

# AVERHAM PARK LODGE AND ITS PAINTINGS

By M. W. BARLEY AND N. SUMMERS

THIS house possesses an historic and architectural interest which has been unaccountably overlooked. The building has, fortunately, been preserved with little alteration, and in particular the paintings which provide such a vivid record of its original form and setting still hang on its walls.

The Sutton family were lords of the manor of Averham from the thirteenth century. William Sutton, the Elizabethan head of the family, married Susan, daughter and heiress of Thomas Coney, a wealthy Lincolnshire wool merchant, who in 1568 built the manor house at Bassingthorpe, near Grantham, part of which still stands. There were sixteen children of the marriage, and Robert, born probably in 1594, was the heir. His father was knighted in 1603, and the young Sir Robert was M.P. for Nottinghamshire in 1624-5 and again in 1640. The family was rising in the world, for Sir Robert married Elizabeth, sister of John, 8th Earl of Rutland. Neither she nor his second wife bore him a son, but his heir, another Robert, was born in 1662 after his third marriage, at the age of about 67, to Mary daughter of Sir Anthony St. Leger.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Robert Sutton was one of the small group of gentlemen who ran the affairs of the county, from helping to raise money for the Crown to arranging horse races on Coddington Moor.<sup>2</sup> When the Civil War broke out, he was naturally a zealous supporter of Charles I; he contributed largely to the maintenance of the Royalist garrison at Newark. As reward, Charles made him Baron Lexington of Averham in 1645, but the penalties were heavy. When he marched out of Newark after the garrison surrendered, with a view to returning to his home across the Trent, he found that his house at Averham had been burnt. He had to pay a fine of £5,000 to recover his estates and spent some time in prison; he was unable to use his title until after the Restoration. A new house was built, at Kelham instead of Averham, and in his will, made in 1666, two years before his death, he left it to his wife, "who had taken pains in

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<sup>1</sup>*Complete Peerage*, vol. VII, Lexington of Aram.

<sup>2</sup>C. Brown, *History of Newark*, II, pp. 43, 44.

the building".<sup>1</sup> Little is known of this house, and it was replaced in 1728-31 by a rather plain and box-like house which is represented minutely on a map of the river Trent made in 1741.<sup>2</sup> This house in its turn was burnt in 1857, and replaced by the house of George Gilbert Scott's design which now belongs to the Society of the Sacred Mission.

