

THE BUILDING OF DENHAM PLACE

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A DOCUMENT preserved at Denham Place is inscribed "An account of the money layd out in Building my new house in Denham", and concluded in Benjamin Way's hand, "commencing in 1688 & continued to 1701, Total £5591.16.9. as per enclosed particulars all of Sir Roger Hill's own handwriting BW Sept 3 1765".¹ When *Country Life* dealt with the house in 1925² the account had been lost for twenty years and it presumably reappeared when the house was sold by the Fothergills to its present owner, Lady Sarita Vansittart.³ It is revealing for the light it throws upon some important artists and craftsmen working during the last two decades of the seventeenth century. If used in conjunction with a topographical painting that has always been at Denham (Plate 1), it is possible to identify certain sculpture in the garden and to define the style of one sculptor, namely Richard Osgood.⁴

The house and gardens existed almost precisely as shown by this view, for on a hot summer's day the ghosts of the parterres can be discerned stretching from the (old) west entrance to the gravel oval before the site of the gates upon which stood the figures of Gog and Magog. The foundations of the office and stable buildings to the south exist beneath the grass and now bordering the lake which was created out of the formal canal. Since 1701 there have been considerable alterations to the structure of the house, notably when Benjamin Way succeeded to the property in 1771. He removed the cupola and transferred the west doorway to where it remains on the east front. A southern entrance leading from the end of the stable court was blocked up; the present stables to the east built; and the grounds landscaped, resulting in the destruction of the water pavilion and much of the garden sculpture. The windows of the house shown in the painting are unusually tall, reaching almost to the string course and cornice respectively. The lowering to their present height must also be the result of this period's alterations in order to give them proportions more conformable to the taste of the time.⁵ Final changes were made to the structure c. 1830 by Benjamin Way II, who substituted thin sash bars for the thicker variety (they have now been replaced); removed the pediments from their dormers; and dismantled the balustrade, which had been an earlier replacement in iron of the original wooden one.⁶

It is unlikely that Sir Roger would have been competent enough to produce the designs for Denham, or for the singularly-invented water pavilion.⁷ A clue to the architect is the presence from 24th August, 1689, of William Stanton (1639-1705)⁸ who was paid to 13th October, 1694, £214 4s. 2d. Denham must have followed soon after his completion of Belton House, Lincs., where he had been the contractor for Sir John Brownlow, 1685-88, receiving £5,091.⁹ It is impossible to avoid comparing the two houses, so close are they in style,

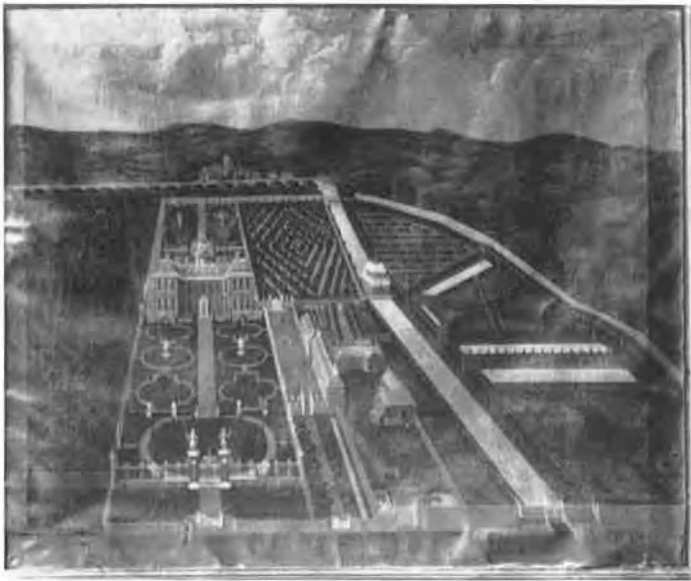


PLATE XII. DENHAM PLACE. A prospect from the West, showing original layout.

although Belton is stone built and more competently classical. It has been attributed to Wren, but more recently to William Winde.¹⁰ With a knowledge of Denham one might presume Stanton's part in the design to be considerable. The original doorway at Belton, now built up as a niche to the front of the forecourt, compares with the Denham one. Perhaps Stanton was the author of the ensemble at Denham producing a design in the light of his work at Belton where he had been under the surveillance of a more competent architect. The Dutch flavour exhibited by the robustness of Denham is suggestive. Its cupola and water pavilion appear notably of that country's origin. Stylistic assimilation between the two countries was considerable at the time, through engravings, first-hand knowledge, and the possession by William Third of palaces such as Het Loo and Breda.¹¹

