-9), 1-4.

outside of the Trust are at the Berkshire Record Office (BRO), where there is material deposited both by the Trust and by the Pleydell-Bouverie family who owned Coleshill until 1945, some of which remains uncatalogued. The BRO records include tradesmen's accounts, correspondence, plans and journals that shed light on alterations made to the house during the long eighteenth century. This represents a small proportion of the Coleshill records at the BRO, leaving other avenues open for further research. For example, material for the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century, mostly uncatalogued, has not been explored in any detail. Some records for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which relate to other aspects of the house and estate such as household management, estate rentals, horticulture and arboriculture have not been thoroughly investigated. Archives for Coleshill can also be found at the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives (WSA), deposited by the Earls of Radnor (Pleydell-Bouveries) from Longford Castle near Salisbury. Other useful records are to be found in private collections and institutions such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

## The Historiographic Myth

The histories of Coleshill House, both visual and textual, reveal the processes that are employed in the formulation of the canon of which Coleshill is a part. The canon is determined by changing ideas of the cultural significance of architectural works that represent milestones of architectural development, framed around art historical values.<sup>16</sup> But whilst some authors view Coleshill as a seminal work, the nature of its contribution to British architecture is elusive, thereby inviting further examination of the notion of its canonical identity. It is an architectural icon which is shrouded in myth. Its cultural significance is not intrinsic to the building but has been shaped by discourses that promote a particular understanding of its architectural form and meaning that extends beyond that which is (or rather was) visible. The 'facts' of the house are presented and received in texts within the broader temporal and intellectual contexts in which architecture is understood. The selective researching and recording of certain aspects of the house at the expense of others, the choice of language, the structural arrangement of texts and modes of presentation are all tools employed, either consciously or subconsciously, to represent Coleshill in historiographic texts. These texts are produced, mined and re-interpreted in order to create new histories that sustain and reinvent the idea of the house, without necessarily returning to the original work. This thesis sets out to examine the problematic relationship between

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<sup>16</sup> On the architectural canon, see Andrew Ballantyne, *Architecture: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 112-116.

Coleshill House as the subject and its historiographic representation. It begins to unpick the complex mechanisms by which myths of architecture are manufactured, interrogating established traditions of representing, thinking and writing about buildings.

This critical reading of Coleshill's historiography regards the literary dimension of texts such as narrative construction and the use of rhetoric as instruments for reconstructing the canonical house.<sup>17</sup> Whilst debates on historiography have moved on since E.H. Carr's *What is History* (1961), this book nonetheless remains valuable in highlighting the problematic relationship between the historian and his or her facts.<sup>18</sup> For Hayden White, all historical explanations are rhetorical and poetic constructions, and historians employ particular linguistic paradigms to conceptualise their field of study.<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes, too, placed emphasis on the use of language and textuality in the construction of historical narratives, arguing that language could be used to provide the illusion of reality and objectivity, and that history becomes mythologised through subservience to narrativity.<sup>20</sup> He writes that historical discourse is 'essentially a product of ideology, or rather imagination, if we accept the view that it is via the language of imagination that responsibility for an utterance passes from a purely linguistic entity to a psychological or ideological one'.<sup>21</sup> In the field of architectural history, archives and buildings are seen as the primary sources, and from these sources verifiable facts are gathered and selected, in what Dominick LaCapra calls a 'documentary model of knowledge', where 'the basis of research is 'hard' fact derived from the critical sifting of sources'.<sup>22</sup> But the 'facts' are interpreted and presented in a literary form for the sake of communicability, and the written account is taken for granted in historical representations of architecture. Such issues of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, truth and fiction, in the narrative construction of architectural histories are key concerns in attempting to unravel the relationship between Coleshill and its texts.

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Lawrence Stone, 'The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', *Past and Present*, 85 (1979), 3-24; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970); Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

<sup>19</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Historical Discourse', in *Introduction to Structuralism*, ed. by Michael Lane (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 145-55.

<sup>21</sup> Barthes, 'Historical Discourse', p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.18.

This thesis acknowledges the problematic nature of historical texts that serve to invoke the metaphorically (or literally) absent building. However, whilst this reflects an awareness of the mediated knowledge of the past, it does not take postmodern scepticism to the extreme, nor does it assume that the imagined house depends solely on the ideology of the expert. These histories are not purely fictional accounts but are elements of historically and culturally conditioned discourse amongst a consensual group. As White contends, 'Affiliation of narrative historiography with literature and myth should provide no reason for embarrassment because the systems of meaning production shared by all three are distillates of the historical experience of a people, group or culture'.<sup>23</sup> Rather, it takes the view that architectural history is always as much about the idea of a building as it is about its physical manifestation. This thesis engages with how Coleshill lives in the mind and considers the changing processes and methods that are involved in this mental rendering according to shifting cultural approaches to architecture. The process of reconstructing the meaning and identity of the building never stops, even now that it no longer stands. The investigation of this process implicitly challenges the notion that Coleshill has a single authentic past waiting to be uncovered. Language is seen to be as central to the construction of Coleshill's historical reality as the stones from which it was originally built, through changing discursive practices that continually reconstruct the house over time.

## Architectural Historiography

Whilst the discipline of architectural history has a strong empirical tradition based on evidential enquiry, more recently scholars have sought to challenge established disciplinary methodologies and practices. Architectural historiography has opened up as a distinct field of investigation which considers the relationship between buildings and their texts, and there is a growing but as yet limited corpus of critical literature on the subject.<sup>24</sup> Dana Arnold's *Reading Architectural History* (2002) provides a useful starting point for thinking about how social and cultural theories can reveal alternative readings of architectural texts, and how they can shed light on the ways in which

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<sup>23</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> See for example a series of theoretical essays on critical historiography in the special issue of the *Journal of Architectural Education*, 52(May 1999), ed. by Kazys Varnelis. Also 'Architectural History 1999/2000: A Special Issue of JSAH', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58 (1999), ed. by Eva Blau. Mitchell Schwarzer draws on philosophical historiography and literary theory in his critique of textual narration in architectural history in 'Gathered this Unruly Folk: The Textual Colligation of Historical Knowledge in Architecture', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 44 (May 1991), 144-49.

architecture has been understood in the past.<sup>25</sup> David Watkin's *The Rise of Architectural History* (1980), stands alone as the most comprehensive account of the development of the discipline from the eighteenth century.<sup>26</sup> However it lacks any critical analysis and therefore sheds little light on the implications of the various disciplinary approaches for the meaning and interpretation of architecture. Some scholars have begun to assess the impact of representational practices, both visual and textual, on the way the architecture of the past is understood.<sup>27</sup> My thesis contributes to this field of enquiry by providing a detailed investigation into how disciplinary conventions have given ideational expression to a single building over time. Furthermore, it considers how past owners of Coleshill in the long eighteenth century subscribed to the idea of the canonical house set out in its texts by exploring the ways in which this was expressed through their architectural interventions. It also investigates how these owners themselves informed the mythography of the house, so that the owners are understood to have a dynamic relationship with the historiography. This offers an alternative to accounts of Coleshill which typically focus on its seventeenth-century origins by exploring how value and meaning were inscribed in the house as an ongoing process during the life of the building.

Coleshill's historiography has largely been shaped by the dominance of two narrative approaches to the study of British architectural history – style and biography – which are closely associated with the canonical status of the house.<sup>28</sup> Style serves as a tool for charting patterns of change, and fêted buildings such as Coleshill are identified to serve as milestones of progress in stylistic development. Classicism is a key paradigm in an established system of stylistic categories providing a norm against which these categories are constructed, such as Palladian and Baroque. Post-war stylistic histories have particularly focused on Palladianism, a style derived from the designs of the Venetian architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). Classicism in architecture is seen as an elite style associated with a distinct social class and ideology. The architecture of the social elite has dominated studies in architectural history since it first developed as

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<sup>25</sup> Dana Arnold, *Reading Architectural History* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History* (London: Architectural Press, 1980).

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, *Articulating British Classicism: New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Elizabeth McKellar, 'Representing the Georgian: Constructing Interiors in Early Twentieth Century Publications 1890-1930', *Journal of Design History*, 20 (2007), 325-44. For a case study approach, Nicholas Cooper offers what he humbly refers to as a 'scissors-and-paste anthology' in his 'Red House: Some Architectural Histories', *Architectural History*, 49 (2006), 207- 21.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of these two narrative approaches, see Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, esp. chapters 2 and 3.



a distinct field of study at the end of the nineteenth century, and the English country house in particular has provided a focus of interest. Stylistic narratives typically assume that style categories such as Palladian are inherent and unproblematic, but such labels and taxonomies are generally retrospectively applied and were rarely used in historic contexts. More recently the difficulties of using style labels which have inexact meanings and overlapping boundaries has been more widely acknowledged by architectural historians.<sup>29</sup> This thesis contributes to the reappraisal of style categories by revealing the shifting conceptions of Coleshill as a classical work and exposing the problematic nature of the classical paradigm as a tool for constructing narratives of architectural history.

The second principal theoretical approach to writing architectural history privileges authorship as the dominant concern, and revolves around the biographies of celebrated architects in which a building is understood through the life of its 'author'. In progressive narratives of architectural history architects achieve the status of 'prophets', in Andrew Ballantyne's words, who 'have seen the future and built it early'.<sup>30</sup> This approach is particularly pertinent to the historiography of Coleshill, where the house is associated with several key figures in British architectural history, including not only Inigo Jones and Roger Pratt, but also the 3<sup>rd</sup> Lord Burlington and Jones's protégé John Webb.

Traditionally, the biographical approach involves an assessment of the architect's work and their sources and influences. This inevitably privileges those buildings where there is a known architect, particularly if this is a celebrated figure. The approach is epitomised by Howard Colvin's invaluable *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*. This provides a map of British architectural history through the attributed works of named architects, although it also includes some master masons and other craftsmen credited with producing notable architectural works.<sup>31</sup> However the notion of assigning the architect as the creative 'author' of a building is itself problematic. Postmodern literary criticism questions a preoccupation with the authorship of works, and both Barthes and Foucault have critiqued the approach on the basis that it is

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Giles Worsley challenged traditional uses of the terms Palladian and Neo-Classical in his *Classical Architecture in Britain: The Heroic Age* (London: Yale University Press, 1994). See also *Articulating British Classicism*, ed. by Arciszewska and McKellar, and *Albion's Classicism: The Visual Arts in Britain 1550-1660*, ed. by Lucy Gent (London, Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Ballantyne, 'The Nest and the Pillar of Fire', in *What is Architecture?*, ed. by Andrew Ballantyne (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 7-52 (p. 38).

<sup>31</sup> Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Yale University Press, 1995).

dependent on the myth of the creative subject as the sole inscriber of meaning.<sup>32</sup> This is significant for biographical approaches to thinking about architecture, because the interpretation of a building becomes entangled with the interpretation of its architect to the exclusion of other makers of meaning (such as the owner, builder, craftsman, occupant, and observer). As Robert Thorne noted in 1981, 'If the quality which sets architecture apart from the common run of building is aesthetic intent the architect is bound to be pushed to the front and his art emphasised at the expense of any other participant'.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the biographical approach privileges the work of the original creative architect and his/her intent over later alterations, and it also fails to recognise shifts in meaning that occur over time.

The historiography of Coleshill House demonstrates the powerful urge to assign a creative architect in architectural histories, and efforts to resolve Coleshill's true authorship continue today. But, as Nicola Coldstream has cautioned, 'as a figure in the process of design and construction the architect is not secure. The evidence is often more ambiguous than we think, and the architect can be elusive'.<sup>34</sup> Histories of Coleshill have ranged from privileging Inigo Jones as sovereign author to almost eradicating his role in favour of Roger Pratt. This aspect of Coleshill's historiography is further complicated by complex and at times conflicting opinions on the relative contributions of Jones and Pratt more generally to British architecture, as well as the problematic nature of their individual architectural idioms. Recently, the extent of Jones's influence as set out in conventional architectural histories has been called into question by some scholars. Elizabeth Chew, for example, argues that Jones's works was experienced by only a tiny group of the ultra elite, whereas leading twentieth-century architectural historians have typically placed him at the pinnacle of pre-Restoration seventeenth-century architecture.<sup>35</sup> Despite such reappraisals Jones nonetheless remains on a pedestal, and the tendency to valorise his classicising

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<sup>32</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' in Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 1977, pp. 155-64; Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 113-38.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Thorne, 'New Perspectives on English Architectural Writing: A Review of Recent Writing', *Urban History Yearbook*, 1981, 80-89 (p. 81).

<sup>34</sup> Nicola Coldstream, 'The Architect, History, and Architectural History', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (2003), 219-26 (p. 221).

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Chew, 'A Mockery of the Surveyor's Style: Alternatives to Inigo Jones in Seventeenth-Century Elite British Architecture', in *Articulating British Classicism*, ed. by Arciszewska and McKellar, pp. 57-95.

interventions in British architecture remains a force in architectural history which impacts upon the idea of Coleshill as a canonical work.

Roger Pratt is largely absent from architectural writings until the early twentieth century, but his name has since become associated with an identifiable house type, sometimes referred to as the Prattian villa, which is widely recognised as one of the most influential house types of the late seventeenth century. Indeed Colvin describes Pratt as 'one of the pioneers of classical architecture in England'.<sup>36</sup> Robert T. Gunther's publication of Roger Pratt's notebooks in 1928 was a key element in the reattribution of Coleshill which demoted the contribution of Jones to that of advisor.<sup>37</sup> Pratt's known architectural output was limited to five country houses, of which Coleshill is the most enigmatic and probably not the most influential. This thesis does not attempt to resolve Coleshill's attribution debate in relation to Jones and Pratt, but it does address the impact that biographical preoccupations which conceive of the architect as a genius and prophet for a new style have had on the idea of the house.

The earliest written accounts of Coleshill House date from the late seventeenth century, of which the first-hand description by the country house visitor Celia Fiennes of around 1690 is the most informative (reproduced in Appendix 1).<sup>38</sup> Her travel memoir was first published in full in 1888, with an edited volume by Christopher Morris in 1947, after which extracts are occasionally quoted in published accounts of the house. However this thesis is principally concerned with professional and scholarly accounts of Coleshill which constitute part of a specialist architectural discourse that first emerged in the eighteenth century when the house was represented as a work for admiration and emulation. This new discourse is exemplified by the publication of Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* between 1715 and 1725, which is generally seen as a treatise for a new national architecture and as heralding a revival of interest in the works of Inigo Jones. These eighteenth-century texts have rarely been considered in relation to the history of Coleshill House beyond their value as empirical sources of information, but here they will be interrogated in order to shed light on how the house was re-imagined in the cultural context of the long eighteenth century.

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<sup>36</sup> Colvin, p. 658.

<sup>37</sup> Robert T. Gunther, *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928); Nigel Silcox-Crowe, 'Sir Roger Pratt 1620-1685: The Ingenious Gentleman Architect', in *The Architectural Outsiders*, ed. by Roderick Brown (London: Waterstone, 1985), pp. 1-20.

<sup>38</sup> *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes, 1685-c.1712*, ed. by Christopher Morris, new edn (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995), p.47-8.

Alongside these published texts, documentary archives for the house over the same period offer an alternative source for investigating how Coleshill was construed and valued, not by expert authors but by its owners. The broader cultural context of the long eighteenth century has been explored in volumes by cultural historians such as John Brewer, Neil McKendrick and Ann Bermingham.<sup>39</sup> These writers address questions concerning the production and reception of cultural meaning in this period, typically focusing on the development of a consumerist society and the construction of identity through consumption against a background of social change. These studies offer a context for considering how cultural meaning was inscribed in architectural works according to contemporary values and social conditions. In this way, the owners of Coleshill in the long eighteenth century can be regarded as consumers executing architectural preferences through their interventions by which they articulated and shaped their own identity, and this can be related to the idea of the canonical house as set out in published texts.

The closing years of the nineteenth century were a watershed for architectural history, marking the start of a period when new institutional, legislative, educational and publishing networks for the histories of architecture were established. Watkin identifies this as the period when what he calls the 'English Tradition' of architectural history emerged, concerned principally with English domestic architecture.<sup>40</sup> He identifies a foretaste of this in the founding of the National Trust in 1895, as well as the establishment of the magazine *Country Life* in 1897, both of which were to be associated with the respective roles of preserving and recording the country house.<sup>41</sup> Until the 1930s authors of architectural histories were typically practising architects, such as Reginald Blomfield and J. Alfred Gotch. They constructed new narratives of the development of British (but more specifically English) architecture, adopting a historicising approach characterised by particular modes of understanding buildings in relation to periodisation, style and nationalism.<sup>42</sup> These new narratives depended on notions of the English Renaissance as heralding a revolutionary new classical

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<sup>39</sup> John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997); Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, (eds), *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and John Harold Plumb, *The Birth of the Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History*, pp.94-115.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Reginald Blomfield, *A History of Renaissance Architecture in England*, 2 vols (London: George Bell and Sons, 1897); John Alfred Gotch, *Architecture of the Renaissance in England* (London: Batsford, 1894).

architecture instigated by the genius of Inigo Jones. In this context Coleshill was re-imagined as a work of the English Renaissance intimately entangled with Jones and his oeuvre. This marked a significant historiographic shift for the house which is addressed in this thesis.

The mid-twentieth century heralded another shift in architectural historiography marked by the influx of continental scholars who brought with them a fresh approach to the study of British architectural history. Writers such as Nikolaus Pevsner and Rudolf Wittkower drew on continental approaches to art history to produce revised accounts of the development of British architecture.<sup>43</sup> Alongside them well educated English amateur authors like James Lees-Milne and Sacheverell Sitwell produced texts in a more insular vein. These were often published by Batsford, a company which had influenced a publishing boom in architectural history with popular texts from the closing years of the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> The Second World War was another major driver for the production of architectural histories, fostering ideas about national heritage which impacted upon attitudes towards historic architecture in the face of threats from bombing raids, economic crisis and post-war urban development. As a focus for national identity, the country house was regarded as a highpoint of the nation's artistic achievements. This argument was forcefully articulated by the National Trust in order to justify its acquisition of country houses for the nation. Many houses came into public ownership by means of the Trust at this time or were otherwise abandoned or destroyed largely as a result of punishing taxation regimes. At the same time, country house archives became more accessible in new county record offices, opening the way for scholarly architectural investigation.

This period saw the emergence of a new heritage consciousness, and associated with this came government initiatives such as the National Buildings Record (1941) and a new statutory system for listing buildings introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. It is in this context that Coleshill was re-imagined as an object of national heritage worthy of preservation, but ultimately was destroyed. There is a significant body of scholarly literature which addresses this period in terms of the turn towards heritage preservation and its exploitation.<sup>45</sup> This thesis offers a micro-

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<sup>43</sup> For example, Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Rudolf Wittkower and Fritz Saxl, *British Art and the Mediterranean* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>44</sup> Such as James Lees-Milne, *The Age of Inigo Jones* (London: Batsford, 1953); Sacheverell Sitwell, *British Architects and Craftsmen* (London: Batsford, 1945).

<sup>45</sup> For example, John Cornforth, *The Country Houses of England: 1948-1998* (London: Constable, 1998); Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (London: Yale University

historical approach to addressing how these changing ideas about the cultural value of historic architecture impacted upon an individual architectural work at the time. It explores how the embryonic instruments for heritage protection operated in practice, and how complex and competing notions of what constituted national heritage were played out. In so doing, this thesis enhances our understanding of Coleshill House and its site, and sheds fresh light on the heritage sensibility of the mid-twentieth century. However the story does not end there. Despite its loss the house retains an ideational presence which depends in part on post-demolition evocations of the building. This thesis considers the ongoing life of the house and recognises the paradoxical nature of the empty site where the absent building continues to reside.

## Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 of this thesis addresses the complex ways in which Coleshill House has been represented through published texts and images since the eighteenth century, and examines how the idea of the canonical house was created and sustained over time through these publications. At the same time, it identifies historiographic fluctuations that arise from changing attitudes to architecture that occur as the cultural context in which the building is experienced and understood alters. This historiographic analysis is approached in three ways: through different modes of visual representation, by considering how the notional house and its architect are entangled, and by examining how Coleshill is framed as a classical work in narratives of the development of British architecture.

In Chapter 2, Coleshill's documentary archives provide a basis for exploring how far Coleshill's owners in the long eighteenth century were concerned with the same disciplinary preoccupations that reconstructed the house as a canonical work. This will be done by exploring how the owners engaged with the seventeenth-century building in their alterations to the house and its setting. It will also consider how these interventions themselves shaped canonical perceptions of the house. The chapter focuses on works carried out by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell between 1728 and 1768, and by Jacob, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor, between 1768 and 1828.

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Press, 1997); Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London: Viking, 1997). For a more recent account see Ben Cowell, *The Heritage Obsession: The Battle for England's Past* (Stroud: Tempus, 2008).

Finally, Chapter 3 confronts the pivotal moment in Coleshill's history between 1943 and 1953 when the National Trust sought to preserve the house in the name of national heritage but it was ultimately lost. The mid-twentieth century was a momentous period in the development of heritage preservation in Britain, and this provides a context for considering how the house was reconstructed as a heritage object at this time. The chapter unravels the circumstances surrounding the proposed acquisition of the house, the fire and the demolition. Furthermore it considers the impact of these events on the ideational house, as Coleshill underwent the transformation from occupied habitation through ruination to the empty site inhabited by the absent building.





# CHAPTER 1: The Historiography and Mythography of Coleshill House

As, when a lofty pile is raised,  
We never hear the workmen praised,  
Who bring the lime, or place the stones,  
But all admire Inigo Jones:<sup>46</sup>

## Introduction

Writing in 1966, Nikolaus Pevsner described Coleshill House as ‘the best Jonesian mid C17 house in England’ [sic].<sup>47</sup> This understanding of the house as a triumph of its age inextricably connected with the name of Inigo Jones still broadly holds true today. Coleshill House is part of the great canon of architectural masterpieces by which narratives of British architectural history are mapped out. Despite its loss some fifty years ago Coleshill’s canonical status is unshaken, but it is also largely unquestioned and unexplored. Published texts dating from the eighteenth century to the present day document the prevailing conceptions of the cultural value of Coleshill as an exemplary work of architecture. Looking back over the historiography of the house it becomes apparent that the nature of its identity as an iconic work has not remained constant. There are historiographic fluctuations as the house shifts about on its canonical plinth, whilst it is never dislodged. Textual re-creations of the house are subject to historical variability arising from changing attitudes to architecture that occur as the cultural context in which the building is construed and experienced alters. Furthermore there are the important questions of how and why the house came to be elevated to its iconic status. In this chapter, I will address the representations of the house as a canonical work through a critical appraisal of its historiography and, in so doing, reflect upon the practice of writing architectural history. My intention is not to discredit established historical accounts of the house, but rather to explore the complex ways in which Coleshill House has been re-imagined over time.

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Swift, ‘For Stella’ (1720), *The Poetical Works of Jonathan Swift*, 3 vols (London: W. Pickering, 1833-4), II (1833), p. 232.

<sup>47</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 118.

This approach of investigating Coleshill through its texts is influenced by Adrian Forty's volume *Words and Buildings* (2004).<sup>48</sup> Forty asserts the determinant role played by language in the experience of architecture, drawing on critical insights from diverse fields such as literary theory, art history and philosophy. My viewpoint assumes that Coleshill House is constituted as much by its texts as by any material form. In other words, these texts are as much a part of the architecture of the house as the stones from which it was built. In Forty's terms, 'language itself constitutes a 'reality' which, while not the same as that formed through other senses, is nonetheless equivalent'.<sup>49</sup> As a model for thinking about the role of language in the way that we understand modern architecture, Forty draws upon Roland Barthes's idea of 'The Fashion System', which considers the place of language within the complex social practices of the world of fashion. Following this model, architecture is understood as a three part system constituted out of the building, its image and its accompanying critical discourse, to which Forty adds a further distinction between the photographic image and the drawn image.<sup>50</sup> In a similar way, art historians have sought to unravel the role of language in relation to the pictorial arts, exploring the gap that exists between images and the words that are used to describe and explain them.<sup>51</sup> In architectural terms, William Whyte sees a 'transposition' that occurs in moving between the observed and experienced building and the verbal or visual account of it, which he refers to as 'a serious intersemiotic leap'.<sup>52</sup> The meaning of the work changes as it is experienced as a plan diagram, a picture, a text or a material structure, but this variety of meanings and accounts all makes up the work of architecture. Coleshill's historiographic texts and its images therefore give the house cognitive presence beyond that which is (or was) visible by articulating and structuring knowledge about it in different ways. The impact of these texts continues to shape responses to the site of the absent house today.

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<sup>48</sup> Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004). On the relationship between language, architecture and architectural history see also Rejean Legault, 'Architecture and Historic Representation', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 44 (1991), 200-25; William Whyte, 'How do Buildings Mean? Some Issues of Interpretation in the History of Architecture', *History and Theory*, 45 (2006), 153-77. Also Markus and Cameron.

<sup>49</sup> Forty, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> Forty, pp. 13-14.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (London: Yale University Press, 1987), and Stephen Melville and Bill Readings, *Vision and Textuality* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

<sup>52</sup> Whyte, p. 176.

My particular interest is in Coleshill's status within the architectural canon, and in approaches to locating the house in broader narratives of British architectural history in these terms. The canon comprises select buildings regarded as of the finest quality which stand apart from the generality of architecture. Institutional values and conventions conspire to attribute cultural value and assert the canonical status of Coleshill. Conversely Coleshill itself possesses qualities that open the way for its interpretation as an acknowledged masterpiece. In other words, Coleshill is both constituted by, and constitutive of the architectural canon. In *Architecture and its Interpretation* (1979), Juan Pablo Bonta proposes a sequence of events which characterise the development of shared consensual canonical interpretation.<sup>53</sup> Canonical status emerges over time as a 'cumulative result of many previous responses, distilled by repetition and reduced to the bare essentials'.<sup>54</sup> The canon regulates our understanding and interpretation of architecture, promoting buildings regarded by influential individuals and connoisseurs within the discipline as being of the highest rank, and therefore of greater historical and cultural value. Furthermore, the canon favors individual works which are construed as the 'masterpiece' of a known individual 'genius'. By setting up canonical works as defining examples of taste and architectural significance according to establishment values, these works become institutionalised. But they are also in a sense mythologised, becoming bearers of commonly-held beliefs and traditions which conceal the disciplinary alchemy that creates and sustains them. Furthermore, the canon is inherently conservative, as Ballantyne observes. Canonical buildings once established are unassailable, and 'any attempt to denigrate them simply undermines the credibility of the critic'.<sup>55</sup> This way of thinking about architecture is now understood as just one of many approaches, yet buildings acknowledged to be of merit in canonical terms continue to serve as signposts through narratives of British architectural history.

Coleshill's texts can be closely examined to reveal the structures and processes which authors employ to assert its canonical value. Influenced by literary theory, particularly with regard to the use of narrative as a paradigm for articulating knowledge, we can begin to question how Coleshill has been re-imagined by the textual strategies of authors and their discursive practices. We can see, for example, how fragments of information about Coleshill have acquired the status of 'facts', how their veracity is accepted without question at one moment, yet may subsequently be challenged. Some

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<sup>53</sup> Juan Pablo Bonta, *Architecture and its Interpretation* (London: Lund Humphries, 1979) pp 131-174.

<sup>54</sup> Bonta, p. 145.

<sup>55</sup> Ballantyne, *Architecture: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 115.

texts achieve the status of seminal works, establishing orthodox accounts which are mined for future texts. Furthermore, specialist discourses of architecture and architectural history draw on particular narratives, conventions, taxonomies and values, with their own rules and rhetoric, which underpin textual representations. Through lexical choices the conventions of the discourse are harnessed to classify and assign value, using rhetorical techniques of persuasion to shape responses to buildings and legitimise scholarly judgements. As Thomas Markus and Deborah Cameron have pointed out, 'Value judgements will lack authority and validity if they are not expressed in a form which is recognised as appropriate by the relevant interpretive community'.<sup>56</sup>

The corpus of texts with which I am principally concerned comprises those produced by authors with established reputations in the disciplines of architecture and architectural history. In Foucauldian terms, their accounts carry authority based on institutional claims to knowledge. They are regarded by those in the know as experts with the right to produce and publish texts, exercising disciplinary power by choosing the language in which their expert knowledge is conveyed. Through these texts Coleshill's credibility and authority as a canonical work is established. Since the end of the nineteenth century narrative accounts of the development of British architecture have centred on biographic and stylistic approaches. Coleshill's long association with Inigo Jones acts as a powerful force in its historiography. Challenges to this attribution in the early twentieth century mark a significant historiographic shift, and a potential point of dislocation, which nonetheless failed to dislodge the house from its canonical status. This raises questions about the imagined identity of the house as a Jonesian work, but also about the sleight of hand that occurs in the writing of architectural history in order to sustain the canon. Similarly, Coleshill is characteristically prefigured as a classical house in stylistic narratives which are dominated by the classical paradigm. However the chronology of classicism is contentious, depending on shifting notions of the English Renaissance and the nature of continental influence on British architecture, so that the meaning of the term 'classical' is itself unstable and open to re-interpretation. Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar in their edited volume *Articulating British Classicism* (2004) are amongst those who have specifically challenged traditional methods and ideas by which British architectural classicism has been understood, and their discussions have influenced my interrogation of the efforts to pin down Coleshill's elusive classical character in its historiographic texts. The catastrophic loss of the house in 1953 provides a further point of historiographic disruption by which to consider the veiled workings of the architectural canon.

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<sup>56</sup> Markus and Cameron, p. 96.

Alongside the discursive practices revealed in Coleshill's historiographic texts, visual representations of the house are also instrumental in its re-imagining within the 'system' as modelled by Barthes. Images may appear as photographs, technical drawings, or as imaginative pictorial representations, all of which deploy established conventions to carry encoded messages and direct the eye to see and evaluate the building in particular ways. Certain disciplinary conventions of architectural representation serve to emphasise the formal, symmetrical, and classical properties of Coleshill, whilst more picturesque renderings express other associative values in the context of changing perceptions of the cultural significance of architecture. Drawings and photographs are never literal renderings and cannot capture the totality of the building. Rather they support particular methods of idealising their subject based on looking at it in specific ways. Furthermore, texts and images can co-operate to direct the reader towards specific interpretations of the architectural work, and images can gain new meanings when they are inserted within a rhetorical text or narrative plot. I will begin my historiographic analysis by considering how varying modes of visual representation in published texts have been instrumental in reconstructing Coleshill as a canonical work over time.

## Visual Historiography: Coleshill House and its Image

### Eighteenth-Century Engraved Plates

The eighteenth century can be seen as a period when the canonical myth of Coleshill House emerged, and it was to be enlarged and reinforced in architectural texts as the century progressed. New architectural literature provided the instrument for establishing the authority of exemplary buildings and elevating them to canonical status. Books of architectural designs became available that focused attention on the achievements of British architects, providing patterns based on built examples as well as on hypothetical designs for emulation by architects, builders and patrons. Notable amongst these publications were Colen Campbell's three volumes of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, published between 1715 and 1725. These volumes celebrated British (or more particularly English) architecture, and were instrumental in establishing a new architectural taste that drew on the classical principles of Inigo Jones and Andrea Palladio as the masters to whom patrons should look for inspiration. These and other architectural books served to legitimise the emergent profession of architecture as a liberal art associated with an educated elite who possessed the intellectual capacity to comprehend the new specialist verbal and visual languages of the profession. Architecture was conceived as a vehicle for expressing elite values associated with classicism which were disseminated in texts from a variety of fields including

philosophy and literature.<sup>57</sup> Architectural texts promoted a shared notion of what constituted good taste in architectural design based on these consensual values.

When these architectural texts first appeared in the opening decades of the eighteenth century, the specialist vocabulary for describing classical architecture was not well developed, and volumes depended on visual images to represent architectural models as sources for emulation. Engraved plates used a specialist visual language based on non-perspectival graphic conventions which required a particular mental capacity to comprehend them. Dana Arnold has suggested that such images of architecture possess a linguistic quality and she draws on the concept of *ekphrasis* to consider how architecture undergoes a process of translation in its graphic re-imagining.<sup>58</sup> For Arnold, specialist conventions of visualisation produced images which, whilst they appeared to be objective, represented the original building using rhetorical devices that made it conform to certain cognitive thought processes. In this sense, Coleshill's re-imagining using specifically architectural visual conventions in the eighteenth century can be understood as directing the viewer's interpretation of the building in particular ways according to shared contemporary cultural values. The images served as tools by which the status of the building was elevated. It is in this visual context that Coleshill first emerged into the realm of eighteenth-century architectural discourse.

The first published visual references for Coleshill appeared in middle quarters of the eighteenth century when the house featured in architectural volumes that sought, amongst other things, to disseminate designs by Inigo Jones. They aimed to codify his role in establishing an elite classicism, so that Jones and his associated works are germane to understanding approaches to architecture as set out in these publications. The authors of these volumes – William Kent, John Vardy and Isaac Ware – were architects and designers associated with Richard Boyle, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Burlington, a key proponent of the eighteenth-century Jonesian revival.<sup>59</sup> Their publications influenced

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<sup>57</sup> For a general discussion of the meanings attached to the classical orders up to the Renaissance see John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Specifically on the country house and classicism in the long eighteenth century see Dana Arnold, 'The Country House: Form, Function and Meaning', in *The Georgian Country House*, ed. by Dana Arnold, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003), pp. 1-19.

<sup>58</sup> Dana Arnold, 'Imag(in)ing Architecture', in *Imag(in)ing Architecture: Iconography in Nineteenth Century Architectural Publication*, ed. by Zsuzsanna Borocs and others (Leuven: Acco, 2008), pp. 15-29.

<sup>59</sup> For an account of Burlington and his career see Colvin, pp. 128-132.

renewed interest in the architecture of Inigo Jones, and were intended as practical source books for architects and patrons. Typically they depicted abstracted architectural details that served as examples for reproduction. The inclusion of Coleshill in architectural volumes at this time signals the emergence of the house from obscurity in the minds of those with the power to influence architectural discourse and practice.

The first of these publications which set the tone for future volumes was produced by William Kent, a painter, architect and landscape designer who entered the Office of Works through the agency of Lord Burlington. Although Coleshill was not referred to by Kent, nevertheless his volumes demonstrate the specific conventions adopted by architectural publications at the time. From 1724, Burlington employed Kent to edit a publication on the works of Inigo Jones, taken from drawings in the Earl's possession by Jones and his protégé John Webb. These drawings were engraved for publication by Henry Hulsbergh from copies made by Henry Flitcroft.<sup>60</sup> In 1727, two volumes were published as *The Designs of Inigo Jones*, with no distinction made between the designs of Jones and Webb - all were presented as Jones's work.<sup>61</sup> Jones's reputation was sufficiently well established by this time that there was an implicit connection between his designs and a consensual view of good taste. Indeed Kent wrote in his preface that 'The Character of Inigo Jones is so universally known, that his name alone will be a sufficient Recommendation of the following Designs'.<sup>62</sup> The volumes were intended to celebrate the genius of Jones and position him as the English equivalent of Palladio. A design attributed to Jones for rusticated gate piers that are similar but not identical to a pair that remain at Coleshill was included in Kent's first volume. Their source is not identified, although Ben Lennon has recently suggested Sherbourne House as a likely contender, but they are nonetheless held up as representing a design idiom worthy of admiration and emulation.<sup>63</sup>

As well as designs by Jones and Webb, Kent's volumes contained drawings by Burlington, Palladio and Kent himself. Christy Anderson suggests that modes of visualizing the architecture of Jones in the engravings within these books were

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<sup>60</sup> Eileen Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers: 1556-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 250. Burlington later made further acquisitions of Jones and Webb drawings, including Webb's *Book of Capitals* in 1726. See also John Harris, *The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, his Villa and Garden at Chiswick* (London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> William Kent, *The Designs of Inigo Jones*, 2 vols (London, 1727).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, I, Preface.

<sup>63</sup> Kent, I, Pl. 61; Ben Lennon, 'Rusticated Piers', *The Georgian Group Journal*, 19 (2011), 66-74 (p. 70).

instrumental in unifying the different architectural works and designers through what she refers to as ‘the equalising medium of engraving’, achieved by the re-drawing of the images in Flitcroft’s hand.<sup>64</sup> Despite the chronological spread of the designs over more than 160 years by different architects, the historical and stylistic distance between them was made to vanish in order to create an architectural standard of good taste. Later historians have interpreted Kent’s volumes as serving specifically to promulgate Palladian designs. John Harris, for example, asserts that ‘This project, more than any other, became the great quarry for neo-Palladian architects and builders, as well as pattern book compilers, seeking approved models for windows, doorways, niches, parts of façades and ornamental details’.<sup>65</sup> This notion of Kent’s volumes as guides to Palladian decorative elements must be treated with caution, as the concept of Palladian as a style category is itself contentious, but nonetheless the plates represent a corpus of designs that were promoted as contemporary models worthy of emulation for a specific architectural programme in the eighteenth century.

Coleshill was identified as the source for plates in volumes by both John Vardy and Isaac Ware which further advanced Jones as a master to whom patrons should look for guidance. John Vardy was an associate of Kent, and was attached to the Office of Works from 1736. In 1744 he published *Some Designs of Mr Inigo Jones and Mr William Kent* which intended, in part, to showcase Kent’s genius with engravings of his architectural and ornamental designs.<sup>66</sup> These plates were preceded with 17 designs by Jones, mainly for chimneypieces, represented with no concession to the century that had passed between the two designers. Vardy’s publication, like Kent’s earlier volumes, served as a pattern book concentrating on details, and served to consolidate Jones’s place in the architectural canon, whilst paradoxically advancing stylistic diversity in Kent’s work. Vardy’s choice of designs by Jones included a chimneypiece for Sir Mark Pleydell’s dining room at Coleshill (Figure 5).<sup>67</sup> He included another unidentified design for a chimneypiece which survives as a drawing by John Webb now in the RIBA collection where it is inscribed as being for Sir George Pratt’s Great Chamber (see Figure 30).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Christy Anderson, *Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 219.

<sup>65</sup> John Harris, *The Palladians* (London: Trefoil, 1981), p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> John Vardy, *Designs of Mr Inigo Jones and Mr William Kent* (London, 1744).

<sup>67</sup> Vardy, Pl. 11.

<sup>68</sup> Vardy, Pl. 8. See also John Harris, *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects: Inigo Jones and John Webb* (Farnborough: Greg International Publishers/RIBA, 1972), p. 23.



The architect Isaac Ware was another member of the Office of Works influenced by Lord Burlington. Ware's *Designs of Inigo Jones and Others* of 1731 included no plates of Coleshill, but his *Complete Body of Architecture*, issued in parts from 1756 contained several plates of the house illustrating designs by Jones but engraved from his own drawings.<sup>69</sup> This volume was more instructional than Ware's earlier work, and offered a lavishly illustrated encyclopaedia of architectural practice and theory, intended 'to serve as a library on this subject for the gentleman and the builder'. In part the text sought to explain difficult architectural terms, supported by images where necessary, marking the emergence of a specialist architectural lexicon. Ware explained his approach as 'wherever the thing expressed by the term is capable of representation by lines, we shall accompany our account with a figure of it, accurately engraved; which will render the expression clear; and striking the eye, will never be forgotten'.<sup>70</sup> His volumes therefore relied on the close inter-dependence of text and image, in contrast to the primarily visual focus of Kent and Vardy. According to the architects John Woolfe and James Gandon, Ware's drawings of Coleshill were made at the instigation of Lord Burlington. These drawings are now in the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives where they were deposited by the Pleydell-Bouverie family.<sup>71</sup> The house was represented by plates of ceilings, gate piers and sections of the entrance hall, which worked alongside the text to reinforce the instructional agenda of the publication and to provide Jonesian models. For example, a plate of Coleshill's dining room ceiling served to demonstrate Ware's advice on the appropriate enrichment of ceilings, thereby 'illustrating our rules by the practice of Inigo Jones' (Figure 6).<sup>72</sup> The depiction of the entrance hall in section is of note, because for the first time it offered a contextual view of an architectural space inside the house, rather than merely showing isolated and decontextualised ornamental details (Figure 7, Figure 8). Until the publication of the elevation and floor plans of the house came about, Coleshill's published identity was not rooted in an idea of the building as a whole. Rather it was understood in terms of transposable parts that were available for re-consumption in a piecemeal fashion. Readers unfamiliar with the house could have no concept of its built form beyond these visualisations, but could be sure that, by association with Jones, it was of the highest quality.

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<sup>69</sup> Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London, 1767). John Harris believes that this was not published under the patronage of Burlington but was motivated entirely by Ware himself. See Harris, *The Palladian Revival*, p. 31.

<sup>70</sup> Ware, Preface.

<sup>71</sup> John Woolfe and James Gandon suggest that Ware made these drawings for Burlington in *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect*, 2 vols (London: Joseph Smith, 1767-1771), V (1771), p. 9; WSA, 1946 Coleshill Drawings.

<sup>72</sup> Ware, p. 508.

These publications by members of Burlington's circle constructed Jones as a hero of English architecture, and set up in the mind of readers that Coleshill was both the work of Jones and amongst the broader canon of admired works to be imitated by modern architects. In this way, Coleshill could be advanced as a serious role-player in the narratives of Palladian classicism constructed by later historians who regarded Lord Burlington as spearheading the Jonesian revival. Furthermore the interspersing of Coleshill's designs with contemporary buildings implied a genealogical link between the seventeenth-century house and later works. Anderson sees this as the establishment of an architectural lineage that could be traced back through Jones to Palladio and Vitruvius, securing this dynasty for the future by inviting emulation.<sup>73</sup> In this way, Coleshill could be physically reconstructed or re-performed in the present. Indeed the Coleshill chimneypiece illustrated by Vardy was reproduced at Blickling Hall in Norfolk around 1745, where it was said by a visitor at the time to have been designed by Lord Burlington.<sup>74</sup> Anderson suggests that this method of establishing lineage and progression was actively employed by Burlington, 'as if describing the breeding of an important line of dogs or racehorses'.<sup>75</sup> However the published images in these volumes were not presented as a chronological sequence and historic and recent works were usually intermingled. The mode of visual representation and its context in the publication compressed the historical distance between past and present. Coleshill was represented as if it were newly built, surveyed anew and redrawn with a contemporary hand. Its architecture was visualised in an abstracted form, and images carried little narrative detail with no patina or context. Chimneypieces were isolated from the wall, and ceilings floated unsupported in space, suggesting they could be easily transposed to other settings. These methods of representing the house served also to commodify it, as can be seen in the case of the Blickling chimneypiece.

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<sup>73</sup> Anderson, p. 220.

<sup>74</sup> John Maddison, 'The Architectural Drawings at Blickling Hall', *Architectural History*, 34 (1991), 75-120 (p. 76).

<sup>75</sup> Anderson, p. 220.

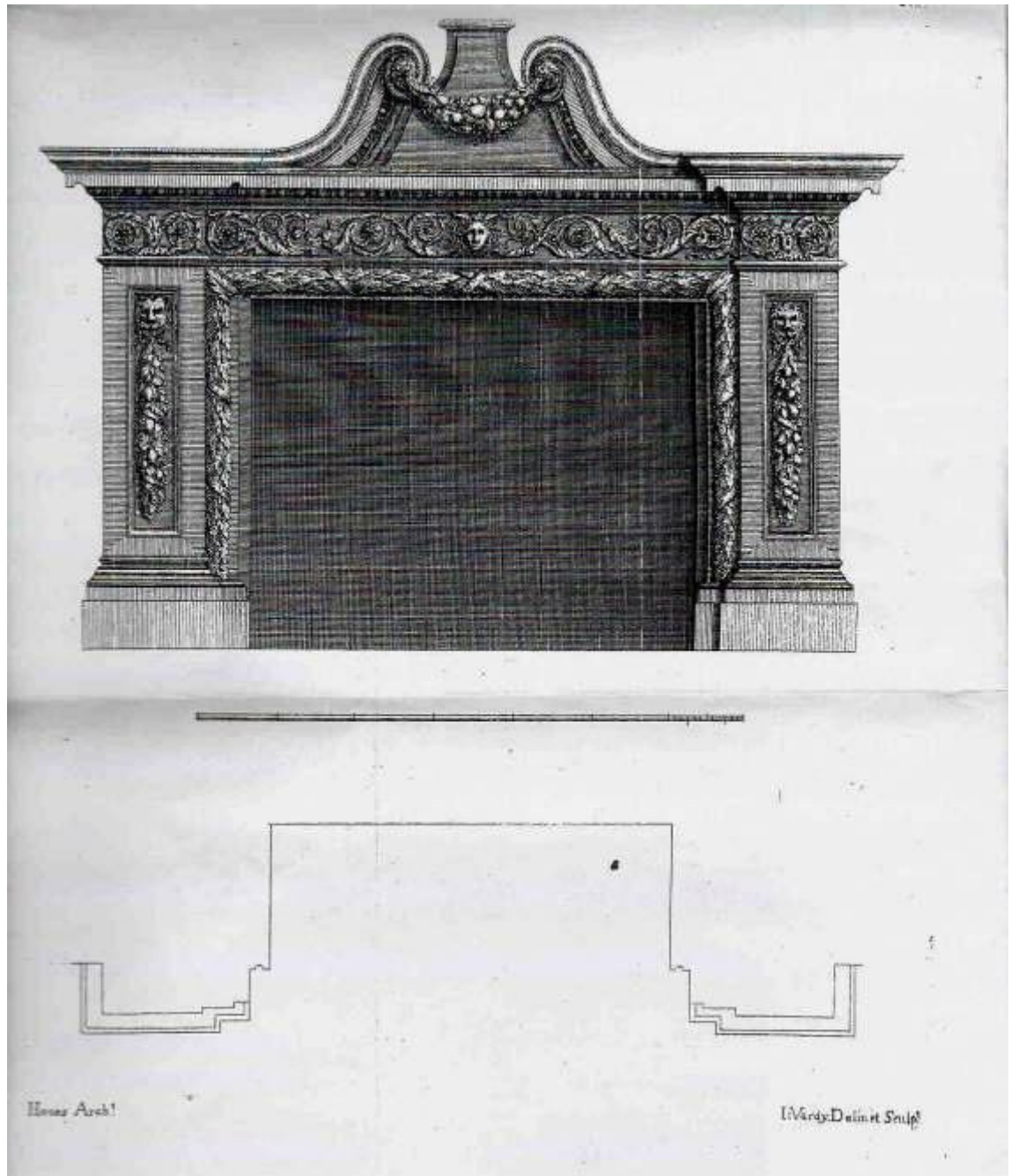


Figure 5 Fireplace for the dining room at Coleshill from John Vardy's *Some Designs of Mr Inigo Jones and Mr William Kent*, 1744.

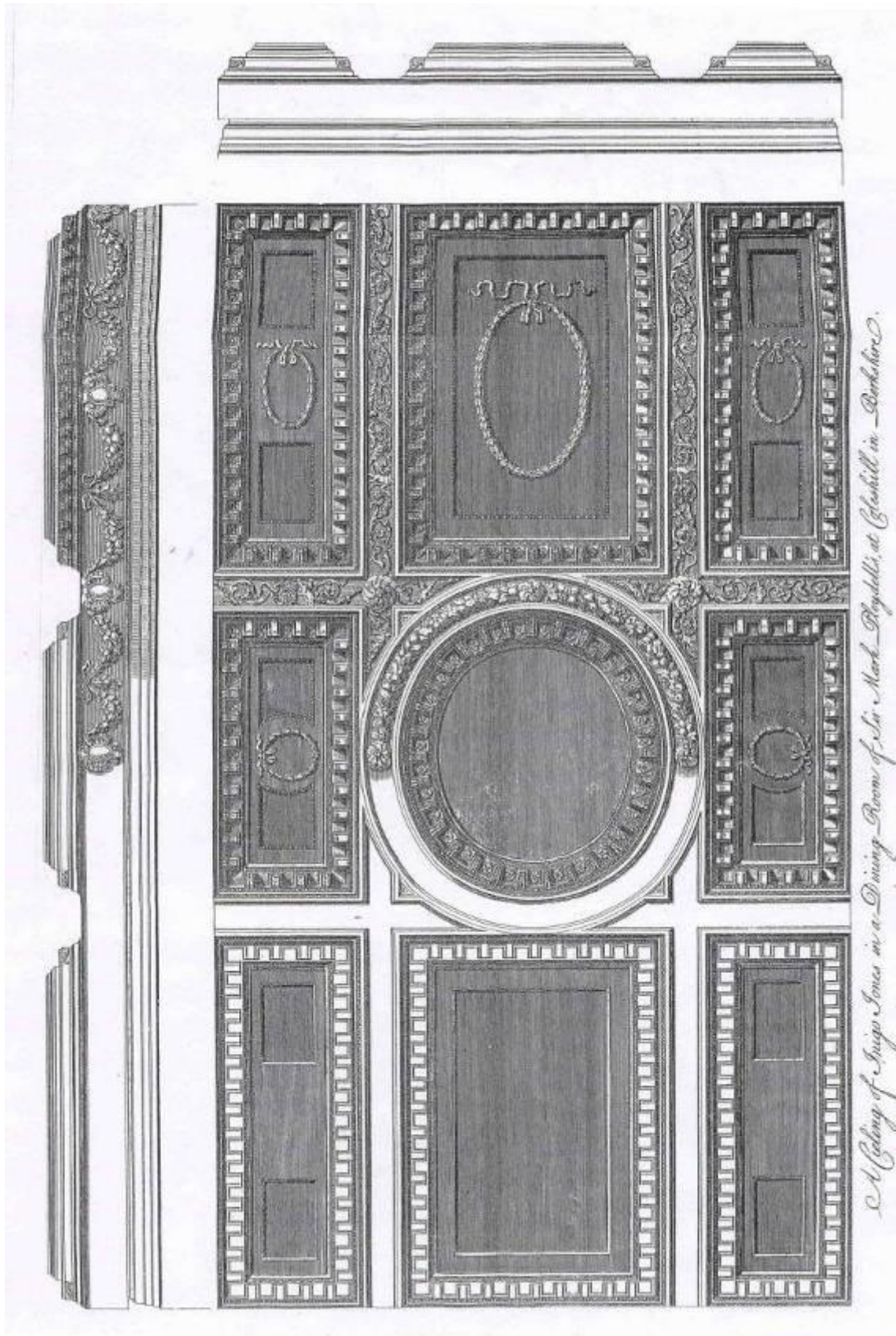


Figure 6 Ceiling from the dining room at Coleshill from Isaac Ware's *The Complete Body of Architecture*, 1756.



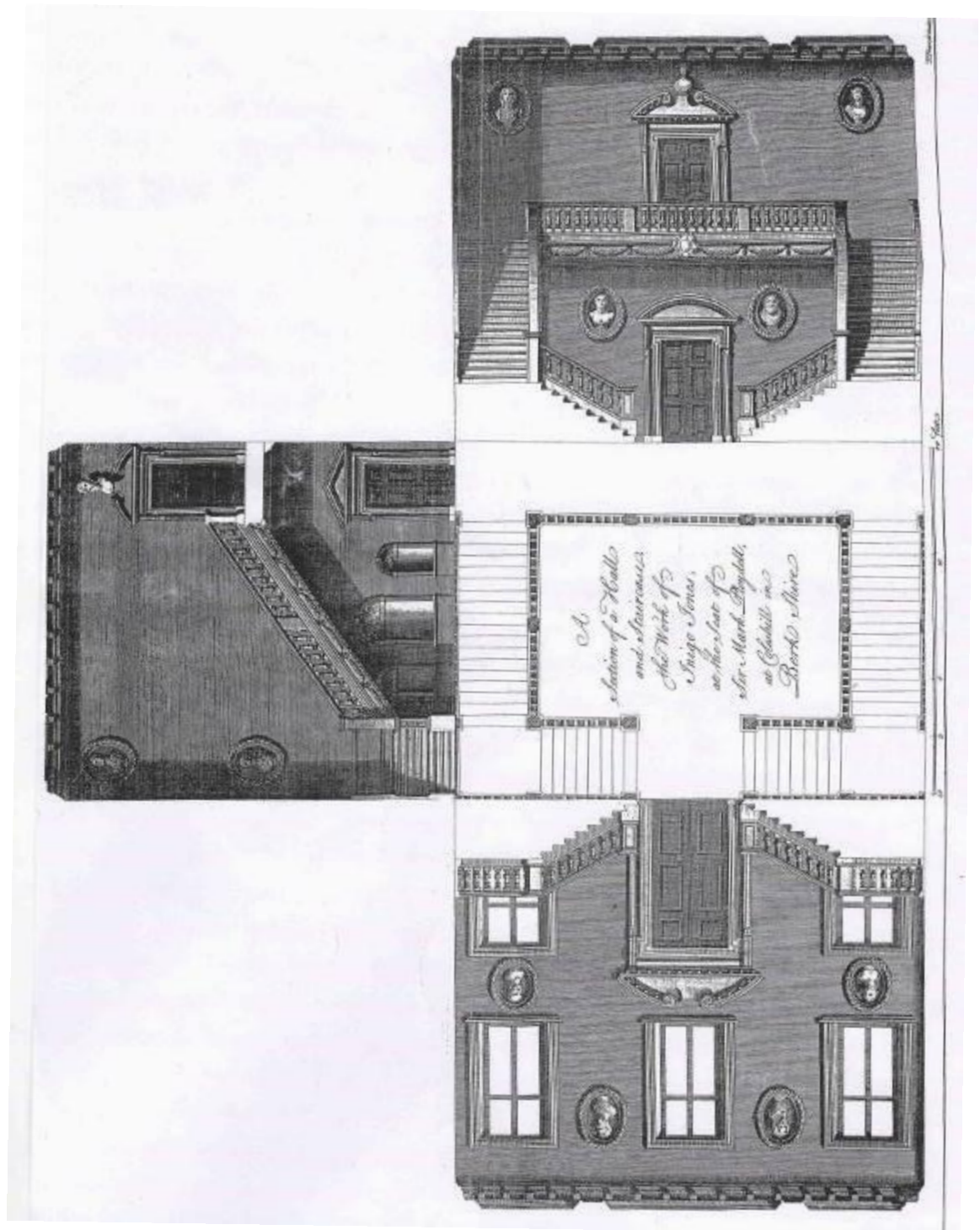


Figure 7 Section of the hall and staircase at Coleshill from Isaac Ware's *The Complete Body of Architecture*, 1756.

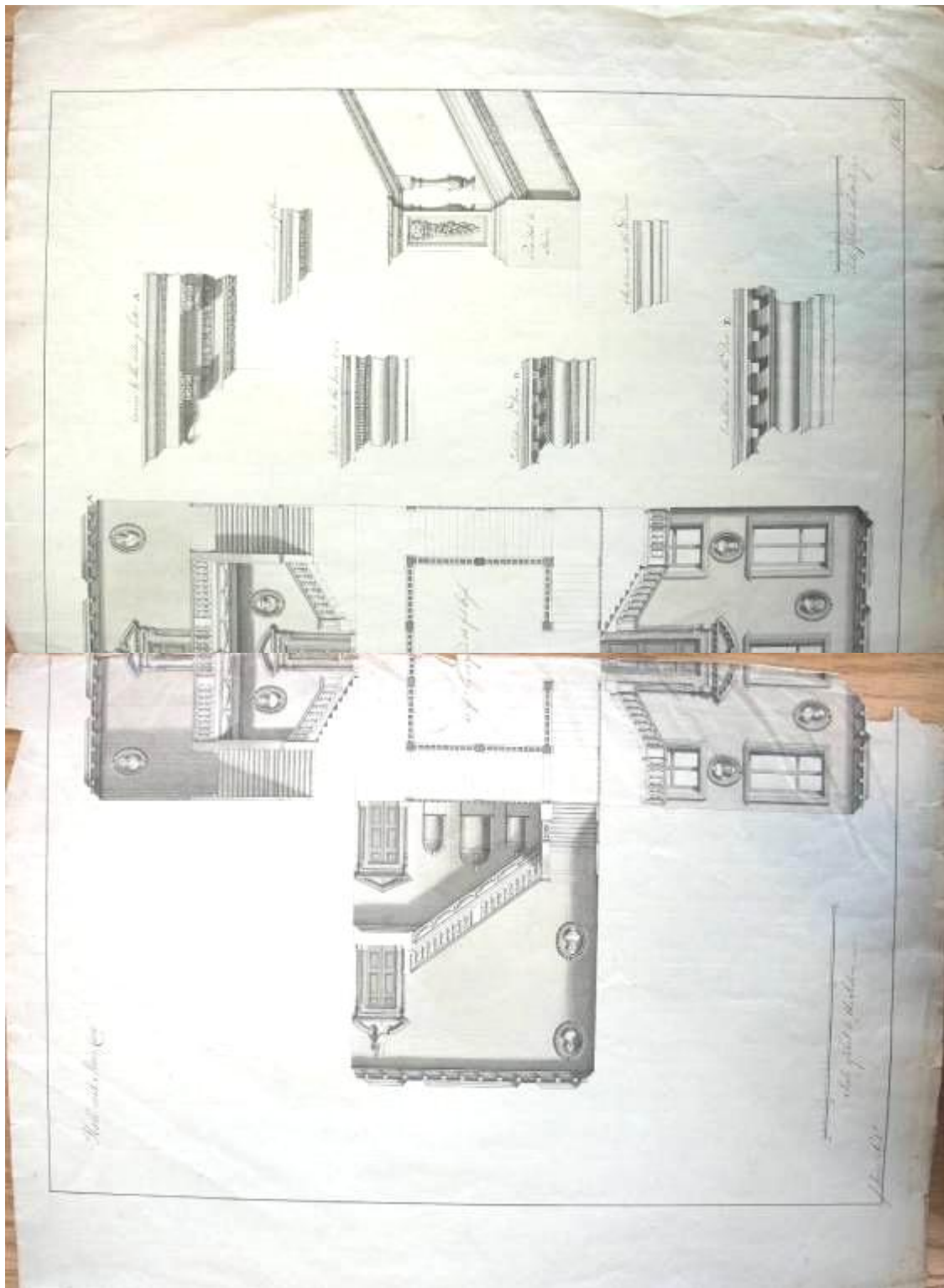


Figure 8 Isaac Ware's drawing of the hall and staircase with scaled drawings of the mouldings. WSA, 1946 *Coleshill Drawings*.

As has been noted, a key architectural text of the eighteenth century was Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, which comprised three volumes of engraved plates of designs by Jones, Wren and prominent contemporary architects of the day. Unlike the Burlingtonian pattern books discussed previously, the plates comprised principally elevations, plans and sections, rather than architectural details, with some birds-eye views of landscapes. The significance of Campbell's volumes lay in their contribution to establishing the architectural canon in the eighteenth century, promoting classical, well proportioned buildings as a model of architectural excellence. Architectural historians of the second half of the twentieth century have identified *Vitruvius Britannicus* as pivotal to the development of Palladianism as the dominant style of the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Unravelling Coleshill's association with this important work is integral to understanding the historiography of the house. It established the orthodoxy of Inigo Jones's contribution to British architecture in relation to Palladio, even before Kent, Vardy and Ware published their volumes.

If Coleshill had been understood as a seminal architectural production by Inigo Jones when Campbell was compiling his volumes, one might expect that the house would have been included in *Vitruvius Britannicus*.<sup>77</sup> Its absence might be explained in many ways. It could simply have lain beyond Campbell's purview, and he includes no houses in Berkshire or that were otherwise in the vicinity of Coleshill in his volumes. T.P. Connor suggests that Campbell had only a limited knowledge of the work of Jones, and that practising architects who were interested in Jones were concerned only with his buildings in London and Greenwich.<sup>78</sup> Connor also proposes that the apparent inadequacy of Campbell's coverage may have resulted from his dependence on the willingness of patrons to have their houses engraved themselves.<sup>79</sup> No engravings of Coleshill's façades are known from this time, the earliest elevation being that by George Vertue of 1735 which appears not to have been published (see Figure 34). The dependence of Campbell on subscribers may well have been a factor in Coleshill's absence, as this seems to have had a bearing on the coverage of the volumes. Lucy Rumble has noted that almost all the owners of houses included in *Vitruvius*

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<sup>76</sup> For the established view of the work as a treatise for the Palladian revival of the period, see Colvin, pp. 209-12; John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, 9<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Yale University Press, 1993), p.296; Rudolf Wittkower, *Palladio and English Palladianism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p.100.

<sup>77</sup> John Harris has commented on the selectivity of Campbell in excluding certain works influenced by Jones. See Harris, *The Palladians*, pp. 13-4.

<sup>78</sup> T.P. Connor, 'The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*', *Architectural History*, 20 (1977), 14-30 (p.21).

<sup>79</sup> Connor, p. 22.

*Britannicus* were also subscribers.<sup>80</sup> The owner of Coleshill at the time of publication, Thomas Pleydell, did not subscribe, although his near neighbour and associate, John Shute Barrington, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Barrington of Beckett Hall, Shrivenham, subscribed to all three volumes.

There is evidence that Coleshill was planned for inclusion in a proposed continuation volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* by the architect Thomas Milton. William Bouverie, Viscount Folkestone, whose family seat was at Longford Castle in Wiltshire, married Harriot Pleydell, daughter of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell and Coleshill heiress, in 1748. On 10 October 1757 William paid £3 3s as the first payment for two subscriptions to Milton for an additional volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, although this was never published.<sup>81</sup> Drawings of Coleshill's floor plans and the garden front by Milton from 1757 survive in the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives (Figure 9). These were probably intended for inclusion in Milton's proposed subscription folio volume of plates.<sup>82</sup> Milton also drew Longford Castle, and his drawings, dated 1766, were subsequently published in 1771 in the second of the fourth and fifth continuation volumes of *Vitruvius Britannicus* by John Woolfe and James Gandon.<sup>83</sup> Plates of Coleshill were published in the same volume, but drawn later by Woolfe himself. By 1771 Coleshill had come into the possession of William and Harriot's son, Jacob, then Viscount Folkestone, although Longford remained the primary family seat.

The inclusion of both Coleshill and Longford Castle in Woolfe and Gandon's volume is notable as these were both historical works. Most of the 55 buildings and structures depicted in the two continuation volumes were executed after 1750 by living architects, so the inclusion of both Coleshill and sixteenth-century Longford is unexpected.<sup>84</sup> Indeed the authors declared in their introduction to volume IV that their aim was to show specifically how the eighteenth century marked the pinnacle of British architectural achievement.<sup>85</sup> Woolfe and Gandon's publication, whilst modelled on Campbell's original three, is now regarded as marginal to Campbell's project of

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<sup>80</sup> Lucy Rumble, 'Of Good Use or Serious Pleasure': *Vitruvius Britannicus* and Early Eighteenth Century Architectural Discourse' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2001), p.63.

<sup>81</sup> WSA, 1946 Accounts 1718-1826, fol. 27.

<sup>82</sup> WSA, 1946 Coleshill Drawings. On Milton see Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers*, p. 496.

<sup>83</sup> Woolfe and Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, V (1771). There is another set of floorplans of the house in the archives from Sir Mark's time which appear to have been drawn for publication, but they are unsigned and undated. See Figure 36.

<sup>84</sup> This was noted in Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers*, p. 498.

<sup>85</sup> Woolfe and Gandon, IV (1767), p. 1.



promoting Palladianism, and is certainly less polemical in tone. As Connor suggests, 'Even Campbell's most sincere imitators, Woolfe and Gandon, filled their volumes with neat, accurate and consistently presented plates, but they lacked any hint of Campbell's prejudices or his self-interested ambition'.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Coleshill's publication by Woolfe and Gandon marked a turning point in the historiography of the house and a significant step in its re-imagining as a canonical work in eighteenth-century architectural discourse. It was the first time that Coleshill was visually represented in a publication not in terms of abstract details but as an architectural whole by means of an elevation and floor plans. In addition, accompanying text provided associative content, as well as evaluative comment. Where previously the calibre of the house was implied by mere inclusion of architectural features in a volume that associated it with Jones, here verbal language was used to construct cultural value, and Coleshill was provided with a narrative in its own right. Woolfe and Gandon's account became a seminal text for Coleshill that was much exploited by later writers and historians, and its assertions were largely taken up uncritically. Whilst these volumes of *Vitruvius Britannicus* may have lacked the broader architectural and cultural impact of Campbell's three, for Coleshill this was a critical moment in its historiography.

Coleshill was illustrated by means of two engraved plates and a short textual account. The plates provided keyed plans of the basement, principal and chamber floors, and an orthogonal front elevation (Figure 10, Figure 11).<sup>87</sup> The text accompanying the plates referred to the house as follows:

It is, perhaps, the most perfect work now remaining of that great architect Inigo Jones, having undergone no alteration since the year 1650 when it was compleated; it is remarkable for the magnificence of the entrance, the height with the fine proportion of the rooms, and the richness of the ceilings, of which that celebrated judge of true architecture, the late Earl of Burlington, had for his own study very correct drawings taken by Mr Isaac Ware, which have never been published.<sup>88</sup>

Coleshill was given no special prominence in this volume, but the text was to be instrumental in elevating the house to canonical status. The identification of Coleshill as 'the most perfect work now remaining of that great architect Inigo Jones' was taken

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<sup>86</sup> Connor, p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> Curiously although referred to as the principal front this was the garden front, as shown by the triangular pediment over the door.

<sup>88</sup> Woolfe and Gandon, V (1771), p. 9.

for granted by the authors, and given no further explanation. This verbal statement of Coleshill's impeccable quality represented a great upward leap that put the house on a pedestal, and from this vantage point it was unassailable.

The text directed the reader to admire specific features and qualities of the interiors of the house that were not visually represented. In noting 'the height with the fine proportion of the rooms' the classical value of proportion in three-dimensional space was introduced into the imaginative rendering of the house. Coleshill's superiority was sanctioned in the text by the opinion of Lord Burlington as an arbiter of good taste, despite the fact that Burlington was long dead by this time. This association continues to be invoked as validation of Coleshill's canonical authority today, but as we shall see in the next chapter the nature of Burlington's involvement requires further examination. The date 1650 was critical to the interpretation of the house as the work of Jones, placing it just within his lifetime, and this again was an important factor seized upon by later historians. In addition, the assertion that the house was unaltered since its completion in 1650 was widely taken up and frequently re-quoted by later authors, but this too is open to question. The notion of its unspoiled originality was an important element in Coleshill's canonisation. Coleshill was held up as being immune to the historical forces of change and degradation over time, a fiction which was reinforced by the ageless representation of the façade of the house in the accompanying plate. Woolfe and Gandon's *Vitruvius Britannicus* was hardly at the cutting edge of contemporary architectural discourse, but the re-imagining of Coleshill in these terms fanned the flame of its emerging mythology.

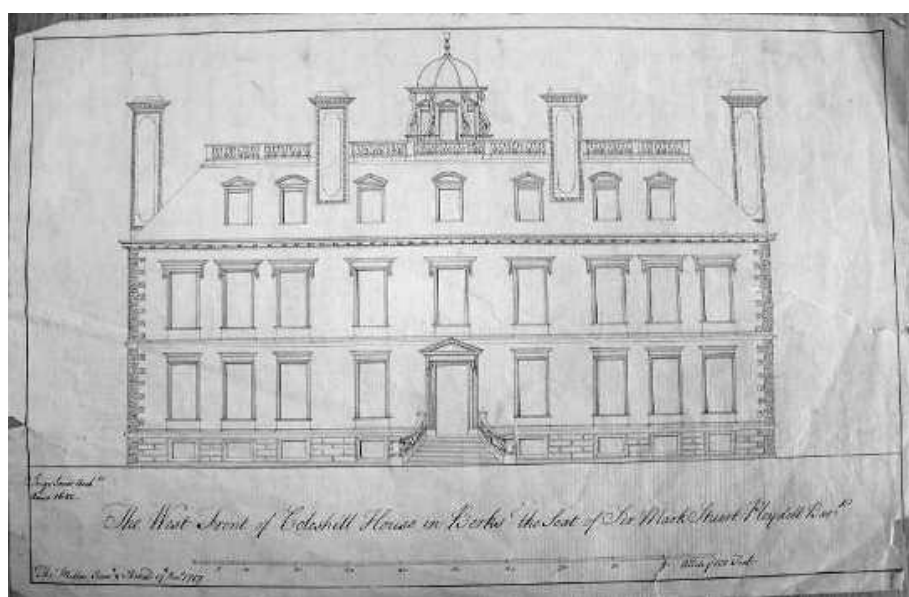


Figure 9 Thomas Milton, west front of Coleshill House, 1757. WSA, 1946 *Coleshill Drawings*.

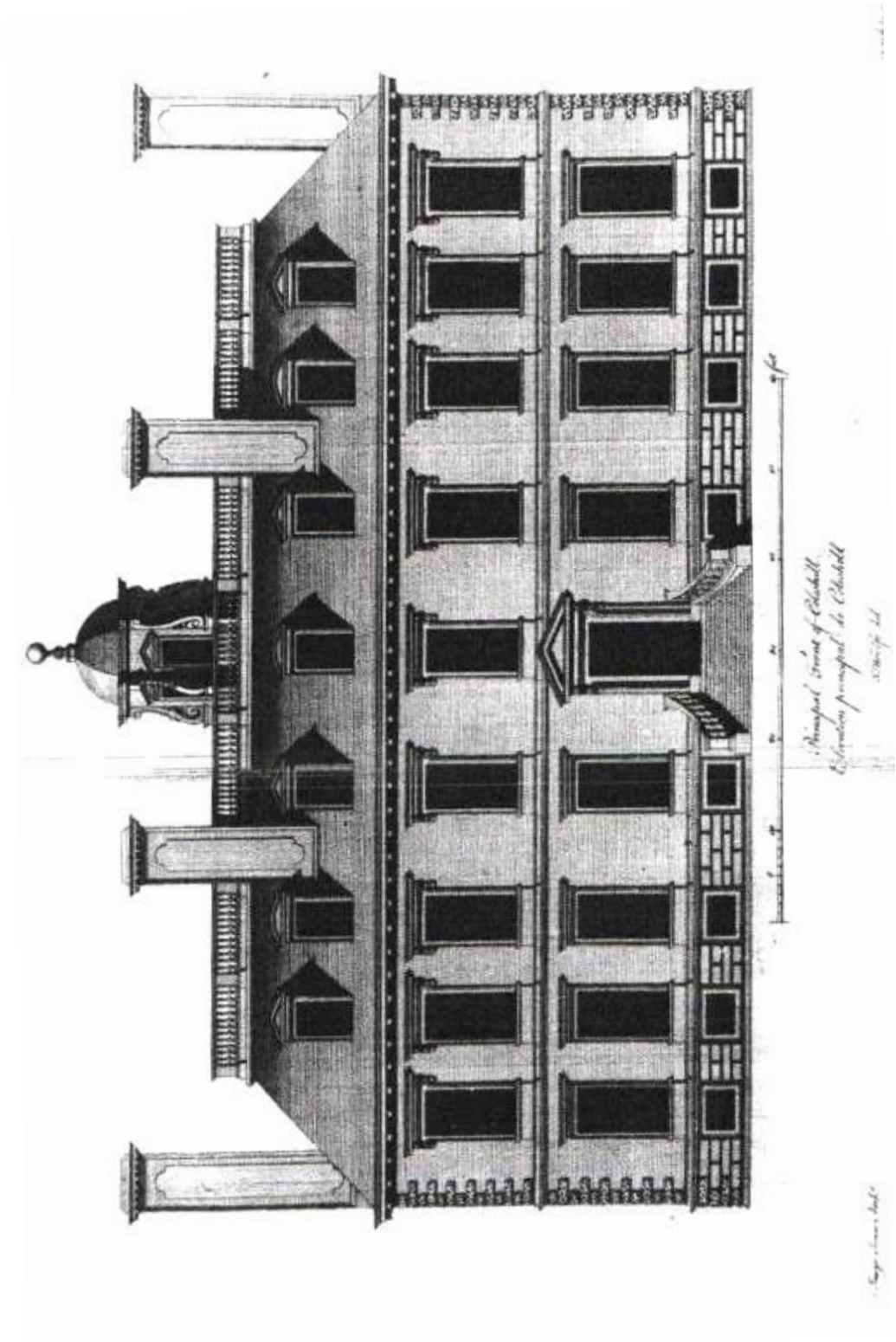
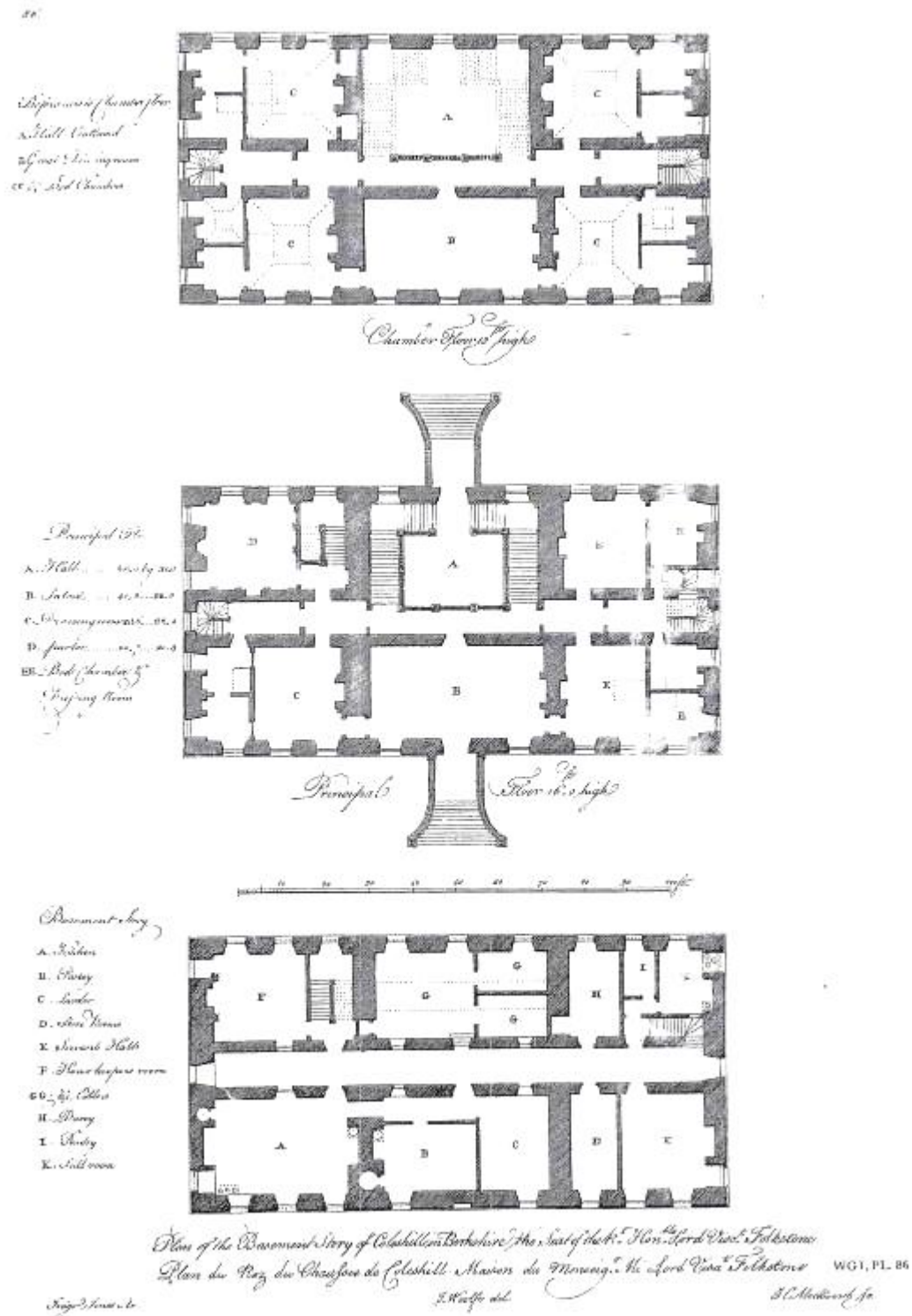


Figure 10 West front from Woolfe and Gandon's *Vitruvius Britannicus* Vol. V, 1771.

Figure 11 Floor plans from Woolfe and Gandon's *Vitruvius Britannicus* Vol. V, 1771.

Woolfe and Gandon's text must be treated with caution when we consider the source of their information. I have already noted the anachronistic inclusion of both Coleshill and Longford in a work intended to promote the architecture of the eighteenth century, and the distinctly un-classical Longford is particularly anomalous. In their account of Longford, the authors state that the Earl of Radnor presented them with drawings and descriptions of both houses.<sup>89</sup> This suggests that Coleshill's inclusion was on the initiative of the Earl, as a conscious move to position the house in contemporary architectural discourse. Both the Earl of Radnor and Viscount Folkestone were subscribers to Woolfe and Gandon's project, and the Earl is credited by the authors as being 'a great encourager and promoter' of the work. From this evidence it appears that Coleshill's inclusion in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, having been overlooked in Campbell's volumes, was orchestrated largely by the Earl of Radnor in collusion with his son. By asserting Coleshill's architectural pre-eminence as an unaltered Jonesian work and a bearer of the classical virtues of harmonious proportion, validated by Burlington, the family's own reputation was enhanced. The Earl and his son were self-interested promoters of the house, who actively represented it according to contemporary cultural conditions in order to bolster their status and identity. Furthermore, this textual rendering of Coleshill as published by Woolfe and Gandon and reinforced through visual representation has remained a mainstay of the historiography of the house.

However the Earl's re-imagining of Coleshill in these terms was itself influenced by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell's interpretation of the house of some 30 years previously, and *Vitruvius Britannicus* was not the first published text to assert Coleshill as an unaltered testament to the genius of Jones. Sir Mark had provided Thomas Wotton with information for his new *English Baronetage* which was published in 1741, having spent many years researching his family history. This text asserted that Margaret Pratt had procured the building of Coleshill House 'in the year 1650 by Inigo Jones and which having since undergone no addition or alteration is remarkable for being the most compleat if not the only compleat work now remaining of that great architect'.<sup>90</sup> Here we can see the embryo of Coleshill's historiographic myth (from which Margaret Pratt was to be excised), which the Earl of Radnor later appropriated to thrust the house into the architectural limelight.

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<sup>89</sup> Woolfe and Gandon, V (1771), p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Wotton, *The English Baronets: Being a Genealogical and Historical Account of Their Families* (London: T. Wotton, 1741), p. 239. In earlier drafts of this text Sir Mark was unsure how to express Margaret's contribution, suggesting that Coleshill was built 'by her permission', or 'at her request'. See Sir Mark's Pedigree Book, WSA, 1946/2/1 fol. 217.

Alongside the textual account of the house in Woolfe and Gandon's volume, the graphic representation of Coleshill's elevation served to reinforce consensual values, which were implicitly embedded in the image of the house on the page. With minimal rendering of textural surfaces and materials, no contextual setting, and the barest hint of perspective, the eye was left free to focus on the linear outlines that set out the inherent geometric qualities of the building. The door and window openings were left blind in accordance with established convention, drawing attention to the framing of the open space and the classical treatment of the surrounds. The image carried little in the way of narrative character or extraneous detail, but primarily expressed controlled order and symmetry. The notion of Coleshill as a 'perfect work' resided in the way it expressed a consensual architectural ideal in this image. Its beauty derived from the classical values of harmony and proportion as espoused by the likes of Vitruvius, Palladio and Leon Battista Alberti, which reached fruition in the architecture of Jones. Such an interpretation required a degree of cultural competence from an educated reader in order to understand the specialised architectural language. Furthermore, despite the fact that the house was over a century old, Coleshill was rendered by the artist's sleight of hand as flawless as if it were new, so that it could be seamlessly integrated into Woolfe and Gandon's project of celebrating the British architectural achievement of the eighteenth century. Image and text were mutually reinforcing on the page, and their combined effect more insistent.

In adopting the orthogonal elevation as the principal method of architectural illustration Woolfe and Gandon were following Campbell's earlier volumes, which were the first published collections of images representing British buildings using this specialist architectural visual language. Robert Tavernor emphasises the influence of Palladio's *Quattro Libri* in introducing this graphic convention to British architectural writers. It was Palladio, he suggests, who recognised how persuasive images could be when accompanied by brief descriptions and who rejected the use of perspective which, although pleasing to the eye, made it difficult to obtain precise measurements from the illustration in order to reproduce buildings in practice.<sup>91</sup>

The use of orthogonal representation to depict Coleshill's façade supported the classical re-imagining of the house, and helped to crystallise its qualities of proportion and the relation of parts for the purposes of aesthetic evaluation in the mind of the beholder. But how far does an aesthetic response to Coleshill derive from the building itself, or is it an idea that resides principally in this mode of visual rendering? To put it another way, can the notion of the beauty and perfection of the house derive from the

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<sup>91</sup> Robert Tavernor, *Palladio and Palladianism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), pp. 111-12.

actual harmony of its proportions, if those proportions depend on the impossible viewing point of the elevation on the page? This problem of 'ocular deception' was recognised by Vitruvius, who proposed adjustments to the rules of proportion to allow for this effect.<sup>92</sup> On the basis that the human eye cannot perceive the entire building at once, Branko Mitrović argues that in order for a building to derive beauty from its proportions regardless of the viewpoint, the aesthetic experience must reside beyond the realm of seeing and in the sphere of thought.<sup>93</sup> He emphasises the role of both visual and non-visual perception of proportion in the production of this sensation of beauty. Perspective illustration might be rejected in favour of forms of architectural representation which more faithfully reproduce the proportional relations of the building than those which can be perceived directly by the eye. For Coleshill, both the building and its re-imagining as an orthogonal elevation collude in the formulation of an idea of the house that satisfies the formal conditions of harmonious proportion in which its beauty is said to reside.