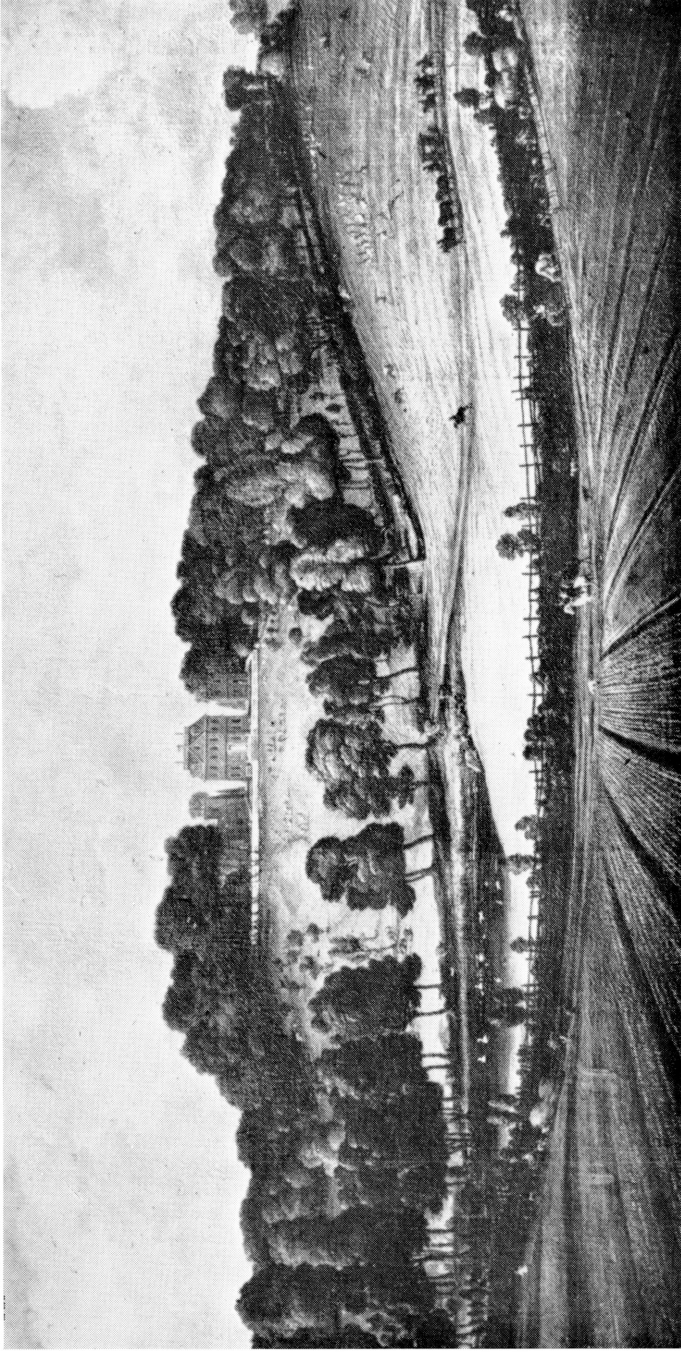
The house which is the subject of this study, and which is known variously as Averham Park, Averham Park House and Averham Park Lodge, belongs to another distinct tradition, that of the hunting lodge. The parish of Averham rises to a height of 200 ft. north-west of the village. This high ground, in the parishes of Averham and Winkburn, had served as a game park since the 12th century, and Robert de Lexington, the then lord of the manor of Averham, had a grant of free warren in c. 1243.<sup>3</sup> There must have been a lodge in the park then, though no evidence of it has survived. There was some habitable residence there in the 1660s, for the second Robert was born at Averham Park in 1668. He held various court and diplomatic appointments between 1689 and 1718, and must have carried out the building of the present lodge in the last years of his life. Some part of the south wing may, from its brickwork, belong to c. 1660, but it has been too much altered for certainty. The Lodge is conceived in grand terms but on a very small scale. It must have been a source of considerable pride to its owner, for he laid down that the two paintings of it, which are described below, and which may have been done by John Wootton (1683-1761),<sup>4</sup> were to remain as heirlooms. Its completion, in or shortly before 1720, came soon after the publication of Kyp's *Britannia Illustrata* (1708) and Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1717), with their drawings of country houses. The success of these two books signalled the widespread interest among the gentry in country houses, new and old, at this time. It is significant also that William Stukeley visited Averham Park in 1728 and made two drawings of it; finally, the

<sup>1</sup>*Complete Peerage*. He also bequeathed to his wife £100 for "a tomb for me and my three wives and all my little ones to be sett upon it", but she did not carry out this bequest.

<sup>2</sup>The house was designed by John Sanderson and built by William Handley, bricklayer, at a cost of £2,870; the building accounts are in the Muniment Room at Belvoir Castle (account no. 377) *ex inf.* H. M. Colvin. The Gilstrap Library, Newark, has a "Map of the River Trent as it runs from Farndon Ferry to Holme Meadow in its two branches by Kellum and Newark, Surveyed, Level'd and Delineated by John Grundy, Junior, Surveyor".

