

SYON HOUSE : THE FIRST TWO HUNDRED YEARS

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Syon, so charmingly and conveniently situated on the banks of the Thames a mere eight miles from Charing Cross, has passed through three distinct phases in its long history. From 1431, the date of the occupation of the first building on the site, till 1539 and again for a short period between 1557 and 1559, it was a monastic house, Sion Abbey.¹ At the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Syon became a semi-royal residence and the monastic buildings were largely reconstructed by Protector Somerset to form a Tudor mansion house. Lastly, since 1594 it has been in the occupation and since 1604 in the ownership of the Percy family. The Percies, in the most important of a number of restorations of the property, transformed the interior in the 1760's, with the aid of the genius of the brothers Adam, into one of the most colourful among English country houses. At the same time, they called in "Capability" Brown to lay out the grounds, which had already been made notable by the work of Protector Somerset's medical adviser Dr. Turner, the "Father of English Botany", and by the care of successive generations of Percies. The exterior of the house, however, has always presented a cold and even an uninviting appearance. The Adam alterations involved changes in the upper floor levels and therefore in the windows in the main parts of the house, the whole exterior was refaced in 1825, and the lion was placed on the riverfront roof after the demolition of Northumberland House, Charing Cross, which it had previously adorned, in 1874, but the general form of the house as a quadrangular, battlemented and angle-turreted building round a central courtyard has not changed since the Protector's day except that a loggia was added to the riverfront in the early seventeenth century and some lodgings which projected to the north and south of the main west front in Tudor and Stuart times have long since disappeared. To recount the history of Syon is to tell, from a particular vantage point, much of the history of England in the last six centuries. Yet the house awaits a modern history and it is still possible to find it omitted from the surveys of our country houses which appear in such profusion in these days.

Sion Abbey was the only house in England of the Bridgettine Order. St. Bridget (1304-1373), a daughter of the Swedish royal house and the widow of a Swedish princeling, had founded the double monastery of Vadstena in the diocese of Linköping in 1344. As there was a papal prohibition of new orders, the community was to live under the rule of

St. Augustine, supplemented by the constitutions drawn up by Bridget. These constitutions she believed to have been revealed to her directly by Our Lord; the whole rule was shown her at once but it later took a long time to write down, for, as she said: "It was as if a multitude of precious jewels was poured out before me in mass, and yet at the same moment I could perceive and realise the detailed beauty and perfection of each separate jewel." The fame of Vadstena spread rapidly through Europe and Bridget was canonized less than twenty years after her death—by Boniface IX on 7 October, 1391. When in 1406, Phillipa, the daughter of Henry IV, was married to King Eric XIII of Sweden, she visited the monastery shortly after her wedding. Among those in the company was one Sir Henry Fitzhugh, Baron Ravensworth and Chamberlain of the English royal household. Fitzhugh was so impressed by what he saw at Vadstena that he gave his manor of Cherry Hinton, Cambridgeshire, to trustees to endow an English house to the Order, if it should come to England within ten years.

The first brother sent to England for the purpose, in 1407, died immediately upon his return from what must have been a short visit. The next year the monastery sent two brothers over, of whom one is known to have stayed eight years and the other thirteen, but quite what they were doing in these years in a mystery. The year they came—1408—two events occurred which would have affected them. On the one hand, an Act of Parliament forbade alien priories; on the other hand, when the king, who had been excommunicated for his part in the murder of Richard II and in the judicial murder of the saintly Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York, made his peace with the Pope in this year, he undertook to found three religious houses as his penance. Fitzhugh was not only an influential figure at Court; he was also the nephew of Archbishop Scrope and it seems more than probable that he now looked forward to the founding of a *Bridgettine community in England* by the king himself. There were two great problems to be solved. First, how to overcome the proscription of alien priories; secondly, how to endow the new house. The solution of these problems was admirably neat, though it was not found by Henry IV but by his son, Henry V. Henry obtained permission from the Pope, Martin V, to found Sion as the first house of a new English order—the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, and endowed it out of the lands of the alien priories which were now suppressed. The other two houses which were planned at this time were to be the Priory of Bethlehem for Carthusians and a house to be called Jerusalem for the Celestines. All three were to be built near the newly restored palace of Sheen, at what is now called Richmond, Surrey;

Bethlehem was to be at Sheen, Sion across the Thames at Twickenham Park and Jerusalem at Isleworth. In the event, the Celestine house was not founded, for the Order was French and Henry was to go to war with France.

The foundation charter of Sion of 3 March, 1415, provided that the monastery should be composed of an abbess and fifty-nine nuns, with twenty-five religious men, of whom thirteen were to be priests, four deacons and eight laymen. The abbess in Bridgettine monasteries ruled in temporal matters, while the elected superior of the brothers, the Confessor-General as he was called, ruled over the men in spiritual and the nuns were "to be refreshed and fed with the hearing divine services and wholesome preaching and erudition, and to be assisted in the perils and difficulties of their spiritual necessities" by the priests. The community as a whole represented the thirteen apostles, including St. Paul, and the seventy-two disciples.