### Nineteenth-Century Pictorial Representation

By 1800 new theories of aesthetics were emerging influenced by changing ideas about landscape and nature and by the writings of aestheticians such as Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price.<sup>94</sup> These new theories of the picturesque were to have a profound bearing on architecture and its interpretation, rejecting rationalist ideas that venerated order and exactitude in favour of qualities such as variety of outline, irregularity and movement. In the wake of these developments new publications appeared featuring picturesque views of country houses in landscape settings which disseminated this new aesthetic.<sup>95</sup> Two accounts of Coleshill published in topographical works in the opening decades of the nineteenth century demonstrate how text and image were instrumental in re-constructing the house according to these changing aesthetic and cultural values.

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<sup>92</sup> *Vitruvius: Ten Books on Architecture*, ed. by Ingrid D. Rowland and Thomas Noble Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 49-50.

<sup>93</sup> Branko Mitrović, 'Objectively Speaking', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 52 (1993), 59-67.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, David Watkin, *The English Vision: The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design* (London: Murray, 1982); Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Cass, 1927, repr. 1967); Andrew Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty: Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>95</sup> Tim Clayton, 'Publishing Houses: Prints of Country Seats', in *The Georgian Country House: Architecture, Landscape and Society*, ed. by Dana Arnold, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2003), pp. 43-59.

John Britton was an antiquary and topographer, and in 1801 he published the first volume of *The Beauties of England and Wales* with Edward Brayley, which sought to celebrate the nation's natural beauties and architectural achievements. The authors visited most of the localities themselves, and illustrated their text with views of buildings in pastoral landscape settings often populated with human figures and animals. Coleshill was illustrated with two pictorial plates showing the front elevation of the house set in newly landscaped grounds (Figure 12). The accompanying textual rendering of the house was incorporated into an account of Coleshill village which included a description of the church and the family monuments there. Britton referred to the mansion as displaying 'a *perfect* and unaltered specimen of the architectural taste of Inigo Jones, from whose designs it was erected in the year 1650, only two years before his death'.<sup>96</sup> He quoted a laudatory account of Jones by Horace Walpole to reinforce in the mind of the reader the importance of the architect, and went on to explain the illustration of the house:

As the celebrity of Inigo Jones must render every display of his works interesting to the admirer of architecture, we have been induced to give a view of the house, which, by representing its shape and style of building, precludes the necessity of verbal description.<sup>97</sup>

There are echoes here of Woolfe and Gandon, and again there is an implicit connection inferred between the external appearance of the house and Jones, which an educated reader would comprehend. The mode of illustration revealed little of the architectural detail of the house, and proportion could be understood only from an oblique viewpoint in contrast to the eighteenth-century orthogonal elevation. Britton was equivocal about the interiors, writing that 'The internal parts are characterised by those ponderous ceilings, heavy cornices, and profusion of carved ornaments and gilding, which, at the period of its erection, were supposed to constitute the essentials of elegance'.<sup>98</sup> This places the interiors firmly in the past, at a time when architectural taste was different to the present. The grounds of the house, which were recently altered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor, provided a context for the illustrated building, and were noted admiringly by Britton as being 'laid out according to the present taste in landscape gardening'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> John Britton and others, *Beauties of England and Wales; Or Delineations Topographical, Historical and Descriptive, of Each County*, 18 vols (London: Vernor and Hood, 1801-1816), I (1801), pp. 131-32.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.



Another topographical series in a similar vein produced by the architectural draughtsman John Preston Neale was *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen, in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland*, published from 1818.<sup>100</sup> Neale's endeavour was 'to collect the most accurate descriptions of the various mansions', as well as to provide biographical and genealogical details of the families to whom they belonged.<sup>101</sup> He asserted the value of the mansions of the gentry and nobility as exhibiting 'our national taste for whatever is beautiful in nature, or classical in art, presenting the happy union of splendid comfort which is honourably characteristic of English feeling'.<sup>102</sup> This patriotic rhetoric was indicative of the cultural imperative to construct a concept of nationhood at the time, and Neale strongly connected architecture to the idea of national culture and values.<sup>103</sup> Coleshill House was illustrated by Neale with an engraving of the front elevation in a pastoral landscape setting (Figure 13).<sup>104</sup> The author provided a more detailed textual description of the architectural features of the house than Britton, and pointed to 'an admirable symmetry to be observed on this interesting example of the architecture of Inigo Jones'.<sup>105</sup> He also elaborated at some length on the family inheritance of the owners, asserting the pedigree of several families of antiquity and distinction associated with the house. This non-aesthetic associative information about Coleshill was a development in its historiography that constituted a new way of assigning cultural value and meaning based on lineage and history.

The mode of visual representation adopted by Britton and Neale rejected specialist architectural graphic conventions in order to exploit the imaginative potentialities of engraving to assign value. This idealisation of the house depended in part on the newly-landscaped gardens, which will be explored in the next chapter, as a setting of formal gardens would have been alien to the picturesque graphic paradigm. The graphic strategy of topographical publications such as these contrasted with the orthogonal mode of representation of the eighteenth century and the different set of values that this espoused. The formal qualities of the house were made to submit to the relative disorder of the planting, the topography and the cloudscape. Depicted in an established landscape setting, the images offered a sense of the rootedness of the

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<sup>100</sup> John Preston Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, 6 vols (London: W.H. Reid, 1818-1823).

<sup>101</sup> Neale, VI (1823), p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of issues of national identity at this time, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Neale, I (1818), p. 59.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

building in the natural world, and reinforced the symbolic link between the house and the land. The house was no longer evoked as pristine and new, but when read in tandem with the family pedigree the past became an important component of its identity. Image and text worked together to position Coleshill within a revised architectural discourse that privileged not only picturesque aesthetics but also historical pedigree. Whilst the Jonesian myth prevailed, these images nonetheless represented an alternative cognition to the eighteenth-century renderings of the house which were based on formal qualities and notions of classical propriety as a condition of good taste.



Figure 12 Coleshill House from Britton's *The Beauties of England and Wales*, 1801.



Figure 13 Coleshill House from J.P. Neale's *Views of Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen*, 1818.

### ***Country Life* and Twentieth-Century Photography**

From 1904, Coleshill was described in a number of publications associated with *Country Life* magazine which, as a popular periodical, introduced the house to a wider audience. Launched in 1897, *Country Life* was described by one Cabinet Minister as 'the architectural conscience of the nation'.<sup>106</sup> Its publications were notable for exploiting photography as a visual medium which was understood to have a powerful sense of truthfulness in comparison with drawings and engravings. This presented new opportunities for re-imagining Coleshill House, and interiors in particular were illustrated as spaces in their own right. The first published photographs of Coleshill were taken by Charles Latham for John Belcher and Mervyn Macartney's volume *Later Renaissance Architecture in England* of 1901, but it was the *Country Life* images that particularly shaped perceptions of the house.<sup>107</sup> Latham was the *Country Life* staff photographer from 1898 until around 1909, as well as working for the publishers Batsford who also pioneered the use of photography in its architectural publications. As a new representational strategy, McKellar has noted the significance of photography

<sup>106</sup> Roy Strong, *Country Life 1897-1997: The English Arcadia* (London: Boxtree, 1996), p. 20.

<sup>107</sup> John Belcher and Mervyn E. Macartney, *Later Renaissance Architecture in England*, 2 vols (London: Batsford, 1901), II.

in the first decades of the twentieth century for its role in the accurate recording of historic architecture and interiors as well as providing sources for modern design at the time.<sup>108</sup>

The main accounts of Coleshill in *Country Life* appeared in three illustrated essays in the magazine, the first in 1904, probably by Henry Avray Tipping, and two by Tipping when he was architectural editor in 1919.<sup>109</sup> Tipping was a trained historian, and an early proponent of using methods of historical research for the study of country houses.<sup>110</sup> According to Roy Strong 'his articles were genuine contributions to architectural history, bringing the country house and garden centre-stage within the magazine'.<sup>111</sup> The essays on Coleshill offered the first detailed published accounts of the house and its history and were well illustrated. The 1904 article reinforced Coleshill's status as a remarkable house with 'the great distinction of being a work of the ripest talent of Inigo Jones'.<sup>112</sup> The interiors received the greatest attention in the photographs, which indulged in the richness of the decorative plaster ceilings, carved staircase ornamentation and chimneypieces, fully exploiting the potentiality of the new graphic technology to capture detail as well as providing a sense of the interior space (Figure 14, Figure 15). The author of the essay claimed that 'The pictures will show that the house is remarkable for nothing so much as for its magnificent ceiling adornments, upon which the finest skill of the carver and modeller in plaster has been employed'.<sup>113</sup> Coleshill was singled out for 'the abundance of fine craftsmanship' which the images ably demonstrated, reflecting an 'Arts and Crafts' sensibility preoccupied by materials and techniques which flourished in England at the time of publication.<sup>114</sup> These photographs contrasted with the visual strategy adopted by Harry Triggs and Henry Tanner in their volume *Some Architectural Works of Inigo Jones* published by Batsford in 1901.<sup>115</sup> This took a more archaeological approach with accurate scale

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<sup>108</sup> McKellar, 'Representing the Georgian', pp. 329-331.

<sup>109</sup> 'Coleshill House', *Country Life*, 7 May, 1904, pp. 666-73; Avray Tipping, 'Coleshill House I' and 'Coleshill House II'.

<sup>110</sup> Bernard Darwin, *Fifty Years of Country Life* (London, Country Life, 1947), p. 31.

<sup>111</sup> Strong, *Country Life*, p. 24.

<sup>112</sup> 'Coleshill House', p. 666.

<sup>113</sup> 'Coleshill House', p. 670.

<sup>114</sup> Similarly in another *Country Life* publication, Laurence Turner's *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain* (London: Country Life, 1927), Turner exploits the potentiality of photography to illustrate his text on Coleshill's decorative plasterwork (pp. 120-26). He suggests that Ware's engraving of what was later the billiard room ceiling does not do it justice when compared with the photographic illustration of the same (p. 125).

<sup>115</sup> Harry Inigo Triggs and Henry Tanner, *Some Designs of Inigo Jones* (London: Batsford, 1901).

drawings of isolated and decontextualised exterior and interior fragments that bore little relation to each other as presented on the page (Figure 16). In Triggs and Tanner's way, as McKellar notes, 'the traditional classical relationship between the part and the whole became reversed', and this graphic strategy arguably had less impact on the idealization of the house than the sublime *Country Life* images.<sup>116</sup>

Also in 1904, *Country Life* published what was to be the first of three volumes edited by Tipping entitled *In English Homes*, which showcased Latham's photographs.<sup>117</sup> The 1904 essay on Coleshill from the magazine was reproduced, but the house was located within the broader rhetoric of the publication. Coleshill was one of 74 houses selected for the first volume, which contained a range of buildings of varying size and date, including Little Moreton Hall, Castle Howard, Waddesdon Manor, and Eastnor Castle. Reviewing the publication at the time, C.J. Cornish located it in the context of contemporary attitudes to architecture, explaining the diversity of works as representative of a 'far more catholic appreciation of architectural and structural merit [...] There are no fashions, either romantic or classical. All work is given every credit'.<sup>118</sup> The first decade of the twentieth century was a period when architectural style was a focus for debate, but the classicism of the Post-Restoration period increasingly came into favour as a source of inspiration for contemporary design.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, Cornish noted the nationalistic agenda of *In English Homes*, observing Latham's intention

that his illustrations shall themselves convince the reader that whenever a form of treatment in favour abroad was brought to the notice of our countrymen, they absorbed and reproduced it in a form absolutely their own. The examples [...] are all unmistakably English.<sup>120</sup>

In this context, Coleshill was set up to be read and admired, not as a specifically classical house, but as exemplifying the superior quality of English architectural design over the continental through the beauty and craftsmanship of the interiors accurately represented on the page.

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<sup>116</sup> McKellar, 'Representing the Georgian', p. 331.

<sup>117</sup> Charles Latham, *In English Homes: The Internal Character, Furniture and Adornments of Some of the Most Notable Houses of England Accurately Depicted From Photographs Taken by Charles Latham*, ed. by Henry Avray Tipping, 3 vols (London: Country Life (1904-09), I (1904).

<sup>118</sup> C.J. Cornish, 'In English Homes', *Country Life*, 11 June 1904, pp. 870-74 (p. 872).

<sup>119</sup> For a discussion of attitudes to architecture and style at this time, see Robert Macleod, *Style and Society: Architectural Ideology in Britain, 1835-1914* (London: RIBA Publications, 1971).

<sup>120</sup> Cornish, p. 872.



Figure 14 Entrance hall at Coleshill House, 1904. © *Country Life Picture Library*.



Figure 15 Saloon, formerly the Great Dining room, at Coleshill House, 1904. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

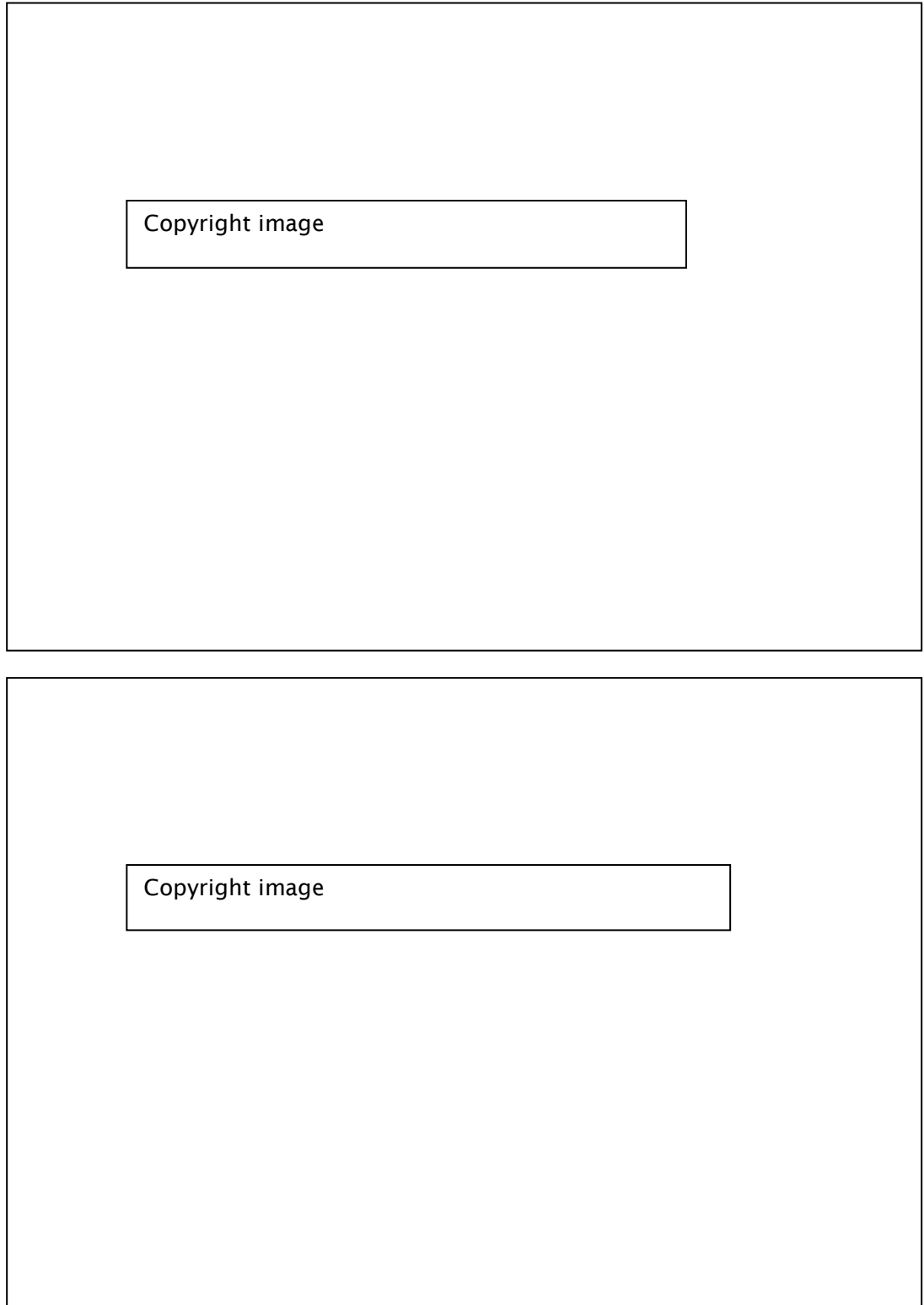


Figure 16 Sections and details of Coleshill House from Harry Triggs and Henry Tanner, *Some Architectural Works of Inigo Jones*, 1901.



In his introduction, Tipping positioned *In English Homes* as a follow-up to Joseph Nash's *Mansions of England in the Olden Time* published 60 years previously. He located Nash's work within the Romantic Movement that had 'stirred the general mind to a revolt against the chilling spirit of a classic convention and the decayed forms of a soulless art'.<sup>121</sup> For Tipping, Nash's book was 'still prized as a pictorial interpretation of the home life of old Englishmen'.<sup>122</sup> But Tipping asserted the superiority of photography as a means for accurately showing the most admirable qualities of English architecture. Tipping also associated the buildings represented in the book with the higher values of 'olden times', reflecting his concern for the decline of modern society 'when once again there are signs of a falling away from the better ideals'.<sup>123</sup> Despite the apparently anti-classical stance of the publication, Jones nonetheless maintained his status by association with the Renaissance spirit. Stylistically, Jones was invoked as a Palladian architect, but in Tipping's value-laden narrative, Jonesian Palladianism was not seen as antithetical to the values of an old England as invoked by the Romantic Movement.

Despite assertions of the verisimilitude of photography, as a technique of visually representing architecture it nonetheless directs the viewer to perceive the subject in particular ways.<sup>124</sup> Photographic images of Coleshill skew perceptions and aestheticise the building through techniques such as framing the field of view, lighting, texture and composition. By 1903, Latham was beginning to denude the interiors of country houses of their modern clutter when he photographed them, in favour of historical furnishings. The *New York Times* referred to Latham's technique as "to restore", so to speak, his models by placing in the interiors selected those things which historically belong there'.<sup>125</sup> The placing of one chair askew in the foreground facing a fireplace became his signature, and this evocative visual device was widely used in *Country Life* photographs (Figure 17).<sup>126</sup> The imaginative reconstruction of houses such as Coleshill in these images was arguably as romanticised as Nash's drawings in *The Mansions of England*.

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<sup>121</sup> Latham, I (1904), p. ix.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. x.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. x.

<sup>124</sup> On this, see Ian Borden, 'Imaging Architecture: the Uses of Photography in the Practice of Architectural History', *Journal of Architecture*, 12 (2007), 57-77.

<sup>125</sup> 'English Homes: Charles Latham's Faithful Pictures of Artistic Interiors', *New York Times*, 13 August 1904,

<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70A12F939541B728DDDA0994D0405B848CF1D3>>[accessed 28 April 2010].

<sup>126</sup> Strong, *Country Life*, p. 22.





Figure 17 The Oak Room at Coleshill House, 1919. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

Coleshill's *Country Life* photographs offer iconic images of the house which assert its architectural authority, in part by presenting only those rooms deemed architecturally significant whilst other parts are absent. The images sought to draw attention to specific features, such as ceilings or chimneypieces, in accordance with sensibilities that privileged artisanal skill and craftsmanship. Furthermore the house was only selectively captured, thereby influencing what was seen as significant through a kind of amnesia as some features of the building were consigned to oblivion through their absence. The photographs of Coleshill tell us nothing of the appearance of, say, the kitchen, the servants' hall or the housekeeper's room. We know what the ornamental ceilings of the state rooms looked like in fine detail, but nothing of the ceilings of the first floor bedrooms which went unrecorded, and whilst we have many images of the great staircase, we have none of the secondary stairs in the corridors or those leading up to the cupola.

The extensive reliance on photographic representation in *Country Life* publications constituted a new step in Coleshill's visual historiography which continues to have a bearing on perceptions of the house now that the building itself is no longer available for visual consumption. Photography was understood at the time to offer a powerful sense of truthfulness, providing the means for the realistic visual representation of

works of architecture.<sup>127</sup> Following Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Coleshill's mass produced image can be seen as part of the general commercialisation of culture, in which photography reconstructed the house in a form that made it available to a wide audience, few of whom would ever experience the building firsthand.<sup>128</sup> These images become all the more potent in framing the identity of Coleshill now that the building itself no longer exists. In a Benjaminian sense, the process of photographic reproduction removes the aura of the house itself, by negating the uniqueness of the original work of art where its auric power resides. According to Benjamin, 'The here and now of the original constitutes the abstract idea of its genuineness' which is beyond technological reproduction.<sup>129</sup> History is played out only on the unique existence of the original work, for example through alterations to its physical structure, and this further constitutes the authenticity of the work.<sup>130</sup> But where the original work of art no longer exists, photographs can assume cultural value by memorialising that which has been lost.

Arguably Coleshill House has not entirely vanished, and Benjamin's criteria for the genuineness of the unique work can still be applied at the site of the house, which retains some of the auric qualities of the original. The site continues to bear historical witness to the passing of time, and the uniqueness and authenticity of the place is constitutive of its ongoing cultural value. Furthermore whilst for Benjamin reproduction devalues the original, for Coleshill it can be argued that the photographic reproductions of the lost house, despite their limitations, nonetheless serve to sustain the cultural value of the site. This corresponds to Barthes idea in *Camera Lucida* where he asserts that photographs possess an aura of their own, and furthermore that they have in some sense the ability to resurrect that which is lost.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, Benjamin identifies a particular type of photograph that takes on the cultural value of the original - the portrait - which serves to 'recall dead or absent loved ones'.<sup>132</sup> This notion of the portrait can be applied to photographs of Coleshill, which acquire an elegiac quality when they are viewed subsequent to the loss of the house. Moreover, as Borden notes, photographs have the power to convey meanings that disperse away from the

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<sup>127</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 77.

<sup>128</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008).

<sup>129</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, p. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>131</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 82.

<sup>132</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, p. 14.

building that is their subject.<sup>133</sup> When Giles Worsley published a *Country Life* photograph of Coleshill in his book *England's Lost Country Houses* (2002) not only was the image infused with a nostalgic longing for the house, it also signified the cultural loss to the nation of the many country houses destroyed during the twentieth century ((Figure 18).<sup>134</sup> Indeed for many, Coleshill is regarded as the most tragic of all these losses. The poignancy of these photographs as portraits of a lost house continues to resonate today, contributing to Coleshill's mythological existence and enhancing the auric quality of the site itself.



Figure 18 Coleshill House, 1919. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

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<sup>133</sup> Borden, p. 70.

<sup>134</sup> Giles Worsley, *England's Lost Country Houses: From the Archives of Country Life* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), p. 104. For the potential of photographs to have this effect, see Walter Benjamin, 'A Small History of Photography', in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), pp. 240-57 (p. 250) (first publ. in *The Literarische Welt* in 1931).

## Coleshill House: The Jonesian Masterpiece and Narratives of Biography

### Eighteenth-Century Jonesian Revival

It has already been shown how eighteenth-century publications established Jones as the creative genius behind Coleshill House in contemporary architectural discourse. Woolfe and Gandon's *Vitruvius Britannicus* cemented this connection with Jones in public perception as well as articulating Coleshill's association with Lord Burlington and his circle. This provided a key text for future architectural historians which proved influential in locating the house in narratives of Palladianism. One further text must be noted in the context of eighteenth-century assertions of Jones's authorship of Coleshill. Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Paintings*, published between 1762 and 1765, was based on the manuscript notebooks of George Vertue, and provided a popular biographical account of the life of Inigo Jones. Walpole lauded Jones as a genius 'so great that in that reign of the arts we scarce know the name of another architect'.<sup>135</sup> He produced an influential list of buildings attributed to Jones including Coleshill which became an important source for later writers and architectural historians. In his analysis of the mythology of Jones's canon, G. Roberts acknowledges the significance of Walpole's list of 47 attributed buildings, which marked a shift away from a canon focused on Jones's London works to one which admitted many non-metropolitan attributions.<sup>136</sup> Unlike other eighteenth-century architectural authors, Walpole was not a practising architect. Roberts sees his contribution as representing a literary strand in Jones's historiography based on a more biographical interest in his achievements. He contrasts this with the earlier approach whereby practising architects presented Jones and his works as a source for imitation by which to influence contemporary architectural design.<sup>137</sup>

Many of Walpole's attributions were highly speculative or imaginative, and he saw no need to supply evidence in order to confirm his attributions. Walpole's construction of an enlarged Jonesian canon indicates the powerful urge to ascribe buildings to Jones, which persisted at least until numerous reassessments of such claims were made in the early twentieth century. In 1907, Tipping discredited Walpole as the originator of many false Jonesian attributions, calling him 'that manufacturer of myths [...] who

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<sup>135</sup> Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England: with Some Account of the Principal Artists*, ed. by Ralph N. Wornum, 3 vols, (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888), III, p.64.

<sup>136</sup> G. Roberts, 'Inigo Jones: the Architectural Historiography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>137</sup> Roberts, p. 88.

concocted history by the easy process of imagining probabilities and not searching out facts'.<sup>138</sup> But until that time, Coleshill remained firmly within Jones's canon and bathed in the reflected light of his genius.

### Nineteenth-Century Attribution

Whilst Jones's reputation waned during the course of the nineteenth century as architectural taste shifted away from the classical, Coleshill nonetheless remained inextricably tied to his name.<sup>139</sup> Not everyone accepted attributions to Jones without question, but Coleshill was amongst those that, according to Reverend Dallaway writing in 1806, were recognised as genuine works.<sup>140</sup> Sir John Soane, whilst not fully endorsing the architecture of Jones, had great admiration for Coleshill inasmuch as it represented the best of Jones's achievements. In a Royal Academy lecture in 1815, Soane referred to Coleshill as one of Jones's 'most celebrated works', and he believed it to be 'the only work now remaining of that great man who first made us acquainted with the magical beauties of Grecian and Roman architecture'.<sup>141</sup> On the strength of Coleshill's attribution to Jones, William John Bankes sent his architect Charles Barry to draw the ceilings there in 1835 as models for sympathetic alterations to his dining room and stairs at Kingston Lacy in Dorset, which was also understood to be the work of Jones (Figure 19).<sup>142</sup> Like Coleshill, Kingston Lacy was later re-attributed to Roger Pratt.

By the 1830s Jones's two most famous and revered works, the Queen's House at Greenwich and the Banqueting House, Whitehall had both been altered. The Queen's House was converted for use as the Royal Naval Asylum School by Daniel Asher Alexander between 1807 and 1812, whilst the Banqueting House was restored and refaced by Sir John Soane and Sir Robert Smirke from 1829. These interventions fuelled Coleshill's mythology as the sole remaining unaltered masterpiece by Jones. Coleshill was conceived as having resisted the historical forces of change and degeneration, and in its unaltered form it preserved the intentions of its creative architect. But in order to represent the house in these terms, it was necessary to blind the reader to those alterations which had been made. Therefore the service annex that was added to the

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<sup>138</sup> Latham, III (1909), p. xxi

<sup>139</sup> See G. Roberts for a discussion of Jones's reputation during the nineteenth century.

<sup>140</sup> James Dallaway, *Observations on English Architecture, Military, Ecclesiastical and Civil [...]* (London: J. Taylor, 1806), p. 200.

<sup>141</sup> David Watkin, *Sir John Soane: The Royal Academy Lectures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 620.

<sup>142</sup> Antony Cleminson, 'The Transition from Kingston Hall to Kingston Lacy', *Architectural History*, 31 (1988), pp. 121-135 (p. 129).

north end of Coleshill around 1788 was suppressed in textual and visual representations in order to preserve the classical proportions of the Jonesian house. Additions and alterations were edited out, refining back to the original building and purifying it at the cost of its historical development. Conceiving of Coleshill in these terms was a key factor in its canonical identity, serving to sustain and enhance its cultural value. Indeed Worsley, writing in 2002, locates Coleshill's importance not only in the quality of the original work, but also in the 'fact' that the house had been barely altered since it was built. In Worsley's view,

Part of the reason for the house's survival was the respect in which it was subsequently held. To the Neo-Palladians, who believed it to be the work of Inigo Jones, the house had iconic status, and it was carefully and respectfully repaired in 1744-45 under the direction of the Earls of Burlington and Leicester'.<sup>143</sup>

The extent to which Coleshill was indeed 'respectfully repaired' in relation to its iconic status will be addressed in the next chapter.

Throughout the nineteenth century there continued to be a powerful urge to assign buildings to Jones. This was given visual expression in 1854 when the architect William Tite exhibited a large drawing called *Composition of the Works of Inigo Jones* at the Royal Academy. Coleshill was amongst the 54 buildings depicted, 21 of which dated from after Jones's death (Figure 20, Figure 21).<sup>144</sup> In 1881 Jones's bloated canon was questioned by Joseph Gwilt in his *Encyclopaedia of Architecture*. Gwilt believed that many of the works assigned to Jones were in fact produced by his pupils and followers, but Coleshill was nonetheless cited as strong proof of Jones's contribution to the advancement of architecture during his career.<sup>145</sup> In 1893, William John Loftie was less certain of Coleshill's attribution, but he had read Woolfe and Gandon's account and been reassured by it: 'Of Coleshill in Berkshire we cannot be sure, though it is positively asserted to have been built by Jones 1650 and certainly looks very like his handwork. Lord Burlington believed in Coleshill and employed Ware to make drawings of it.'<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Worsley, *England's Lost Country Houses*, p. 114.

<sup>144</sup> This drawing is in the RIBA collections, FRA/TITE/1. See 'The Work of Inigo Jones', *RIBA Journal*, 72 (1965), 342-43.

<sup>145</sup> Gwilt, Joseph, *An Encyclopaedia of Architecture: Historical, Theoretical and Practical*, ed. by Wyatt Papworth (London: Longman, Green, 1881), p. 207.

<sup>146</sup> William John Loftie, *Inigo Jones, Wren, and the Rise and Decline of Modern Architecture* (London: Rivington, Percival, 1893), p. 140.





Figure 19 The Dining Room at Kingston Lacy, Dorset, with ceiling based on Coleshill.

©NTPL/Andreas von Einsiedel.



Figure 20 Sir William Tite, *Composition of the Works of Inigo Jones*, 1854. ©RIBA Library Drawings Collection.



Figure 21 Detail from above showing Coleshill House. *RIBA Library Drawings Collection*.

### Jones and the English Renaissance

In February 1889 the Scottish architect John McKean Brydon delivered two prescient lectures on classicism to the Architectural Association in which he re-introduced Jones to contemporary architectural debate in response to the prevalence of Gothic and other debased revivalist styles.<sup>147</sup> Brydon provided a foretaste of things to come with his advocacy of the architecture of the English Renaissance, an approach which was to have considerable influence on contemporary architecture at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. The notion of the English Renaissance dominated the writings of the coming generation of new architectural historians, who asserted Jones as the pioneer of the classical architecture of the period and the inspirer of Wren's style. Jones was understood as thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Renaissance, which was seen by Brydon as 'an awakening of the liberty of thought and speech and action from the thralldom of Medievalism and all its works'.<sup>148</sup> Along with Wilton, Coleshill was invoked by Brydon as a notable example of Jones's unique taste and skill. It revealed Jones as a master of proportion who discarded the orders in his façades and designed his details with a vigour and freedom from the so-called

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<sup>147</sup> The lectures were reviewed in 'The English Classic Revival of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *The Building News*, 22 February 1889, p. 263-64. They generated considerable interest at the time and were reported by four leading architectural journals.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, p. 263.



'trammels of the Classic'.<sup>149</sup> The classicism of the later eighteenth century was rejected as having 'somewhat declined from the high ideal of its more vigorous manhood'.<sup>150</sup> For Brydon, Jones not only founded the English Renaissance but established its national character, 'leaving it to us as a precious heritage to keep and to guard'.<sup>151</sup>

The years around 1900 were a significant period in the development of the field of architectural history, marked by a publishing boom that produced widely accessible volumes aimed not only at those with a specialist interest but more importantly also at a wider non-specialist audience.<sup>152</sup> A small coterie of authors, all practising architects or garden designers, proved to be particularly influential - Reginald Blomfield, J. Alfred Gotch, Henry Avray Tipping, John Belcher, Mervyn Macartney, Harry Inigo Triggs and Henry Tanner. The historiography of this period reflects the co-dependence of professional architecture and the emergent discipline of architectural history. In the early decades of the twentieth century there was a sense in some quarters of the architectural profession that architecture in Britain had stagnated. Functionalist modernism offered one alternative to the pervasive degenerate historicism that characterised late Victorian architecture, but the revival of history as a source was also advocated as a means of reinvigorating the profession. Architect-authors promoted a change in taste by drawing on an idealised notion of the English Renaissance for their sources. The architectural works of Jones and his follower Wren were seen by many of these authors as exemplifying a highpoint of national culture and achievement. In this context, texts which hero-worshipped Jones as the initiator of an architectural revolution served as instruments for the revival of national architecture in the present. Jones offered a role model for the profession, and was celebrated for his individuality and creative genius as an architect. He was contrasted with architects of the later eighteenth century who were condemned for their strictly academic approach. Underlying Jones's hagiography was the question of his relationship to Palladianism, a quiet undercurrent in these texts that did not emerge as a discursive focus until the second half of the twentieth century. At the same time traditional attributions to Jones were also questioned, and a more scholarly approach to architectural history was adopted that relied increasingly on the presentation of evidence. These early twentieth-century texts typically represented Coleshill as a Renaissance house and a bearer of Jones's revolutionary classical ideals, even as his role in the building of the house was challenged. Furthermore, these texts consolidated the reputation of Jones and of the

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<sup>149</sup> 'The English Classic Revival of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', p. 263.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 263.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 263.

<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of this publishing context see McKellar, 'Representing the Georgian'.

works associated with him in the minds of a wider readership that might never experience these buildings for themselves.

A seminal architect-author who set out an influential narrative for the architecture of the English Renaissance was Reginald Blomfield, who referred to Coleshill as ‘a typical instance of Inigo Jones’s manner in the design of country houses’, framing the house as a metonym for Jones’s style.<sup>153</sup> For Blomfield Coleshill represented ‘a very interesting phase of architecture which extended from about 1640 to 1670, an architecture directly inspired by Inigo Jones, and as yet uninfluenced by Wren, of which Coleshill is perhaps the most perfect and complete expression’.<sup>154</sup> Belcher and Macartney largely followed Blomfield’s interpretation of Jones and the English Renaissance in their publication *Later Renaissance Architecture in England* (1901). Whilst Blomfield was cautious about Jones’s authorship of Coleshill, Blomfield and Macartney asserted that there was certain evidence in the form of a brass plaque in the house which proclaimed Jones as the architect (Figure 22).<sup>155</sup> Macartney visited many country houses himself and must have seen the plaque firsthand as it had not previously been cited directly as evidence. The plaque was installed by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell in 1748 following his own research into Coleshill’s origins, and it became a key piece of evidence in the attribution debate. The inscription of Jones’s authorship on the plaque gave it a material and visible permanence which strengthened the authority of the claim. However the plaque is problematic as evidence and we will return to it in the next chapter.

J. Alfred Gotch followed these earlier authors in asserting the contribution of Jones and Wren to elevating English architecture to new heights. In his early writings, Gotch was cautious about attributing Coleshill to Jones, but in later texts he became more accepting on the basis of what he saw as ‘fairly good evidence’.<sup>156</sup> He viewed Coleshill as ‘a striking embodiment of that cultivated manner in architecture which was begun by Jones’.<sup>157</sup> But it was to be Gotch who first publicly displaced Jones in favour of Roger Pratt as the creative genius behind the house, thereby changing the course of Coleshill’s historiography.

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<sup>153</sup> Reginald Blomfield, *A Short History of Architecture in England 1500-1800* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), p. 88.

<sup>154</sup> Blomfield, *A Short History of Renaissance Architecture*, p. 94.

<sup>155</sup> Belcher and Macartney, I, p. 74.

<sup>156</sup> John Alfred Gotch, *The English Home From Charles I to George IV* (London: Batsford, 1918), p. 54.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 22 Brass plaque erected in Coleshill House by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, 1748.

### The Reattribution of Coleshill House

I have already alluded to the doubts that were raised about the many attributions to Jones in the opening decades of the twentieth century, and many buildings were subject to detailed reappraisal at this time. It was during the course of the publication of *The English Home from Charles I to George IV* in 1918 that Gotch learnt of new material that threw serious doubt on Jones's authorship of Coleshill, despite what had previously been regarded by many as sound evidence. His attention was drawn to Roger Pratt's notebooks at the Pratt family residence in Ryston, Norfolk, along with Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell's commonplace book which contained his notes on the history of the house. Prior to these discoveries, Gotch attributed Coleshill to Jones on the basis of Sir Mark's plaque, whilst acknowledging that it was not certain as the plaque was not contemporaneous with the building of the house.<sup>158</sup> Gotch added the new found evidence to his publication in two appendices. He included the now familiar story taken from the commonplace book of the earlier house that was erected in the cucumber garden at Coleshill before Pratt and Jones caused it to be pulled down and rebuilt in its present location. Reluctantly Gotch acknowledged that this evidence made it 'tolerably

<sup>158</sup> Gotch, *The English Home*, p. 56.

clear that Pratt had a large hand in the matter'.<sup>159</sup> In 1924 he wrote an essay intended to demonstrate how Jones's reputation was largely dependent on tradition that had been accepted without question as to its accuracy.<sup>160</sup> He challenged misconceptions about Jones's role in designs for Whitehall Palace, the King Charles Block at Greenwich and Coleshill. From his earlier guarded interpretation of the new evidence he now declared Pratt as the 'actual architect' of the house, although he conceded that John Webb may have had some connection, and that Jones was consulted. Four years later when he published a monograph on Jones he fully accepted the evidence that overturned the old attribution, concluding that 'beyond giving advice to Pratt, Jones could have had very little to do with Coleshill', and he gave Webb no role.<sup>161</sup>

Tipping's articles in *Country Life* in 1919 took up Gotch's reattribution to cement Pratt's contribution to the building of the house, noting that 'Jones's contribution is vague, whilst Pratt's is 'definite and resting on written evidence'.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore Tipping also set about revising the dates of Coleshill's construction from 1650 as traditionally asserted, offering the evidence of a bill for work to the staircase dated 1662 to indicate a revised completion date.<sup>163</sup> This was to be a significant revision, as it placed the completion of the house beyond the lifetime of Jones and opened the way for the younger architect Pratt. However, despite downgrading Jones's role, the architect remained a powerful presence in Tipping's text, which characterised Pratt as a follower of Jones. Tipping sought correspondence between Coleshill and Jones's style, for example in the absence of a pediment and in the severity of the exterior. Taking into account all the new evidence including the 'cucumber garden' story, Tipping offered 'something approaching to a correct account of the building of a house of much value in the annals of our domestic architecture'.<sup>164</sup> But he remained doubtful of Pratt's broader contribution to Renaissance architecture when measured against Jones and Webb. He proposed that although Pratt possessed 'an accurate

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<sup>159</sup> Gotch, *The English Home*, p. 400.

<sup>160</sup> John Alfred Gotch, 'Inigo Jones: Some Surviving Misconceptions', *Journal of the Royal Society of British Architects*, 31 (1924), 598-99.

<sup>161</sup> John Alfred Gotch, *Inigo Jones* (New York: Blom, 1928, repr. 1968), p. 219.

<sup>162</sup> Tipping, 'Coleshill House I,' p. 113.

<sup>163</sup> This bill for carving work by Richard Cleare dated May 1662 has not been traced. When Daniel Lysons, whilst preparing *Magna Britannia* in 1803 sought evidence for the house having been built in 1650 it seems no satisfactory evidence was produced. His published account therefore vaguely placed the house as having been built by Jones in the middle of the seventeenth century. BRO, D/EPb E59, letter from Daniel Lysons to Jacob, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Radnor, 19 February 1803. Daniel Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, 6 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806-22), I, p. 264.

<sup>164</sup> Tipping, 'Coleshill House II', p. 146.

knowledge of form and proportion, a nice sense of balance and distribution, a pure taste in detail and ornament', he soon reached his limits and his approach was 'narrow' and 'pedantic'.<sup>165</sup> Despite these reservations about Pratt's abilities, the combined force of the two great experts, Gotch and Tipping, set Coleshill's historiography on a new path which was widely, if reluctantly, accepted by many scholars.

By the time R.T. Gunther published his edited volume of Roger Pratt's notebooks in 1928, Pratt's role in the building of Coleshill had already gained credence amongst architectural historians of greater authority than he. Until Gotch published the evidence for Coleshill's reattribution in 1918, Pratt was only a marginal figure in narratives of British architectural history. He had only recently been 'rediscovered' through the diaries of Pepys and John Evelyn, which contained various references to his work at Clarendon House, Horseheath Hall and as one of the commissioners to survey St Paul's after the Restoration.<sup>166</sup> Pratt earned an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1896.<sup>167</sup> Beresford Chancellor, in his *The Lives of British Architects* of 1909, noted Pratt's architectural achievements, but it was Clarendon House which he described as 'Pratt's best, perhaps only known work', and there was no mention of Coleshill.<sup>168</sup> Gunther sought to rehabilitate Pratt to narratives of British architecture when he published the edited notebooks, and his volume became an important source in Coleshill's reattribution debate. It was seized upon by architectural historians looking to answer the question of the authorship of the house, as well as furnishing them with a hitherto unknown account of seventeenth-century architectural practice. Gunther included a short chapter on Coleshill, although direct references to the house were relatively few, and he reproduced the relevant extracts from the notebooks along with a facsimile of the text. For Gunther, Coleshill was the house that gave Pratt practical training in the classical and more specifically Palladian knowledge that he acquired through his travels in Italy and from his extensive library of architectural books.<sup>169</sup> He questioned the broader canonisation of Jones and the many doubtful attributions to

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<sup>165</sup> Henry Avray Tipping, *English Homes, Period IV, Late Stuart 1649-1714* (London: Country Life, 1920), pp. xxii-xxxiii.

<sup>166</sup> *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. by Henry B. Wheatley, 10 vols (London: George Bell and Sons, 1893-1899); *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by Esmond S. De Beer, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), III.

<sup>167</sup> L.H. Cust, 'Sir Roger Pratt (1620-1684)', *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Elder Smith, 1896), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/olddnb/22708> [accessed 2 April 2011].

<sup>168</sup> Edwin Beresford Chancellor, *The Lives of British Architects from William of Wykeham to Sir William Chambers* (London: Duckworth, 1909), p. 169.

<sup>169</sup> Gunther, p. 7.

him, noting that ‘The fame of many an artist rests on as insecure a pedestal’.<sup>170</sup> In making Pratt’s notebooks more widely available, albeit in edited form, Gunther smoothed the way for Pratt to assume an important place in English architectural history. Coleshill enhanced Pratt’s reputation by association, and the two have since become co-dependent in some historical narratives. Nathaniel Lloyd for example cited Coleshill as ‘the best work of Sir Roger Pratt [...] and it alone establishes him as a great architect’.<sup>171</sup> But Pratt struggled to emerge from under the shadow of Jones, and in 1945 Sacheverell Sitwell, whilst acknowledging that Clarendon House was ‘the wonder of London for a generation’, wrote that ‘who, but the learned and pedantic, know of Sir Roger Pratt’.<sup>172</sup> Such was Coleshill’s canonical entanglement with Jones that the two remained firmly coupled together in many narratives, and continue to be so into the present.

Despite the new evidence cited by Gotch, some continued to assert Jones’s authorship of the house. When the *Victoria County History* published their Berkshire volume on the history of Coleshill parish in 1924 the house was referred to as ‘a typical instance of Jones’s manner in the design of country houses’, although it was acknowledged that there was no positive evidence that Jones was the architect.<sup>173</sup> Gunther’s publication in no way settled Coleshill’s attribution, but rather increased the allure of the house, pitching one expert against another. In response to a paper delivered at the Royal Institute of British Architects in June 1933 on the authorship of a number of seventeenth-century houses, William Grant Keith refuted Gunther’s claim to Pratt as architect of Coleshill. He introduced fresh evidence into the discussion, in the form of drawings of ornamental capitals for Coleshill taken to be produced under Jones’s instruction by his protégé Webb. These were interpreted as evidence that Jones’s contribution was more than verbal, disregarding the possibility of Webb’s independent role. Keith believed that Gunther’s publication proved only that Pratt completed the interiors and that he was not the originator of the plan. This was to be one of the many positions adopted by scholars on the vexed issue of Coleshill’s attribution.<sup>174</sup> James Lees-Milne is typical of those authors who were reluctant to exclude Jones. Writing in 1953 he fully accepted Pratt’s involvement at Coleshill, admiring him for

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<sup>170</sup> Gunther, p. 94.

<sup>171</sup> Nathaniel Lloyd, *A History of the English House*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London: Architectural Press, 1951), p. 102.

<sup>172</sup> Sitwell, p. 64.

<sup>173</sup> William Page and P.H. Ditchfield, eds, *The Victoria History of the County of Berkshire*, 4 vols, (London: Archibald Constable, 1906-24), IV (1924),

<sup>174</sup> William Grant Keith, ‘Six Houses in Search of an Architect: John Webb and the Marshalls’, *RIBA Journal*, 40 (1933), 732-33.

accomplishing ‘one of England’s greatest masterpieces’.<sup>175</sup> But this was only achieved with Jones as his ‘inspirer and advisor’, at least in the early stages. For Lees-Milne, Coleshill’s groundbreaking design could only have come from the mind of Jones, arguing that ‘The direct connection of the great man with Coleshill helps to explain why the style of the building was so essentially classical when other country houses, like Thorpe and Wisbech, begun at a later date, were yet to show Flemish influences’.<sup>176</sup>

As Pratt began to emerge as a force in his own right, Coleshill was represented as part of his wider oeuvre, which included Horseheath Hall, Kingston Lacy, Clarendon House and Ryston. With these houses, Pratt was to be given credit as the instigator of a new type of astylar double-pile house in the Restoration period, of which Kingston Lacy or Clarendon House were generally thought to be the most influential. Kingston Lacy was built from 1663 for Sir Ralph Bankes, and much altered by Charles Barry between 1835 and 1839. Its pedimented projecting frontispiece represents a marked differentiation from Coleshill that was nonetheless seen as characteristic of the Pratt type (Figure 23). Clarendon House in London’s Piccadilly, built for Lord Clarendon between 1664 and 1667, was a short-lived house demolished in 1683. The three-bay projecting wings on either side of a nine-bay central block with a pedimented frontispiece created an impressive 15-bay elevation in a prominent urban location (Figure 24). Pratt’s friend John Evelyn made no mention of Coleshill in his architectural writings, but he described Clarendon House as ‘without hyperbolies, the best contriv’d, the most usefull, gracefull, and magnificent house in England’ (although he was later to modify that opinion).<sup>177</sup>

Summerson’s *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830* (1953) was a key text that gave Pratt a degree of independence from Jones in developing his own ideal classical house type which became the established model after the Civil War.<sup>178</sup> Significantly, Summerson separated Jones and his followers from their Edwardian association with Wren, who he re-cast as a Baroque architect, marking a period of deviation from pure Jonesian classicism before the return to Palladianism in the 1720s. Colvin’s *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* (1954) provided another authoritative account of Pratt’s achievements, and Pratt was identified as ‘one of the pioneers of classical architecture in England’. Like Summerson, Colvin saw Pratt as establishing a new house type, culminating in Clarendon.<sup>179</sup> Although Colvin’s *Dictionary* contained no original

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<sup>175</sup> Lees-Milne, *The Age of Inigo Jones*, p. 216.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 212.

<sup>177</sup> Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p.141.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>179</sup> Pratt’s own house, Ryston in Norfolk, was not included. Colvin, p. 658.

research on Coleshill, his notes recited at some length its complex and unresolved building chronology, so that the house was largely defined by its problematic authorship.<sup>180</sup> This provided a valuable source of information for architectural historians, but also fuelled the ongoing attribution controversy.

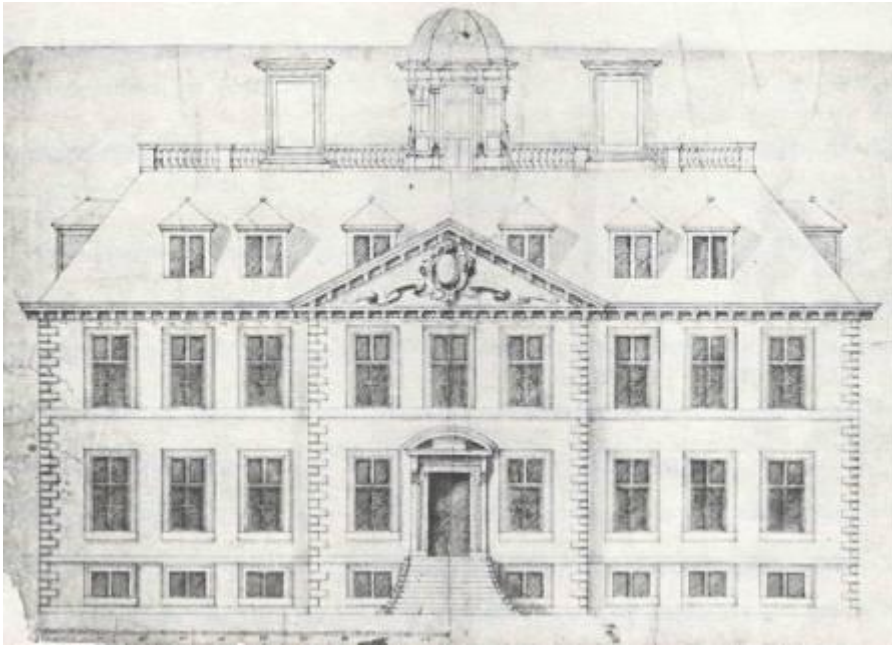


Figure 23 Roger Pratt's design for Kingston Lacy. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

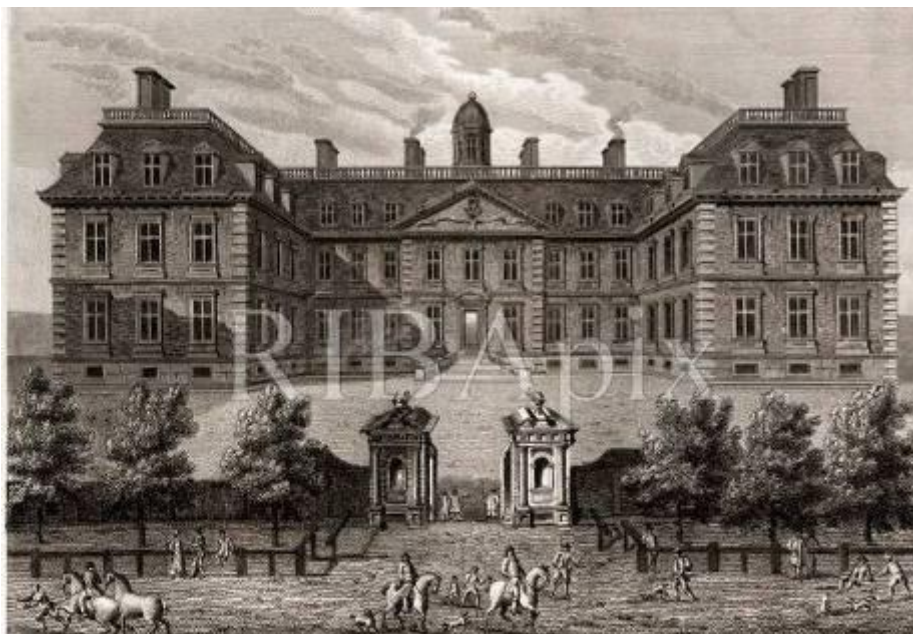


Figure 24 Roger Pratt's Clarendon House in Piccadilly, London, completed 1667. © *RIBA Library Photographs Collection*.

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<sup>180</sup> Colvin, pp. 658-659.



Nigel Silcox-Crowe was one of the few scholars who, like Gunther, actively sought to distance Coleshill from Jones. He attributed Pratt's success to his first hand experience of continental architecture, in contrast to those who derived their architecture from books to produce what Silcox-Crowe called 'mannered classicism' as at Thorpe Hall (Figure 25).<sup>181</sup> He saw Pratt and his near contemporaries such as Hugh May as developing a formula that enabled English architecture to establish its own insular classical language during the second half of the seventeenth century, producing a house type which earned a far wider acceptance than the 'over-refined Italianism of Jones'.<sup>182</sup> In Coleshill, Silcox-Crowe credited Pratt with bringing together a number of disparate features derived principally from continental sources, to achieve a 'demonstrable harmony of parts' in accordance with classical ideals.<sup>183</sup> He regarded Coleshill as 'undeniably one of the first, and the most perfect models' of these new houses, successfully translating continental classicism into an English idiom.<sup>184</sup> Much of the established evidence for Jones's role at Coleshill was challenged by Silcox-Crowe, including the start date of 1650, and he blamed Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell for starting the rumour that Inigo Jones was the architect of the house. He preferred a starting date of around 1657, but this was not widely taken up not least because it excluded the possibility of Jones's involvement.

Whilst Jones remained a powerful presence in accounts of Coleshill despite the evidence of Pratt's role, it was Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw's provocative article in *Country Life* in 1992 which forcefully argued for the reinstatement of Jones as the architect of Coleshill.<sup>185</sup> This was further developed in their volume *Architecture Without Kings* in 1995 which constructed a stylistically-based narrative to reappraise the contributions of Jones, Pratt and Webb to British architecture, notably during the Interregnum. As part of their narrative, the authors sought to rehabilitate Jones as the creative force behind Coleshill, and furthermore to locate Jones as the pioneer not only of the high Palladian manner but also of an opposing vein of minimalism. This so-called 'Puritan Minimalism' derived from a coming together of Court Classicism and what Summerson referred to as 'Artisan Mannerism' to produce a style appropriate for

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<sup>181</sup> Silcox-Crowe, *Sir Roger Pratt 1620-1685*.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>184</sup> Nigel Silcox-Crowe, 'The Life and Work of Sir Roger Pratt (1620-1685)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 1986), p. 123.

<sup>185</sup> Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, 'Inigo Jones Restored', *Country Life*, 30 January 1992, pp. 46-49.

the aristocracy in the uncertain political climate of the Interregnum.<sup>186</sup> Coleshill was represented as the fulfillment of Jones's minimalist designs that he had produced in the 1630s, and the house and its proposed architect were co-dependent in driving forward this narrative.<sup>187</sup> The authors returned to evidence rejected by some scholars in order to reassert Jones as the architect of Coleshill, including Pratt's notebooks and Sir Mark's commonplace book. They distanced Coleshill from Pratt's other attributed houses, where he was said to have 'played safe with the easy relief of breaks in the elevation and the cosy contrast of stone quoins to warm brick'.<sup>188</sup> By locating Coleshill as Jones's work specifically in the Interregnum, the house became politically and socially charged, by virtue of Jones's own Royalist leanings and Court associations. Furthermore, in rejecting Pratt's contribution to the design of the house, the authors connected Coleshill to Palladianism in a self-serving narrative of attribution, and Sir Mark's plaque was rehabilitated as evidence of the admiration of those arch-Palladians the Earls of Burlington and Leicester. Inasmuch as the house reflected Jones's minimalist tendencies, it served as, in Mowl and Earnshaw's terms, 'a chilling exemplar to Lord Burlington when he launched a deliberately reserved version of Palladianism as a house style for the Whig ascendancy'.<sup>189</sup> These authors therefore provided a narrative that not only entangled questions of authorship with those of style, but which also coloured Coleshill with political and social connotations.

In the same way as Mowl and Earnshaw connected Coleshill to Court architecture and aristocratic Palladianism by way of Jones, the reattribution by some scholars to Pratt opened the way for the interpretation of the house as an exemplar of a new Restoration gentry house type. Pratt has been credited with introducing an understated, balanced and compact house type with a double-pile block plan, characterised by a balustraded rooftop platform and central cupola, with a raised ground floor reached by an external flight of stairs. Eric Mercer was not alone in proposing that Jones's Court style failed to gain wider approval, and that it was the gentry type built on a block plan, presaged at Coleshill by Roger Pratt and at Thorpe Hall in Cambridgeshire by Peter Mills, which became dominant and almost universal in

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<sup>186</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw, *Architecture Without Kings*, pp. 25-26. Summerson defined Artisan Mannerism as a style produced by craftsmen such as masons, carpenters and bricklayers influenced by the Mannerism of France and the Netherlands. He referred to it as being 'broad and coarse and has none of the naïf intensity or exciting contrasts of the preceding style, nor the fine taste and exquisite balance of Jones' (Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 142).

<sup>187</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw, *Architecture Without Kings*, pp. 48-58.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.

the Restoration.<sup>190</sup> By locating Coleshill as a prototype for this Restoration gentry house, it was removed from the social and political crisis of the mid-seventeenth century to a time when the gentry class was expanding. Questions of Jones's political affiliations, and the relation between Court and courtier, become irrelevant. Roger Pratt himself made the distinction between 'noblemen' and 'gentlemen' in his notebooks, advising that the gentleman's house was to have a simple façade enriched only by a platt band, a cornice and some steps to the front door.<sup>191</sup> Writing in 1966, Oliver Hill and John Cornforth identified the Restoration house as a distinctive type that emerged in the 1660s and 1670s, 'produced by the synthesis or fusing together of a variety of current influences of which the aesthetic was only one'.<sup>192</sup> The authors note that the interiors of Wilton House were decorated by Jones and Webb around the same time that Coleshill was under construction, and differentiate these two houses as 'the supreme expression of the taste of the two most important classes of English society of that day, the aristocracy and the gentry'.<sup>193</sup> For Hill and Cornforth, the house type initiated by Jones and Webb was perfected by Pratt and his contemporary Hugh May, who built Eltham Lodge in Greenwich. They viewed the modest gentry house as making 'a strong claim to be considered the beau-ideal of country houses, essentially comfortable and convenient to live in, satisfying in proportion and scale, and sympathetic in material'.<sup>194</sup>

In contrast to the early twentieth-century emphasis on the English Renaissance, the notion of a Restoration house type shifted attention away from Jones and Wren to assert Pratt and May as the new heroes of the day. It was they who provided the model for the gentry house at least until the arrival of the Palladian villa in the 1720s.<sup>195</sup> Indeed Worsley cited Coleshill as 'being the first, and only intact, work by Sir Roger Pratt, the architect who, together with Sir Hugh May, introduced the typical English Classical country house that predominated for the rest of the seventeenth century and which was profoundly influential well in to the nineteenth century' (Figure 26).<sup>196</sup> However Coleshill has a problematic position in relation to Pratt's oeuvre. It stood slightly apart from his other houses stylistically, which Mowl and Earnshaw exploited to construct their narrative of Puritan Minimalism. For Worsley, Coleshill was also very

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<sup>190</sup> Eric Mercer, 'The Houses of the Gentry', *Past and Present*, 5 (1954), 11-32 (p. 28).

<sup>191</sup> Gunther, pp. 29-30.

<sup>192</sup> Oliver Hill and John Cornforth, *English Country Houses: Caroline 1625-1685* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 1985), p. 26.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

<sup>196</sup> Worsley, *England's Lost Country Houses*, p. 113.

much influenced by Jones's astylar manner, and it was not this but the compact brick-built Prattian villa with a central pediment that broadly remained the dominant architectural type until the early nineteenth century.<sup>197</sup> This leaves the stone-built, pediment-less Coleshill as something of an enigma in narratives of the Restoration gentry house. Worsley dealt with this by identifying Coleshill as transitional between Jones's regular astylar type and the Prattian villa, in order to accommodate the house within his particular account of British classicism.<sup>198</sup>



Figure 25 Thorpe Hall, built around 1653 by Peter Mills, photographed by Nathaniel Lloyd, 1928. *English Heritage.NMR.*



Figure 26 Hugh May's Eltham Lodge, Greenwich, London, completed 1665. ©Bernard Cox/RIBA Library Photographs Collection.

<sup>197</sup> Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain*, p. xiii.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

The duality of these interpretations of Coleshill as a Jonesian or a Prattian house demonstrates the impact that a preoccupation with authorship can have on the idea of an architectural work. The distancing of Jones from Coleshill, and the foregrounding of Pratt, signalled an important psychological shift in the historiography of the house that extended beyond its authorship, opening the way for a revised social interpretation. The practice of assigning single creative architects and locating works in their artistic oeuvres can have far-reaching implications for how works are re-imagined and located in broader narratives of architectural history, whilst the house itself is unchanged. Furthermore questions of authorship are intimately connected to notions of the stylistic character of an author's productions. In this way the nature of Coleshill's elusive classical style is another recurrent theme in its histories.

## **Coleshill's Classical Mythography: Narratives of Style**

### **Stylistic Periodisation**

Coleshill's histories betray tensions in the stylistic classification of the house, specifically in relation to differing notions of its contribution to the development of English classicism. For example, some see it as exemplifying Jonesian classicism of the English Renaissance, whilst others make connections with Burlingtonian Palladianism, or locate it as a prototype for a classical Restoration house. Since architectural history emerged as a distinct field of enquiry from the end of the nineteenth century, differing historical periodisations have provided the structural framework for stylistic narratives of the development of English architecture, depending on the particular chronological approach of the author and on complex and often competing notions of the meaning of classicism as an aesthetic category. Periodisation in architectural history is also based on stylistic methodologies which create time-limited style categories such as Baroque and Palladian, a practice which Daniel Abramson critiques for the constraints that it places on the historical interpretation of architecture.<sup>199</sup> Coleshill has frequently been characterised as a stylistic prototype for a classical tradition, which derives from the practice in architectural history of creating narratives of stylistic progress with the benefit of hindsight. Canonical buildings typically influence the course of history in some way, and cultural status is projected onto Coleshill by invoking it as a stylistic pioneer for a future tradition. In 1961, John Harris suggested that 'The seventeenth century witnessed the building of a group of houses which, almost without warning, created a new style or type. The Queen's House at Greenwich is one, Coleshill is

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<sup>199</sup> Daniel M. Abramson, 'History: The Long Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 64 (2005), 419-21.

another'.<sup>200</sup> Worsley, amongst others, cast Coleshill as a precursor for a Georgian house type extending its influence into the early nineteenth century. Shifting chronologies and conceptions of classicism therefore provide a context in which Coleshill is represented in such a way as to sustain its canonical status as an innovator.

### **The English Renaissance Classical House**

In the years around 1900 historical narratives of architecture established authoritative accounts of British architecture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the first time, constructed by authors who, as we have seen, were usually practising architects. This occurred at a time of growing social and political turbulence when many architects considered national architecture to be in decline. These architect-authors saw past precedent as a means of influencing not only architectural design in their own time, but also wider social and cultural values. They sought to promote the architectural achievements of the past to revive the national architecture of the present, establishing connections between the revolutionary new classicism of the seventeenth century and the lofty idealism and cultural flourishing of the English Renaissance. The classical Renaissance house that they admired was understood to have set a new standard for improving and civilising domestic architecture in seventeenth-century England. They believed architecture might do so again in the twentieth century as a response to the mass of poorly-built speculative housing that had spread across the country. Inasmuch as Palladianism figured in these narratives of classicism, it was Jones's uniquely English interpretation which was venerated, rather than the doctrinal Palladianism of the Burlingtonians and their adherence to the full classical orders. The very absence of orders at Coleshill, with its quiet stone façades, imbued the house with values of simplicity and restraint on a domestic scale that was contrasted with grandiose eighteenth-century Palladianism.

Typically the narratives of these early twentieth-century authors focused on the domestic house, and more particularly the country house, to construct models of architectural progress. Architecture was seen as reaching a highpoint in the English Renaissance with the introduction of a new classicism, and the architecture of Jones and Wren represented the peak of achievement. The Palladianism of the eighteenth century was regarded as dull and insipid in comparison to the originality of the work produced by Jones and his followers. In this context, Coleshill was invoked as an innovative work of the English Renaissance and a bearer of Jones's classical ideals. Furthermore it survived in the twentieth century as a rare unaltered testimony to the

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<sup>200</sup> John Harris, 'Thoresby House, Nottinghamshire', *Architectural History*, 4 (1961), 11-20 (p. 11).

superiority of Jones. Prestige was also conferred by attributing nationalistic qualities to the house as the embodiment of a specifically English classical style, exemplifying Jones's achievement in mastering continental taste according to native climate, society and values. These narratives of English Renaissance classicism functioned in complex ways to elevate and sustain Coleshill's status as a canonical work, but they depended on vague and at times conflicting notions of what Renaissance classicism meant.

The chronology of architectural development that focused on the achievements of the English Renaissance as we have seen was largely set out by Blomfield in his *History of Renaissance Architecture* of 1897. This landmark publication marked a shift in Coleshill's historiography by positioning the house in a historical narrative of the development of English architecture. Drawing on the earlier writings of Bannister Fletcher, Blomfield's Renaissance period extended from the revival of interest in the remains of Roman architecture in Italy from the late fifteenth century until the end of the eighteenth century, by which time the essential 'Englishness' of architecture was felt to be abandoned. For Blomfield, the persistence of the English vernacular tradition was an essential characteristic in the 'Englishness' of Renaissance architecture, and the failure of eighteenth-century architects was in losing sight of this. The centrality of tradition to the architectural canon of the English Renaissance was to prove anathema to the architectural historians of the post-war period, who would assert the modernity of eighteenth-century classicism as central to its identification as a national style. Jones was responsible for introducing simple qualities of line, mass and proportion to native architecture. Wren continued the tradition of a style that mixed the classical and the indigenous, and Blomfield believed this was the basis for the nation's vernacular of the English Renaissance.<sup>201</sup>

Blomfield regarded Coleshill's plan as setting it apart from other buildings of the period, demonstrating a move towards a type which became common at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>202</sup> It represented what Blomfield called the more 'civilised' house plan of the Renaissance, betraying his belief in the link between architecture and social improvement. Coleshill exemplified the simple block plan based on Palladian ideals which was introduced by Jones. Yet, as Blomfield acknowledged, the house also diverged from typical Palladian plans where the ground floor was more usually treated as the basement and the first floor as the piano nobile reached by external stairs thereby negating the need for a lavish internal staircase. Coleshill possessed an

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<sup>201</sup> For a more detailed discussion of contemporary attitudes to classicism by Blomfield and others, see Macleod, *Style and Society*, especially Chapter 6, 'Education and Resurgent Classicism'.

<sup>202</sup> Blomfield, *A Short History of Renaissance Architecture*, p. 94.

impressive entrance hall and large ground floor saloon, and a grand internal staircase leading up to the first floor dining room. Blomfield accommodated Coleshill's variance from Palladian norms as providing evidence of the persistence of Elizabethan tradition, and he noted a similar occurrence at Chevening. He saw the staircase at Coleshill as combining Palladian details with 'some of the feeling of the fine spectacular staircases of the Elizabethan home'.<sup>203</sup> This incongruity is presented by Blomfield as indicative of the genius of Jones, whose artistic instinct was too refined to abandon such an admirable means of effect.

Coleshill was often associated with Raynham Hall in Norfolk in these Renaissance narratives as exemplifying the new classic style introduced by Inigo Jones (Figure 27). For some architect-authors, Raynham was a first rate house of the English Renaissance, which, like Coleshill, was widely believed to be the work of Jones.<sup>204</sup> Blomfield regarded Raynham as

the most distinguished example of 17th-century domestic architecture in England. It is peculiarly refined and accomplished. Quiet, reserved and dignified in the highest degree, it stands by itself apart from the mere picturesqueness of Jacobean work, and from the general yet coarse merit of Wren.<sup>205</sup>

Belcher and Macartney also venerated Raynham, where architectural quality was seen as stemming from a blending of the cultivation of contemporary practice with more traditional design values. The house was described as 'one of the most pleasing of the later Renaissance, combining as it does, something of the picturesqueness and broken skyline common in the earlier period with all the repose and refinement peculiar to the later'.<sup>206</sup> The authors believed that Raynham's charms were evidence of the versatility of Jones's ingenuity. Coleshill was also said to exhibit features which betrayed Jones's individual classical approach, including its general proportions, the spacing of the windows, the cupola and the design of the chimneys. However to be best appreciated, the authors suggested that the house should be seen in the midst of its surroundings,

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<sup>203</sup> Blomfield, *A History of Renaissance Architecture*, II, p. 278.

<sup>204</sup> Raynham is now believed to have been designed by its owner Sir William Townsend in collaboration with his mason William Edge. For accounts of its complex and contentious history see Harry Lawrence Bradfer-Lawrence, 'The Building of Raynham Hall', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 23 (1929), 93-146; Christopher Hussey, 'Raynham Hall I', *Country Life*, 14 November 1925, pp. 742-50; John Harris, 'Raynham Hall, Norfolk', *The Archaeological Journal*, 118 (1961), 180-87.

<sup>205</sup> Blomfield, *A History of Renaissance Architecture*, p. 118.

<sup>206</sup> Belcher and Macartney, II, p. 93.



to mitigate the rather sombre effect of its entrance front.<sup>207</sup> For these authors, therefore, Raynham with its more lively and diverse façades perhaps more closely corresponded to their notion of the ideal Renaissance classical house than Coleshill.

Notions of a specific Palladian version of classicism introduced by Jones surface at times in these narratives, as we have seen with Blomfield's account of Coleshill's plan. Latham's *In English Homes* of 1909 endeavored to chart how English Palladianism arose and developed, and he credited Jones with adapting the Palladian style to the English climate and ethical conditions.<sup>208</sup> Jones was said to have applied Palladianism with discretion according to purpose, reserving full Palladianism based on the classic orders for public or town buildings whilst modifying the style for country houses.<sup>209</sup> Both Raynham and Coleshill were again singled out as representing the new country house style espoused by Jones, exhibiting his Palladian ideals regarding disposition and proportion, with hipped roofs, key-stoned and pedimented window openings, and chimneystacks and other features that were disciplined according to Palladian rules.<sup>210</sup>

When Gotch published *The Growth of the English House* in 1909, he largely followed the orthodox view that credited Jones and Wren with the establishment of a new way of designing buildings in the seventeenth century.<sup>211</sup> Jones initiated a mature Renaissance manner with the introduction of the 'full "Classic" style'.<sup>212</sup> In Gotch's narrative, both Raynham and Coleshill illustrated the new methods adopted in treating the exterior of houses in the Renaissance, but Raynham was not fully formed. Rather it provided a link between the old and the new styles, with projecting wings and gables that were reminiscent of the past, sash windows (which he mistakenly thought were original to the house) and a bold cornice, all serving as foretastes of the future. In this progressive model of classicism, Coleshill was more advanced than Raynham, exhibiting more marked continental influence, with a more symmetrical plan and elevations that were even more classic.<sup>213</sup> This distancing of Coleshill from Raynham was to become the established historiographic approach, with Coleshill assigned the more significant role in narratives of English classicism. In Gotch's terms, Coleshill

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<sup>207</sup> Belcher and Macartney, II, p. 74.

<sup>208</sup> Latham, III (1909), p. xxi.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. xxii.

<sup>210</sup> Latham, III (1909), p. xxii.

<sup>211</sup> John Alfred Gotch, *The Growth of the English House: A Short History of Its Architectural Development from 1100 to 1800* (London: Batsford, 1909).

<sup>212</sup> Gotch, *The Growth of the English House*, p. 207.

<sup>213</sup> John Alfred Gotch, 'The Development of Domestic Architecture in England', *The Builder*, 82 (1902), p. 43.

'left Elizabethan times far behind, and retains nothing of their peculiarities either in plan or appearance'.<sup>214</sup> Gotch therefore departs from Blomfield's approach to Renaissance classicism by emphasising how Coleshill's design rejected the English tradition.<sup>215</sup> Coleshill did not exhibit a transitional style between a native eclectic tradition and Jonesian classicism, but was the fully-formed culmination of the transition on a linear trajectory to Wren. However Gotch was later to suggest that the house fell short on comfort because of the constraints of its regular plan, where 'Homeliness is somewhat sacrificed to stateliness'.<sup>216</sup> For Gotch such a plan was not readily adaptable to the English way of life, and the needs and comfort of the household were subordinated to its architecture.

The revolutionary classicism of the English Renaissance as demonstrated by Coleshill was generally articulated by these authors in terms of aesthetic qualities of regularity and proportion, as well as by features such as the form and arrangement of windows and the absence of gables. However, in *The English Home* of 1918, Gotch provided a rendering of Coleshill that, in contrast to his brief and prosaic description of Raynham, included more abstract qualitative values in his evocation of the new Renaissance classicism. He saw Coleshill as

the striking embodiment of that cultivated manner in architecture which was begun by Jones, continued by Webb, and was destined gradually to supersede the traditional methods of the countryside. Although thoroughly English in feeling it could never have been devised without an intimate knowledge of Italian detail. It is simple, dignified, and regular, depending for its effect upon nice proportion and skilful detail, not at all upon picturesque variety or broken grouping. It is a plain oblong plan, without wings or projections; it is lofty in elevation without gables or even a pediment; the corners are emphasised with bold quoins, the roof springs from a widely projecting cornice, and is crowned with a stout balustrade surrounding a spacious lead-covered flat, out of which rises a large central cupola. The slopes of the roof are diversified with dormers; the massive chimney-stacks are accurately and symmetrically placed, each answering to each. There is nothing about it haphazard or unexpected, nothing quaint or piquant; everything is correct, regular, stately. It cannot, however, be deemed, like Tennyson's Maud, "Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null",

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<sup>214</sup> Gotch, *The Growth of the English House*, p. 214.

<sup>215</sup> However contradicts this statement by noting that the continued presence of ground floor bedrooms and the upstairs dining room reflected an earlier approach to planning. Gotch, *The Growth of the English House*, p. 213.

<sup>216</sup> Gotch, *The English Home*, p. 54.

for its effect is both striking and attractive; it is noble without being oppressively grand.<sup>217</sup>

Here Gotch offered not simply a description of Coleshill's salient features, but employed qualitative and rhetorical language to endow the house with abstract character attributes in a value-laden idea of the house that moved beyond the realm of the aesthetic. The use of terms such as cultivated, dignified, correct, noble and stately imbued the house with virtuous qualities, directing the reader's understanding of Coleshill beyond that which was visible in the accompanying image of the façade. Gotch reinforced his sentimental enrichment of Coleshill by placing it in opposition to the stony character of Maud in Tennyson's eponymous poem, whose 'cold and clear cut face' displayed 'dead perfection' to the hero of the piece.



Figure 27 East front of Raynham Hall, Norfolk designed c. 1635, drawn around 1671.

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The preference of these architect-authors for the Renaissance as a model for the architecture of the present reflected deep-rooted concerns about prevailing social and political values. Blomfield, for example, saw Modernism as importing dubious ideologies from the continent.<sup>218</sup> For Gotch, Coleshill's Renaissance classicism embodied positive qualities of Englishness, and his text sought to represent the house according to specific national values. Whilst acknowledging the European influences in

<sup>217</sup> Goth, *The English Home*, p. 54.

<sup>218</sup> See Nigel Whiteley's comments on Blomfield's *Modernismus* in 'Modern Architecture, Heritage and Englishness', *Architectural History*, 38 (1995), 220-37 (pp. 223-24).

the adoption of classical forms and motifs, these authors set out national qualities in the architectural works that served as way markers through their historical narratives, drawing on architecture as a metaphor for national character. Coleshill was consistently referred to as an English conception, and indeed, for Stanley Ramsey writing in 1924 Coleshill was more truly English than any other of Jones's creations.<sup>219</sup> Authors drew on a language of character and disposition to inscribe the house with national attributes that extended beyond empirical description, using terms such as noble, dignified, cultivated, pure and stately. Character terms were an important determinant in how texts conveyed meaning about Coleshill, as the authors read underlying desirable national characteristics into its physical features. This kind of architectural physiognomy rendered the physical form of the house analogous to human character in the mind of the reader. In this sense Coleshill was more than an architectural role-model, it was also a metaphorical instrument for cultivating and civilising the national character, coloured by nationalist mythologies. The architecture of the past was understood to hold social utility at a time when there was a general consciousness of social and constitutional crisis in the pre-war period. Indeed Peter Mandler argues that in a broader sense by the 1930s history had become a necessary antidote to what was regarded in some quarters as a debased national character.<sup>220</sup>

### Popular Histories

In the years around the Second World War many popular histories of architecture by amateur but well-educated connoisseurs such as James Lees-Milne and Sacheverell Sitwell were published, mainly by Batsford. John Betjeman, a Berkshire resident who was later to be embroiled in the efforts to save Coleshill after the fire, wrote about the house in *Murray's Architectural Guide* for the county in 1949.<sup>221</sup> He was tentative in asserting the architectural merit of the house, writing that 'Coleshill House is said to be an innovation in English country house building', and referring to its 'old manorial plan' and rooms that are 'somewhat heavily decorated'.<sup>222</sup> But he was more comfortable providing a sentimental evocation of the village, with its 'big house, church and limestone houses light ochre painted, all in a well-timbered landscape'.<sup>223</sup> He added, 'Coming from Buscot there is a view of the tall chimneys of Coleshill House in trees, framed between stone model cottages that flank the upper road into the village. But the best view of the house is through the gate piers on the Faringdon-Highworth

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<sup>219</sup> Stanley C. Ramsey, *Inigo Jones* (London, Ernest Benn, 1924), p. 23.

<sup>220</sup> Peter Mandler, *History and National Life* (London: Profile, 2002), p. 80.

<sup>221</sup> John Betjeman and John Piper, *Murray's Berkshire Architectural Guide* (London: John Murray, 1949).

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

road'.<sup>224</sup> Later scholars interpret the flurry of popular texts at this time as a part of response to the insecurities of wartime which excited a desire to promote the preservation of the essence of English identity through its architecture.<sup>225</sup> This was reflected in other aspects of public life including the creation of the National Buildings Record in 1941, established to collect photographs and other records of the historic environment, as well as in new legislation such as statutory listing (discussed in Chapter 3). Indeed Batsford published at least 10 books for the National Trust between the years 1945 and 1950, including their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary volume.<sup>226</sup> Sitwell in his *British Architects and Craftsmen* of 1945 summed up the impact of war on attitudes to the architecture of the past at the time: 'the perils of our modern times weigh heavier on architecture than on the other arts [...], our island contains buildings of many different periods and styles that, second only to our prose and poetry, are the expression and idiom of the English genius'.<sup>227</sup> Coleshill was interpreted by Sitwell as 'an Italian villeggiatura brought to Berkshire', but it was not 'slavishly Palladian' like the villas built later for Lord Burlington and other amateurs, and was deemed to possess English individuality of its own.<sup>228</sup>

James Lees-Milne's volume *The Age of Inigo Jones* went to press in 1953 just as the house was being demolished following the fire the previous year. It was part of a series of architectural histories aimed at the general reader published by Batsford from 1947. At the time Lees-Milne was working as Architectural Advisor to the Trust, which he had joined in 1936, and he was involved in the negotiations for the proposed acquisition of the house. Lees-Milne was to be one of the most influential figures in Coleshill's historiography in the mid-twentieth century. He was seduced by the simple harmony and proportion of the building, and his published account signaled his reverence for it as a classical work:

the horizontal harmony of Coleshill is nowhere disturbed, except by the crowning cupola where the punctuation is needed. From ground level to skyline a series of parallel lines in podium ledge, string-course, cornice, balustrade and chimney caps, emphasises the astonishing geometrical perfection of the building. Seldom has such economy of line resulted in such majesty of form.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Betjeman and Piper, p. 121.

<sup>225</sup> As in Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History*, p. 138.

<sup>226</sup> James Lees-Milne, *The National Trust: A Record of Fifty Years of Achievement* (London: Batsford, 1945).

<sup>227</sup> Sitwell, p. 1.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

<sup>229</sup> Lees-Milne, *The Age of Inigo Jones*, p. 212.

Whilst accepting Pratt as the architect of Coleshill, Lees-Milne nevertheless assigned Jones a significant role as Pratt's inspirer and adviser during the initial stages of the building of Coleshill. For Lees-Milne, Pratt's contribution to architectural history was that he 'resolved out of several conflicting influences an eclectic style of domestic architecture which is one of the high achievements of art of all times', although Pratt was thought to be 'strangely prejudiced' in his preference for the astylar.<sup>230</sup> In the absence of the orders, it was the spacing of the windows both on the main elevations and the end elevations which Lees-Milne regarded as the determining feature in the brilliance of the composition of the house, and the skilful contrivance of the upward thrust of the chimneys which provided balance conveyed a magical quality to the design:

"Exact and very uniform", was the verdict of Celia Fiennes upon Coleshill when she visited the house in the lifetime of its builder. Her words convey the secret of its composition. Coleshill is like a sonnet by Milton, wherein are compressed infinite subtleties of meaning. The pre-ordained framework may be circumscribed, and the traditional order exacting of strict obedience in the structure. Yet Roger Pratt in recognising parallel obligations nevertheless introduced rich beauties and varieties of effect into the task he set himself at Coleshill and accomplished in its architecture one of England's greatest masterpieces.<sup>231</sup>

To this paean he added a poignant but barbed footnote after he became aware of the loss of the house: 'Since these words were written Coleshill has been burnt and the shell disastrously levelled to the ground. This act of vandalism can never be too strongly censured'.<sup>232</sup> These were strong words to put in print in a popular work of architectural history, but they were indicative of the shock and anger that was felt by many scholars and preservationists at the time.