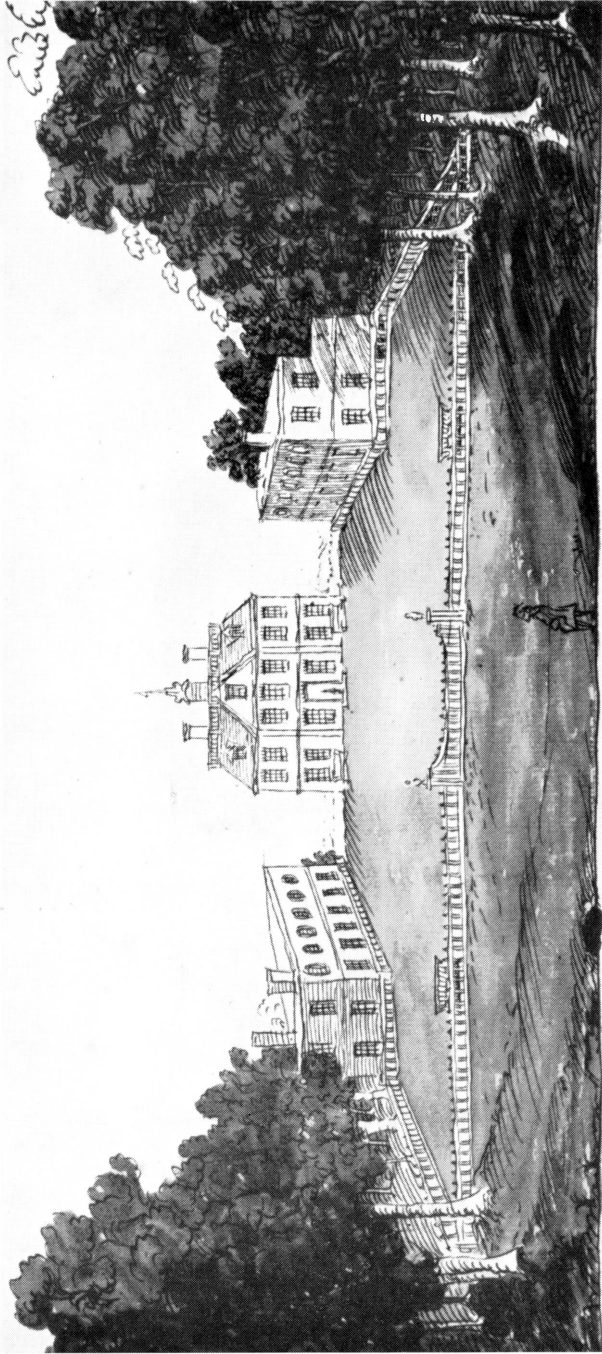
<sup>3</sup>Robert Thoroton, *Nottinghamshire*, p. 326.

<sup>4</sup>The suggestion of Mr. Edward Croft Murray of the British Museum.



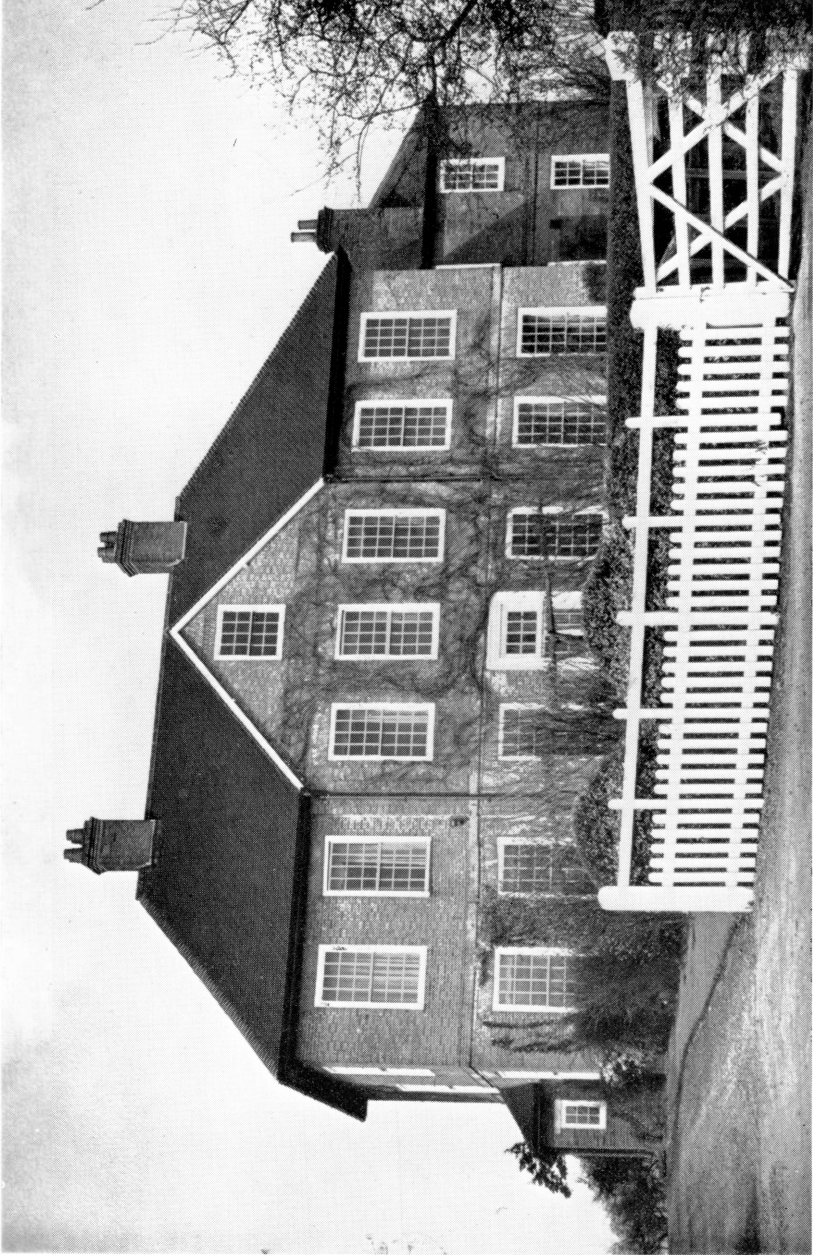
Pl. I. Prospect of Averham Park Lodge from the east