The brothers and sisters lived in separate courts within the same monastery but shared a common church. Strict, separate enclosure, however, still held. The sisters occupied a raised choir in the upper part of the church: they had a view of the Lady altar on the east and of the High altar on the west so that they could take their part in liturgical services. The brothers' choir was below at the west end, behind the High altar. The sisters sang the Hours of the Bridgettine Office of Our Lady alternately with the brothers' Hours of the Divine Office, so that there was practically continuous praise being given. The rule also provided—and it was the first monastic rule to do so—for the continuous exposure of the Sacrament; the particular objects of the constitutions were the Passion of Christ and the honour of the Virgin Mary. The rule of silence was observed in the monastery and conversation with seculars was allowed only in company and with the licence of the Abbess on Sundays and great feasts through grilles.

Sion was well endowed from the start. The foundation charter provided that the community should receive one thousand marks from the Exchequer annually until estates of that value had been settled upon it; Henry bequeathed one thousand marks of gold to Sion in his will of 24 July, 1415, and made good his promise of extensive endowments of land by the grant of lands forfeited from the alien priories on 20 April, 1416. By 1420, with aid from the Vadstena community, Sion was sufficiently far advanced to be formally enclosed, and the profession of sisters and brothers on 21 April of that year may be regarded as the true foundation of the house; before this it could not have been more than a loose grouping of religious men and women. Soon the buildings at

Twickenham proved too small for the growing numbers and, in any event, the site was marshy; despite the construction of a ditch, the position remained unhealthy. In 1422 the manor of Isleworth-Syon had been severed from the duchy of Cornwall and granted to the Abbey, and now it was decided to build a new monastery on the site originally intended for the Celestines. The foundation stone was laid by the Duke of Bedford on 5 February, 1426, and the community moved to the new buildings on 11 November, 1431, when the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of Rochester and Bath, the Duke of Gloucester and a galaxy of other notabilities, spiritual and temporal, graced the occasion.²

In the course of the next century, the house, favoured by successive kings, prospered until it became one of the wealthiest and most respected in the country. The preaching of the monks attracted considerable audiences from the nearby capital on Sundays and great holidays; their learning was outstanding and the elaborately written catalogue of the monks' books shows us that the library contained some of the rarest manuscripts and most important printed books then in existence; it was evidently primarily a Latin library, for of the nearly 1,500 items only 26 were in English, four were in French and none was in Greek. Sion was a favourite place of retreat with the nobility and gentry; two of the prioresses, for example, were Anne, daughter of Cecily, Duchess of York and Mother of Edward IV, towards the end of the fifteenth century, and Margaret, sister of Andrew, Lord Windsor, from 1518 to 1539. By the time of the Dissolution Sion held lands in almost every county in southern England; the gross annual revenue was put at £1,944 11s. 5¼d. and the net at £1,731 8s. 4¾d.³

Sion was one of the first of the larger monasteries to be suppressed. Trouble came first over the reception at the Abbey of the Benedictine nun, Elizabeth Barton, who was known as the Holy Maid of Kent. Richard Reynolds, the noted divine and a monk of Sion, arranged two meetings between this nun who was denouncing the second marriage of Henry, and the Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More. Elizabeth Barton was executed on 20 April, 1534, and soon Richard Reynolds was arrested for refusing to take the oath of Supremacy; on 4 May, 1535, the "Angel of Sion", as he is remembered, was burnt at Tyburn, together with three Carthusian priors and John Hale, the Vicar of Isleworth. Visitations from the King's Commissioners became frequent. After these executions, the Confessor-General and two brothers were used to try to persuade some of the monks of the Charterhouse to acknowledge the Supremacy of the King and the house seems to have been reduced to accepting the temporal situation quietly. But Sion was doomed.

In May, 1538, a writ of *praemunire* was issued against the Bishop of London, the Abbess and the Confessor of Sion on account of the professing of some brothers in 1537 and 1538; the Bishop obtained pardon, but the penalty—the loss of lands, tenements, goods and chattels—was exacted against the monastery on 25 November, 1539.⁴

The story of the distribution of the lands of the monastery can be traced for the most part through the Patent Rolls, fortunately calendared for this period. Some properties were annexed to Crown lands, at least in the first instance; Hampton in Sussex was annexed to the honour of Petworth, at this time in the hands of the Crown by the attainder of the sixth earl of Northumberland in 1537. Others were leased or sold for a price, often as part of a great bundle of properties sold to speculators; Loders in Dorset was granted, with many other monastic lands, to Richard Andrewys and Leonard Chamberleyne of Woodstock, Oxfordshire, in consideration of £4,451 15s. Hinton was part of a grant made to the Corporation of London for the support of Bridewell. Much of the property, however, went to servants of the Crown; even before the suppression, the Abbess had been persuaded to grant lands in Felsted, Essex, to Sir Richard Ryche, Chancellor of the Court of Augmentations, and at the Dissolution considerable proportions of the Sion estates were either leased or granted to the new nobility and the lesser officials in the King's service.⁵

