

AUDLEY END.¹

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The Mansion of Audley End, large as it is to-day, is but a small part, less than one-third, of what it was when first built, and during the first century of its existence. Now it is a mansion; then it was a palace, but a palace not built for a king, but for a subject—the Lord High Treasurer. The King, indeed—James I.—was himself mightily impressed with its size and magnificence. “Such a place,” he is reported to have said (possibly with an *arrière pensée*), “was too large for a King, though it might do for a Lord Treasurer.”

But how shall we realize its first extent? The present house forms three sides of a court—if we restore the fourth side, long since pulled down, we get what used to be called the innermost or small court. Then beyond this fourth side project two wings nearly as large as the present wings, and you get what may be called the body of the house. Now add to the present entrance front, another court as long each way as the front is, surround it with buildings of two storeys, with taller blocks at the corners and in the middle of each side, and you get the great court. To this must be added yet another large block, also about the size of one of the present wings, containing the kitchens; and this completes the habitable part of the great palace.

But in front of the great court itself, which was surrounded by buildings, there was yet another or outer court, enclosed by a wall, and stretching forward to such an extent that the river flowed straight across the middle of it, and was spanned by a bridge. Up this court a double avenue of elms or limes (for reports differ) led the visitor

¹ Read at Audley End August 12th, 1892.

from the "Great Road" to the entrance of the principal court. In its two front corners were two small bowling greens. On the north side it was flanked by the stable yard, some ponds, and the keeper's lodge. On the south it had two cherry-gardens. It was some eight or ten acres in extent. So large, indeed, was it, that however magnificent it may have looked on a plan, much of its effect must have been lost in reality; for the eye, attracted by the avenue that traversed its length, would fail to realize the fact that it was symmetrically enclosed by a stone wall, and was part of a vast, carefully devised scheme. But this merely goes to prove once more that size is not a necessary factor in art; indeed, beyond a certain limit, size becomes a disadvantage, inasmuch as the eye ceases to realize the design, and fails to grasp the relation of one part to another, whereby the very object of the designer is defeated.

But although with this great outermost court we complete the palace and its approaches, we have by no means enumerated all the adjuncts that formed essential parts of the establishment. First there was the bowling green (for those already mentioned were only distant and subsidiary greens), adjoining the house on its eastern side opposite to that on which you entered. Then, flanking the whole length of the house on the south was the Mount Garden, laid out in the pleasant formal manner of the times. To correspond with this on the north side, was the wilderness and the cellar garden, bounded by the great pond. Near the kitchen was the wood yard, and further away the store yard, the brewhouse yard and the brewhouse garden. Outside and beyond all these was the park.

I hardly suppose you will have been able to follow very closely the disposition of these various places, nor does it greatly matter if you have not; the chief impression I desire to convey is the vast scale upon which the house and its surroundings were laid out. It is the necessity for this hugeness which is one of the principal lessons which we shall learn from Audley End; for in the destruction of the outer court, the gallery, and the clock tower, there disappeared most of what was piquant, and quaint, and interesting in detail. The part that is left was com-

paratively plain and severe, and served to set off to great advantage the richness of its adjuncts which have been removed.

I should like, if I could, to convey to you some notion of what these adjuncts looked like. Standing in the principal court you had on either side a long two storeyed building, of which the upper floor, with its mullioned windows, rested on an arched cloister supported by alabaster columns. In the middle of each side rose a square pavilion one storey taller, the face of its main wall finishing in a curved gable containing a sun dial, and each corner crowned with a cupola surmounted by a glittering vane. Against the upper storey of this portion the pierced stone parapets of the lower buildings stopped. Parapets pierced not with a pattern, but as Evelyn remarked, with "a bordure of capital letters." In front was the house, much as we see it to-day, with its one-storeyed hall flanked by a lofty building at either end, terminating again with cupolas and vanes. Behind was a one-storeyed building, wherein was the triple entrance gate, guarded as it were by four round turrets. At the corners where the front and the sides met, were yet other pavilions crowned with balustrades and cupolas and vanes. At intervals rose tall chimneys fashioned like isolated columns; the roofs were flat and made of lead, and permitted the daylight to shine through the "bordure of capital letters," so that you could read the motto of the Garter, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," and the Latin sentence, "Prudentis est in consilio fortunam semper habere."