*Prospect of Averham Park House 24 July 1728.*

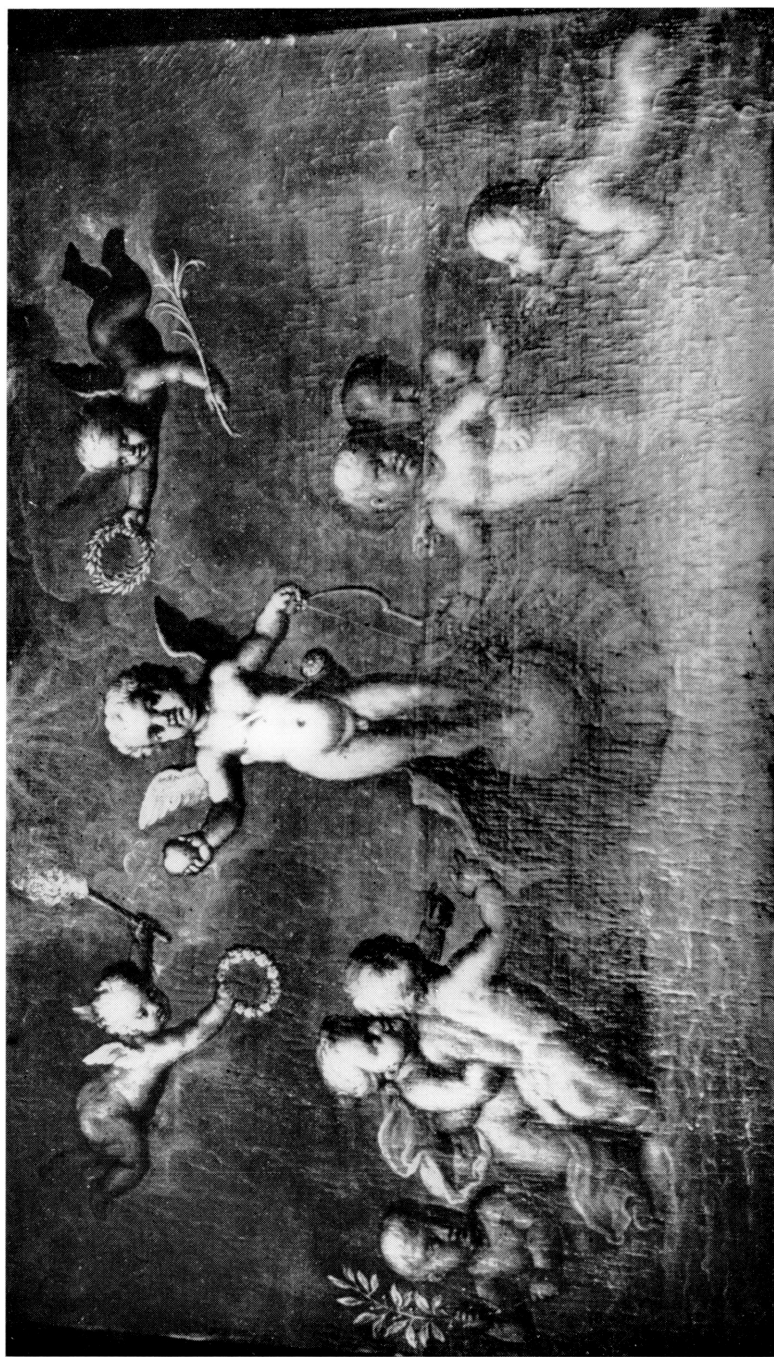


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Pl. II. Stukeley's drawing of Averham Park Lodge from the west



Pl. III. The present view of Averham Park Lodge from the east



Pl. IV. Panel painting in the chamber over the hall (no. 12)

house was included in the rare fourth volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, published by Badeslade and Roque in 1739.