The Middlesex estates remained intact and in the hands of the Crown. The monastic buildings served as a prison for the unfortunate Katherine Howard from 14 November, 1541, to 10 February, 1542, when she was removed to the Tower three days before her execution. She is said to have been kept very strictly but served as Queen. A patent of 20 July of the previous year had appointed John Gates, later Sir John and a minion of Warwick's, at this time "the King's servant", to be keeper of the house and site of Sion monastery, bailiff of the lordship and manor of Isleworth and of all the lands of Sion in Middlesex and keeper of the woods there. At that Henry seems to have been satisfied and he is not known to have used the buildings himself very much—he had, after all, Hampton Court at hand and ready for his occupation. The consequence was that the buildings became dilapidated and when Henry died and the body rested at Syon on the night of 14 February, 1547, on its way from Westminster to Windsor, the chapel had to be renovated specially to receive the royal corpse.

Very shortly after his assumption of power, the Protector Somerset granted the house to himself. A patent of 23 July, 1547, granted him "the house and site of the dissolved monastery of Sion, Middlesex, the

church, steeple, and churchyard, the lordships and manors of Sion and Isleworth . . . the grange called le Dayrey and all the demesne lands of Sion." The rest of the estate was made over to him later in the year as an exchange. It was Somerset who converted the buildings from a derelict monastery to a large mansion substantially in its present general form with angle turrets; the angle turrets of the house to-day, though refaced externally, are, apart from that at the north-west corner, all substantially of sixteenth century brick and retain doorways with four-centred heads. The architect of Somerset's house is not known, though Mr. Adrian Bury has suggested that it might have been the renowned John of Padua. Very little of mediaeval building survives at Syon. The west range of the house incorporates two rooms forming part of the fifteenth century vaulted undercroft of the Abbey. The rooms are of two and three bays respectively and have brick columns and vaulting. In both the dividing wall and the west wall are original doorways with four-centred heads and there are two blocked windows in the west wall. Mr. Christopher Hussey considers it fairly certain that the present entrance hall preserves the shell of the original refectory and it is also believed that the courtyard of the modern house represents the nuns' cloister of the monastery. How much of the monastic building was left by Somerset is not known but the brothers Adam wrote when they were restoring Syon in the eighteenth century of "some inequality in the levels of the old floors, some limitations from the situation of the old walls" and it may be that more of the mediaeval building remained until that time.

Somerset was not only responsible for a major reconstruction of the buildings at Syon; he also laid out the gardens, surrounding them with high walls. Dr. Turner, his personal physician, founded the first botanical garden in England at Syon and the mulberry trees in the Nuns' orchard are reputed to have been planted by him. Turner's book *Names of Herbes* (1548) was dedicated to Somerset and the preface is dated from Syon. To obtain a good view of the Thames, "that rare jewel" of Norden's, the Protector built a high triangular terrace to the south-east of the house, the remains of which are still visible in a mound, today planted with cedars. But Somerset's tenure of power was short-lived and he was accused at the time of his final fall of fortifying his house from ulterior motives because of this terrace!⁶

We gain some idea of the style in which the Duke and Duchess of Somerset lived at Syon from the list of jewels and other valuables handed over to Sir Andrew Dudley, the keeper of the palace of Westminster, by Sir John Gates, the vice-chamberlain and Captain of the

Gentlemen Pensioners, on 7 June, 1553; these valuables had been found at Syon at the time of Somerset's apprehension and Sir John as the former keeper had taken charge of them for the time being. The contents of one coffer alone required nearly eight folios of close writing on both sides of the paper to catalogue briefly. In this coffer they found 44 tablets and brooches. Many of them had scriptural allusions in their designs like the one described as a fair brooch of gold imagery work of the woman accused of adultery, which was set with 27 small rubies and two diamonds on a green ground. There were here, also, two fine prayer books; the one, which contained morning prayers, was covered with black velvet garnished with gold which had been enamelled black and had on either side the cipher of E and A (Somerset's Christian name was Edward and his second wife was Anne Stanhope); the other, similarly covered and garnished, was wrought with acorns and an S on either side. In this same coffer were three of the Duke's Georges, his Garter, his collar of St. Michael and his coronet; this last was set with five roses of diamonds, six small pointed diamonds, a table emerald, seven great balases, seven sapphires and 38 great pearls, with a cap of crimson velvet and a roll of powdered ermines round it. 34 rings, eight chains and eight girdles of gold, four pairs of bracelets, a great quantity of buttons and beads, a little plate and a number of precious stones which were unset, fifteen rich garments decorated with goldsmiths' work and 55 loose pieces of goldsmiths' work and sundry other items down to the gold toothpick shaped like a fish filled the rest of this coffer. The other sixteen folios of this inventory tell the same tale of fabulous wealth. In the Duchess's wardrobe pride of place was held by a rich robe of cloth of silver with a broad border of scallop shells and knots of great wreaths of gold and flames like fire, embroidered and lined throughout with white satin. She had besides a Venetian gown, 17 French gowns and 15 other gowns. The rest of her wardrobe was on a proportionate scale—cloths of silk, gold, silver, damask, fine holland, abounded in the house, and there was an exceptionally large store of lace.