### **The Demolished House**

Although Lees-Milne's reverential rendering of Coleshill was deeply personal, his was not a solitary voice, and his text is indicative of the seminal position of the house in mid-twentieth century narratives of architectural history. The demolition following the fire of September 1952 did not diminish Coleshill's iconic status, and arguably the added drama of its loss helped to sustain its position. It is hardly possible now to think

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<sup>230</sup> Lees-Milne, *The Age of Inigo Jones*, p. 209, p. 211.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

of Coleshill without thinking also of the circumstances of its demise, and the house has taken on new meanings in the context of lost heritage that extend beyond the building itself, adding greater depth to its cultural significance. Immediately following the demolition, some authors dramatised the event using heightened language and emotive terms. The idealisation of Coleshill and the hyperbolic language of these accounts magnified the sense of loss to create a kind of romantic longing for the house. Furthermore these texts re-framed Coleshill as an object of national architectural heritage which had slipped from the nation's grasp. Yet the house also became a poignant symbol of the wider country house problem, and a metonym for the many losses of the twentieth century.

The fire was announced in *The Times* on 24 September 1952, and it was reported in an article in *Country Life* just over a week later.<sup>233</sup> Whilst reports of losses of country houses by decay or deliberate demolition had become regular features of the magazine, nevertheless it was said that 'a calamity such as that which has befallen Coleshill House [...] can still leave us aghast'.<sup>234</sup> Coleshill's destruction was presented as a singular tragedy: 'To think of it as a smoke-blackened ruin is grievous beyond words'.<sup>235</sup> Whilst it was noted that the most valuable contents were safely removed, nonetheless this was regarded as a 'small consolation to set against the destruction of the finest country house of its kind and period in the islands'.<sup>236</sup>

In the same issue, the magazine's reporter on the current condition of the estate market under the pseudonym 'Procurator' referred to the Coleshill fire in a short piece on 'Historic Homes in Danger', highlighting the perilous state of many houses regarded as of historic and architectural interest. The following week 'The Coleshill Disaster' was again evoked to draw attention to the wider problem of fire damage to country houses.<sup>237</sup> Some months later as news of the demolition of the remains of the house filtered out in the first weeks of 1953, *Country Life* reported bleakly on 'The Last Days of Coleshill'. Previously, *The Times* had published a letter signed by such notables as John Betjeman, Lord Esher, James Lees-Milne, and the architect and writer A.E. Richardson, deploring the fact that an application had been made for the complete demolition of the house. These signatories believed that, despite the collapse of the roof and the gutting of the interior, the outside could and indeed should have been reinstated. *Country Life's* Procurator wrote that

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<sup>233</sup> Frank Whitaker, 'Destruction of Coleshill', *Country Life*, 3 October 1952, pp. 1008-09.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1008.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1008.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1008.

<sup>237</sup> 'Procurator', 'Damage by Fire', *Country Life*, 10 October 1952, p. 1127.

Whether or not it would have been practicable to save part of Coleshill I do not know, but it is indeed tragic that this famous house, which has stood almost unaltered since it was built [...] should have been lost to the nation. And it is the nation's loss in the fullest possible sense, for Mr Ernest Cook, the owner of Coleshill, had arranged to leave the house to the National Trust.<sup>238</sup>

The furniture historian Geoffrey Beard responded with a letter to the magazine, sympathising with Procurator's sentiments. He cited the restoration of Hagley Hall in Worcestershire following a fire in the 1920s, based partly on *Country Life* photographs, as an example of what could be achieved in terms of reconstruction. He wrote that 'It is, however, of small compensation to realise that soon all we shall have of Coleshill will be the same excellent photographs, and R.T. Gunther's monograph on its gifted architect, Sir Roger Pratt'.<sup>239</sup>

*Country Life's* announcement of the destruction of Coleshill was followed in November 1952 by a piece in the *Architectural Review* by the architectural theorist and long standing editor of the magazine, J.M. Richards. The language of the piece reflected the perceived impact of the loss of Coleshill, and elevated the house to the status of an English national treasure and a unique artistic masterpiece. In the words of Richards, the destruction of the house 'caused a grave lacuna in a part of the history of English architecture [...] It has destroyed an irreplaceable work of art'.<sup>240</sup> A further article appeared in *The Connoisseur* in 1953 by L.G.G. Ramsey, entitled 'X Marks the Spot'. It was illustrated with a pair of photographs showing before and after the demolition of the house (Figure 28).<sup>241</sup> Ramsey's lament began with a diatribe against the English propensity for destroying places of historic interest, but he laid the blame for Coleshill's loss firmly with the government ministries who might have saved the house from demolition. Coleshill was identified as 'the first absolutely classical country house of the English Renaissance, and a building of impeccable qualities'. Ramsey poignantly closed the piece with the words 'Coleshill was the most important and significant single house in England. Now only X marks the spot'.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> 'Procurator', 'Last Days of Coleshill', *Country Life*, 23 January 1953, p. 231.

<sup>239</sup> Geoffrey Beard, 'Country House Fires', *Country Life*, 13 February 1953, p. 426.

<sup>240</sup> James Maude Richards, 'Coleshill House', *Architectural Review*, 112 (December 1952), p.342.

<sup>241</sup> Ramsey, 'X Marks the Spot'. Ramsey had written to the National Trust in March 1953 enclosing a copy of the photograph of the empty site of the house. He asked for confirmation that it did indeed show the site: 'I am assured that it is, but the destruction and removal of all traces of the building is so completely unbelievable that I want to be quite sure'. NTA, Box 836, File 1395, letter 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1953.

<sup>242</sup> Ramsey, 'X Marks the Spot'.



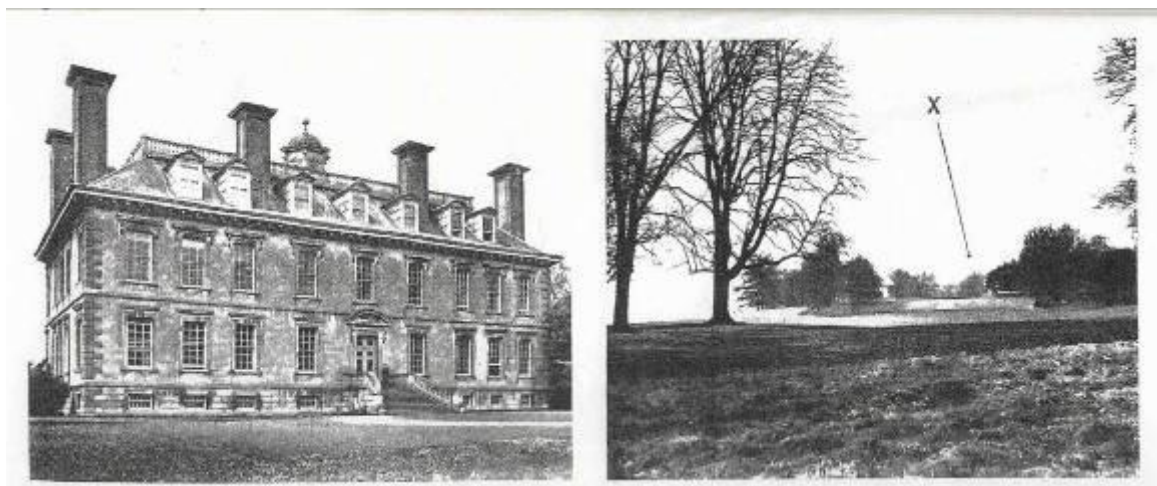


Figure 28 Before and after the fire, from *The Connoisseur*, August 1953. Courtesy Hearst UK.

The immediate effect of the loss of Coleshill was the use of heightened language and hyperbole by the architectural press which represented the event as a national tragedy. The drama of the fire and the perceived calamity of the demolition infused the house with melancholic meaning that continues to resonate today. Forty years after the fire, the absent house still had the power to elicit elegiac language from those who felt its loss keenly. In 1992, Alan Powers wrote a 'Lament for Coleshill', a house which he saw as having a legacy extending far beyond the seventeenth century. He alluded to its influence on modern architecture, and saw its progeny as:

not only the foursquare boxes of Queen Anne and the Georgians, but in a line of horizontal unemphasised architectural compositions of all periods which at their best have transcended monotony to attain a certain understated perfection. To look at a photograph of Coleshill is still an education in architectural values of enduring importance – mass, line, silhouette, rhythm and proportion.<sup>243</sup>

When the volume *The Destruction of the Country House* was published in 1974 to accompany an exhibition on the subject, Coleshill was naturally included amongst the numerous houses in the photographic survey of country house losses of the twentieth century.<sup>244</sup> Some thirty years later Worsley's volume on *England's Lost Country Houses* took a narrative approach to country house destruction, and specifically located Coleshill as epitomising the country house crisis of the 1950s. Like Lees-Milne before

<sup>243</sup> Alan Powers, 'Lament for Coleshill', *The Spectator*, 5 September 1992, pp. 35-36 (p. 36).

<sup>244</sup> Roy Strong, Marcus Binney and John Harris, *The Destruction of the Country House* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974).

him, Worsley hinted at something exceptional about this particular destruction, which rendered the loss all the more piteous. He wrote that:

The destruction of Coleshill was a tragedy that should never have happened; it was probably the most serious architectural loss of the 1950s, for few houses had such a canonical place in British architectural history. What makes the loss so appalling is that Coleshill should have been safe. It had been bought for the National Trust, and repairs on the roof were under way when it caught fire.<sup>245</sup>

Worsley published a dramatic account of the fire:

Within four hours, all that remained of the house was the burnt-out shell, surmounted by eight massive chimneys. High winds caused flames to spread rapidly, and fire-fighting was hampered by an inadequate water supply and molten metal pouring from the roof. Although there was time to remove all the valuable furniture and works of art from the house, except one or two heavier pieces, the result was, as *Country Life* put it, “grievous beyond words”.<sup>246</sup>

He added: ‘The house was not restored after the fire; not even the shell was retained. The whole was demolished, leaving only four pairs of gateposts’.<sup>247</sup>

These emotive narratives exhibited a nostalgia for the house in terms expressed by Susan Stewart in her volume *On Longing* (1993).<sup>248</sup> For Stewart, nostalgia is ‘sadness without an object’, which she suggests ‘creates a longing which is inauthentic and not part of lived experience’. It is ideological in the sense that ‘the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative’, and it is always based on a signification burdened by cultural assumptions. The narratives and descriptions on which nostalgia is based rely on established conventions for organising and interpreting information which are shared by social members.<sup>249</sup> In this sense the nostalgic longing for Coleshill expressed in these texts can be seen to rest on the value-laden narratives of the house according to disciplinary conventions shared by scholars of architectural history. The distance from the object – the house – caused by the demolition created an enhanced sense of its physical perfection and its idealisation. The house itself could no longer be

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<sup>245</sup> Worsley, *England’s Lost Country Houses*, p. 113.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, p. 114.

<sup>248</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

experienced and was rendered unrepeatable, its materiality had escaped, and it could continue to exist only through its narrative invention.

### The Palladian House

By the time of the fire of 1952, Coleshill's canonical status drew largely on pre-war English conventions of architectural history. But increasingly its historiography came under the influence of a new generation of scholars who, rather than focusing on the Englishness of classical architecture, sought to emphasise continental influence in the development of English classicism. As a result, a revised canon of British architectural history was constructed within a relatively short space of time. The 1930s and 1940s was a period of flux in the field of architectural history brought about by the arrival of art historical scholars from the continent associated with Aby Warburg and the Warburg Institute.<sup>250</sup> They placed English architectural developments in a European context, overturning the relative insularity of the previous generation of native writers. These authors were not practising architects, but academics brought up on continental art history traditions. They promoted a more professional approach to architectural history as a distinct field of study, in which the interpretation of documentary evidence was a starting point.<sup>251</sup> These scholars drew particularly on continental notions of Palladianism in their assessment of English architecture. Pevsner's *Outline of European Architecture* of 1942 set the tone for this new generation.<sup>252</sup> With his broader continental perspective, he saw English architecture between 1615 and 1665 as 'represented by the work of Inigo Jones, Webb, Pratt and May, and so on to Wren, i.e. by the introduction and the spread of Palladianism, and then the French and Dutch classical style of the seventeenth century and by the work of Rubens and Van Dyck in and for England and their effect on the country'.<sup>253</sup> In this way new stylistic narratives were constructed corroborated by documentary evidence which set out accounts of the development of classical architecture in Britain with Palladianism as a dominant theme over the long eighteenth century, and the old chronology of the English Renaissance became redundant.

This new generation of architectural historians was to have a significant impact upon the notion of Coleshill as a classical house in the post-war period. In 1941 two Warburgian scholars, Rudolf Wittkower and Fritz Saxl, organized an exhibition called

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<sup>250</sup> For an account of the arrival of these scholars, see Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History*, especially chapter on 'The Establishment of Art History'.

<sup>251</sup> These alternative approaches are discussed in Timothy Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars* (London: John Murray, 2000).

<sup>252</sup> Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture*, p.15.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31-2.

*British Art and the Mediterranean*, which formed the basis for a publication of that name in 1948. Wittkower and Saxl reconstructed Coleshill not as an English classical house but as a work of continental classicism. They used photography as a medium for comparative analysis in a survey which aimed to demonstrate the age-long impact of the Mediterranean tradition on the British mind, at a time when inter-European relations were disrupted. Indeed Anderson suggests that it was this threat to political and cultural ties with the Mediterranean which led to the powerful assertions of the importance of continental classicism to British artistic achievement.<sup>254</sup> Wittkower and Saxl offered photographs of diverse buildings from prehistory to the present to draw comparisons between them, accompanied by text that reinforced their message. This approach reflected art historical methodologies that privileged the visual qualities of architecture over any more abstract values. By illustrating Coleshill alongside various British and continental examples the authors directed the reader to see continental influence in the house, and emphasised its visual Italianate qualities. A photograph of Coleshill's main elevation was shown alongside Eltham Lodge, the Queen's House and Scamozzi's Villa Molena, as well as other works. Coleshill was referred to as a simple Italianate block, but features such as the roof with its dormers and enormous chimneys were identified as 'unclassical'. By way of contrast, back in 1924 Stanley Ramsey had referred to Coleshill's steeply hipped roof in vernacular terms as comparable to that of an Elizabethan farmhouse.<sup>255</sup> For Wittkower, precedents for Coleshill's unclassical features were found not in indigenous English architecture, but in continental sources such as Rubens' *Palazzi di Genova* of 1622 and in French buildings such as those shown in Le Muet's *Manière de Bien Bâtir*, so that the continental connection was emphasised.<sup>256</sup> Elsewhere Coleshill's entrance hall was illustrated to demonstrate how such spaces were used as settings for classical statuary in a continental manner.<sup>257</sup> Coleshill's grand staircase was defined, not specifically as part of an older English tradition as Blomfield had done, but rather as 'quite un-Italianate'. However the details and decoration of the staircase were identified as both Italian and classical. Although the choice of works in this volume was said to have been a personal one by its authors, the inclusion of Coleshill was most probably influenced by Wittkower's collaboration with the English art historian Margaret Whinney.<sup>258</sup> Wittkower did not mention Coleshill

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<sup>254</sup> Anderson, *Inigo Jones and the Classical Tradition*, p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> Stanley Ramsey, p. 23.

<sup>256</sup> Wittkower and Saxl, p. 44.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59

<sup>258</sup> Copies of photos of Coleshill by Whinney can be found in the Conway Library at the Courtauld Institute. She went on to write extensively on Coleshill in her discussion of Stuart art and architecture in *The Oxford History of English Art: English Art 1625-174* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

again in his subsequent texts on Anglo-Palladian architecture which influenced the turn towards Palladianism as a focus of architectural debate. However his approach was widely taken up by other scholars and influenced the way in which Coleshill was re-imagined in the coming decades.

Summerson's *Architecture in Britain* of 1953 was the first substantial text by an established British author to draw on the continental approach in order to provide an intellectually coherent narrative of British architectural history. He privileged the classical tradition and the primacy of style as an organising principle. Summerson already had a long career in architectural history by this time, having been writing on the subject since the 1930s, and his approach was coloured by a modernist sensibility.<sup>259</sup> His account challenged the pre-war emphasis on the superiority of the architecture of the English Renaissance in favour of the long eighteenth century as a framework for the development of classicism in Britain. In so doing, the architecture of the seventeenth century was repositioned in relation to this new chronology. Albert Richardson had earlier presented a revised view of the long eighteenth century in his *Monumental Classic Architecture in Great Britain and Ireland During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1914).<sup>260</sup> Where Blomfield saw value in the continuing English tradition in the architecture of Jones and his successors, Summerson was influenced by the Warburg scholars to dislike this emphasis on Englishness which he thought too parochial, preferring an internationalised outlook. Jonesian classicism was redefined in terms of continental characteristics, and Anglo-Palladianism emerged as a distinct approach to the classical style.

Coleshill was reassessed under the influence of Wittkower's modernist-informed approach to Anglo-Palladianism, and McKellar's analysis of his writings helps to explain how the house was re-imagined in these terms.<sup>261</sup> In architectural texts such as *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* he overturned previous interpretations of architectural form and took a more rational and syntactical approach, rejecting ornament in favour of compositional design and asserting proportion as the key

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<sup>259</sup> For discussions of Summerson and his career see Elizabeth McKellar, 'Populism versus Professionalism: John Summerson and the Twentieth-Century Creation of the Georgian', in *Articulating British Classicism*, ed. by Arciszewska and McKellar, pp. 35-56; Mowl, *Stylistic Cold Wars*.

<sup>260</sup> Albert E. Richardson, *Monumental Classic Architecture in Great Britain and Ireland During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Batsford, 1914).

<sup>261</sup> McKellar, 'Populism versus Professionalism'.

feature of Palladianism.<sup>262</sup> He argued that the neo-classical conception of architecture was essentially a two-dimensional approach. McKellar sees Wittkower's linear and non-spatial interpretation of the neo-classical as more appropriate to a paper-derived version of English Palladianism, where drawings were as much a focus of investigation as the buildings themselves. English eighteenth-century buildings were understood in terms of flat planes and surface patterns, as if viewed from a distance, and drawings and engravings became an appropriate means for their interpretation.<sup>263</sup> Buildings were regarded as geometric configurations to be analysed in terms of plans and façades with less concern for interiors, or for other facets of architectural interpretation such as meaning and context. Wittkower understood Anglo-Palladianism as a series of individual elements superimposed on white surfaces, and the wall served as the compositional device.<sup>264</sup> In this context, it is easy to see how Coleshill could be conceived with a Palladian sensibility by modernists who directed their gaze to look for geometric uniformity and simplicity in the mass of a building, even where direct Palladian references could not be found. There is one further way in which Wittkower's writings can be seen as instrumental in reinventing Coleshill's canonical status in a Palladian context. Wittkower added the names of Burlington and his circle to the cast of great men in narratives of Anglo-Palladian architectural history.<sup>265</sup> This opened the way for the reassertion of Burlington's admiration for Coleshill as set out by Woolfe and Gandon in order to uphold the Palladian authority of the house.

To return to Summerson and his own modernist-informed approach, in *Georgian London* of 1945 he asserted that 'Palladian taste represents a norm to which classical architecture in this country has returned over and over again'.<sup>266</sup> He diverged from Blomfield and his circle in viewing Palladianism in stylistic terms which lost the connotation of humanist Renaissance values. In *Architecture in Britain*, Summerson limited the period of the English Renaissance to between 1530 and 1610. He also

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<sup>262</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, *Studies of the Warburg Institute*, 19 (1949); 'Pseudo-Palladian Elements in English Neoclassicism', in Wittkower, *Palladio and English Palladianism*, pp. 155-76 (p. 174) (first publ. in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 6 (1943), 154-64).

<sup>263</sup> McKellar, 'Popularism versus Professionalism', pp. 44-45. See also Alina Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 53 (1994), 322-42.

<sup>264</sup> See Cinzia M. Sicca, 'The Architecture of the Wall', *Architectural History*, 33 (1990), 83-101.

<sup>265</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, 'Lord Burlington and William Kent', in Wittkower, *Palladio and English Palladianism*, pp. 115-34 (first publ. in *Archaeological Journal*, 102 (1945), 151-64).

<sup>266</sup> John Summerson, *Georgian London* (London: Pleiades Books, 1945; rev. London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 20.

expanded his stylistic taxonomies by identifying a new style that blended continental classicism with a more vernacular tradition in the years 1615 to 1675, which he termed 'Artisan Mannerism'. Furthermore, as we have seen, he uncoupled Jones and Wren, and Wren was relocated to the Baroque thereby interrupting the inevitable progress of Jonesian classicism towards the Palladianism of the eighteenth century. Summerson's inclusion of Coleshill in what came to be regarded as an orthodox text provided a mechanism for sustaining its presence in narratives of British architectural history through the many editions of the book published since.<sup>267</sup> But Coleshill sits uncomfortably in his revised chronology, and although he searched for both the Palladian and the Jonesian in Coleshill, he found both to be elusive, concluding that 'the general conception of Coleshill [...] owes relatively little either to Jones or Palladio'.<sup>268</sup>

Palladio never gave two principal storeys so nearly equal importance, unless the ratio was controlled by superimposed orders, nor used dormer windows or chimneys of the type which at Coleshill are important parts of the design; nor did he envisage a stair such as that at Coleshill, whose double flights and uniting gallery belong to the seventeenth-century Italian Baroque. Coleshill was not Palladian. It was a mixture of Italian, French, English and possibly Dutch themes.<sup>269</sup>

Conversely, he believed that the 'details of the windows and cornice are very much what Palladio or Jones might have done. The rustic basement was likewise near to Jones, but nearer to du Cerceau's work at Verneuil'.<sup>270</sup> The house is therefore paradoxical, and defies neat stylistic taxonomies. Yet despite its ambiguity, it was nonetheless a 'remarkable' house in Summerson's view. He provided an eloquent expression of the significance of Coleshill that despite his rational and modernist leanings betrayed a sentimental response to the house: 'Massive, serene and thoughtful, absolutely without affectation, Coleshill was a statement of the utmost value to British architecture'.<sup>271</sup> His words became all the more emotive as the house was demolished just as the volume first went to press in 1953.

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<sup>267</sup> Now in its ninth revised edition.

<sup>268</sup> Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 138.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

### The Astylar House

Following Summerson's approach, Coleshill was evaluated by other historians in relation to notions of Palladianism as the superior form of classicism associated with Jones and his oeuvre. However, inasmuch as seventeenth-century classicism prefigured the Palladianism of the eighteenth century, authors offered more complex and sophisticated interpretations of the period, developing arguments for divergent stylistic strands. As well as Summerson's Artisan Mannerism, other style categories were constructed including Harris's Courtier or Subordinate Style, and Mowl and Earnshaw's Puritan Minimalism.<sup>272</sup> These stylistic narratives continued to be defined largely by their relationship to Jones as the inspirer of Palladianism, but they also took on social and political interpretations. For example, Harris employed the category of Courtier style as a tool for dismantling the mythology of certain Jonesian attributions. Jones's role specifically as a Court architect was emphasised, and the country houses of courtiers designed by his subordinates represented an alternative, more idiosyncratic style adopted by those who lacked the full intellectual grasp of Jones's more sophisticated approach.<sup>273</sup>

We have seen how the absence of orders was regarded as a significant feature of Coleshill's classicism, and Hill and Cornforth characterised the house as

a full-blown classical house in a land without a building tradition in that manner. Its classicism is derived not from columns and pilasters but in the harmony of its proportions. The discipline of the orders was so deeply ingrained in the building that there was no need for them.<sup>274</sup>

Coleshill played a key role in arguments for a particular mode of astylar classicism developed by Jones in the 1630s. Cinzia Sicca, however, doubts that Jones's astylism had much impact, and whilst some see it as prefiguring Burlingtonian astylism in the eighteenth century she regards Burlington's approach as distinct and more archaeological.<sup>275</sup> Those who favour Pratt as the author of Coleshill also identify his astylar classicism as highly influential, possibly extending beyond the seventeenth century to shape the Georgian style beloved by John Summerson. But the authority of astylism is not intrinsic to the house, and depends on the perceptions of the beholder.

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<sup>272</sup> See John Harris, 'Inigo Jones and the Courtier Style', *Architectural Review*, 154 (July 1973), 17-24; John Harris and Gordon Higgott, *Inigo Jones: The Complete Architectural Drawings* (New York: The Drawing Center, 1989); Mowl and Earnshaw, *Architecture Without Kings*.

<sup>273</sup> Harris, 'Inigo Jones and the Courtier Style'.

<sup>274</sup> Hill and Cornforth, p. 94

<sup>275</sup> Sicca, p. 93.



We cannot be sure of the significance of Coleshill's astylism in the 1650s, and A.A. Tait has proposed that the Jonesian 'stone box' which Coleshill may be seen to exemplify was rejected at the time in favour of a more comfortable and less doctrinaire classicism.<sup>276</sup> In this way Tait drew parallels with the perceived rejection of modernist architecture in more recent times. Equally, this austere classicism may have been out of favour in the early decades of the eighteenth century, and certainly the majority of the elevations depicted in Campbell's volumes of *Vitruvius Britannicus* have columns and pilasters. A classical language based on the orders required columns as overt symbols and vehicles for learning that rendered architecture readable to those with the cultural capacity to comprehend them. Nevertheless, the identification of astylism as a distinct classical typological category has shaped post-war accounts of Coleshill.

Mowl and Earnshaw regarded Coleshill as the prototype for a simple astylar classicism which pre-figured Burlingtonian Palladianism, and this depended on their assertion of Jones as Coleshill's true architect. We have seen how they invented the term 'Puritan Minimalism' to distinguish a style appropriate to the conditions of the Interregnum which lay somewhere between the 'inept' vernacular classicism of Summerson's Artisan Mannerism, and the architecture of the Stuart Court. They located the house as 'a prototype for the modest astylar classicism that would satisfy [...] the architectural aspirations of the class that rose to power through the Civil War and the Commonwealth'.<sup>277</sup> The authors explained Jones's choice of astylar minimalism by reference to three earlier Berkshire houses built by owners with Court connections – East Hampstead Lodge, West Woodhay House and Aldermaston Court (Figure 29). At Coleshill, Jones was seen as responding to this trend by developing a modest style for those with similar 'Puritan' inclinations. The three earlier houses accounted for 'the authoritative simplicity which would allow the Burlingtonians to accept Coleshill as a Palladian prototype even though it had few marks of outward Palladian design'.<sup>278</sup> Whilst Mowl and Earnshaw sought to challenge past scholarship on seventeenth-century classicism, their interpretation nevertheless remained focused on Palladianism as an inevitable outcome of stylistic progression, and Coleshill's protean stylistic identity was articulated in terms of Jonesian astylism to serve this narrative.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> A.A. Tait, 'Post-Modernism in the 1650s', in *Inigo Jones and the Spread of Classicism: Papers Given at the Georgian Group Symposium 1986* (London: Georgian Group, 1987), pp. 23-35 (p. 23).

<sup>277</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw, *Architecture Without Kings*, p. 31.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>279</sup> The self-serving nature of Mowl and Earnshaw's stylistic narrative is noted by Elizabeth McKellar in 'Palladianism via Postmodernism: Constructing and Deconstructing the 'English Renaissance'', *Art History* 20 (1997), 154-56 (p. 155).



Figure 29 West Woodhay House, Newbury, Berkshire built 1635.

Coleshill also served as a signpost through Worsley's narrative of classical building types which owed a debt to Jones's later domestic designs for astylar hipped roof houses. He identified a small, unassuming astylar house type which came to dominate the second half of the seventeenth century, characterised by regular astylar façades, plat bands, vertical rectangular windows, modillion cornices, dormer windows, and rooflines parallel to the front elevation. We have seen how Worsley constructed the idea of the astylar 'Prattian villa' as a type based on Pratt's limited oeuvre which influenced later architecture through to the Georgian period. Worsley accepted Pratt's authorship of Coleshill, but could not pin down Coleshill's stylistic contribution to British classicism. He went so far as to use the term 'Coleshill type', but evidence of direct emulation of the house is slim.<sup>280</sup> Whilst acknowledging Coleshill's place as a prototype, it was Pratt's subsequent works such as Kingston Lacy that provided the model for the compact brick villa. Worsley dealt with Coleshill's ambiguous role by identifying it as amongst a number of transitional houses dating from the 1650s.<sup>281</sup> In contrast to Mowl and Earnshaw's model for astylar classicism based on Jones's authorship, when identified as the work of Pratt Coleshill could be understood as a providing a prototype for a more modest brick Restoration gentry house that was ultimately rejected by the Burlingtonians. One reason why Coleshill hovers between the opposing interpretations of Mowl and Earnshaw and Worsley lies in perceptions of the very fabric from which it was built. Its finely ashlarred freestone has elite connotations

<sup>280</sup> Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain*, p. 161.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

more closely allied to high Palladianism, whereas the notion of the Prattian villa rested with the mellow and less austere vernacular brickwork of the gentry house as built by Pratt at Kingston Lacy and Horseheath.<sup>282</sup>

The significance of Coleshill's astylism in classical narratives is particularly contentious when Webb's drawings of decorative capitals for the front, atrium and Great Chamber and a Corinthian columned chimneypiece are considered (Figure 30, Figure 31). These drawings tend to be seen as representing an earlier manifestation of Coleshill, perhaps for the house in the cucumber garden that was abandoned. Harris sees this as indicative of what was 'quite clearly a Palladian house articulated by orders, unlike Pratt's Coleshill, which was astylar'.<sup>283</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw propose that Webb was designing an old-fashioned house with Corinthian pilasters of the giant order.<sup>284</sup> The shift away from this proposed columned design to the 'powerful and intensely sophisticated design of the Coleshill known to history' is understood as a dramatic and highly significant change' that set the house on its path to canonical status.<sup>285</sup> These undated isolated capitals are taken to stand in for the overall stylistic identity of an entire house that was distinct from the as-built Coleshill, and to indicate the unified conceptual intentions of their designer. My intention is not to dispute that Webb produced designs for Coleshill that were never realised. But these arguments require the house to be either Palladian or not Palladian, and either astylar or not astylar, according to pre-defined categories. Yet the as-built Coleshill was not stylistically uniform or even pure 'Jonesian'. It exhibited traditional and classical features both internally and externally, including its wainscoted and pilastered parlour, its enriched plasterwork ceilings, the architectonic chimneys and the hipped roof. Coleshill demonstrates the complexity of the architectural lexicon of classicism which is skewed to accommodate progressive narratives. Apparent stylistic incongruities are overlooked or glossed over in accounts that attempt to reconstruct the house as an original unified concept depending on the presence or absence of orders according to the intentions of a single creative architect.

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<sup>282</sup> Kingston Lacy's brickwork was encased in stone in the nineteenth century.

<sup>283</sup> Harris, *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the RIBA*, p. 23.

<sup>284</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw, *Architecture Without Kings*, p. 88.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.



Figure 30 Design for a chimneypiece and overmantel drawn by John Webb. ©RIBA Library Drawings Collection.



Figure 31 Capital for the front of Coleshill House drawn by John Webb. ©RIBA Library Drawings Collection.

That Coleshill defies neat stylistic taxonomies based on unifying concepts is demonstrated by the interior of the living parlour. The Jacobean-style paneling and chimneypiece were admired in *Country Life* in 1904 as evidence of Jones's skillful handling of the classical idiom (Figure 32).<sup>286</sup> But in 1918 Gotch, while seeing this interior as contemporaneous with the building of the house, was dismissive of the discordant style, and unable to see evidence of Jones's influence. 'It is difficult', he wrote, 'to suppose that Jones would have departed from his usual manner [...] it is probable that the room was left to the unaided skill of some local craftsman'.<sup>287</sup> In 1919, Tipping explained this stylistic incongruence by suggesting that the paneling was introduced probably as a survival from the fire that burnt Henry Pratt's old house in the village sometime around 1647.<sup>288</sup> This is indicative of a general resistance to stylistic hybridity in progressive narratives of architectural history that depend on notions of a single creative mind and which do not readily admit the idiosyncrasies of consumer choice. Yet as we shall see Coleshill's living parlour reflected conscious style preferences that do not sit comfortably with the canonical ideal of the house. Moreover, the search for Coleshill's original, pure stylistic identity has largely written out later alterations from its historiography. In fact Coleshill was far from unaltered, and the extent to which past owners were influenced by canonical preoccupations as they set about making their interventions will form the subject of the next chapter.



Figure 32 The living parlour at Coleshill House. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

<sup>286</sup> 'Coleshill House', *Country Life*, p. 670.

<sup>287</sup> Gotch, *The English Home*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>288</sup> Tipping, 'Coleshill House II', pp. 145-46.



## CHAPTER 2: 'To Make Coleshill House Compleat': Coleshill House in the Long Eighteenth Century

### Introduction

In 1748 Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell mounted a new brass plaque in his house marking the culmination of five years of improvements at Coleshill which he had inherited from his father in 1728.<sup>289</sup> Amongst other things Sir Mark had tackled structural failings that threatened the future survival of his house, which after many years of research he confidently ascribed to one of the most revered architects of the day, Inigo Jones. He had sought advice on the repair of Coleshill from two noted men of taste, the Lords Burlington and Leicester, whose contribution he acknowledged on the plaque. Alongside these illustrious names was that of Jonathan Barrett, the trusted stone mason who nearly lost his life whilst excavating water mines as part of Sir Mark's ambitious scheme to supply the house and gardens with fresh water. Sir Mark addressed the plaque to the anonymous future owners of the house, who he urged to continue to make repairs. His plaque provided practical guidance on the upkeep of the house and observations on the water supply. For Sir Mark family tradition would not suffice in transmitting his wishes through the generations. His decision to permanently inscribe his message on a plaque is unusual, and perhaps he had in mind the longevity of church memorials. In 1738 he had placed a brass plaque with a genealogical table in Coleshill church, which he referred to as 'the inscription in material the most durable and least liable to be removed'.<sup>290</sup> He initially considered fixing the plaque away from the public gaze on the brick front of a chimney in the west garret.<sup>291</sup> This suggests that it was not intended for public display or to be seen by casual visitors who ventured no further than the show rooms, but rather for those with an intimate knowledge of the house. When Tipping noted the plaque in his *Country Life* article of 1919, it was in a back area, mounted at the top of the service stairs between the basement and the former living parlour. The plaque survived the fire of 1952, which ironically was caused by a spark as the house was undergoing repairs. It found its way into the ownership of

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<sup>289</sup> See Appendix 2 for a transcription of the plaque's inscription.

<sup>290</sup> WSA, 1946/2/1, Pedigree Book, bet. fols 208 and 209. It is worth noting here a stone plaque in the garrets of nearby Lydiard House of a similar date, with an inscription that provides a rebuilding date of 1743 and some family details.

<sup>291</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, bet. fols 14 and 15.

the tenant of Lower Lodge in the village, and on their death it was left to the National Trust. It now hangs on the walls of the Trust's estate office, a poignant reminder of the failure of Sir Mark's aspirations.

Sir Mark's plaque has some resonance with historiographic interpretations of Coleshill in its concern to establish authorship of the house, and indeed it has been interpreted by some architectural historians as evidence that Jones was its architect. However this was not the primary message of the plaque, and indeed its discreet siting suggests that it was not intended as an overtly public proclamation of Jones's authorship. The complex inscription may be subjected to other readings which challenge the established histories of the house. We can begin to see that there were alterations and interventions which contest the traditional canonical view of Coleshill as frozen in time. Indeed Sir Mark urged future interventions in order that the house might endure. Moreover, rather than being a perfect model and exemplar, the plaque indicates that the house was flawed, requiring Sir Mark to correct and refine it. Necessary repairs to the chimneys and other features constituted interventions which would in some way have altered the appearance of the house, even in the like-for-like replacement of old fabric and workmanship, moving Coleshill further away from its original state. The water mines though hidden below ground opened the way for alterations to the garden setting of the house, as well as improving living conditions for its occupants, and the heroic act of excavating the mines itself became part of Coleshill's mythology. Furthermore, Sir Mark demonstrated a temporal approach to the house which is largely absent from traditional historiographic accounts. He was sensible of Coleshill's past and this influenced the choices he made in his interventions. He used the term 'restore' to indicate his desire to carry forward valued older features of the house. His inscription looked towards the future beyond his own lifetime and perhaps even that of his family, demonstrating a concern for Coleshill's long term survival. Sir Mark recognised that the fate of the house rested on the care and maintenance of it by future occupants and owners, whoever they might be.

The plaque provides a first step in returning to sources to investigate how past owners of Coleshill House responded to it in relation to historiographic notions of the canonical work explored in the preceding chapter. The established accounts of the house seek to conceptualise it in terms of its origins, authorship and stylistic identity. However, even a cursory glance through the archives offers an alternative view of Coleshill as a house which evolved and matured as the world around and within it changed. For a building which was in continuous occupation for 300 years this is not surprising, but it exposes the myth of the unaltered house. This chapter examines how these alterations were accommodated in relation to the canonical ideal of the house. It



considers what these works tell us about the extent to which owners construed the house as something sacrosanct according to the values ascribed to it in its histories. Furthermore it addresses how ideas about Coleshill's Jonesian authorship and classical style influenced the choices and preferences that owners made through their architectural negotiations with the building.

My study will focus on developments taking place at Coleshill during the long eighteenth century, drawing on previously unpublished archival material. In this way I will reveal aspects of the house and its history that have been overlooked in established accounts that rarely return to the documentary archives to seek out fresh interpretations. I will not attempt to provide a detailed account of all the works carried out at this time, but the intention is to explore what these activities tell us about attitudes to the seventeenth-century house which until now has served as the focus of Coleshill's histories. A narrow reading of the archives has typically been used as a means of locating the house within the canon of architectural history, so that certain types of evidence are privileged over others. Key pieces of evidence are repeatedly cited to reconstruct and confirm the original identity of the house, whilst others are left untouched. Like the brass plaque, a commonplace book kept by Sir Mark, now in a private collection, is one such source which has been used as direct evidence in the controversy of attribution, whilst Sir Mark and his times have remained largely beyond the scope of study. A broader reading of the archives opens the way to a richer understanding of the history and development of Coleshill, indicating how the owners engaged with the house at the time. Drawing on the archives to explore the conceptual frameworks in which the house was understood by its owners provides an alternative method for critiquing the canonical historiographic texts, as points of resonance and dissonance emerge.

This chapter focuses principally on the period of ownership by Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell from his inheritance in 1728 until his death in 1768, and that of Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor from his inheritance of the house in 1768 until shortly after his death in 1828. This includes the period when Jacob's son, William, Viscount Folkestone, partially took over the running of Coleshill from his father in 1802.<sup>292</sup> There is a rich supply of documentary material for this period, but I have focused my research on archives pertaining directly to alterations to the architecture, interiors and setting of the house. These archives are mainly to be found amongst material deposited by the Pleydell-Bouverie family and the National Trust at the Berkshire

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<sup>292</sup> William was styled as Viscount Folkestone until the death of his father, when he became 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Radnor. The title relates to the family's acquisition of the Folkestone estate.

Record Office, and at the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives. The archives comprise primarily household accounts, journals, inventories, receipt books, stewards' papers, plans and tradesmen's bills. The tradesmen's accounts are a particularly rich resource although they are generally non-specific on the exact location and context of the works being carried out. However they are useful indicators of the extent and type of activities being undertaken.

My approach to exploring alterations at Coleshill has been influenced by two texts in particular: *How Buildings Learn* by Stewart Brand (1997) and *On Altering Architecture* by Fred Scott (2008).<sup>293</sup> The authors are concerned principally with the adaptation of buildings as a contemporary issue in the architectural profession rather than in a historical context. However their examination of the ideological processes of altering architecture points the way to a more in-depth interrogation of the interventions of Sir Mark and the Pleydell-Bouveries at Coleshill. They raise questions about what these interventions might mean in terms of attitudes to what Scott refers to as the 'host building'. Both authors emphasise that architecture is not permanent and that all buildings can 'grow' and 'learn', and that this process depends on a relationship between the building and its occupants. As Brand notes, 'The dwelling and the dwellers must shape and reshape themselves to each other until there's a tolerable fit'.<sup>294</sup> This may seem obvious, but what is different about the approach of these two authors is the centrality of the concept of the original or host building. The traditional approach of architectural historians is to treat alteration as a sequence of new work, but Scott distinguishes the alteration of an existing structure from what he refers to as 'pure architecture' or the making of a new building. For Scott, alteration is a collective production acting across generations, requiring contrasting sensibilities and imaginations from the pure work of the architect. 'Alteration is more like a duet than a solo', he writes. 'It is about an art of response as much as it is an art of individual genius'.<sup>295</sup> Coleshill constitutes what Brand refers to as a 'High Road' building, which acquires its character through 'high intent, duration of purpose, duration of care, time and a steady supply of confident dictators'.<sup>296</sup> Whilst it might seem self-evident that buildings mature in this way, the historiography of Coleshill as a canonical work demonstrates a certain blindness to this process of alteration. As Brand observes, 'Between the dazzle of a new building and its eventual corpse, when it is either demolished or petrified for posterity as a museum, are the lost years – the

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<sup>293</sup> Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* (London: Phoenix, 1997); Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>294</sup> Brand, p. 164.

<sup>295</sup> Scott, p. xvii.

<sup>296</sup> Brand, p. 35.

unappreciated, undocumented, awkward-seeming time when it was alive to evolution'.<sup>297</sup>

I have taken two ideas in particular from these texts in my approach to interrogating the interventions at Coleshill. Firstly, Brand sees the process of adapting houses as a combination of 'slowly shifting fantasies and rapidly changing needs'.<sup>298</sup> These adaptations act across a series of layers of which the building is composed, ranging from the site or setting, the structure, the skin or surfaces, the services such as the plumbing, the space or plan, and the 'stuff' (furnishings, pictures etc).<sup>299</sup> Secondly, I will borrow from Scott the idea that alteration is a paradoxical function of the impulse to conserve, and a response to anxiety about what might be lost by the passage of time.<sup>300</sup> In this way I will address how Coleshill House, after 300 years of occupation and alteration, nevertheless was open to be re-imagined as largely unaltered by architectural historians. I will consider how the owners themselves influenced this way of construing the house. Furthermore Scott sees alterations as being guided by a vision of the ideal host form or model, whilst acknowledging the building's own individual particularities. Alteration is therefore an act of negotiation between the ideal and the actual.<sup>301</sup> In the case of Coleshill, this ideal house might relate to the notion of the canonical work, or the classical Jonesian house of its histories. Scott writes that 'the purpose is to work the existent and the ideal together through the processes of intervention, to keep the existing occupied and significant. In doing so, one lives to a certain extent with the inadequacies and aspirations of an earlier time'.<sup>302</sup> Seen in this light, the alterations at Coleshill can be understood as a progressive act to resist the obsolescence of the old house and breathe new life into the work, or to put it in Scott's terms, as an act of translation which carries the host building over from one age to another.<sup>303</sup>

Before exploring the various alterations carried out at Coleshill during the long eighteenth century, I will begin by introducing Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell and Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie under whose ownership the house and its setting were re-imagined to meet their changing needs and aspirations.

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<sup>297</sup> Scott, p. 11.

<sup>298</sup> Brand, p. 10.

<sup>299</sup> Brand derives this concept of layering from the work of Frank Duffy. See pp. 13-17.

<sup>300</sup> Scott, p. xviii.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. xviii.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

## Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell

Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell was a leading member of the Berkshire gentry in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, who inherited Coleshill House from his father, Thomas Pleydell, in 1728 (Figure 33).<sup>304</sup> He and his wife Mary settled at Coleshill in April 1721, and he was already involved in the running of the house and gardens by this time.<sup>305</sup> The house and the manorial title came to him with few demesnes and at first he had only a modest landed income.<sup>306</sup> He lost heavily in the South Sea Bubble in 1720, and subsequently sought to extend his holdings to include estates in Berkshire, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. This included reunifying the Coleshill estate which had been broken up by his forebears to pay for debts, and he largely achieved this aim by 1738.<sup>307</sup> Whilst Janie Cottis has explored Sir Mark's role as an innovative resident landlord and agricultural improver at Coleshill, his ambitions in relation to the house and its grounds have gone unnoticed up to now.<sup>308</sup> At a time when architectural display signalled wealth and status, it might be expected that Sir Mark would wish to remodel his ageing home. He would have been acutely aware of the proximity of elite houses that rivalled Coleshill, including those newly constructed by wealthy neighbours. Several houses were built or remodeled in the locality in the first half of the eighteenth century, and by 1760 what became known locally as the 'Golden Ridge' was well populated with fine houses including Radley Hall (1721-5 for Sir John Stonehouse), Kingston Bagpuize (originally 1660s, remodelled 1720s), Pusey House (1748 for John Allen), and Lockinge House (c.1750 for Matthew Wymondsold). Only

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<sup>304</sup> Sir Mark acquired the 'Stuart' element of his name from his mother, Jane, daughter of Sir Nicholas Stuart of Hartley Mauduit, Hants. He was created baronet in 1732.

<sup>305</sup> BRO, D/EPb E8, fol.13. Sir Mark married Mary in 1719. She was the daughter of Robert Stewart of Ascog, Bute. Sir Mark's ledgers in the BRO and his commonplace book point at his early involvement with the running of the house whilst his father was still alive.

<sup>306</sup> Janie Cottis estimated his income to be less than £2000 a year in 1732 with a further £700 in reversion from lifeholds. See her essay 'A Country Gentleman and his Estates, c. 1720-68: Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, Bart., of Coleshill, Berkshire', in *Town and Countryside: The English Landowner in the National Economy 1660-1860*, ed. by Christopher W. Chalklin and J. Ross Wordie (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 26-51 (p. 26).

<sup>307</sup> Sir Mark noted in his commonplace book that his great-grandfather, Sir George Pratt, had been a profligate spender, and two of his manors had to be sold at his death in 1673 to pay outstanding debts. Sir George's widow, Margaret, also died in debt, and two of the demesne farms at Coleshill as well as the Great Farm at Coxwell were sold to her grandson, George Pratt Webb.

<sup>308</sup> Cottis, 'A Country Gentleman'. See also Christopher Clay, 'Landlords and Estate Management in England', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume 5, 1640-1750, Part 2*, ed. by Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 119-251.

Ashdown House on the Berkshire Downs, a modest house built in the 1660s for the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Craven, probably as a hunting lodge, shared Coleshill's austere seventeenth-century style. Sir Mark might therefore have felt under some pressure to update his aged home.



Figure 33 Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, British School, c. 1732. *Private Collection.*

©Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

If we turn to the documentary archives, we can see that Sir Mark carried out some significant interventions, but these nonetheless outwardly left elements of the old house intact. Sir Mark's approach to Coleshill's alteration was, I propose, influenced by a sensibility of the history of the house. The archives reveal his fascination with uncovering the origins of Coleshill, and curiosity about its past. His research notes are set out in his commonplace book, starting in 1728 and continuing into the 1740s as well as in his 'Pedigree Book' at the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives.<sup>309</sup> The death of his father may have encouraged investigations into his ancestral inheritance and the descent of the manor of Coleshill, not least because of the complex issues of establishing entitlement and the lack of early records. But his interest went beyond issues of title to delve further into the history of the house. Significantly, his research

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<sup>309</sup> Pedigree Book, WSA, 1946/2/1.

sought to identify the architect of Coleshill. In the absence of written records he relied on family tradition, and Inigo Jones, Roger Pratt and John Webb were all implicated in his findings. His research was encouraged by the interest of Burlington, who may have visited the house around May 1730 at a time when the Jonesian revival and Palladianism was becoming established.<sup>310</sup> Lord Bruce, Burlington's brother-in-law, perhaps made the introductions, as he had recently worked with Burlington on the design of his Palladian mansion at Tottenham Park, and Bruce was amongst Sir Mark's social circle.<sup>311</sup> Indeed John Harris has suggested that an early design for a staircase at Tottenham Park was based on Coleshill.<sup>312</sup> We have seen how Burlington was keenly interested in the work of Inigo Jones, acquiring drawings by him and his pupil Webb and promoting publications about his works. Sir Mark would have been aware of the potential to capitalise on any connection between his house and the fashionable interest in the work of Jones. This is likely to have swayed his mind in favour of Jones as the original architect, despite the other names raised during the course of his research.

Further evidence that Sir Mark identified the house with Jones came in 1735, when George Vertue made a print of Coleshill's north-east entrance front (Figure 34). It was a surprisingly modern (for Vertue) orthogonal view which emphasised the architectural qualities of the building, with the inscription '*Built by Inigo Jones in the year 1650*' and the Pleydell coat of arms.<sup>313</sup> This indicates that by this time Jones was favoured as the

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<sup>310</sup> This was noted by Richard Hewlings with reference to letter 162.3 from Lord Bruce to Lord Burlington in the Chatsworth and Devonshire Collection, 23 May 1730, giving directions to Coleshill. Richard Hewlings, 'Chiswick House and Gardens: Appearance and Meaning', in *Lord Burlington: Architecture, Art, Life*, ed. by Toby Barnard and Jane Clark, (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), pp. 1-149 (p. 27).

<sup>311</sup> For example, Lord St John at Lydiard Tregoze was a shared acquaintance and kinsman of Sir Mark who regularly played host to both. See Brian Carne, 'The Diaries of Goddard Smith', *Friends of Lydiard Tregoze Report* 33 (2001), Appendix 1, pp. 44, 45, 47.

<sup>312</sup> John Harris, 'The Buildings Works of Lord Viscount Bruce', in *Lord Burlington and his Circle: Papers Given at a Georgian Group Symposium [...]* (London: Georgian Group, 1982), pp. 25-51 (pp. 27-28).

<sup>313</sup> On Vertue, see Martin Myrone, 'Graphic Antiquarianism in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Career and Reputation of George Vertue (1684-1756)', in *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700-1850*, ed. by Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (London: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 37-56. Also David Alexander, 'George Vertue as an Engraver', *Walpole Society*, 70 (2008), 207-517, cat. no. 696. The print is included in Vertue's own list of his engravings that he gave to Lord Oxford in 1740, which is appended to Alexander's article. Vertue's notebooks do not record visiting Coleshill (although confusingly they refer to a visit to

architect of Coleshill, although Sir Mark's research into the origins of the house was ongoing. The print helped to establish the build date of 1650 as part of Coleshill's mythography, although it was unsubstantiated even by Sir Mark's own research. But printed in this way it assumed the status of legitimate evidence. The print does not appear to have been intended for publication, and Sir Mark probably commissioned it for private circulation to invite the admiration of his close associates and connect his family to a first rate house.<sup>314</sup> The assertion of Jones's authorship must have been one motivation for this, and would certainly have increased the appeal of a commission to Vertue. Sir Mark distributed the print whilst he was researching his ancestry. When he was looking into the genealogy of the Stawels of Aldermaston, he sent a copy to his ageing relative Lady Stawel, who wrote back appreciatively noting how it stirred her memories so that she could almost 'see every room in the house as if I had been there but yesterday though you were then but in yr nurses Arms'.<sup>315</sup> Thomas Wotton obtained a copy of the print from Sir Mark's broker, Mr Snow, in order to engrave the family coat of arms for his new edition of *English Baronets* which was published in 1741.<sup>316</sup> We have seen how this publication marked the emergence of Coleshill's historiographic myth.

Whilst Sir Mark was clearly keen to identify Coleshill's architect his interest went beyond this, and he sought to establish the layout of the house as it had been in George Pratt's time. He sketched out plans in his commonplace book based on the reminiscences of a kinswoman, which were annotated to identify the rooms according to the names of occupants or by use (Figure 35). By way of comparison he sketched a plan of the house as it was in his own time alongside the old layouts. Although the function of rooms had changed, the broad arrangement of the apartments in Sir Mark's time was little changed from the seventeenth century (Figure 36). Furthermore he recorded details of the old interiors, such as the tapestry of Moses that hung in Lady Pratt's room, as well as recording the names of household members including those of the servants during the time of the Pratts. Sir Mark's notes therefore point towards a rather more homely and personal sense of Coleshill's past life alongside a concern to establish the authorship of the house.

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Lord Digby's Coleshill House in Warwickshire). Richard Gough recorded the print in *British Topography [...]*, 2 vols (London: T. Payne, etc, 1780), I, p. 180.

<sup>314</sup> I am grateful to Martin Myrone, David Alexander and Tim Clayton for their comments on this.

<sup>315</sup> WSA, 1946/2/1, fol. 127, letter from Lady Stawel to Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, 5 December 1735.

<sup>316</sup> WSA, 1946/2/1, fol. 225, letter from Thomas Wotton to Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, n.d.

Copyright image

Figure 34 George Vertue, Coleshill House, 1735. *BRO, D/EPb P9.*

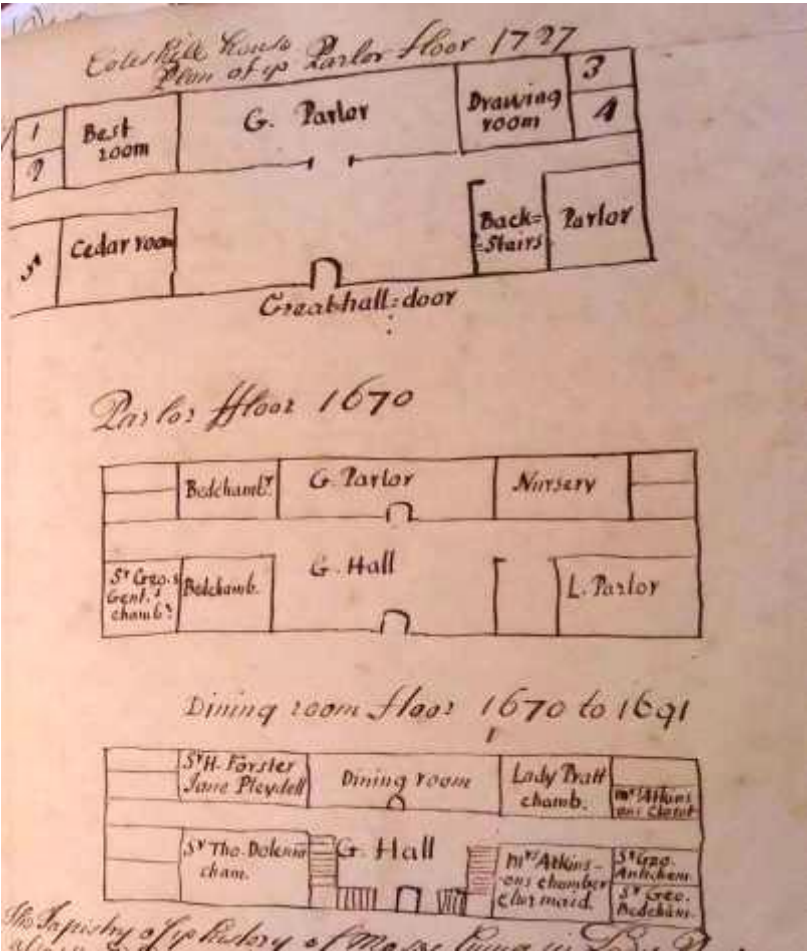


Figure 35 Sketch plans of Coleshill House from Sir Mark's commonplace book. *Private Family Collection.*



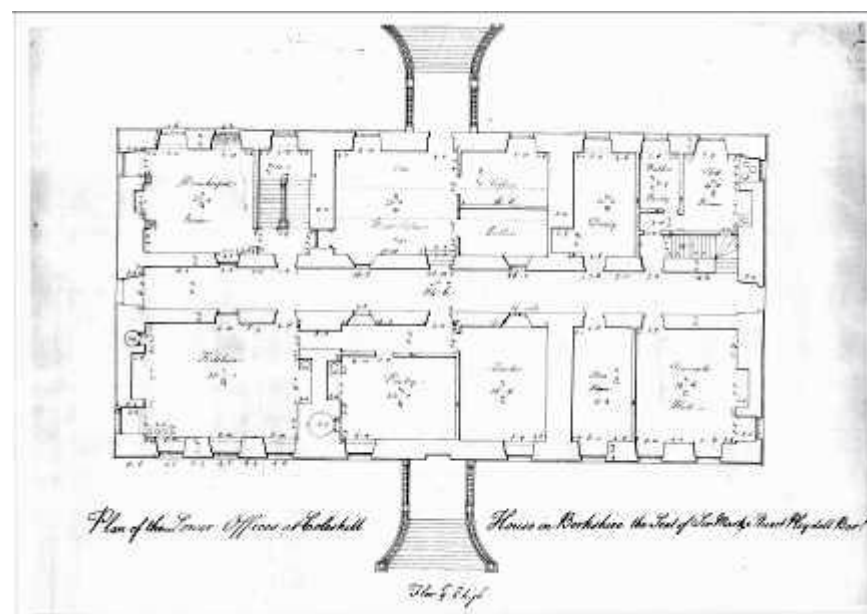
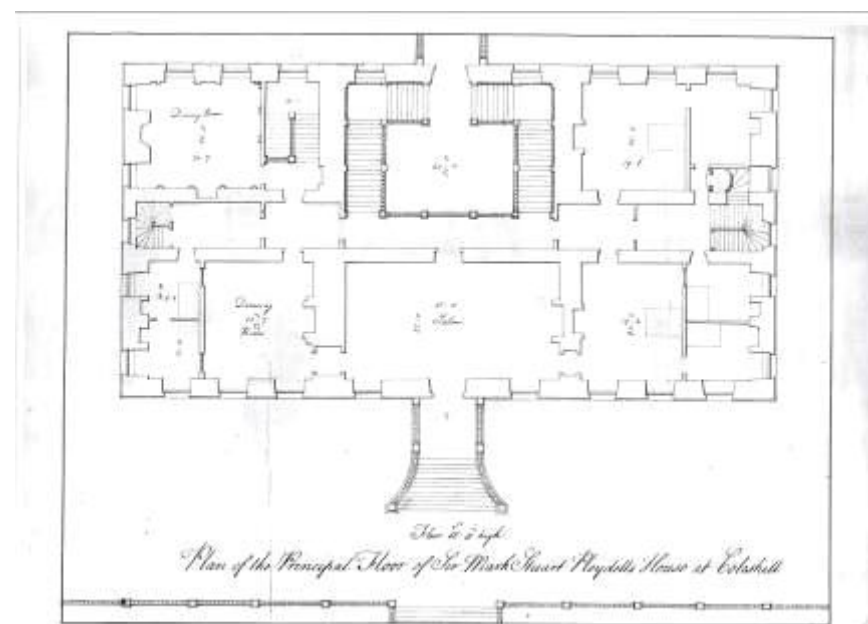
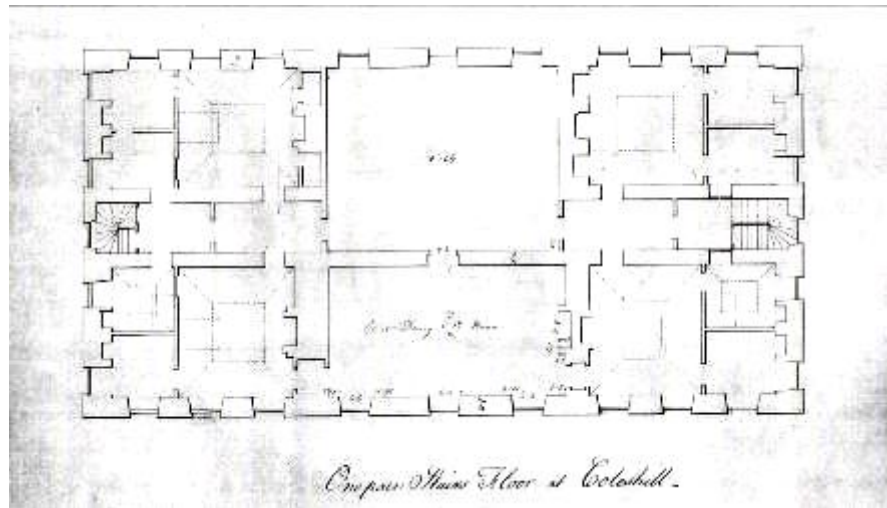


Figure 36 Unsigned plans of Coleshill from Sir Mark's time. WSA, 1946/2/2.

## The Pleydell-Bouveries

Sir Mark's daughter, Harriot, brought Coleshill into the Bouverie family by her marriage to William Bouverie, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Folkestone, in January 1748.<sup>317</sup> William was created 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Radnor in 1765. The Bouverie family was of Huguenot descent, whose wealth originally derived from the London silk merchant Sir Edward des Bouveries (1621-94).<sup>318</sup> Harriot was heiress to Coleshill House, but whilst William invested a great deal in beautifying the family seat at Longford Castle he spent little time at Coleshill. However a painting made around the time of her marriage suggests that Harriot retained a strong connection with her ancestral home, depicting her standing before the Coleshill landscape gesturing towards the distant house (Figure 37).<sup>319</sup> Harriot died in 1750 shortly after giving birth to a son, Jacob, who was to become 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor (Figure 38). There were personal disagreements between William and Sir Mark, who in consequence placed a codicil in his will ensuring his fortunes and lands passed directly to Jacob and his heirs, provided they added Pleydell to their family name. Jacob inherited Coleshill House on the death of his grandfather in 1768, and he was the executor of Sir Mark's will. He graduated from Oxford in 1773, and made brief visits to Coleshill often on route to and from the city. In 1776 Jacob succeeded to his father's seat in the House of Lords on William's death, and Longford Castle became his primary family seat. In 1777 he married Anne Duncombe, stepdaughter of Anne, Lady Feversham, and their eldest son, William, was to inherit Coleshill on Jacob's death in 1828.

I have previously noted how William, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Radnor and Jacob, Viscount Folkestone were complicit in promoting Coleshill onto the national stage as the work of Inigo Jones in Woolfe and Gandon's fifth volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* in 1771. Indeed in the context of contemporary architectural discourse the classical Coleshill arguably had more to offer than Longford Castle. Jacob was therefore aware of the potential of Coleshill to serve as an instrument for advancing the family's social position as the masterpiece of Jones's work. Coleshill was no more than an occasional residence for Jacob, who resided principally at Longford and became a prominent figure in the public

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<sup>317</sup> See Appendix 3 for a simplified family tree.

<sup>318</sup> For a history of the family see Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Radnor, *A Huguenot Family: Des Bouveries, Bouverie, Pleydell-Bouverie, 1539-1889* (Winchester: Foxbury Press, 2001).

<sup>319</sup> See Helen Matilda Pleydell-Bouverie, Countess of Radnor, *Catalogue of Pictures at Longford Castle and Categorical List of Family Portraits* (privately published; Longford Castle, Wilts, 1898). Also Hugh Belsey, 'Painting Like Devis: Edward Haytley', *English Heritage Historial Review*, 1 (2006), 82-91 (p. 89).

life of Salisbury, as well as spending time in London. In 1796 he commissioned the architect James Wyatt to undertake an ambitious scheme to remodel Longford Castle which was never completed. However once he had inherited the Bouverie wealth and the Earldom in 1776 he began a major programme of works at Coleshill that was to continue well into the next century, and he invested considerably in developing it as his secondary seat. This work involved not only the house itself, but also ancillary buildings and alterations to the grounds.<sup>320</sup>



Figure 37 Harriot Pleydell, the Hon. Mrs Bouverie, by Edward Haytley, c.1748. *Private Collection. © Photographic Survey, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.*

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<sup>320</sup> See for example, BRO, D/EPb A7 Household Bills and Vouchers Coleshill House 1777-1801 for tradesmen's bills for Jacob's works to the house.

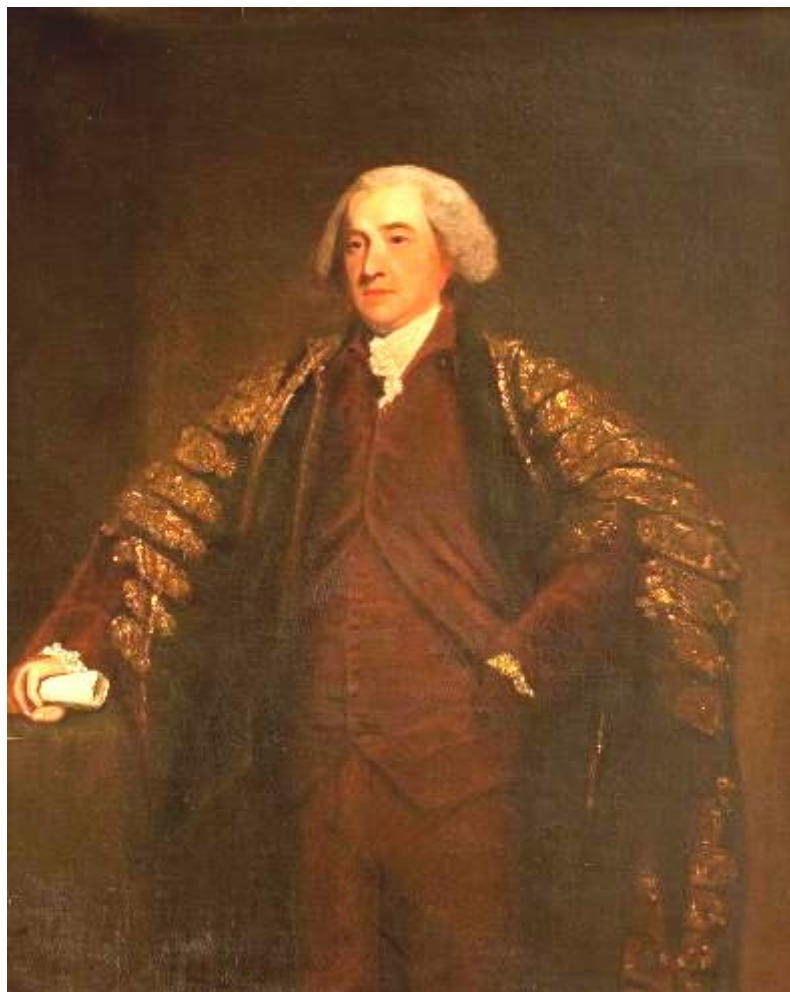


Figure 38 Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, 2nd Earl of Radnor by John Hoppner. *Salisbury City Council art collection.*

In 1799 Jacob's son William, then Viscount Folkestone, returned to England from travelling in Europe, and the following year he married Catherine, daughter of Henry Fiennes Pelham-Clinton, Earl of Lincoln. Soon after his son's marriage Jacob put into place plans for William to take on Coleshill, although he was not inclined to turn the house and estate over fully to his son. In 1801 he gave instructions to the steward, Maurice Ivernay, about arrangements for the handover to William, indicating those parts of the house and grounds that were to be given up.<sup>321</sup> Although he was initially discontented with Coleshill William came to favour the house even after he inherited Longford Castle in 1828, and once he retired from political life in 1848 Coleshill became his main residence. Although there was a hiatus in work at Coleshill between about 1805 and 1814, perhaps due to the impact of the wars with France, both Jacob and his son contributed to the alterations at the house and its setting in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>321</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, memorandum 6 April 1801.

Both Sir Mark and Jacob were aware of the architectural pre-eminence of Coleshill inasmuch as it was construed as the work of Inigo Jones, and this as we shall see was a determining factor in choices that they made about material alterations to the house, eliciting a certain regard for the original building. Here Scott's concept of alteration seen as a function of the conservation of the host building becomes relevant. I wish now to examine more closely some of the alterations at Coleshill during this period, and to investigate the extent to which the owners' reverence for the old house impacted upon their choices. At the same time, these alterations demonstrate the ongoing life of the building, which far from remaining static was reinvented and reinterpreted by its owners in response to changing circumstances over time.

## Sir Mark's Alterations and Lord Burlington

Sir Mark's accounts of the 1720s and 1730s make some reference to works on the house at this time, including to windows and chimneypieces. The first major intervention that he considered was the replacement of at least some of the old seventeenth-century casement windows with more up-to-date sash windows from around 1730. With its lofty position on a windy terrace Coleshill's windows were vulnerable to attack by the elements and the archives contain many references to the replacement of broken glass. The original windows were described somewhat critically by Roger Pratt in his notebooks, which tell us that the openings were five feet wide and 'seemed somewhat narrow, & whither because not sufficiently splayed on ye sides or because ye wooded frame and ye iron one tooke soe much from ye glasse.'<sup>322</sup> Sir Mark included an undated sketch of one of the old casement windows in what is known as his 'Journal of Mining' on a page alongside a sketch of one of Coleshill's chimneys as well as, curiously, sketches of Thomas Archer's triangular rectory at Deptford (Figure 39).<sup>323</sup> We cannot be sure why he drew the window or if this has any connection with the Deptford drawings, but nevertheless he had some interest in recording these original features of the house at a time that he was undertaking renovations.

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<sup>322</sup> Quoted in Gunther, p. 95.

<sup>323</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, Journal of Mining, between fols 2 and 3.



Figure 39 Sketches showing a seventeenth-century window and chimney at Coleshill.  
*BRO, D/EPb E33.*

The timber mullions and transoms of the old windows formed a cross shape, with wrought iron casements and diamond-shaped quarries set in timber frames. These cross-windows retained some structural function, and reflected a seventeenth-century approach to classicism which Hentie Louw proposes was probably French in derivation.<sup>324</sup> By the 1730s sashes were the norm. This window type was introduced in Britain at the end of the seventeenth century, and Louw suggests that it allowed the realisation of true Classical fenestration. Sashes released windows from their earlier structural function, so that they became no more than a ‘hole-in-the-wall’ fitted with a non-load bearing frame. For the first time a clear distinction could be drawn between the window and wall as distinct architectural components.<sup>325</sup> The alteration of Coleshill’s windows from their seventeenth-century form would have represented a significant intervention, but the references to sashes in Sir Mark’s account are puzzling, because we know that the house still retained at least some mullioned windows when the architect Daniel Asher Alexander came to work at Coleshill in 1814. Furthermore J.P. Neale’s drawing of the house which was published in 1818 also shows mullioned windows rather than full sashes. This suggests that Sir Mark adopted a

<sup>324</sup> Hentie Louw, ‘The Development of the Window’, in *Windows: History, Repair and Conservation*, ed. by Michael Tutton and Elizabeth Hirst (Shaftesbury: Donhead, 2007), pp. 8-96 (p. 24).

<sup>325</sup> Louw, pp. 24-5.

conservative approach to introducing sashes, perhaps by retaining the form of the mullioned windows in at least some of the rooms thereby lessening the visual impact of the alterations. It is possible that his sashes were of a form that resembled Louw's seventeenth-century 'A1' type which appeared as a cross window.<sup>326</sup> If, as seems to be the case, Sir Mark consciously sought to retain something of the old seventeenth-century windows in his renovations, this would have gone against the contemporary preference for full sashes that represented a more sophisticated approach to classicism and utilized up-to-date window construction technology.

Sir Mark began researching for his new windows around 1728, and he made enquiries of his neighbour Lord Barrington about the glass at Beckett Park, noting however that Coleshill on its lofty ridge stood 'more high and windy' and was therefore more vulnerable to extreme weather conditions.<sup>327</sup> The first reference to work on sashes comes in April 1730 when a mason and carpenter were working on a sash in Mr Webb's room at Coleshill.<sup>328</sup> Replacing the windows required alterations to the masonry of the apertures, and in April 1744 the mason Strong spent six days working on sashes.<sup>329</sup> Sir Mark also provided specific instructions on the construction of the windows, which were to be made and glazed a year before they were actually installed in the house.<sup>330</sup> The archives suggest that the windows were replaced in a piecemeal fashion over a number of years, thereby temporarily subverting the visual harmony of the façades. The seventeenth-century classical mouldings in stone around the windows with aprons beneath were retained, or perhaps replicated, providing a measure of aesthetic continuity with the old house.

With the repair of the chimneys Sir Mark more clearly adopted a measured and conservative approach. This work materially but almost imperceptibly altered the appearance of the house, and sought to perpetuate the chimneys as essential elements in the architectural vocabulary of the building. Sir Mark demonstrated great regard for these features as key components of the original Jonesian concept of the house, which he sought both to perfect and preserve despite the structural problems that they caused. The works are set out in his *Journal of Mining*, commenced in 1743, which reveals that there were serious structural problems with the outer chimneys that necessitated intervention. Sir Mark consulted various estate workers and craftsmen as

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<sup>326</sup> Hentie Louw, 'The Origin of the Sash Window', *Architectural History*, 26 (1983), 49-72, p. 53.

<sup>327</sup> BRO, D/EPb acc3313.6 B1, fol. 102.

<sup>328</sup> This was probably Sir Mark's kinsman George Pratt Webb, who inherited some of Coleshill's demesnes. Webb died in 1731.

<sup>329</sup> BRO, D/EPb E14.

<sup>330</sup> BRO, D/EPb acc3313.6 B1, fol. 61.

well as the architect and builder Richard Kittermaster on how best to repair the chimneys, but he could not settle on any of the solutions that were proposed to him. On 24 July 1743 he wrote a letter to Lord Burlington which he drafted in his journal. Sir Mark described how the four angular chimneys had been found for some years to lean inward towards the house, and that on opening the southern chimney it was found that its supporting timber had rotted. He set out the various proposals that had been put forward to remedy the defect, which included constructing arches and trussing the walls at the base of the faulty chimneys (Figure 40). However Sir Mark expressed concern that this method would disfigure the closet ceilings underneath the arches, 'wch are as beautiful rooms as any in the house'.<sup>331</sup> No images survive of the closet ceilings which Sir Mark appreciated and wished to preserve, and the most that we know is that two of them were coved (as indicated on plans of the house – see Figure 36, One Pair Stairs floor). The proposals also suggested reducing the dimensions of the chimneys, which Sir Mark thought acceptable 'if it will not prejudice the beauty of the architecture'.<sup>332</sup> Writing from Chiswick a few days later, Burlington reassured Sir Mark that the state of the chimneys was not as bad as had been suggested, and that they should simply be shored and the rotted timbers replaced.<sup>333</sup> However in December 1743 Sir Mark wrote again to Burlington to say that, amongst other problems newly discovered, the inclination of the chimneys was double that stated previously and was so clearly visible that it 'offends every eye even the most ignorant, and so gives every body the apprehension of danger'.<sup>334</sup>

Sir Mark was later also to credit the Earl of Leicester with contributing to the restoration work to the chimneys in his inscription on the brass plaque, but the nature of the Earl's involvement is not recorded. It is likely however that this was only advisory. Matthew Brettingham, the supervisory architect for works by Burlington for Leicester at Holkham Hall, was also drawn into the discussions. Following consultation with Burlington, in January 1744 Brettingham advised that after further consideration the Earl approved of modestly reducing the dimensions of the four chimneys, making them lighter on the floors beneath but with 'no diminution to their beauty'.<sup>335</sup> The estate mason Barrett offered to rebuild the chimneys for £12 each on 10 May 1744, and work began two weeks later.<sup>336</sup> Sir Mark later wrote to Burlington that the new

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<sup>331</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 3.

<sup>332</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 3.

<sup>333</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 7.

<sup>334</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 11.

<sup>335</sup> BRO, D/EPB E33, fols 23-4.

<sup>336</sup> BRO, D/EPB E33, fol. 25.



chimneys were standing firm, but that despite repairs to the roof timbers and re-covering the roof it was still letting in some water.<sup>337</sup>

This account indicates that Sir Mark recognised the contribution of the chimneys to the architectural ideal of the house, but his desire to preserve them had to be weighed against the necessity for structural interventions required to ensure the long-term security of the building. Such was the perceived significance of this intervention that Sir Mark sought the advice of influential individuals in the sphere of architecture, and it is notable that he consulted Lord Burlington as much for practical advice as on finding a suitable aesthetic solution. Coleshill's architectonic chimneys, despite their classical mouldings, reflected a distinctly seventeenth-century approach to classicism which was by no means up-to-date by the standards of the 1740s. Rather, contemporary architectural taste favoured plain diminished stacks combined with a shallow roof concealed behind a parapet. But Coleshill's chimneys were intrinsic to Sir Mark's ideal of the house and he went to considerable lengths to retain them.

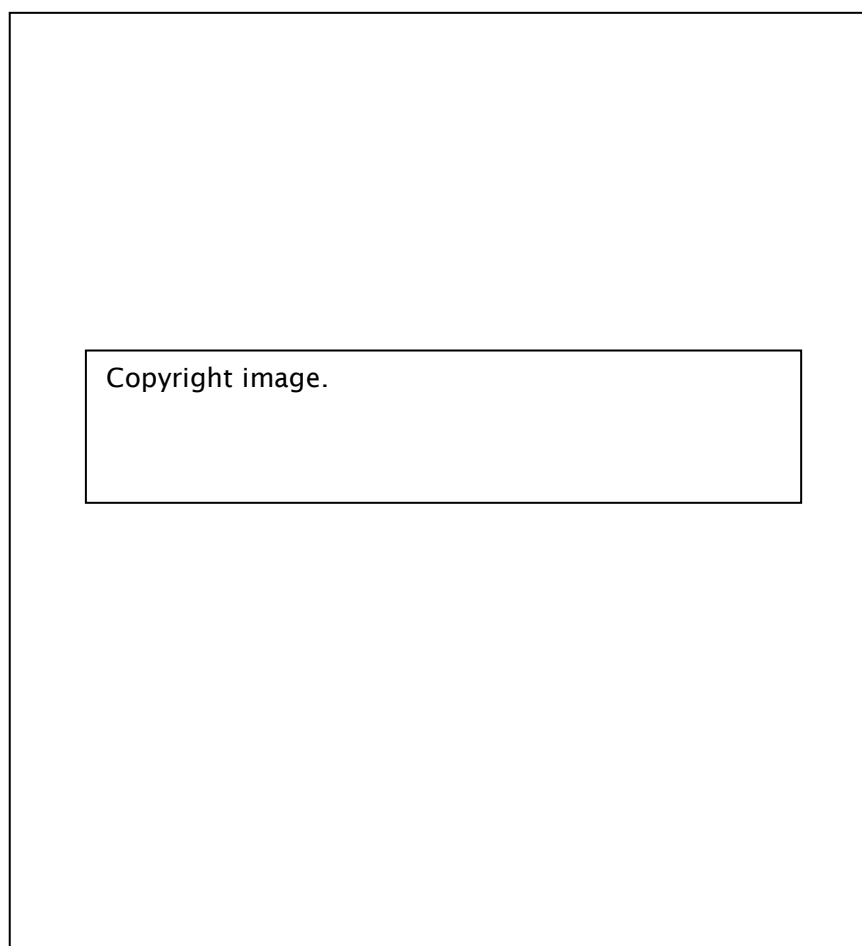


Figure 40 Sketched proposal for trussing beneath the chimneys. *BRO, D/EPb E33*.

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<sup>337</sup> *BRO, D/EPb E33*, unnumbered insert between fols 68 and 91.

## Jacob's Alterations

Sir Mark's approach to repairing the chimneys at Coleshill suggests how he balanced a desire to preserve defining features of the host building with a need to intervene in order to keep the house viable for future occupation. In a similar way, we can consider alterations to the house that were proposed and carried out by his grandson, Jacob, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor. Many of these are set out in a series of tradesmen's accounts in the Berkshire Record Office, and Appendix 4 provides a summary of works based on these records. Although not comprehensive this nonetheless is indicative of the extent and variety of works undertaken during his ownership.

The earliest major intervention that Jacob made was to construct a new office annex adjoining the north end of the house which, in effect, destroyed the classical symmetry of the building. Furthermore, Jacob abandoned the austere classicism of the main house for his new annex in favour of the vernacular, at a time when the design of office wings for newly built houses was more typically viewed in the context of the overall architectural idiom. By that time, the existing seventeenth-century service rooms in the basement of the house were no longer adequate for the requirements of the household, and Jacob must have been keen to upgrade service provision to modern standards. The annex was built on the site of a former small walled side court, and comprised two parallel single storey ranges separated by a central open passage that sloped down to a doorway into the main house. This passage opened into the basement corridor by the kitchen. It was built of irregularly coursed rubble with hipped roofs and stone slates. The annex provided additional store rooms, cellars and larders, and a block of water closets was constructed for the servants accessed from an external flight of steps. Work probably began soon after 1776, and the mason Daniel Barrett is recorded working on the 'new offices' from 1780 by which time work was already well underway.<sup>338</sup> A sketch map of the grounds of the house dated 1788 shows one arm of the new annex complete by this time (Figure 41).<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59 Bundle 6, and D/EPb A7/7.

<sup>339</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59 Scheme for the grounds at Coleshill Aug 29 1788.

Copyright image.

Figure 41 Detail from a sketch of the grounds at Coleshill, 1788. *BRO, D/EPb E59*.



Figure 42 Photograph showing the diminutive service annex on the right of the main house. *WSA, 1946/1/6*.



Figure 43 Service annex with seventeenth-century piers, photographed following the fire in 1952. *WSA*, 1946/1/6.