The house stands, as hunting lodges usually did, on the top of a hill, with a wide view over and across the Trent Valley. The prospect of it in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, drawn by T. Badeslade and engraved by I. Harris in 1731, picks out Newark and the distant villages which could be seen from it. The lodge consisted of a central block with two detached wings, one of which (the north wing) has been demolished, but the other still stands, little altered externally. It is said that the north wing was for guests, the south wing for services (kitchen, etc.), and there is no reason to doubt this. It is also said that the main block was linked with the south or kitchen wing, some six yards away, by an underground passage. There is a blocked doorway in a small cellar below the staircase lobby in the south-west corner, and such a passage would have made the serving of meals more satisfactory for all concerned. This arrangement was appropriate for a house designed primarily for entertaining, and the simplicity of the plan of the central block is in keeping. The other feature of the principal block is that its two outer doorways, on the east and west sides, are exactly aligned on the spire of Newark parish church. In the painting and also in Stukeley's drawing (see plate II) the doors are shown open so as to frame the spire. This is perhaps a conscious reflection on the part that Lord Lexington's father had played in the Royalist defence of Newark.

The painting of the lodge from the east shows a setting which has been changed, but whose authenticity can be discerned (plate I). In the foreground is open field arable land, lying east of the lane from Upton to Caunton and Norwell, along which horsemen and farm waggons are passing; the accurate representation of ridge and furrow makes the painting an important document in the history of agriculture.<sup>1</sup> The open park land with deer, across which a coach drawn by six horses is making its way up to the house, has been enclosed, and the house is now approached by a drive from, as it were, the left hand corner of the picture.

The painting of the house from the west is much larger, measuring 9 ft. 3 ins. by 5 ft., and even more attractive. It shows the forecourt made by the central block and the two wings, and enclosed by white

<sup>1</sup>It was in fact C. S. Orwin's reference to the painting, in *The Open Fields* (1938) p. 45 (though he incorrectly called the house Averham Hall) which first drew attention to the lodge.

palings. Stukeley made two drawings<sup>1</sup> from the same viewpoint, and in the more finished of them showed garden seats, but he omitted the details which give the painting so much interest: figures of guests sitting and strolling; a nursemaid with a child; two peacocks sitting on the fence; a flock of turkeys being fed; one tame deer lying in a corner and a flock outside the fence; in the foreground a gamekeeper or forester with his dogs. The central block is shown with a balustraded flat roof, from which the view and the hunt could be observed, and with a small turret in the centre covered by a lead dome, over which there is a flag staff supported by wrought-iron brackets. This block now has a hipped roof, but the new principals and rafters have been placed over the original timbers and the method of constructing the flat roof can be observed in the garret. The dormer windows vanished in the re-roofing. The block is of seven bays, the pediment over the centre three having a window lighting the garret. The south wing, shown with a flat roof, now has a pitched roof with pantiles. The two-storey north elevation of the south block is largely unaltered, with a range of five windows to each floor; the first floor windows are set in oval frames formed in the brickwork. The wing is only one room thick and measures 56 ft. by 16 ft. It has further building on its south side, but even before the recent conversion of this block into a house for Mrs. Bostock, there were no certain traces of the internal arrangement. Still further south are farm buildings, no doubt replacing the original stables.

The design of the house belongs to the class of great Palladian houses, but there are parallels to its particular features. Shobden Court, Hereford, built in *c.* 1715 by Sir James Bateman, Lord Mayor of London, had an underground passage linking the house with a detached kitchen. A house named Ynysymaengwyn in Merioneth consisted of a central block with balancing wings, one of which was the kitchen. It was built in *c.* 1730, and since the range linking the house with the kitchen is of later date, it is at least possible that the original communication was below ground.<sup>2</sup> These two examples suggest that the arrangement appealed particularly in the highland

<sup>1</sup>One of them is in the Bodleian Library collection of Stukeley drawings (MS. Top. Gen. d. 14), signed and endorsed "Prospect of Averham Park House 24 July 1728"; the second, differing only in details of the trees flanking the house, is in the Lincolnshire County Record Office (3 Anc. 8/2/27), and is endorsed "Mr. Austin at the Bell & Anchor Bedford Street Covent Garden".

