

XII.—A FORMAL LANDSCAPE AT HESLEYSIDE IN NORTHUMBERLAND.

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The publication of Mr. David Green's book on Henry Wise and the Formal Garden¹ in 1956 was a reminder that little remains of the seventeenth-century formal gardens in Britain. Their departure from many country estates has come about in several ways, including the substitution of informal landscapes in the eighteenth century, subsequent decay and splitting-up by impoverished owners, and the encroachment of building development. Yet, if this kind of garden was never at home in our island landscape—and does not represent the native genius at its best—it is an occasion to find an example to-day.

Bramham in Yorkshire² is the accepted northern version of the kind of layout which extended with straight avenues and *rond points* beyond the parterre or decorative garden near the house. Such gardens were inspired by Le Notre and his School in France from the seventeenth century, whose works must have been observed by Royalist exiles from this country during the Protectorate. This particular contact with France continued through the Catholic recusants until the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829. The recusants who were best able to survive in Britain were those living in the less accessible areas, such as Hesleyside on North Tyne before the valley disappears into the Border Hills. Here, the remains of the old planting show that an example in the style of seventeenth-century France exists in the north.

The house at Hesleyside is of considerable interest, and

¹ *Gardener to Queen Anne*, by David Green (Oxford University Press, 1956).

² See "Country Life", Vol. 123, June 12th and 19th, 1958.

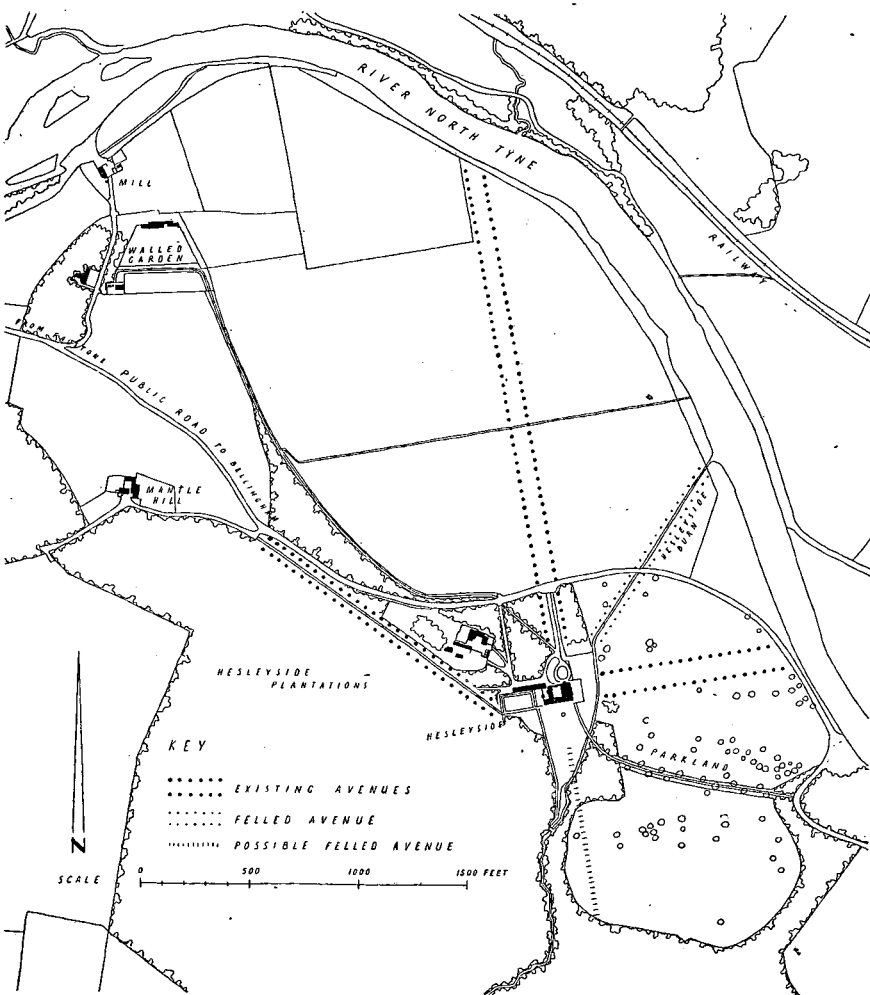
indeed the same can be said for the Charlton family—one of the oldest in the Border country. But reference is made only to those facts about the house itself which have a bearing on the development of the landscape around. Up to the seventeenth century, Hesleyside was little more than a Border Hold. In that century (possibly from 1620 onwards) a substantial house was commenced, and some of the original seventeenth-century work can be traced in the core of the later south front. The dates are not, however, substantiated. In Barbara Charlton's (née Tasburgh), *Memoirs, The Recollections of a Northumbrian Lady 1815-66*³ reference is made to the south front, suggesting a date as late as 1719, though qualifying this by "but which is possibly a century earlier". If one takes as a criterion the earlier work at Capheaton Hall in Northumberland, the home of the Swinburnes (who were well connected with the Charltons by friendship and marriage), the date 1719 would seem to fit the south front at Hesleyside as it is clearly an example of developed Renaissance architecture, whereas Capheaton (1668) is an essentially "Jacobean" façade with a rich hotch-potch of classical and vernacular ornament.⁴ Some notes by John Warburton, made about 1750, refer to a "newly-erected edifice" at Hesleyside, which may suggest a later date than 1719. And to add to the problem of dating, the house at Nunwick further down the river and built about 1750 has the appearance of belonging to a later period of architectural development than the south front at Hesleyside.