The choice of the vernacular rather than the classical for this annex with its lack of architectural pretension in part reflected the utilitarian nature of its function, and it also responded to the existing seventeenth-century vernacular brewhouse and laundry building across the roadway towards which it extended. However inasmuch as the annex was conjoined with the house and was not an independent structure it can also be considered as a response to the host building to which it clearly deferred. The new annex made no attempt to emulate the architectural style of the house, but rather it was designed in a contrasting subordinate style to be subservient to the mansion, and, at least on the approach to the house it was screened by trees thereby having little visual impact on the main elevation. The annex sat low to the ground such that its walls barely reached to the height of the sills of the ground floor windows of the house (Figure 42). This addition can be understood as the result of an aesthetic negotiation in which the need to extend the building for the amenity of the household was weighed against a desire to preserve the architectural coherence of the original house. However the entrance to the passageway between the ranges of the new annex was flanked by two seventeenth-century stone piers that formed part of the original garden scheme of the house (Figure 43). These piers established an architectural and material connection

between the new annex and the house, and signalled a desire to lend a degree of prestige on the approach to the otherwise humble service annex for visitors who might arrive that way.

Jacob had ambitions to make further significant interventions at Coleshill which are indicated in several memoranda in the archives. A remarkable undated memo from the years around 1800 entitled 'To make Coleshill House compleat' sets out some of his proposals.<sup>340</sup> This is reproduced in Appendix 5 with a transcription. His proposed alterations included, amongst other things, replanning the rooms, adding a mezzanine and alterations to staircases. In part he wished to address the inadequacies of the house to meet his personal needs and those of the wider household, but he also had an eye to aesthetic considerations. There is no indication that Jacob sought the advice of an architect in initially developing these ideas. Rather, they were the product of his own aspirations to renew the house primarily to ensure its ongoing utility as a family home. Not all of the proposals were carried out, and some were executed differently. Whilst the archives do not reveal why some plans were abandoned and others pursued they nevertheless offer some insight into what is at times a surprising approach to the house as far as architectural interventions are concerned.

Jacob's most radical proposal was to rebuild the entrance hall staircase, although this was never realised. Had it been so, it would have marked a major intervention into the canonical house, as this was regarded as one of Coleshill's most striking and celebrated features. It therefore seems surprising that Jacob should consider such an apparently irreverent act. He gave his reason as that he wanted 'the stair case of the hall made less steep', and indeed with his short stature he may have found them difficult to negotiate. That this was a serious concern is suggested by various calculations and measurements of the stairs in the archives.<sup>341</sup> In deference to the amenities of the house, he suggested that a water closet could be put underneath the new staircase. Water closets were more typically placed in out-of-the way locations where unpleasant odours were less likely to cause offence, so it is unexpected for such a facility to be placed in the most important and public reception area. He gives no indication of the style and ornamentation of the proposed new staircase, but provides a sketch of the configuration that he desired (Figure 44). This provided a single first stage rising from within the hall before dividing into two flights, in contrast to the existing arrangement of twin flights rising from either side of the entrance door. As a

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<sup>340</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, undated memorandum 'To make Coleshill House compleat'. See also Karen Fielder, 'Lost Splendour', *The National Trust Historic Houses and Collections Annual 2010* (London: Apollo), pp. 62-66.

<sup>341</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59.

consequence of this, the entrance was to be removed to one side, which would have the shattering effect of destroying the symmetry of the façade. We cannot know exactly why this work was not done – perhaps it was too costly, or Jacob may have had second thoughts about such a dramatic intervention. In any case, we can be sure that the practical inconvenience of the old stairs weighed heavily against their preservation, and even the central position of the entrance which contributed to the symmetry of the elevation was potentially expendable. The service annex that Jacob had added twenty years previously had shown some deference to symmetry, but it would seem that Jacob was not overly preoccupied with maintaining the formal axes of the house.



Figure 44 Jacob's sketch for proposed alterations to the entrance hall staircase, c.1800.  
*BRO, D/EPb E59.*

Jacob also proposed alterations to the timber service stairs of the house, and he found his inspiration in France, at the country house of Bénouville near Caen.<sup>342</sup> The Château de Bénouville was completed about 20 years previously, and was designed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (Figure 45). The Pleydell-Bouveries were a Francophile family with Huguenot origins and Jacob and his wife spent much time in France, staying in rented accommodation in Caen and Paris where their son Philip was born in 1788. Rather than adhering to any notion of pure Jonesian or English classicism, Jacob therefore proposed introducing a taste of French neoclassicism into Coleshill which testified to this personal affiliation. Bénouville was much admired for its grand imperial staircase, which was built entirely of stone and occupied a high open volume above which was a coffered ceiling with a *trompe l'oeil* painting of the sky (Figure 46).<sup>343</sup> This staircase

<sup>342</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, 'To make Coleshill House compleat'.

<sup>343</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Claude-Nicolas Ledoux* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990); Conseil Général du Calvados, *Le Château de Bénouville: une Oeuvre de Claude-Nicholas Ledoux* (Cabourg, Normandy: Éditions Cahiers du Temps, 2007).

may have been the inspiration behind Jacob's proposed revision to his own principal stairs. The service stairs at Bénouville which he wished to emulate were simple winding stone stairs of cantilevered construction with plain iron balusters and balustrade (Figure 47). Coleshill was well provided with service stairs, which along with the corridors contributed to the innovative spatial plan of the house. However, as Andor Gomme and Alison Maguire have noted, the ends of the corridors must have been very dark, as the service stairs occupied the full width of the passages at each end.<sup>344</sup> In places the heads and feet of the stairs barely cleared the doorways into the corner apartments, so that members of the household risked unexpected collisions as they went about their business. Jacob indicated in his memo that the new arrangement would gain two feet or more from the north-east wall of the corridor, thus avoiding the doors, as well as gaining more light for the passages. These alterations would not have significantly altered the social functioning of the house, but would have eased some of the practical difficulties of the existing arrangement and provided the house with more up-to-date staircases. These alterations, like the proposal for the entrance hall, were not carried out to this plan, although Jacob did remove a service staircase at the south end of the house between the ground floor and the basement and rebuilt it in the passageway in 1784 to free up space in one of the apartments.



Figure 45 The Château de Bénouville, near Caen, France. *Karen Fielder.*

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<sup>344</sup> Andor Gomme and Alison Maguire, *Design and Plan in the Country House: From Castle Donjons to Palladian Boxes* (London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 265.



Figure 46 The principal staircase at the Château de Bénouville. *Karen Fielder, by kind permission of the Conseil Générale du Calvados.*



Figure 47 The service stairs at Château de Bénouville. *Karen Fielder, by kind permission of the Conseil Générale du Calvados.*



Amongst external alterations that Jacob proposed was a scheme to add a new balcony above the semi-basement on the garden front of the house, perhaps to take in views of the new gardens that he was laying out at the same time (Figure 48). Drawings were made for it and in 1802 a payment of £59 6s 3d was made to the mason Strong for a balcony at Coleshill (Figure 49, Figure 50).<sup>345</sup> If this balcony was indeed built, it must have been short-lived and there are no subsequent references to it. Jacob also proposed rebuilding another characteristic feature of the house, the external timber modillioned cornice upon which the deep eaves rested. He wished the cornice to be rebuilt in stone, most likely because of the recurring problem of decay and the frequent need to replace the timber modillions. This had first been proposed to Sir Mark back in 1743, but was never carried out.<sup>346</sup> Furthermore, Jacob suggested that a 'reduction of 9 inches in the projection of cornice would not be amiss'.<sup>347</sup> This would involve rebuilding the external chimneys that stood on the eaves and which had been altered in Sir Mark's time. The work to replace the cornice was estimated at £525 by the stonemason Robert Strong, which included the cost of producing 392 feet of freestone cornice and carving 164 Corinthian modillions.<sup>348</sup> Had this work been carried out, it would have subtly altered the distinctly seventeenth-century classicism of Coleshill's hipped roof. The heavy ornamented cornice emphasised the deep projection of the eaves, and provided a strong articulation between wall and roof. A reduction in depth would lessen the visual drama of the shadows cast over the walls beneath, and soften the assertiveness of the eaves line. However for reasons that are not set out, the deep timber cornice survived. Jacob's various proposals show a remarkable preparedness to intervene in some of Coleshill's defining features that contributed to its canonical rendering. This prompts us to question if Coleshill's iconic status as a seventeenth-century work could have endured had these alterations been carried out, and renders the canonical house of its histories less stable.

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<sup>345</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, draft letter 12 Dec 1797 and undated drawings. WSA, 1946 Accounts 1796-1827, 10 November 1802.

<sup>346</sup> BRO, D/EPb, Journal of Mining, fol. 1.

<sup>347</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, 'To make Coleshill House compleat'.

<sup>348</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, undated estimate.

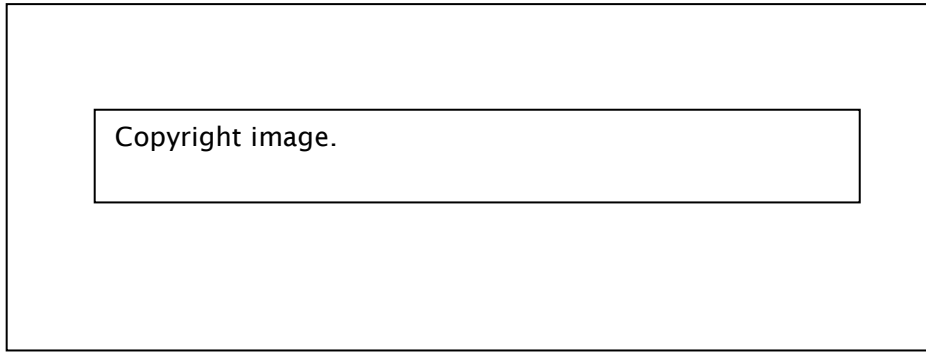


Figure 48 Jacob's sketch for a balcony at Coleshill House, 1797. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

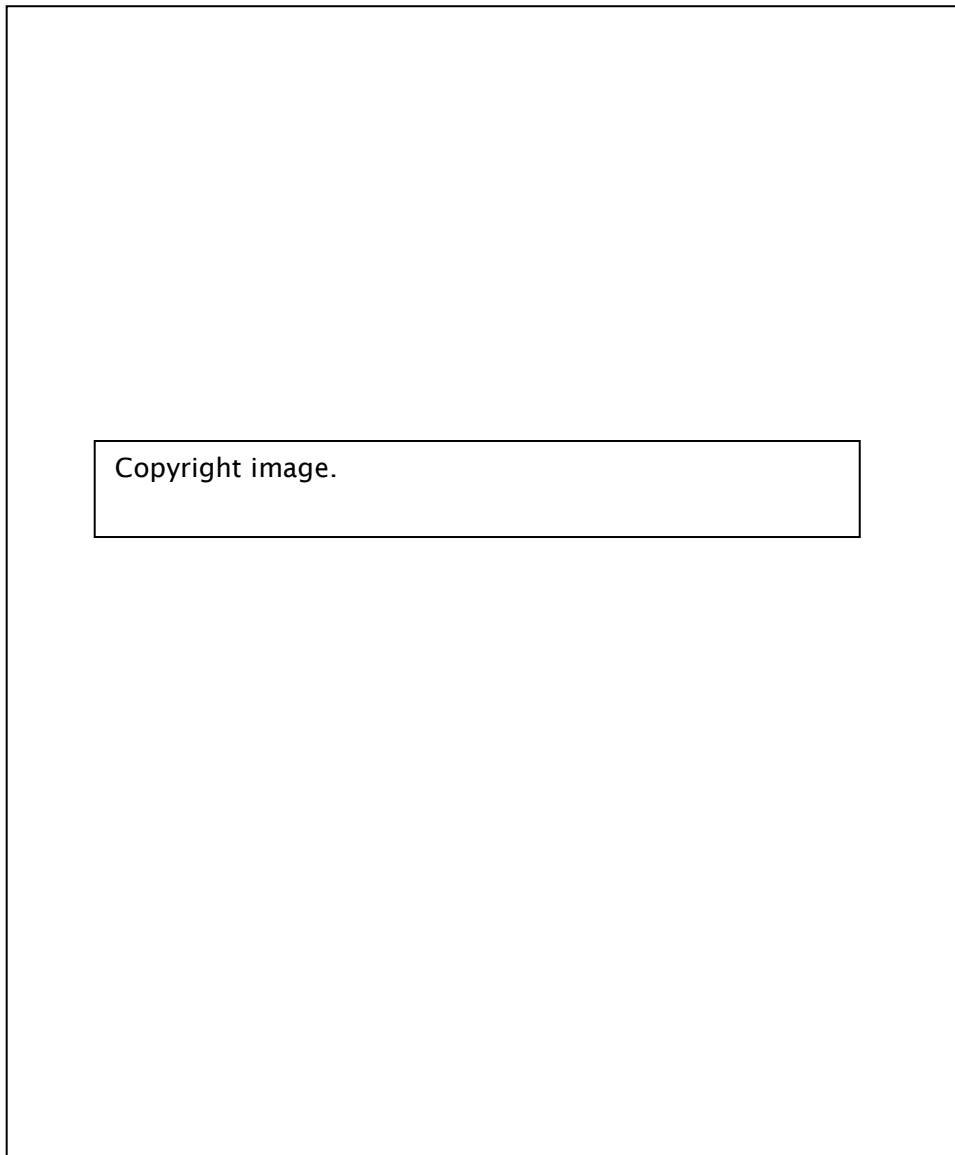


Figure 49 Designs for a balcony at Coleshill House, c. 1797. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

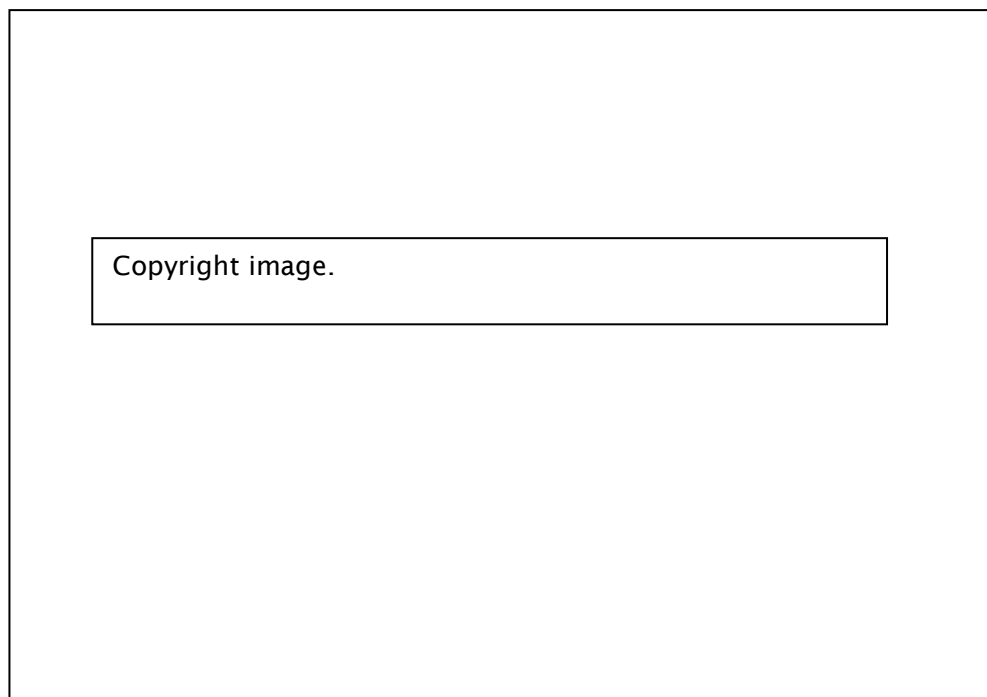


Figure 50 Design for a balcony at Coleshill House, c. 1797. *BRO, D/EPb E59*.

## Repairing the House

These alterations and proposals are indicative of how Coleshill's owners negotiated with some of the salient features of the 'Jonesian' classical house according to their own preferences and values. In contrast to the historiographic representations of the house as perpetually untouched by history, the owners were also sensible of Coleshill's age and its deteriorating condition, and were mindful of the need for regular repair and maintenance to keep the building habitable. Sir Mark, for example, recorded guidance for the ongoing care of the house in an estate journal which included notes on such matters as slating, painting and mortar mixes.<sup>349</sup> The top of the house – the balustrade, the chimneys, the cornice, the guttering, the cupola and the roof slates – were a recurring source of anxiety for the owners of Coleshill, and both Sir Mark and Jacob were preoccupied by rooftop repairs. The windows frequently needed attention, and as has been noted the exposed position of the house often resulted in broken panes. As well as replacing glass, Jacob repaired or replaced the windows over a period of more than ten years. This was a major undertaking which included not only glazing and carpentry work, but also new stonework executed by Robert Strong with the aid of two kinsmen, Thomas and Charles. For example, in April 1786 Robert Strong was paid for window work that included 549 cubic feet of freestone in scantlings.<sup>350</sup> Strong also

<sup>349</sup> *BRO, D/EPb/acc3313 B1*.

<sup>350</sup> *BRO, D/EPb A7 10a*.

took down and rebuilt the four middle chimney shafts that had been left when Sir Mark restored the angle chimneys.<sup>351</sup> Jacob left instructions for the ongoing maintenance of the house when he handed it over to his son William, advising that the water mine was to be cleared out every year, and that the outside woodwork of the house ought to be painted that same year and then every third year. He observed that the cornice was in need of repair, but recommended a conservative approach repairing it only as necessary.<sup>352</sup>

Such was their concern for the long term care of the perceptibly ageing house, that both Sir Mark and Jacob sought specialist architectural advice on its condition and on appropriate repairs, and they were prepared to make significant investment in the longevity of Coleshill. For Sir Mark, for example, the chimneys were just one of a number of deficiencies in what he construed as his time-worn but venerable home, and in 1743 he sought the advice of the architect Richard Kittermaster about the general state of the building. Kittermaster has not previously been associated with Coleshill. He was a provincial architect and an associate of the mason Nathaniel Ireson, with whom he was working on the Palladian remodeling of the nearby Lydiard Park at Swindon for the St Johns.<sup>353</sup> The Pleydells and the St John family were connected by marriage, and were also part of the same social circle, and this may explain Kittermaster's involvement at both properties.<sup>354</sup> Whilst Lydiard was undergoing a radical refashioning, at Coleshill Kittermaster was primarily charged with addressing the defects in the building that threatened its long-term viability. In addition to the chimneys, Kittermaster identified serious problems with the cupola, the Great Stair, the hall, the kitchen ceiling and the cornice. For example, he observed structural problems in the entrance hall and advised Sir Mark to 'truss ye beam over ye hall'.<sup>355</sup> He also advised constructing a pillar in the kitchen to support the floor above. He suggested that the windows would be better if the frames were positioned six inches further outwards as it 'wd keep off ye martens and rain'.<sup>356</sup> The roof was 'very faulty', but

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<sup>351</sup> BRO, D/EPb A7/8.

<sup>352</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, memorandum 6 April 1801.

<sup>353</sup> Colvin, p.558; *Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of Wiltshire*, ed. by Elizabeth Crittall, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957-), IX (1970), p. 75-90. Kittermaster has not previously been connected with Lydiard Park, but he was corresponding with Sir Mark from Lydiard at the time. See the Journal of Mining, BRO D/EPb E33.

<sup>354</sup> I am grateful to Sophie Cummings, Collections Manager at Lydiard House, for her advice on the connections between the two families.

<sup>355</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 1.

<sup>356</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33 fol. 2.

could not be addressed until 'ye matter of restoring ye Chimnies is settled'.<sup>357</sup> Instructions were noted for restoring the oak rooftop balustrade, and repairs to this and to the cupola were calculated to require over 920 feet of timber. Sir Mark sketched out his recommendation for the design of new balusters for the balustrade in his journal, and they were to attach to the bottom rail 'like an inverted bottle thrust down upon the cork'.<sup>358</sup> A drawing for the new balustrade dated 1757 survives in the archives.<sup>359</sup> Many of Kittermaster's recommendations were carried out during the 1740s and 1750s, amounting to a significant investment in the ongoing life of the house.

Kittermaster was not the only architect to be consulted about the repair of Coleshill, and we have already seen that Sir Mark sought the advice of Lord Burlington on works to the chimneys. Indeed concerns about the deteriorating condition of Coleshill appear to be the principal motivation for commissioning architects to work on the house during the long eighteenth century, rather than to undertake refashioning or remodelling. This is not to say that the house underwent academic restoration at the hands of these architects, but rather that works of repair and modest alteration, along with the upgrading of services to modern standards, served to revive the old house for use in the present. These interventions represented a concerted effort by the owners of Coleshill to resist the inevitable degradations inflicted by the passing of time, the assaults of inclement weather and other forces of nature. Their efforts saw that the house did not fall into neglect, which might subsequently have necessitated significant rebuilding, either along more up-to-date lines or as wholesale restoration to take the house back to an earlier state. Rather their actions allowed a gradual maturation and evolution over time, and some of this new work could subtly melt into the host building. These interventions would nonetheless have visually modified the house to some extent, and also transformed the experience of living there for its occupants.

The architect Daniel Asher Alexander was employed at Coleshill from 1814 to 1816 to carry out substantial repairs to the building.<sup>360</sup> This work may have been prompted by a letter that Jacob received in April 1814 from his son William who was then living at Coleshill. William was finding Coleshill inconvenient and uncomfortable, partly as a

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<sup>357</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 6.

<sup>358</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, esp. fol. 2.

<sup>359</sup> BRO, D/EPb E32.

<sup>360</sup> See James Broughton Harris, 'Daniel Asher Alexander 1768-1846' (unpublished Masters dissertation, University of Manchester, 1967). This includes a chapter on Alexander's work at Coleshill.

result of the size and condition of the house, as well as it being expensive to run.<sup>361</sup> This concerned Jacob, who had intended William to occupy it as ‘the most respectable situation you could have’, and he observed that the house was to be occupied ‘not as a family house but as a Gentleman’s house’, indicating the perceived power of Coleshill to confer social status upon its occupant. Whilst he was sympathetic to William’s displeasure he stipulated that no alterations were to be made without his consent, but he must nonetheless have been conscious of the need to make improvements.<sup>362</sup> Indeed the construction of a new model farm which was so admired by William Cobbett in 1826 seems to have been an attempt to appease William, as Jacob told his son that ‘if you want a farm in addition, a farm you shall have’.<sup>363</sup> Jacob had already commissioned Alexander to continue James Wyatt’s scheme for transforming Longford Castle where he had been working since 1802.<sup>364</sup> Alexander was a well regarded architect, who specialised in designing large utilitarian buildings rather than domestic works. Amongst his few domestic projects was the construction of a new mansion at Mote Park in Kent for Lord Romney, a kinsman of Jacob, and it may have been Romney who initially recommended Alexander to work on Longford. With all his experience of massive dock building, bridges and prisons, Alexander might seem like an unlikely candidate to carry out sensitive works to a country house of the importance and subtlety of Coleshill. However it is significant that between 1807 and 1810 Alexander had also been responsible for extensive and sympathetic additions to Inigo Jones’s Queen’s House at Greenwich. He adapted the house for the Royal Naval Asylum, adding colonnades and flanking wings, and he had shown deference to Jones in his approach to this work.<sup>365</sup> This would no doubt have sanctioned Alexander’s employment to work on Coleshill.

Jacob initially commissioned Alexander to prepare a report on the state of Coleshill, and between April and May 1814 the architect carried out a complete survey of the mansion in order to form an opinion and formulate a programme of repairs. On 10

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<sup>361</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, letter from Viscount Folkestone to Lord Radnor, 12 April 1814.

<sup>362</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, letter from Lord Radnor to Viscount Folkestone, 15 April 1814.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid; William Cobbett, *Rural Rides: In the Counties of Surrey [...]*, ed. by James Paul Cobbett, rev. edn (London; A. Cobbett, 1853), p. 419-20. Cobbett asserts that this was the work of Daniel Palmer, Lord Folkestone’s steward at Coleshill. This farm was short-lived and was removed when the existing farm was laid out in 1854.

<sup>364</sup> Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, p. 59.

<sup>365</sup> John Bold, *Greenwich: An Architectural History of the Royal Hospital for Seamen and the Queen’s House* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 230-235.

May 1814 he produced 'A report on the general state of repair of this fabric – with a view to such matters only as relate to the sustaining and upholding the Premises'.<sup>366</sup> A transcript of this is provided in Appendix 6. Alexander indicated that repair alone would be insufficient 'to render the House a commonly comfortable Mansion for the Doors and Shutters are past mending and the Windows if eased will admit as much Wind as they do at present'.<sup>367</sup> The Earl gave lengthy consideration before he resolved to carry out some of Alexander's proposals, at an estimated cost of £3300.<sup>368</sup> An abstract of the accounts for the 30 November 1814 is provided in Appendix 7. Much to Alexander's annoyance, all his correspondence and accounts had to be copied both to Lord Radnor and Viscount Folkestone, duplicating his administrative workload. These difficulties were compounded by Jacob's failing health and lack of funds, and he requested that William should superintend the works. In December 1814 Jacob wrote to Alexander that his memory was so bad that he could not remember what had been done or what needed to be done at Coleshill.<sup>369</sup> Alexander made repeated requests for money, and Jacob could only express his ongoing ineptitude for business. On 30 June 1815 he wrote that 'from loss of memory I have become a very poor soul – almost unfit for business. I am also poor in another sense, and for the present at least can make you no remittance'.<sup>370</sup>

Alexander employed both country workmen and London craftsmen for a variety of repair works. This included repairs and alterations to the old laundry and brewhouse offices, taking down walls, rebuilding them and making good the roof. Principally however he was charged with renewing the mansion house. His proposals included replacing much of the joinery and carpentry, and addressing some of the damp problems. Repairs included rebuilding the chimney tops, reslating with Westmoreland slate and boarding the roof, new rain pipes and leadwork, and works to gutters and air drains. The external flights of stairs had become unsafe and were reset, and he proposed replacing the entrance doors which were 'rude, clumsy and untight' although Jacob opposed this.

Whilst Alexander's repairs were clearly aimed at the failing condition of the old house and securing it for the future, they also demonstrated his regard for the seventeenth-

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<sup>366</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, report 10 May 1814.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> BRO, D/ERa E3, accounts for Daniel Alexander building works 1814-5. Also WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, estimate 16 June 1814.

<sup>369</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, correspondence, Lord Radnor to Daniel Alexander, 6 December 1815.

<sup>370</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, Lord Radnor to Daniel Alexander, 30 June 1815.

century design, and at times he sought to make subtle improvements to it. He was certainly interested in the connection between Jones and Coleshill. On 9 March 1815 he reported to Jacob on one of Soane's Royal Academy lectures which his son had told him about. Soane had been speaking on the subject of poorly designed roofs and chimneys, and he 'observed that it was possible to make them interesting and imposing, as Inigo Jones had done at Coleshill' (which is ironic given the structural problems that dogged Coleshill's roof).<sup>371</sup> Alexander quoted part of the lecture including Soane's comment that the house 'is almost the only specimen by Inigo Jones which exists in its original state – and to the eternal honour of its successive possessors, remains unaltered'.<sup>372</sup> Alexander's respect for the Jonesian character of the house is indicated by his comments on the windows, which suggest that at least some were still mullioned at the time although the original casements may have been replaced with sashes. Alexander proposed putting in new windows 'of the ordinary Sashed kind, such as Inigo Jones originally used in the Queens House at Greenwich, and in the Banqueting House at Whitehall, for I think Repairs to the present Windows not proper'.<sup>373</sup> Not only could the existing windows not be satisfactorily eased or made weatherproof, but Alexander thought to renew them as they were 'in such a House objectionable – for the Munnion Window is not the style of Inigo, it is submitting in this respect to the before established manner of his day'.<sup>374</sup> Such was Alexander's deference to Jones that he mistakenly believed that Jones pioneered the use of sashes. His comments were directed specifically to the ground floor windows, but on the first floor the primary concern was for the windows in the great dining room 'which is worth any Expense which can reasonably be bestowed on it'.<sup>375</sup> Otherwise on the first floor Alexander believed there was less necessity to make 'Doors and Windows so perfect as those below'.<sup>376</sup> Jacob, however, disapproved of replacing the windows, perhaps because of the expense, requesting simply that the existing sashes be made to slide.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, correspondence, Daniel Alexander to Lord Radnor, 9 March 1815.

<sup>372</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, correspondence, Daniel Alexander to Lord Radnor, 9 March 1815.

<sup>373</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, report 10 May 1814. The windows at the Queens House had already been replaced with sashes by the time Alexander worked there. I am grateful to John Bold for this information.

<sup>374</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, report 10 May 1814.

<sup>375</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, report 10 May 1814.

<sup>376</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, report 10 May 1814.

<sup>377</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1880 consideration was given to inserting oak or mahogany frames and casements in place of the sashes then in situ 'as demonstrated by examples of other works of Inigo Jones in the neighbourhood'. An alternative proposal was to put in stone



Like Jacob, Alexander also recognized flaws with the design of the Great Staircase, but he wished to preserve its essential style, regarding it as 'perfect in its substantial'. Over the years it had sunk and had become 'unpleasant as well as with strangers dangerous to go much up and down'.<sup>378</sup> The risers varied in height and the treads were uneven, but this could be easily remedied. Like the Earl, Alexander also thought the stairs too steep 'which is a great defect', and he believed the design was flawed inasmuch as it was 'hunched into too little space so that there was not room to ascend the height'.<sup>379</sup> Where Jacob had previously proposed a dramatic reconfiguration of the stairs, Alexander more modestly suggested adding a riser or two (Figure 51). Jacob wrote to his son William at Coleshill to ask him to confirm details of the existing staircase in order to consider Alexander's proposal, which he subsequently rejected on the basis that it would make the treads too narrow, and it seems no agreement could be reached.<sup>380</sup>

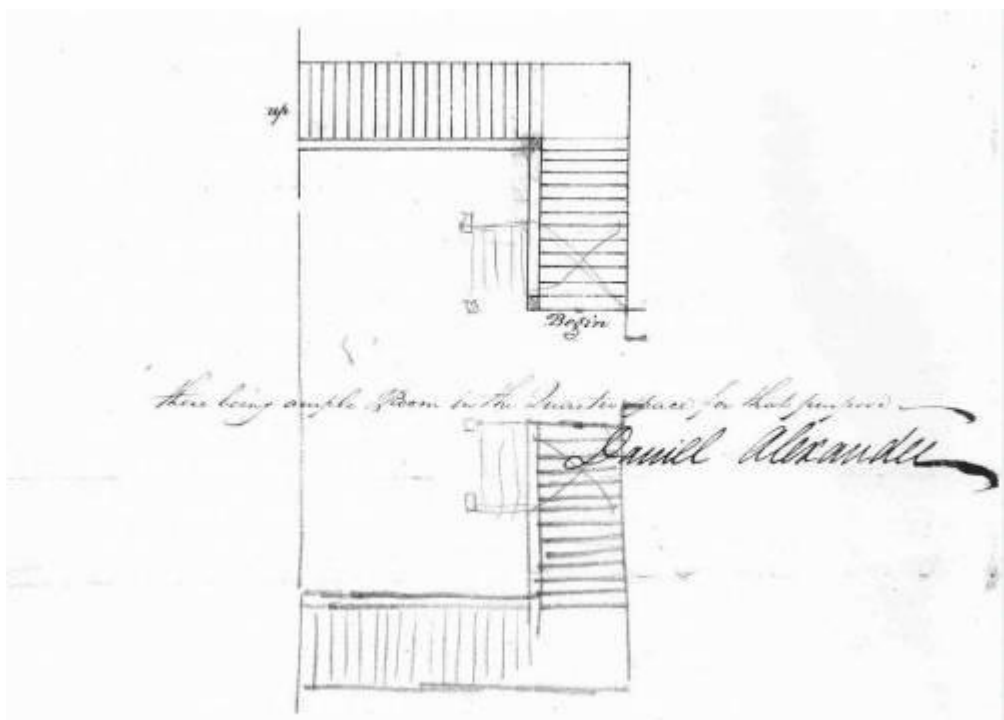


Figure 51 Alexander's proposal for adding steps to the Great Staircase with pencil annotations suggesting other solutions, 1814. WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*.

mullioned windows with iron casements which it was believed 'would more nearly approach a restoration of the original intentions of the architect'. See BRO, D/EPb acc4698 D102.

<sup>378</sup> WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*, report 10 May 1814.

<sup>379</sup> WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*, report 10 May 1814. Alexander also noted that the steps of the service stairs were too low, so that one tired from lifting the leg too high when using them.

<sup>380</sup> WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*, report 10 May 1814. Also note with sketches 13 June 1814, and memo from Lord Radnor to Viscount Folkestone with sketches, 16 June 1814.

The external eaves cornice was in a poor state by the time Alexander examined it, with some modillions missing and others insecure. Alexander considered the possibility of replacing the cornice with one of stone. However as well as the practical difficulties and expense of this, he regarded the existing arrangement which concealed the lead gutter as 'the perfection of Design in regard to the appearance of Cornice or the façade of the House and of utility in forming a complete drip drainage from the Roof'.<sup>381</sup> He had also heard of a technique of having modillions made of cast iron, although Jacob rejected the idea.<sup>382</sup> Alexander pierced holes in the timber cornice to admit air and prevent rotting, but both Jacob and William objected to this because of its disfiguring effect. The architect therefore proposed adding a carved rose over each hole, suggesting that 'this rose is truly grammatical, and ought to have been put up by Inigo himself' (Figure 52, Figure 53).<sup>383</sup>

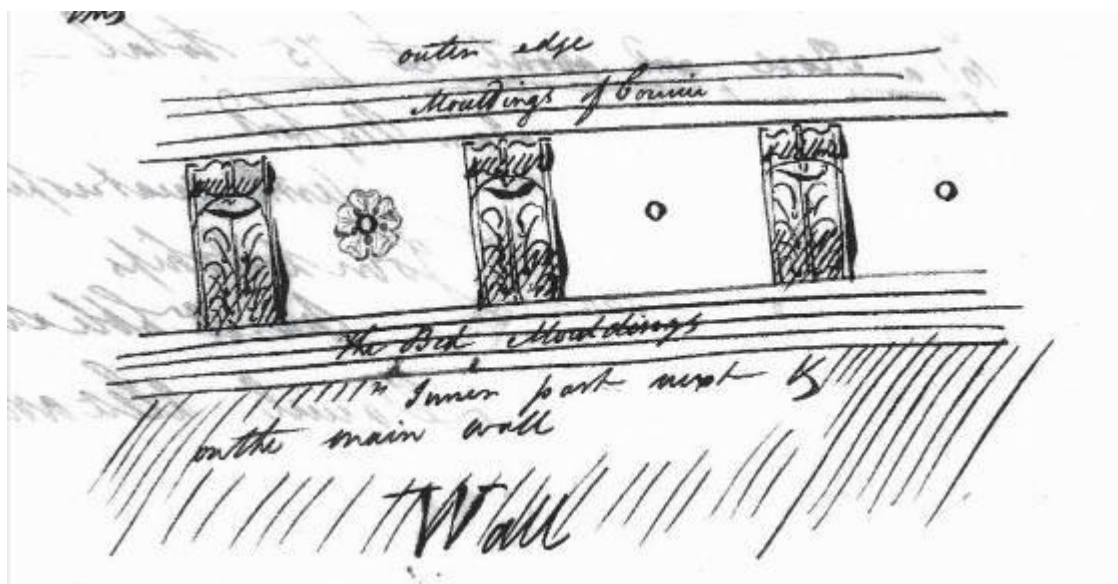


Figure 52 Alexander's proposal to cover the holes in the cornice with roses, 1815.

WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*.

<sup>381</sup> WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*, report 10 May 1814.

<sup>382</sup> Interestingly after the fire several cast iron cornice modillions were found amongst the debris. Did Alexander put some in despite Radnor's objections? SPAB Archives, Coleshill file, Marshall Sisson report, 8 November 1952.

<sup>383</sup> WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*, letter from Daniel Alexander to Lord Radnor, 9 May 1815.



Figure 53 Coleshill's eaves cornice with roses as altered by Alexander, photographed by Margaret Whinney, 1950. ©Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Alexander identified the cause of some of the damage to the modillions as being due to the way water was carried off the roof at the ends of the house 'where it is unhappily voided by 4 of the old common vomitory pipes – this has been a serious evil to the House'.<sup>384</sup> He attributed the dripping of water from these pipes onto the ground below as causing the four angular chimneys to settle, taking with them the string courses, the window heads and the floors. He therefore recommended that the water be brought down by additional stacks of lead pipes, which Jacob approved (Figure 54).

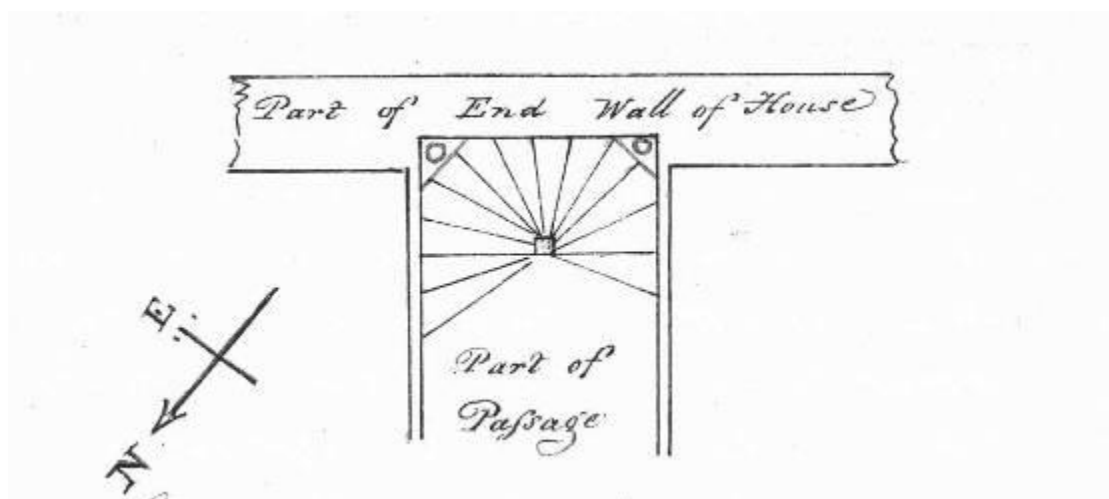


Figure 54 Alexander's proposal for adding internal lead pipes in the corners of the back stairs, 1814. WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*.

<sup>384</sup> WSA, 1946 *Alexander Accounts*, report 10 May 1814.

Internally much of the woodwork was repaired or replaced, including skirting and wainscot. Doors were rehung and door jambs and lintels replaced. Some new turned balusters were made for the Great Stair by London carpenters. London craftsmen also carried out repairs to the ceilings, which were a particular concern of Jacob's to the extent that he requested clarification on the work and who would be entrusted to it.<sup>385</sup> The ornamental carver Francis Bernasconi produced new plaster ornaments as part of the repairs.<sup>386</sup> Bernasconi had worked for the Royal family at Windsor Castle and at Buckingham Palace, and his employment is indicative of the importance attached to achieving high quality work for these decorative features. Whilst internal decoration was not part of Jacob's original plan, Alexander proposed that 'Painting and Whitewashing to Wainscots walls and Ceilings of the interiors of the House' were necessary to preserve the restored interiors. He therefore recommended that

the ornamental ceilings be properly repaired washed and whited in Distemper. That the stucco Walls be properly painted in Oils and that all the dados – Doors Jamb linings, Shutters, Ballusters of Stairs and such like should be painted of grained Oak – varnished to resemble Real Oak - and that the Walls of the Bed Rooms be papered.<sup>387</sup>

Despite Jacob's more radical proposals for interventions at Coleshill, Alexander's works are indicative of a more conservative response, and what emerges is a sense that Coleshill's canonical status to some extent rested on the outcome of these negotiations with the host building by its owners. Inasmuch as Coleshill was understood to be the work of Jones its canonical status was to a degree self-fulfilling in eliciting a sympathetic response in order to safeguard, and even enhance, the idea of the Jonesian house. The sensitivity with which Alexander carried out repairs to Coleshill was later praised publicly by Soane alongside his work at Greenwich. Soane applauded Alexander for the 'gratification he had afforded to all lovers of Jones's works in the substantially conservative repairs he has made to those edifices and especially in the scrupulous exactitude with which every part had been restored and preserved without addition or diminution'.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, letter from Daniel Alexander to Lord Radnor, 27 July 1815.

<sup>386</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, bill 31 May 1815.

<sup>387</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, note from Daniel Alexander, 10 January 1815.

<sup>388</sup> Quoted in 'Obituary, D.A. Alexander Esq.', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 26 (1846), 211.

## Improving Amenities

Against this conservative approach which was shaped by ideas of Coleshill's architectural and aesthetic value, the owners did not lose sight of the importance of the utility of the house as a domestic residence and of modernizing the amenities accordingly. Sir Mark's pioneering water mining project to improve the water supply to the house shows how he saw Coleshill as a site for experimentation in this regard.<sup>389</sup> His ambitious scheme was motivated in part by a desire to overcome practical problems that resulted from the necessity of bringing water up to the elevated position of the house, as well as by plans to relandscape his gardens. The existing water supply was unreliable and the water quality was poor, carried in old elm pipes that had rotted. When his wife had fallen seriously ill in 1724 Sir Mark attributed this to drinking bad water with meals.<sup>390</sup> He sought the advice of Lord Bathurst, the well-connected Earl who had created celebrated landscape gardens at his home in Cirencester Park, and it was he who proposed constructing water mines.<sup>391</sup> It may have been Bathurst who sent a Mr Crossley to visit Coleshill in 1743, who Sir Mark was to consult about 'a piece of water for Beauty and shew him the river and other spots proposed'.<sup>392</sup> Crossley also advised on the construction of a reservoir. Together with his estate team Sir Mark set about investigating the most promising springs in the vicinity of the house from which water might be directed to this reservoir via excavated tunnels, and thence pumped by horse engine to deliver water to the house and gardens. Estate women tested the quality of the water in each of the potential springs by means of washing garments such as waistcoats and reporting back on whether they found the water hard or soft and whether it lathered well with soap.<sup>393</sup> Sir Mark began mining on 27 October 1743, and by 9 March 1745 water had been brought from a spring to the north-east of the house via the yard in front of the laundry building, then brought down to the lower garden, carried in an underground brick aqueduct which still survives.

Daniel Alexander was also involved in upgrading Coleshill's amenities, demonstrating the duality of his commission that was both conservative and modernising, as he was not only charged with making substantial repairs to the house but also with specifying

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<sup>389</sup> 'Water Mining in Eighteenth Century England', *The Geographical Journal*, 121 (1955), 377-78.

<sup>390</sup> WSA, 1946/2/1, fols 28-9.

<sup>391</sup> Bathurst was to have been commemorated in Sir Mark's plaque and is recorded in a draft for the inscription, BRO, D/EPb E33, bet. fols 14 and 15. The final plaque suggests that Bathurst financed the venture but his name was been blanked.

<sup>392</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 25.

<sup>393</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 26 and 36.

an advanced warm air heating system in 1814. This included making a new stove room in the basement offices (Figure 55).<sup>394</sup> Cold air was brought into the stove room via a flue located in the gardens in the Gravel Walk, and it was warmed by iron smoke flues heated by a coal fire, so that warm air could be circulated to the rooms. The quantity of cold air admitted to the stove room could be regulated using a dial and control in the dining parlour (Figure 56). The system was not a great success, with soot accumulating in the flues which sometimes ignited posing a serious fire hazard. However it paved the way for a new system introduced after Jacob's death by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl in 1833 operated by hot water circulation developed by A.M. Perkins.<sup>395</sup> By January 1834 Lord Radnor was pleased to note the moderate heat that had been achieved in the previously unheated entrance hall: 'I have not seen the thermometer stand much below 50, nor higher than 56 or 57'.<sup>396</sup> By 1837 Coleshill was one of only a handful of large domestic houses with the Perkins heating apparatus, which was also being used at the British Museum and at the temporary Houses of Parliament.<sup>397</sup>

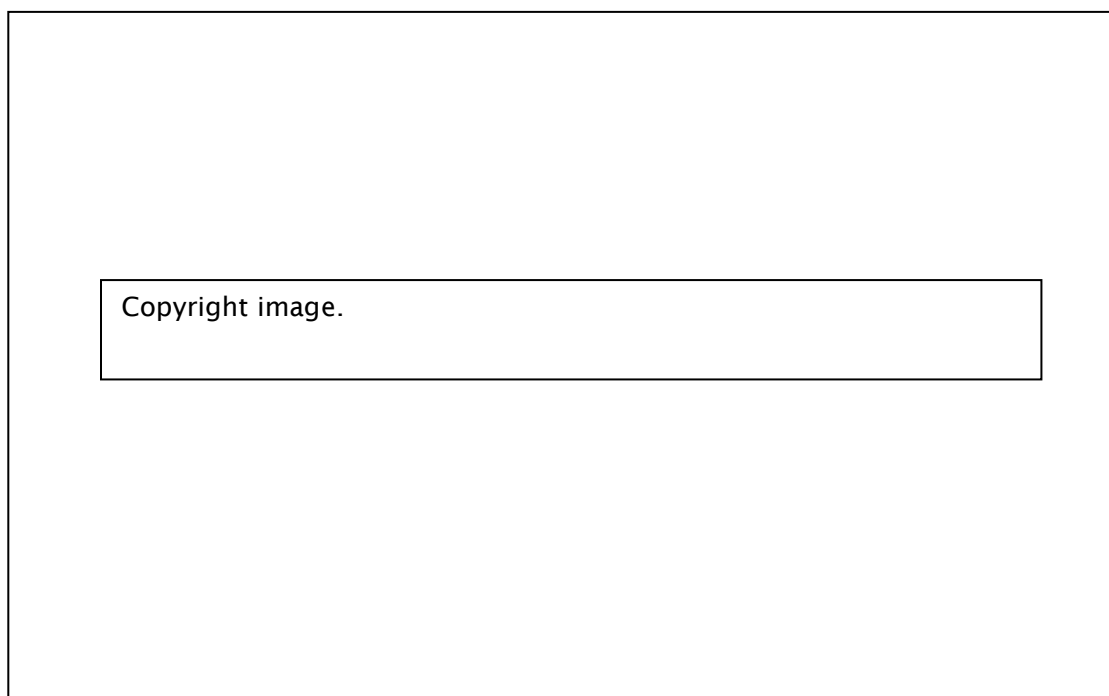


Figure 55 Section of Alexander's new stove room in basement, 1814. *BRO, D/EPb E155.*

<sup>394</sup> BRO, D/EPb E155 Description of stove room and warm air heating system 1814.

<sup>395</sup> For a history of the firm of Perkins, see David A. Hayes, 'Perkins and Co.: Four Generations of Steam and Heat Engineers in Camden', *Camden History Review* 32 (2008), 19-24. Also C.J. Richardson, *A Popular Treatise on the Warming and Ventilation of Buildings [...]* (London, John Weale, 1837).

<sup>396</sup> BRO D/EPb E97.

<sup>397</sup> Reported in 'Public Notices: By Royal Letters Patent' in *The Leeds Mercury*, 7 October 1837.

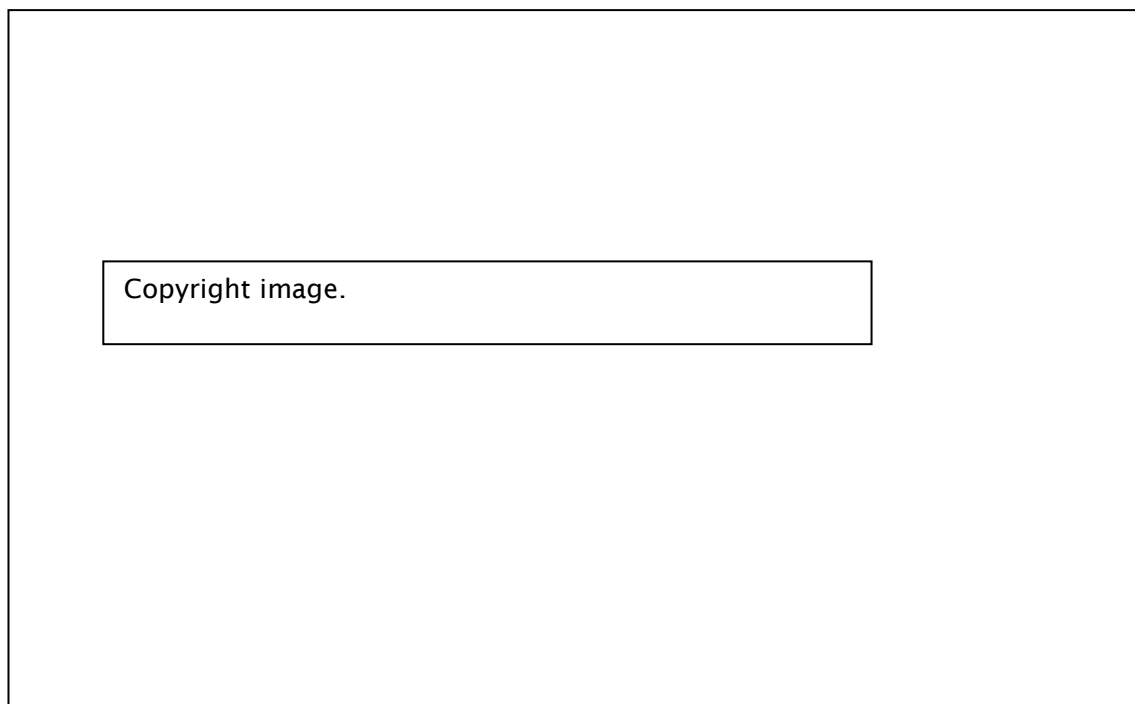


Figure 56 Alexander's specification for a warm air heating system 1814. *BRO, D/EPb E155*.

Another architect employed at Coleshill whose contribution has not previously been noted is Thomas Hopper. Building accounts and annotations connect him with a programme of works to both the offices and the mansion carried out between 1822 and 1830.<sup>398</sup> Hopper was much admired by the Prince Regent, for whom he constructed the Gothic conservatory at Carlton House, and he also designed the Egyptian Hall at Craven Cottage, Fulham. The Prince's patronage led to a large practice amongst the nobility and gentry, and Hopper was extensively employed in building new houses and enlarging old ones.<sup>399</sup> He developed an eclectic style and was an exponent of both Greek Revival and Norman Revival.<sup>400</sup> Jacob and William would have known of Hopper's work through the architect's rebuilding of the County Gaol at Fisherton Anger for the Wiltshire justices between 1818 and 1822, and Hopper also designed the extension to the Guildhall at Salisbury in 1828, a building originally commissioned by Jacob in 1794.<sup>401</sup>

<sup>398</sup> BRO D/EPb A11. See Appendices 7 and 8 for examples.

<sup>399</sup> Wyatt Papworth, ed., *The Dictionary of Architecture*, 9 vols (London: The Architectural Publication Society, 1892), I, p. 76.

<sup>400</sup> Neil Burton, 'Thomas Hopper 1776-1856', in *The Architectural Outsiders*, ed. by Brown, pp. 114-131.

<sup>401</sup> Colvin, p. 513. The records for Hopper's work on the Gaol can be found at WSA, G23/152/1 and A1/509.

Despite Hopper's strong design ethos, at Coleshill his role included more mundane improvements to the offices and amenities of the house rather than with creative refashioning. The work was overseen by the London builder John Pryor of Regent Street, who was later employed on alterations at William's London home in Grosvenor Street. Hopper advised on an upgrade of the kitchen, and the London furnishing ironmonger Joshua Jowett supplied equipment for a complete refit including ranges, stoves, spits, hot plates and a modern back boiler at a cost of £577 10s between 1825 and 1828.<sup>402</sup> It may have been at this time that the kitchen was relocated from its original location in the basement of the main house to the service annex, where it is shown in a plan of 1878.<sup>403</sup> It was certainly more in keeping with contemporary planning to remove the kitchen from the main house. The blacksmith Thomas Angell received almost £800 between 1822 and 1826 for works that included piping for the hot air room.<sup>404</sup> Between 1826 and 1827 the slater William Struthers prepared new dairy and larder tables and shelves, as well as slating the roof of the offices along with the mansion.<sup>405</sup> Hopper's role here was not so much abstract design and fashionable remodelling for public display, but rather to improve the services for the amenity of the household. The cost of works to both the mansion and offices between 1822 and 1829 amounted to £11605 4s 9d, a figure which alarmed William when the house became his in 1828 and he was faced with the bills. Hopper was reluctant to accept payment for his work, for reasons that are not clear, but nonetheless William insisted he accept £250 for his services in 1830.<sup>406</sup>

## Spatial Replanning

The addition of the new service annex in the 1780s was not the only replanning that Jacob undertook as he sought to reinvent the house to meet the changing needs of his household. To this end he set about rearranging the floor plans to address the inadequacies of the old layout, but in so doing the seventeenth-century classical scheme with its symmetrical axial orientation remained embedded within the new arrangement. One of Jacob's aims was to create more informal rooms on the ground floor, reflecting the contemporary trend in house planning towards more casual living

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<sup>402</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

<sup>403</sup> BRO, D/EPb acc4968, Sanitation Report 1878.

<sup>404</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

<sup>405</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

<sup>406</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11, letter from Thomas Hopper to Lord Radnor, 8 May 1830.



and private family life.<sup>407</sup> Historically, the rooms to the right of the hall on the ground or parlour floor had been used as family living accommodation, whilst those on the left served as bedchambers and closets. Jacob intended to increase the number of informal living rooms on this floor by changing the use of existing bedrooms. He proposed that one of the ground floor bedchambers could be made into a breakfast room, and another with its closet made into a Dining Parlour.<sup>408</sup> He also wished to make greater use of the vertical space of the house, and proposed creating a new mezzanine level to take advantage of the great ceiling height (Figure 57).<sup>409</sup> This insertion was originally intended to provide a mezzanine dressing room for Jacob above Lady Radnor's dressing room on the ground floor.<sup>410</sup> Another flue was to be created in the chimney so that the new room would be heated.<sup>411</sup> By the time architectural plans were drawn up, William had married, and the new rooms were therefore designated for the use of Lord and Lady Folkestone (Figure 58, Figure 59).

The scheme was carried out, probably within a few years of the marriage in 1800. Dressing rooms were provided for Lord and Lady Folkestone on the ground floor, along with Lord Folkestone's bedroom. The new mezzanine above provided a room for Lady Folkestone's maid, a water closet and a substantial store room, with a lumber room over the passage.<sup>412</sup> The retention of Lord Folkestone's bedroom on the ground floor was far from ideal, but Coleshill was not a large house and was showing its limitations in the changing family circumstances. The bedroom was accessed directly from the passage, and a red baize door signalled the threshold into this private space. By this time, Jacob had already removed the set of old backstairs leading down to the basement at this end of the house to create a larger apartment.<sup>413</sup> Two closets in the south-west corner of the house on the ground floor had also been knocked through to create a large dressing room.

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<sup>407</sup> See Mark Girouard's chapter on 'The Arrival of Informality' in *Life in the English Country House* (London, Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>408</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, memo 'To make Coleshill House compleat'.

<sup>409</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, memo.

<sup>410</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, undated sketch plan of the mezzanine.

<sup>411</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, memo.

<sup>412</sup> BRO, D/EPb P23, P24, undated plans of the mezzanine.

<sup>413</sup> BRO, D/EPb A7/10.



Figure 57 Jacob's designs for a new mezzanine, c. 1800. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

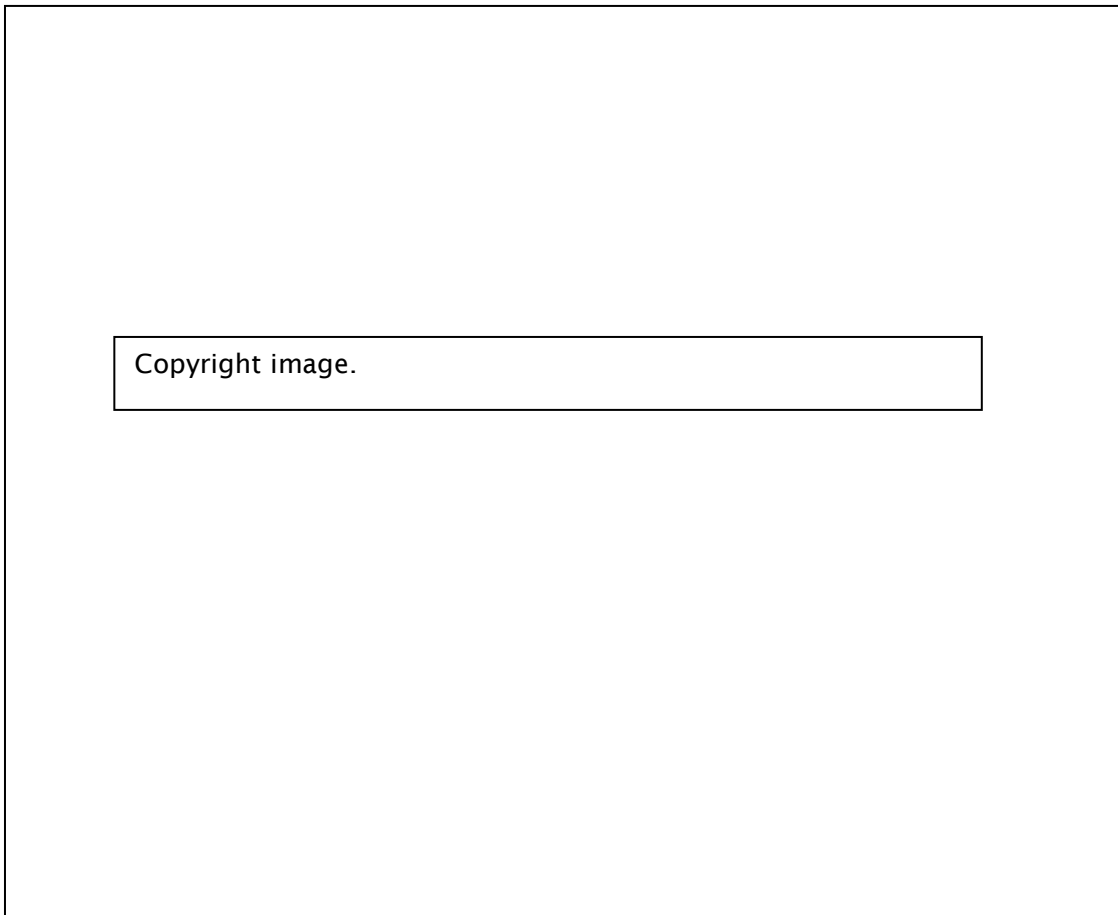


Figure 58 Plans for a new mezzanine, c. 1800. *BRO, D/EPb P23.*

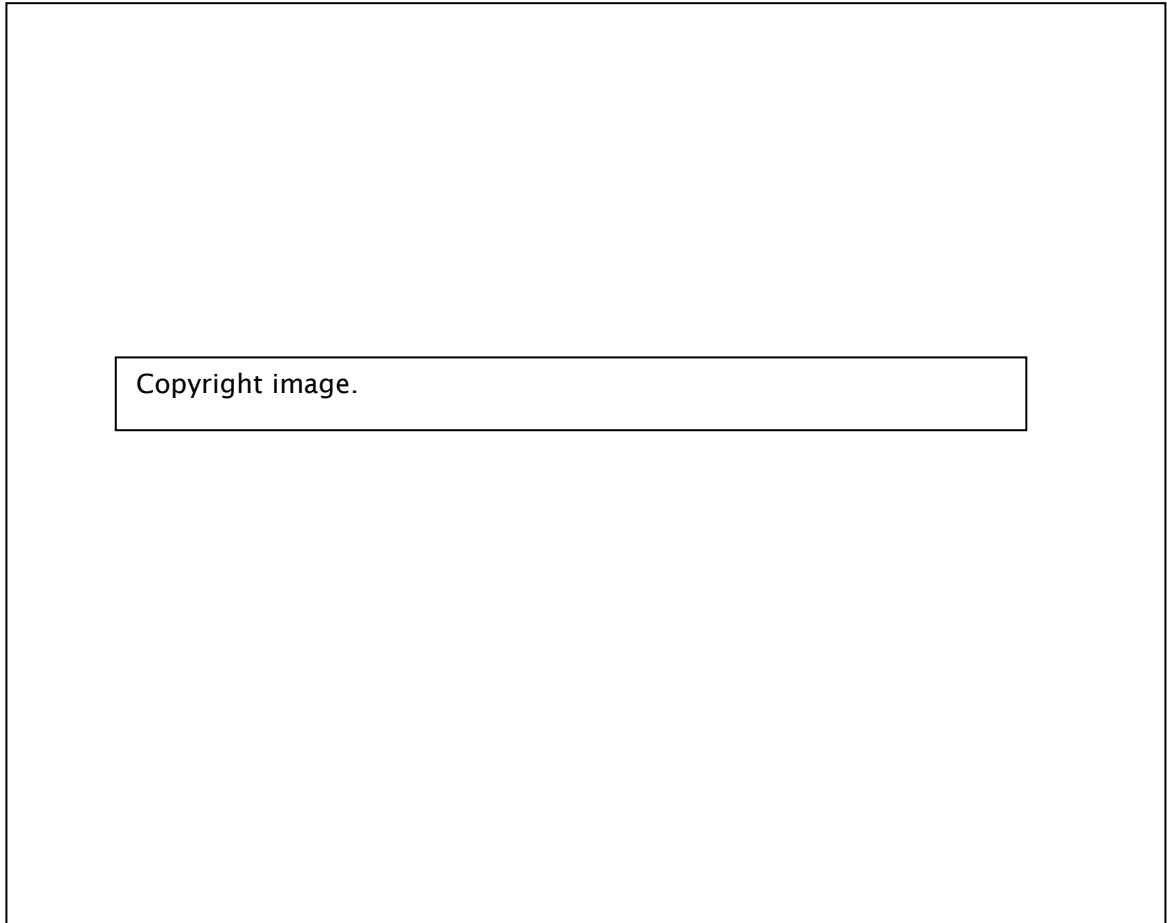


Figure 59 Plans and sections for the new mezzanine, c. 1800. *BRO, D/EPb P24*.

## Altered Interiors

As well as these spatial interventions the archives show that other changes were made to the interiors which would have updated the house for its occupants. The interiors of Coleshill have received little attention in its histories up to now, beyond references to the 'Jonesian' ceilings which lent magnificence to the principal apartments, but the archives contain a variety of sources that illuminate aspects of its changing interiors over time. It is not surprising that such alterations were made, and one would expect furnishings, room linings and decorations to alter inasmuch as these were often the cheapest and quickest features to modify. However my point in addressing the internal alterations at Coleshill is to continue to explore how the owners negotiated with the idea of the original house, addressing interventions which a historiographic preoccupation with the outward appearance of the building has concealed. As Edward Hollis notes, unlike exteriors, interiors have no fixed historiographic canon, but rather are 'temporary arrangements: the meeting places of building, lining, furnishing, and

occupation'.<sup>414</sup> Coleshill's interiors therefore provide fresh territory for examining how the owners responded to the old house, in the sense that, in the words of Hollis, 'all interiors, are, to some degree or other, made out of the remnants of others'.<sup>415</sup>

Sir Mark consciously engaged with the idea of the classical interior of the house when, in 1755, he commissioned a new portrait bust of himself by Roubiliac (Figure 60). This was added to the chimneypiece of the upstairs dining parlour as a focal point of the principal room (Figure 61).<sup>416</sup> Lord Hobart's version of Coleshill's chimneypiece which was installed at Blickling around 1745 also had a bust placed between the scrolls of the broken pediment in the same manner, but this pre-dated Sir Mark's own modifications.<sup>417</sup> A newly discovered drawing of Coleshill's chimneypiece by Isaac Ware is overlain with pencil sketches of urns and a bust that conform to Sir Mark's alterations (Figure 62).<sup>418</sup> This altered chimneypiece was a significant feature of Coleshill's most important room, and was believed to have been designed by Jones. However it proved difficult for later architectural historians to evaluate in the context of the canonical house. Avray-Tipping thought Sir Mark had added the broken pediment and swags himself and disliked them, whilst Belcher and Macartney believed the chimneypiece was a modern insertion.<sup>419</sup> Sir Mark did not regard Jones's work as sacrosanct and untouchable, but sought to improve upon it to meet his own needs. The new bust responded to the existing busts in the niches of the entrance hall which were part of the original treatment of the house. Sir Mark personalised this classical vocabulary for his own ends in a manner appropriate to his own time.<sup>420</sup> The new bust represented him in the style of a Roman emperor, thereby identifying himself with the virtues and authority of Ancient Rome. At this time the classicism of Roman antiquity was specifically associated with Augustan values and as such served as an appropriate model for elite culture and society. Sir Mark harnessed the classical idiom of the original house as an expression of his own social status according to these consensual values. He was evidently extremely proud of the bust, as he recorded specific

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<sup>414</sup> Edward Hollis, 'The House of Life and the Memory Palace: Some Thoughts on the Historiography of Interiors', *Interiors*, 1 (2010), 105-118 (p. 105).

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>416</sup> The bust is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. There was a copy of this bust in the entrance hall which did not survive the fire of 1952.

<sup>417</sup> Maddison, p. 76.

<sup>418</sup> WSA, 1946 Coleshill Drawings.

<sup>419</sup> Tipping, 'Coleshill House II', p. 145; Belcher and Macartney, II, p. 74.

<sup>420</sup> On the use of classical busts at Coleshill, see Malcolm Baker, 'Public Images for Private Spheres: The Place of Sculpture in the Georgian Domestic Interior', *Journal of Design History* 20 (2007), 309-323.

instructions for its care in his journal: 'If any soil on face or drapery: clean it with clean sponge and fair water. Hair clean it by rubbing with soap suds and an hardish brush dipped into some silver sand [...] if only dusty blow on it with Bellows'.<sup>421</sup>



Figure 60 Bust of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell by Roubiliac, 1755. *Karen Fielder with kind permission of Victoria and Albert Museum.*



Figure 61 Saloon fireplace with bust of Sir Mark and urns. © *Country Life Picture Library*

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<sup>421</sup> BRO, D/EPb acc3313.6 B1, Estate Accounts and Memorandum Book 1715-1765, fol. 25.

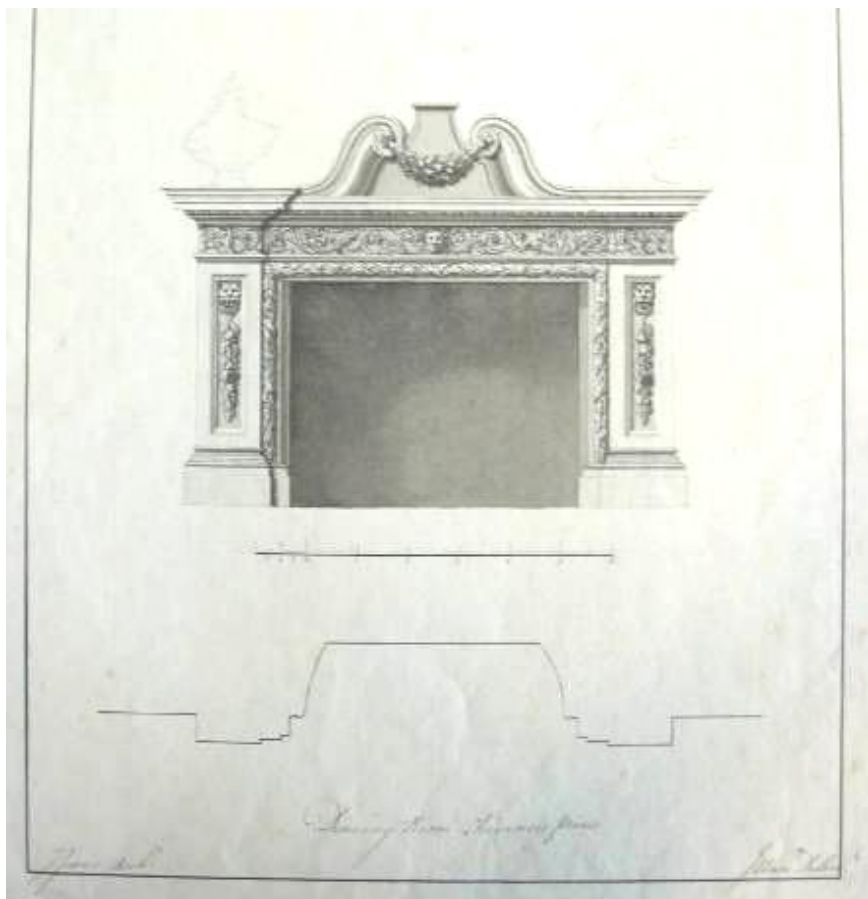


Figure 62 Isaac Ware's drawing of the dining room chimneypiece. WSA, 1946 *Coleshill Drawings*.

Jacob wasted little time in making modifications to Coleshill's interiors once he inherited the Bouverie family wealth in 1776. Chimneypieces were altered and moved, new chimneypieces installed, and internal carpentry was repaired or replaced. William Collett the carpenter was kept particularly busy in the house from 1777 and throughout the 1780s, preparing many hundreds of feet of boards, wainscot, mouldings, skirtings, doors etc. At times he worked alongside the mason Strong on doorframes and windows. From 1778 Jacob set about refurnishing the house using the Marlborough upholsterer and cabinet maker Samuel Hilliker. Amongst other things, Hilliker supplied beds and bed furnishings, chairs, tables, fire screens and festoon curtains.<sup>422</sup> Many of the rooms were redecorated between 1800 and 1801. For example in 1800 Daniel Sawyer was paid for painting the Great Dining room with white lead, stone ochre, Patent yellow and Kings yellow, and the carpenter Edward Drew was paid for putting up paper in various rooms.<sup>423</sup> As well as estate workers, Jacob employed provincial and London craftsmen for some of the finer quality work, including the

<sup>422</sup> BRO, D/EPb A7/6, A7/41.

<sup>423</sup> BRO, D/EPb A7/38 and A7/39.

Swindon mason Robert Jones, the ornamental plasterer William Neale and the sculptor Thomas Scheemakers. The extent of these internal works must have transformed the house to a considerable degree, even in rooms where there was only modest updating of wall treatments, and even the like-for-like replacement of tired seventeenth-century handiwork would to some extent have rejuvenated the house.

When Daniel Alexander was working at Coleshill, one of the biggest bills was for painting and paper hanging. In part this work was suggested by Alexander to preserve his restored work, and it would have visually transformed the interiors to effectively revive the house. The exterior was also painted, and the ball of the cupola re-gilded. The total bill for this work carried out by Thomas Hill between 1815 and 1816 was £1532 5s 8d.<sup>424</sup> In the Great Drawing Room the paneling was painted in flat peach blossom, with mouldings in dark peach and angle mouldings in burnished gold. The walls of the dining room were painted in still green, and in the Little Drawing Room the walls were flat lilac with dark lilac mouldings and burnished gold angle mouldings. The basement passage and back stairs were painted in flat stone. Colourful papers were hung in the attics, including in the large attic room on the north front where papers in Beaumont Green on peach with an acorn border on green were hung. Ceilings and stucco work were also painted, and even picture frames were re-gilded and paintings varnished to complete the renewal.

Family paintings were a key element in Jacob's new decorative scheme for the interiors, and an important expression of his relationship with Coleshill. As the first of the Bouverie family to claim the house, it is clear that Jacob wished to assert his family title through his interventions. Like Sir Mark he wished to stamp his identity upon it, particularly in the more public rooms of the house. However unlike Sir Mark it was not Coleshill's classicism that he sought to engage with. Rather he was concerned to demonstrate lineage and inheritance in order to assert his authority at Coleshill. One way in which he did this was to brand the house with family coats of arms, which he added to various features of the interiors. For example Scheemakers was paid £18 4s for work that included carving a coat of arms on two chimneys in 1777, including one in the Saloon.<sup>425</sup> At the same time the stonemason Robert Jones was employed in painting 'in their proper colours 18 coats of arms on family pictures', and a few years later he painted a coat of arms on a shield in the Great Hall.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, General Abstract of Accounts.

<sup>425</sup> BRO, D/EPb A7/1 and A7/4.

<sup>426</sup> BRO, D/EPb A7/3 and A7/12.

Jacob was particularly keen to emphasise his genealogical ties with the Pratts, the Pleydells (whose connection with Coleshill dated back to the fifteenth century), and other old established families. In 1776 he acquired family portraits from the Forster lineage at the sale of Ralph Congreve's personal effects from the Forster family seat at Aldermaston House.<sup>427</sup> This family was connected to Coleshill by the marriage of Sir George Pratt to Margaret Forster in 1647. An inventory was made of pictures at Coleshill on 20 June 1777, perhaps prompted by the recent change in Jacob's circumstances following the death of his father.<sup>428</sup> This list included pictures acquired from Aldermaston as well as those already found at the house in 1768 when Jacob inherited Coleshill. Jacob was quick to hang the newly acquired Aldermaston portraits alongside Bouverie pictures. The Aldermaston acquisition included portraits of the Forsters by Lely, and pictures relating to other associated families such as the Kingsmills and the Stawels. There were also portraits of unidentified sitters, for example 'A Lady Canary on her Arm', which were perhaps acquired simply for their suggestion of ancestral heritage.

A sketch plan by Jacob shows a hanging scheme for paintings in the upstairs dining parlour in 1797, and was probably associated with the modifications that he was making to the interiors at the time (Figure 63).<sup>429</sup> The walls are shown closely hung with family portraits, and the plan is accompanied by a genealogical pedigree. It was not unusual to make these overt displays of family lineage in the principal rooms of a house, as Sir Richard Colt Hoare observed in 1822 that family portraits were a 'very appropriate decoration' for entrance halls and dining rooms: 'They remind us of the genealogy of our families, and recall to our minds the hospitality of its former inhabitants'.<sup>430</sup> Some of the portraits in the dining room dated back to the Tudor period, and there were early portraits of the Pratts and the Stewarts. In this sense, it was the old ancestral house with which Jacob engaged, which provided the setting for portraits emphasising hereditary ties and legitimising his place at Coleshill. This also differentiated Jacob from the new money of the rising middling classes, whose status rested on industry and commerce, to assert old wealth and ancestry as an endorsement of his power and authority. The psychological link that Jacob made between the house and the family pedigree is further demonstrated by a design that he sketched for a new window in Coleshill church in 1799, not executed. This connected

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<sup>427</sup> BRO, D/EPb acc3133/15 Inventory of Pictures at Coleshill House June 20 1777.

<sup>428</sup> BRO, D/EPb/acc3313/15.

<sup>429</sup> BRO D/EPB/acc3313/15.

<sup>430</sup> Richard Colt Hoare, *The History of Modern Wiltshire: Hundred of Mere* (London: John Nichols and Son, 1822), p. 70. I am grateful to Alastair Laing for drawing my attention to this reference.



an image of the house with a string of family heraldic shields that traced back to Thomas Pleydell, who had founded a chantry at Coleshill in 1499 (Figure 64).<sup>431</sup>

Another phase of alterations to Coleshill's interiors occurred towards the end of Jacob's life in the 1820s when Hopper was engaged at the house. A large bill of £3008 15s was paid in 1822 for internal carpentry and masonry work, some of which was decorative and some more utilitarian. Large bills were paid for painting and papering, and a new black and gold chimneypiece was supplied by R. and C. Maile of Fitzroy Square, London.<sup>432</sup> Between 1828 and 1829 Thomas Hill was back decorating the house, and was paid £878 15s 2¾d for internal and external decoration, including painting the exterior woodwork to blend with the old moss-covered stonework (see Appendix 8). All the principal bed rooms and dressing rooms were painted, and the wainscot of the study was grained with imitation oak. Three staircases were painted, as was the grand staircase ceiling, and the inside of the newly refurbished offices. In 1830 Hill was paid a further £466 for paints, paper and papering, in colours that included brown ochre, burnt umber and Prussian blue. Some fine ornamental work was commissioned by Hopper as part of these refurbishments. In 1826 on Hopper's instructions Peter Bernasconi supplied the modeller J. Finney of Adam Street, Westminster with two 'rich Corinthian pilaster capitals 14" wide at the neck and 10" high', at a cost of £27 5s, and Finney was also paid for modelling a frieze in 1826 (see Appendix 9).

Some of these accounts relate to the creation of a new study and dining room on the ground floor to the right of the entrance hall. The new dining room would replace some of the function of the great dining parlour on the first floor, and locating this room on the ground floor was more in keeping with contemporary fashion in house planning. These alterations are shown in an undated architectural drawing which provides plans and sections of the two new rooms (Figure 65).<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> BRO, E/EPb E59.

<sup>432</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

<sup>433</sup> BRO D/EPb P26.

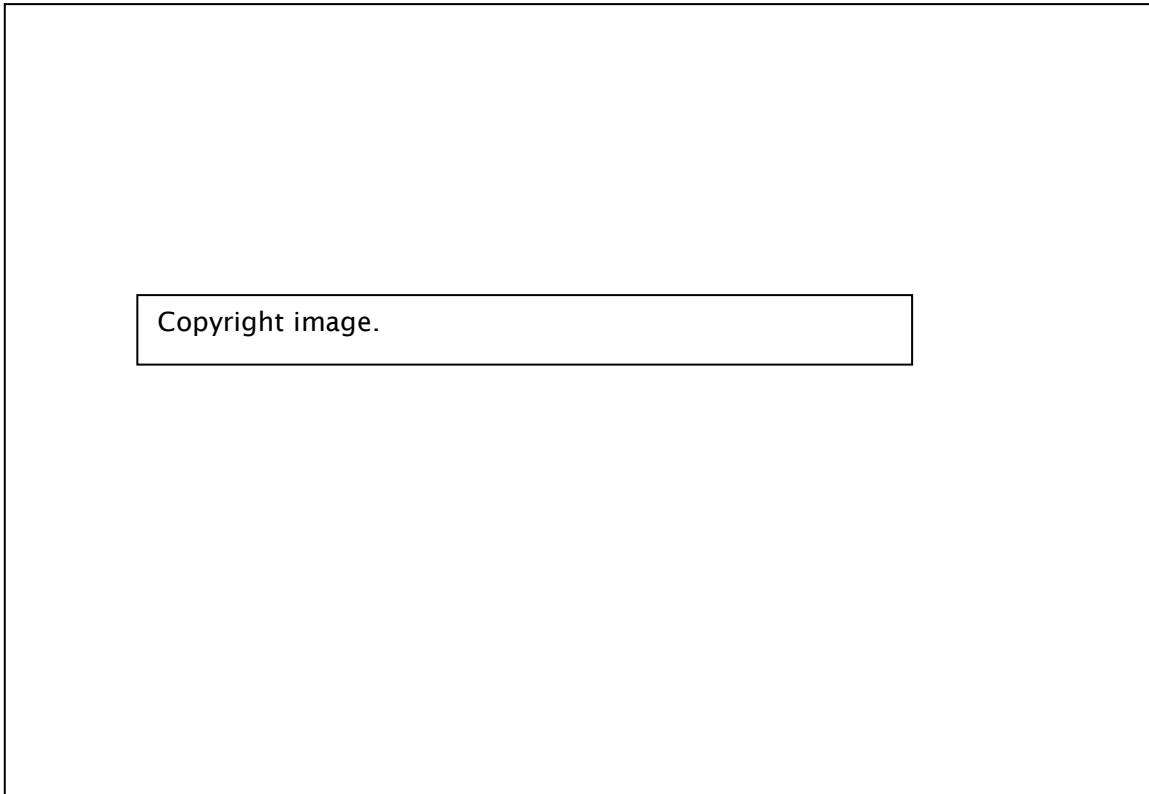


Figure 63 Hanging scheme for paintings in the dining room, 1797. *BRO, D/EPb acc3313/15.*

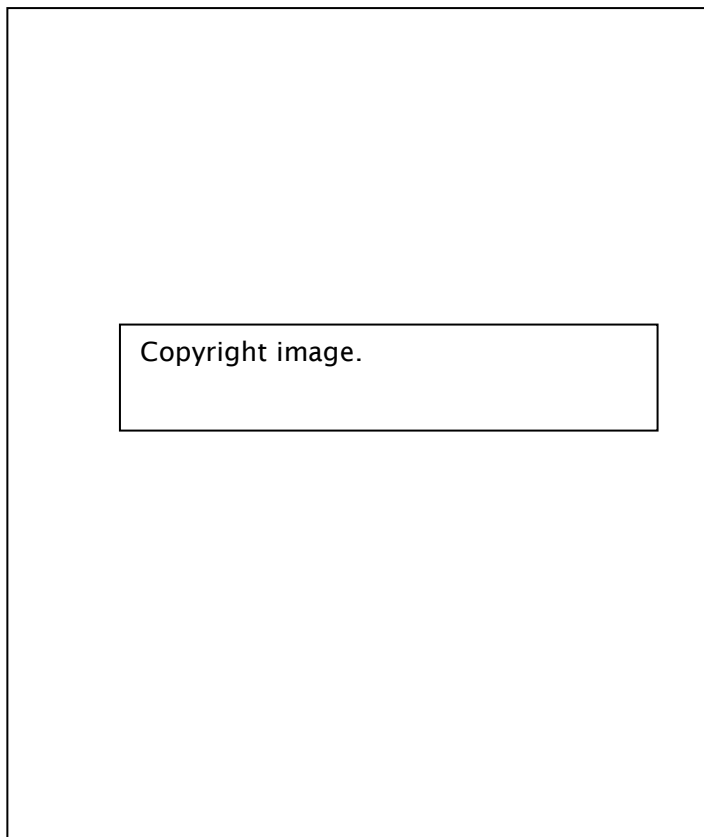


Figure 64 Design for a family window at Coleshill church, 1799. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

The study was created from the old family living parlour. It stood at the head of the stone back stairs from the basement, and could only be accessed from the lobby area of these stairs rather than directly from the passage, lending it a degree of privacy. Later photographs show the room fitted out with features of a late sixteenth or early seventeenth-century style including wainscot with geometric and arcuated embellishment and full height pilasters, as well as a substantial chimneypiece of coupled columns with armorial carvings in the overmantel, and a seventeenth-century panelled door (Figure 66). We have already seen how later historians found the style of this room difficult to accommodate in their canonical renderings of the house, and they could not agree as to its relationship with Jones's work. The pilastered wainscot is evident in architectural plans of the house from Sir Mark's time, and was probably part of Coleshill's original scheme even if it was sourced from another building (Figure 67).<sup>434</sup> However the chimneypiece is more problematic. Floor plans of the house show a coupled-columned chimneypiece in the housekeeper's room in the basement (Figure 68). Most probably this chimneypiece was relocated to the new study as part of the conversion of the room set out in the design drawing for the scheme. In any case, a clear preference was shown for the existing classical vernacular style by choosing to install new bookshelves that were sympathetically designed to fit the old wainscot (Figure 69). The large carpenter's bill for 1822 included, amongst other items, payments for diminished Corinthian pilasters and moulded pilasters, some with notches for bookshelves, which probably relates to the fitting up of the wainscot for the study.<sup>435</sup> Jacob's interventions here demonstrate that he did not pursue any universalised notion of Coleshill's classical identity.