<sup>2</sup>Hist. Mon. Comm., *Hereford* III, p. 180; P. Smith in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1960, p. 174.



zone, where the medieval tradition of the detached kitchen was not yet dead, but the idea of an underground passage was novel and the detached kitchen had no significant place in the local tradition of Nottinghamshire.

After Lord Lexington's death in 1726, an inventory was made of the paintings in Kelham Hose and Averham Park Lodge, as a record of his wishes.<sup>1</sup> The portion relating to Averham Park reads as follows:

“Averham Park Lodge. In the hall a picture of great value of St. Jerome, two landscapes of a sea storm by Greffier, also pictures of Greenwich, and Richmond with Sion House, of still life of the Regalia, of places on the Rhine, two other pieces of still life, one of Our Saviour, and the other an amber cabinet with a globe on it, four landscapes, one of which has a large cow, another a lesser cow, another has a white horse and a man leading him, and a fourth has a sea prospect with boats.

In Lord Lexington's room were twenty-four prints of seats of noblemen and gentlemen in England and five paintings by Parmentier.

In the first room up one pair of stairs was Lady Hungerford's wrought bed, twenty-seven prints of seats in England and three paintings by Parmentier.

In the blue room were twenty-four prints of seats in England and three paintings by Parmentier.

In her Grace's bedchamber and closet were prints of seats and paintings by Parmentier.

In the first chamber in the north wing were four flower pieces by Bontalls.

In Lord Lexington's chamber were three flower pieces by Bontalls, Lady Caroline and Lord Granby in one of them, a landscape of the town of Nottingham, a picture of Queen Anne by Bontalls, six prints of the Duke of Marlborough's battles and six of the cartoons.

Upstairs in the first garret, a picture of Judge Crook.

In the gallery, five pictures of men and women.”

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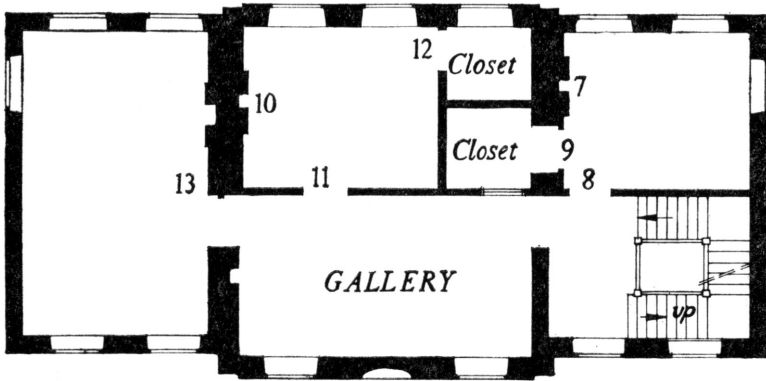
<sup>1</sup>Hist. MSS. Comm., *Rutland II*, pp. 340-1.

Apart from the demolition of the north wing, the principal alteration has been the addition, in 1924, of service quarters to the central block to make it a self-contained house (see plate III). The east front, including its sash windows, is quite unchanged. On the west front six window openings are now blocked, including that in the pediment lighting the garret. The painting shows the opening over the west door, now blocked, as a recess with a statue. The internal arrangement of the main block is very simple.<sup>1</sup> The principal entrance was from the west into a shallow entrance lobby. To the right was the staircase lobby, with a handsome staircase rising round an open well to garret level with three flights to a floor. The staircase has a closed string, square newels with a sunk panel on each face and small turned pendants, a moulded rail and turned balusters. In the upper flight the balusters in front of the (now blocked) window are cut out of the flat, and not turned. The small outer entrance on the south side of the staircase lobby is certainly not original; it is in effect a modern replacement of the underground passage to the adjacent service wing. The principal ground floor room, called the hall in the inventory, has an arched opening (not a doorway) from the entrance lobby, flanked by fluted pilasters with no entasis; the opening has a segmental head with a moulded cornice over. The whole feature is repeated on the hall side, where it fits into the panel divisions. The hall has four doorways proper, symmetrically placed, two into the north room now called the dining room, one into " Lord Lexington's room " on the south and one into the staircase lobby. This is a formal (and no doubt draughty) conception, rather than a domestic one. The hall had, in 1723, some fourteen pictures on its walls, including " a picture of great value of St. Jerome ". Lord Lexington's room had, as well as the panel paintings listed below, " 24 prints of seats of noblemen and gentlemen in England ".