From the level of the court the porches of the house, which we can still admire to-day, were reached by an ascent on to a broad balustraded terrace, and through the porches that part of the house was gained which is still left. The house indeed is left, but much of its beautiful embellishments are gone, and chief among them the splendid wood-work of the hall. There is still much that remains, however. The fine, largely designed ceiling over the staircase, the contorted strapwork in the ceiling of the small library, where over an area of more than 20 ft. by 10 ft., no part of the pattern repeats itself, and above all, the beautifully modelled ceiling of the Saloon, unrivalled for its delicacy

of form and line. Chimney-pieces there are, too, and staircases, characteristic of the time, but not a twentieth part of what there once was.

For the long Gallery, 90 paces long, and 32 ft. wide (wider than the length of a large modern room), and 24 ft. high, has gone, and with it its panelled walls and its oak chimney-piece whereon were carved the labours of Hercules, and its stucco ceiling that pourtrayed the Loves of the Gods. And with it has gone the charming Clock Turret that projected from the middle of its length, and the Clock which, according to Cosmo, Prince of Tuscany "proclaimed to a great distance the magnificence of this vast fabric."¹

All this departed splendour we can see in the views and plans of Henry Winstanley,² and read of in the pages of Evelyn and Pepys and Cosmo, Prince of Tuscany. To Evelyn it "shewed without like a diadem, by the decorations of the cupolas and other ornaments on the pavilions." To Samuel Pepys "the stateliness of the ceilings, chimney-pieces and form of the whole was exceedingly worth seeing." Moreover the cellars contained most admirable drink, of which he partook; and an excellent echo, which he discovered by playing a tune on his flageolet.

But the place was too vast. Already in the time of Evelyn and the musical Mr. Pepys, it was hardly used as a habitation, and its aspect struck such profound melancholy into the bosom of the Frenchman, St. Evremond, when he went to see it, that he had not even the spirit to hang himself on one of its trees, as urged by his companion. After this for a few decades it became more cheerful as the occasional home of the King's Court; and we hear of the Queen setting out from its ample gates in company with duchesses, all disguised as country wenches, to have some fun at a fair. But they overdid their parts, and like unskilful conjurors, were quickly found out, and at length had to return to the palace attended by an admiring rabble.

After this the house again fell into decay. We catch glimpses of school girls from Saffron Walden in George I.'s time playing in the long empty gallery; of strangers

¹ See Lord Braybrooke's "History of Audley End." London, 1836.

² Prospects of all the parts of his

Majesty's Royal Palace of Audley End, by Henry Winstanley. Littlebury, 1688.

wandering in and out at their will; of broken windows stuffed with rags; of the creaking clock-turret rocking in the wind and ready to fall. And finally we see a schoolboy going over from Walden of an evening to see the place pulled down, and through his ears we hear the thunder of the lead as it was hurled down from the roofs, and with him we think that such might have been the scene two centuries earlier when the monasteries were despoiled.

But having thus realized to some extent the great size of Audley End, and having seen how, being far too large for the descendants of the builder, it had to be ruthlessly curtailed to the destruction of its most interesting features, let us take a brief glance at its history, noting the important epochs; and then at the style in which it was built, so that we may learn what place it holds in the great diorama of architectural progression.

It was built, then, by Thomas Howard, created first Earl of Suffolk in the year of his beginning the house, and Lord High Treasurer to King James I. in 1614. According to tradition it was begun in the year 1603 and took thirteen years to build, which we can very well believe. A model is also said to have been sent from Italy, and that there was a model there can be no doubt—indeed, remains of it exist to this day. That the model was made in Italy I am not prepared to dispute, but that the house was designed in Italy—and this is the important point—I venture very strongly to doubt. It is essentially Jacobean in character, which implies that along with Italian details there is a strong flavour of English workmanship and arrangement, a flavour which could only have been imparted by English designers, and would never have been caught on Italian soil. That is evidently how the matter struck Prince Cosmo of Tuscany, born and bred amid purely Italian architecture. After his visit in 1669 he says (or rather his secretary says for him):—“The architecture of the palace, though it was only built 60 years ago, is nevertheless not regular but inclines to the Gothic, mixed with a little of the Doric and Ionic.” There speaks the Italian, accustomed himself to “regular” architecture, and surprised that any building erected so recently as “60 years ago” should not have lost all trace of gothic influence, and be as “regular” as his own Italian palaces.

Audley End, therefore, however much it owes to Italy—and, in common with all buildings of the age, it owes a great deal—was of English design. It is, moreover, probably due to the ubiquitous John Thorpe, as there is a plan of it in his collection of drawings.¹ The difficulty with John Thorpe's drawings is to determine whether they are his own designs, or merely surveys of existing buildings. In this particular instance we can compare his plan with that drawn by Henry Winstanley (already mentioned) about the year 1676, and we find that although in the main the two plans agree room for room, yet there is one notable discrepancy, namely, the disposition of the entrance front of the principal court. Had the two plans tallied exactly, John Thorpe's might have been a mere survey, just as Winstanley's was; but the discrepancy is of such a nature as not to be accounted for by subsequent alterations, but rather points to Thorpe's plan having been modified in the carrying of it out. Thorpe has, however, no upper plans of the place, nor any elevations.