References to work in the new dining room also appear in the building accounts of 1822, when it was being painted.<sup>436</sup> The room was created by taking down the partition walls between two corner closets and a room that had variously served as a drawing room and a nursery. A design for the new scheme shows cupboards on either side of the fireplace, one cut into the thickness of the wall and the other created by blocking the door from the Great Parlour so that access was only available from the passage (see Figure 65). The accounts record the mason Stephen Stanbrook taking down a stone wall for a cupboard in the new dining room in 1822.<sup>437</sup> The design, which may not have been fully executed, included two simple arch-headed alcoves on the end wall, blocking the windows on that side, and two small fireplaces that previously served the closets were blocked. An undated drawing of an arched niche with ornate

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<sup>434</sup> WSA, 1946/2/2.

<sup>435</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

<sup>436</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

<sup>437</sup> BRO, D/EPb A11.

scrolls and broken pediment is probably an alternative design for one of these alcoves (Figure 70).<sup>438</sup> The new classically proportioned panelling of the room which was suggestive of woodwork was actually, according to Arthur Stratton, carried out in plasterwork.<sup>439</sup> What is particularly interesting about this room is the ceiling with its enriched beams, central circular panel and moulded ornamental rosette. This echoed the ornate design of the seventeenth-century ceilings of the principal rooms albeit executed more lightly, with shallower beams and enrichments that were less deeply undercut (Figure 71). That this ceiling offered a more up-to-date interpretation of Coleshill's seventeenth-century ceilings is unexpected.<sup>440</sup> It signals Jacob's regard for the richly moulded ceilings of the old house, understood to be the work of Jones, and a desire to perpetuate these as part of the essential architectural vocabulary and character of Coleshill despite their outmoded appearance.

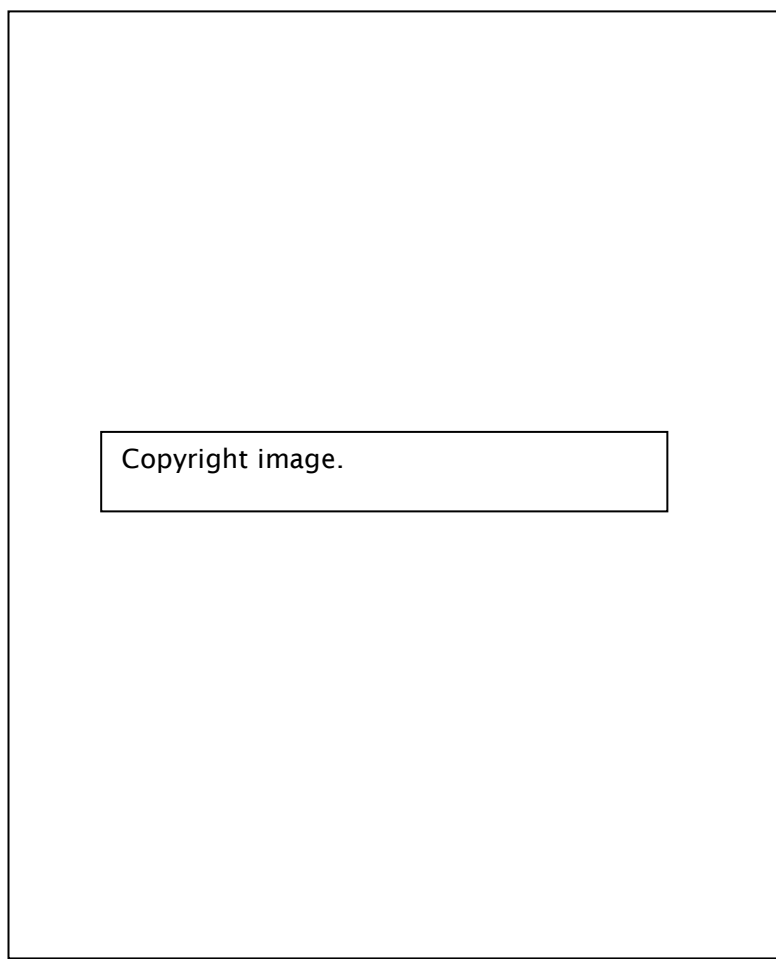


Figure 65 Designs for a new study and dining room. *BRO, D/EPb P26*.

<sup>438</sup> *BRO, D/EPb P27*.

<sup>439</sup> Arthur Stratton, *The English Interior: A Review of the Decoration of English Homes from Tudor Times to the XIXth Century* (London: Batsford, 1920), p. xv.

<sup>440</sup> I am grateful to Claire Gapper for pointing out the revivalist nature of this ceiling.



Figure 66 Jacob's study, formerly the living parlour. ©Country Life Picture Library.

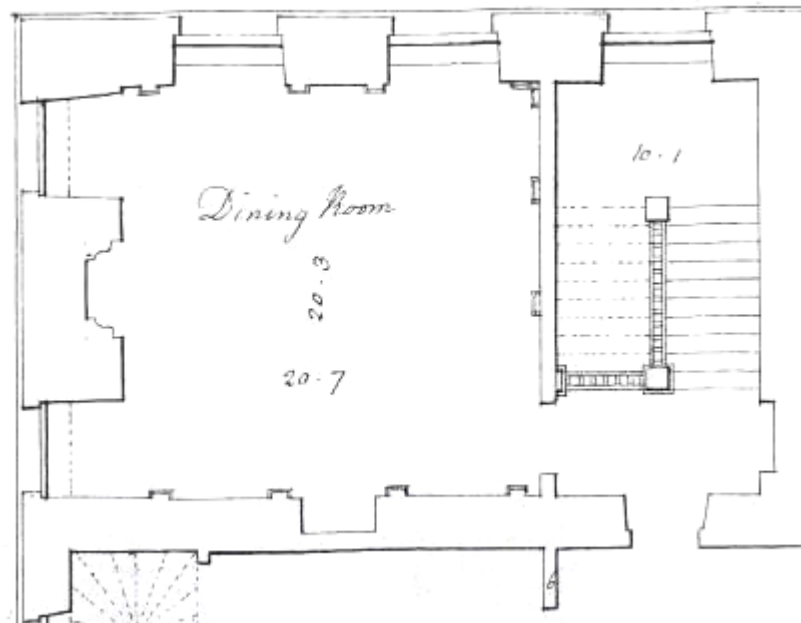


Figure 67 Detail from the undated floor plans from Sir Mark's time showing old living parlour or dining room with pilasters. WSA, 1946/2/2.

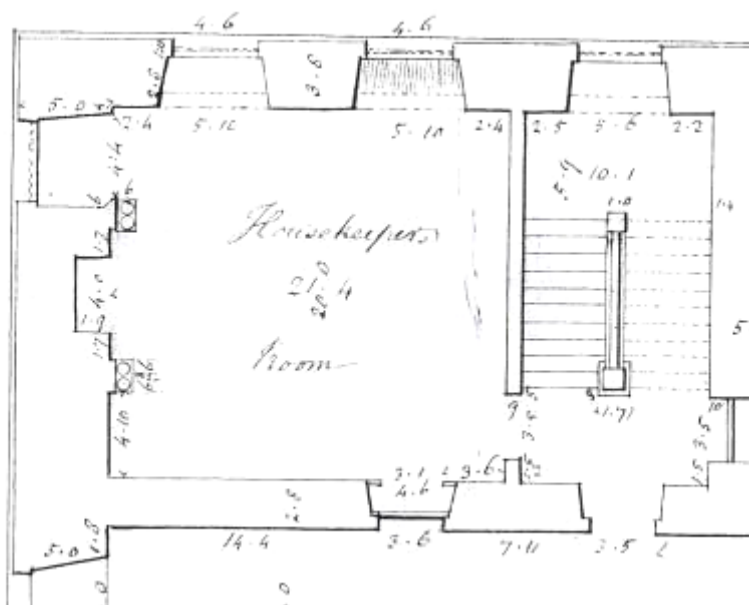


Figure 68 Detail from the undated floor plans from Sir Mark's time showing the housekeeper's room with a coupled-columned chimneypiece. *WSA, 1946/2/2*.

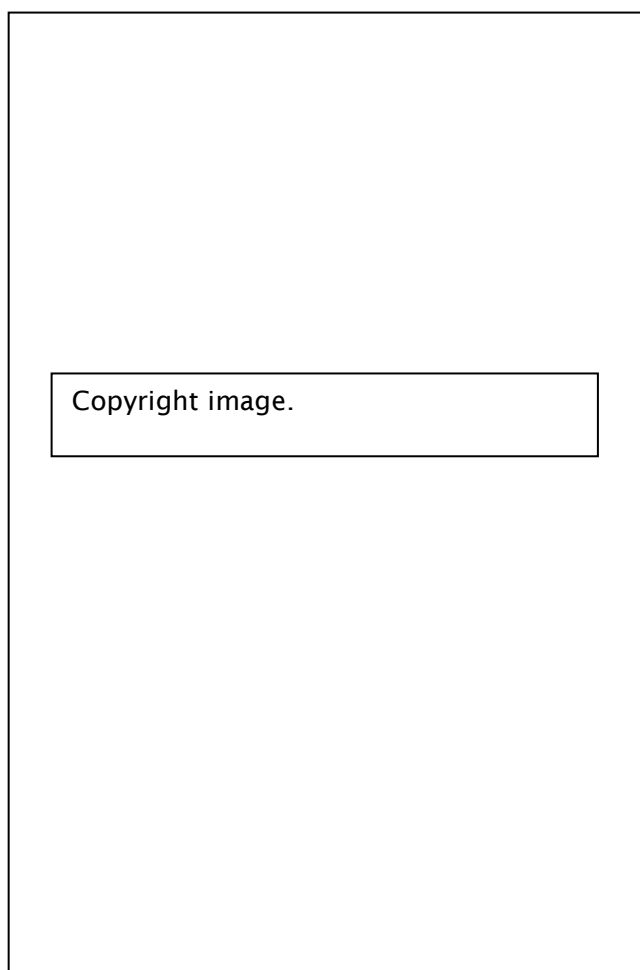


Figure 69 Undated pencil sketches of designs for bookshelves. *BRO, D/EPb E32.*

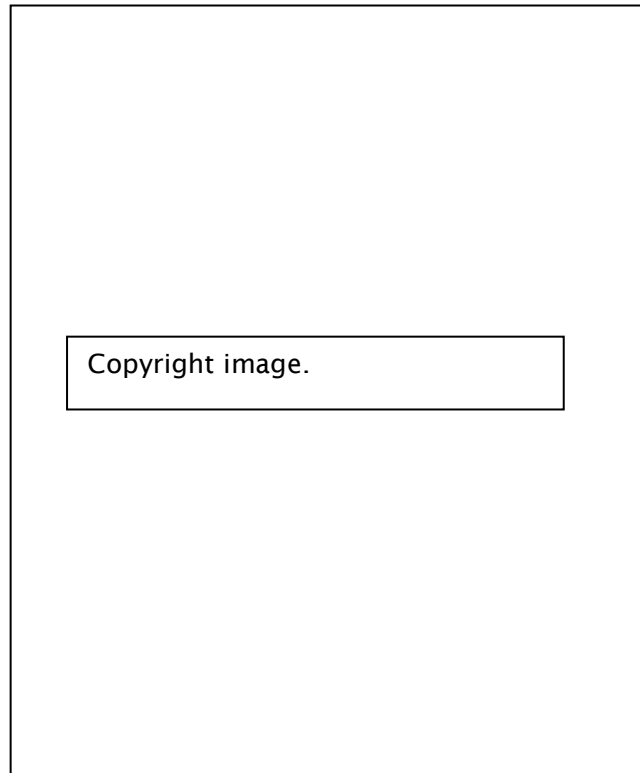


Figure 70 Design for a niche, possibly for the new dining room. *BRO, D/EPb P27.*



Figure 71 Jacob's new dining room at Coleshill. The side table is now at the Victoria and Albert Museum. © *Country Life Picture Library.*

## The Altered Setting

I have so far addressed alterations to the mansion house itself, but I wish to turn to changes that were made to the gardens and parkland at Coleshill during the long eighteenth century inasmuch as these provided the setting for the house. This landscaping work has so far received little attention although the archives are replete with references to it.<sup>441</sup> Landscape alterations provide another means of challenging the historiographic notion of Coleshill as having been unaltered, as well as offering further evidence for how the owners negotiated a path between the old house and its revival in the present. The house and its setting must be regarded as interdependent, since the house was read in its landscape setting and the landscape was also read from the house. I am influenced here by Tom Williamson, who rejects the traditional historiographic division between the study of gardens and architecture, arguing that most eighteenth-century gentlemen would have regarded the design of house and garden as a unity, and as complementary to one another.<sup>442</sup> The Coleshill archives suggest that this was indeed the case in the view of Sir Mark and Jacob, who both reveal a keen awareness of the intimate connection between house and garden in addressing the alterations both to the immediate environs of the house and its wider setting. A desire to influence the experience of being at the house in some ways informed changes beyond its walls. My intention here is not to provide a complete history of the gardens and landscape at Coleshill, and the rich archive sources deserve more thorough investigation. Rather I will explore how certain alterations made by Sir Mark and Jacob were intended to impact upon the house itself. These alterations relate specifically to changing taste in landscape gardening during the eighteenth century and the ways these were adopted at Coleshill.

We know something of the seventeenth-century gardens at Coleshill from a survey made by William Brudenell in 1666 (Figure 72), and from Celia Fiennes's account of around 1690 which reads as follows:

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<sup>441</sup> But see Sally Jeffery, 'Gardens and Courtyards of the Seventeenth-Century Villa and Smaller House', in *The Renaissance Villa in Britain 1500-1700*, ed. Malcolm Airs and Geoffrey Tyack (Reading: Spire Books, 2007), pp. 110-126. Also Gervase Jackson-Stops, *An English Arcadia: Designs for Gardens and Garden Buildings in the Care of the National Trust, 1600-1990* (London: National Trust, 1991), pp. 130-31, for designs for Coleshill's gardens by John Claudius Loudon, 1843.

<sup>442</sup> Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), p. 18.



all the avenues to the house are fine walkes of rows of trees, the garden lyes in a great descent below the house, of many steps and tarreses and gravel walks with all sorts of dwarfe trees, fruit trees with standing apricock and flower trees, abundance of garden roome and filled with all sorts of things improved for pleasure and use; [...] the Cupilow [...] gives you a great prospect of gardens, grounds, woods that appertaine to the Seate, as well as a sight of the Country at a distance.<sup>443</sup>

Running down the south-west slope behind the house were three roughly square walled terraced gardens (the Upper, Middle and Lower gardens), that were navigated by gravel walks. On the entrance front were the Green Court and the Fore Base Court and Upper Base Court.<sup>444</sup> Although it was not possible to achieve strict regularity these gardens and courts were broadly aligned with the axial arrangement of the house. As Fiennes tells us in her tour of the house, on entering the hall 'directly fore-right enters a large dineing roome or great parlour which has a door through into the garden that gives a visto through the house'.<sup>445</sup> At the time of Brudenell's survey there was also a series of side courts bounded by a continuous wall running along the village street. At the south-western foot of the gardens there was a pigeon house and what was perhaps a summer house, with a sort of pavilion at one corner to the north-east. There were gate piers at some of the openings into the courts, the most prominent of which on the 1666 survey shows the entrance into a side court off the public road (Figure 73). Soon after Brudenell's plan was made some of the side courts were removed to make way for what is now the Clock House and probably for stables and other ancillary buildings set in a service yard.<sup>446</sup> The entrance from the road may have been moved at this time to approach directly into the fore courts. Brudenell's plan also shows avenues of trees beyond the walled gardens crossing Court Lees from the house, but most of the surrounding park was pasture with a few clumps of trees.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, ed. by Morris, p. 47.

<sup>444</sup> They are referred to by Sir Mark Pleydell in his *Journal of Mining*, BRO, D/EPb E33. Sir Mark also refers to a statue in the Green Court, but we cannot be sure if this was part of the seventeenth-century scheme.

<sup>445</sup> *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, ed. by Morris, p. 47.

<sup>446</sup> For a discussion of the stables, see Sally Jeffery, 'The House in the Cucumber Garden'.

<sup>447</sup> Brudenell's survey shows that a significant proportion of the parish was enclosed by this time. Sir Mark continued to enclose in a piecemeal fashion by consent of his tenants, and the process was completed by Jacob upon his inheritance of Coleshill in 1768. There was no parliamentary enclosure at Coleshill. See Cottis, 'Agrarian Change in the Vale of the White Horse'.

Copyright image.

Figure 72 Detail of William Brudenell's survey of Coleshill, 1666. *BRO, D/EPB P1*.

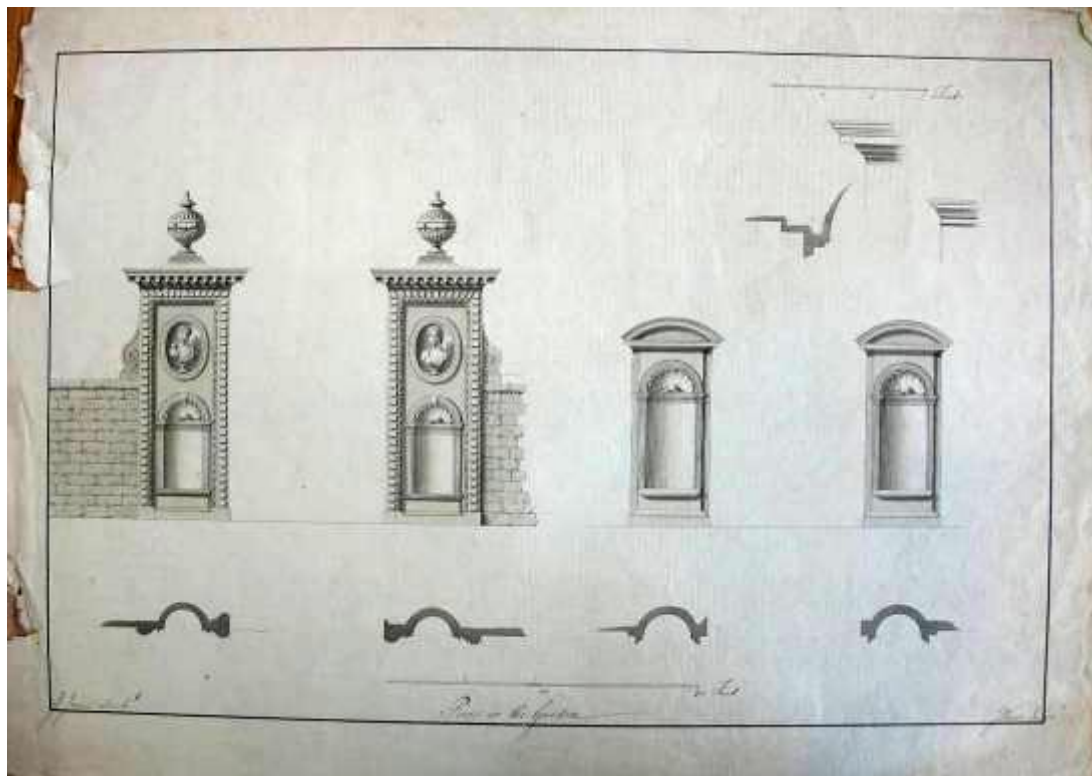


Figure 73 Isaac Ware's drawings of garden piers at Coleshill. WSA, 1946 *Coleshill Drawings*.

It is generally thought that this broad arrangement of formal terraced gardens remained until Jacob swept them away during the fashion for a more natural landscape later in the eighteenth century. However Sir Mark's journals show that he had already begun to adopt new landscaping ideas at Coleshill in his lifetime, introducing more informality and variety, albeit underpinned by the geometry of the existing terraces, and his contribution has been overlooked up to now. His modifications may have been influenced by the work of William Kent, who he knew socially.<sup>448</sup> As a young man, Sir Mark had shown great interest in gardens. When he was in France in 1716 he saw, amongst others, Les Tuileries, Versailles and St Cloud, and he wrote lengthy notes on the gardens that he visited in his commonplace book.<sup>449</sup> He also visited English country houses and gardens which must have influenced his later plans for his own grounds. On 12 August 1709 when he was 17 he saw what remained of the Enstone Marvels, the ingenious water gardens near Chipping Norton created by Thomas Bushell in the

<sup>448</sup> Peter Willis, 'William Kent's Letters in the Huntington Library, California', *Architectural History*, 29 (1986), 138-168 (p. 165), letter from William Kent to Selina Countess of Huntingdon, 15 December 1739. For William Kent's garden style, see John Dixon Hunt, *William Kent: Landscape Garden Designer: An Assessment and Catalogue of his Designs* (London: Zwemmer, 1987).

<sup>449</sup> Sir Mark's commonplace book, private collection.

1620s. Although they had fallen into disrepair after the Civil War, enough remained for Sir Mark to consider that the wells and grotto were ‘remarkable’.<sup>450</sup> On 24 August 1713 he visited Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, where he thought the house to be ‘too low and damp’, and noted the gardens as ‘large and uneven, the cascade very long, falls from a pond at the top of the hill into a canal fronting the greenhouse’.<sup>451</sup> At Chevening, a house believed to be by Jones which he saw in July 1725, he noted the wilderness ‘partly planted and partly natural’.<sup>452</sup> In 1719 he acquired a Poussin print, a prerequisite for any aspiring gentleman landscape gardener, which was perhaps intended for display in an existing or proposed greenhouse, as set out in a sketch of 1744 (Figure 74).<sup>453</sup>

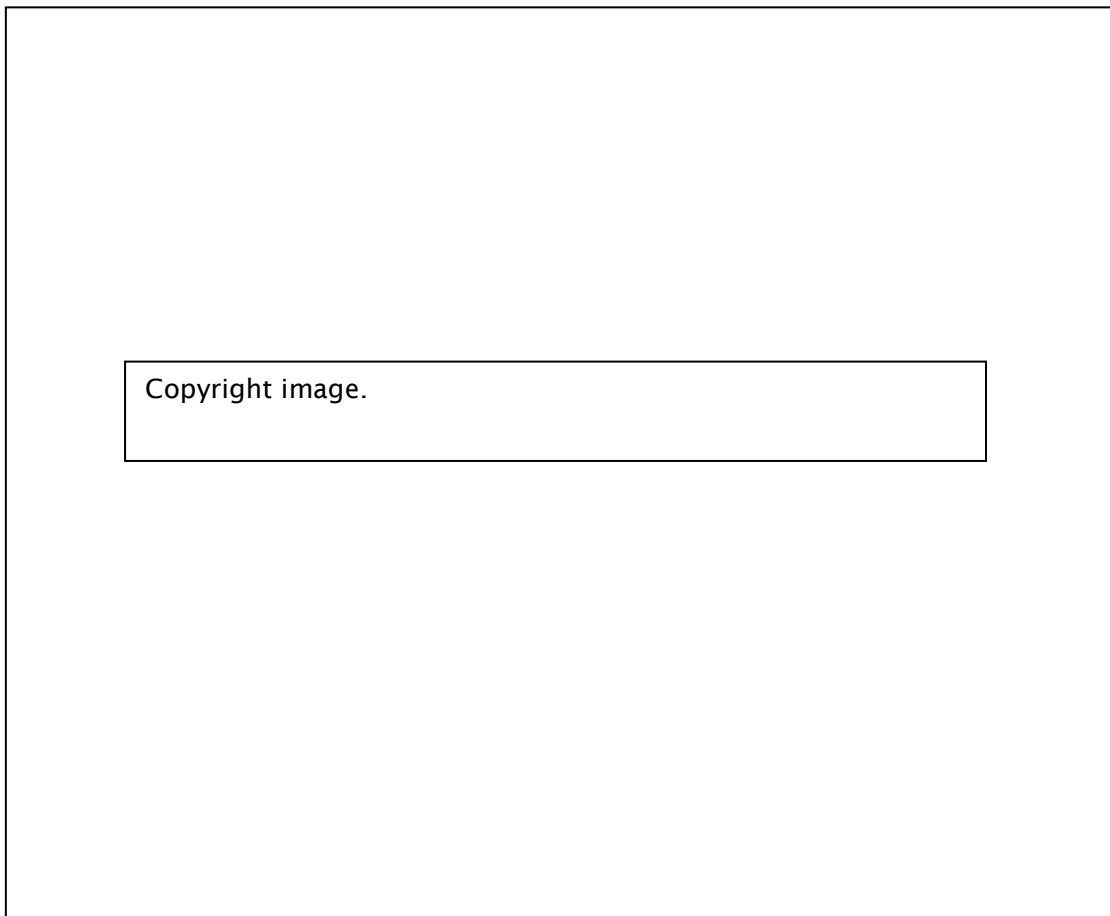


Figure 74 Sketch for greenhouse with Poussin landscape, 1744. *BRO, D/EPb E33.*

<sup>450</sup> Sir Mark's commonplace book, private collection.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> *BRO, D/EPB/acc3313 B1*, fol. 89; *D/EPb E6* 20 May 1719. Tim Clayton has noted the role of such prints in influencing fashionable taste in landscape design. See 'The Print and the Spread of the Picturesque Ideal', in *The Picturesque in Late Georgian England*, ed. by Dana Arnold (London: Georgian Group, 1995), pp. 11-19.

Although Sir Mark did not inherit Coleshill from his father until 1728 he was actively involved in works to the gardens for some years prior to this. Cottis notes his early interest in agriculture, and in stocking the orchard amongst other things in the 1720s.<sup>454</sup> He was also attending to the pleasure gardens at this time, and in 1722 he planted elm hedges around a temple or portico, planted ornamental shrubs or standards in the Middle Garden, trimmed yew and holly bushes into standards in the Upper Garden and checked on fir trees recently planted in the Dark Walk.<sup>455</sup> However in the early 1740s he conceived of more significant alterations to the seventeenth-century gardens, which are principally set out in his *Journal of Mining*. Although as a working document full of sketches, annotations and corrections his notes are not always easy to interpret, it is clear that he was influenced by contemporary taste for informality and variety. The *Journal* contains a sketch plan dated 15 December 1741 for a scheme to transform the upper garden with meandering serpentine walks six feet wide contrasted with regular rows of trees planted four feet apart (Figure 75).<sup>456</sup> A sketch map of the gardens 'as intended' dated 1 March 1743 notes the present state of some of the planting made during the preceding years (Figure 76).<sup>457</sup> On 6 October 1747 Lord Barrington of Beckett Park prepared a scheme for the upper kitchen garden centred on an irregularly shaped opening 200 feet wide around a basin 40 feet wide, planted with broken open woods and flowering bushes with serpentine paths. It was also suggested that a spring could be made to pass through a grotto (Figure 77).<sup>458</sup> A broad walk was to align with an avenue of trees running south-west across Court Lees pasture. It is not known if Barrington's scheme was executed exactly as shown, but certain elements were developed including the basin and grotto. Like many early amateur landscape gardeners, Sir Mark drew on informal social networks for advice and inspiration, including Lord Barrington and Lord Bathurst, and this was characteristic of the early movement towards landscape gardening.<sup>459</sup> Indeed many of his neighbours were engaged in creating new landscape parks at this time sometimes as settings for new houses that were also being built in the vicinity. This included Pusey House, built for John Allen-Pusey, with a landscape garden by John Sanderson a few miles away at Faringdon. Sir Mark developed his ideas in a piecemeal fashion, and sought further

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<sup>454</sup> Janie Cottis, 'Agrarian Change in the Vale of White Horse 1660-1760' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 1984), p. 253.

<sup>455</sup> Sir Mark's commonplace book, private collection.

<sup>456</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fols 49-50.

<sup>457</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 64.

<sup>458</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, bet. fols 68 and 91.

<sup>459</sup> The importance of social networks in garden design at this time is discussed by Tim Richardson in *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London: Bantam Press, 2008).

inspiration from other English gardens. In May 1746, for example, he saw the landscape that William Kent designed at Rousham, and he also saw the newly designed gardens at Forde Abbey, and returned to Dyrham Park where he again noted the springs and cascades. Furthermore during a visit to Derbyshire in May 1748 he saw Chatsworth, and was impressed at Matlock by the river Derwent which he found 'fierce and roaring' as it tumbled over natural rocks.<sup>460</sup>

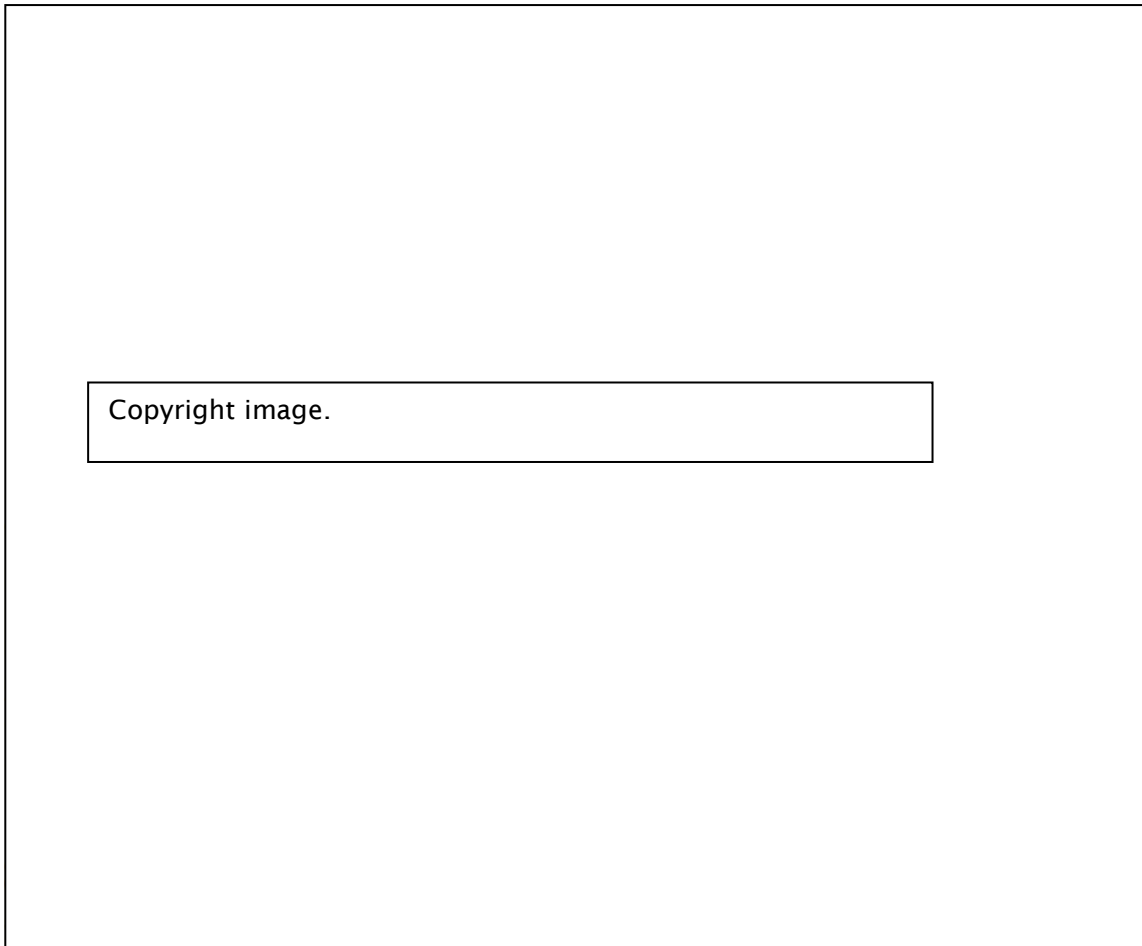


Figure 75 Sketch of Sir Mark's plans for serpentine walks in the Upper Garden, 1741.

*BRO, D/EPb E33.*

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<sup>460</sup> Sir Mark's commonplace book, private collection.

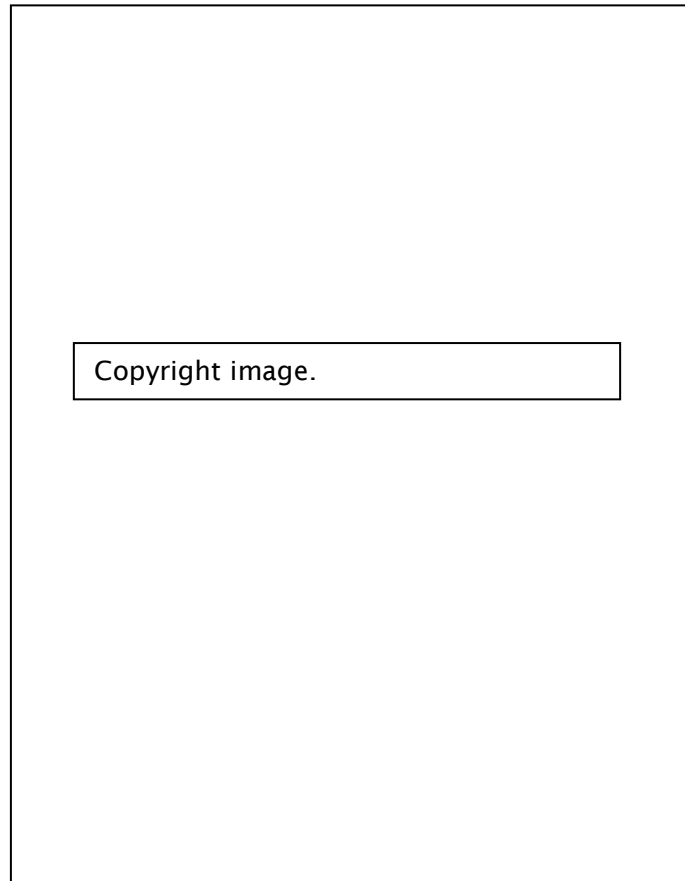


Figure 76 Sir Mark's sketch map of 'gardens as intended', 1743. *BRO, D/EPb E33.*

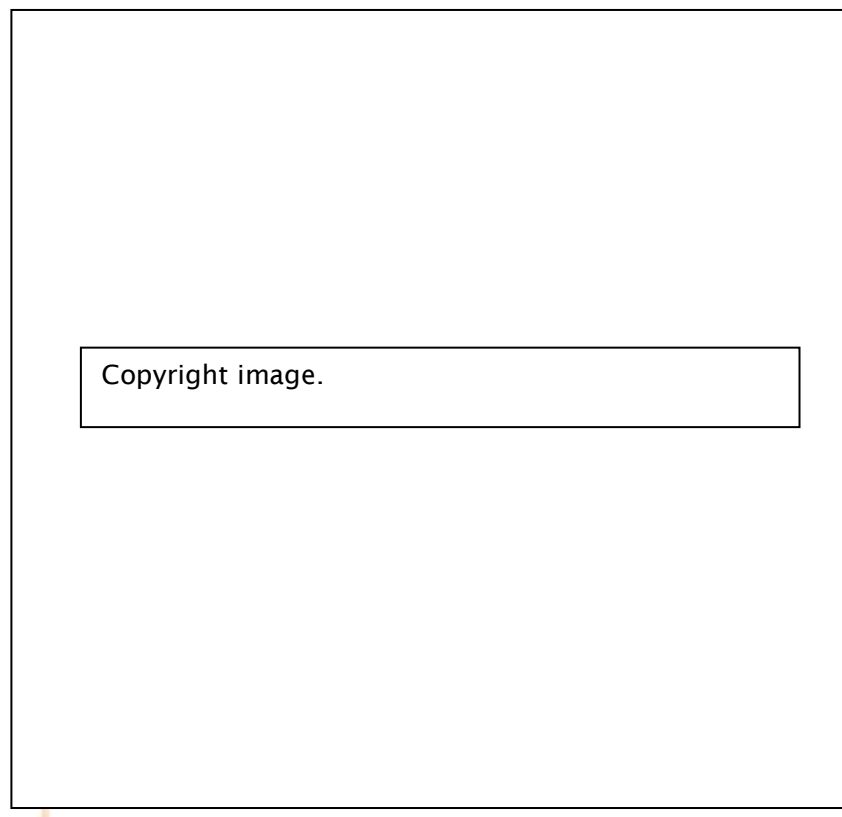


Figure 77 Lord Barrington's plan for the old kitchen garden, 1747. *BRO, D/EPb E33.*

As has been noted, one of Sir Mark's principal concerns in the 1740s was to improve the water supply both to the house and the gardens. At the advice of Lord Bathurst between 1743 and 1745 Sir Mark and his estate team excavated an underground aqueduct some quarter of a mile in length which brought water from a spring to the north of the house firstly into the yard behind the brewhouse and thence into the house and down to the middle and lower gardens.<sup>461</sup> This new water supply was central to Sir Mark's plans for the gardens, which included the introduction of fountains and cascades running down the south-west garden slope. Along with grottos, cascades were an essential feature of early eighteenth-century landscape gardens. They were understood to possess the capacity to excite the imagination and elicit a range of emotions and sensations, in part because of the variety of sounds that moving water could produce. Thomas Whately in his *Observations on Modern Gardening* of 1770 suggested that a 'gently murmuring rill', for example, 'leads to meditation', whereas a more lively stream 'spreads cheerfulness all around'.<sup>462</sup> Sound had been a component of English garden design since the early seventeenth century, inspired by continental gardens such as Pratolino and the Villa D'Este which featured devices such as musical organs, artificial bird song and speaking statues.<sup>463</sup> The use of sound was taken up in England rather less extravagantly. One example of its early use was the cascade at Chatsworth which Sir Mark would have seen on his visit, and which was originally built in 1696. This used groups of steps of varying numbers and heights, and with differently shaped edges to the paving slabs, to create a varied soundscape as the water streamed over them. Publications on hydraulics and fountains appeared in England in the early eighteenth century, including Stephen Switzer's *Hydrostaticks* of 1729.<sup>464</sup> Sir Mark was certainly not in the vanguard of garden design in the 1740s, but what is interesting about his approach is the care that he took with the use of sound in contriving his new garden, and in particular how he drew the house into the soundscape that he wished to create.

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<sup>461</sup> This process is well documented in the Journal of Mining, BRO, D/EPb E33.

<sup>462</sup> Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (Dublin, 1770), p. 62. The psychological effects of water in landscape gardens are discussed by John Dixon Hunt in "'What's water but the Generated Soul?": The Metaphysics of Water in the Landscape Garden', *Occasional Paper (Garden History Society)*, 2 (1970), 3-17.

<sup>463</sup> Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), pp. 130-34.

<sup>464</sup> For hydraulics and the use of fountains, see Christopher Thacker, 'Fountains: Theory and Practice in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Occasional Paper (Garden History Society)*, 2 (1970), 19-26.



For his new water features, Sir Mark studied the 'Principles of Sound', drawing on Ephraim Chambers's *Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, first published in 1728.<sup>465</sup> Aided by sound analyses described by Chambers such as 'Phonicks', 'Cataphonicks', and 'The Theory of Whispering Places', Sir Mark considered the various methods by which different forms of cascades could produce different sounds including undulation, echo and reverberation (Figure 78). This was not abstract theorising, as Sir Mark took a highly personal and idiosyncratic approach to the potential use of sound in his gardens. On 15 and 16 October 1747, noting a calm north wind, Sir Mark began a series of experiments using a tambourine which he played from the roof of the house and down in the gardens in order to study the effects of the ascending and descending sound of the proposed cascades.<sup>466</sup> In August that year he took a French horn and played it against different materials in and about the house to test their response to sound. From this experiment he found that a brick wall produced a dull sound, the freestone under the cornice produced a good response (although it is not recorded how he managed to reach this), the sound from the rustic basement of the house was not good, deal wainscot was duller than the freestone, and oak wainscot even worse, whilst polished marble was worse of all.<sup>467</sup> He was quite particular about the sounds he wished to create, and in one instance he noted his desire for a water jet to sound 'smartly and shrill like packhorse bells'.<sup>468</sup> On 26 November 1750, Sir Mark observed that the 'angle of y<sup>e</sup> Green Terrace will [...] carry y<sup>e</sup> sound 40ft above y<sup>e</sup> botts of y<sup>e</sup> winds of y<sup>e</sup> parlor floor, ie to y<sup>e</sup> cornice'.<sup>469</sup> The water in the new cascades was flowing by October 1748, when Sir Mark reported that, despite a severe drought in late summer, 'y<sup>e</sup> cascade sound exceed well in all y<sup>e</sup> 13 falls'.<sup>470</sup>

Much of the working out of the new water features was down to trial and error over a period of several years. He continued to monitor how well they flowed in different seasons and weather conditions. In part this was to determine how best to maintain them, for example keeping them free of toad spawn and algal velvet. The changing rates of flow were measured by the number of kitchen coppers that could be filled per minute. During the cold 'Russian winters' when the frosts were so hard that the ink froze in Sir Mark's inkstands he concluded that the best approach was to empty the water completely.

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<sup>465</sup> Sir Mark acknowledged his debt to this publication in the brass plaque that he mounted in the house in 1748.

<sup>466</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 99.

<sup>467</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 110.

<sup>468</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 106.

<sup>469</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 137. This sketch also indicates the grotto near the stewpond.

<sup>470</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 111.

Nothing now remains of these cascades, but there are some clues in Sir Mark's journal as to their appearance. One of his sketches shows a series of eight fountain jets with water staircases supported on three arches (Figure 79).<sup>471</sup> The stonework for the cascades and associated water cisterns were mostly constructed by a mason named Brindle and his son. An undated sketch plan of the terraced gardens before they were removed by Jacob shows the basin in the middle garden with a curving feature below which is suggestive of a fall of water (Figure 80). One further piece of evidence that we have for the waterworks comes from Richard Pococke, who visited Coleshill in 1757. He wrote,

I went 3 miles to Coleshill where Sr Mark Pleydell has an exceedingly well built house of hewn freestone brought from Barrington, nr Burford. There is a wilderness garden behind the house. But the great curiosity of the place is the water, which Sir Mark has brought to this house, and the garden.<sup>472</sup>

Pococke goes on to describe how the underground mine brought water to the house and also to the basin in the garden:

From the basin it is carried back underground and passes down through stone pipes into little basins, and forms another basin in a garden below. This underground work is exactly like that mentioned between Damascas and Palmyra in the Description of the East, and as it was done about 8 years ago it is probable he took his hint from that.<sup>473</sup>

As well as water works and a grotto, Sir Mark emphasised Coleshill's classical vocabulary by building a small garden temple near the lowest cascade in 1757, constructed by William Brindle with Doric pillars, pilasters and pediments.<sup>474</sup> This was another essential feature of a fashionable mid-eighteenth-century landscape garden, and it may have been based on the design for an arched Doric summer house produced in 1743 by Richard Kittermaster (Figure 81).<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 137.

<sup>472</sup> *The Travels Through England of Dr Richard Pococke*, ed. by James Joel Cartwright, 2 vols (London: Camden Society, 1889), II, p. 249.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, p. 249. Here Pococke is promoting his own publication *Description of the East and Other Countries* of 1743 as providing inspiration for Sir Mark.

<sup>474</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 1; D/EPb E12, fol. 17.

<sup>475</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fol. 58.

Another characteristic of Sir Mark's new scheme was to add further avenues of trees that radiated out from the house and gardens into the surrounding parkland in the process of converting the pasture into what Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy refer to as a landscape for display.<sup>476</sup> These are shown on John Rocque's map of Berkshire of 1761 (Figure 82).<sup>477</sup> A new terrace was added on the south east side of the gardens to take in views of the landscape across Court Lees. There were long avenues of trees running south-west on the main axis of the house, with another on a secondary axis at right angles to it. These reinforced the architectural symmetry and axial planning of the house. Another path curved away to the north-east through what became the long shrubbery, which as yet was not densely planted but which nonetheless invited walks out into the grounds to take in views towards Badbury Hill. These avenues visually linked the house to the wider estate which Sir Mark had fought to consolidate since the loss of land under the Pratts, and they served as a potent symbolic expression of his status and ownership.<sup>478</sup>

Although Sir Mark retained elements of seventeenth-century formality, the new gardens that he created at Coleshill reflected contemporary taste for the noble classicism of the Augustan Age and of Virgil and Horace, with informal wooded features, winding paths and the stirring sound of falling water. In this way, the gardens served as a vehicle for Sir Mark's self expression in much the same way as the new bust with which he cast himself as a virtuous Roman emperor. Coleshill's seventeenth-century classicism was therefore modified as part of an ongoing process of re-imagining the house according to the revised classical vocabulary demanded by elite culture of the early eighteenth century. For Sir Mark, the connections that he made between the house and the garden were not simply aesthetic but also aural. The new gardens were to be experienced aurally from within the house, and in this sense would alter the house itself. Furthermore, Sir Mark's personal experimental approach to understanding sound as an individual sensory experience reflects Enlightenment concerns for rational thought and a scientific interpretation of the world. Like his water mines, the cascades and the sounds they produced rendered Coleshill an expression of Sir Mark's command over both art and science. Born in 1692, he had grown up in a new era of science-based

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<sup>476</sup> Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy, *Property and Landscape: A Social History of Land Ownership and the English Countryside* (London: George Philip, 1987).

<sup>477</sup> Rocque's map shows the terrace gardens planted informally on the south-east side of the axial path, with kitchen gardens on the north-west. The map would have been surveyed some years previous to its publication in 1761, and Rocque was soliciting for subscriptions as early as 1751. It may therefore show Sir Mark's gardens before his scheme was complete.

<sup>478</sup> See Williamson and Bellamy on the symbolic significance of such landscapes in relation to social status.

experimentation, represented by the work of Sir Isaac Newton and the Royal Society. It was in this spirit that he approached his water mining venture, exploring rock types and water samples under a microscope, as well as in his experimental use of sound.<sup>479</sup> Both house and gardens at Coleshill were therefore manipulated to serve as an integrated arena for Sir Mark to express himself as a man of the Enlightenment.<sup>480</sup> However these interventions which served to revive the house and its setting could be made whilst leaving the fabric of Coleshill House largely untouched.

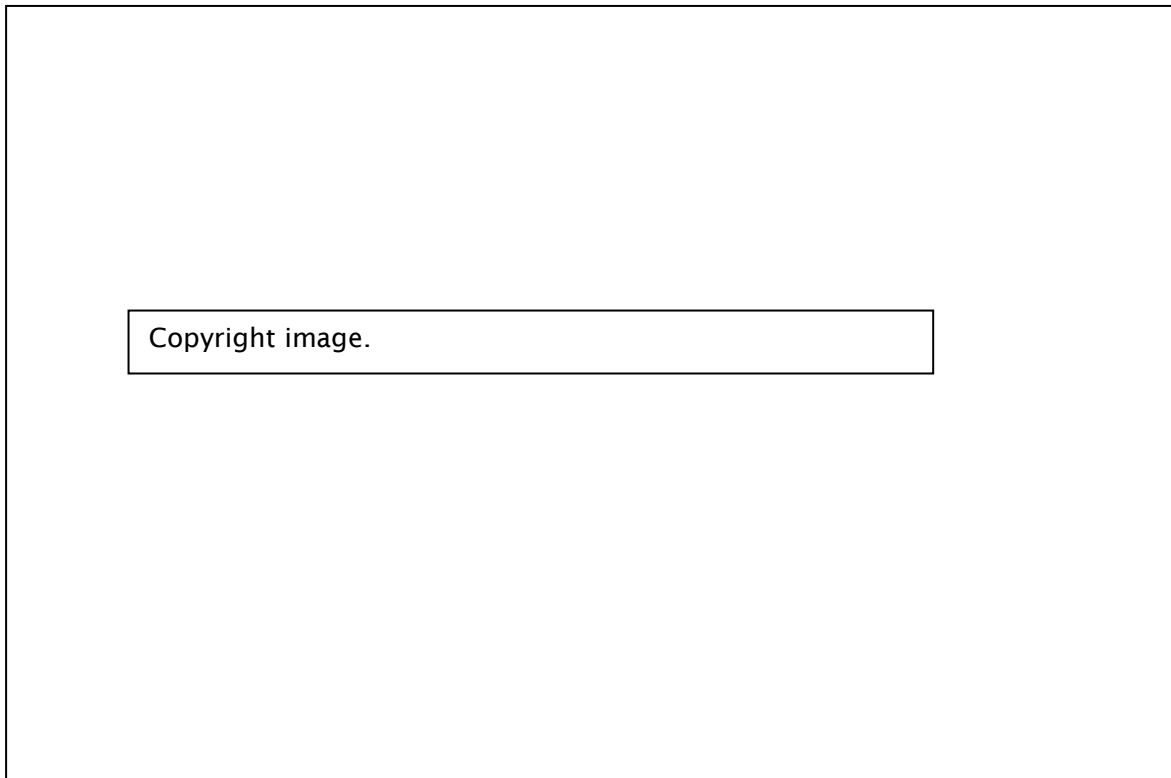


Figure 78 Sketches of different forms of cascades and their associated sounds, 1746.  
*BRO, D/EPb E33.*

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<sup>479</sup> BRO, D/EPb E33, fols 59-60, 131.

<sup>480</sup> Edward S. Harwood, 'Personal Identity and the Eighteenth-Century English Landscape Garden', *Journal of Garden History*, 13 (1993), 36-48.

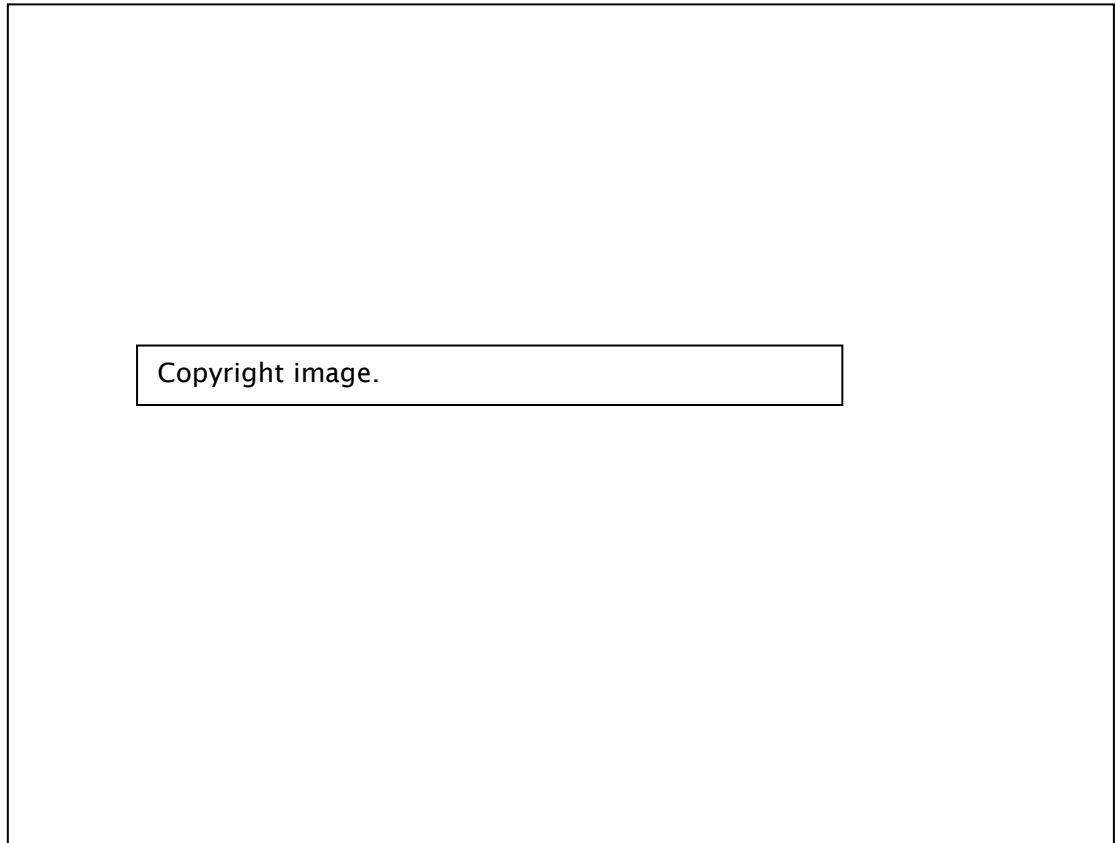


Figure 79 Notes and sketches on the water staircase, grotto etc. *BRO, D/EPb E33.*

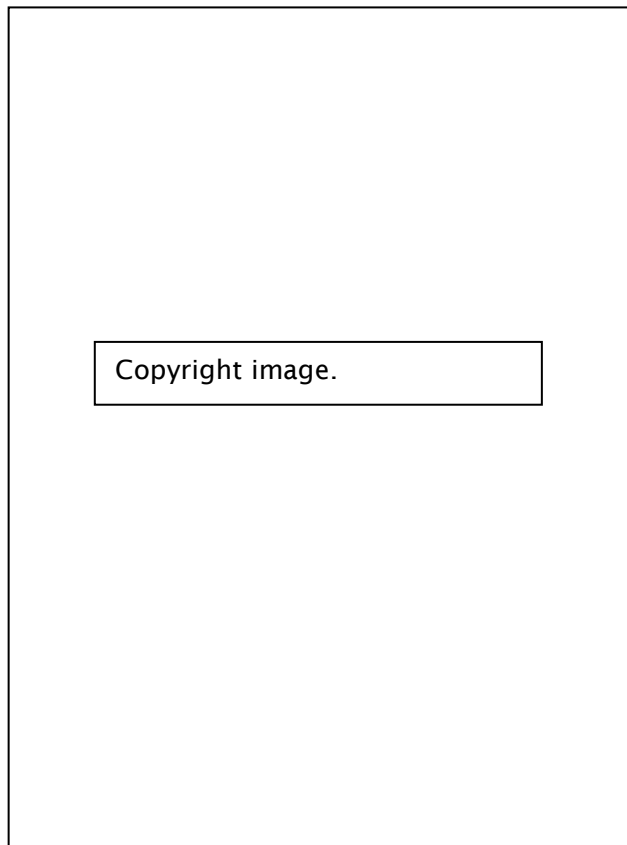


Figure 80 Sketch of the gardens before Jacob's alterations. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

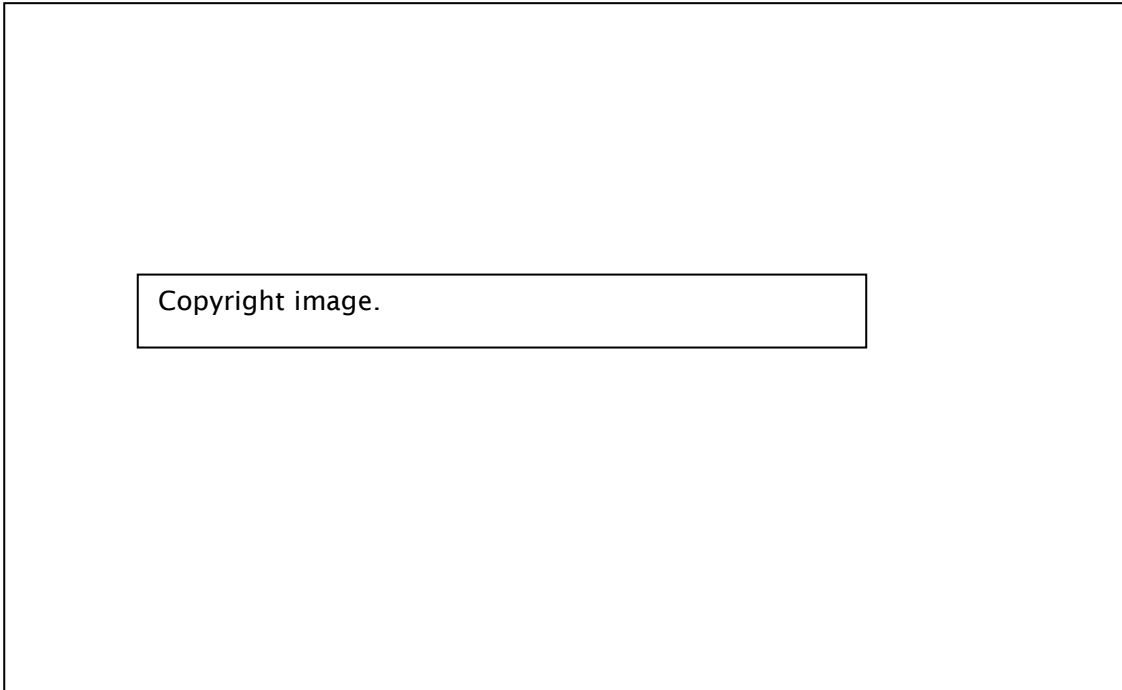


Figure 81 Design for a Doric garden temple by Richard Kittermaster, 1743. *BRO, D/EPb E33.*

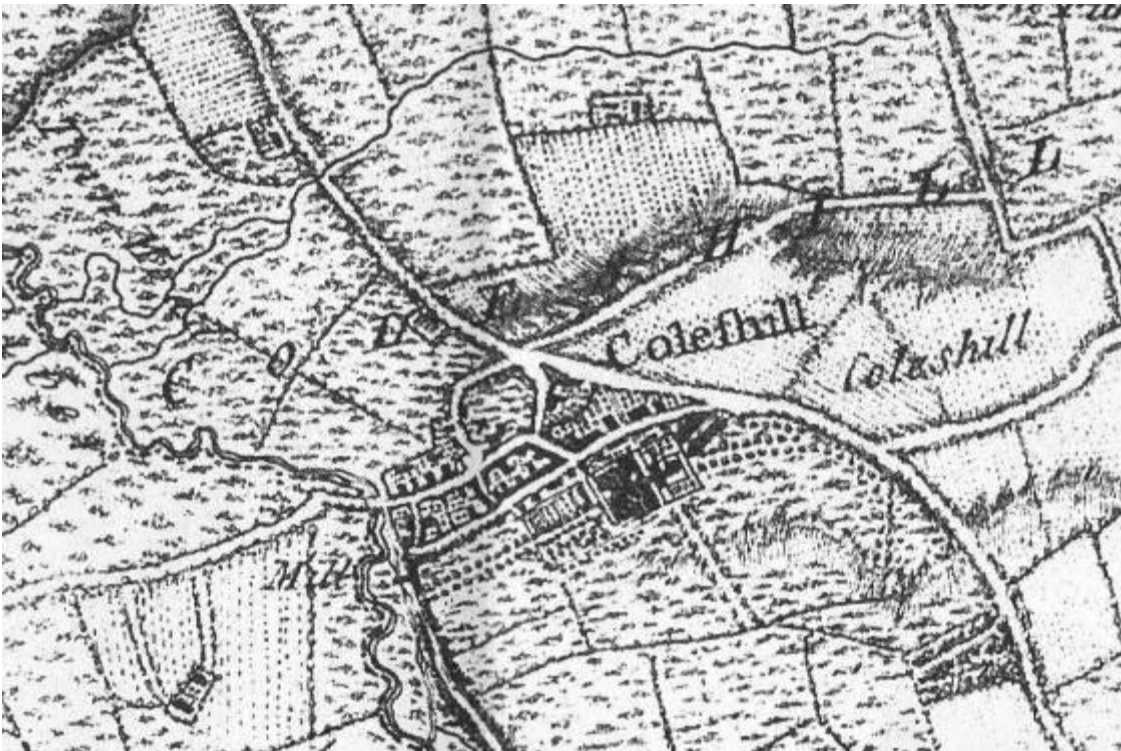


Figure 82 Detail from John Rocque's map of Berkshire, 1761.

Sir Mark's works to the gardens at Coleshill mark a transition between seventeenth-century formality and the more naturalistic landscape style adopted by Jacob in his alterations to the grounds later in the eighteenth century. Jacob pursued the classicising agenda according to late eighteenth-century taste which rejected any underlying geometry in favour of the open picturesque informality made popular by Lancelot "Capability" Brown in the 1750s. He set about removing what remained of the seventeenth-century terraced gardens and courts around the house to create a more natural landscape setting in place of the formality of the avenues, gravel walks and terraces. Jacob also sought to transform the wider landscape, planting strategic clumps of trees to create interesting prospects, moving earth to alter contours and create variety, and constructing a new ha-ha which opened out the relationship between the house and the wider landscape. An old village thoroughfare was re-routed in the 1780s to enlarge the park and distance the house from the public road and the village itself.

Simpson's survey map of 1775 shows modifications which reveal Jacob's emerging ideas about altering the landscape setting of the house (Figure 83). It shows a revised route for the village road along with proposals to rearrange the stable yard and alter the approach to the house by concealing it from view with a small 'hook' in the drive at the entrance.<sup>481</sup> At the Quarter Sessions in 1781 a licence was granted to close the old road and divert the route along the Faringdon turnpike road.<sup>482</sup> This was plotted out on a map which showed the existing road that was to be closed running alongside the house and terraced gardens (Figure 84). Ostensibly this new arrangement was to be more 'commodious to the public' but it also pushed the village further from the house, demolishing cottages along the way to enlarge the park. At the same time Jacob proposed altering footways across his land on the basis that it improved public convenience. This included removing public access from a curiously named lane called 'Egypt' to the south-west, and he made a new footway at his own expense that was more distant from the house.<sup>483</sup> A sketch map of his scheme for the grounds in 1788 shows the revised position of the road through the village with new coachways and a newly laid-out stable yard (Figure 85).<sup>484</sup> This scheme was largely complete by 1797. A coach road brought visitors from the turnpike road down an undulating wooded route to a turning circle in the front of the house, whilst another entrance led into the stable yard to the side. In this way the house was hidden from view until one was almost

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<sup>481</sup> BRO, D/EPb P3.

<sup>482</sup> BRO, D/EPb E24, Quarter Sessions licence order, 1781. This route was largely recreated when a new road was built to link the model farm constructed in the 1850s with the stable yard. Plans for this road can be found at BRO, D/EPb acc4968 A7.

<sup>483</sup> BRO, D/EPb E24.

<sup>484</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, scheme for the grounds at Coleshill, Aug 29 1788.

upon it, subverting its axial symmetry. The side approach passed between the old offices (the Clock House) and the new service annex into the newly laid-out stable yard. The old stable block (a building which Sally Jeffery identified as still standing in a ruinous state) were remodelled in 1788 and their orientation reversed by opening new doors on the north side.<sup>485</sup> Various seventeenth-century gate piers and niches were relocated at this time to mark new approaches, including one pair from the Fore Court moved to the road (Figure 86, Figure 87). The great piers with busts in niches were relocated around 1780 from the Green Court to the turnpike road and hung with oak gates, their most ornamental fronts placed not in public view but facing inwards to the house and park (Figure 88).<sup>486</sup> As Jeffery has pointed out, these piers were purely for show in their new location because the new ha-ha was dug in front of them.<sup>487</sup> The seventeenth-century piers were believed to be the work of Jones, and were valued features of the new arrangement. Jacob cautioned his estate team that ‘nothing should be let grow which will cut against and hurt the free stone work of the piers’.<sup>488</sup>

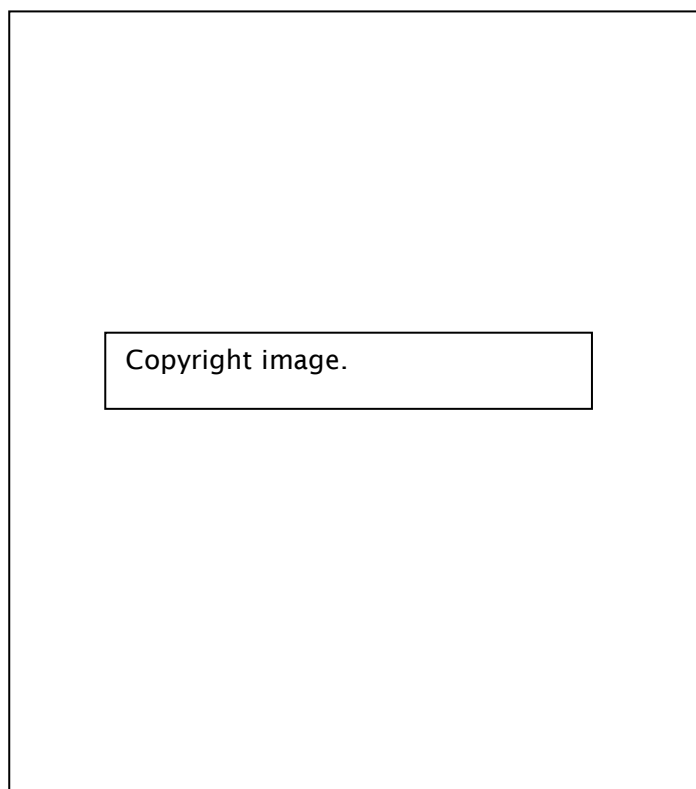


Figure 83 Detail of William Simpson's survey map of Coleshill of 1775. *BRO, D/EPb P3*.

<sup>485</sup> For works to the stables, see *BRO, D/EPb A7/14*. See also Jeffery, 'The House in the Cucumber Garden'.

<sup>486</sup> *BRO, D/EPb A7/8*, accounts 1777-1801.

<sup>487</sup> Jeffery, 'Gardens and Courtyards', p. 123.

<sup>488</sup> *BRO, D/EPb E26/2*, instructions to Maurice Ivernay.



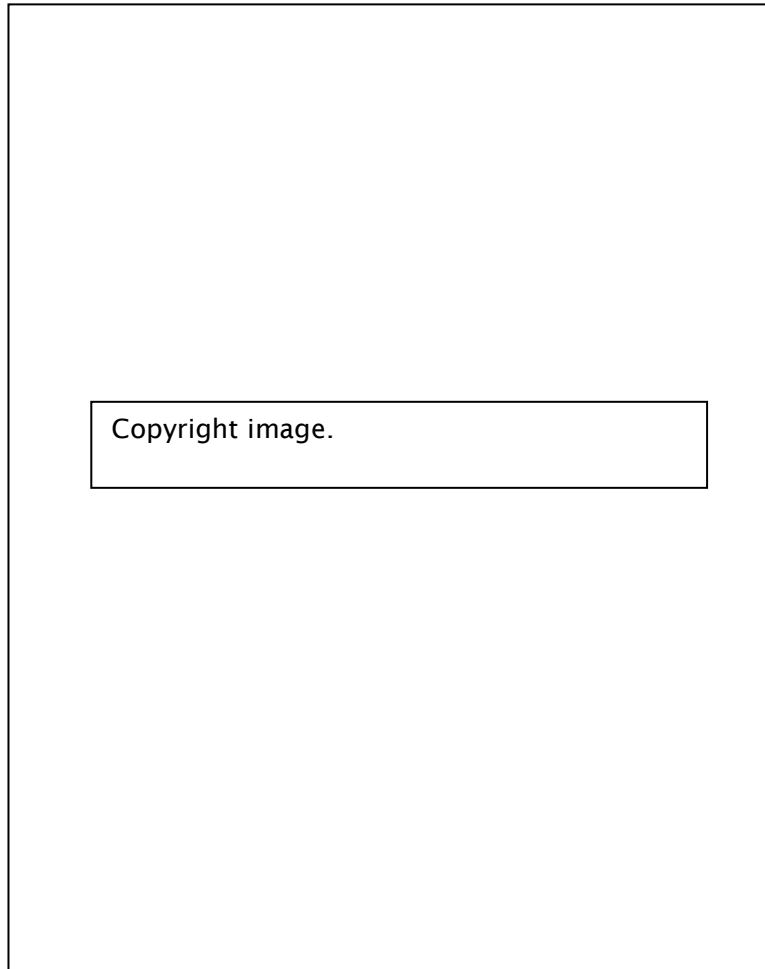


Figure 84 Detail of a Quarter Sessions map, 1781 . *BRO, D/EPb E24.*



Figure 85 Jacob's scheme for the grounds at Coleshill, 1788. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

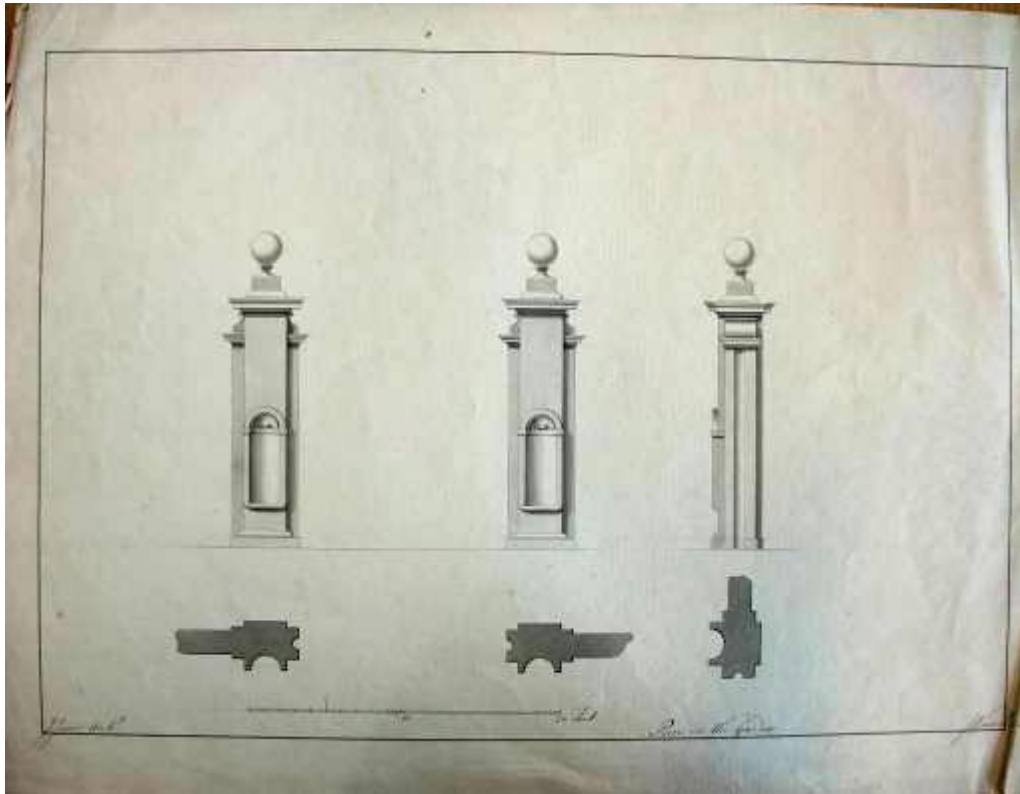


Figure 86 Seventeenth-century piers drawn by Isaac Ware. *WSA, 1946 Coleshill Drawings.*



Figure 87 Piers as they are now on the coach road created by Jacob. *Karen Fielder.*



Figure 88 The Great Piers on the road. © *Country Life Picture Library*.

In 1781 the terraced gardens and courts still broadly survived, but these were soon to disappear as Jacob's remodelling scheme progressed. Estate workers undertook extensive earthworks to level, sink and raise the ground around the house over a period of more than twenty years to alter the contours of the land and create informal variety. Much of this work is documented in a series of instructions from Jacob along with worksheets accompanied by sketches that served as reports by the steward Maurice Ivernay to the absent Lord whilst he resided at Longford.<sup>489</sup> For part of this time before William took up residence at Coleshill Jacob's half brother, Bartholemew, stayed at the house. To the north-east the Green Court was levelled in 1796 and grassed over so that the greensward continued up to the house. This created an open vista aided by the new ha-ha dug around the northern perimeter of the park (Figure 89). Parts of the old ha-ha in this area were filled in. The ground to the north and around the south-east of the house was levelled in such a way as to create continuity with the ground to the south-west. The old terraced gardens were dismantled, the former kitchen garden covered over, and a new ha-ha dug out. Sir Mark's garden features were removed, including the 'sounding house', a reference perhaps to the grotto. The basin that was central to the water features was filled in, a new cold bath

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<sup>489</sup> BRO, D/EPb E25, E26.

and ice house were built, and the old pigeon house was pulled down (Figure 90, Figure 91).

The formal avenues of trees that had radiated out from the house across the park were replaced with an informal planting scheme of perimeter belts, strategically positioned clumps and individual trees to create interesting prospects. The Verge existed in a vestigial form but was planted up by Jacob around the northern and eastern edge of the park from around 1796 'as a source of amusement, when things of that nature were capable of amusing me', with a walk along it (Figure 92).<sup>490</sup> A design by Jacob for a garden seat in the form of a temple, adorned with classical medallions and statues taken from the avenues of the gardens was destined for a corner of the Verge to delight those who ventured out there (Figure 93).<sup>491</sup> The predominant trees were English hardwood varieties - elm, oak and beech - slow growing trees which the landscape designer Humphrey Repton associated with long-established English families.<sup>492</sup> However there were some fast-growing trees including Scotch firs, and in 1826 William Cobbett noted a locust tree planted some 40 years previously when Jacob was laying out the new grounds which he perhaps planted as a specimen.<sup>493</sup> Pollards were out of keeping with a naturalised landscape, and Jacob gave instructions for one that was visible from the steps of the house to be cut down in 1800.<sup>494</sup> By 1805 Bartholemew reported to his brother that 'In truth, I am pleased with everything that has been done, and not least so with what nature has achieved, for the growth of the trees has been great'.<sup>495</sup> He added, 'I have long been partial to Coleshill. I think now I feel myself more than ever so'.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts, letter from Lord Radnor to his son, 15 April 1814.

<sup>491</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59.

<sup>492</sup> Williamson and Bellamy, *Property and Landscape*, p. 196.

<sup>493</sup> Cobbett, p. 419. In 1824 Viscount Folkestone acquired some locust trees from Cobbett with which he created large clumps as part of a plantation at Coleshill. Other trees included chestnuts, elms, ashes, oaks and beeches. See Cobbett, pp. 417-18.

<sup>494</sup> BRO, D/EPb E26/1, Instructions to Maurice Ivernay.

<sup>495</sup> WSA, 1946 Family Letters, letter from Bartholomew to Lord Radnor, 16 June 1805.

<sup>496</sup> WSA, 1946 Family Letters, letter from Bartholomew to Lord Radnor, 16 June 1805.

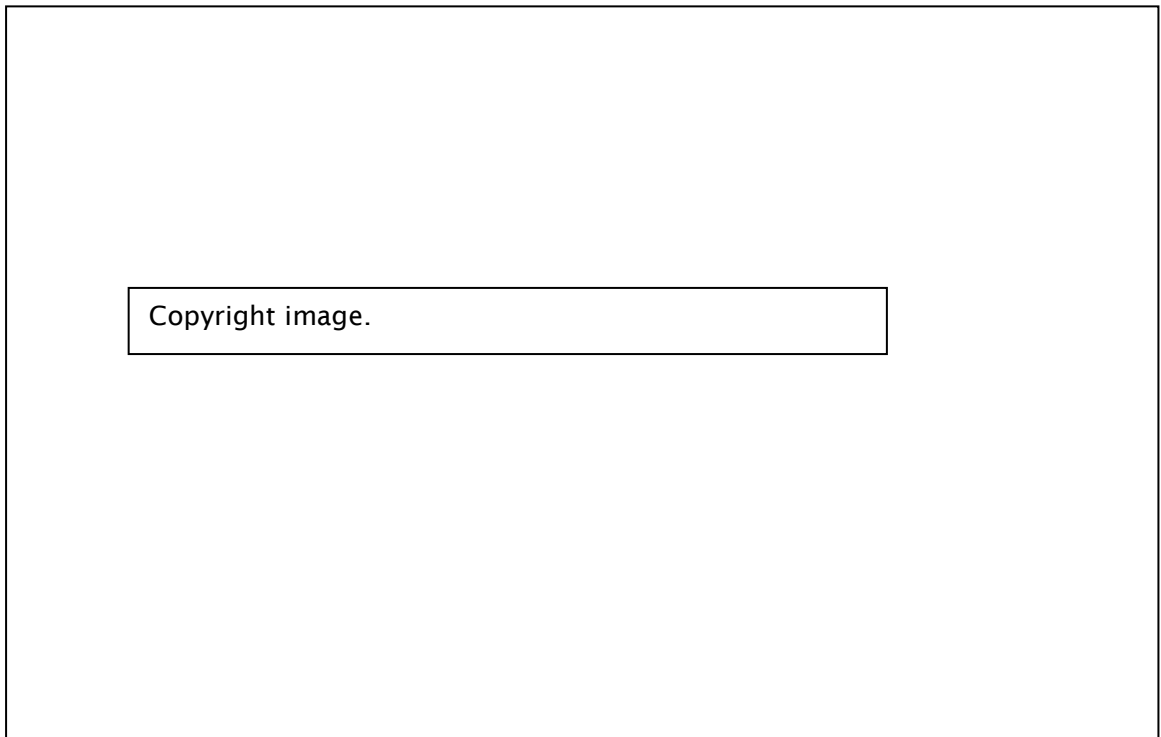


Figure 89 Report on progress with ground works on north-east side, 1799. *BRO, D/EPb E25.*

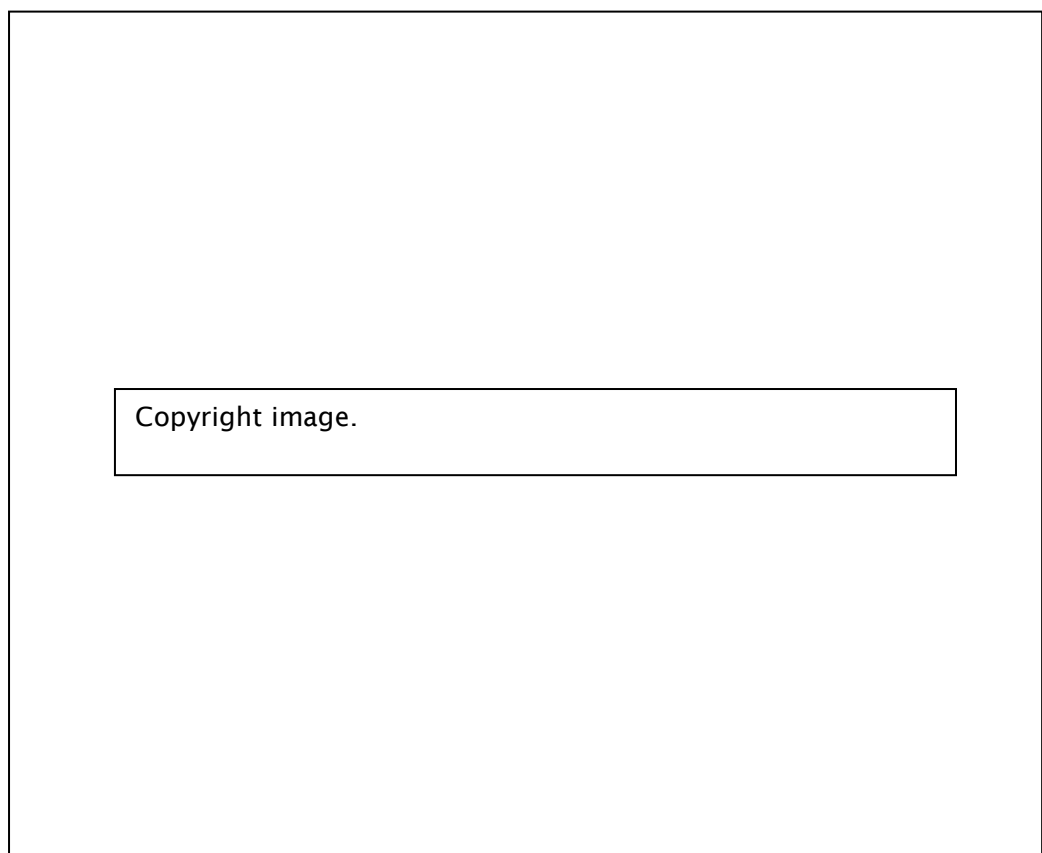
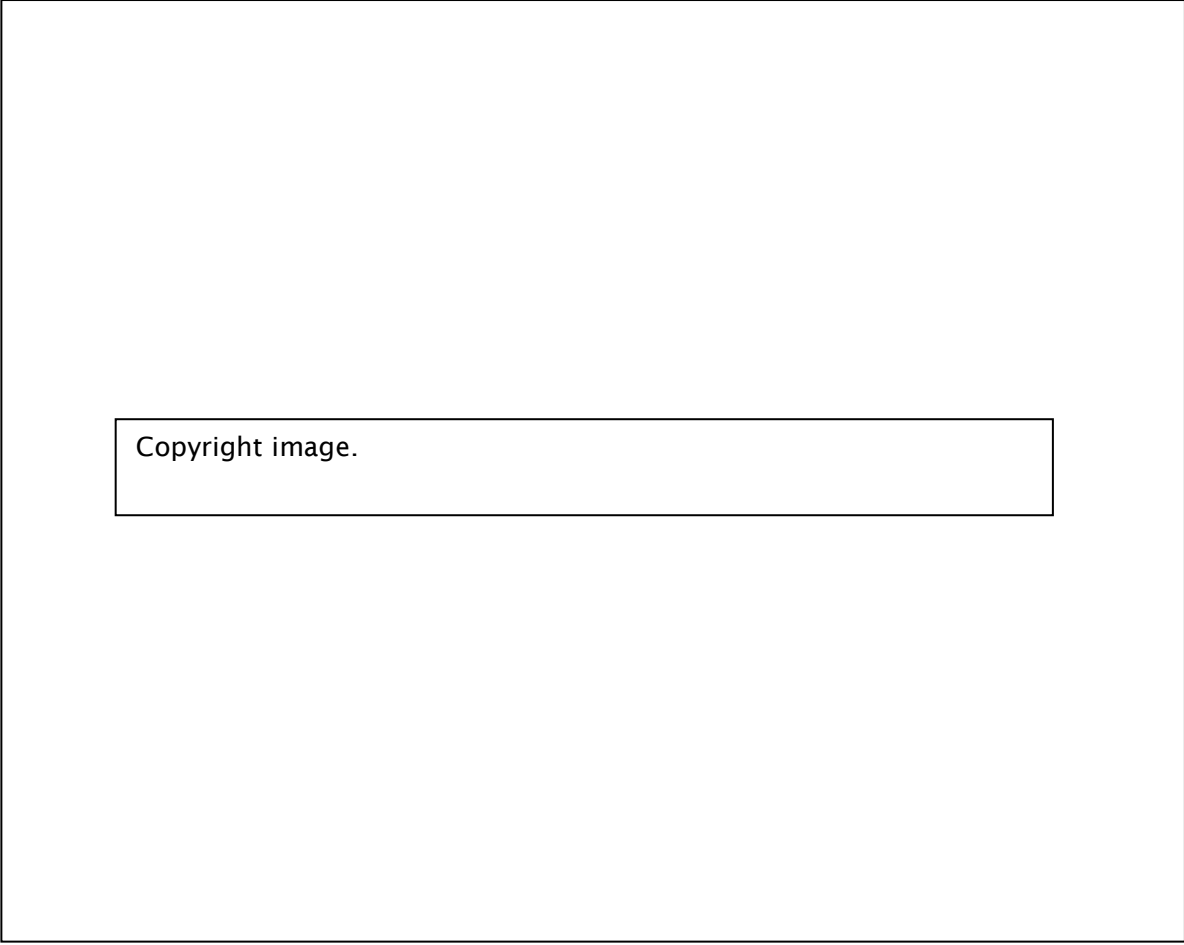
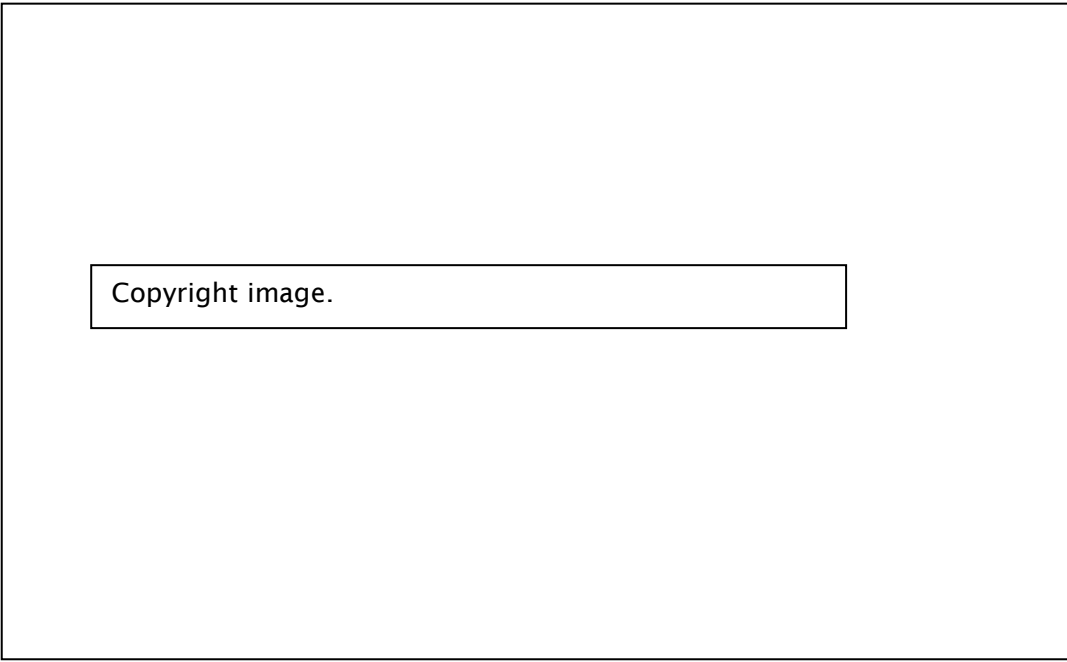


Figure 90 Report on the scheme for the south-west garden side, 1796. *BRO, D/EPb E25.*



Copyright image.