Upstairs there was a gallery on the west side with " five pictures of men and women "—presumably family portraits whose identity was already lost. One chamber with a closet—perhaps that over the hall—was " her Grace's bedchamber ", but the other chambers cannot be identified. The inventory fails to make clear whether Lord Lexington's chamber, its walls hung with five paintings and twelve prints, was in the main block or in the north wing.

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<sup>1</sup>It is, even in a house as small as this, impossible to make the inventory tally completely with the plan as it originally was.



First floor

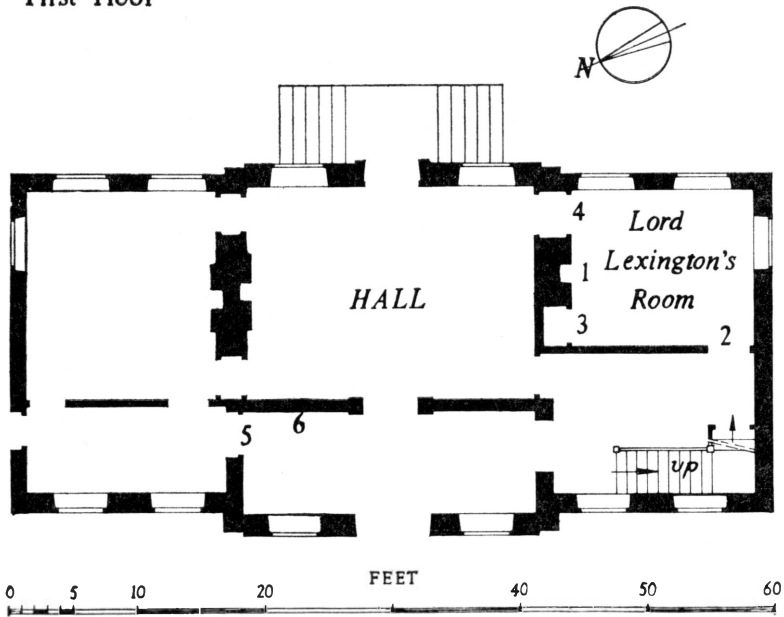


FIG. 1. Plans of Averham Park Lodge.

The Ground and First Floors of the main block are shown in their original forms. The probable position of the access from the Service Wing (via an underground passage to the cellars) is shown under the rise of the second flight of the main staircase. The position and direction of winding steps still remaining in the cellar bear out this assumption. The present entrance under the staircase, in the South Wall, is not shown, as this is probably a modern innovation.

The modern service wing attached to the North side of the House has obliterated evidence of access from the Guest Wing, but a doorway is assumed and shown. The large chamber at first floor level on the North side has since been divided to provide a landing and service stair down to ground level.

Four recessed panels in the West wall, and two on the North side maintain the symmetry of fenestration, but have brickwork that is neither bonded nor coursed into the main walls. Windows have been assumed to be original in all these positions, although the staircase passes across two of the panels. Balustrading cut from the flat and still in position across the first floor panel on the staircase indicates this as a window recently built up solid.

The original Gallery on the First floor has, in modern times, been partitioned off to form a Bedroom with a passage way beside it. The two Closets shown between the Bedrooms have been made into one Dressing Room by the removal of the dividing cross wall.

Apart from these changes, the House is preserved in a remarkably good condition, and is very close to its original form and detail. The new roof has unfortunately changed the character, but much of the original timber structure is incorporated in the renovation and can be clearly traced in the attics.

Numbers on the plans indicate the position of the panel paintings described on pp. 55-6 below.

The second Lord Lexington died in 1723, in this house, and was buried at Kelham, where there is a fine monument to him. He had no son, and so the barony became extinct, but his daughter Bridget had married John, 3rd Duke of Rutland, in 1717; Kelham House and Averham Park descended, through her youngest son, to the family of Manners Sutton. Thus the painting of the east prospect remained, and that of the west prospect was brought here from Kelham House. The two pictures were sold in 1961 by the widow of R. M. V. Sutton, the last representative of the family, to the present owner, Mr. R. J. Bostock. He has had both pictures cleaned and repaired. Of the other paintings listed in 1723, none remain except those which were fixtures. The inventory lists in five different rooms, "paintings by Parmentier". Their identity is fixed by one of the panel paintings in Lord Lexington's room (no. 1 on the ground floor plan, fig. 1), which is signed by J(?) Parmentier and dated 1720.