Syon in Somerset's day, however, was not all show and no culture. Mention is made of some miniatures. There was a picture of the Countess of Suffolk in a yellow box, and others of Andrew Dorey, of Katherine Seymour, who as Katherine Parr had been the last Queen of Henry VIII, and one of Dudley himself, in one coffer; while in another were miniatures of Edward VI and of Queen Katherine Parr again, together with the Lord's Prayer bound with the Duke's arms and the Duchess's picture. Of the three chess sets the finest was one of crystal;

the board was garnished with silver and gold and stood upon four feet which were shaped like castles, it was bordered with pictures of men hunting and other devices, and the men, to match the board, had the white queen somewhat broken. The Duke's library consisted of more than one hundred books. Of the forty or so titles listed, the majority are theological works, many written against the supremacy of "the Bishop of Rome." Among the volumes on his shelves, the Duke had Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* in English, bound in white, Sir Thomas Elyot's dictionary covered with pearly velvet and—a book from which he does not seem to have profited adequately—the same author's *Of the knowledg whiche maketh a wise man*, Robert Fabyan's *Chronicle*, Johann Carion's three books of chronicles, the statutes of the Order of the Garter and Sir William Forrest's *The pleasaunte poesie of princelie practice*—the last two in parchment. Accounts, deeds, letters patent, pedigrees and other documents are listed as preserved, some of them, including his will, in a sea-chest covered with black leather.⁷

When Somerset had first fallen from power in October, 1549, he had lost Syon but it had been restored to him in 1551. On Somerset's first fall, Sir Thomas Wroth had been appointed one of the four principal gentlemen of the privy chamber and on the second fall he was given on 7 June, 1552, a 21 years' lease of Syon as keeper. Strype says that the rich furniture and bedding of the house were granted to Wroth as well in the September; certainly, as the inventory quoted above shows, the furnishings were still there in June, 1553. Somehow—it is reputed upon the understanding that the property would go to a charity—Wroth was persuaded to surrender his rights in Syon. The charity proved to be John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland; the patent granting him the house and some of the lands of the Syon estate is dated 26 June, 1553, less than three weeks after the inventory had been made. On 6 July, 1553, the boy-king died. Now Northumberland embarked on the fatal attempt to place the Lady Jane Grey, whom he had married as recently as 21 May to his son Lord Guildford Dudley, on the throne. From Syon, where she had lived a few weeks with her parents-in-law, she was conveyed with the ceremony reserved for a new Sovereign to the Tower, preparatory for her Coronation. Within nine days Mary had established herself as Queen and this unfortunate child of sixteen was a prisoner of state in the fortress which she had entered as nominal queen, by the autumn Northumberland had been executed and Syon had a new keeper for the Crown. One of the Queen's gentlemen ushers in ordinary, George Tyrrell, was made

keeper on 8 October with the yearly wages of £40. It was a life appointment but he surrendered the position less than four years later. Mary was, of course, an ardent Catholic and she was prevailed upon to restore the Bridgettines to Syon.⁸

On the suppression of the monastery in 1539, the community had not dispersed to the homes from which they had been drawn but had deliberately formed groups in which they could maintain some form of religious life in the hope that one day they could return to Syon, of which they had, incidentally, retained a few relics. The Abbess, Agnes Jordan, had rented a farmhouse called "Southlands" of Sir Edmund Peckham, near Denham in Buckinghamshire; with her went nine of the sisters. Sister Elizabeth Yate had taken eight with her to her home at Buckland, Berkshire, and the Sisters Alice and Dorothy Bettenham five to their home at Puckley, Kent. Others, led by Sister Catherine Palmer, had gone to the Low Countries and there they had been joined by those who had been living at Denham, after Abbess Jordan died in January, 1546.