Figure 91 Report on progress in the old gardens, 1800. *BRO, D/EPb E25.*



Copyright image.

Figure 92 Report on progress of plantations in the Verge and Cuckoo Pen, 1807. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

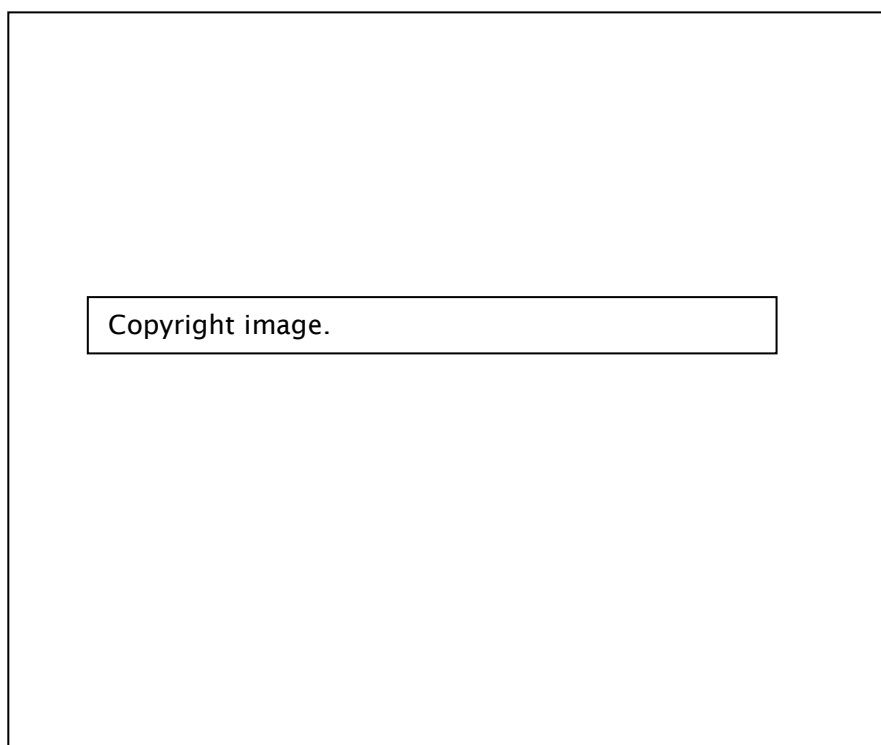


Figure 93 Jacob's design for a seat in the Verge. *BRO, D/EPb E59*.

These new arrangements radically changed the visual and symbolic relationship between the village and the house, creating a more private and secluded setting by isolating the mansion in the park where once it could be seen as part of the village. Furthermore the informality of the revised landscape design at Coleshill which removed formal avenues of trees and geometric terraces was a rejection of axuality that to some extent mirrored the growing desire for informality within the house itself. The earlier dominance of the axial principal rooms (the ground floor saloon and first floor great dining room) was replaced by an arrangement more suited to new forms of social interaction and family life. Jacob created a new dining room on the ground floor which in part replaced the function of the stately first floor dining parlour. Indeed by 1833 the ground floor saloon had become a library and the great dining parlour contained nothing but a pair of bookcases, some cases of stuffed birds and some drawers of minerals.<sup>497</sup>

Much as Sir Mark had regarded the house as a focus for his garden soundscape, so Jacob was also mindful of the house in laying out his new landscape park. He was particularly concerned to precisely lay out the view of the park from the house, and took an active role in the long term planning and management of that view. Between

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<sup>497</sup> *BRO, D/EPb F30*, general inventory 1833. The saloon was probably converted by William, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Radnor to accommodate the large library of books that he had collected.

1795 and 1798 he re-routed part of the river Cole to make it more visible from the house, altering the County and Parish boundaries between Berkshire and Wiltshire accordingly (Figure 94).<sup>498</sup> He also left instructions to 'lay out the view from the House to the Bridge'.<sup>499</sup> In 1795 he plotted out the trees as they appeared from a fixed point from the garden side of the house, in order to 'fix from time to time which should be removed'. He revised this plan in July 1807 to indicate which trees remained at that point (Figure 95).<sup>500</sup> In 1792 he created a gothic 'eye-catcher', Strattenborough Castle or Castle Farm, which lay beyond the park but was visible from the rooftop of the house. This comprised a working farm concealed behind a tall castellated facade with sham towers to the north facing towards the house. The careful use of materials implied great antiquity as if it were a repaired ruin, and included an authentic eleventh-century tympanum. A design for a new gothic-styled pigeon house dated 1788 indicated that it was to be placed on high ground west of Cuckoo Pen facing west, where it would have been visible from the house, although it is not clear if this was ever built.<sup>501</sup>

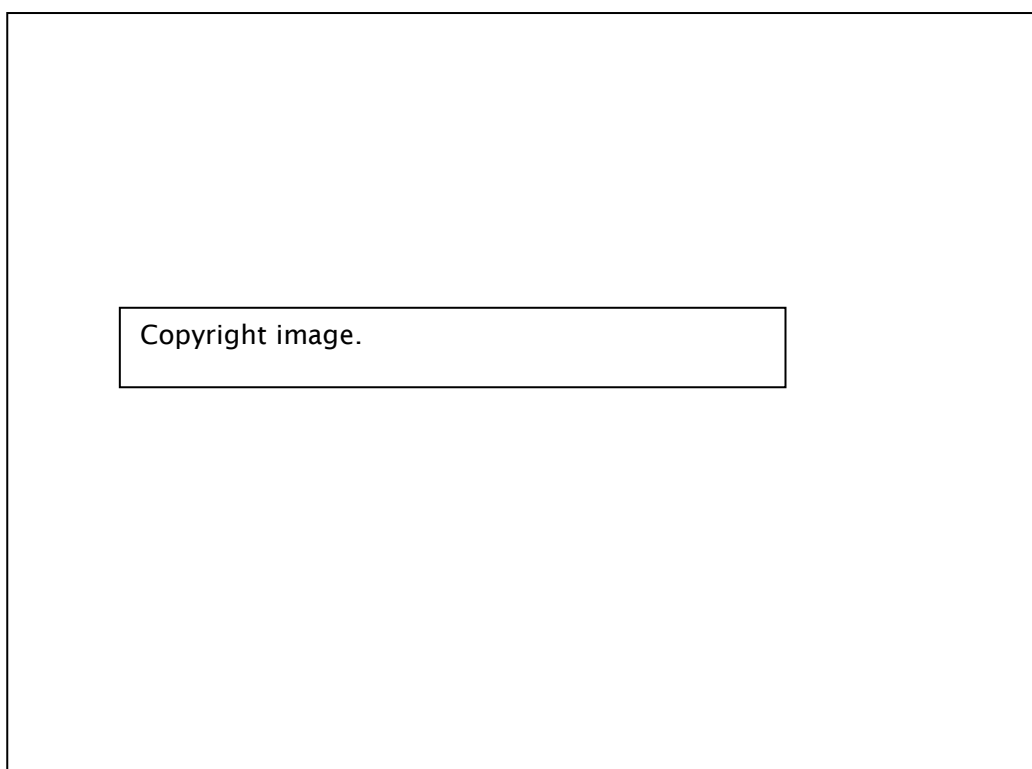


Figure 94 Scheme for altering the county and parish boundaries and to make the river more visible from the house, 1798. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

<sup>498</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, Scheme for moving the County & Parish Bounds.

<sup>499</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, Things to be done at Coleshill.

<sup>500</sup> BRO, D/EPb E59, Relative situation of the trees in the back front at Coleshill.

<sup>501</sup> BRO, D/EPb E26.



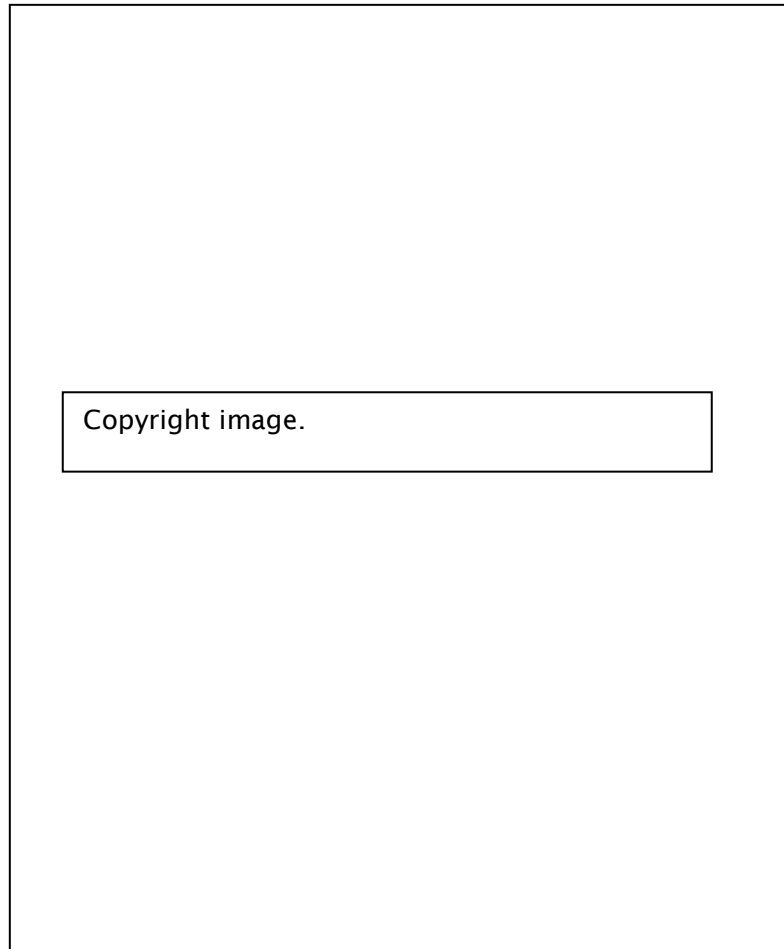


Figure 95 The situation of trees seen from a fixed point at the house, 1795. *BRO, D/EPb E59.*

The archives contain many references that point to Jacob's concern with views of the gardens and landscape from the house, rather than with views towards it. Like Sir Mark and his soundscape, Jacob regarded alterations to the gardens as intimately connected with the house. He could experience the view privately from his own domain, allowing his eye to range out across the estate and the wider countryside. Coleshill House was inherently designed as a place from which to gaze out to the surrounding landscape with its lofty position, its rooftop terrace and its cupola. This arrangement was not typical of new houses that were built at the end of the eighteenth century, and indeed many older houses had their cupolas removed because they frequently caused structural problems to the roof.<sup>502</sup> However at Coleshill the cupola remained a defining feature of the house which the owners nurtured with frequent repairs and regular maintenance. Not only was the house visually dominant in the landscape, but it also commanded the landscape around by the authority of visual surveillance.

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<sup>502</sup> The cupola at Kingston Lacy was removed in the early eighteenth century, but later reinstated. See Anthony Mitchell, *Kingston Lacy* (London: National Trust, 1987), p. 57.

In 1801, when Jacob's landscaping scheme was broadly complete, John Britton described the new landscape in the Berkshire volume of his *Beauties of England*:

The grounds have lately undergone a complete alteration, and been laid out under the direction of the Earl of Radnor, according to the present taste in landscape gardening. They abound with pleasing scenery, and are diversified by that inequality of surface which seems requisite to render the landscape either picturesque or beautiful.<sup>503</sup>

Edward Mogg's edition of *Paterson's Roads* of 1824 also praised the new grounds at Coleshill:

The elegant mansion was designed by the celebrated Inigo Jones, and is the most perfect specimen of architecture erected under the superintendence of that great master. It is a fine elevation in the form of an oblong square, pleasantly situated on a lawn. [...] The park and grounds are laid out with great taste, according to the present system of landscape gardening, and its varied surface adds diversity to the scene, assisted by the meandering of the river Cole. From many parts of the grounds, the beauty of the landscape is heightened by a fine view of the busy town of Highworth.<sup>504</sup>

Jacob's relandscaping at Coleshill was admired for conforming to the established taste for informal greensward and picturesque variety, and it created a more pleasing prospect of the house in a naturalised setting. It is to be expected that he should seek to adopt the fashionable landscape park in accordance with the common standards of taste of the elite. However it is notable that these alterations functioned alongside interventions that he made in the house itself to reinforce a semblance of authority over the local landscape and its people. This takes us back to the visual and textual renderings of the house by Britton and Neale, which not only privileged picturesque aesthetics but also asserted the vital connection between the house and its landscape and between the owner and ancestral title over the land. By altering the setting of the house Jacob could connect Coleshill to an apparently natural and long established landscape. The revised landscape shifted the experience of being at the house itself, so that it was possible to gaze out from it across the park and beyond from privileged viewing points that denoted possession of the wider place.

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<sup>503</sup> Britton, I (1801), pp. 131-32.

<sup>504</sup> Daniel Paterson, *Paterson's Roads*, ed. by Edward Mogg, 17<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Longman, 1824), p. 130.

## CHAPTER 3: 'The Most Regretted of All Lost Houses': Coleshill and the National Trust

### Introduction

On visiting the Coleshill estate today the site of the house can be found on a raised terrace contained behind estate fencing, old masonry terracing and boundary walls. It lies within private grounds belonging to the tenants of what is now known as the Clock House (Figure 96). The Clock House was built in the seventeenth century and served as an ancillary building for the main house, and was at one time the laundry and brewhouse. Saskia Lewis has noted this reversal of fortune which now sees the Clock House dominating over the empty site of the mansion that it formerly served.<sup>505</sup> She refers to the families who live there now as 'the informal guardians of the immediate estate'.<sup>506</sup> Indeed the tenants of the Clock House harnessed the visual language of Sir Mark's time to assert this revised relationship by planting a new avenue of lime trees in the 1960s that drew the gaze southwards, passing presumptuously across what would have been the garden façade of the mansion.<sup>507</sup> The footprint of Coleshill House is marked out with the low hedges of a garden planted and maintained by the tenants. The surrounding park provides pasture for one of the estate farms, and those using the footpaths across the grounds pass by perhaps oblivious to the place where the stone edifice of the house once commanded the landscape. Yet to stand at the site itself there remains a palpable sense of the absent house. This arises not simply from the physical remnants of the building such as the piles of moss-covered masonry rubble or the standing structures such as the monumental gate piers that point to something of substance having once been there (Figure 97). The site has a story to tell, a narrative that engages the viewer and prompts the imagination to seek out the absent building. It invites us to question what happened at this place. Why did Coleshill House become what the Trust's Architectural Historian Tim Knox once referred to as 'this most regretted of all lost houses'?<sup>508</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Saskia Lewis, 'Clock House', in *Architectural Voices*, ed. by Littlefield and Lewis, pp. 104-115 (p. 107).

<sup>506</sup> Lewis, p. 113.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> NTRA, Tim Knox to Assistant Historic Buildings Representative, Thames and Chilterns, 12 June 1998.



Figure 96 The site of Coleshill House, 2008. *Karen Fielder.*



Figure 97 Pile of loose masonry from the demolished house. *Karen Fielder.*

This chapter addresses the circumstances of the loss of Coleshill House, and examines the impact of the loss on its historiography. It takes us back to issues of the alteration and preservation of a canonical work, as the house passes from habitable structure to ruin to a mere phantom. It considers how in the mid-twentieth century the path that was taken between these two mutually dependent modes of intervention led to the demise of the house. The archives of Sir Mark Pleydell and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor have shown how they navigated between alteration and conservation in their approaches to Coleshill, in order to carry it forward for future generations and resist the threat of obsolescence. This allows us to consider how they constructed their relationship with the house, and the extent to which their approaches correlate with historiographic interpretations of it as a canonical work. This chapter confronts another episode in the history of the house where the archives demonstrate how alternative approaches to the notion of Coleshill as an iconic building materially impacted upon it, by examining the point at which it was lost. The archives offer a route to explaining why a house considered to be axiomatic to British architectural history vanished. It was more than a stray burning ember that determined its fate, as substantial remains were still standing after the fire. Had different choices been made the ruins might have been repaired or restored rather than razed to the ground.

The chapter sets out with an investigation of the proposed acquisition of the house by the National Trust in an effort to secure its future, tracing the subsequent events that led to its demolition in January 1953, and the aftermath of this action. I suggest that the particular circumstances of the loss continue to colour our ideas about the house and its meanings, and furthermore that this influences our experience of being at the site of the absent house today. Other houses suffered a similar fate to Coleshill, including Dunsland House and Clumber Park, both architecturally important houses damaged by fire and subsequently demolished in the twentieth century.<sup>509</sup> The sites of both these houses are in the care of the National Trust, and both retain material remnants and parkland settings that provide visual clues to the lost buildings. The destruction of Coleshill however had a particular resonance that rendered its loss, for some at least, as a peculiarly profound and tragic event. I have already referred in a previous chapter to the impact of Coleshill's demise on scholarly texts and published expert opinions, where hyperbolic language expressed the perceived profundity of the loss. Summerson's words of 1953, published within months of the demolition, linger

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<sup>509</sup> Dunsland was a Tudor house that was destroyed by fire in 1967. The estate remains in National Trust ownership, and, as at Coleshill, the stables and coach house survived. Clumber Park was an eighteenth-century house rebuilt following a fire in 1879, and further damaged by fire in 1912. It was subsequently abandoned and demolished in 1938. The park was acquired by the National Trust in 1946.

as an epitaph to the house: ‘Massive, serene and thoughtful, absolutely without affectation, Coleshill was a statement of the utmost value to British architecture’.<sup>510</sup>

In this chapter I will draw on a different set of archives from those used previously in order to explore how Coleshill was construed as an architecturally significant work during the 1940s and 1950s. A rich archive has survived comprising records of conservation bodies, government papers and the private correspondence of those involved in the proposed acquisition of the house and its subsequent demolition. This allows me to trace in detail Coleshill’s place in what came to be regarded as a significant moment in British conservation history. But whilst the building has vanished and has been rendered temporally remote, its place nonetheless persists in the present, and this is more than simply an empty site in the sense of a fixed and precise geographical location.<sup>511</sup> The site is experienced in terms of a perceptible narrative of loss and the ineffable presence of the phantasmal house which invokes a nostalgic longing for it.<sup>512</sup> For the National Trust, this raises perplexing questions regarding its approach to the care and interpretation of the site as a historic place with both tangible and intangible remnants, but no coherent standing building.

The complex circumstances surrounding Coleshill’s association with the Trust and the eventual demolition of the house can be considered both in terms of its own unique narrative but also in relation to contested visions of the wider role of the historic built environment in the national sphere from the mid-1940s until the early 1950s. As Nigel Whiteley points out, ‘a major change occurs when you claim something is part of a nation’s heritage, as opposed to being part of a nation’s history, because it implies the building [...] is significant in somehow contributing positively to the construction of your present day identity’.<sup>513</sup> Peter Mandler and others have examined how country houses were transformed into objects of national heritage during the twentieth century, and how these buildings were implicated in the continuities and discontinuities of national identity.<sup>514</sup> John Cornforth traces the origins of this

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<sup>510</sup> Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 138.

<sup>511</sup> Edward Casey makes the distinction between ‘site’ and ‘place’ which is appropriate here in ‘The World of Nostalgia’, *Man and World*, 20 (1987), 361-84 (pp. 363-64). See also Laurajane Smith on place in her *Uses of Heritage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), esp. pp. 74-79.

<sup>512</sup> For a discussion of the association of place and nostalgia, see Casey, ‘The World and Nostalgia’; Dylan Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>513</sup> Whiteley, ‘Modern Architecture, Heritage and Englishness’, p. 222.

<sup>514</sup> There is a large body of literature on the rise of heritage, typically identifying it as a late twentieth-century phenomenon associated with modernity. See for example, Hewison, *The*

transformation back to the late 1920s. He asserts the role of *Country Life* magazine in effecting this change, referring to an article of 1930 which stated that ‘our great country houses, with their treasures of art, their wide-spreading parks and delightful gardens, have now come to be considered as national and not merely personal heritages’.<sup>515</sup> Mandler refers to this move from private home to public symbol as the nationalisation of the country house.<sup>516</sup> Against this background the modern system of heritage protection took tentative steps during the tumultuous years of the mid-century. From this time architectural historians were seen as promoting the cause of preservation by celebrating British architecture framed in terms of national heritage.<sup>517</sup> Indeed for Giles Worsley the most dramatic change to the country house of the twentieth century was the introduction of state planning controls which were largely intended to protect these historic buildings from demolition or significant alteration.<sup>518</sup> Coincidental to these changing perceptions of the country house was a growing appreciation of classical architecture as the twentieth century progressed, reflected in the publication of volumes such as Summerson’s *Georgian London* (1945) and the founding of the Georgian Group in 1937. This growing interest in classicism and particularly the aesthetics of Palladianism has been linked not only to the conservation movement but also to architectural modernism.<sup>519</sup>

This chapter considers the complex relationship of Coleshill to developing notions of architectural heritage that emerged at this time. The archives demonstrate how Coleshill was re-imagined as a heritage object of exceptional national importance as the world around it changed, and how in so doing the house was drawn into a new cultural discourse of heritage. Laurajane Smith identifies ‘authorised heritage discourse’ as a form of social practice frequently linked to ideas about national identity

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*Heritage Industry*; Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*; Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*; Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: the National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London: Verso, 1985). For an account which challenges this temporally specific view of heritage, see David C. Harvey, ‘Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7 (2001), pp. 319-38.

<sup>515</sup> Quoted in Cornforth, p. 21.

<sup>516</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘Nationalising the Country House’, in *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain*, ed. by Michael Hunter (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), pp. 99-114.

<sup>517</sup> For a general account of architectural history in the context for the development of heritage protection, see Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History*. Specifically for country houses, see Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*.

<sup>518</sup> Worsley, *England’s Lost Houses*, p. 24.

<sup>519</sup> See for example Payne, ‘Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism’.

which privileges expert opinion in order to naturalise certain assumptions about cultural values and heritage.<sup>520</sup> The English country house provided a focus for authorised heritage discourse that emerged in the twentieth century, and it became what Smith views as ‘one of the iconic authorised images of Western heritage’.<sup>521</sup> As Coleshill was struck by fire and debates ensued as to its fate, the house was increasingly articulated using the language and rhetoric of heritage conservation by those engaged in what was ultimately a futile struggle to save it. Wider concerns about heritage and identity discontinuity therefore provide a context for examining some of the contradictions in the fundamental positions about the nature of Coleshill as a thing to be preserved in the mid-century.

The discourses of history and heritage have a complex and problematic relationship with one another which is relevant to considerations of the historiography of Coleshill at this time. Although the notion of intangible heritage is increasingly acknowledged, in its traditional Western sense heritage is generally taken to reside in the material world. History on the other hand is understood to be concerned with the more abstract idea of knowledge.<sup>522</sup> There is a large body of literature on the nature and meaning of heritage, and some influential authors on the subject have framed heritage as a subversive force that falsifies and corrupts history, and which constructs a distorted elitist and institutionalised form of national memory. History on the other hand is justified by its striving for truth based on verifiable facts. For example, in fashioning myths of national identity, Lowenthal argues that heritage ‘mandates *misreading* of the past’.<sup>523</sup> It achieves this through exaggeration, omission, invention and forgetting. He goes on to say that ‘heritage everywhere not only tolerates but thrives on historical error. Falsified legacies are integral to group identity and uniqueness.’<sup>524</sup> It is not my intention to debate the relative merits of history and heritage here, but it is necessary to recognise heritage as a discourse that is distinct from, but not unrelated to, history. Coleshill’s historical texts and narratives are essential to its reconstruction as a heritage object. As Forty has indicated, language is required in order to create the shared meanings which transform material objects into heritage.<sup>525</sup> By the 1940s

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<sup>520</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*. See also Markus and Cameron, esp. pp. 120-38.

<sup>521</sup> Smith, p. 116.

<sup>522</sup> John R. Gillis, ‘Heritage and History: Twins Separated at Birth’, *Reviews in American History* 25 (1997), 375-78. Also David Lowenthal, ‘Fabricating Heritage’, *History and Memory*, 10 (1998), 5-24; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 259-73.

<sup>523</sup> Lowenthal, ‘Fabricating Heritage’, p. 9.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>525</sup> Forty, p. 120. This point is also made by Markus and Cameron, p. 121.



Coleshill's published texts had positioned the house as a canonical work in relation to contemporary architectural values, and as a highpoint of English architectural achievement. The house could not have been promoted as a fitting emblem of national heritage without texts which established its value and provided the context in which it could be experienced as culturally meaningful in a national arena.<sup>526</sup> Coleshill had already assumed a specific and mythical position in genealogies of British architectural history that singled it out from other country houses as something extraordinary. Historical texts and the values they espoused were therefore appropriated for new purposes to establish a political role for the house as a heritage object.

However, if heritage is a tangible, material thing, and indeed built heritage is tangible almost by definition, then the razing of the house in 1953 was a cathartic moment in terms of its value as a heritage object. It consigned Coleshill to the realms of history where it could reside only in historical memory. When the site of the house was marginalised in the 1960s by its incorporation into the private garden of the Clock House this action implied a partial negation of the cultural value of the site as national heritage, placing it in a kind of heritage limbo. This presents a dilemma for the National Trust today, inasmuch as it raises the question of how far the site of the absent house can be regarded as an object of cultural heritage, and how the Trust should respond to its duty of care towards it. Indeed this dilemma provides one motivation for this doctoral research project which was commissioned by the Trust in response to specific conservation objectives for the Coleshill property. The site of the 'iconic house', together with the garden and landscape, are identified as the most significant 'conservation features' of the Coleshill estate and it remains a key aim for the property that 'the House site has found some purpose or perspective'.<sup>527</sup>

Furthermore the site occupies an uneasy space between the categories of building and landscape, being neither one nor the other. It lacks standing remains or ruins in the conventional sense, but there are scattered material fragments, hidden below-ground structures, and remote built and landscape features that both point towards it and to which the site itself points. Notionally, but not visually, it continues to provide a focus for the estate. It therefore sits awkwardly in conventional categories of heritage discourse, and this too challenges approaches to the conservation management and heritage interpretation of the site. The Trust faces questions of how to manage and conserve the physical remnants of the house, as well as how to communicate the many meanings of the site in order to inform and engage visitors to Coleshill today.

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<sup>526</sup> Forty, p. 121.

<sup>527</sup> Set out in the property's Conservation Performance Indicators for 2007.

In the middle years of the twentieth century Coleshill House was the focus of a conservation dilemma that addressed the preservation of its tangible form in the name of national heritage. The archives allow us to trace the unfolding sequence of events which surrounded the efforts to secure Coleshill for posterity. For those in the know, Coleshill remains to this day a poignant reminder of the shortcomings of the embryonic national conservation framework of the period. Whilst many country houses had already been destroyed in the opening decades of the twentieth century, the loss of such a highly regarded work as Coleshill was keenly felt. It threw into sharp relief the perceived threat to national heritage and the weakness of state protection at the time. There is a sense that it was not the fire which was understood to be responsible for the destruction of Coleshill. Many believed that the house was demolished unnecessarily and that in so doing something of immeasurable value to the nation was lost. This gave rise to a nostalgic longing for the house that prevails to this day. At the time of the fire, James Lees-Milne wrote caustically that 'Coleshill has been burnt and the shell disastrously levelled to the ground. This act of vandalism can never be too strongly censured'.<sup>528</sup> Nine years later, his anger was undiminished when he wrote 'Coleshill has to the lasting discredit of our age been allowed to disappear off the face of the land'.<sup>529</sup> References to the loss of the house are frequently tinged with sentimentality and a keen sense of regret. In 2002 the architectural historian Hugh Massingberd wrote that, whilst gazing at photographs of Coleshill 50 years after the fire, 'I don't mind admitting that I felt overcome with emotion'.<sup>530</sup> As recently as 2003, Dr Peter Woodward, in response to an exhibition of lost houses at the Holbourne Museum in Bath, called for Coleshill to be rebuilt in order to 'to rectify an absolutely pivotal loss to English architecture'.<sup>531</sup>

The rich archival sources that relate the story of the efforts to save Coleshill present an opportunity for a close analysis of the case which contributes to a deeper understanding of this iconic building. Furthermore this analysis provides a window into attitudes to historic architecture in the prevailing political and cultural context of the mid-twentieth century, exposing nuances that impacted upon architectural preservation thereby adding to our knowledge of the period. Many of the issues raised by the case in relation to built heritage remain pertinent to conservation debates today, such as the ethics of whether to rebuild ruined historic buildings. Of particular relevance is the relationship between statutory processes and instruments of heritage

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<sup>528</sup> Lees-Milne, *The Age of Inigo Jones*, p. 216.

<sup>529</sup> James Lees-Milne, *Earls of Creation: Five Great Patrons of Eighteenth-Century Art* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1962), p. 253.

<sup>530</sup> Hugh Massingberd, 'From Des Res to Rubble', *The Spectator*, 27 July 2002, p. 4.

<sup>531</sup> Letter from Dr P. Woodward in *Country Life*, 22 May 2003, p. 88.

protection and the actual practice of preserving the historic environment. The National Trust has recently publicly intervened in government proposals for planning reforms that will directly impact upon the preservation of historic buildings and places, and it has challenged the underlying values that these reforms espouse. This resonates closely with the broader context of Coleshill's demise some 60 years ago. The drama of the destruction of Coleshill is a key element in the mythological aura of the house, but the circumstances of its loss have never fully been explored. This chapter attempts to unravel this pivotal moment and its implications in relation to wider attitudes to the historic built environment at the time through a forensic examination of the archives.

## The Acquisition Proposal

Conflicting notions of the cultural significance of Coleshill House as an object for heritage preservation began to emerge when Miss Mary Pleydell-Bouverie proposed that the National Trust might acquire the house in September 1943. The house at that time was still requisitioned, and Mary lived with her sister, the potter Katharine Pleydell-Bouverie, in a few unrequisitioned rooms.<sup>532</sup> The proposal was greeted warmly by James Lees-Milne, then secretary of the Trust's Country Houses Committee. This Committee was established in 1936 to administer the Trust's Country Houses Scheme, which was introduced with Treasury backing in the face of growing pressure from owners and campaigners concerned about the future of these houses. Until the 1930s neither government nor preservation societies had shown much interest in country houses, but increasing taxation and maintenance costs were perceived as threats to their survival. Under the terms of the Country Houses Scheme, owners could donate their houses to the Trust with certain tax benefits, principally avoiding death duties, whilst continuing to live there if they so wished.<sup>533</sup> In return, the property was to be opened to the public from time to time, at least in part. However in order for the Trust to meet the considerable costs of upkeep, it was required that houses must come either with a substantial endowment or with land capable of generating sufficient income to maintain the property, and this was frequently a stumbling block.

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<sup>532</sup> Mary and Katharine were the unmarried daughters of Duncombe Pleydell-Bouverie and his wife Maria. Their brother, Edward, was killed in November 1914. Duncombe succeeded to Coleshill House on the death of his father, Jacob 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Radnor, in 1889. When Duncombe died in 1909 under the terms of his will if his children died without issue the Coleshill estate was to be sold and divided amongst his family and his wife's family.

<sup>533</sup> For a discussion of the development of this scheme, see John Gaze, *Figures in the Landscape: A History of the National Trust* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1988), pp. 121-33.

When the scheme was first proposed in 1936 the Country Houses Committee was tasked with producing a list of the houses most worthy of preservation in collaboration with government officials in what was then the Office of Works.<sup>534</sup> The Committee was also to contact owners to see which of them might be interested in entering these arrangements. Lees-Milne visited Coleshill in 1936 when Mary's mother Mrs Maria Pleydell-Bouverie was still alive to discuss the proposed acquisition of the house, indicating that Coleshill was a desirable property for the Trust from the start.<sup>535</sup> At that time the Pleydell-Bouveries were anxious about the obligations that such a gift would entail upon the estate and nothing came of this initial proposal. The situation appeared to be unchanged in 1943 when Miss Pleydell-Bouverie and the other beneficiaries of her father's will were at first unwilling to hand over the house unless the Trust paid the market value and waived the endowment requirement.

Lees-Milne was not prepared to give up on a house he regarded as of great architectural importance easily, and he suggested that it might be possible to find someone to purchase Coleshill and at least part of the estate themselves, but who would leave the house to the Trust in their will. He had in mind Ernest Edward Cook, who had already proved to be a generous benefactor to the Trust and who was interested in acquiring country houses and estates.<sup>536</sup> Cook's agent was Captain John Burrow Hill of Whatley, Hill and Co., who was also a member of the Trust's Estates Committee.<sup>537</sup> Cook was a reclusive figure who shunned publicity and disliked direct communication, relying on Hill to act as intermediary. Hill's role, which Lees-Milne was later to refer to as 'manipulative', was to be the source of much conflict and misunderstanding in the negotiations between Cook and the Trust over Coleshill.<sup>538</sup> It was to Hill that Lees-Milne wrote indicating the Trust's hope to secure the house, setting out its importance as one of the few country houses to be 'authentically

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<sup>534</sup> Known as the Ministry of Works from 1940.

<sup>535</sup> Lees-Milne's 'Red Book' notes his visit to Coleshill in 1936 (private collection). At the time he recorded the house as being built by Roger Pratt, but designed by Inigo Jones. He later amended this to 'possibly advised by Inigo Jones'. The papers relating to the early work of the Country Houses Committee and Lees-Milne are missing in the National Trust archives. Coleshill was on a list of 400 country houses considered as of first importance drafted by the National Trust for the government in 1939. See NA HLG 103/119.

<sup>536</sup> Ernest Cook was the grandson of Thomas Cook, founder of the firm of travel agents. For an account of his relationship with the Trust see E.J.T. Collins, A.K. Giles, and J.G.K. Malleson, *Innovation and Conservation: Ernest Edward Cook and his Country Estates* (Reading, University of Reading, 1989), pp. 3-5.

<sup>537</sup> Hill had been connected with the National Trust since 1935.

<sup>538</sup> On Captain Hill, see James Lees-Milne, *People and Places: Country House Donors and the National Trust* (London: John Murray, 1992), p. 102, and Gaze, pp.102-3.

connected with Inigo Jones'. Significance was also attached to the house because it preserved 'original elevations' and 'rich interior decoration'.<sup>539</sup> Cook however was known to be primarily interested in country estates rather than specifically in houses, and it would not be the Jonesian mansion that would sway him to purchase Coleshill but the lure of the wider estate.<sup>540</sup> Lees-Milne recognised that for the arrangement to succeed the estate must therefore be available along with the house.

At first the proposal was rejected by Miss Pleydell-Bouverie, whose main concern had been the preservation of the house itself, but six months later she relented and agreed that an arrangement which included the estate could be made. On 26 April 1944, Lees-Milne returned from a visit to Coleshill in an upbeat mood, noting that the sisters were devoted to the house and estate and extremely anxious to preserve them. He reiterated to Hill that the property was ideal for Cook, with lovely land and an excellent house. Of the house he wrote, 'Built by Inigo Jones it is without exaggeration of the first importance and, without being large, one of the great country houses of England'.<sup>541</sup> With this hyperbolic language Lees-Milne sought to put Coleshill on a pedestal and assert it as a work of seminal cultural value. It is notable that Lees-Milne cast Jones as the architect of the house, despite the fact that elsewhere he recognised the role of Pratt.<sup>542</sup> This was part of Lees-Milne's strategy to reconstruct the house as a worthy object of national heritage, emphasising both its unaltered and authentic state, and claiming its Jonesian authority.

The sisters did not wish to live in the house after the war, and Lees-Milne considered that they would agree to sell the house and estate to Cook for a modest price, if they believed that these would eventually come into National Trust hands. Furthermore, Coleshill was regarded as a fitting property to mark the Trust's forthcoming 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1945. Over the coming months all seemed to progress well. Cook was open to buying the house and estate and making it over to the Trust on reasonable terms. Lees-Milne favoured finding a private tenant for the house, fearing that if it were to become a school or any other kind of institution, as was often the case with redundant country houses, it would inevitably lose much of its character and interest. In January 1945 Hill reported that a six figure sum was agreed with the sisters, and that Cook was anxious to sign the contract without delay. Hill was irritable, complaining that his assistant had collapsed from overwork and that he had broken his two best pipes, but he nonetheless prepared a report on the Coleshill property for the

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<sup>539</sup> NTCA, James Lees-Milne to Captain Hill, 4 October 1943.

<sup>540</sup> Cook acquired 17 country estates during his lifetime. See Collins, Giles and Malleson, p. 1.

<sup>541</sup> NTCA, James Lees-Milne to Captain Hill, 27 April 1944.

<sup>542</sup> For example, Lees-Milne, *The Age of Inigo Jones*, pp. 211-16.

Trust. At this point, Cook proposed to convey the house directly to the Trust but to retain the estate for life, which would be passed to the organisation on certain terms on his death.<sup>543</sup> The estate comprised 3618 acres, and other assets included 65 cottages and 350 acres of woodland.<sup>544</sup> The house was deemed by Hill to be 'very sound'. He estimated that the estate would be self-supporting even if the house was not let, and that if it was fully let a surplus of around £900 per annum would be generated. However Cook's insistence on anonymity meant that it was not possible for the Trust to fully and openly survey the estate. 'If anyone communicates with him on this subject', wrote Hill, 'I shall get the sack'.<sup>545</sup> The Trust's secretary, Donald Matheson, was under pressure to confirm the Trust's acceptance of the arrangements so that the contract could be signed, but without the benefit of an inspection of the estate he had only Hill's assurance that it would be self-supporting. He had no choice but to urge members of the Historic Buildings Committee (as the Country Houses Committee was then known) to recommend accepting the offer. In May 1945 the contract was signed passing Coleshill House and the estate into Cook's ownership, with a covenant concerning the arrangement to hand over the property to the Trust.

Differing notions of the significance of Coleshill House as a heritage object were already coming to the fore, but a detailed analysis of the archives specifically exposes how personal interests and preferences were played out in negotiations between key individuals. As we shall see, these individuals remained powerful forces in directing the unfolding events, whilst formal institutional and official frameworks for heritage protection were vague. Lees-Milne and Captain Hill were at the forefront of negotiating with Miss Pleydell-Bouverie with minimal institutional or state intervention. The different approaches to Coleshill were further amplified by clashes of personality notably between members of the Trust on one side and Hill and Cook on the other. It is Lees-Milne who emerges as Coleshill's most vociferous champion, reflecting his own personal architectural interests as well as his position of influence within the Trust. Lees-Milne was an aesthete and amateur architectural connoisseur who joined the Trust at the suggestion of Vita Sackville-West in 1936 at a time when the institution was extending its remit to country house preservation. He had developed an interest in

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<sup>543</sup> Cook was 75 by this time, and described by Hill as 'old and frail'. NTCA, correspondence and report by Captain Hill to Donald Macleod Matheson, 31 January 1945.

<sup>544</sup> It was subsequently found that due to a discrepancy on the conveyance document there was actually an additional acreage taking the total to 3817 acres, which was treated as a 'gentleman's agreement'. NTCA, correspondence between H.J.F. Smith and Anthony A. Martineau, 18 May 1948.

<sup>545</sup> NTCA, correspondence and report by Captain Hill to Donald Macleod Matheson, 31 January 1945.

architecture as a student in the classical environs of Oxford, and whilst his architectural taste broadened he retained an admiration for the simple proportion and propriety of classical buildings.<sup>546</sup> He was also sensitive to what he later referred to as ‘the terrible fragility of architecture’.<sup>547</sup> In addition, he possessed what his biographer Michael Bloch refers to as ‘an innate understanding of the traditional landed class from the lower reaches of which he sprang’.<sup>548</sup> This empathy with owners contributed to his aspiration for country houses that they should be preserved not simply as architectural works of art but also for them to remain as homes for the families who had built them and dwelt in them for generations. At that time the Trust’s leadership was dominated by aristocrats and men of affairs many of whom were themselves owners of country houses, such as Oliver, 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount Esher and Paul, 4<sup>th</sup> Baron Methuen. Lees-Milne was a charismatic and maverick figure in the Trust, and he came to command great influence over its leadership. As Cornforth wrote in 1981, it was Lees-Milne

more than any other single person who gave shape to the Country Houses Scheme in its first 15 years, providing it with its particular appreciation of history, [...] James Lees-Milne gave form and direction to the perhaps not altogether clear instinct of the leaders of the Trust in 1936.<sup>549</sup>

He was largely free to exercise his own judgement over which houses were to be accepted and under what terms. Although Coleshill was a relatively modest country house, Lees-Milne’s advocacy of it as an exceptional architectural work and as a worthy object for heritage preservation was a key factor in the elaboration of its mythology at this time.

Hill, on the other hand, regarded old country houses as liabilities, and as a member of the Trust’s Estates Committee he often warned against accepting houses with inadequate land to support their upkeep. He was less concerned with the nature of Coleshill as an architectural work than with its position at the hub of a working country estate which he wished to see preserved as a viable economic unit. John Gaze, who

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<sup>546</sup> This is evident in his response to Philipps House, an early nineteenth-century Neo-Grecian house near Salisbury: “How splendidly proportioned, clean-limbed and precise this great house is ... All my cravings for proportion, propriety and solving architectural problems are satisfied”. Quoted from Lees-Milne’s diary, 2 April 1942, in Michael Bloch, *James Lees-Milne: The Life* (London, John Murray, 2009), p. 150.

<sup>547</sup> From Lees-Milne’s autobiographical volume, ‘*Another Self*’, first published in 1970, quoted in Bloch, p. 50.

<sup>548</sup> Bloch, p. 95.

<sup>549</sup> Quoted in Cornforth, p. 26.

worked as a land agent for the Trust, was later to be relatively sympathetic to Hill, who he claimed cared 'deeply for the traditional rural estate, its proper management and the welfare of its tenants'.<sup>550</sup> Hill had joined the Estates Committee following the Trust's acquisition of the West Wycombe Estate in 1934, which he was already managing on behalf of the Royal Society of Arts.<sup>551</sup> In the Trust's archives he emerges as the villain largely responsible for the demise of Coleshill, and indeed at times he appears devious and calculating. But he was also clearly out of step with the Trust, and more particularly with Lees-Milne, in his approach to country houses. For Hill, country houses had a functional value to estate management which transcended material, aesthetic or metaphorical criteria, and which rendered them inherently replaceable with a practical, economically viable modern house if necessary.

The archives suggest that Mary Pleydell-Bouverie and her sister felt a sense of duty to ensure the preservation of Coleshill for posterity even in the absence of heirs. With the prohibitive costs of maintaining the house there was little prospect of Coleshill ever again serving as a dynastic family home. Arguably the sisters would have been keen to offload the house, and relief from its financial burden cannot have been far from their minds, but they were nonetheless conscious both of its architectural significance and of its importance as an emblem of family heritage and dynastic longevity. Later historians of country house preservation, including Mandler and Robert Hewison, are typically hostile to self-interested owners seeking to cling on to their homes and land at state expense. This image is at odds with the Pleydell-Bouveries, who may not have been entirely altruistic in their actions but who were nevertheless far from indifferent to the survival of their architectural heritage, even if it had to be outside of family ownership. In this they harked back to the spirit of Sir Mark Pleydell's brass plaque which had urged future owners of the house, whoever they might be, to look to its care and maintenance. The Pleydell-Bouveries represent a challenge to those who suggest that country house owners of the time did not cherish their houses as heritage.

## Coleshill and Ernest Cook

Ernest Cook's direct role in determining Coleshill's fate is harder to unravel from the documentary archives. Few documents have survived in Cook's own hand, and his personal approach to Coleshill is always mediated through Hill. It is clear however that whilst he no doubt appreciated the architectural significance of Coleshill, it was the wider estate and the country house way of life that it represented which attracted him

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<sup>550</sup> Gaze, pp. 102-3.

<sup>551</sup> Gaze, p. 102.



to the property. Cook had conceived of acquiring his own collection of country house estates for his enjoyment as early as 1934, with the intention to pass these to the National Trust on his death to secure their long term preservation. The Trust on the other hand, viewed countryside and landscape in terms of natural aesthetic beauty or as providing the setting for country houses. Collins, Giles and Malleson suggest that Cook was responsible for the Trust's growing interest in acquiring entire estates, and that in this way he influenced the strategic development of the organisation.<sup>552</sup> However differing notions of the significance of the country house and its estate in relation to national heritage were to be a source of much conflict which came to the fore in negotiations over Coleshill.

For Cook country house estates were not simply territorial units but complex systems embodying a particular traditional way of life that included landlord and tenant relationships, countryside activities such as shooting, and forestry. The country house was simply one component of the system.<sup>553</sup> The rural traditions associated with the country house estate constituted part of a threatened national heritage that Cook sought to preserve, and it was in this context that he wished to acquire the Coleshill estate. Cook, like Hill, was also conscious of estates as economic units to be held together for income generation, which went against the Trust's notion of holding land in perpetuity primarily for its natural beauty or as a setting for a country house. The issue of the inalienability of land held for preservation purposes was a point of principle on which Cook and the Trust disagreed, and this resulted in clashes over the Coleshill estate.<sup>554</sup> Furthermore, for Cook continuity of ownership across generations was an important component of the country house estate. Where it was no longer possible for established families to retain ownership landowning trusts offered an alternative model. Whilst the National Trust generally encouraged owners to remain in residence at country houses in a gesture to continuity, the aim was principally to preserve the character of houses as 'lived-in' homes to avoid turning them into museums.<sup>555</sup> Although the Trust notionally acknowledged the cultural value of the whole ensemble of house, estate, family and way of life, emphasis was placed on the

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<sup>552</sup> Collins, Giles and Malleson, p. 9.

<sup>553</sup> On Cook's approach to country house estates, see Collins, Giles and Malleson, pp. 3-5.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-12. By an Act of Parliament of 1907 the Trust were given the power to declare land 'inalienable', meaning that it could not be sold, given away or mortgaged.

<sup>555</sup> The Trust's Historic Buildings Committee was opposed to houses turning into museums and encouraged owners to stay in residence to preserve 'living country houses'. However Lees-Milne believed this policy failed to a large extent, as the zeitgeist was against them. In 1992 he wrote that 'today's cultivated bourgeoisie are perfectly content to visit country house museums', but he personally regretted the absence of 'homely things'. Lees-Milne, *People and Places*, p. 16.

aesthetic and architectural importance of the house itself and on maintaining its character as an aristocratic home. The conceptual divorce of the house from the estate reflected an approach to architectural history which privileged the notion of country houses primarily as celebrated works of art. Indeed this division was encapsulated in the Trust's organisational structure, where responsibility for estates and houses lay with separate committees.

Despite the sale of the house to Cook, Mary Pleydell-Bouverie continued to take a close personal interest in the future of Coleshill from her new home at Elcombe Hall near Wroughton, and to involve herself in preparing the house for its handing over to the Trust. Whilst most of the important contents of the house had been removed prior to requisitioning, she wished to present the Trust with what remained of the furniture that had been made especially for Coleshill, provided that it would be kept there indefinitely.<sup>556</sup> She wished to see these items preserved not purely for artistic or aesthetic value, as some were utilitarian pieces from the Servants' Hall, but rather because they belonged in the house. These items were: a set of 20 Chippendale chairs and one settee from the Saloon, two glass china cabinets which stood on the first floor landing, four four-poster beds, one of which was erected in the Oak Bedroom whilst the others were disassembled in an outbuilding, two large oak tables from the Servants' Hall along with three associated forms, and two settles from the main Hall. There was also a quantity of books, including law books and county histories, which Miss Pleydell-Bouverie preferred to stay in the house as they had always resided at Coleshill. A fine 'William Kent' console table could not be included, as Cook wished to purchase this for himself.<sup>557</sup> Hill proposed that a caretaker be found for the house until a tenant was in place, and that the furniture should be kept in the Saloon for safe-keeping, albeit at the Trust's own risk.

There was much confusion within the Trust about what their role was to be in relation to the house under Cook's ownership, and about the terms of the covenant for the handing over of the property. Both the Trust and Hill were aware of the need to find a tenant as quickly as possible, but this proved problematic with the house in its existing condition, as it lacked modern conveniences such as bathrooms and lavatories, up-to-date central heating and electric light, and the old kitchen was far from ideal. Like the eighteenth-century owners of Coleshill, it was understood that repair and

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<sup>556</sup> Some of the contents of Coleshill had already gone to Longford Castle, and other items went with the sisters when they moved out of the house, Mary to Elcombe and Katharine to Kilmington, Wilts. According to Fox and Manners, some items were also made available to staff (p. 94).

<sup>557</sup> This was later given to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Cook.

modernisation were required if the house were to remain in active use, to secure its safe passage into the future not simply as a museum piece. By 1951 Coleshill was still untenanted, and had been lying empty for five years since the sisters had moved out.<sup>558</sup>

Finding a suitable tenant was not the only difficulty. At a meeting of the Trust's Finance Committee on 15 June 1951 the Chairman of the Trust, Lord Crawford, reported that Hill was no longer sure that the Coleshill estate would be self-supporting, and furthermore that the same might be true of two other properties that Cook had agreed to devise to the Trust, Bradenham in Buckinghamshire and the Buscot estate which bordered on Coleshill. The Trust had already accepted Buscot Park house from Cook in 1949, largely to smooth the way to the future acquisition of Coleshill and in anticipation of receiving both estates.<sup>559</sup> There was growing unease within the Trust about the security of the covenant to devise Coleshill to them, and a sense that perhaps Hill's hedging was an attempt to wriggle out of the agreement. Furthermore the Trust's secretary, J.F.W. Rathbone, learnt that Cook intended to form his own Trust from his properties, and suspicions grew that he might wish to retain Coleshill for this purpose.<sup>560</sup>

The reasons behind Cook's apparent turning against the Trust are not clear, but it is likely that he was suspicious of the close links between the Trust and a Labour government who were sympathetic to their cause. Cook disliked any form of state intervention, and in 1948 he described government policy in relation to the Trust as one of 'driving owners of fine old houses out of them by the back door and letting the public in by the front door'.<sup>561</sup> According to Hill, Cook wanted to form his own trust because it would 'be able to preserve his Estates for all time and without threat, at any rate at present, of his Trust being taken over by the government'.<sup>562</sup> Indeed Cook had apparently specifically expressed his concern about Coleshill getting into the wrong

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<sup>558</sup> Hill was reluctant to advertise for a tenant for fear that the house would be taken over by a government department, but an advertisement was eventually placed in *The Times* on 4 October 1951.

<sup>559</sup> NTCA, J.F.W. Rathbone to Captain Hill, 9 November 1951.

<sup>560</sup> The Ernest Cook Trust was eventually established in 1952 and is still one of the UK's leading educational charities, with its roots in the conservation and management of the countryside.

<sup>561</sup> NTCA, Ernest Edward Cook files, File 645, copy of letter from Ernest Cook to Captain Hill, 17 October 1948.

<sup>562</sup> NTCA, Ernest Edward Cook files, File 645, letter from Captain Hill to Hubert Smith, National Trust Chief Agent, 10 October 1951.

hands.<sup>563</sup> Cook and Hill's fears were not entirely unfounded, as the Labour party had made it clear in the elections of 1945 that they believed in land nationalisation, although the Trust's ability to hold property itself inalienably was never seriously under threat in planning legislation.<sup>564</sup> But for Cook there was an inherent contradiction in the state's interference in the preservation of a form of national heritage that was by definition private property, and it was the values and traditions of private owners which had shaped the country house and its estate. Nevertheless despite these concerns in the light of Miss Pleydell-Bouverie's wishes for Coleshill Captain Hill sought to reassure the Trust that Cook remained committed to covenant the house and estate to them.

Under Cook's ownership, some improvements were carried out around the Coleshill estate.<sup>565</sup> By March 1952 new letting agreements were made with the nine farms on the estate and increased rents were secured. Deferred farm repairs were completed or underway at Cook's expense. A new village inn was opened, and most of the cottages in the village had been supplied with electricity, with mains water on its way. There had been forestry replanting on Badbury Hill, estate roads had been upgraded, and a new road constructed that linked the Coleshill and Buscot estates, which facilitated the future management of the two estates as one unit. However the house constituted a heavy liability, and Hill entered into negotiations with prospective tenants, Sir Dennistoun Burney and his wife, who it was suggested might be prepared to pay a considerable sum for alterations and improvements to the property. The Trust remained anxious about the future financial liability of the devised property and sought to make provision to fund the estate and any deferred repairs if necessary. It was proposed that holding up to three of the Coleshill farms alienably would allow Coleshill to be self-supporting since they could be sold if necessary. For Mary Pleydell-Bouverie this proposal came as a shock, for her intention had been to see the whole estate preserved in perpetuity, but the Trust offered reassurance that any sale of property would be a last resort, and would not impact on the setting of the house or on the main part of the estate.

Cook's aversion to the Trust became clear on 15 April 1952 when Hill revealed that Cook did indeed wish Coleshill, Buscot and Bradenham to be transferred to his own new trust. Although Hill offered reassurances that these properties could still come to the National Trust if they wished, he reiterated that they would be encumbered with

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<sup>563</sup> NTCA, Ernest Edward Cook files, File 645, letter from Captain Hill to James Lees-Milne, 15 December 1948.

<sup>564</sup> Keith C. Clark, 'The British Labor Government's Town and Country Planning Act: A Study in Conflicting Liberalisms', *Political Science Quarterly*, 66 (1951), 87-103 (p. 90).

<sup>565</sup> NTCA, report by Hubert Smith, 21 March 1952.

heavy financial liabilities. He argued that as part of Cook's trust it would be possible to make longer term provision drawing from other properties until these three estates could be self supporting. Furthermore Hill announced, somewhat deviously, that the negotiations with his prospective tenants for Coleshill would be much helped if the estate went to Cook's trust, and he emphasised the urgency of securing a good tenant to provide for the future maintenance of the property. Sir Dennistoun Burney, it appeared, preferred to deal with a small trust rather than with 'the very large and impersonal body' of the National Trust.<sup>566</sup>

Hill instructed the Trust that Burney required a 99 year lease on Coleshill House along with the estate and the shooting rights. This raised questions about provision for public access. At this time, issues of accessibility and presentation were not at the forefront of the country house programme, and notions of national heritage rested on a more philosophical idea of public benefit. Nonetheless it was a requirement for the Trust that the property should be opened to the public on some occasions and this would have to be a necessary condition of any lease. Hill was concerned that imposing these conditions might result in the loss of a good tenant who was willing to spend a significant sum on the house. This was interpreted by the Trust's legal advisor as 'a dangerous and sinister threat'.<sup>567</sup> The relationship between the Trust and Hill became increasingly strained. Lord Crawford took the unprecedented step of circumventing Hill to write directly to Cook asserting the Trust's intention to accept the Coleshill estate on his death, and to declare it inalienable if finances permitted. Crawford regarded this as a moral obligation to the vendors of the estate.<sup>568</sup> According to Hill, Cook took offence at Crawford's letter, not least because of its apparent disregard of a generous gift that he had made to the Trust of £100,000 of Wagon Lits stocks.<sup>569</sup> Cook determined to cease any further expenditure on Coleshill or Buscot, and cancelled all further gifts to the Trust.

With this withdrawal of financial support, Hill insisted that it was necessary to resort to borrowing money on a mortgage in order to fund essential repairs and improvements at Coleshill, the costs of which were continuing to escalate. Reluctantly, the Trust agreed that Hill should raise the £5000 required for repairs to the house on a

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<sup>566</sup> NTCA, Sir Dennistoun Burney to Mary Pleydell-Bouverie, 18 April 1952.

<sup>567</sup> NTCA, J.F.W. Rathbone to Anthony A. Martineau, 8 May 1952.

<sup>568</sup> NTCA, Lord Crawford to Ernest Cook, 16 May 1952.

<sup>569</sup> In 1928 Cook and his brother had sold shares in the family firm to the Compagnie des Wagon Lits. In 1933 he promised to assign his interest in £100,000 of the Wagon Lits stock to the Trust. However, by 1952 they had still only received £30,000 of this sum. This was privately set aside as possible endowment for the Buscot and Coleshill estates if required.

mortgage, but they were concerned to ensure that the integrity of the house was not compromised by any material alterations. They insisted on supervising the work and also required approval of the terms of any lease so that the ultimate preservation of the house for the benefit of the nation was not prejudiced and public access could be secured.

By late July 1952 repairs were underway. Cook agreed to the Trust appointing an architect to supervise the work, and Darcy Braddell was commissioned. As the eighteenth-century owners of the house had done previously, repairs centred on the rooftop, included rebuilding two chimney stacks and repairing the remainder, repairing the balustrading and the external cornicing, as well as painting the whole of the exterior. These were essential repairs to prevent further deterioration of the house, but further work was needed on the interiors to upgrade them for tenants. Hill estimated that an additional £15,000 may have to be found. He requested that the Trust fund the work, in view of the fact that Cook was to devise Coleshill to them. Negotiations continued with the Burneys who insisted that the house was put in order, and indicated that they intended to open it to the public for just 30 afternoons each year. Furthermore they wished to have a free hand in the layout of the garden, where Hill warned he would soon have to pull down the glasshouses and dividing walls due to their poor condition unless negotiations were swiftly concluded. The estimated liabilities for the house were £20,000, with a further £5000 required for work to the cottages and gardens.

Rathbone instructed Hill that he foresaw difficulties with the Trust spending £25,000 to enable the Burneys to take the lease, as expenditure on a property which they did not own was hard to justify even if the money could be found. The Trust also considered the proposed level of public access inadequate, and they could not allow the tenants the freedom to alter the house and garden at will. Hill's comment about the glasshouses was construed as a malicious threat, and the Trust's legal advisor wrote that 'At all costs we must enforce and maintain the attitude, not that we are obliged to Hill for any little crumb that he is good enough to drop from his table, but that he is under an enforceable obligation to let us have the property at Cook's death in substantially as good condition as it was when Cook covenanted to leave it to us'.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> NTCA, letter from Anthony A. Martineau to J.F.W. Rathbone, 19 September 1952.

## Fire!

At this point, it was unclear how these ill-tempered negotiations would be resolved, but events were to take an unexpected turn. Fire broke out at Coleshill House on the afternoon of 23 September 1952 as the external repairs were underway. The estate clerk of works, Mr Down, spotted smoke rising from the roof around 3pm, and it was reported that within four hours all that remained of the building was a burnt out shell surmounted by the eight chimneys.<sup>571</sup> Decorators, farmers, estate workers and villagers hurried to the house and helped to carry out the remaining paintings, furniture and books. The fire was caused by a stray ember from a blow lamp that was being used to burn paint off a dormer window. Fourteen fire brigades sent engines but the local water supply was inadequate and they were unable to quench the flames. The fire burned for almost two days, with further outbreaks occurring for another two weeks from smouldering debris within the shell. The library floor collapsed on 6 October, and two days later when the western chimneystack fell it brought with it a portion of the south-west wall (Figure 98).

On 24 September Rathbone, the Trust's Secretary, broke the news of the Coleshill fire to the Chief Agent, Hubert Smith: 'The house, which has been key to all the negotiations with Cook and Captain Hill has been burnt. The roof has fallen in and all that remains are the walls and the two main chimneys. I doubt if it will be possible to rebuild it'.<sup>572</sup> Smith's terse response was that 'The Buscot-Coleshill comedy has ended in tragedy'.<sup>573</sup> He could see no point in rebuilding the house, and added that there was a glimmer of satisfaction in that the estate would no longer be a financial problem, and that the Trust would still have the 'very pleasant and attractive country' of the estate.

Within two days of the fire, Hill informed the Trust of his intention to demolish the remains of the house.

Coleshill House is no more. It is expected that most of the walls will fall in. The fire disclosed that much imported pine was used and that most of the timbers were decayed or decaying and it is unlikely that the house would have survived many years without being to a great extent rebuilt. The fire, once started, could not be stopped. A great house has gone. It is quite dead. The furniture and books were saved by the Estate staff and residents of the village. Their devotion

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<sup>571</sup> 'Fire Destroys Coleshill House', *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, 24 September 1952.

<sup>572</sup> NTCA, memo from J.F.W. Rathbone to Hubert Smith, 24 September 1952.

<sup>573</sup> NTCA, memo from Hubert Smith to J.F.W. Rathbone, 29 September 1952.

was wonderful. They love the Estate and look upon the destruction of Coleshill House as a personal loss and calamity.

Cook is very upset. When I saw him today I was alarmed but he showed his fighting spirit and says he will use the insurance money or a large part of it to build a smaller house. I have to persuade him to build it on the Coleshill Estate – he prefers the Fairford Estate. We shall pull down what remains of Coleshill House, it is unsafe – but if you would like to have a report on it please send your Architect at once. I must act quickly to keep Cook's interest alive. I am glad Coleshill is quite dead, if it had been only badly wounded we should have been faced with many difficult problems and the wounds would have disclosed many festering sores.<sup>574</sup>

As events unfolded Coleshill House was framed by all parties as a national monument and its loss as a disaster for the nation. In Hill's view, 'The destruction of Coleshill House is nothing more than a national tragedy and its loss to the nation cannot be estimated'.<sup>575</sup> Yet he intended to demolish the remains on the basis that 'Coleshill House is no more and can never be rebuilt to produce the same position as an architectural monument of the seventeenth century as heretofore'.<sup>576</sup> Hill's observation that the fire had revealed decayed timbers which suggested that the life of the house was in any case drawing to an end was greeted with scepticism. The roof had been inspected by William Weir, an expert in historic buildings who had worked both with the National Trust and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), in 1939 and he had taken a contrary view.<sup>577</sup> Within a week of the fire Hill reported to the Trust that he had approached the Ministry of Works about the proposed demolition. The house was well insured, and Hill indicated that he wished to spend part of the insurance money on a small modern house at Coleshill in order to hold the estate together, wiping away the remains of the old house. Hill could see no point in stabilising the house as a ruin as had been done at Bodiam Castle or Lyveden New

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<sup>574</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to J.F.W. Rathbone, 25 September 1952. The Fairford Park Estate where Cook proposed building a new house was acquired by him in 1945. The country house at Fairford became dilapidated after the war and was later sold to Gloucestershire County Council. It was subsequently demolished, but the Fairford Estate remains the headquarters of the Ernest Cook Trust.

<sup>575</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to J.F.W. Rathbone, 26 September 1952.

<sup>576</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to F. Leigh Wyatt, 25 September 1952.

<sup>577</sup> NTCA, F. Leigh Wyatt to Captain Hill, 30 September 1952.



Bield, and he was dubious about the value of preserving an empty shell.<sup>578</sup> Bodiam and Lyveden were both properties acquired by the Trust in the 1920s and preserved in a ruined (or rather in the case of Lyveden incomplete) state. Hill was therefore attacking the Trust's approach to heritage preservation with regard to these properties, reflecting his own concept of architectural heritage as requiring an ongoing utilitarian value to justify its preservation. Whilst Hill acknowledged that Coleshill House was valuable to national heritage, for him there was no purpose in preserving an empty ruin that could no longer serve its purpose as the engine of the estate, and which represented an economic burden on estate finances.



Figure 98 The ruins of the house following the fire, 10 October 1952. *The National Archives: ref. WORK14/1964.*

## Rebuild the Ruin?

The issue of the value of ruined historic buildings and whether they should be rebuilt remains contentious in heritage debates today. In 2010 the Chairman of the National Trust, Simon Jenkins, caused controversy by suggesting that the ruins of Corfe Castle in Dorset should be rebuilt in order to make them more comprehensible to visitors.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Bodiam was a fourteenth-century castle that had been substantially restored from a picturesque ruin by Lord Curzon and the National Trust, who acquired the property from Curzon in 1925. Lyveden was a garden lodge left incomplete on the death of its owner in 1605 and preserved in this state by the Trust who acquired it in 1922.

<sup>579</sup> 'Popularising the Past', interview with Simon Jenkins in *English Heritage Conservation Bulletin*, 64 (2010), 3-5.

In 1952 the burnt-out remains of Coleshill House prompted questions about the value of ruinous historic buildings in the new post-war climate of heritage preservation. Arguments ranged around whether the house should be reconstructed from the fire-damaged remains, stabilised as a ruin, or demolished. The protagonists were uncertain about where Coleshill's heritage value now lay, and there were competing notions about the implications of the ruins for the authority of the house as a national monument. Alois Riegl's important study of 'The Modern Cult of Monuments' (1903) set out to identify the cultural values that resided in the idea of the monument at the outset of the twentieth century, and this text provides a useful basis for analysing the arguments surrounding the rebuilding of Coleshill. Riegl understood 'historical value' as resting largely in the original state of a monument which marks a significant stage in the development of human activity.<sup>580</sup> For Riegl, 'The objective of historical value is [...] to maintain as genuine as possible a document for future art-historical research'.<sup>581</sup> Lees-Milne and others revered Coleshill for its authenticity as an unaltered and therefore authentic work of Inigo Jones which represented a turning point in the development of English architecture. For those who wished to see Coleshill rebuilt they had in mind the idealised mythological house that represented the original architect's work. But the equivocation over whether to rebuild Coleshill or not in part reflected ambiguity as to whether the building's authenticity resided in the original design of the house or in its original fabric.

Another 'monument value' that Riegl proposed was 'age value', which resided in perceptions of antiquity and natural decay, as could be seen in ruins for example. Riegl's understanding of this value was that it ultimately stood in opposition to the preservation of monuments. In Riegl's terms age value was not concerned with preserving historic structures in a fixed state, but with allowing for the natural passing of time. Furthermore, age value was essentially made manifest through visual perception and the appeal of the decaying monument to the emotions.<sup>582</sup> By contrast, Riegl's concept of 'use value' referred to a present utilitarian function, a value which he proposed to be 'indifferent to the treatment of a monument as long as the monument's existence is not affected and no concessions whatsoever are made to age value'. He added that 'On the other hand, use-value may also require the destruction of a monument: for instance, if decay endangers human life'.<sup>583</sup> It was this notion of use value which largely shaped Hill's response to the ruined house.

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<sup>580</sup> Alois Riegl, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origins', *Oppositions*, 25 (1982), 21-51.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>583</sup> Riegl, p. 39.

Conflicting perceptions of Coleshill's 'monument value' as an object of national heritage were played out in the ensuing arguments about whether to rebuild the house. The National Trust was conflicted over the vexed ethical issue of rebuilding, regardless of whether it was practicable to do so or not, or indeed whether Cook could be persuaded to reconstruct the house. The principle of restoration and rebuilding had troubled preservationists since at least the mid-nineteenth century, and largely reflected concerns with Riegl's notion of historical authenticity. In Britain, anti-restoration philosophy developed by John Ruskin and William Morris in the late nineteenth century provided the context for these concerns, placing value on the original fabric of the building.<sup>584</sup> This culturally-constructed Ruskinian idea of value became a key determining factor in arguments for heritage preservation. It vigorously opposed any reconstruction, on the basis that old buildings should be valued in their own right regardless of their condition rather than 'improved', and that only essential repairs should be undertaken. The Trust's usual policy adhered to this doctrine and was opposed to rebuilding, which it regarded as fakery in accordance with these Ruskinian principles. However as far as Coleshill was concerned there was a lack of consensus within the organisation as to the best course of action. If a building reached the point where restoration was necessary, then Ruskin's advice was clear as set out in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*: 'Look the necessity in the face, and understand it on its own terms. It is a necessity for destruction. Accept it as such, pull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, make ballast of them, or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a lie in their place.'<sup>585</sup>

Almost 40 years later another seventeenth-century house, Uppark in West Sussex was largely destroyed by fire, and the Trust was to face the same dilemma. Uppark too was regarded as an exceptional house, in part for its unaltered state of preservation (albeit in an early nineteenth-century condition).<sup>586</sup> Here too the house was largely destroyed, and the burnt out shell was left open to the sky where the roof and ceilings had collapsed. Yet in the case of Uppark the Trust decided that enough of the house

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<sup>584</sup> For a discussion of the development of this philosophy, see Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), pp. 184-186, and for a broader discussion of the philosophy of restoration see John Earl, *Building Conservation Philosophy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Shaftesbury: Donhead, 2003), pp. 50-64.

<sup>585</sup> John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Orpington: George Allen, 1880), p. 244.

<sup>586</sup> For an account of the restoration of Uppark, see Christopher Rowell and John Martin Robinson, *Uppark Restored* (London: National Trust, 2006). Also Dan Cruickshank, 'Rebuilding Uppark', *Country Life*, 18 June 1990, pp. 56-57.

survived to justify its total restoration (Figure 99).<sup>587</sup> The Trust's committee rejected either leaving the ruin to return to nature or leaving it as a controlled ruin. With meticulous care the Trust took the house back as far as possible to an accurate recreation of how it had been the day before the fire, in what Paul Eggert refers to as 'the moment of embalming' approach to conservation.<sup>588</sup> This total restoration met with criticism from those who believed that the result would be a fake, including the SPAB, whilst others argued that the demolition of the remains would constitute an act of vandalism.<sup>589</sup> The house was coming to the end of an extensive restoration project prior to reopening by the Trust, and Eggert suggests that given the despair that was felt by those who had only recently completed the restoration of the house there was simply no preparedness to allow it to become a controlled ruin.<sup>590</sup> However Uppark, like Coleshill, faced resistance from those who opposed on philosophical grounds the principle of the accurate academic restoration of historic architecture.

Why then was Coleshill not similarly meticulously restored? There were some obvious differences between the two cases. For one thing, Uppark was owned by the National Trust when it burned down, Coleshill was not. Uppark had fine collections of furniture and artworks which were saved from the fire and it was thought necessary to provide a suitable context for their re-display. Furthermore the house was fully insured specifically for reinstatement whilst Coleshill was not, and its demise came at a time when the country was only just emerging from post-war austerity. Uppark's restoration was viewed as providing a fillip for traditional building skills, whereas in the 1950s these craft techniques were largely rejected as architecture embraced modern industrial building materials and methods. More significantly, perhaps, country house preservation generally was not a minority interest in 1989 as it was in 1952, and there was greater enthusiasm for country house visiting, encouraged in part by improved transport and paid holidays.<sup>591</sup> As Adrian Tinniswood suggests, alongside this popular appreciation of the architecture of the past, there was also a wider understanding that modern society was destroying valued elements of the rural landscape. This sense of

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<sup>587</sup> Rowell and Robinson, p. 33.

<sup>588</sup> Paul Eggert, *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 57.

<sup>589</sup> Philip Venning, 'Uppark: Accept No Facsimile', *SPAB News*, 10 (1989), 10-11.

<sup>590</sup> Eggert, p. 50.

<sup>591</sup> Samuel locates the country house in his discussion of the rise of popular heritage in the twentieth century in his *Theatres of Memory*.

loss fuelled the burgeoning interest in old country houses, fostering a climate in which notions of a common architectural heritage could flourish.<sup>592</sup>

Coleshill's destruction occurred at the cusp of this turn towards popular heritage. As Tinniswood notes, by the early 1950s the Trust had opened 98 houses and gardens and 700,000 tourists a year came to see them.<sup>593</sup> Furthermore in 1950 National Trust membership topped 20,000 for the first time, and within 10 years it increased to 100,000.<sup>594</sup> But Tinniswood also suggests that at this time it was conservation rather than public access that took precedence:

Looking back on those years from the very different cultural climate of the 1980s, one has the impression that the preservation of the country house, and where possible the maintenance of the social hierarchy which it epitomized, was the major objective of those working for the [National Trust's] Country Houses Scheme, that the protection of the *status quo*, regardless of society's changing needs, was an end in itself.<sup>595</sup>

By the time of the Uppark fire, modern marketing techniques had fuelled what Tinniswood calls 'the stately home business', and country house visiting was a major and lucrative component of Britain's tourism industry, attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. The English Tourist Board's *English Heritage Monitor* for 1980 estimated that there were at least 51 million visits made to historic buildings in 1979.<sup>596</sup> National Trust membership was higher than ever before, with access to a large portfolio of properties providing a major benefit for members. Unlike Coleshill, the issue of whether to rebuild Uppark or not was debated very publicly in the media. But in the early 1950s the economic potential of country house preservation was only just being recognized, and it had not yet captured the public imagination as a common cause.

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<sup>592</sup> Adrian Tinniswood, *A History of Country House Visiting: Five Centuries of Tourism and Taste* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 164.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid*, p. 179.

<sup>594</sup> Gaze, p. 288.

<sup>595</sup> Tinniswood, p. 180.

<sup>596</sup> Quoted in Tinniswood, p. 190.



Figure 99 The South Front from south east at Uppark, West Sussex. © NTPL/*Matthew Antrobus*.

We can begin to see therefore that Coleshill's destruction occurred at a time when attitudes to country houses and their preservation were very different from that of the Uppark fire. Whilst this goes some way to explaining the loss of the house, a closer unpicking of the events leading up to and immediately following the demolition reveals other facets to the heritage debate and the contested visions of Coleshill's value in relation to national heritage.

A pivotal point in the discussions about the fate of Coleshill was the understanding that the house was of seminal importance to British architectural history, requiring special treatment as a heritage object. This idea had been set up by Lees-Milne when the house was first proposed for acquisition by the Trust. In the aftermath of the fire, Robin Fedden, who replaced Lees-Milne as secretary of the Trust's Historic Buildings Committee in 1951, and the architect Darcy Braddell were sent to inspect the ruins.<sup>597</sup> Following a site visit on 2 October, Braddell produced the first of what was to be a series of expert reports on the remains of the house (Appendix 10).<sup>598</sup> Braddell's account of the remains was bleak. His assessment was that the condition of the building was 'beyond all repair'. The salient features of the house had been destroyed,

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<sup>597</sup> NTCA, letter from J.F.W. Rathbone to Captain Hill, 27 September 1952.

<sup>598</sup> NTCA, report by Darcy Braddell, 6 October 1952.

most notably those associated with the roof including the cornice with its elaborately carved modillions, the lead flat, the fine cupola and the handsome balustrade. He thought the interiors were wrecked, and the 'great staircase, all the famous plaster ceilings, nearly all the floors, and many of the cross walls are lying in an enormous tangled heap of rubble [...] The outer walls at first sight appear to be in reasonably good condition, but even this is not so' (Figure 100). Braddell concluded that even if the external form of the house was recreated as it once was, with a purely utilitarian modern interior as opposed to restoring the old rooms, the costs would be out of proportion to any possible use that the house might have. He estimated that the cost of such a scheme would be at least £60,000. But despite Braddell's pessimism, the Trust instructed Hill that it would not be impossible to shore up the remaining walls and put on a roof in order to preserve 'an architectural masterpiece' as an empty shell.<sup>599</sup>



Figure 100 The gutted entrance hall and staircase after the fire. WSA, 1946/1/6.

Whilst Rathbone initially hoped that at least the external walls of the house would be rebuilt, he became concerned that the Historic Buildings Committee should be consistent in their approach to the issue of rebuilding. He noted that, had the Trust owned the house, it would not have been insured for its replacement value, as it was

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<sup>599</sup> NTCA, J.F.W. Rathbone to Captain Hill, 3 October 1952.

deemed irreplaceable. Therefore he believed that it would be a mistake to press Cook to reconstruct the house with the insurance money, if it was found necessary to entirely demolish what remained of the original. However, Lees-Milne, by then part-time architectural advisor to the Trust, wrote from Venice arguing for the reinstatement of the house on the basis of its exceptional architectural importance. This demonstrates the extent of Lees-Milne's regard for Coleshill, because generally he was opposed to reconstruction. For example, he was against the rebuilding of the Trust's Bath Assembly Rooms after they were damaged during the Baedeker Blitz, on the grounds that 'they were never first class architecture'.<sup>600</sup> But his view was that Coleshill was unquestionably first rate. Indeed he framed Coleshill as the first truly classical English country house, articulating in definitive terms the significance of the house in relation to the development of English classicism. For Lees-Milne, Coleshill was

the earliest English country house to be designed as a classical entity. Other important houses contemporary with it, like Thorpe Hall and Raynham, were still Flemish in detail, or added to, like Lamport, or even entirely Italian reproductions like the Queen's House, or still Jacobean like the majority of the pre-Wren houses. But I always revered Coleshill as perhaps the first really English classical house. [...] It was one of the best pieces of domestic architecture England ever produced. And so I believe there is a good case for entirely rebuilding, if the outside walls are left intact.<sup>601</sup>

Despite Rathbone's reservations, members of the Trust's Historic Buildings Committee without exception adopted Lees-Milne's view that in consideration of the architectural importance of Coleshill they would recommend rebuilding the house if funds permitted. But Rathbone was not alone in his unease about this position. The Trust's Chief Agent was concerned that this might indicate a change of policy, as he regarded the severity of the damage to Coleshill as a total loss, and that Braddell's figure of £60,000 for rebuilding was a gross under-estimate. Moreover he thought the Trust's desire to see the house rebuilt was nothing more than 'a pious expression of hope', as Cook had already stated that he wished the site to be cleared.<sup>602</sup> Rathbone believed the Committee's decision went against usual policy, but reluctantly acknowledged that the Bath Assembly Rooms could be seen as setting a precedent for rebuilding.<sup>603</sup> Donald

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<sup>600</sup> NTCA, James Lees-Milne to Robin Fedden, n.d. The Bath Assembly Rooms came to the Trust indirectly via Ernest Cook, who had initially acquired them for the SPAB, in 1931.