The decorative paintings in the house are as grandiose and fashionable in concept as is the design of the building. The English aristocracy of the Restoration was immensely attracted by the work of the school of decorative painting created in France by Simon Vouet and Charles Le Brun.<sup>1</sup> A "great army of painters—mainly French, some Netherlanders—arrived in England in the latter part of the 17th century". Its leaders were Antonio Verrio who did work at Burghley House and at Chatsworth, and Louis Laguerre who was engaged at Thoresby Park (1687), at Wollaton Hall (c. 1699)

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<sup>1</sup>The following paragraphs are based on chapters V-VII of Edward Croft Murray's *Decorative Painting in England, 1537-1837* (forthcoming) vol. I.

as well as at Chatsworth and Burghley House. Among the lesser men was Jacques Parmentier,<sup>1</sup> nephew and pupil of Sebastian Bourdon, who arrived in England in 1676 or 1677. He was employed under Lafosse at Montagu House, the town house in Bloomsbury (on the site of which the present British Museum was built in the 1840s) of the 1st Duke of Montagu.<sup>2</sup> His most considerable work to survive is the ceiling of the Treves Saal in the Binnenhof at the Hague, on which he was engaged in *c.* 1695. When he returned to England, he removed to Yorkshire after completing further work at Montagu House, and he spent the twenty years after *c.* 1700 in painting “for many Noblemen” (Vertue) and for churches. He did some work as a portraitist, but is said, by Vertue, to have despised portrait painters as “Phiz Mongers”.

He did decorative paintings at Worksop Manor,<sup>3</sup> but since his work there has been destroyed, as well as his other known work at Montagu House and elsewhere, the Averham House paintings are his only surviving secular works in England. Holy Trinity Church, Hull, has an altarpiece, but the paintings in St. Peter’s Church, Leeds, have also gone. At Averham he worked as a monochrome painter of feigned sculpture and plaster relief. This particular kind of work may have been his *forte*, as he was certainly employed in it at Montagu House.

The surviving paintings at Averham are as follows, with their position indicated by numbers on the plan:

In “Lord Lexington’s room”:

1. overdoor painting with two women seated by a chest; over it a medallion containing a female head in profile.
2. overmantel with feigned sculpture of a female figure on a pedestal in foreground with a colonnaded perspective behind.
3. overdoor to left of fireplace, scene with a chimaera(?), a centaur, two females and a male human, with dolphins and putti.
4. overdoor to right of fireplace, a medallion with a female head surrounded by rich scroll work and foliated ornament. Mr. Murray states that this is a very characteristic motif of the Franco-Italianate school in England.

<sup>1</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 66, 67, 256-7.

<sup>2</sup>The British Museum has a watercolour by the elder George Scharf showing Parmentier’s work on the staircase of Montagu House.

<sup>3</sup>Vertue II, p. 35 and III, p. 45; the staircase “finely painted by Parmentiere (his best)”.

5. over the north door out of the entrance lobby: an urn flanked by two putti, each holding a medallion with an heraldic crest.
6. on the east wall of the entrance lobby and to the left of the opening to the hall, a large painting of Venus in the same manner of feigned sculpture has recently been uncovered. The lower part of the painting has been destroyed. There must presumably have been a matching painting to the right of the opening, and these two will have been much the largest paintings done by Parmentier in the house.

On the first floor, in the south chamber:

7. overmantel, nude male figure, with a beehive.
8. over entrance door, interior with five figures, and 9, over door to closet, interior with four figures. Mr. Murray suggests that these two are “based on the famous antique Roman painting, now in the Vatican, known as the ‘Aldebrandini Marriage’”.

In the chamber over the hall:

10. overmantel, Neptune enthroned.
11. over entrance door, scene with four adults and four putti.
12. over door to closet, scene with Cupid standing on a shell and attendant putti.

In the north chamber:

13. over entrance door (panel not *in situ*), putti with a dolphin.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writers are indebted to Mrs. E. J. Bostock and to Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Bostock for their generous hospitality at Averham Park House and their tolerance of visitors with measuring tapes and diverse queries; to Mr. C. H. Bear who took the photographs, and to Mr. H. M. Colvin for information and advice on the matters of architectural history here considered. Mr. Edward Croft Murray, Keeper of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, most kindly allowed us to see the proofs of vol. I of his forthcoming book, *Decorative Painting in England, 1537-1837*, which includes an account of Jacques Parmentier and a catalogue of his known works. The account of the house and its contents would have been seriously defective without his help.