Gradually, from November, 1556, the Bridgettine community, though depleted by death and desertion during the years of exile, reformed at Syon. Catherine Palmer and her group returned from the Low Countries early in 1557 and the restoration charter of 1 March, 1557, appointed Catherine Palmer Abbess. A patent of 18 April gave the house and much of the Middlesex land of Sion to the community in *frank almoign*; a further grant was made in January, 1558. The little community, which seems to have consisted of no more than 21 sisters and three brothers, was enclosed by the Bishop of London, Bonner, on 1 August, 1557, and they settled down to rebuilding. For two sides of the monastery had been pulled down and Sir Francis Englefield had given them some money to restore the Abbey.⁹

The restoration, however, was short-lived. Mary died in November, 1558, and the first act of the new reign dissolved the restored monastic houses. Syon now commenced a period of forty years as a semi-royal residence. For much of this period we know little beyond the names of those who acquired an interest in the property. On 27 May, 1560, Sir Francis Knolles and Catherine his wife were granted for life in survivorship the keepership of Syon House and of the woods there, and Sir Francis was also made steward and bailiff of the manor; the wages were 8d. a day for the keepership of the house, 2d. a day for the keepership of the woods and a further 2d. a day for the bailiffship with £5 annually for the stewardship. At the same time, Sir Francis and Lady

Knolles received a lease of Dairy House Farm and other lands in Isleworth-Syon for 3 years from Michaelmas, 1560, at yearly rents of £59 4s. 7d. and a rose. Lady Knolles died in 1569; Sir Francis lived on, undisturbed in his possession of Syon, but a complicated history arose of the transference of the legal right to the reversionary interests. By letters patent of 22 March, 1576/7, the fourth son of Sir Francis Knolles, Robert, an esquire of the body in ordinary to the Queen, was granted the Syon offices of his father upon his death and the reversion of the lease of lands held by him until Michaelmas, 1591, for 21 years. Robert Knolles made over all his rights under these letters patent to his father by a deed of 6 June, 1577, but received them again for himself and his wife by a deed of 30 December, 1584. By an indenture of 2 February, 1586/7, Robert Knolles mortgaged his rights in the lands and offices for £436 10s. to John Stanhope, and the mortgage was not redeemed. The young Earl of Essex bought out Stanhope (15 February, 1587/8) and in his turn took out a mortgage on 24 July, 1588, with Thomas Crompton, who stood bound for the debts of Essex to Mr. Customer Smyth for £1,500. Essex and Crompton made over their Syon interests to Sir John Perrot the following 4 March for £1,400.

This complex story of the descent of interests in Syon serves another purpose than to sharpen the reader's perception. It explains why when an inventory of Syon was taken in March, 1592/3, it was written between Isaac Whitwell, clerk of the Queen's works there, and Gelly Meyrick, comptroller to the Earl of Essex, in the presence of Austen Vasse, servant of Sir Thomas Perrot, the son and heir of Sir John Perrot; Sir John had died in September, 1592, while in the Tower of London awaiting execution after his attainder the previous June. Despite Sir John's attainder, the lands and possessions of the Perrots were handed down by the Queen's grace and when Sir Thomas himself died in February, 1594, his widow had no difficulty in getting his interest in Syon made over to her. Lady Perrot was Dorothy, sister to the Earl of Essex, and the daughter of Lettice, Sir Francis Knolles' daughter. Before the end of 1594, Lady Perrot had married again—to Henry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland—and her new husband acquired her rights in Syon as part of her dowry; we have her testimony that she had been offered £2,000 for these rights. Although Sir Francis Knolles lived until 19 July, 1596, his grand-daughter and her husband took up residence at Syon immediately upon their marriage and the lease seems to have been made over to Northumberland. Syon became the second principal residence of the Percies, next in importance to Petworth.¹⁰

The use of Syon from the time of the dissolution of the monastery in 1559 to the coming of the Percies in 1594 is not well documented. It is very improbable that Sir Francis Knolles ever lived at Syon for any length of time himself. His seat was Rotherfield Greys, near Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, though he often resided at Reading Abbey by permission of the Crown. As a leading courtier—he had charge of Mary Queen of Scots in 1568-9 and he was treasurer of the royal household from 1572 until his death—and as an Oxfordshire and Berkshire man—he represented Oxfordshire in Parliament from 1572 onwards—he was not likely to have found much time or occasion to occupy Syon himself and most likely, after the common custom, acted as keeper through a nominee.

Sometimes the Court came to Syon, however. Sir Edmund Chambers in his Court Calendar lists four royal visits to Syon in this period, spread over the years from 1576 to 1594. On each occasion the Queen was on her way to or from somewhere on one of her progresses and does not seem to have stayed more than a few hours. In September, 1563, the Marquis of Winchester as Lord High Treasurer was sent to survey the house, as it was intended to hold the Court of Exchequer there since the plague was raging in London. Although Winchester reported to Cecil as Secretary of State that the house would easily accommodate the Court, Syon does not seem to have been used in the event. Yet it is abundantly clear from the inventory of 1593 that the rooms of the house were arranged ready for Court use and that lodgings were provided at Syon for the chief courtiers.