<sup>601</sup> NTCA, James Lees-Milne to Robin Fedden, n.d.

<sup>602</sup> NTCA, Hubert Smith to F. Leigh-Wyatt, 23 October 1952.

<sup>603</sup> NTCA, J.F.W. Rathbone to Donald Matheson, 1 November 1952.



Matheson argued that circumstances at Bath were very different from those of Coleshill inasmuch as it was covered by the War Damages Act, but also that the Rooms had an important use as they were leased to the Bath Corporation and therefore the Trust had a moral if not a legal responsibility to rebuild them.<sup>604</sup>

Institutionally the Trust was divided on the ethical issue of whether to rebuild the house, but such was Lees-Milne's influence that his opinion prevailed. But these debates were of little interest to Hill, who was set on demolition. In his view the cost of rebuilding would in any case be extortionate - in the order of £300,000 - and even if money were found to rebuild it the result would be a 'sham' of no use to anyone.<sup>605</sup> He arranged for a report on the ruins from a 'leading architect' that was perhaps Charles Herbert Watson, a Beaconsfield architect who had worked on Cook's estates for many years.<sup>606</sup> An inspection of the remains was also carried out by George Chettle from the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works, accompanied by the architect T.A. Bailey. Hill anticipated no obstruction to the demolition of the house, and was to maintain a position that even partial reconstruction could only be done at heavy expense and probable risk to life. He warned the Trust that the structure was dangerous 'and as soon as we have the reports we shall pull it down and clear the site'.<sup>607</sup>

An unsigned report in the archives dated 23 October may be that commissioned by Hill (Appendix 11).<sup>608</sup> This stated that the interiors were largely destroyed and that there was significant damage to the inner linings of the walls. Furthermore the fall of the chimney stacks had shaken the remaining fabric. However, the ashlar of all the facades was regarded as still in good condition and 'the two noble centre doorways with their flights of steps' were still complete (Figure 101). The report set out three options for Coleshill: reconstruction, total demolition and partial demolition. Restoration would require pulling down the remaining structure to ground floor level, and whilst as much old stone as possible could be reused much new stone would be required and practically the whole interior would have to be new. This could only be done at great

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<sup>604</sup> NTCA, Donald Matheson to J.F.W. Rathbone, 2 November 1952.

<sup>605</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to J.F.W. Rathbone, 29 October 1952.

<sup>606</sup> Watson was noted for his role in the development of Beaconsfield new town and was awarded one of the first post-war housing medals for his role in the planning of the town's council estates. See his obituary in *The Builder*, 15 January 1954, p. 136. A biographical file in the RIBA notes 'the repair and restoration of historic mansions' as amongst his architectural practice.

<sup>607</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to J.F.W. Rathbone, 10 October 1952.

<sup>608</sup> WSA, 1946/1/6, unsigned report 23 October 1952. Another copy can be found at NTRA, Coleshill file.

expense. The author suggested that total demolition was regarded generally as 'a deplorable feature of our time', whereas 'so many of our most beautiful estates are enriched by the ruins of ancient buildings'. The report therefore recommended partial rebuilding, taking down the walls to the level of the ground floor window sills with the exception of the three bays in the centre of each front with their great doorways and steps. The interior was to be levelled at the ground floor, a walk to be paved around the perimeter of the external walls and the remainder grassed over. For the service annex, which was less damaged than the main house, the roofs were to be removed in what would have been a deliberate act of ruination, leaving only the external walls, and it was suggested that two piers made out of the famous chimney stacks could flank the approach from the lower yard up to the main terrace. Architectural pieces that had been salvaged, such as the chimneypieces, were to be set against the inner walls of the rebuilt main portion. Visual mock-ups showed how this might look. This would not be a picturesque ruin in the sense of those that beautified country estates, but would be a carefully orchestrated and regularised monument, as cool and disciplined as the house itself (Figure 102). In a sense, Coleshill's controlled symmetry and proportionality resisted the idea of picturesque ruination, and these proposals reflect the conceptual difficulties of re-imagining Coleshill as a preserved ruin.



Figure 101 The external stairs on the south-west front after the fire. *The National Archives: ref. WORK14/1964.*

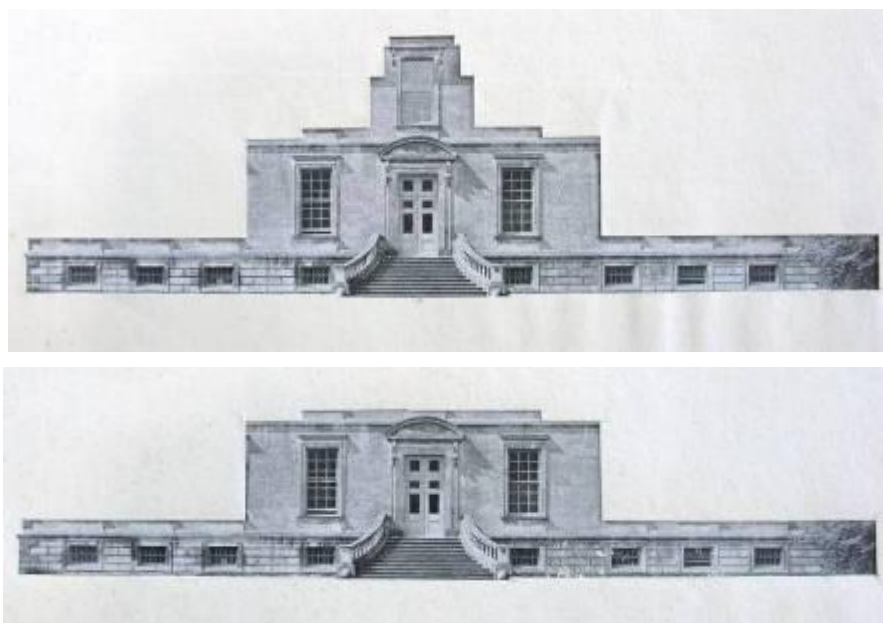


Figure 102 Proposals for the preservation of the ruins of Coleshill House. WSA, 1946/1/6.

Chettle and Bailey's report for the Ministry of Work's described Coleshill as of 'superlative importance externally and internally' (Appendix 12).<sup>609</sup> The staircase was particularly singled out as an exceptional feature of the house. Their assessment was rather less gloomy than Braddell's, suggesting that the internal walls that remained on the south side were 'still plastered and appear to be structurally safe', including the walls of the ground floor library and the saloon (Figure 103). Several fireplaces were noted to have survived undamaged. Of the external walls, whilst the rubble infill was in a very poor condition, the ashlar skin was noted to be 'in almost perfect condition'. The authors concluded that 'It is considered [...] that the rebuilding of this House is possible if sufficient funds are forthcoming. This would mean that the external walls would be original but that the interior and roof would be largely reproductive'. A copy of the report was sent to Hill on 5 November by the Ministry of Housing, and his attention was drawn to Chettle and Bailey's opinion that a good deal of architectural and historic interest still remained after the fire, and that the house could be rebuilt. The letter stated that 'It is hoped that your client will give serious consideration to the possibility of rebuilding and that you will not take action to clear away more than is necessary in the interests of safety until the matter can be given further consideration'.<sup>610</sup>

<sup>609</sup> NTCE, G.H. Chettle and T.A. Bailey, Report following fire on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1952. 31 October 1952.

<sup>610</sup> WSA, 1946/1/6, Miss I. Kublicke, Ministry of Housing and Local Government to Whatley, Hill and Co., 5 November 1952.



Figure 103 The first floor dining room after the fire with the fireplace and Sir Mark's bust. *The National Archives: ref. WORK14/1964.*

A further report on the remains was prepared by the architect Marshall Sisson for the SPAB on 8 November (Appendix 13). His account of the significance of the house echoed that of Lees-Milne. He identified Coleshill as

the earliest country house of formal classic design in England and is incomparably the best of the whole class of similar houses built between 1650 and 1700. It is especially notable for its assured and flawless design, the great refinement of the detail, the excellence of its execution and the almost perfect condition of the external stonework after three centuries of life.<sup>611</sup>

Sisson asserted that 'at the present time sufficient evidence, either in the form of surviving structure or in fragments, remains to make possible an almost exact reinstatement of the building, including its internal decoration'. This is a remarkable statement considering that the guiding manifesto of the SPAB, now as then, violently opposes restoration which, it contests, can only lead to 'a feeble and lifeless forgery'.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> SPAB, Coleshill file, report by Marshall Sisson, 8 November 1952.

<sup>612</sup> [www.spab.org.uk](http://www.spab.org.uk), The Manifesto, accessed 10/01/2011.

The main obstacle, however, was the high cost of reconstruction. A more practicable solution, Sisson proposed, was to conserve and consolidate the walls, but to reconstruct the interior simply to make a modern and convenient house. This would preserve the 'superb exterior as a masterpiece of architecture' for future generations. Sisson recommended that urgent measures should be taken to consolidate and shore up the remains. He concluded his report that as 'Coleshill is uniquely valuable both architecturally and historically, and as reinstatement is practicable without loss of the principal aesthetic values, reconstruction is far more justifiable than in the case of numerous well known houses that have been rebuilt after similar damage'. This suggests that for Sisson, like other experts, Coleshill's main aesthetic values could be found in the design of the exterior façades, rather than in the original fabric or in the interiors. Contrary to Ruskinian conservation principles, such was Coleshill's singular value to national architecture that despite many of its most notable features having been destroyed the rebuilding at least of the exteriors was justified.

Lord Euston, Vice Chairman of the SPAB, visited Cook with Sisson's report in an attempt to persuade him to rebuild the house, but was told that an application had been made to demolish the remains to two feet below ground floor level as soon as possible. If the Trust wished to rebuild the house themselves, Cook offered to transfer the site to them, but there was little point when no funds could be found for that purpose.<sup>613</sup> The Pleydell-Bouverie sisters were concerned about the Trust's apparent indefinite position on the remains of the house and on the future of the estate under these changed circumstances. They did not wish the house simply to be made safe as an empty shell and left to stand as a ruin, perhaps because such a partial monument would negate the perfect and unaltered totality of the building for which it was admired, and which had been their home. Furthermore such a monument would stand as a constant testimony to the disaster that had befallen the house. Rather the sisters wanted the house either restored externally as it was originally or a smaller house built on the same or another site. They regarded it as important to provide accommodation for a tenant at Coleshill who would continue to take an interest in estate affairs and those of the village.<sup>614</sup>

Hill had been cautioned by the Ministry to delay demolition whilst they considered the case, but he was irritated by their dithering. In the words of the Trust's Chief Agent,

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<sup>613</sup> Hill dismissed this on the basis that the Trust had the equivalent of £100,000 in cash from the Wagon-lit money as well as £150,000 of property already presented by Cook and further properties coming to the value of £400,000. Rathbone thought that Hill 'must be dotty' to think this. NTCA, Captain Hill to J.F.W. Rathbone, 28 November 1952.

<sup>614</sup> NTCA, Hubert Smith to J.F.W. Rathbone, 14 November 1952.

Hill thought it 'somewhat illogical – as indeed it is – that no Government department apparently took an interest in Coleshill when it was an unspoilt architectural monument, but immediately it is reduced by fire to a dangerous ruin everybody gets hot and bothered'.<sup>615</sup> By 17 November the structure had reached a perilous state, and Hill informed the Pleydell-Bouveries' agent that subject to the licence being received demolition was to start at once.

Neither the Trust nor the Pleydell-Bouveries had any legal authority to insist on the rebuilding of the house, and the final decision rested with the Ministry. In a last desperate attempt to harness public opinion and halt demolition, a letter appeared in *The Times* on 3 January 1953, signed by John Betjeman, Lord Esher, the architect Harry Stuart Goodhart-Rendel, James Lees-Milne, the architectural historian A.E. Richardson and Marshall Sisson. Instigated by Lees-Milne, the letter invoked the house in hyperbolic terms as 'the first absolutely classical country house of the English Renaissance and furthermore a building of impeccable qualities'. It was the opinion of the signatories that at least the outside of the house could and should be reinstated, and they decried the inaction of the Ministries which alone had the legislative powers to preserve historic buildings such as Coleshill. To quote from the letter:

The fate of Coleshill is made more tragic by the knowledge that only a few years ago the house was sold by the family who for centuries owned and cherished it on the strict understanding that it was ultimately to be vested in the National Trust for preservation. Surely therefore every effort should be made to save one of the most important works of architecture this country has produced.<sup>616</sup>

Despite the orchestration of the letter by Lees-Milne, Rathbone was horrified by its publication and sought to distance the Trust by denying all knowledge of it, fearing the wrath of Cook and Hill. Hill was 'appalled that anybody in his right senses should put their signatures to this ignorant and cruel letter'.<sup>617</sup> Lees-Milne had no regrets, and in his view the ongoing deterioration of the unprotected remains only made Hill 'more villainous for not shoring up the ruins which the SPAB report strongly advised'. Hill had apparently 'railed and swore that Coleshill was a beastly old house anyway, had fulfilled its purpose, was decayed and a white elephant'.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> NTCA, Hubert Smith to J.F.W. Rathbone, 12 November 1952.

<sup>616</sup> *The Times*, 3 January 1953.

<sup>617</sup> WSA, 1946/1/6, letter from Captain Hill to Sir Ralph Glyn, 5 January 1953.

<sup>618</sup> WSA, 1946/1/6, quoted in letter from John Betjeman to Sir Ralph Verney, 7 January 1953.

On 2 January 1953 Berkshire County Council issued a licence for demolition, notifying Hill that despite the inclusion of Coleshill House on the list prepared by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, the Ministry raised no objection to the demolition of the remains on the grounds of their dangerous condition (Appendix 14).<sup>619</sup> A few days later work began. All the serviceable ashlar stone was to be stacked near the site. The Trust had the right to buy from the contractors any other stone or materials that they required, but Hill doubted there would be much of value owing to the condition of the building. The Trust requested that as many items as possible should be salvaged, noting particularly the saloon and library fireplaces, the boudoir and billiard room fireplaces (regarded as of lesser importance but still interesting), and the busts in the roundels over the stairs. The Jacobean fireplace in the dining room was assumed to have been destroyed. In the event Hill reported that just the two library fireplaces were retrieved and that only the bust of Sir Mark Pleydell had been saved as the others had disintegrated along with the saloon fireplace.<sup>620</sup> Of the masonry saved during the salvage operation, some was destined to be incorporated into other buildings around the Buscot and Coleshill estates, as well as in the ramparts of Uffington hill fort, and other deposits of loose masonry were left around the grounds and the village. A surprising number of timber corbels survived from the rooftop cornice, and the caretaker's son Derek Pedley later reported that some masonry rubble was taken away to an old quarry behind Cuckoo Pen wood. By 13 February the house was completely demolished.

## The Ministries

In this account of the demise of Coleshill House, Lees-Milne and Hill are shown to be the principal protagonists, representing competing notions of Coleshill's heritage value, and even the Trust's own institutional handling of the case appeared vague and uncertain. But there is another agency whose contribution to these negotiations requires investigation, and that is the government ministries that enacted national heritage legislative procedures. It might be expected that the ministries would have played a key role in determining the outcome of Coleshill's fate, but although they ultimately authorised the demolition they otherwise imparted little to the discussions. Although Coleshill's pre-eminence as a national treasure was acknowledged by government officials, Hill's argument for demolition on the grounds of an unsafe structure was accepted with minimal resistance. In order to unravel the government's

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<sup>619</sup> WSA, 1946/1/6, licence for demolition.

<sup>620</sup> One of these, bearing the monogram of William, Earl of Radnor, is now at the Trust's Montacute House.

low key role in the negotiations, it is necessary first to understand something of the nature of state heritage protection at the time. Government officials possessed little power to prevent alterations and demolitions to historic buildings beyond preservation orders, introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932. In practice these were seldom used, due to the cumbersome bureaucracy associated with them.<sup>621</sup> By 1952 the state preservation system had barely moved beyond the inventorisation stage, introduced as early as 1908, and followed up with the National Buildings Record in 1941 and by listing with the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947.<sup>622</sup> This process attempted to draw on the scholarship of experts to identify the most worthy monuments for protection, and at least in theory sought to survey the historic built environment in its entirety. In the interests of historic preservation the post-war Labour government commissioned the Gowers Report on Houses of Outstanding Historic or Architectural Interest in 1948. This was published in 1950, with a strong bias towards country houses, although no action was taken on its recommendations until 1953 under the Conservative administration.<sup>623</sup> This report, as Cornforth has pointed out, took for granted that country houses were of historical and aesthetic importance and that the government had a national responsibility for their preservation, but the point had not been debated.<sup>624</sup> However as Coleshill demonstrates, in practice there was little real protection for imperilled buildings of any kind at this time despite the government rhetoric in relation to national heritage.

Examining the role of the ministries in the case of Coleshill reveals the complexities and contradictions of government policy towards heritage preservation at this time.<sup>625</sup> In particular, it suggests that despite the emerging interest in country houses as constituents of national heritage in practice they were marginalised by a state

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<sup>621</sup> Listed building consent was only introduced in 1968.

<sup>622</sup> The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of England was introduced in 1908 to compile an inventory of the most important buildings and structures in England as a basis for recommending what should be protected. The 1944 Town and Country Planning Act introduced a panel of experts to provide a comprehensive list of buildings worth protecting, but it was not until the 1947 Act that it became a statutory duty for the government to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The initial list was only completed in 1970.

<sup>623</sup> Mandler, *Nationalising the Country House*, esp. p. 105. The recommendations of the Gowers Committee were scaled back by the Conservative administration in 1953, but resulted in the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act which introduced limited grants for outstanding buildings and new advisory Historic Buildings Councils for England, Scotland, and Wales.

<sup>624</sup> Cornforth, p. 51.

<sup>625</sup> For a broader discussion of the politics of heritage preservation during the twentieth century, see Samuel, especially pp. 288-312.



protection system that was designed to operate collaboratively with town planning. By the 1940s the protection of inhabited historic structures was conceptually and legislatively connected to land use planning and development control. This connection was notionally made from the late 1920s, when the influential architect and conservationist Clough Williams-Ellis wrote *England and the Octopus* (1928) as a polemic against ribbon development, which included a chapter on 'The Great House'.<sup>626</sup> Williams-Ellis called for a 'really critical commission' to make a list of country houses that deserved 'protection as national monuments and as characteristic and precious parts of England'.<sup>627</sup> He proposed that the best of these 'national heirlooms' as he called them should be scheduled as 'untouchable' and immune from 'unauthorised alteration'.<sup>628</sup> The Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 enshrined the principle of the association between protection and controlling development in legislation.<sup>629</sup> This Act sought to preserve existing structures of architectural, historic or artistic interest within new planning schemes by means of building preservation orders, although there were no lists at this point to serve as guidance as to what should be preserved. Wartime further sharpened the focus both on preservation of national heritage and, in the early post-war period, on the need for improved town planning in the interests of national reconstruction. This connection between heritage protection and development introduced a specific political imperative that directed state heritage concerns at this critical time.

The legislative agenda of the Labour administration reinforced this connection between planning and preservation in the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. With this Act, as one correspondent in *The Times* put it, 'The British people, almost without knowing it, are embarking upon one of the greatest experiments in social control of their environment ever attempted by a free society'.<sup>630</sup> In the post-war world of blitzed towns and cities, the issue of planning and development had taken on a renewed vigour. Conceived as an aid to post-war reconstruction the new Act was understood as correcting the faults of earlier legislation, and was intended to pave the way for positive town and country development rather than being merely regulatory and passive.<sup>631</sup> Historic preservation was overshadowed by this enthusiasm for reconstruction and a system with an inherent presumption in favour of development, and the Act did little more than require the Minister to compile a list of buildings of

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<sup>626</sup> Clough Williams-Ellis, *England and the Octopus* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1928).

<sup>627</sup> Williams-Ellis, p. 80.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid, pp. 82-83.

<sup>629</sup> Cornforth, pp. 19-20.

<sup>630</sup> Quoted in Clark, p. 87.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

historic or architectural interest. As Pevsner observed in 1955, 'Our problems are those of improvements in towns [...] and the laying out, or, as it is now called, the planning of new towns or new parts of towns'.<sup>632</sup> For Pevsner, these 'urgent problems' were 'so much more serious and portentous than those of the country house and its grounds', by which he meant not to denigrate the country house but rather to indicate that it had little to contribute to the principal concern of the day.<sup>633</sup>

When the Conservatives took power in October 1951, they therefore inherited a system of historic preservation located within a framework of development control. The new Conservative administration was less enthusiastic about measures which sought to curtail personal liberties in the name of the abstract benefits of heritage preservation, and by measures which were influenced conceptually by the notion of nationalising the country house. David Eccles, the Conservative Minister of Works, on whose watch Coleshill was lost, believed the country house way of life was gone forever and that the nation should not become a curator of the past. He argued that to preserve dead country houses would mark a decline in the nation.<sup>634</sup> Coleshill's demise occurred at a time when this new planning and conservation regime was taking its first hesitant steps shepherded by the new administration. There was a good deal of confusion about the operation of the 1947 Act, and progress with the listing of national heritage assets was painfully slow, with national coverage still patchy by 1952. Two ministerial departments were responsible for the preservation of historic buildings, the Ministry of Works (Ancient Monuments division), who were primarily responsible for uninhabited structures and monuments, and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MofHLG), who were concerned with listing and planning. This division of responsibility was loosely based on a conceptual distinction made between ruined buildings and habitable buildings, and depending on whether there were planning issues at stake or not.<sup>635</sup>

This muddled and embryonic heritage protection system was put to the test by the imperiled Coleshill House. Hill first wrote to the Secretary of the Ministry of Works three days after the fire on 26 September 1952, requesting an inspection of the

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<sup>632</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (London: The Architectural Press, 1955), p. 168.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>634</sup> Hansard HC Deb 06 February 1953, vol. 510, 2209.

<sup>635</sup> The Ancient Monuments Act of 1931 sought to broaden the definition of 'monument' to take in occupied buildings, but in practice the limited preservation powers that existed were applied principally to ruins due to cumbersome bureaucracy. This remained the case until the 1960s. See Hansard HL Deb 26 June 1962 vol. 241, cc927-33.

remains in order to 'give a recommendation as whether in the national interest any part of the structure should be retained'. Speedy action was urged owing to the apparently dangerous condition of the walls.<sup>636</sup> However as Coleshill was not scheduled as a monument under the terms of the Ancient Monuments Act the letter was immediately passed to the MofHLG to deal with under planning powers as a listed building. The Chief Investigator of the MofHLG considered Coleshill House to be of the greatest national importance and that all that was left of it which could be saved should be saved. However, it was felt that the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments had greater expertise and were better qualified to give advice on the case. Accordingly Chettle and Bailey were dispatched to Coleshill to assess the ruins on 10 October as we have already seen. They reported that it had been made clear to them that Cook saw no other way out than to demolish the standing remains and make use of the stone for repairs to his other properties.

The MofHLG at first decided to take no further action under their planning powers, leaving it to Ancient Monuments provisions owing to the ruined nature of the house. The Ministry of Works however saw things differently, believing the remains to be listed under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act, and in a sternly worded memo they noted: 'we are certainly not dealing with Coleshill House in the sense that you may leave it to our powers to safeguard the building'.<sup>637</sup> In fact the remains of Coleshill House were on a preliminary list which had not yet been made statutory, and the house was not therefore legally protected.<sup>638</sup> The Ministry of Works suggested that this was 'an accident of geography', owing to the lack of progress with listing in certain areas of the country, and that in any case 'before the fire the House lay well outside our field as it was habitable.' Although action under the Ancient Monuments Acts was not impossible, it was regarded as an 'unsatisfactory' solution.<sup>639</sup> Spot listing the remains in order to delay the demolition pending further consideration was dismissed, as Chettle and Bailey's report had noted the dangerous condition of the remains and nothing could be done to prevent works considered necessary in the interests of safety. Despite this, the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments doubted the

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<sup>636</sup> NA, WORK14/1964, Captain Hill to the Ministry of Works, 26 September 1952.

<sup>637</sup> NA, WORK14/1964, N. Digney, Ministry of Works, to Miss I.V. Kuhlicke, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 4 November 1952.

<sup>638</sup> At the time of the fire, under Section 30 of the Town and Country Planning Act, the remains of Coleshill were on the 'interim selective' list, to be categorized at the highest level as Grade I. The list drawn up by the investigators had been sent to the local authority, and was to be issued in statutory form once the authority supplied the names and addresses of owners.

<sup>639</sup> NA, WORK14/1964, Mr N. Digney, Ministry of Works to Miss I.V. Kuhlicke, MofHLG, 7 November 1952.

structure was in fact a danger to anyone, and could see no reason why the labour necessary for the demolition might not be used more profitably to save the structure. To argue for demolition on the grounds of safety was, as he saw it, 'an attempt to prejudice the case for survival of a very fine house'.<sup>640</sup>

Ministry officials acknowledged that some organisations wished the house to be rebuilt, but that others appreciated that having suffered so severely as a result of the fire the house must be regarded as lost, and this more or less became the official view. Listing of the remains either under the Town and Country Planning Act or the Ancient Monuments Act, it was argued, would not have prevented demolition. In view of the keen interest in the property and fearing widespread criticism for licensing its demolition, the MofHLG consulted their lawyers, who confirmed that listing would not prevent work to avert danger and that ineffective spot listing would only bring the Department into disrepute. Furthermore, some officials were opposed to the reconstruction of the house, concluding that, 'in any event those taking an interest in Coleshill House are primarily concerned in its restoration rather than in the saving of the shell. Quite apart from the vital questions of financing such a costly enterprise there is the important point that a restored building would be very largely a reconstruction and not the original in all its beauty'.<sup>641</sup> It was agreed that a licence for demolition must be approved.

Even as the site was levelled, questions were asked in parliament about the demolition, and Coleshill became something of a leitmotif for the impotence of the conservation framework that had failed it. In particular, the case of Coleshill exposed the fragility of notionally valued expert opinion in relation to state conservation practice, at a time when experts and professionals were taking on a dominant role in public life. Indeed Lees-Milne was later to observe that to 'extract a definite pronouncement from the academic officers of the Ancient Monuments section was always like wringing blood from a stone'.<sup>642</sup> At a Commons sitting on 6 February 1953 ministers discussed the Gowers Report which had been untouched since its publication three years earlier. The Prime Minister had previously announced that the government would proceed with new legislation on the issue when time permitted, but some members regarded the situation as desperate, with ongoing losses and demolitions of historic houses characterised using inflammatory language as a 'widespread holocaust'. Indeed demolitions reached a peak in the early 1950s, with 204 country houses demolished

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<sup>640</sup> NA, WORK14/1964, B.H. St John O'Neil, 27 November 1952.

<sup>641</sup> NA, WORK14/1964, briefing document, Miss M.E.I. Waterman, 6 January 1953.

<sup>642</sup> Lees-Milne, *People and Places*, p. 8.

between 1950 and 1955. Arthur Colgate, MP for Burton, moved that legislation be introduced at the earliest practicable date. As evidence he exhibited a list of many houses that had been demolished or were in jeopardy, including Coleshill, which he regarded as 'one of the loveliest houses of its period'.<sup>643</sup> Mr Blenkinsop, MP for Newcastle upon Tyne East, also raised the subject of Coleshill:

the tragedy is that here was a case of fire, but a fire which did not, in the view of the experts, wholly destroy the building. It would still have been possible to save it, if it was felt that it was one of special value in the view of the experts and could have been done without a wholly unreasonable expenditure of money. The tragedy is that this house, undoubtedly like many others, is being demolished, and that we are losing it and others without any proper and careful examination of the question of whether they are properties which we should wish to preserve or no.<sup>644</sup>

Later that year the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 was enacted following the recommendations of the Gowers Report.

## The Lost House

With the demolition of the house complete, Coleshill entered a new phase in its history that centred on its absence and the perceived injustice of its loss, and few laid the blame with the fire as the cause of Coleshill's demise. On 23 February 1953 a letter appeared in *The Times* by an anonymous correspondent entitled 'Coleshill: The Story of a Great House'. This gave public expression to the anguish felt amongst those sensitive to the importance of the building: 'The burning of Coleshill House last autumn escaped with little notice. Yet it caused a keen sense of loss to those who know their English architecture. Something unique and irreplaceable has perished'.<sup>645</sup> The SPAB reported the destruction of the house as 'a most grievous loss', and lauded Coleshill as 'the first house to be erected in England embodying the purely classical style – it was in fact a masterpiece of great intrinsic beauty, a landmark in the history of English architecture and considered by many to be the most important house of its kind in this country'.<sup>646</sup> The report continued, 'Those who feel keenly the destruction of

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<sup>643</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 06 February 1953 vol. 510 cc2186-242.

<sup>644</sup> Hansard, HC Deb 06 February 1953 vol. 510 cc2186-242.

<sup>645</sup> *The Times*, 23 February 1953.

<sup>646</sup> SPAB Report of the Committee for the 74<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> Years 1952-1957, p. 49-50.

any part of our architectural heritage will lament with the Society the causes which led to the disastrous loss of this superb house'.<sup>647</sup>

Amongst those who knew the circumstances surrounding Coleshill's demolition, it was Hill who was portrayed as the villain responsible for the loss rather than the ministries, suggesting that there was little expectation of a robust ministerial response. Hill was vilified by those that he referred to as 'the anti-demolition party'. Back from his winter retreat in the south of France, Lees-Milne attacked Hill for what he perceived as the unnecessary demolition of the house. An angry Hill retorted that those who wanted the house rebuilt or the shell retained had shown little practical interest in Coleshill after the fire, making no more than cursory visits to the site, and that Cook had simply been acting on the advice of 'the greatest experts in the land'.<sup>648</sup> Marshall Sisson believed that Hill had failed in not acting sooner to shore up the remaining walls, as heavy rain in the months immediately following the fire had further damaged the structure. He cited SPAB doctrine that any standing structure could be stabilised and repaired without rebuilding, and noted specific examples where walls had been saved in other gutted buildings, including St James's Church, Piccadilly, and St Brides, Fleet Street. Sisson dismissed Hill's 'leading architects', arguing that if 'real experts' such as Professor Richardson or J.E.M. Macgregor had been consulted the outcome might have been different. In Sisson's view Hill had found a niche amongst the great iconoclasts, and he wrote to Lees-Milne accordingly: 'his name shall not be forgotten while any appreciation of architecture remains. I think we were the only two people who realised what Coleshill was worth'.<sup>649</sup> Despite Coleshill's iconic status and the efforts of preservationists to assert the unique value of the house to national architectural heritage, state protection had proved inconsequential in the face of Hill's determination to demolish the remains. Lees-Milne shared Sisson's withering indictment of Hill. He also believed that first-aid measures should have been promptly implemented, having seen for himself buildings in both France and Italy that had been saved in this way. In a scathing letter to Hill, Lees-Milne wrote that 'If Coleshill had been another pleasant Cotswold Manor house, I and my co-signatories of the Times letter would not have expressed our views so strongly. But it was unique, and its total loss to architecture is irreparable. I only hope that your name will not be remembered by a reproachful posterity alongside those of the classic iconoclasts of history – like Herostratus of Ephesus, Thomas Cromwell, Will Dowsing and Mr Herbert Morrison who jubilantly pulled away the first stone of Waterloo Bridge under a battery of cameras'.<sup>650</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> SPAB Report of the Committee for the 74<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> Years 1952-1957, p. 50.

<sup>648</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to James Lees-Milne, 14 August 1953.

<sup>649</sup> NTCA, Marshall Sisson to James Lees-Milne, 23 April 1953.

<sup>650</sup> NTCA, James Lees-Milne to Captain Hill 1 September 1953.

## Architectural Heritage in the Mid-Twentieth Century

In drawing comparison with Herbert Morrison, Lees-Milne associated Hill and his actions in relation to Coleshill with a wider modernising agenda which some conservationists perceived as a threat to the nation's historic buildings. Morrison and his allies had personally begun dismantling John Rennie's Waterloo Bridge in 1937 without permission in order to force the government to allow the London County Council (LCC) to build a replacement. Rennie's Doric structure of 1817 was much admired, and the artist Canova had famously referred to it as 'the noblest bridge in the world'. However it was deemed too narrow to carry the growing volume of traffic, and was declared unsafe in 1924 due to collapsing foundations. The controversial demolition of the bridge was part of Morrison's wider ambitions for the redevelopment of the area between Waterloo Bridge and Westminster Bridge. This later became the site of the Festival of Britain in 1951, a pet project of Morrison's when he was deputy leader of the post-war Labour administration, which provided further evidence of the Labour government's modernising programme. Although the Festival was ostensibly a non-political celebration of British character and achievement, heralding economic regeneration and prosperity to come, Becky Conekin nonetheless identifies the Festival with the social democratic agenda advanced by the government.<sup>651</sup> Furthermore, she sees the motifs of heritage and tradition that were found in certain elements of the celebrations as instruments for reinventing notions of nationhood and Britishness as part of a wider modernising project. Conservationists such as Lees-Milne and his ilk demonstrated what Miles Glendinning regards as an anti-modern approach to heritage preservation.<sup>652</sup> The language that they employed to articulate the threat to national heritage such as vandalism, destruction, loss and tragedy had little place in the post-war world of optimism and modernity promoted by the Festival organisers. This is not to say that there was no room for the past and its conservation in this new vision for Britain, but it was a particular conception of the past that differed both in nature and intent from the aristocratic heritage championed by Lees-Milne and others. Indeed Glendinning identifies the idea of the conservation of the 'city monument' specifically as a modernizing influence at this time.<sup>653</sup> Despite notionally gaining the support of government legislation country house preservation was no more than a minority interest, rather than a national, common cause.

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<sup>651</sup> Becky Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

<sup>652</sup> Miles Glendinning, 'The Conservation Movement: A Cult of the Modern Age', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 13 (2005), 359-76.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*

The relationship between the Festival, national identity and history provides a context for understanding attitudes to the architecture of the past at the time of the Coleshill fire. Whilst nominally commemorating the centenary of the Great Exhibition of 1851, this was not a dominant theme of the Festival, because, as Conekin suggests, there was little appetite for an era associated with class conflict, imperialism and capitalism.<sup>654</sup> As an architectural type, the country house, with its connotations of aristocratic rule, ostentation and authoritarianism, also had a problematic relationship with the idea of the British people that was promoted through the Festival celebrations, which constructed the British nation in terms of a long tradition of a classless, free, and unified society. The country house represented a minority elite culture which was unsuited to the levelling agenda of the Welfare State. In wartime, national heritage was a politicised domain which by the early 1950s was seen within the context of a modernising project linked to planning and reconstruction. As Conekin observes, the Festival's centrally-organised events including the South Bank exhibition sought to harness planning and urban renewal along with science, design and technology as key components in national regeneration. On the other hand urban Georgian architecture was celebrated in regional events in towns and cities around Britain, just as it had been advanced by Summerson for its contribution to the nation's history of progressive town planning in his volume '*Georgian London*'.<sup>655</sup>

The country house therefore had an ambiguous position in notions of national heritage in the early 1950s, and whilst it was viewed by some as an appropriately highbrow focus for heritage protection, it was of marginal relevance to the modernising project of either the Labour or Conservative administration. Authorised national heritage protection only partly took its cue from scholarly architectural history and the authority of experts, but also connected with new narratives of national character and identity which necessarily excluded the country house and its estate. Debates about the value of individual canonical works were of little relevance to a state protection system that rested more on an integrated notion of the urban built environment. Furthermore despite efforts to articulate Coleshill as a work of utmost importance to the nation's architectural heritage, it was no great treasure house, and it lacked outstanding collections, magnificent gardens, or historical associations that might have bolstered its appeal. The fire of 1952 exposed the fragility of a canonical status formulated in

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<sup>654</sup> Conekin, p. 80.

<sup>655</sup> For a discussion of Summerson in relation to planning see Peter Mandler, 'John Summerson 1904-1992: The Architectural Critic and the Quest for the Modern', in *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, ed. by Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 229-45.



architectural histories that relied on aesthetic categories and values that did not necessarily have currency in the wider world.

## The Coleshill Estate

Without the house, questions were raised about the significance of the Coleshill estate in relation to the Trust's preservation role. The loss of the house brought with it the small compensation that the estate could be more easily self-supporting for the Trust without it. Whilst Cook still intended to devise Coleshill to the Trust in accordance with the wishes of Miss Pleydell-Bouverie, there was still disagreement over the question of inalienability. Whilst protecting the amenity of the house was no longer a consideration, the Trust could only justify declaring land inalienable where it was of outstanding beauty in its own right. But as far as Hill was concerned, Cook's agreement to covenant the estate had been made on the basis that it would be held in its entirety for preservation purposes in perpetuity, and that the Trust was going against the spirit of the bequest by proposing to sell some of the land.<sup>656</sup> Relations between Hill and the Trust became even more strained, with Rathbone foreseeing litigation if Cook's devise was conditional upon the whole estate being declared inalienable. A tense meeting with Hill resulted in him storming out, and Cook instructed his solicitors to intervene. By April 1955 the Trust conceded that the whole estate could be regarded as of sufficient natural beauty to be declared inalienable.

## The Empty Site

The Coleshill estate finally passed into the Trust's ownership on 12 October 1956 following the death of Cook. After the demolition of the house, the site was grassed over and made into the village cricket pitch. Plans to turn the laundry and brewhouse building into a community centre, or perhaps an area office for the Trust, came to nothing. When the Trust's Richard Stewart-Jones visited in May 1955 he noted 'the uncanny atmosphere of Coleshill, where all the appurtenances of a great house remain except the building itself, of which there is no trace'.<sup>657</sup> Stewart-Jones appears to have been the first to suggest some sort of marker for the site in order to record the architecture in some way. He proposed putting a zinc or lead engraving by the

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<sup>656</sup> NTCA, Captain Hill to Mary Pleydell-Bouverie, 16 March 1953.

<sup>657</sup> NTCA, R.L. Stewart-Jones to Robin Fedden, 10 May 1955

entrance 'so that visitors to the most superbly sited cricket pitch in England should have the chance of seeing the design of the building'.<sup>658</sup>

In 1961 Lees-Milne reported to Fedden that the village was looking unloved and uncared for, and he suggested that the laundry building, which had found no regular use, could be converted into a small residence.<sup>659</sup> He noted in front of it an amusing statue of a Roman worthy. In June 1961 a draft tenancy agreement was drawn up for the Clock House, as it became known, which included the site of the mansion. This required that no alteration was to be made to the layout of the site without prior approval of the Trust. There was to be no public access to the property, and the statue in the forecourt was to be left in position and kept in proper repair.<sup>660</sup> The empty site of the house reverted to a grassy field for the use of the tenants. The decision to remove the site of the house from the public domain by locating it within the tenanted property suggests that the Trust regarded it as of little cultural value, although the terms of the tenancy did offer some protection from further alteration. In another sense, this might be understood as a move by the Trust to institutionally 'forget' the site of the house, and to consign the house itself to history. Furthermore, the site was a painful and disheartening reminder of the failure of the Trust and of the nation to save a prized symbol of English architectural achievement from irrecoverable loss.

In 1989 the tenants of the Clock House created a garden outlining the ground floor plan of the house. This was done with the help of villagers and family members and through sponsorship and donations. A box hedge marked out the external walls of the house and the position of the original steps was laid out with slate. The tenants also produced a leaflet on the history of the house. However ten years later Tim Knox, the Trust's Architectural Historian, suggested some more lasting and monumental marker should be placed on the site. He proposed that the 'site of what is perhaps the most important and beautiful of all Carolean houses deserves to be commemorated in a dignified way [...] having lost this great house whilst it was in our keeping we have in a

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> NTCA, James Lees-Milne to Robin Fedden, 13 February 1961.

<sup>660</sup> A second statue was later found in woodland and placed outside the Clock House alongside that noted by Lees-Milne. Both of these statues represent Roman legionnaires. Trevor Proudfoot has pointed out that they are both foreshortened as if to be exhibited at a great height (NTRA, Coleshill files, November 1985). Both have location points at the back possibly to take an iron cramp or restrainer. The original location of these statues is not known, and they may be from another site.

sense a debt to pay, a score to settle, with Coleshill'.<sup>661</sup> Whilst he approved of the idea of a parterre marking the footprint of the house he also proposed constructing a belvedere that would allow the geometry of the building made visible by such a garden to be seen from above. This could utilise original stonework from the house, although Knox also acknowledged that the piles of remaining masonry lying around the site had come to form an important and distinctive part of the landscape of Coleshill. The stone belvedere would provide a permanent monument to the lost house, making a material and aesthetic connection with the object to which it referred. By providing a purpose for the stones of the house which had otherwise been abandoned to decay, it would materially contribute to the preservation of its memory.

## The Site of the House Today

To visit the site of Coleshill House today armed even with the barest knowledge of the house is to experience a profound sense of its absence. In Benjaminian terms, there remains the aura of an authentic and unique place, not formally curated and mediated, which continues to bear witness to the passing of time. There are metaphoric and poetic connections with the house as well as physical remnants. The site possesses what Fred Davis refers to as the 'bittersweet' nature of nostalgia, where yearning for the positive qualities of the house is tainted by the sadness of its loss and the violence of its destruction.<sup>662</sup> This nostalgic longing is invoked by the knowledge of its physical ruination, and derives in part from an understanding of the iconic status of the house that arises from the cultural assumptions and mythology borne out in its historiography, as well as a sense of a world that has vanished. Moreover there is a desire which arises from a Bachelardian yearning for comfort and homeliness which is prompted by the lure of a lost home.<sup>663</sup> The imagination longs to take a journey through the once inhabited place of lived-in rooms, with chairs to sit in, passages to navigate, beds to sleep in, stairs to climb to reach attics or to descend to cellars, and warm hearths to sit by. Therefore the site is experienced in complex ways as a dialogue between the absent building and the observer which lies beyond any normal architectural experience. It elicits alternative imaginings of the house from those of its

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<sup>661</sup> NTRA, Tim Knox to Assistant Historic Buildings Representative, Thames and Chilterns, 12 June 1998.

<sup>662</sup> For a discussion of this 'bittersweet' quality of nostalgia, see Fred Davis, 'Nostalgia, Identity and the Current Nostalgia Wave', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (1977), 414-24. See also Edward Casey on place and nostalgia in 'The World and Nostalgia'.

<sup>663</sup> Gustav Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994). See also Edward Casey on the relationship between built space and dwelling in *Getting Back into Place*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 109-145.

histories and confronts the limitations of a materialist approach to heritage value. The house is released from traditional modes of interpretation which conspire to fix meanings in what some critics regard as heritage pastiche. Meaning is not embedded in the stony monumentality of the house, but in the material and memory traces it has left behind. Furthermore, the site of the house retains a dynamic relationship with its landscape setting, which is itself constantly shaped and reshaped over time, both visually and cognitively.

Whilst traces of the house remain at Coleshill, its status as a monument is thrown into question. Coleshill House was construed by experts as a monument to Jones's genius, and authority was conferred upon it not only by the actions of its owners in the long eighteenth century but also by the reappraisals of architectural historians who inscribed it with cultural value. In the 1940s and opening years of the 1950s, conservationists and scholars argued for its preservation as an exceptional and authentic monument that commemorated a key moment in English architectural endeavour. When Coleshill House perished, its standing as a celebrated historical monument was also shattered. It was rendered to be what Riegl refers to as an anti-monument, seeming to resist memory as its remains were left lying in the grass, abandoned to natural decay and submitting to ephemerality.<sup>664</sup> Yet in a sense the act of destruction itself recharged the site with a new cultural and political significance that derived from the narrative of loss. The site testifies in a most extreme way to the mutability of architecture as opposed to its enduring materiality. It serves as a reminder of the ultimate futility of preservation and the impossibility of the idea of the authentic monument preserved in its original state, as all buildings must inevitably decay over time. Yet the physical and imaginative traces of the house that remain, indeed the very absence of the house, lends the site a dynamism of its own.<sup>665</sup>

The persistence of material and memory traces at Coleshill allow the house to continue to live on at the site, and in so doing sustains a degree of cultural value. In David Littlefield's terms, the voice of the building can still be heard as it 'emerges slowly through a fusion (an alchemy) of imagination, metaphor, association, memory, sensory experience, emotional response and hard architectural and historical facts'.<sup>666</sup> Littlefield argues that 'buildings rarely have a single, clear, unambiguous voice; and any voice

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<sup>664</sup> Riegl, 1982.

<sup>665</sup> On the dynamic and autonomous nature of ruins see Trigg, *The Aesthetics of Decay*; Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins* (New York: Rodopi, 2004).

<sup>666</sup> See David Littlefield, 'Introduction', in *Architectural Voices*, ed. by Littlefield and Lewis, pp. 9-15 (p. 15).

that is detectable is often amplified by demolition'.<sup>667</sup> A dramatic recent example of this is the World Trade Centre, where the absence of the buildings continues to haunt the site. The destroyed building provides a constant reminder of the act of destruction itself. As Dylan Trigg notes, 'Sentiment and intuition demand that we are more receptive to objects that have first-hand experience of suffering, the reason being that they are more able to bear witness to events than those that monumentalise through either proxy or speculation'.<sup>668</sup> The demolition of Coleshill failed to annihilate it, and the house retains an ineffable presence through the traces that remain which offer the potential to disrupt traditional expectations of visiting a country house. This calls to mind Robert Ginsberg's observation on ruined buildings that 'though the artefact is destroyed, the ruin is free to be creative in its own terms'.<sup>669</sup>

There is a further sense in which Coleshill might be regarded in terms of nostalgic sentiments which depend on the remnants that linger on in the present, much in the manner of a souvenir. The stones that lie about the site function as souvenirs generated by the narrative of the house, and have the capacity to serve as traces of the authentic experience of being at the house which cannot now be repeated (Figure 104). For Susan Stewart, the souvenir

always displays the romance of contraband, for its scandal is its removal from its 'natural' location. Yet it is only by means of its material relation to that location that it acquires value [...] The souvenir speaks to a context of origin through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value; it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.<sup>670</sup>

The souvenir is by definition always incomplete and has a metonymic relationship to the site of its original appropriation in the sense that it is a sample. But the souvenir will not function without the supplementary narrative discourse that attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins.<sup>671</sup> Furthermore souvenirs have a 'double function' to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present'.<sup>672</sup> The stones remain a poignant reminder not only of the house but of the failure to save it from destruction. As souvenirs, the abandoned stones whilst 'uncurated' are nonetheless removed from their context of origin and

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<sup>667</sup> Littlefield, 'Introduction', p. 12.

<sup>668</sup> Trigg, p. 60.

<sup>669</sup> Ginsberg, p. 56.

<sup>670</sup> Stewart, p. 135.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

devoid of use value, but they have the power to engage the viewer's imagination.<sup>673</sup> It is through narrative and reverie that the stones are restored to Coleshill once more, creating a bridge across temporal distance to reach the absent house.



Figure 104 'Souvenirs' or masonry fragments of Coleshill House. *Karen Fielder*.

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<sup>673</sup> Stewart, p. 150.

## CONCLUSION: The Present Absence of Coleshill House

As a collaborative project with the National Trust, this thesis has addressed the lack of research into this iconic building, confronting the ideational house that is invoked on the empty site left behind on the Trust's Coleshill estate. The site retains both material and mental traces of the lost building, and in this way the house continues to reside there in the imagination. Rather than focusing on the original form of Coleshill House, this thesis engages with past and present human responses to it that imbue the building with meaning and value. It investigates how the physical and imaginative structures of Coleshill are fused in the continuous process of reconstruction over time. This recognizes the ongoing life of the house not simply as a sequence of building works but as occurring through shifts in how the building is construed. As Dell Upton observes, 'once introduced into the landscape, the identity of a building and the intentions of its makers are dissolved with confusing patterns of human perception, imagination and use'.<sup>674</sup>

In addressing the shifting perceptions of Coleshill, this study specifically confronts the idea of the canonical house. Historiographic analysis has exposed the practices and conventions of the formulation of architectural histories by which the idea of the canonical work is created and sustained, contributing to the growing interest in the study of architectural historiography. By returning to the documentary archives for the long eighteenth century, architectural and landscaping interventions are revealed which offer insight into how later owners construed the house. This challenges the notion of Coleshill as an unaltered work that underpins historiographic conceptions of its authenticity and cultural value. This approach also demonstrates the extent to which past owners subscribed to the idea of the original Jonesian house that constitutes the canonical work of its histories. It shows how through their actions they were complicit in Coleshill's ongoing canonisation. The pivotal moment in the mid-twentieth century when the house was re-imagined as an object of national heritage, but ultimately was lost, provides a unique micro-historical insight into the shift in attitudes to historic architecture that occurred at this time, and helps to explain the empty site that exists today.

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<sup>674</sup> Dell Upton, 'Architectural History or Landscape History', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 44:4 (1991), 195-99 (p. 195).

Under the influence of literary criticism as a basis for interrogating the historiographic myth of Coleshill House, the judgements of scholars of architectural history have been shown to shape the idea of the canonical work through texts formulated by the complex interaction of narratives of style, specifically the classical style, and narratives of biography. They invite an aesthetic and conceptual evaluation of the house derived from art historical values such as period, style, creative author and artistic innovation. These narratives engage with the notion of an original and authentic identity for Coleshill which underpins the ideational house in its histories. There is a powerful urge to invoke Coleshill as a uniform stylistic entity, pure, newborn and untouched by the passing of time, representing a single, un-negotiated concept of the mind of a creative genius. Yet, as Borden notes, 'buildings are neither fixed in time, nor are they a-temporal things. Rather they are part of social reproduction, part of the way people live their lives, [...] part of the way architecture itself changes'.<sup>675</sup>

Established art historical methods of thinking about architecture have operated as systems of knowledge in the discipline of architectural history in varying ways since narrative accounts of the development of British architecture were first constructed at the end of the nineteenth century. Outside of these frameworks, Coleshill had little to offer scholars. It had no great historical associations, no great collections, and until the arrival of the Auxiliary Units in 1940, no remarkable events took place there. It was a relatively modest and otherwise unremarkable house. Evoking Coleshill as an extraordinary, innovative and seminal work within an architectural canon suppressed the commonplace in the house's existence by which it functioned and was experienced on a day-to-day basis.

Coleshill's histories draw on earlier specialist architectural texts and images which are mined and reinterpreted as empirical sources in their own right, rarely returning to the documentary archive (or indeed to the building itself whilst it still stood). The historiography of Coleshill reveals the extent to which historical 'facts' are derived from selected pieces of evidence and deployed as truthful and authoritative by historians to be carried forward in historical accounts. Sir Mark's brass plaque and the research he recorded in his commonplace book have become essential sources for formulating Coleshill's histories. The 'cucumber garden' story has been explicitly part of Coleshill's scholarly histories since it was rediscovered and published by Gotch in 1918. But its influence is more deeply rooted in the histories of the house than this, since it was interpreted by Sir Mark to establish Jones's authorship at the expense of Pratt and even Webb. However the veracity of the story remains uncertain and

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<sup>675</sup> Borden, p. 66.



contested. It was ultimately derived from the hearsay of family members and associates, yet as recorded by Sir Mark in his commonplace book it has acquired the status of an authoritative archival source, and is taken by some as solid evidence. But other oral traditions that were familiar to those who were close to the house are absent from official accounts. An example of this is the long-established story of a wax doll, or more ghoulishly the effigy of a dead baby, that it was said must remain at Coleshill for the security of the house.<sup>676</sup> Such was the power of this tradition in relation to the house that it was inscribed in the legal contract that assigned Coleshill to Ernest Cook, stipulating that the doll must remain there for all time. This oral tradition is deeply rooted in the popular memory of the house, but it is left out of authorised accounts as, unlike the cucumber garden story, it cannot be accommodated in the established frameworks of knowledge by which its histories are formulated.

Coleshill's histories, both visual and textual, have provided the means by which the house is given historical reality, meaning and value. They demonstrate how disciplinary practices have given shape to Coleshill at the expense of other more complex relationships between human experience and the generation of meaning. Historiographic analysis reveals how these histories are manipulated according to the cultural contexts in which architecture is understood, so that they are coloured by contemporary rhetoric. As a Jonesian work of the English Renaissance, Coleshill was promoted by architect/authors in the early twentieth century as an exemplary work of English ingenuity within a broader agenda of reviving the national architecture of the present. These texts imbued the house with national characteristics and values that went beyond aesthetic qualities. At a time of political upheaval, the new European scholars that arrived in Britain from the 1930s challenged this insular approach to architecture to re-imagine Coleshill as a continental work with a Palladian sensibility. In the post-war period, those who accepted Pratt as Coleshill's author offered a revised social interpretation of the house which rejected the elitist connotations of Palladian classicism in favour of the modest gentry house, reflecting moves to direct architectural history away from a preoccupation with the monumental architecture of the elite. This reattribution infused the house with alternative meanings, allowing for its mental reconstruction whilst all the while the building itself remained unchanged. It

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<sup>676</sup> A version of the story is recounted by Alfred Williams, writing around 1914, in *Round About the Middle Thames: Glimpses of Rural Victorian Life*, ed. by Michael Davis (Stroud: Sutton, 1982), pp. 46-47. The doll is mentioned by Derek Pedley in his unpublished account of Coleshill, and Doris Pleydell-Bouverie refers to the doll in a recorded interview made in 1990, a copy and transcript of which is at the Coleshill Estate Office. The doll survived the fire and is believed to be at Longford Castle.

shifted the course of Coleshill's historiography by linking the house to a new strand of architectural development.

Despite these shifting narratives, Coleshill has retained its status as a way marker in scholarly accounts of the development of British classical architecture, demonstrating its unassailability as a canonical work. Whilst scholarly debates eddy around it, the house does little more than fidget on its canonical plinth, remaining constant and flawless. Authors variously see Coleshill as a prototype, transitional or as fully formed in order to make connections between the house and what had gone before and what was to come after, constructing narratives of progress that sustain its cultural importance. They continually seek out the extraordinary in the house rather than the prosaic. However the house cannot be disciplined by approaches that depend on concepts and categories such as English Renaissance, Jonesian, Prattian, astylar and Palladian. It remains elusive and resists being universalized in these terms. These histories of Coleshill attach cultural and historic significance to the house according to disciplinary preoccupations, but their adherence to the practice of constructing and sustaining the architectural canon inevitably constrains our understanding of the absent building.

By returning to the rich archive sources for Coleshill, this thesis contributes new knowledge to our understanding of the house. It turns attention away from origins to address the ongoing life of the building. My documentary research has focused on two specific episodes in Coleshill's history – the alterations to the house and its setting made by Sir Mark and Jacob in the long eighteenth century, and the period of the National Trust's involvement with the house in the mid-twentieth century. These phases shed light on alternative approaches to the idea of the canonical house over time, specifically by addressing the co-dependence of alteration and conservation as modes of engaging with the building.

Alterations to Coleshill have been downplayed in histories which represent the house as largely unaltered and therefore close to its original and authentic condition until the fire of 1952. The archives are however replete with references to alterations carried out during the periods of Sir Mark's and Jacob's ownership. Although the association of Lord Burlington and Daniel Asher Alexander with Coleshill has long been recognised, the nature of their involvement and its implications in relation to the idea of the Jonesian house has never fully been explored up to now. Pratt's contribution to the house was notionally erased by Sir Mark, and thereafter Coleshill was regarded as a testament to the genius of Jones which informed future responses to it. Sir Mark and Jacob both subscribed to the importance of 'Jonesian' features that were legitimated in

publications, such as ceilings, chimneypieces and gate piers, and they invested in preserving these. The monumental chimneys were clearly valued as part of the architectural composition and aesthetic character of the house despite the structural problems that they caused. To this end Sir Mark consulted Lord Burlington on their repair. Under Jacob's ownership Daniel Asher Alexander was commissioned to carry out sympathetic repairs to valued features of the house such as the eaves cornice and the decorative ceilings, and indeed his sensitive work in relation to the idea of the Jonesian work was praised by Sir John Soane. The contribution of the windows to the house was however more questionable, in part because of a lack of consensus as to their correct Jonesian form. Alexander's repairs were carried out in the spirit of keeping the house alive and habitable, and included the introduction of modern features such as hot air heating. Soon after Alexander was at the house the old paneled parlour was altered to accommodate a new study for Jacob, with bookshelves sympathetically designed to fit the existing wainscot and an old chimneypiece relocated from the housekeeper's room in the basement. Similarly, a revivalist style ceiling which acknowledged the original ceiling designs elsewhere in the house was installed over a new dining room despite diverging from contemporary fashion. There is an interesting comparison here with Charles Barry's work at Kingston Lacy, which he substantially rebuilt for William Bankes to restore the house in the manner of Inigo Jones, who was believed to be the architect of the house. This work included encasing the house with Chilmark stone, and adding a new rooftop balustrade and cupola, and even adding tall corner chimneys similar to those of Coleshill.<sup>677</sup> But at Coleshill there was no comprehensive rebuilding or restoration. Rather the house was sustained by ongoing and at times costly repairs, with sensitive alterations to its salient features, such that it matured and subtly evolved over time.

This research sheds new light on fields of professional architectural practice that have been largely overlooked - those of repair and adaptation rather than creative design. Architects were commissioned not to dramatically refashion the house, but to repair and upgrade it as a deliberate move to resist inevitable decay whilst remaining sensible of Coleshill's architectural significance. These interventions addressed shortcomings in the design of the house that were not anticipated at the point of its original conception, including structural failings and inadequacies of accommodation. The engagement of esteemed architects such as Alexander and also of Thomas Hopper is indicative of the importance placed on these alterations. Arguably financial constraints limited the extent of remodelling at Coleshill, but nonetheless significant sums were spent on sympathetic works which might have altered the house more radically had the

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<sup>677</sup> Mitchell, pp. 59-60.

owners not been mindful of the host building with which they engaged. Yet both Sir Mark and Jacob continued to invest positive meanings in the house, transforming it as an emblem of their status and identity and to meet the changing needs of the household.

These alterations clearly displayed a conservative mentality, but such self-imposed constraints did not prevent alterations to the fabric of the building altogether, and it would be wrong to view these owners as Coleshill's conservators. Rather they adopted a complex and nuanced approach to alterations. In this way the idea of the canonical house seems less secure, depending as much on the choices of past owners of the house as on disciplinary conventions. It is likely that had Jacob not been hard pressed financially more of his proposed alterations would have been executed and these would have impacted upon subsequent renderings of the house as an unaltered canonical work. Some elements of the seventeenth-century house would have been effaced, subverting the notion of its authentic classicism as set out in its histories. Many alterations were carried out to ensure the long term security and utility of the house as a family home, and to accommodate a degree of modernisation. But there were also stylistic interventions which evade the neat stylistic taxonomies that provide frames of reference for later historians.

The addition of the service annex to the north of the house around 1788 in a vernacular style which contrasted with the architectural idiom of the main house shows how Jacob balanced the need to extend the house with preserving the integrity of the original block. The annex broke the rigid symmetry of the house but was necessary to accommodate the growing service needs of the household. The structure was consistently left off visual renderings of the house in its histories which continued to assert its symmetrical composition, and indeed visually the annex was intentionally very submissive. Another dramatic intervention that was proposed by Jacob was the alteration to the grand entrance staircase, which would also have subverted the symmetry of the house by shifting the entrance to one side. The long list of alterations that were actually carried out by Jacob included knocking through closets, inserting a new mezzanine floor, altering and adding fireplaces and rearranging ground floor rooms. New heating and hot water systems were introduced, and the kitchen was modernized at great expense. There were also extensive redecorations of wall linings and paintwork, and new furnishings. The acquisition and hanging of old family portraits rooted the house and its new occupants in the traditions of the locality. By the time of Jacob's death in 1828, Coleshill was a very different house than it had been 100 years previously, and the experience of the building by its occupants and users would have been transformed by the alterations that he made.

It was not only the house itself that altered during the long eighteenth century, but also the setting in which it was read and experienced. Jacob has been credited with transforming the setting from the formal seventeenth-century terraces to a more naturalistic scene according to contemporary taste. He took a very personal approach to laying out the view across the landscape from the house that served as its hub. This work opened the way for the reinterpretation of the house by Britton and others in terms of the new picturesque paradigm in the years around 1800. It also allowed Jacob to assert associational values which rooted the house and his family in the parish and established his authority as a local landowner. However Sir Mark's earlier contribution to the gardens and park at Coleshill has not previously been noted. In fact, Sir Mark began the process of introducing new landscaping ideas as a setting for the house in the 1740s alongside his better known work excavating water mines. To some extent he worked within the framework of the seventeenth-century terraced gardens to create serpentine paths and new water features, whilst also opening up views to the landscape beyond with a new ha-ha and avenues of trees. More surprising, however, were his experiments with sound, in which the house provided a focus for a new soundscape created by the water features. The archives make it clear that the landscaping works of both Sir Mark and Jacob were concerned with altering the experience of being at the house itself as much as with how the building was seen in a revised setting. These interventions provided a method of altering the house according to contemporary cultural values whilst leaving the fabric of the building untouched.

Coleshill was shaped in part to reflect the owners' sense of their place in the world. For Sir Mark, his experimental use of sound pointed to him as a man of the Enlightenment who engaged with new forms of knowledge, whilst Jacob took steps to assert his ancestral pedigree through his interventions to the house and its setting. It is of course hardly surprising that Coleshill was altered during 300 years of almost continuous occupation. The absence of the ongoing life of the house in published accounts of Coleshill reflects the dominant practices and methodologies of architectural history in constructing the canon of elite and venerable works of which Coleshill is a part. A preoccupation with the creative architect and the seventeenth-century house in histories of Coleshill to some degree mirrors the concerns of later owners, but it also sidelines their role in re-shaping the house and giving it new meanings and interpretations that were more consistent with their aspirations. Gradually, the owners addressed aspects of the house that could be made more agreeable and efficient, eliminating what failed to work for them. Coleshill is traditionally viewed as a 'work' by architectural historians, in the sense that it is understood as a building that, in Paul Eggert's terms, materialises a documented architectural intention, aiming to solve a design problem with a degree of originality, and therefore inviting an aesthetic

reading.<sup>678</sup> But for Brand 'works' and what actually works are two different things, and rather buildings are the products of an 'endless ravelling and unravelling skein of relationships over time'.<sup>679</sup> Coleshill's archives for the long eighteenth century suggest that the house would rarely have been free from the sound of labourers at work in and around the building. The house became not the work of a single creative author but the result of the many hands of owners, architects, stewards, masons, carpenters, decorators and others, in a composite of alterations and adjustments made since its original completion.

Coleshill's archives show how the owners exerted their preferences as consumers of a historic building. It demonstrates that interventions were not simply sequences of new work, and that what was carried forward of the old building was equally as important. These sort of slowly evolving interventions rarely feature in architectural histories, which rather seek out moments of 'pure' architectural development that constitute complete and singular acts of creativity. This method of interpretation rests largely on a Summersonian canonical approach to constructing narratives of architectural history. The more conservative approach to altering historic architecture in the eighteenth century which Coleshill reveals merits further research as an alternative to scholarly preoccupations with new forms of classicism at this time. It suggests that an alternative methodology which examines alteration in terms of, to use Scott's analogy, a 'duet' between old and new can yield insights into contemporary attitudes to architecture. Sir Mark and Jacob clearly approached Coleshill in these terms, ensuring that the house remained functional, homely and useful, whilst mindful to some extent of protecting and indeed perfecting aspects of the original model. Furthermore they pursued a co-existence of styles, whether in the vernacular of the offices or the vernacular classicism of the study. In the case of Coleshill, we are left with a sense of how far the owners held a regard for the old house when confronted with changing contemporary notions of fashion and taste, and the changing requirements of their household.

Brand observes that a long-lived building always matures at the hands of attentive owners, but also that owners co-evolve with the building. For Sir Mark, Coleshill House and its setting evolved with him to assert his character as a man of the Enlightenment, whilst Jacob moulded the house and landscape to connect and root himself and his family within the locality. They also had more homely domestic concerns. As Brand notes, 'We shape our buildings around our routines loving the fit when it becomes

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<sup>678</sup> Eggert, p. 20.

<sup>679</sup> Brand, p. 71.

intimate and sure'.<sup>680</sup> Sir Mark and Jacob's approaches to Coleshill bring to mind Edward Casey's ideas about place-making in the realm of architecture, which he expresses in terms of 'cultivation' or 'caring-for'.<sup>681</sup> In Casey's terms built places 'resist construal as sheerly constructed things. They exceed their own construction by giving rise to familiarity and reverie alike'.<sup>682</sup> Casey sees the cultivation of built places as an ongoing process. Interior decoration and even the rearrangement of paintings and furniture are essential to the process of 'settling in'. By 'cultivating' Coleshill Sir Mark and Jacob showed that they cared about where they and their families lived. Their concern was not simply with the main structure of the house but also with the outlying setting which nevertheless constituted part of the 'place' of Coleshill House. The boundary between the house and its setting became blurred as both owners sought to establish more intimate connections between the house and the landscape, and the cupola symbolised the porosity of the boundary between the two. In Casey's terms this process of cultivation can be thought of as transforming Coleshill House from building to dwelling:

To dwell is to exercise patience-of-place; it requires willingness to cultivate, often seemingly endlessly, the inhabitational possibilities of a particular residence. Such willingness shows that we care about how we live in that residence and that we care about it as a place for living well.<sup>683</sup>

Heidegger's phenomenological perspective in his essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking' proposes that the buildings that we shape reflect our way of being in the world.<sup>684</sup> Ballantyne invokes Heidegger's concept of 'dasein' as a means of exploring the relationship between the building and the life within it, as they work together to produce a state of mind or 'being there' which is 'rooted in the culture of the place'.<sup>685</sup> Coleshill's archives invite us to view the house not as a 'work' in the established sense, but rather as a dwelling place. In this way, the path that Sir Mark and Jacob took as they negotiated between alteration and preservation might be understood as emanating from a sense of attachment to the place that derived from a complex synthesis of cultural, natural and social associations, including not only the building

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<sup>680</sup> Brand, p. 167.

<sup>681</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, p. 173.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid, p. 178.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>684</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Basic Writings from 'Being and Time' (1927) to 'The Task of Thinking' (1964)*, ed. by David Farrell Krell, rev. edn, (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 319-39.

<sup>685</sup> Ballantyne, 'The Nest and the Pillar of Fire', p. 17.

itself but also the landscape, history and family. These elements constituted the meaningful particularities of the place of Coleshill.

The other principal area of archival research for this thesis which has uncovered new knowledge about Coleshill House concerns the events of the mid-twentieth century. This also offers a sense of how new meanings were inscribed upon the house as the world around and within it changed. The association with the National Trust and the subsequent loss of the house contributed to Coleshill's mythography, but the precise circumstances surrounding these events have not previously been explored. Whilst accounts of the country house crisis of this period have been written, the micro-historical approach taken here to unraveling how the cultural conditions of the period played out on a particular building is illuminating. Worsley has pointed out that the question of why some houses survived and others were lost is complex and has yet to be researched in detail.<sup>686</sup> This thesis makes a timely contribution to the history of heritage protection just as the link between planning and conservation is again under scrutiny as the Trust challenges the government's new National Planning Policy Framework.

Coleshill tested the new legislative heritage protection system of the 1940s and demonstrated its inherent weakness and conflicted philosophical underpinnings. Experts reconstructed the cultural significance of Coleshill at a time when the country house was promoted by an educated elite in grand narratives of national identity. The cultural values that infused scholarly architectural history were harnessed to validate architectural preservation. As arguably the most influential figure in the Trust, James Lees-Milne played a pivotal role in exerting his preference by articulating Coleshill as the first English classical country house, in order to promote it as worthy of preservation as an object of national heritage. He encouraged the use of laudatory and hyperbolic language to invoke the house as a work of unique importance. But the concerns voiced by a small conservation minority of which Lees-Milne was a member in 1952 had little impact on the largely impotent ministries responsible for wielding the instruments of heritage protection that were available to them. The system was essentially starved of any real conviction in its bureaucratic procedures. Country house conservation that focused on individual iconic works was out of step with the modernising political agenda that linked conservation to post-war reconstruction and town planning. Furthermore there was a sense in some quarters that the country house was in any case doomed.

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<sup>686</sup> Worsley, *England's Lost Country Houses*, p. 7.



Such was Coleshill's perceived canonical value amongst architectural historians and conservationists that despite institutional doubts about the ethics of rebuilding many of those in the Trust and elsewhere argued for its reconstruction, at least of the exterior. Debates about whether to rebuild or not addressed the heritage value of the ruined house, demonstrating how Riegl's 'monument values' were played out according to contemporary attitudes to historic architecture. The issue of the rebuilding of historic structures remains contentious in heritage debates today. Simon Jenkins recently bemoaned a return to the 'cult of ruins', suggesting that Witley Court in Worcestershire, a nineteenth-century mansion gutted by fire in 1937 now run by English Heritage, should be rebuilt.<sup>687</sup> Indeed he questioned what would have done with Uppark if the decision had not been made to restore it as an absolute facsimile.<sup>688</sup>

Eggert argues that thinking in terms of origin, of the moment of production as the sole legitimating authenticating source of history does not get us far with historic buildings, as their fate is to undergo continuous change.<sup>689</sup> He favours a kind of 'Ruskinian' approach to preservation that recognizes the life of a building that includes alteration and decay. Eggert's concept of historical witness is a materialist one which rests on its imprint in the physical fabric, rather than on the mental figuration and the shifts in meaning that a building undergoes. Laurajane Smith proposes a shift away from a materialist concept of heritage that focuses on the 'object' or on the 'site' to one which theorises it in terms of a cultural process.<sup>690</sup> Similarly David Harvey suggests that heritage should be understood as a process with a long temporal trajectory.<sup>691</sup> Quoting from Barbara Bender, heritage 'is never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it and contest it. It is part of the way identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group or nation state'.<sup>692</sup> In this way the 'site' of Coleshill House can be reconceptualised not as the remnant of what in Harvey's terms might be called an authentic, fetishised physical relic, but as a place where meanings and memories have been continually culturally and socially constructed over time. Indeed the very absence of the house attests 'to the fact that all buildings [...] are ephemeral social

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<sup>687</sup> Simon Jenkins, 'This Cult of the Ruin Renders England's Landscape Soulless. Better to Rebuild', *Guardian*, 15 April 2011, p. 29.

<sup>688</sup> 'Popularising the Past', p. 5.

<sup>689</sup> Eggert, p. 22.

<sup>690</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>691</sup> Harvey, 'Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies'.

<sup>692</sup> Barbara Bender, 'Introduction; Landscape – Meaning and Action', in *Landscape: Politics and Perspective*, ed. by Barbara Bender (Oxford: berg, 1993), pp. 1-18 (p. 3), quoted in Harvey, p. 336.

constructions, and that the built environment is a testament to change rather than something of enduring materiality'.<sup>693</sup>

The sense of injustice felt amongst scholars of architectural history and conservationists following the loss of the house fuelled Coleshill's mythography. Despite the passing of more than half a century since the demolition, the destruction of the house continues to resonate when Coleshill is recalled to mind today. This has tainted the site of the absent house with a melancholic quality and a bittersweet nostalgia for those in the know. Arguably, what is most striking and unique about the site of Coleshill House for the National Trust today is not the seventeenth-century Jonesian classical work which is the subject of its histories, but the place of the absent house itself, which subverts the normal experience of country house visiting. Confronting the period of its loss helps us to understand both the house and its site. It is the lost house which contributes to the unique sense of place or aura which the visitor experiences at Coleshill, the 'now' rather than the seventeenth century or an idea of the seventeenth century. The absent house which continues to reside there is a powerful stimulant to the play of the visitor's imagination which can be inhibited by conventional methods of presentation and interpretation that seek to deliver the hard facts of history. The place of Coleshill continues to testify to the passing of time and human interaction as it is construed anew by those who engage with it. The encounter with the site stirs a kind of nostalgia for past events that it has witnessed, stressing the importance of history over aesthetic interpretations of the house.

Saskia Lewis engaged with this abstract notion of Coleshill as a response to the 'voice' of the absent building in her account of the Clock House. She writes,

There is an intimacy here, a serenity, a stillness. The residents have inherited a legacy and relationship with the estate and village that is based both on the buildings and the personalities of the people who have spent their lives here. The past is treasured and integrated into the present.<sup>694</sup>

Whilst this is a romantic evocation, there is a real sense in which Coleshill House has left its imprint on the place that remains. Inasmuch as the site of Coleshill House blurs the conventional boundaries between building and landscape we might return to Dell Upton, who advocates a more contextualized approach to architectural history by accepting the cultural landscape as a unit of analysis. This approach 'emphasises the

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<sup>693</sup> Glendinning, p. 374.

<sup>694</sup> Lewis, p. 117.

fusion of the physical with the imaginative structures that all inhabitants of the landscape use in constructing and construing it. Since there can be no normative perception, the human environment is necessarily the product of powerful yet diffuse imaginations, fractured by the faultlines of class, culture and personality'.<sup>695</sup> Upton argues for a stronger sense of place in architectural history by adopting a more integrated approach to relating architecture and topography, moving on from the idea of buildings as art/architecture to the notion of the culture of place. Untrammelled by traditional materialist constraints, Coleshill invites us to move beyond the established preoccupations of architectural history to ask more challenging and wide-ranging questions about its significance as a place where meanings are constructed and memories are made.

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<sup>695</sup> Upton, p. 198.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Account of Coleshill by Celia Fiennes, c. 1690

From *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes 1685-c.1712*, ed. by Christopher Morris, new edn, 1995.

By Farington is a fine house of Sir George Pratt's called Coalsell; all the avenues to the house are fine walks of rows of trees, the garden lyes in a great descent below the house, of many steps and terrasses and gravel walks with all sorts of dwarf trees, fruit trees with standing apricock and flower trees, abundance of garden room and filled with all sorts of things improved for pleasure and use; the house is new built with stone; the entrance of the house is an ascent of severall steps into a hall so lofty the roof is three storyes, reaches to the floore of the gallery, all the walls are cut in hollows where statues and heads carved finely are sett; directly fore-right enters a large dining room or great parlour which has a door thorough into the garden that gives a view through the house; the great Staires goes out of the hall on each side, spacious and handsom; all good chambers; they are all well and genteel'ly furnish damasked chamber and wrought beds fashionably made up; over this runs a gallery all through the house and on each side severall garret rooms for servants furnished very neate and genteele; in the middle are stairs that lead up to the Cupilow or large Lanthorn in the middle of the leads, the house being leaded all over and the stone chimney's in severall rows comes up in them on each side; the Cupilow it shewes exact and very uniform, as it the whole Building. This gives you a great prospect of gardens, grounds, woods that appertain to the Seate, as well as a sight of the Country at a distance; there was few pictures in the house only over doores and chimneys.

## Appendix 2: Inscription on Sir Mark's brass plaque, 1748

Coleshill House

31 Dec<sup>r</sup> 1748

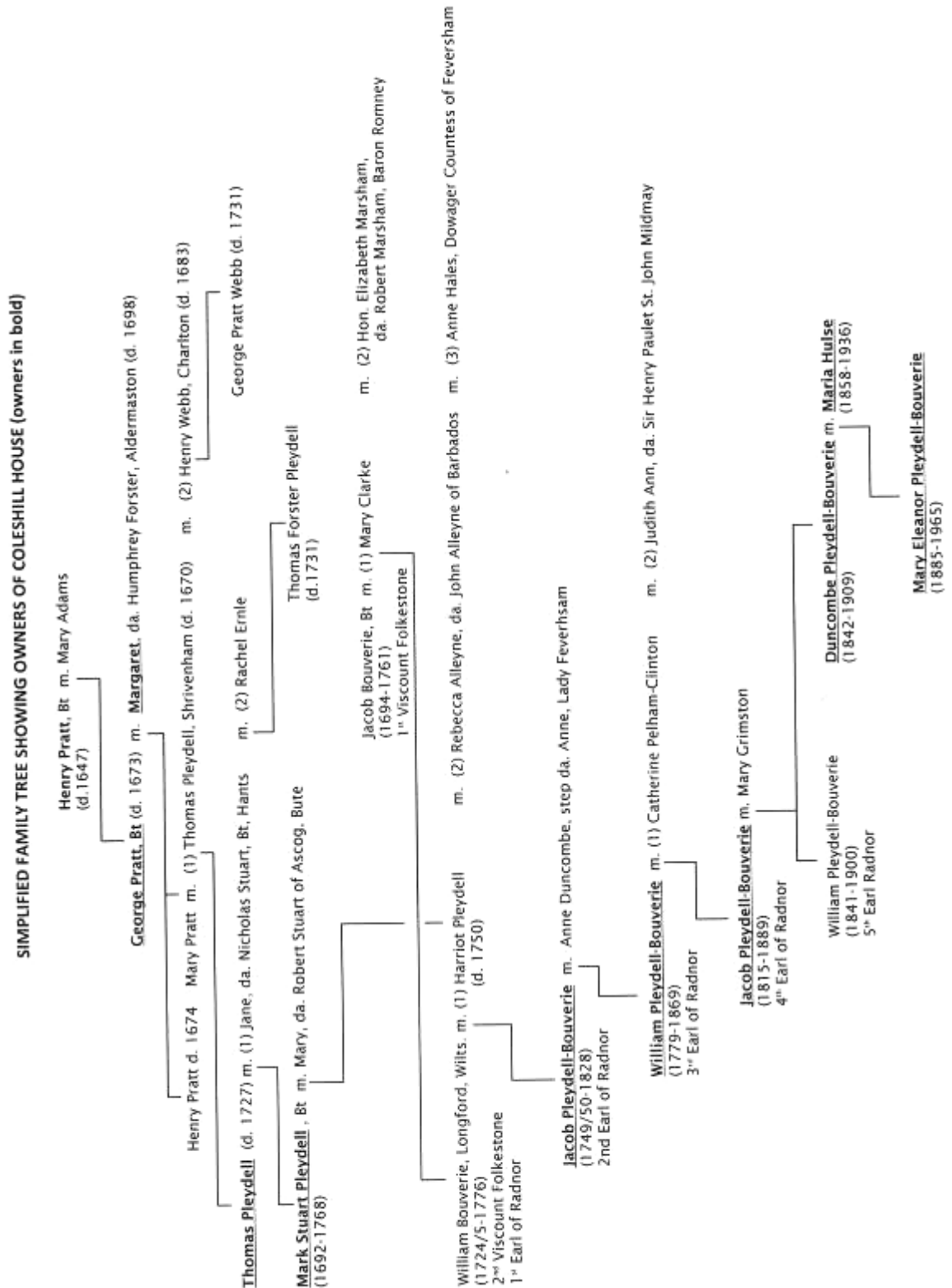
To y<sup>e</sup> future Owners of this Ho built for S<sup>r</sup> Geo Pratt Bt in 1650 by Inigo Jones.

Rebuild y<sup>e</sup> Cupola: case it w<sup>th</sup> lead & restore its scrolls. Restore y<sup>e</sup> wooden Balustrade: let y<sup>e</sup> Base penetrate y<sup>e</sup> Balusters, & not vice versa. Dry slatt y<sup>e</sup> roof & gutters. Never lessen or weaken y<sup>e</sup> Jambs of y<sup>e</sup> Windows & Chimneys: Y<sup>e</sup> middle Stacks w<sup>ch</sup> are 6-4 by 5-4 project on decay'd Oak & 8 inches to y<sup>e</sup> N.W. & 8 to y<sup>e</sup> S.E: if ever they fail rebuilt y<sup>m</sup> without timber or diminucon, supporting each projection w<sup>th</sup> an arch like that on y<sup>e</sup> Angular Stacks: w<sup>ch</sup> (being originally 6-4 by 6-4 & projecting only inwardly on Oak) inclined 15 inches & were thus rebuilt for S<sup>r</sup> Mark Pleydell B<sup>t</sup> in 1744 by y<sup>e</sup> direct<sup>s</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> Earls of Burlington & Leicester.