Assuming this reasoning to be correct, we find that the Earl of Suffolk built the house, that John Thorpe designed it, and that a model was procured—perhaps from Italy—for the edification of the builder and the workmen. The cost is said to have been, including inside and outside work, some £200,000—a very large sum of money in those days.

But when the Lord High Treasurer was dead, and there was no longer occasion for the display attending the household of a great officer of state, the place became a white elephant to his successors, and his grandson sold it to the Crown in 1669 for one quarter of the original cost—£50,000. Of this sum £30,000 was paid down, and the remaining £20,000 left on mortgage.² For 32 years it was a royal palace, and it was during that period that Winstanley, who was Clerk of Works, made his invaluable series of drawings. One of his reasons for so doing, as he states in his dedication to the Earl of Suffolk, was that Audley End, although as fine a palace as any to be found in France or Germany, had not acquired that fame which was its due. Accordingly he made his drawings, his care being “to take true views of all, without striving to add

¹ Fol. 203-4.

² Lord Braybrooke's "History of Audley End."

any fancy to that which is so perfect in itself." Yet one little fancy he did add, namely, a view of himself sketching the building, seated cross-legged on a stone pedestal, on which his initials H. W. and the date 1676 are inscribed.

From a royal palace it became once more a private residence, being reconveyed to the fifth Earl of Suffolk, on condition that he forewent all claim to the £20,000 left on mortgage, and as this was secured on the duties on hearths and stoves in Ireland, which Parliament as about to repeal, he had every inducement to accept the condition: so the price is now one-tenth of the original cost. But the size of the place was still a terrible burden, and after enduring it for another twenty years, the Earl, by the advice of Sir John Vanburgh, pulled down the whole of the principal court in the years 1721-2, together with the kitchens and offices. The projecting chapel and cellar followed in a few years, and there remained only the inner court. This mutilated remnant passed in the course of time to the Countess of Portsmouth for the sum of £10,000. Much of it was condemned as unsafe by surveyors, and the materials of the whole fabric were valued in view of its demolition. And what has the original £200,000 sunk to by now?—to £7,985 7s. 9d. It was the East wing that was considered unsafe, and accordingly in the year 1749 it was pulled down, and with it went, of course, the long gallery which Evelyn regarded as the most cheerful and one of the best in England. Not all the Labours of Hercules, carved on the Chimney Piece, nor the Loves of the Gods, modelled on the ceiling, could save it. But when it was gone the Countess's successor found that he had no access from one side of the house to the other, and so, at his own great and proper charge, he had to build the corridor at the back of the hall. The great raw places left at the ends of the two wings by the removal of the gallery wing were healed by the building of the large bay windows; and the shape which the house then assumed it has retained till this day. A good deal has been done by recent proprietors to the interior to put and keep it in proper repair, but most of what was left after the destruction of the gallery has been spared, the most notable exception being the fine wood work of the hall, drawn by Nash in his "Mansions."¹

¹ The Mansions of England, by Joseph Nash, 2nd series, plate 28.

The rise and decay of the house having thus been traced, a very few words as to its style will bring these remarks to a close.

Every building that ever had any life in it is eloquent of the spirit of the age which produced it. So with Audley End. Its vastness speaks of the magnificence of a high court-official at a time when stateliness was of the essence of life. Its numerous rooms tell of the visits of noblemen with large retinues, and those of Majesty itself on its Progresses through the country. The fashion of its ornaments "twixt antiq and modern," as Evelyn has it, proclaim the influence that Italy had acquired in all matters relating to art, but they shew that that influence had not yet overwhelmed and submerged all native design, as it did in later years. There was still much that was distinctly English about it. And though its multitude of turrets were a reminiscence of the defensive arrangements of preceeding centuries, the dials with which they were adorned spoke of peace, and pointed more to the serene future than to the boisterous past. There is something about them of the peace expressed in Shakespeare's lines:—

Thou, by thy dial's shady stealth may'st know
Time's thievish progress to Eternity.

England had left behind her the strife of the Middle Ages; the sun had dispelled the clouds that enveloped those fierce times, and was lighting up the many vanes that made the great house of Audley End shine like a diadem.