By comparing this inventory with a contemporary ground-plan, it is possible to reconstruct the lay-out of the State rooms. The west range of the house, then as now, was largely occupied by the Hall. A central flight of seven steps admitted one to the colonnaded narrow entrance hall which occupied the whole length of the west range. The main wall of the house divided the Hall and the adjoining rooms from this entrance hall. At the north end of the spacious Hall were the buttery and pantry, on either side of a lobby leading to the angle turret; the buttery had two half-doors, the pantry one large door. At the south end of the Hall, a narrow lobby opened on to the stairs leading up to the Great Chamber; these stairs were well-lighted with twenty panes of glass.

The Great Chamber, occupying a position which corresponds roughly with that of the anteroom of the modern house, was furnished in 1593 with three deal tables, six long oaken forms and five trestles with square feet. Going along the south side of the house, the rooms

of which looked out upon the "green court" as they do not to-day, the next room was the fine Presence Chamber. Like the Great Chamber, its windows had wooden casements with ironwork to strengthen them, but here there were also spring shuttings to the windows. The trestles with square feet and the deal tables recur, too, but in place of the long forms, this room had four joined forms and a joined cupboard. The Privy Chamber next door was a smaller room, as one would expect. It seems to have been exceptionally well appointed. Its windows had wainscot shuttings fixed as well as casements and spring shuttings and rings upon them and iron handles, and the frieze, cornice and panels over the windows which formed part of the decoration of the room were all in good condition. A lobby on the courtyard side of the wing divided the Privy Chamber from the last room of the south range—the Withdrawing Chamber. This small room was furnished quite as well as the Privy Chamber and had the distinction of a chimney piece and of wainscotting on the chimney side of it.

The east range of the house was divided into two, as it still is, by a long gallery which occupied its entire length. It is clear from the ground-plan that the general shape of the gallery has not altered at all. Some 86 windows ran along the whole of the river side and the west wall of the gallery was divided by three doorways and two fireplaces in similar positions to those in the present Long Gallery. The doorway at the south end—corresponding to the entrance to the Red Drawing Room in the modern house—opened on to the Bedchamber, a wainscotted room with one portal containing two doors. One of these doors seems to have led to the closet, the other to a lobby which connected with the Coffer Chamber. The closet and the Coffer Chamber were both small rooms, the former wainscotted, the latter not. The Coffer Chamber adjoined the stairs which led down into the central courtyard of the house and the ground-plan shows that the opening into the court in the middle of the east side of the house, which is one of the delights of the modern Syon, is of at least three and a half centuries' antiquity. From this point, it becomes more difficult to follow the disposition of the rooms at Syon at this time, for the draughtsman of the ground-plan contented himself, as too many Tudor plan-makers contented themselves, with a laconic description; the only words on the plan are "A plott of Sion howse". The inventory tells us, however, that there were rooms at Syon occupied by the Lord Chamberlain, the Lord Keeper, the Lord Treasurer, Lady Howard, Lady Vere, Lady Skiemore, Lady Marquis, the Lord Admiral, Mr. Vice-Chamberlain, Sir Robert Cecil, and a number

of lesser people about the Court, as well as privy lodgings for the Queen and the maids of honour.

The general shape of the house approximated to that of the modern house, but to the quadrangular building round a court were added at this time two brick buildings. These stood, as the ground-plan indicates and as Ralph Treswell's thumb-nail sketch of the house on his plan of 1607 confirms, to the north and south of the approach to the house and actually inter-communicated with it. They were called the "brick lodgings" while the main house was referred to as the "white house".

We know from the inventory that the lodgings and the angle turrets were leaded and that all the chimneys were water-tabled; the pipes were evidently well placed and cared for, and the considerable company which apparently used Syon upon occasion would not have gone short of water, caught after the custom of the day from the roofs and stored in large cisterns.¹¹

When the Percies came to take up residence at Syon in 1594, then, it seems clear that they found a house which may have required a few minor repairs but which was in essentially good order. Only minor renovations were carried out by the Earl of Northumberland at Syon between 1594 and 1602, though the long stable at the north-west corner of the house was rebuilt in 1599-1600 for £12 5s. 10d. When the Earl was given a lease of Syon Park in 1602, the Queen granted him £256 13s. 10d. for the repair of the house. His expenditure on the house which had been as little as £20 a year now rose considerably, and it is interesting to note that the carpenter from Petworth, one John Dee, emerges as the nearest approach to an architect in Northumberland's building arrangements, coming to Syon four several times to make models for stairs, a round roof for the Great Chamber and to set out the garden plot.¹²