Be careful of y<sup>e</sup> Aqueduct & its Spring discovered 21 Feb<sup>y</sup> 1743 at 96 yards bey<sup>d</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Pump-ho after mining 4 mō at a venture & producing hitherto in 24 ho<sup>s</sup> in y<sup>e</sup> lowest Ebb 20 & in highest y<sup>e</sup> Flow 160 Hhds of y<sup>e</sup> best water by w<sup>ch</sup> you are deliv<sup>d</sup> from extream scarcity even of y<sup>e</sup> worst: & pay due regard to Chambers's Diction<sup>y</sup> & to y<sup>e</sup> memory of Jonathan Barret who, w<sup>th</sup> no other instruction & with<sup>t</sup> any experience, open'd it a passage thro rocks damp & falling sands, often buried, & once on 4 Feb. 1744 for 3 ho<sup>s</sup> at y<sup>e</sup> bottom of y<sup>e</sup> Northern Well under a perpendicular f<sup>t</sup> of stones. This Aqued<sup>t</sup>, whose arch extends a quarter of a measured mile, begun 27 Oct. 1743 at & 53 y<sup>ds</sup> bey<sup>d</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Pump-ho, was perfected 19 Feb. 1745 at y<sup>e</sup> expence of L \_\_\_\_\_, including y<sup>e</sup> Fountains & other conseq<sup>t</sup> alteracōns in y<sup>e</sup> Gardens & Offices (4s being then y<sup>e</sup> medium price of a bushel of Wheat). Y<sup>e</sup> dryness or moisture of y<sup>e</sup> Stone-Wall bey<sup>d</sup> y<sup>e</sup> East \* mine, has hitherto presaged like a Weather-glass, y<sup>e</sup> degrees of y<sup>e</sup> ensuing Ebb or Flow. Y<sup>e</sup> Flow has hitherto begun in Jan<sup>y</sup>, y<sup>e</sup> Sumer-Ebb in May & y<sup>e</sup> Autumn Ebb in Sep<sup>t</sup>. Each Flow has lost one third in y<sup>e</sup> r<sup>n</sup> Ebb, another in y<sup>e</sup> 2<sup>d</sup> & sometimes more. Springs may be Stopp'd w<sup>th</sup> their own gravel till y<sup>o</sup> remove it. Y<sup>e</sup> Springs of Pidwell & Turwell may be lowerd, perhaps to great advantage & conducted to y<sup>e</sup> Northern Well. Y<sup>e</sup> Brick pipe if loaded w<sup>th</sup> 4 f<sup>t</sup> of earth would probably carry water ascending.

## Appendix 3: Simplified family tree

(Owners of Coleshill House bold and underlined)



## Appendix 4: Summary of works to Coleshill House and grounds 1776-1830

(Compiled from Berkshire Record Office records)

FROM	TO	SHORT DESCRIPTION	Executant	ARCHIVE REF.
1776	c.1782	Masonry, taking down, moving and rebuilding piers (including Great Piers in Green Court, working freestone windows in back side of offices, taking down old steps in forecourt, laying down marble for chimneypieces including Saloon, taking down and rebuilding 4 middle chimney shafts, altering kitchen chimney, putting up chimneypieces in attic storey, cutting rockwork down rustic quoins at SE end of house, paving in back court, preparing and setting freestone for doorway at end of passage, altering window etc in passage, steps in forecourt	Robert Strong Thomas Strong Charles Strong	D/EPb A7/8
1777	1777	Taking down 3 chimneypieces, altering one to fit bed chamber and fixing, carving coat of arms on Saloon chimney, carving and engraving small coat of arms for chimney piece	Thomas Scheemakers	D/EPb A7/1 and/4
1777	1777	Plastering and whitewashing	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/2
1777	1777	Carpentry, 800ft boards, girders etc in Dining Room, taking down tapestry, preparing mouldings, chimneypieces, wainscoting, scantlings, works in Drawing Room and Saloon, inc. taking up floors in Saloon, works to floorboards in Lord's bedchamber and closet, works in Drawing Room, Cotton Room, China Closet, Best Bedchamber, preparing 850 feet board, also	William Collett	D/EPb A7/2



		works in Yellow Room and to Hall door		
1777	1777	Quantity of bricks supplied	Heath	D/EPb A7/2
1777	1777	Miscellaneous masonry works	Thomas Strong	D/EPb A7/1 and /2
1777	1778	Mason repairing broken marble chimneypiece, drawing and painting in colour 18 coats of arms on family pictures, sawing marble and plaster of paris for London masons, 2 marble plinths set on chimneypieces, 268ft astragal steps to east front and other works to steps including plugging together with iron cramps	Robert Jones, Swindon	D/EPb A7/3
1777	1777	Carpentry works in Dining Room, Yellow Room, Saloon, closet to no. 5, My Lord's room, Mr Harris's room, taking down windows in Dining Room, Drawing Room, taking down houses in lower yard, wall at new road, wall against south east end of house for skilling and necessary	William Collett	D/EPb A7/5
1778	1778	Ironwork, inc large brass handles for Saloon door and fittings for front door	Benjamin Anns	D/EPb A7/3
1778	1778	Carpentry work, Saloon door frame, stiles and rails of sashes, works to Saloon door, Dining Room door, study closets, shutters, garret windows, cutting away joists, garret chimneys, long passage in garret, sawing joists for the passage, works to the Great Garret, finishing chimneys at top of house, works to garden door, mending balustrade, deal press bed for closet	William Collett Thomas Salmon Strong	D/EPb A7/3
1778	1779	Masonry works to Parlour, new road wall, walls in courts, beating roughcast off office wall for	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/3

		pointing, Green Court wall		
1778	1779	Glazing 4 windows in the Saloon and 2 in the Drawing Room, 64 squares best London Crown glass, 32 of plate glass, works in Mr Battin's room, mending windows about the house, leadwork to keep the wet out of the house, leadwork to chimneys	Charles Farr Thomas Salmon Strong	D/EPb A7/3
1778	1778	Making good stucco, laurel leaf, berry, shell in bedchamber		D/EPb A7/3
1778	1778	Plastering and whitewashing in garrets etc	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/3
1778	1778	Carpentry, taking down old windows including Saloon, work to closet to Drawing Room and room over kitchen, soffits in Dining Room, deal for casing Drawing Room closet, work to Saloon windows and study closet floor, work to Mr Battin's room, altering Drawing Room doors, Mr Harris's room, work to roof of house, parlour and Saloon doors, putting up beds, hanging sashes in Drawing Room and Saloon, works in Dining Room, laying floor in Drawing Room	William Collett	D/EPb A7/4
1778	1779	Supplying internal furnishings and furniture including chairs, beds and bed furnishings, night tables, drawers etc	Late Henry Hills	D/EPb A7/6
1779	1779	Carpentry for new necessary, works to parlour closet, window curtains, pictures, wainscot in passages, scaffold in hall, stairs, Great Hall, putting up beds etc	William Collett	D/EPb A7/6
1780	1780	Curtains and rods etc		D/EPb A7/7
1780	1781	Masonry work at new offices inc pitching, paving and altering doorways, paving in house and at passage door	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/7
1780	1780	Glazing etc, room next to old	Charles Farr	D/EPb A7/7

		study, mostly repairs		
1780	1780	Odd ironwork jobs inc lock for old Drawing Room, lock for Ladyship's Room, lock in Mr Harris's room, latches in hall and gallery, putting up map of London	Charles Farr	D/EPb A7/7
1780	1780	Inc plastering Great hall windows and dressing old slates	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/7
1780	1782	Painting coat of arms on shield in Great Hall, large sink stone in kitchen, carving 6 modillions to cornice of Great House (18" long 11" deep and 9" thick in Corinthian orders), carving 20ft 9" of mouldings to go round modillions w large running leaves, stones to go over drain going out of passage, stone lintel 6ft long etc, painting coats of arms on 3 family pictures	Robert Jones	D/EPb A7/7
1780	1781	Measuring stones with Mr Jones for passage, preparing for carving and carting modillions, carpentry work to passage doorway, necessary, parlour drawers, repairing staircases	William Collett	D/EPb A7/8
1780	1780	Taking out modillions under cornice etc, work to pump in Pump Room	Charles Farr	D/EPb A7/8
1780	1780	Painting in straw colour, whitewashing	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/6
1780	1780	Stonemason's works in courts and gardens, new carpenter's shop and gardener's house, work to piers	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/6
1781	1781	Turning several footways	William Collett Messrs Pye and Loveden	D/EPb A7/7
1781	1782	Stonemason at new offices, new road wall, new necessary, pulling down old wall on terrace, pulling down other walls, new walling at each side of lately erected piers	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/8

1782	1782	Carpentry, new shutters, laths for Yellow Room, windows and door frames for cold bath, work to passage door, fitting up old door at bottom of passage, new necessary, oak planks for new gate between piers, works to cupola, curtain lath, work in Cotton Room	William Collett	D/EPb A7/8
1782	1782	Masonry at Cold Bath inc claying, paving and repairing steps, pulling down banisters on terrace, work to new wall, raising wall in Courts, laths in Steward's Room	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/8
1782	1782	Glazing, inc. at Cold Bath, pedestal under scroll of cupola, new glass over door at south end of house, new necessary	Powney and Sayer	D/EPb A7/8
1783	1783	Masonry, taking down stone belonging to windows at south east end of house, repairing and rebuilding	Robert Strong	D/EPb A7/9
1783	1784	Painting in great house, altering chimney in Lord's Room Closet, putting in grates etc, coping court walls etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/10
1783	1783	Plastering and painting in house	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/10
1783	1783	Glazing, inc staircase, new necessary, glazing in Lord's bedchamber with best London Crown glass, work to window in steward's room etc	Powney and Sayer	D/EPb A7/10
1784	1784	Mason's work, repairing windows, inc 549 cubic feet freestone, finishing window at NW end	Robert Strong Charles Strong Thomas Strong	D/EPb A7/8
1784	1784	Masonry, preparing 2 stones, 6ft 8" for east front, inc cutting holes for ironwork	Thomas Jones	D/EPb A7/10a
1784	1784	Inc. plastering new necessary	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/9
1784	1784	Carpenter's work to staircase at SE end of house inc. sawing 250 ft of timber, 625 feet of deal board, work to Lord's Room	William Collett	D/EPb A7/10

		window		
1784	1784	Timber supplied, inc. for wainscot, ceiling joists for store room, shutters and soffit in Dining Room, 270 ft wainscot for sashes	Walker, timber merchant	D/EPb A7/10
1784	1784	Whitewashing and cleaning cornice stuccowork	William Neale	D/EPb A7/10
1784	1784	Inc. taking down old windows and 3 new windows in Dining Room with best Crown glass	Charles Farr	D/EPb A7/10
1785	1785	Putting in lines to sashes and work to Great Doors, work to window curtains and bed furniture, bed for Mr Duncombe, taking down necessary, gates etc	William Collett	D/EPb A7/10a
1785	1785	Inc. pulling down old necessary, mason's work to pond in new gardens etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/10a
1786	1786	Inc. putting up curtains, preparing shutters for steward's room etc	William Collett	D/EPb A7/11
1786	1786	Masonry walling in garden	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/11
1786	786	Taking down and mending carpenter's shop, pigeon house, slating the new coach house	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/6
1786	1786	Converting Mr Sayer's house into a new coach house (details given), work to timber balustrade, skirtings and mouldings for balustrade, converting Widow Sexton's into carpenter's shop, work to door at lower end of passage etc	William Collett	D/EPb A7/6
1787	1787	Masonry inc. building wall between carpenter's shop and drying yard, plastering buttery and pantry, works in cellar inc. new wine bins etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/11
1787	1787	Pulling down old pigeon house, cleaning cold bath, pitching at new coach house etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/12
1787	1787	Taking down slates of pigeon	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/12

		house etc		
1787	1787	Carpentry inc. work in pantry, steward's room, putting up curtains, making good and putting up wainscoting in Servants' Hall, work in Pleasure Garden, repairing old study window frame etc	William Collett	D/EPb A7/12
1788	1788	Plastering etc in new laundry	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/13
1788	1788	Inc. drawing plan of stables and taking dimensions	William Collett	D/EPb A7/13
1788	1788	Inc. stables, reslating, hiping both ends of stables and taking off slates on north side, also work at coach house	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/14
1788	1788	Various carpentry in stables	William Collett	D/EPb A7/14
1788	1788	Various masonry in stables	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/14
1789	1789	Inc. pitching at stables, taking out arches etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/15
1789	1789	Inc. new windows in south front with best crown glass	Powney and Sayer	D/EPb A7/15
1789	1789	Plastering in stables and coach house	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/15
c.1789	c.1789	Putting up pictures, joists in butler's old pantry, studs in nursery closet	William Collett	D/EPb A7/16
1790	1790	Masonry etc, inc. levelling pleasure ground, works to gravel path etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/17
1790	1790	Glazing inc. sash squares in nursery	Powney and Sayer	D/EPb A7/18
1790	1792	Carpentry inc. making garden seats, cutting away old window frames and putting in new sashes, putting ball on cupola, sawing studding for nursery closet, repairs	William Collett	D/EPb A7/21
1791	1791	Carpentry inc. cutting away old window frames and fitting sashes	John Peapell	D/EPb A7/19
1791	1791	Glazing inc. glazing 3 new sash windows	Daniel Sayer	D/EPb A7/19
1792	1792	Plastering and whitewashing in kitchen and hall	John Liddall	D/EPb A7/21

1792	1792	Carpentry inc. putting up dressers in larder, putting up and taking down beds, repairs	John Peapall	D/EPb A7/21
1792	1792	Laying new hearth	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/21
1792	1792	Carpentry, lining windows for new sashes, making sashes for 2 windows, cutting away window frames for new sashes	John Peapall	D/EPb A7/22
1794	1794	Carpentry, inc. putting up rail and balusters, mending cornice, carved mouldings to go round modillions, centre for mason to work arch in study etc	John Peapall	D/EPb A7/26
1794	1794	Carving ornaments of Corinthian order for 4 modillions for cornice	Robert Jones	D/EPb A7/26
1796	1796	Carpentry inc. in nursery closet, hall windows, putting together book cases	John Peapall	D/EPb A7/30
1797	1797	Inspecting modillions for decay, work at top of house and cupola, taking down pigeon house	John Peapall	D/EPb A7/32
1797	1797	Inc. taking down old houses, pigeon house, old garden house, putting freestone doorway in necessary	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/32
1798	1798	Inc. mending foundation of house	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/33
1799	1799	Inc. digging out ha-ha, works to garden walls etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/35
1799	1799	Inc paving to niches to kitchen door, paving passage, steps to necessary etc	Daniel Barrett	D/EPb A7/36
1800	1800	Pointing chimneys	John Liddell	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Repairing gutter and skirting at top of house etc	John Peapell	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Pitching from kitchen door to niches	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Taking down the cold bath	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Pitching for court	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Altering Ha-Ha	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Walling and digging out Ha-Ha	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Quantity of bricks and lime delivered	Daniel Heath	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Work to Court walls	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7

1800	1800	Putting in lead pipes to reservoir	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	New wall at Ha-Ha	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Pull down old wall at Pigeon House	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Works to pipe work, pumps in passage, pump house, brewhouse, reservoir	Daniel Sayer	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Painting the large room	Daniel Sayer	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Various repairs, whitewashing, plastering etc	John Liddall	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Putting up paper, putting up window curtains in Drawing Room, putting up window curtains and bed furniture in the young ladies sitting room, putting up curtains and furniture to the bed in the Blue Room.	Edward Drew	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Making packing case to carry marble slab to Fairford	Edward Drew	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1801	Repair plinth of balustrade	Edward Drew	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1801	Putting up paper in rooms, taking down and putting up bed furniture, curtains etc, putting up bordering in Great Drawing Room, Drawing Room, book case in library	Edward Drew	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1801	Taking down old Ha-Ha wall, building new wall	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1801	Delivery of bricks and lime inc gutter bricks	Daniel Heath	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1801	Lintels for door	Thomas Jones	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1801	Repairs to stables and Great House	John Liddall	BRO D/EPb A7
1800	1800	Pitching on walk to back door to offices, coping wall in front		BRO D/EPb E26/1
1800	1800	Work to Cold Bath, spring and materials		BRO D/EPb E26/1
1800	1800	Paint paper in Great Room once with white and twice with yellow		BRO D/EPb E26/1
1800	1800	Ground to be levelled down and sown at road to back of house		BRO D/EPb E26/1
1800	1800	Little brick summer house to be taken down		BRO D/EPb E26/1



1800	1800	Inc. levelling around cold bath and where pigeon house stood, filling in old ha-ha, removing stones from Green Court		BRO D/EPb E25
1800	1800	Levelling Bank to cold bath, levelling ground off south east corner of house, stone etc for ha-ha, filling foundation of old garden, levelling ground at mount etc		BRO D/EPb E25
1801	1801	Claying, paving, walling for Cold Bath	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Working freestone quoins for doorway	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Digging Ha-Ha	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Building end wall to stables	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Water grate, new casements etc, ironwork for Cold Bath	Thomas Acott	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Works to Cold Bath, preparing tables and chairs for audit, making temporary stairs	Edward Drew	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Painting 2 doors chocolate colour	David Sayer	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Lead for gutters at top of house	David Sayer	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	New glass for Cold Bath	David Sayer	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Glazingfinc. Servants Hall	David Sayer	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Delivery of bricks	David Heath	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Repairing slates and plastering in stables	John Liddall	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Slating and plastering at Cold Bath	John Liddall	BRO D/EPb A7
1801	1801	Deal to be made into drawers for south corner of closet in nursery and another closet		BRO D/EPb E26/1
1801	1801	Faulty cornice to be investigated		BRO D/EPb E26/1
1801	1801	Mason's work to new Cold Bath	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb E26/2
1801	1801	Ramp and doorway through wall at ha-ha	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb E26/2
1801	1801	Take down bulging wall at Great Stable and securing	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb E26/2
1801	1801	Finish paper border in Great Room		BRO D/EPb E26/2

1801	1806	Levelling ground etc		BRO D/EPb E26/3
1801	1801	Digging clay for cold bath, inc. Drying Room, drain etc	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb E25
1801	1801	Work at Rosemary Lane ha-ha	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb E25
1801	1801	Taking down and rebuilding SW wall of Great Stable	Daniel Barrett	BRO D/EPb E25
1802	1802	Oven at Ivernay's to be taken down and materials set aside for Pigeon House		BRO D/EPb E26/3
1802	1803	Pigeon House to be built at Upper Binhill, with proposed plan	Daniel Palmer	BRO D/EPb E26/3
1802	1802	Stone to be dug on Hatchborough Farm for Pigeon House		BRO D/EPb E26/3
1807	1807	Blank doorway into kitchen to be broken into and wall put up, deal box lined with lead, filtering stones, conveying filtered water to kitchen		BRO D/EPb E26/3
1814	1814	Mason's works for chimneys etc, Ionic modillions, moulded quoins, freestone to pillar in pastry, decayed modillions etc	Daniel Alexander/Robert Strong	BRO D/ERa E3/7
1814	1814	Slating and boarding roof, modillions, repairing gutters, works to roofs of offices, edges of boards, repairs to boarded floors, skirtings, repairing sash frames, shutters etc, works to stairs, general repairs	Daniel Alexander/Richard Martyn and son	BRO D/ERa E3/8
1814	1814	Repairing gutters, ridges to roof, new rain pipes, dormer roof	Daniel Alexander/Ann Sayer	BRO D/ERa E3/9
1814	1814	Smith's work to roof and gutters inc. plates for fastening lead to attic windows, plates for modillions, plates for edges of boards in floors, cramps for stairs	Daniel Alexander/Thomas Acott	BRO D/ERa E3/11
1814	1814	Work to modillions	Daniel Alexander	BRO D/ERa E3/12
1814	1814	Freight of 22 packages of modillions	Daniel Alexander/Wilts and Berks Canal	BRO D/ERa E3/13

			Navigation Co.	
1814	1814	38 feet lime tree timber	Daniel Alexander/James Saunders	BRO D/ERa E3/14
1814	1814	Deals and sawing elm and deal for slating and boarding roof. Scaffold for chimney tops	Daniel Alexander/Daniel Palmer	BRO D/ERa E3/15
1815	1815	Main house slated in best Westmoreland slate and copper nails, roofs to offices in best Westmoreland slate with copper nails	Daniel Alexander/George Williams	BRO D/ERa E3/10
1820	1820	Dome of ice house to be covered with brick and cement	Daniel Palmer	BRO D/EPb E59
1822	1824	Carriage of goods - boards, slates, deal, wood delivered	James Kent	BRO D/EPb A11
1822	1824	Oak sash sills, ends of oak, sap lath, floorboards	Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1822	1822	Mason's work, cutting down stone quoins, sash frames, taking down lath and plaster, old mortar for pugging floors, taking down stone wall for cupboard in new dining room, lath and plastering in new room, breaking in cupboard in dining room	Stephen Stanbrook	BRO D/EPb A11
1822	1824	Flat crown glass and plate glass supplied	James Parker, Spur Street, Leicester Square	BRO D/EPb A11
1822	1825	New crown glass for sashes, chocolate paint on outside of sashes, soldering cisterns and water closets in lower offices, repairs to cupola and chimneys (leadwork)	James Frawkis	BRO D/EPb A11
1822	1822	Masonry and carpentry, inc. ovolo sashes, shutters, wainscot, panel doors (4,6 and 8), diminished Corinthian pilasters, moulded pilasters some with notched marks for bookshelves, fanlights, skylights, workbench for steward's office, deal blocks with	John Pryer R.& C. Maile, statuaries and masons, Fitzroy Square, London	BRO D/EPb A11

		carved scroll fronts and carving on Corinthian modillions, black marble in jamb covings, plain Portland chimney, Portland door jambs for state door, Yorkshire paving, black and gold chimneypiece by R&C Maile		
1822	1822	Painting and papering inc. papers and borders for best bedrooms, paper and borders for SE and NW attics, stamped papers, papers in lodgings	Thomas Hill	BRO D/EPb A11
1823	1823	Turning ornaments to bookcase		BRO D/EPb A11
1823	1824	Stone and workmanship, inc. 96 ft parapet ashlar, setting 2 chimney fronts in freestone etc	Jacob Cowley	BRO D/EPb A11
1823	1824	Various ironmongery at house	Benjamin Acott	BRO D/EPb A11
1823	1823	Carriage of fir timber, deal supplied	John Pullen	BRO D/EPb A11
1823	1823	Carriage of timber	Samuel and William Hopkins	BRO D/EPb A11
1823	1826	Freight of timber and deals	George Keates	BRO D/EPb A11
1824	1824	Freight of timber	Edward Hopkins	BRO D/EPb A11
1824	1824	Freight of deals, boards, mouldings, sashes etc	James Kent	BRO D/EPb A11
1824	1824	Delivery of timber, 84½ft and 47ft oak timber	Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1824	1824	Bricks and lime supplied	Lovedon Heath	BRO D/EPb A11
1824	1830	Plumbing work	James Frawkis	BRO D/EPb A11
1824	1824	Preparing 3 pairs of shutters for dining room, study and bedroom, 2 doors for dining room, oil etc	Thomas Hill	BRO D/EPb A11
1825	1826	Freight of materials inc. bricks, lime, timber board, deals, laths, battens, oak timber etc supplied	Lovedon Heath/James Kent/Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1825	1825	Mason's work for 9 bins etc	M. Goold, Swindon	BRO D/EPb A11
1825	1829	Ironwork delivered and in hands of Thomas Hopper, large extra strong kitchen range, back boiler, stoves etc	Joshua Jowett	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1827	Slating at house, Best green	William	BRO D/EPb A11

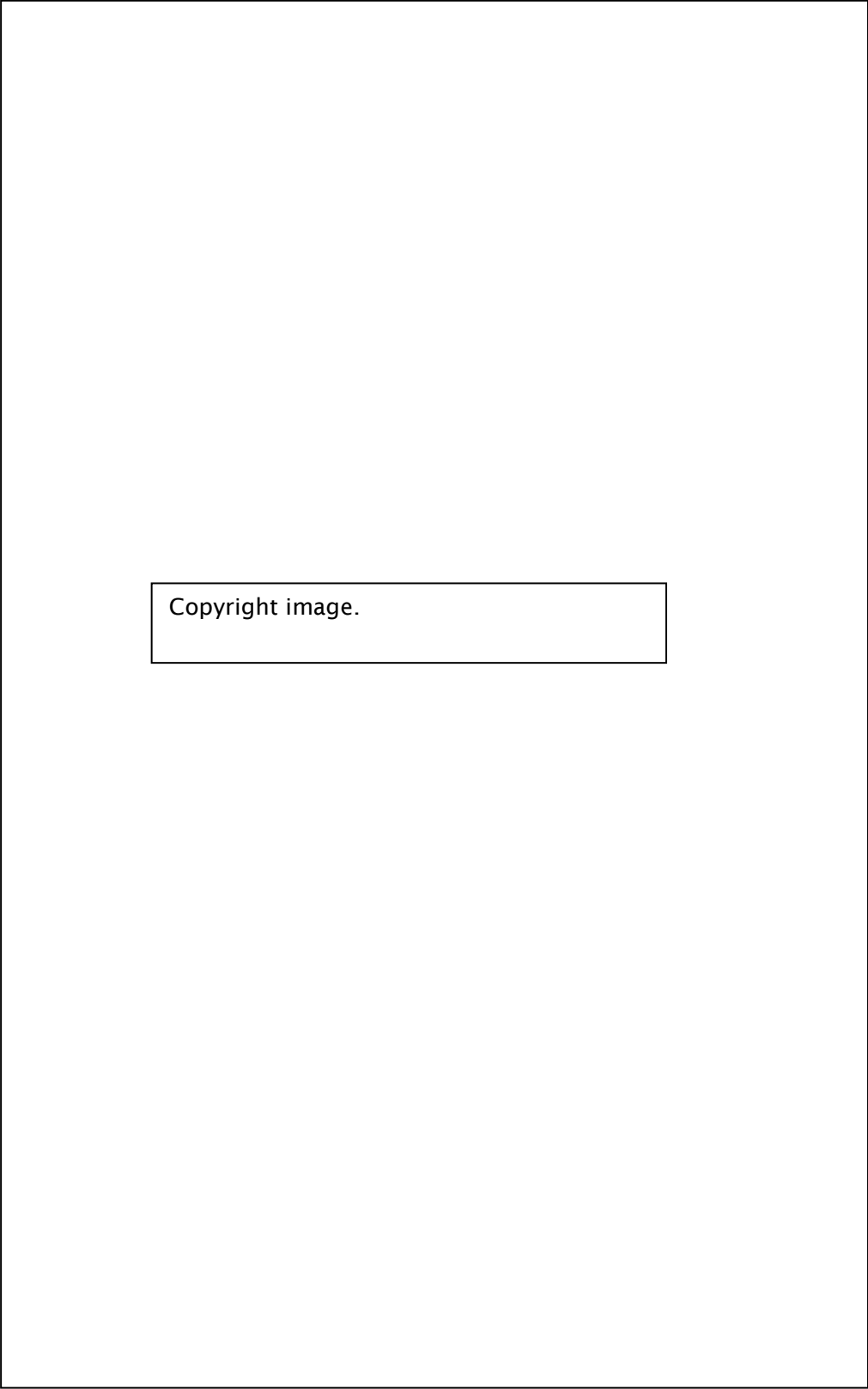
		Westmoreland slate nailed with copper nails	Struthers/Thomas Hopper	
1826	1827	Slater's work, dairy and larder tables, wall casing and skirting	William Struthers/Thomas Hopper	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1827	Stone masonry, Painswick chimneypiece, stone lintel, freestone covering for flue, door jambs, door heads, window heads, jambs, sills etc (for approx. 12 windows), stones for Drawing Room chimney, string course, cellar steps and windows and paving, best Forest sawed paving	M. Goold, Swindon	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Bricks and lime supplied	Loveden Heath	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1828	Ironwork inc. chimney bars for kitchen, spikes for hip poles to house, brackets for slate shelves, air grate for coal cellar	Benjamin Acott	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Modelling, carting and trimming 2 capitals for Thomas Hopper	Mr J Finney, modeller/Peter Bernasconi/Thomas Hopper	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Smith's work, piping for hot air room, new back door and frame at end of piping in Servants Hall to bring off cold air, castings for cooking stove etc	Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Smith's work, castings, new cast rails for the balustrades 221ft 8"	Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Foreststone steps, astragal nosed and rubbed, oak butts, corbels etc	Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Plastering, inc. making good around oven, jobbing in room where cupboard taken down, staircases and closets, etc	John Liddell/Thomas Angell	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Modelling frieze	J. Finney	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Modelling and casting 2 rich Corinthian pilaster capitals 14" wide at neck and 10" high, 4" projection each	Thomas Hopper/J. Finney	BRO D/EPb A11

1826	1826	Carriage of lath, timber, deals, etc	James Kent	BRO D/EPb A11
1826	1826	Plumber's work	James Frawkis	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1827	Bricks and lime supplied	Lovedon Heath	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1827	Carriage of slate and stone	James Gibbins/Thomas Woollard	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1827	Stone walling to front of kitchen offices, brickwork to arches, setting stone to coal hole, setting old freestone jambs to and heads of doorways, setting string courses, setting old copings, rendering to external wall, setting stone jambs etc to 12 window openings and 3 doorways	Stephen Stanbrook	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1827	Lime, brick, paving bricks, stone lime, chalk lime, tiles, supplied	Loveden Heath	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1827		Christopher Harris	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1827	Painting cupola, framing of sashes, new crown glass and flashing to cupola	James Frawkis	BRO D/EPb A11
1827	1828	Delivery of freestone etc, gutter stones, Painswick jambs and mantels, Forest paving, cellar steps, freestone door jambs, string course, Painswick chimneypiece and slab, cellar paving		BRO D/EPb A11
1828	1829	Painting outside inc. cornices, balusters, cupola, painting all principal bed rooms and dressing rooms, study, 3 staircases, lobby, passage, grand staircase ceiling, inside of all of new offices, housekeeper's room etc	Thomas Hill	BRO D/EPb A11
1828	1828	Plumbing and glazing inc. works to baths, water closets	James Frawkis	BRO D/EPb A11
1828	1829	Repairs inc painting, masonry etc	F.J. Kelsey/various tradesmen	BRO D/EPb E28
1829	1829	Plumbing and glazing to offices, works to butler's pantry, cistern room, window in entrance hall	James Frawkis	BRO D/EPb A11
1829	1829	Fancy trimmings etc, shutter	R. Shuter & Co, St	BRO D/EPb A11

		blinds, fringe and fancy trimmings	Martins Lane, London	
1830	1830	Slater's work		BRO D/EPb A11
1830	1830	Paints, papers, papering	Thomas Hill	BRO D/EPb A11

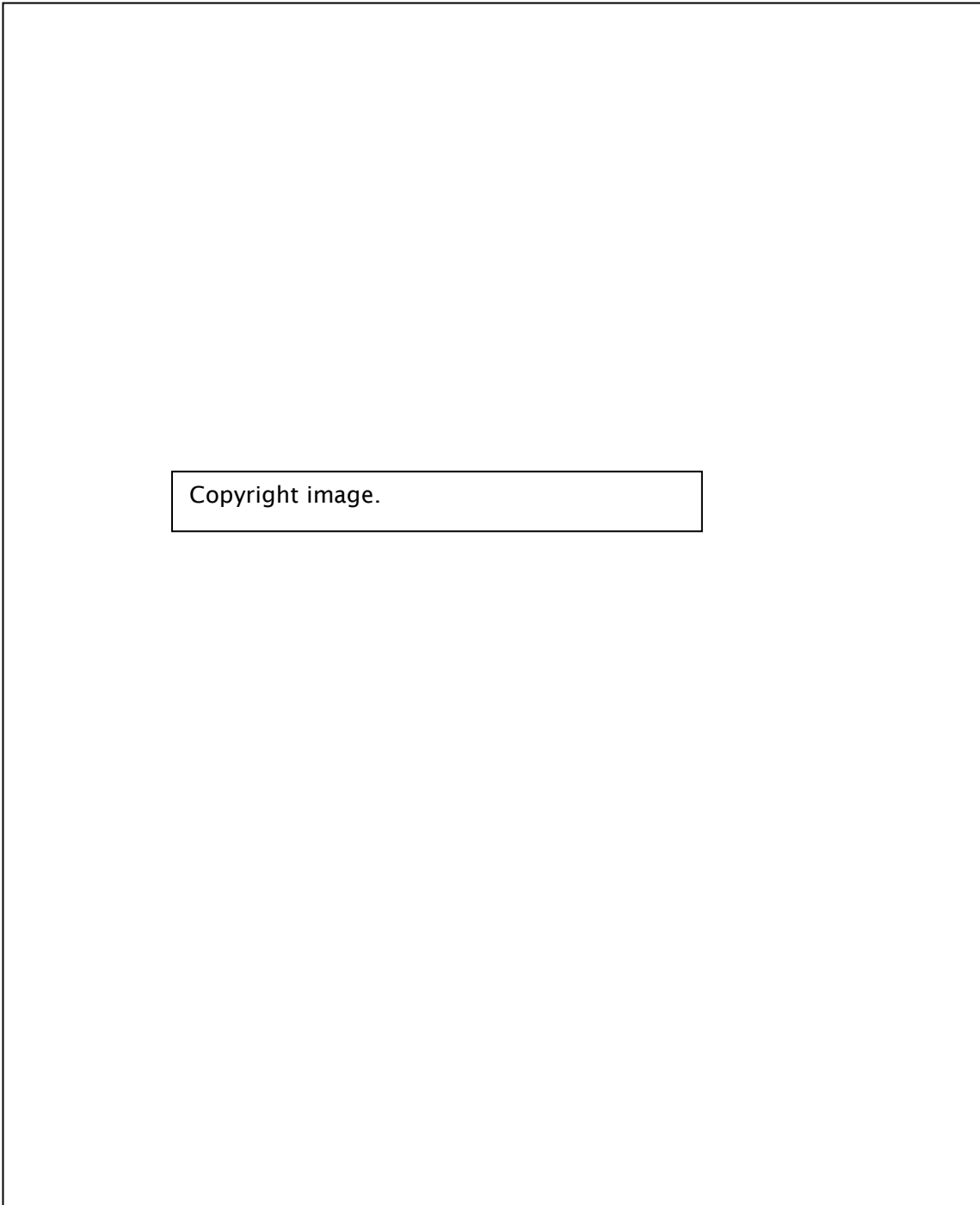
## **Appendix 5: Memo ‘To make Coleshill House compleat’, c. 1800**

Jacob, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Radnor, BRO, D/EPb E59.



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**Transcription:**

To make Coleshill House compleat

1. The offices should be arched – This I think could be done the walls being so stout possibly without [?] pillars, but certainly with them -
2. Stone back stair cases should be built – I think these could be managed to come down like the stair cases at Benouville near Caen, and to avoid the door way at the bottom 18 inches, or 2 feet or more might be gained out of the N.E. wall of the passage, arching above it – glazing the inside would light the passage –
3. The present parlour should be the entrance, and might be fitted up if room was wasting as a study – the stair case of the hall made less steep by forming it as in the margin – under the stairs might be a water closet and on the other side a way out –
4. The bed-chamber on the ground floor if not thought necessary to be left would make a breakfast room [...? ...] The present bed-chamber opposite the drawing room with the closet [?] would be the dining parlour –
5. The several rooms in the next floor which is 17-6 high (except the Great Room), might be made two in height each – viz by a sort of mezzanine, tho in this case each [?set] would be equally good – the windows must be made in three sashes, of which the lower one would [?fling] up a little way or might open being the window of the under room – the middle would be partly dark viz against the floor and the upper part would push down being the window of the upper room so over the windows internally should be an arch, to allow approach to the window as without it the window would be inaccessible and if it were found necessary the window might be lengthened 9 or 12 inches – the chimneys must in general be new built to put in new flues – some of the rooms should have 1, some 2 dressing rooms-
6. The cornice should be executed in stone, and the external chimneys must of course for this purpose be rebuilt – the reduction of 9 inches in the projection of cornice would not be amiss.
7. The house should be slated –
8. The passage should be arched on the three floors –

## **Appendix 6: Transcript of Report on Coleshill House by Daniel Asher Alexander, 1814**

WSA, 1946 Alexander Accounts

(The original is annotated by Lord Radnor)

**May 10 1814**

**A report on the general state of repair of this fabric – with a view to such matters only as relate to the sustaining and upholding the Premises**

The House contains a Basement Story half sunk below, and half raised above, the Ground Surface, - a Ground or principal floor – a first floor, - and a Story in the Roof which is so formed as to have a Terrace on the Top for a Gazebo –

It is that kind of Structure both as to its essentials and its finishing that if twas asked that it wanted for substantial Repair I should say only new Slating and Gutters to the Roof, and partly a new Cornice- Repairing the floors, easing Doors, Sashes, & Shutters, as none of them will open & shut, with new Locks and painting – and yet, this is not sufficient to render the House a commonly comfortable Mansion for the Doors and Shutters are past mending and the Windows if eased will admit as much Wind as they do at present.

The Basement of the House is in so far in a State of Repair as not to require my saying any thing upon it – except so much as may apply to the Vault of the Beer Cellar under the front steps whose Roof should be made dry, and also as to the damp state of the lower parts of this floor or Story and of the blind airy made some years ago around the House which does not sufficiently take the damp off, which I think might be effectively done by laying in dry air Drains in Tubes communicating from said low parts & the airys, to the Chimneys severally of the Kitchen, Servants Hall, & Stewards Room, whereby a perpetual exhaustion of damp air might be effected by drawing it away from those parts up these flues, and so admit a succession of pure dry air.-

In the Ground floor – If it could be had, I should recommend – first – going over the floors and taking out the sappy edges of decayed Boards, and laying them in with new bits of Deal to match the old – the floor boards are far from decayed, but far from good – secondly the putting up new Oak Doors and good Locks to the old linings & Jambs of the old doorways piecing up the Jambs and making them perfectly good, and painting them oak to answer the Doors when done – Thirdly the putting new Deal Shutters to all the Windows to be made of very dry Materials and painted Oak when

done, and formed so as to box in within the Margins of the Piers into proper Architraves instead of hanging over lumbering upon the Piers half a foot into the Room as they now do – Fourthly to put in new Windows, and I should recommend them to be of the ordinary Sashed window kind, such as Inigo Jones originally used in the Queens House at Greenwich, and in the Banqueting House at Whitehall, for I think Repairs to the present Windows not proper, as they cannot be made to go easy and be Weather proof, and to renew them of this kind I confess I should think in such as House objectionable – for the Munnion Window is not the style of Inigo, it is submitting in this respect to the before established manner of his day.

I see no decays in any of the Cielings, nor in any of the Wainscots under the papering nor in any of the Dados – only that all the skirting Boards are much shrunken upwards from the floor Boards so as to occasion much Wind – whiter new Doors are put in or not I should advise those things to be rectified by a good Joiner at the same time that he pieces the floor Boards – the floors are uneven in their surfaces being hollow in some parts and round in others, but this cannot be remedied but at the expense of taking up every floor which is not worth while to do – this has arisen of old times from the unseasoned state of the timbers when they were laid into the House at first.

The great Staircase may be said to belong to both Stories, as such I mention it here – It is perfect in its substantials, but it has many years since sunk or subsided by the shrinking of the oak timbers and the casting of the oak Treads of which it is composed-It is unpleasant as well as with strangers dangerous to go much up and down it as the Risers are of such various heights (from 7 ins to 10 ins) so as that they operate as tripping places – this could be rectified at a very moderate expense without altering the Style in the least, by taking up and relaying the Treads after planing out the convexities in them; and we it required another riser or two in the height could be added so as to diminish the steepness of their ascent which is a great defect in this Staircase:-the contrast between the risers of this Great Staircase & the back stairs is very great – one far too steep, the other so low that you tire by lifting the foot too high every time.-with all modesty towards the Design it is evident here that the Staircase was hunched into too little space so that there was not room to ascend the height.-

The Entrance Doors are particularly rude, clumsy and untight, yet as to continuing in repair as Doors they may remain for many years –if they could be new I should recommend Mahogany on account of their great size and not being liable to cast & warp in that wood, and to introduce plates of glass in them in order to give light to the Stairfoot which wants it very much, and to render the Great Hall cheerful by affording a Window to see out of as you pass along.-

The first floor is subject to the same remarks as the Ground floor but perhaps not with the necessity of making these Doors & Windows so perfect as those below, except perhaps the stately Dining Room which is worth any Expense which can reasonably be bestowed on it.

#### Story in the Roof

After all the examination I could give it externally and internally I am of opinion that it is absolutely necessary to strip off the present Stone Slate (or Shingle, I don't know what its called) and reslate with the small Green Westmoreland Slate on Copper nails in inch deal Boarding – the weight of the present Stone is very great, and it is very much bent and sunken in places and admits snow & wet.

I don't apprehend it will be necessary to take up the Lead Work of the external Cornice – Guttering, at least not for the purpose of the Slating – nor indeed for its own defects, for I do not perceive any of Note:-But it may be so if upon a thorough examination of all the Modillions which carry the Gutter they should turn out as necessary to be removed for New – If it is the recasting the Lead of the Gutter will be no great expense – It appears to have been laid promiscuously on boardings of Oak & Deal.-

The whole Guttering is sustained by the Modillions, I found 8 of these gone, (but they appear to have been gone a long time & the Cornice is still supported by the rest) and on trying them all round from the Cradle I think 8 or 10 more are not trustworthy, 3 of them I could pull down with my hand – I would suggest to have the whole Cornice carefully examined and to remove any untrustworthy Modillion, and replace it by a new one cut out of well seasoned live Oak of America, or Teak Wood of India, which can be had in such sort lengths, as the Modillions run, out of a Ship Breakers yard in the Port of London, this kind of Timber is more durable than English Oak and is not so liable to split and cast – there should be a dozen or 20 of them kept ready for any future occasion.-

An ingenious Idea has been thrown out of having the Modillions of Cast Iron but I am not acquainted with any method of making them discharge from the Mold with such undercut carvings in the Leaves as they must have; as also of substituting a Stone Cornice; but not to mention the difficulties, & expense in tailing down so large a Stone Cornice as this of 3 feet 2 ins in projection, and 2 feet 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  in high, the Stone Cornice could lose all the advantage of the present conceal'd leaden gutter which now lies within the Cornice or upper Member of the Cornice and which as far as such a Scheme now goes is the perfection of Design in regard to the appearance of Cornice or the

façade of the House and of utility in forming a complete drip drainage from the Roof – there is great ability in this Cornice.-

The Water of the Roof is all carried down to 4 outlets at the 2 ends of the House, where it is very unhappily voided by 4 of the old common vomitory pipes – this has been a serious evil to the House, for it has caused 3 out of 4 of the next adjoining Modillions to rot and drop out; and the perpetual drip on the Ground below has caused the Piers of the 4 Great Chimneys to settle down bodily into the Ground, and has taken Strings, Window heads, floors etc etc with them – I should by every reason recommend the Water to be brought down by stacks of pipes either external or internal, and if in the latter, (as the cistern head cannot be perpendicular with the pipe) with means to get at the pipes to cleanse them.-

The Lead flat round the Gazebo and the Ballustrade round it appears to me in good condition; the latter is very ingeniously contrived to take off the Wet and keep the Timber from rotting – all the painting Work is in excellent Condition.

I cannot speak of certainty as to the Condition an state of Repair of the servant Dormer Windows, which are very large and very much decorated with Wooden Cornices – Some of their Sills and edging next the Lead of the Slate, are rotting, they should be uncased when the Roof is slated and their defective parts renewed.-

The 8 Stacks of Chimneys are in good repair except here and there a Stone of the rich Ionic Cornice with which they are crowned, which is mouldered away – these should be renewed – It is pity when the End Stacks were rebuilt that flues for the Rooms there were omitted, as there are now 4 Rooms in this Roof story without Chimneys.-

Outside of the House.-

The Masonry of the House has been originally very good, much better in its kind than the Timber and finishing Work – It has also been paid much attention to keep it in good condition – the front Steps however are in bad condition, they require new setting entirely and making good with new, where the frost has split them, and they should be underlaid with lead to prevent the Wet getting into the vault below.

The Outer Buildings

The low Roofs of the small Offices adjoining the Basement Entrance should be slated at the time of the House- the weight of the Stone is too much for the small Timbers in these Roofings.-

The Brewhouse and Laundry Building is sadly out of Repair – there should be a new floor under the Roof to prevent its falling in, and the back and end Walls are so bilged as to require to be taken out lest they fall out – the Roof here has been very well done some years ago.-

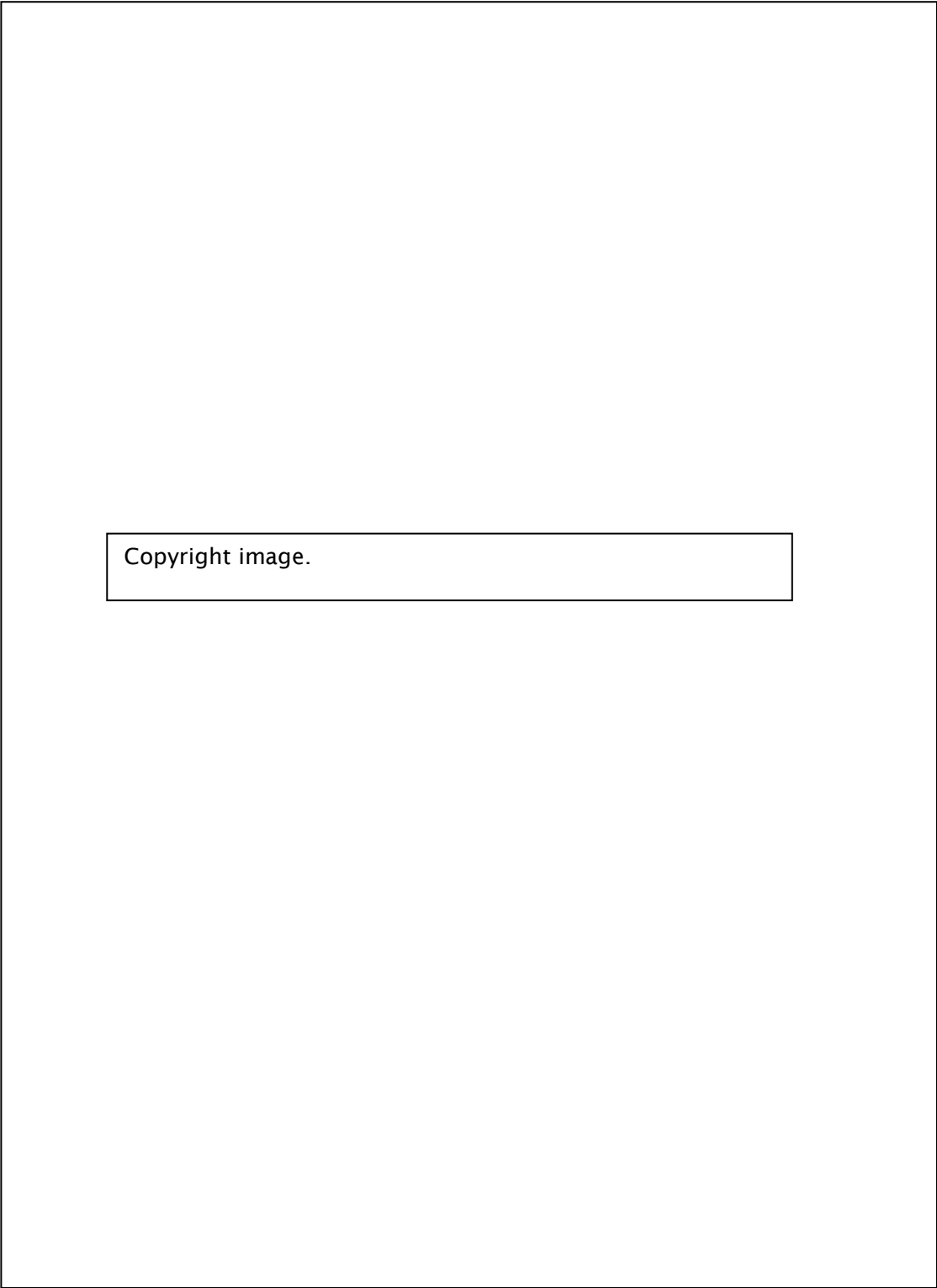
The Cottage lately converted into a Carpenters Shop must have its Chimney Gable rebuilt, or it will fall out.-

The other Offices of Stables, Coach house etc are in very good Condition – There is no piggery – No Cow Lay – But a great deal of Room is allowed behind the Buildings for a Timber yard part of which might be spared for such purposes.-

Daniel Alexander

## **Appendix 7: General Abstract of Accounts, Daniel Asher Alexander, 30 November 1814**

BRO, D/Era E3

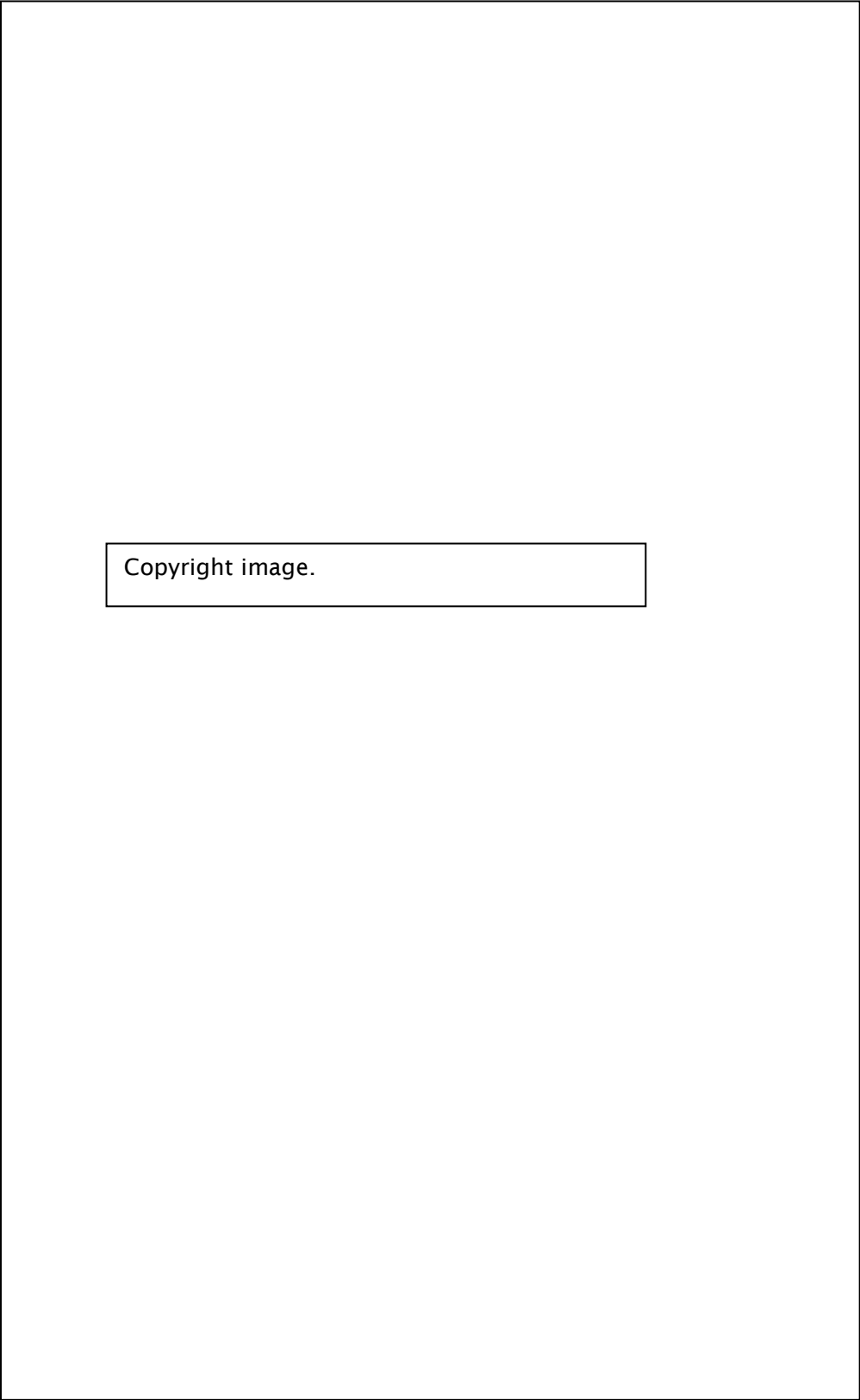


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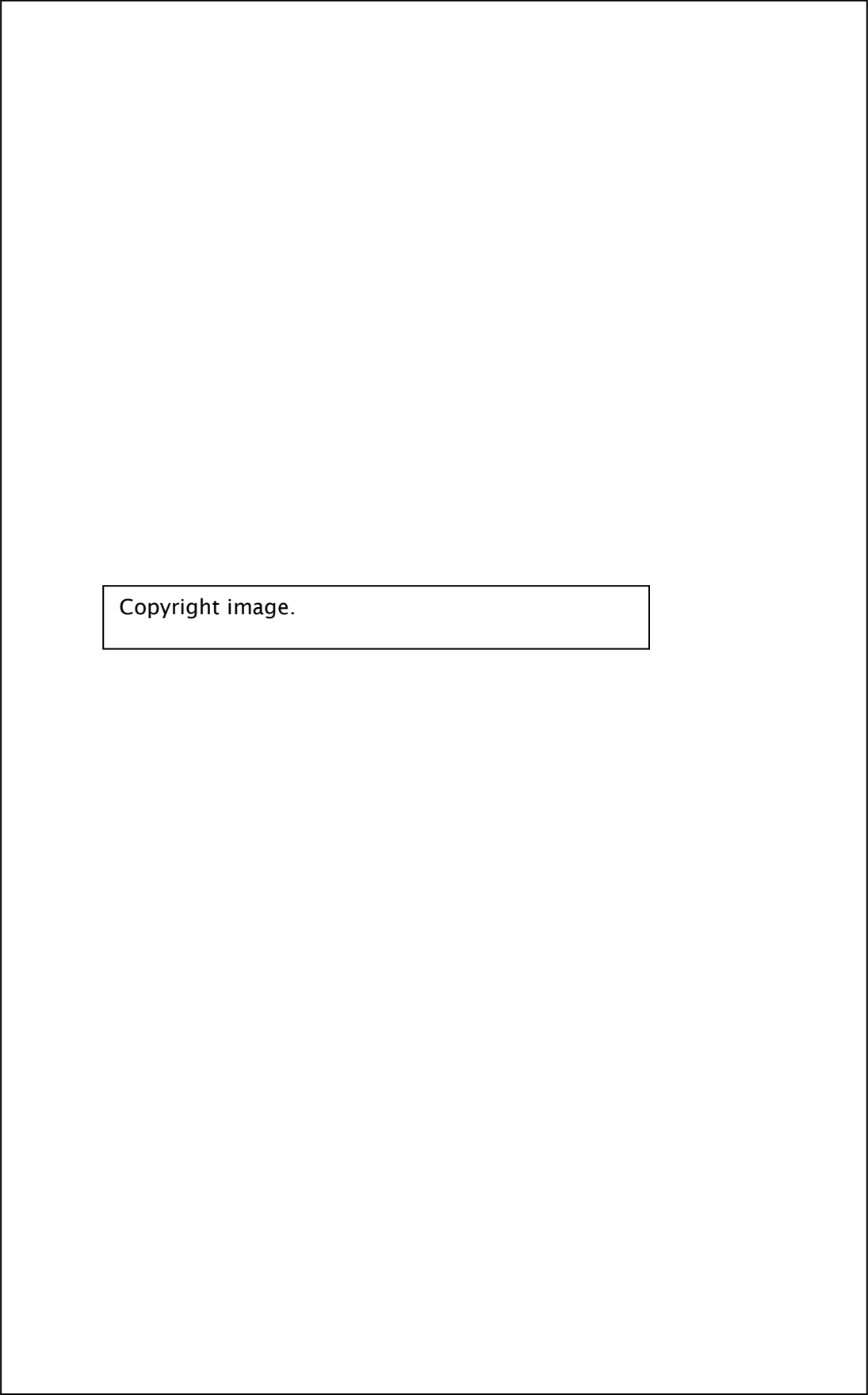


## **Appendix 8: Bill for Thomas Hill for painting and papering at Coleshill, 1828-29**

BRO, D/EPb A11 (Note payment to Thomas Hopper on final page)



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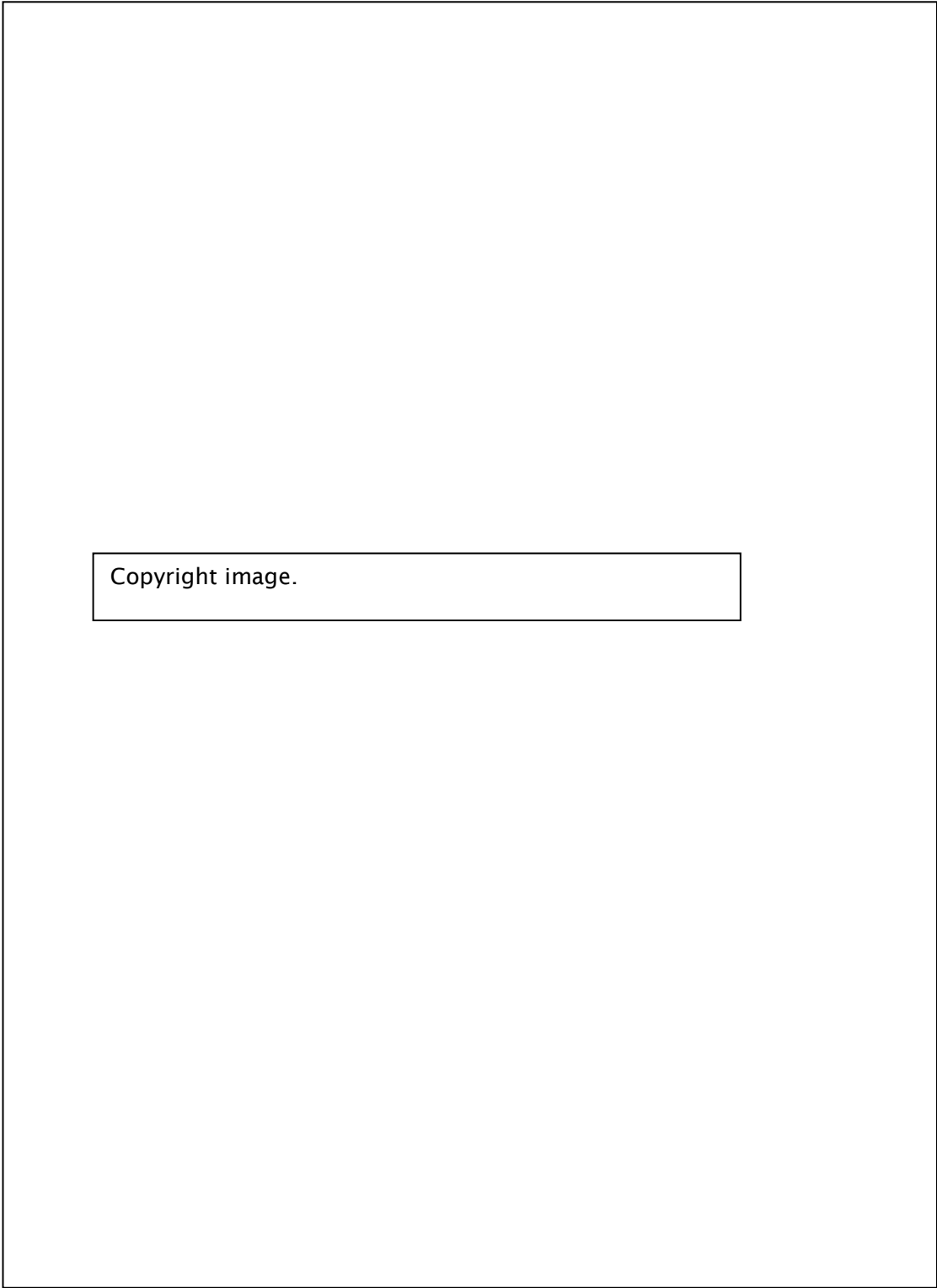
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## **Appendix 9: Letter to Thomas Hopper from John Finney, for Corinthian capitals, 1826**

BRO, D/EPb A11



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## **Appendix 10: Transcript of Report to National Trust by Darcy Braddell, 6 October 1952**

NTA, Box 836, File 1795

I visited the above in company with Mr Fedden on Thursday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>. We were thus able to view the burnt out remains nine days after the disastrous fire which had overwhelmed the house.

The condition of the building is, in my judgment, beyond all repair. To begin with, the entire roof has disappeared, including the very large cornice with its elaborately carved modillions. Incidentally we discovered a piece on one of these modillions which we found to be made of oak under its coat of white paint. Apart from the cornice, the roof was a very rich and elaborate structure. Its stone slated slopes terminated on the edges of a large lead flat, in the centre of which was a very fine cupola giving easy access to it. This lead flat was a feature of the house and was deliberately constructed in order that they might be able to enjoy the wide views of the countryside to be obtained from such a point of vantage. A handsome balustrade of painted oak ran round all four of its sides.

In addition to these features, fourteen dormer windows with pedimented tops gave light to attics inside the roof. All this has been destroyed.

Among the outstanding architectural details of Coleshill were its great stone chimney stacks, each faced and panelled in ashlar and capped with heavily moulded cornices. Only four out of the eight of these stacks are now standing.

The interior of the house is a dreadful sight. The great staircase, all the famous plaster ceiling, nearly all the floors, and many of the cross walls are lying in an enormous tangled heap of rubble, which it will take many weeks to clear and be a dangerous job to do. What walls are standing are calcined in many places, and every stone would have to be taken down and examined before it could be trusted for replacement. The outer walls at first sight appear to be in reasonably good condition, but even this is not so, for the end (South) wall is right out of plumb and would certainly have to come down and be rebuilt.

Even if the house were replaced in the form it once had externally and no attempt were made at any replacement of the interior other than the reinstatement of concrete floors and staircase of purely utilitarian design, the costs would still be enormous and out of all proportion to any uses the house could be put to. Making the roughest of guesses, I do not think such a scheme could be carried out under sixty thousand pounds.

## Appendix 11: Report on Coleshill House following the fire

WSA, 1946/1/6

### COLESHILL HOUSE.

The fire has destroyed all woodwork in the main block with the exception of two or three basement rooms at the east end, and the servants' wing to the west. Not only have all floors fallen in but the timber lintols which span more than two thirds of the thickness of the outer walls at both basement and upper floor levels are badly damaged with resulting fractures in the inner skin of the walls. The fall of chimney stacks has badly shaken the remaining fabric.

Nevertheless, the ashlar, facing all facades, remain in good condition, and the two noble centre doorways with their flights of steps are whole.

Three courses must be considered:

1. Reconstruction.
2. Total demolition.
3. Partial demolition.

### RECONSTRUCTION.

The restoration of this historic house would involve pulling down stone by stone to the ground floor level with due attention to the foundations, rebuilding with as much of the old stone as possible; much new stone would be required and practically the whole of the interior would be new. This could only be done at great expense.

### TOTAL DEMOLITION.

The total demolition of these great houses is a deplorable feature of our time. Such portion of them as possible should be retained particularly when they have the quality, architectural significance and magnificent setting of Coleshill.

So /

ANCIENT DEMOLITION CONCEPTS

So many of our most beautiful estates are enriched by the ruins of ancient buildings. The higher level of the

PARTIAL DEMOLITION.

We have examined with care the practicability of survival of some small portion and make the following recommendation.

Take down all walls to the level of the ground floor window cills with the exception of the 3 bays in the centre of each front, with their great doorways and steps. Leave standing the two doors with one window on each side of both and rebuild to first floor level out of old materials walls linking the ends of the upstanding portion on the foundations of the old walls containing the staircase hall and room behind. Two-thirds of these remain standing and large openings can be left in the portion to be built.

It would add immensely if the window above each entrance door, or certainly one, at first floor level could be left in position even if this meant taking down and rebuilding the upper portion and the construction of additional buttresses on the inner walls.

Fill in with stone rubble, in deep recess, the basement windows and level the whole floor area of the main house at ground floor level, pave a walk round the perimeter of the external walls and grass over the remainder.

Take down the existing roofs over the servants' approach leaving the external walls only standing, and if possible form two piers out of the famous chimney stacks to flank the approach /



PARTIAL DEMOLITION Contd.

approach through the lower yard to the higher level of the main terrace. The extraction of excess rubble remaining after the basement is filled should be done through the wall of the servants' wing and also if necessary through the centre of the East wall, if this last is unavoidable, the gap should be rebuilt.

Two fine marble fireplaces appeared practically undamaged. These together with other interesting plaster and timber fragments should be set against the inner walls of the centre. All walls should be capped and rendered waterproof with cement or asphalt.

Two photographs are enclosed illustrating these proposals.

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## Appendix 12: Report following the fire at Coleshill House by G.H. Chettle, Inspector of Ancient Monuments and T.A. Bailey, Architect, Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works, 31 October 1952

The National Archives, WORK14/1964

### COLESHILL HOUSE, Berkshire

Architect Sir Roger Pratt c.1660  
Owner Mr. E. E. Cook

Report following fire on 23rd September, 1952

#### 1. Architectural Description

Architecturally this building is of such superlative importance externally and internally that, until the publication of Sir Roger Pratt's Notebooks in 1928, it was always described as one of the supreme works of Inigo Jones. It is a house of two main storeys with an attic floor and semi-basement enclosed within a rectangle measuring about 125' x 62'. The main front faces N.E. and both this and the garden front have fine doorways with swept balustraded steps. The external walls, 3' 0" thick, are faced with fine ashlar on a coursed rubble backing, each elevation being treated symmetrically.

The corners of the building are dressed with rusticated quoins and the whole stands on a rusticated base stopped at ground floor level by a strong course.

The architectural detail is of the highest order, the windows having moulded architraves with full entablature heads. The main cornice was of wood with painted plaster rosettes between carved wood consoles.

The slated hipped roof, pierced on all four sides by dormer windows with alternating straight and curved pediments was finished with a balustraded lead flat suggesting a very fine octagonal Cupola.

A feature of the house was the series of eight conspicuous chimney stacks with moulded caps and panelled enriched sides.

Adjoining the N.W. end of the original building are more modern single storey domestic quarters. These additions are well positioned, and being screened by trees do not detract from the original architectural conception. The detail, general proportions and fenestration of the exterior all have the greatest refinement and may be said to represent the highest development of Renaissance domestic architecture.

The planning of Coleshill is simple, straightforward and symmetrical and shows the earliest example of a central corridor giving direct access to each room on every floor. The middle third of the house is given to the main entrance hall rising through two storeys with its double staircase, a saloon 40 x 22, later to become the library, and above it the state dining-room, later the great drawing room. The ceilings of these rooms were of enriched plaster-work, divided into large panels by moulded beams decorated with scrolls and wreaths. Pratt had studied the work of Italian and French masters, and had made many detailed notes of Inigo Jones's work at the Queen's House, Greenwich and the Queen's Chapel at St. James's. The frieze of the cornice was decorated with swags in high relief attached to cartouches below the ends of the main beams. The chimney-piece in the main first-floor room had an overmantel with a curved pediment: the door-cases also had pediments carried on carved brackets: the window-linings and shutters had enriched mouldings. Other houses had rooms as handsome as those of Coleshill: none had a more beautiful staircase than this with its twin flights, its carved balusters, its carved and panelled newels, save the smaller and more famous one at Ashburnham House, Westminster, almost contemporary, and like that at Coleshill ascribed because of its beauty to Inigo Jones. In 1668 Roger Pratt was knighted, the first architect to be so honoured. Four years earlier he had designed his most important work, the house in Piccadilly for Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, which survived for less than twenty years. On Coleshill, his one unaltered building to survive, he had lavished all the knowledge, the scholarship and the artistry gained in his studies in Italy, in France, and in England.

### Structural Condition

A fire gutted the whole of the interior except for two rooms on the ground at the S.E. end of the building together with the corresponding rooms in basement beneath them. The roof has entirely disappeared and three of the chimney stacks have collapsed. Except for a breach in the S.W. front the external walls still stand in various degrees of stability but about half of the internal walls are now down to ground floor level. Less than one quarter of the first floor itself remains together with about one third of the ground floor but their condition is unknown. The flooring is almost certain to have been destroyed. Remains below ground floor level are entirely unknown since the bulk of the debris collapsed through to Basement level. It will be appreciated that this report is based upon an examination of the building from the exterior since it was considered too dangerous to enter the remains. The N.W. end of the building is in fact most dangerous, but it is hoped that some day the remains will be cleared and the building will be reconstructed.

#### (b) Chimney Stacks

The one remaining stack on the N.W. wall has a very pronounced inward lean and is considerably undermined at wall plate level. Although it is still within its middle third safety margin this stack may collapse if subjected to high wind or the vibration from low flying aircraft which take off and land at a nearby airfield. Deterioration of the poor quality construction of the stack below roof line level, now exposed, will also contribute to its fall. A similar condition exists in the remaining western stack of the fractured wall at the north end of the library. The remaining three stacks, whilst in themselves substantial, depend for their stability upon the condition of the walls upon which they sit.

#### (c) Internal Walls

These are all built of coursed rubble the mortar of which has not stood up to the intense heat and flame of the fire. Their thickness appear to average about 2' 0" and those which remain show serious fractures where stripped of their plaster. The walls still standing in the southern half of the building are still plastered and appear to be structurally safe. These walls, such as those of the Library and Saloon still retain much of their enriched plaster cornice and frieze. Several fireplaces are still intact and do not appear to have suffered much damage by fire but those doorcases which remain have naturally suffered greatly through the scorching of flames. Unfortunately, there is no visible trace of the splendid double stair which formed so much a feature of the Hall. The condition of basement walls, being buried beneath so much debris, is unknown but at the south end at least they should be quite good. It will be appreciated that deterioration of the remaining plasterwork will be considerable during the coming winter, through exposure and further collapses.

#### (d) External Walls

These walls approximately 3' 0" thick are built of fine ashlar masonry backed by coursed rubble which remains, in many places, in very poor and unsafe condition. On the other hand, the external skin of ashlar still remains in almost perfect condition. This applies also to the architectural detail in stone which is so fine. Stone decay through age is almost entirely absent on the exterior although this must be qualified by saying that no detailed examination was made to discover the extent of stone replacement, if indeed there has been any in the main walls (it is known that some stone repair had been carried out to the chimneys).

(i) N.E. Front (Entrance) All the external masonry of this front is still good but the middle third or more of the whole wall is now leaning inwards by approximately 12" beginning from about head level of the ground floor and being most pronounced above the head of the central window. No fractures in the external ashlar could be seen but it is obvious that the fire has caused partial disintegration of the rubble backing which has now lost the support of the collapsed cross walls. More than two thirds of the wood cornice have gone and less than one third of the window frames remain. The architectural detail



the main entrance door remains untouched and only little damage has been done to the entrance steps which have lost part of the landing balustrade. The stability of this front depends entirely upon the remaining strength of its rubble backing which does not appear to be good.

(ii) South East End. This is well preserved except for the cornice which has been completely burnt out. There is some distortion on the upper part of the wall but evidence is lacking to prove whether or not it was caused by the fire. Nearly all the window frames are reasonably intact and the quality of the stone and detail remains virtually untouched.

(iii) South West (Garden) Front. Except for the first floor breach in this wall caused by the collapse of one of the N.W. chimneys, the wall itself appears to be fairly stable. It still has the support of its internal cross walls and this undoubtedly has saved it. All the cornice has gone and only a few of the window frames remain but here again, the quality of the external masonry even down to small detail, remains untouched. The garden door and stairs are still in almost perfect condition.

(iv) North West End. Whilst the stonework detail remains in very good condition and the lower portion is partially protected by a more modern adjacent building, the upper part of the wall has an inward bulge, weakened by the collapse of the corridor walls and chimney etc. The cornice has been more than half destroyed and the window frames are practically gone.

#### (e) Conclusion

As stated previously, the interior was not examined due to its present dangerous condition and it must be stressed that upon removal of the heavy debris from the shell, it might well be found that more serious defects are present. Even before debris is removed, several of the chimney stacks and walls would require substantial shoring and the whole operation is one which would call for the greatest care and skill due to the dangers present.

The external ashlar skin is in such perfect condition that very little repair would be required if it is decided to restore the house. Considerable strengthening of the rubble backing would however be required including the tying in of the outer skin. It might be found necessary to even rebuild some of the internal walls that still remain. Whether or not any of the remaining interior details could be preserved is not known.

It is considered however that the rebuilding of this House is possible if sufficient funds are forthcoming. This would mean that the external walls would be original but that the interior and roof would be largely reproductive. Considerable evidence exists in the form of photographs and measured drawings etc., to enable a reasonably faithful reconstruction of the principal rooms at least to be carried out.

At this stage however, no estimate of cost has been considered and this report has been confined chiefly to the architectural merits of the house and its present state after the fire.

*G. H. Gifford*  
G. H. GIFFORD  
Inspector of Ancient Monuments

*T. A. Bailey*  
T. A. BAILEY  
Architect

31st October, 1952.

Ancient Monuments Branch  
Ministry of Works

## Appendix 13: Report by Marshall Sisson for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, 8 November 1952

SPAB Archives Coleshill File. *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.*

To the Committee of the Society for  
the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

8th November 1952.

Gentlemen,

### COLESHILL HOUSE.

I visited Coleshill with the Earl of Euston on the 29th October and examined the ruins with the Clerk of Works who has been in charge of the building.

Coleshill is the earliest country house of formal classic design in England and is incomparably the best of the whole class of similar houses built between 1650 and 1700. It is especially notable for its assured and flawless design, the great refinement of the detail, the excellence of its execution and the almost perfect condition of the external stonework after three centuries of life.

Although built under the supervision of Roger Pratt, it seems probable that the direct influence of Inigo Jones accounts for the superior excellence of this house, an excellence which was never equalled in any of the subsequent buildings of Pratt or in those attributed to Webb, May, Mills or other designers of the period. The masterly pattern of fenestration which emphasises the centre without break or pediment distinguishes it from other houses of similar form and scale. While the proportions and fenestration owe much to Italian models, such influences have been thoroughly assimilated and the design may be regarded as the ideal type of English house during the next fifty years.

The interior is well planned and the ceilings and staircase were magnificent but it is the exterior which is of particular value.

Not only is Coleshill generally acknowledged to be one of the highest achievements of English architecture but as the first and finest example of its class it is historically perhaps the most valuable single house in England.

- 2 -

EFFECTS OF FIRE

The roof and upper floors have been burnt and debris from these and from three of the great chimney stacks has filled the basement storey almost up to the level of the principal floor. Owing to the chaotic mass of debris, it is impossible yet to inspect all parts of the structure but my previous knowledge of the building has assisted me in forming opinions on the case.

At the present time, the house preserves almost exactly its original external appearance up to cornice level as the ashlar facing is completely intact and undamaged except for a small section of the upper storey of the West Front which has been destroyed by the fall of a chimney. One remarkable feature of the case is that the fire appears to have burnt exclusively upwards and the flames have not burnt through the windows. There is thus no scorching of the external stonework except above one window of the East Front and in fact almost all the window frames and sashes have survived.

Three of the eight great chimneys have fallen, two during the fire and one since. One of the remaining five stacks leans slightly inwards and looks insecure but this deviation from the vertical was noticeable before the fire. As the stacks are of great height and are not now stiffened by the roof structure, there is certainly a risk of collapse during stormy weather.

Much of the wooden crowning cornice has been burnt or has fallen and only short lengths remain in situ. Most of the missing modillions are lying on the ground. These are generally of carved elm or oak, but a few are painted cast iron replacements.

Parts of the internal cross walls, which are constructed of stone rubble, have fallen and in particular the wall and chimney on each side of the staircase hall has collapsed, thus leaving the centre part of the long East Front inadequately stiffened. In the lower part of the building the floors have



- 3 -

been burnt or destroyed by falling debris but the walls, in many places, are little affected and it is noticeable that much of the inner face of the stonework of external and internal walls has been protected from the effects of fire by the plaster skin, and in the Library, for example, even the canvas backing of the wall paper is still in position. A diagram is attached to show what parts of the walls are standing.

The external walls are constructed of ashlar facing backed by stone rubble and an examination of the more accessible parts of the structure shows that while the stonework of the internal rubble face is not much damaged by fire, the mortar jointing is defective. It is evident, however, that the effect of fire has not penetrated far into the walls and that the softness of the mortar is due largely to the fact that lime was used in its composition. Its condition, therefore, resembles that often found in the core of a medieval wall. For the reinstatement of the building or for the conservation of the existing remains these walls would need, in many places, to be consolidated internally by pointing, grouting or rebuilding parts of the rubble backing.

There is some evidence that parts of the external ashlar faced walls have sunk inwards slightly owing to the weakening of the rubble interior by fire or the charring of some of the wood lintels and much emphasis has been placed on this. It is important to note, however, that a careful examination of photographs taken many years before the fire proves conclusively that much of the deflection apparent in the external walls, and especially on the East and South Fronts, has existed for a long period and is not attributable to the fire. Indeed this condition is to be expected in a structure of this kind and age, and it is noticeable in most houses of the later 17th and 18th centuries.

- 4 -

It is my belief also that in the case of Coleshill the walls of the upper storey are intentionally battened inwards as an architectural refinement, but this can only be verified by careful measurement.

As the lower parts of the house have not been completely burnt out, several fine chimney pieces, for example in the Library, are intact and most of the oak panelling in the Oak Parlour, which was probably re-used in the building of the house and presumably came from the earlier house which was destroyed by fire.

#### THE PROSPECT OF REINSTATEMENT

There is no doubt in my mind that at the present time sufficient evidence, either in the form of surviving structure or in fragments, remains to make possible an almost exact reinstatement of the building including its internal decoration. The only obstacle would be the high cost of such a reconstruction. Although the magnificent plaster ceilings have all fallen, numerous large fragments still remain among the debris and could provide detailed models for replacement. The elaborate plaster entablature and cornice of the Saloon on the first floor remain for the most part in situ in a damaged condition. Without the removal and sorting of the debris, it is impossible to ascertain just how much detail available for record or reconstruction has survived, but a great deal is visible on superficial inspection only.

A more practicable alternative to identical reinstatement would be to conserve and consolidate the existing walls, to reinstate floors and roof and to reconstruct the interior simply and in such a way as to make it a convenient house of modern size without attempting to provide elaborate internal decorations. This would preserve for future generations the superb exterior as a masterpiece of architecture, and would at the same time provide a useful house suited to modern requirements. It would



not be difficult to replan the house in such a way that all living accommodation was on the ground and first floors, with perhaps some accommodation in the roof storey. The basement could thus be utilised merely for heating, storage etc. It must, however, be realised that the basement in the case of Coleshill is largely above ground and well lit.

#### COST OF REPAIR

Any estimates of the cost of repair made at the present time before clearance of the debris and without more detailed examination must necessarily be very tentative, but in my opinion identical reinstatement of the building externally and internally would under present conditions probably amount to at least £150,000. On the other hand, identical reinstatement of the exterior and a simple reconstruction of the interior designed to make it a convenient house on modern lines, would probably cost £70,000. Reinstatement of the external form only, leaving the interior undeveloped, would necessarily cost very much less and perhaps about £30,000.

#### CONSERVATION

It seems most important that measures should be taken at once to conserve the remains by consolidating weakened walls so as to prevent further damage to the structure. To achieve this conservation, the external walls should be shored where necessary, loose mortar and damaged stone removed and defective parts shuttered and grouted. Where the wood lintels are burnt and decayed, reinforced concrete lintels should be inserted. The tops of the walls should be water-proofed.

On account of the soft nature of the jointing on the exposed inner faces of the walls, it is likely that disintegration from damp and frost will be rapid if some such protective measures are not put in hand.

If reinstatement of the structure takes place, by far the greater part of the external walls can unquestionably be consolidated in situ and re-used, but it appears possible that

- 6 -

certain parts where inward deflection has taken place in the past and may have been accentuated by fire might have to be rebuilt. The areas on the East and North Fronts where there might be some question of the necessity of rebuilding are indicated on the accompanying diagrams.

An urgent necessity is the making of the fullest possible measured and photographic records of all that remains and for this purpose also, some immediate conservation and clearance work is required.

#### CONCLUSION

Since Coleshill is uniquely valuable both architecturally and historically, and as reinstatement is practicable without loss of the principal aesthetic values, reconstruction is far more justifiable than in the case of numerous well known houses that have been rebuilt after similar damage. If preservative action is to be taken, it must be taken immediately.

Marshall Sisson, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

## Appendix 14: Licence for the demolition of Coleshill House issued by Berkshire County Council 2 January 1953

WSA, 1946/1/6

WSA/1946/1/6

COPY

BERKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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Tel. No. Reading 3081      Ext. 49      COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT,  
MY REF Far. R/1123 APP/PKD      6 & 7, ABBOT'S WALK, READING.  
YOUR REF.....

All communications to be addressed to The County Planning Officer.

THOMAS HOUGHTON, A.R.I.C.S., M.T.P.I.  
COUNTY PLANNING OFFICER

2nd January, 1953.

Dear Sir,

Coleshill House, Faringdon, Berkshire.

Thank you for your letter of the 31st December 1952, notifying me of the proposed demolition of the remains of Coleshill House.

In accordance with the requirements of Section 30 (7), I have notified the Regional Office of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Faringdon Rural District Council. I understand from the Regional Office of the Ministry that although the remains of this house are included in the list prepared by the Minister under Section 30 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1947, no objection is raised by the Ministry to the proposed demolition of the remains of Coleshill House, on account of their dangerous condition.

In the circumstances it would appear that you will be in order to proceed with the demolition.

Yours faithfully,

Signed.....T. HOUGHTON.  
County Planning Officer.

Messrs. Whatley, Hill & Co.,  
Estate Agents,  
West Wycombe,  
BUCKS.

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