The dating of the south front at Hesleyside is important in that it must surely pinpoint the beginning of a gentleman's estate, which soon materialized into a landscape of formal tree-planted avenues radiating out into the area which had been cleared from the natural forest in the typical seventeenth-century French manner. Other examples of this kind of layout appeared at Hampton Court (c. 1662 *et seq.*) and

³ Edited by L. E. O. Charlton (Jonathan Cape, London, 1949).

⁴ Architectural developments took place in the north several years later than in the south; thus, the date of Capheaton—1668—does not lie within the accepted dating of Jacobean architecture.

Greenwich (1668 to 1695). Paintings made c. 1685 of Capheaton and c. 1735 of Blagdon (also in Northumberland) show on the other hand the typical enclosed garden, with walls or hedges which might have been laid out by travelling craftsmen from the Netherlands in Jacobean times.



The three radiating avenues at Hesleyside lie roughly north-west, north and east, but their points of origin are not common, a fact which might suggest that a comprehensive layout, carefully related as to the parterres and the formal parkland beyond, was not prepared in full by a professional designer as happened with the more notable examples in France. Nevertheless, the layout at Hesleyside was more comprehensive than many of its contemporaries in Britain, for these usually had snippets of the various clichés of the formal garden added one to the other indiscriminately.

A fourth avenue, running north-east by the side of the straightened Hesleyside Burn, is shown on a map of 1776; this avenue was not shown on an earlier map of 1722, although the latter marks the marshy area which was drained by the "canalized" burn.

The possibility mentioned in the *Memoirs* that a fourth avenue ran in a southerly direction from the house strengthens one's belief that the Hesleyside layout was influenced directly by France or the Continent, and not at second-hand from the English examples. It may well be that it was the radiating avenue idea appealing to an amateur, perhaps lately returned from France, that is the key to the Hesleyside layout. These English examples are typified by David Green in his book on Henry Wise thus: "The great avenue on the north, formal gardens to east and west, the main parterre on the south, with woodwork (bosquets) and wilderness farther off, these, with variations, formed the familiar frame." The avenue from the south front of Hesleyside (if it existed at all) may have been sacrificed when Run-away Will's⁵ ornamental lake was formed (this in turn no longer exists).

In the light of the fragmentary evidence available about the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century period of development at Hesleyside, the possibility of an earlier dating than 1719 for the planting of the avenues or the planning of the

⁵ Run-away Will was William Charlton, who died abroad in 1736.

layout should not be dismissed.⁶ After all, many of the young Charltons were educated in France during this period and they could have brought the ideas of Le Notre back to Northumberland, by-passing, as it were, Hampton Court and other examples. The *Memoirs* referred to earlier do, in fact, state that the "woods were thrown back from the house, grounds were shaped, and a demesne was marked out" so that by the end of the seventeenth century the estate "stood out from its surroundings as a gentleman's seat of attractive appearance". At that time, the countryside around was covered with the natural growth of trees—even up to about 1730, and vestiges of the birch forest can still be seen to-day close to Hesleyside where the valley lands change to moorland.

The three radiating avenues still exist after 200 or more years. Two of them are clearly discernible where they cross the parkland and the fields towards the river; that to the north was probably sycamore originally with some Scots Pine added later, and that to the east was probably chestnut with similar additions. The third, to the north-west, has tall and venerable limes and is considerably overgrown. But no obvious trace of the original garden layout remains immediately round the house. In fact, the nineteenth-century "Italian" garden has been largely removed except for some balustrading and an oval pool.

Some additional facts appear in the *Memoirs* which throw light on the garden. The walled kitchen garden was removed from a site near to the house on the north side to the present position halfway between the house and the river, probably sometime in the period 1767 to 1778, and from that time the garden was celebrated for its pineapples for many years.

The estate was also not untouched by the eighteenth-century landscape movement, perhaps during the new phase of development marked by the north wing of 1796 (by the local architect William Newton). Prior to this date, the

⁶ Cuthbertson's map of 1722, referred to on page 166, clearly shows the north-west avenue.

main entrance to the house was in the south front, approached from the public road which then ran close to the south of the house. But about this time, the road was moved to the present line north of the house—a modification which gave a generous area of land all round the house uncrossed by public roads. In line with this new emphasis to the north instead of to the south, the parkland between the avenues may well have been planted with single trees and groups of trees, and perhaps also Run-away Will's ornamental lake added on the other side. Pevsner's *Northumberland* (The Buildings of England Series) refers to Capability Brown working at Hesleyside in 1776 and that his plans are at the house, and there is a Charlton tradition that he laid out the avenues. But nothing is known of any landscape layout plans at Hesleyside, apart from a field boundary map dated 1722 made by Cuthbertson for Run-away Will Charlton which shows the lime avenue and more woodland on the valley lands to the north than now exists, and a later map dated 1776 which shows the four avenues and may have led to the confusion. It also seems unlikely that Brown would have mixed radiating avenues and informal clumps of trees as late as 1776.⁷

But to return to the 1796 date as a likely one for the informal parkland planting, further evidence comes from the improvements carried out under the Dixons, father and son, who were agents from 1780, their major contribution being the drainage of the parkland (at that time very much liable to flooding) by a "sunk fence" dividing it into two areas, though not in an obvious manner.

The avenue which runs to the north came into its own when Bonomi, the nineteenth-century Durham architect, built the present entrance on the north side of the house facing directly along the avenue, though the new public road cut across the view.

When Barbara Charlton came to the house as a young

⁷ The second map of 1776 shows the old public road, and also hints at a formal garden to the south.

bride in 1831, she found it lying as an oasis surrounded by woodland and swamp. Since that time a large acreage of afforestation has been formed on the south and south-west up to the moorland, and the low-lying valley is under agriculture. The present owner, Mrs. Charlton, is rightly carrying out some replanting of the avenues, for these are of greater importance at Hesleyside than the scant remains of nineteenth-century Italian gardens.

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