After King James had granted Syon to Northumberland in perpetuity at a rent of £99 2s. p.a. on 5 July, 1604, in gratitude for the major part which Northumberland had played in securing his quiet succession, the Earl did all in his power to make it one of the great houses of England—and this, despite the fact that he was imprisoned in the Tower from 1605 to 1621 and never able to enjoy the house much again. He had been suspected of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot and had been sentenced in Star Chamber in 1606 to life imprisonment and a fine of £10,000. In the course of negotiating with the King for some remission of this penalty, he offered the Syon property back to the Crown, as the only one of his properties which was not entailed. In a

letter of 14 April, 1613, the Earl told the King that he had spent £9,000 on the Syon estate and that "the house itself, if it were to be pulled down and sold by view of workmen, would come to £8,000. If any man, the best husband in building, should raise such another in the same place £20,000 would not do it."¹³

The building accounts of Syon are complete from 1607 to 1613 and it is therefore possible to check on the Earl's statement. On the house alone, £1,903 15s. 8d. was spent in these years. Apart from building new rooms for the Countess and a number of outbuildings, including a coachhouse, the Earl did not alter the general structure of the house. Masons were only employed in the first two of these years. Much of this work was done by workmen who were paid for their labour only and who drew their materials from the Clerk of the Works for the Earl, Christopher Ingram, though some items were put out as taskwork.

At this time the Earl generally spent £20 to £30 a year on the gardens at Syon. He kept a head gardener and two or more labourers under him, as well as employing weeders, often women. Among the works which he carried out, we may mention the cherry garden of over three acres to the north of the house which was laid out with 1,423 cherry-stocks, bought for £4 19s. 3d. in 1599-1600; the new orchard of four acres and more to the north of the cherry garden which was made in 1603-1604, and the nightingale garden which was "new-made" in 1607-1608. Most of the money was spent on the "great garden" of 18 acres which led from the east front of the house towards the river, and there were other gardens laid out to the south of the house. Rose-trees and fruit-trees, especially apricots, were bought for these gardens in *great numbers*, as well as elms and sycamores to set in the walks. We know, too, that the Earl was proud of the vines at Syon, though there are only occasional mentions of them and of the vinehouse in the accounts; often while he was in the Tower grapes were brought to him from Syon.

After 1613, the incompleteness of the Percy household accounts so far discovered for the lifetime of the ninth Earl makes it difficult to follow the progress of building there. There must have been major work in hand in 1616-1617, when £520 1s. 6d. was spent on reparations at Syon, and again in 1630-1631, when £256 13s. 1d. was spent there. In the one account of Christopher Ingram's which survives for this time—that for 1618-1619—there is mention of the paving and whitewashing of the Evidence House, of making two doors and the wainscot presses for it, and of filling up between the wainscot and the wall there and making the chimney higher. This work reads like the finishing touches to a new

building; it may be that the Evidence House was built in 1616-1617, though the Historical Monuments Commission gave the sixteenth century as the date of the exterior of the old muniment room at Syon—within it has been much altered.

The expenditure on gardens in these later years of the Earl's life, where it is possible to trace it at all, varied between £60 and £100. In the early 1630.s, at the end of the Earl's life, Peter Collins the head gardener was being paid £80 a year to keep the gardens.¹⁴

While the Earl was in the Tower, Syon was kept up as no other house of his was but when he was released in 1621, he retired to Petworth and spent little time at Syon. The inventory taken at his death in 1632 shows us that, though he regarded Syon as a secondary residence, he maintained it in considerable style. It was certainly well supplied with linen—the fine damask linen in a trunk and the table linen, sheets and pillow-cases stored in a little room next to the hall alone were valued at £200. This does not include the bedclothes on the fifty or so beds in the house. There was £500 worth of silver at Syon at the Earl's death; £300 worth of it was in the pantry and the rest was in the keeping of the Clerk of the Kitchen.

The inventory gives few clues as to the disposition of the main rooms but we may note some details of furnishings. The hall was typically bare of furniture—we hear only of tables, forms, the iron in the chimney to make coal fire in, fire-forks, tongs and a shovel; the lot together worth only £5. The dining room was on the south side of the house; like all the main rooms, it was hung with tapestry. Its hangings, sidetable, court cupboard and fire-grate pieces were valued at £50. Next it was the Withdrawing Chamber, the same room one imagines as was used as a withdrawing chamber in 1593 and with a fire-place as that had; here there was a carpet on the floor as well as on the table and chairs as well as stools. Three bedrooms follow, two for guests, one for a servant. The second bedroom was especially well-furnished in green, a favourite colour with the ninth Earl. It had a large bed with clothes to match and a traverse of green damask and a green velvet carpet, besides the expected table, chairs, stools, hangings, and brass and irons; the whole worth £100. Another special bedroom was on the other side of the gallery from this—one imagines in the north range of the house. This was even more luxuriously furnished, this time in crimson. The bed and clothes were of damask, the tapestry hangings, carpets and upholstery for the chairs and stools of velvet. The colour of a window carpet and curtain and of a foot carpet also in this room is not given, but was presumably red too. As a rule the family was content with much less grandeur than

this; for example, the new countess' bedroom at Syon had a couch bedstead in it of gilded wood and the whole furnishing of the room was valued at a mere £10, against the £120 of the best bedroom just described. The long gallery itself seems to have been kept clear of furnishing normally. At any rate, we are told only of gilded leather hangings—the sort of background which would do equally well for the salon or the dormitory aspects of the long gallery's use. There was an upper gallery, too, at this time; its solitary item of furnishing was a billiard table worth ten shillings. Mention is made of a chapel, an upper room over the south side of the house, and of another room "where prayers were said", more simply furnished than the chapel. There were also two rooms called nurseries; of the other rooms in the house and the lodgings attached, the majority were bedrooms sparsely furnished.¹⁵

Two hundred years before, the house had been the site of the buildings of a religious community; by 1632 little could have remained to remind the visitor of the past. Three hundred years later, the character of the house had not radically changed, though rebuilding had rearranged most of the rooms, and to-day as then Syon House is the home of the Percy family and, more than that, a treasured heritage of England's history. Thanks to the careful preservation of the documents by the Percies, it would be possible to trace many of the changes at Syon in the last three hundred years in detail; but that is a task which must await another day.¹⁶

- 1 The Abbey was normally called "Sion"; the house is usually called "Syon". Here I use this difference in spelling to distinguish the two.
- 2 I have based this account of the foundation of Sion on the following Mss.: Syon MSS (H.G. the Duke of Northumberland), D. XIV. 2 a, b, and c.; and on the following works: G. J. Aungier, *The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery* (Lond., 1840), 1—56 and Appendices I—V; M. Deanesley, *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole* (Manchester, 1915), Introduction; Canon J. R. Fletcher, *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* (Syon Abbey, 1933), 16—28.
- 3 P.R.O.: S.C. 12/19/31. Aungier, 56—89 and Appendix X; M. Bateson, *Catalogue of the Library of Syon Monastery* (Cambridge, 1898), Introduction; Fletcher, 29—30.
- 4 Aungier, 83—89 and Appendix IX; Fletcher, 30—36.
- 5 *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (Ed. J. Gairdner and others) (Lond., vols. X—XXI, 1887—1910, Addenda, 2 pts., 1929—32); *Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1 Ed. VI—5 Eliz.* (Lond., 12 vols., 1924—48), *sub* Sion.
- 6 Syon Ms. D. XIV. 5b; B. M. Harl. Ms. 570, f. 8r. *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. xvii (Lond., 1900), 692; *Cal. Pat. Rolls, Ed. VI*, vol. i (Lond., 1924), 1 Ed. VI, pt. IV, m. 47 and pt. VI, m. 20; Aungier, 89—92; Historical Monuments Commission: *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Middlesex* (Lond., 1937) *sub* Isleworth; C. Hussey: "Syon House, Middlesex", *Country Life*, 1 Dec., 1950; and *Syon House: the Story of a Great House* (Syon House Estate, 1950).
- 7 Alnwick Ms. W. II. 4.

- 8 Syon Ms. D. XIV, 5c. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, Ed. VI.*, vols. iii and v (Lond., 1925 and 1926), 4 Ed. VI, pt. viii, m. 39, and 7 Ed. VI, pt. viii, ms. 9—10; *Cal. Pat. Rolls, Philip and Mary*, vol. i (Lond., 1937), 1 Mary, pt. xv, m. 25. Aungier, 93—6.
- 9 Syon Ms. D. XIV, 6a. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, Philip and Mary*, vols. iii and iv (Lond., 1938 and 1939), 3 & 4 P & M, pt. iii, ms. 15—7, and 4 & 5 P & M, pt. xiii, m. 23. Aungier, 96—8; Fletcher, 37—42.
- 10 Syon Mss. D. XIV, 8 f and g; F. II. 1 k; H. I. 3. *Cal. Pat. Rolls, Eliz.*, vol. i, (Lond., 1939), 2 Eliz. pt. vii, m. 21. Aungier, 112.
- 11 Syon Mss. B. XIII, 1a, 2c; H. I. 3. Aungier, 112—4; Sir Edmund Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford, 4 vol., 1923), iv. 92, 100, 102, 108.
- 12 Alnwick MSS. U. I. 2 and 3; Syon Ms. D.XIV, 9.
- 13 Alnwick Ms. O. I. 2c, f. 65; Syon Ms. D.XIV, 10 b.
- 14 Alnwick MSS. U. I. 2, 3, 4, 5, 50 (2) and U. III. I.
- 15 Syon Ms. H. II. 1b.
- 16 I would like to record here my indebtedness to His Grace the Duke of Northumberland and to His Grace's solicitors and servants for facilitating my researches on Syon in the past four years.