As a sculptor Stanton was distinctive and it may have been through the influence of his earlier tomb work in the Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire areas that he received the Denham commission. In 1675 he carved the Sir John and Lady Dormer monument in Quainton church¹²; 1682, the altar tomb to Edmund Waller in the churchyard at Beaconsfield¹³; 1685, Sir Richard and Lady Newdigate's monument at Harefield; and in the same church in 1696 the Abraham Stanyon monument. The comparatively large sum paid to him at Denham may indicate his responsibility (or his workshops) for much of the garden sculpture; the busts on the walls; and those upon the doorway. The busts are crude essays in the manner of Roman portraits (Plates 2 and 3) of which seven remain scattered about the gardens. Richard Osgood (fl. 1691-1728) was paid 3rd March, 1694, for "figures upon the Great Gates", and this payment of £40 must relate to Gog and Magog. His manner is discernible in individual pieces such as the Neptune and Hercules seen in the west parterre garden. The former figure is today by the bridge that lay at the easternmost extremity of the canal (Plate 4). It shows influence from the work of Bernini and is a type with that provided for other clients, when in 1695 for Lord Fauconberg at Sutton Court, Chiswick, he made two statues of Mars and Minerva for £34 and a group of Cain and Abel for £42.¹⁴ Whether he possessed a workshop capable of producing the frieze of dancing boys that extended the length of the garden from the south-west angle of the house is not known. There was a total of thirty-four figures dancing on the wall constituting a bizarre example of English garden sculpture. The nearest type in Osgood's work is the "pair of shield boys" supplied with other sculptures for Col. Child in 1704.¹⁵

Returning to the account, "Mr. Taylor Mr. Stanton's man" received £98 12s. 8d. from 19th September, 1691, to 4th August, 1694. He may be identified with one of that name made free of the Mason's Company, 10th March, 1682,¹⁶ and was perhaps recorded in the Company's Search of September, 1694, as one of Samuel Fulkes's men.¹⁷ There is a Stanton connection as Fulkes's daughter married Edward Stanton, William's son. Many of the craftsmen in the account are obscure, but some do emerge possessing previous records and it is possible to link them together in the history of contemporary City of London work.

"Mr. Price the Glazier" received between 24th September, 1691, and 29th

November, 1695, £150 0s. 6d. and is identifiable as Joshua Price, associated in 1694 with Stanton and Edward Pierce in the building from Wren's designs of St. Andrews, Holborn,¹⁸ where he received with "the widdow Dutton" £75 10s. 4d. "ffor 223 ft. of square glasse at 8d. per foot & ffor pinning 21 casements 12d. each". About 1712 he was carrying out the two windows in the chapel at Bulstrode Park from designs by Sebastiano Ricci¹⁹ and in 1719 the ten chapel windows at Cannons by Francesco Sleter.²⁰ This suggests that Price may have provided a painted window in the chapel at Denham. Parts of the heraldic one there are signed by James Pearson, who must have been commissioned for this by Lewis Way. In the upper light of the window is Jewish symbolism reflecting Way's identity with Stanstead Park, Sussex, where he founded a Hebrew College early in the nineteenth century. Pearson was concerned the way glass should be painted, "it must all be done as one piece of glass, as a fine picture must all be don as one piece of canvas".²¹ In December, 1695, "Mr Wicks ye Glazier" was paid £21 3s. 7d., presumably for completing the general work of glazing.

"Mr. Lord the Carver" was paid 1st June, 1692, £26 5s. The bolection panelling at Denham is too considerable for Lord's small payment, but to him may be attributed the carving in the Chapel, especially the gallery front and the cartouche above the window. In one of the upper bedrooms is an over-mantel carved in a similar style which may also be his. The origin of the late fifteenth-century or early sixteenth-century screen in the Chapel is problematical. It is fitted into a cornice of the 1690s which is also the date of the Gothic-style pews. The linen fold panelling around the walls is *ex-situ* and with the screen suggests the earlier house of the Peckams (devout Catholics) as the source. However, Sir Roger Hill was a staunch Whig and Puritan and a regard for a Popish chapel must have been unusual. The whole question is further complicated by the tradition that the woodwork came from Somerset, where the Hills possessed a seat at Poundisford; and the evidence that at the sale of nearby Bulstrode Park, c. 1816, the seat of the Duke of *Somerset*, the chapel fittings are recorded as having gone to Denham,²² a convenient date for the insertion by Lewis Way of his painted window in its Gothic frame.

The plasterwork in the house has been attributed to Dutch craftsmen, but "Mr. Parker the Plaisterer" was paid £274 11s. from 11th September, 1691, to 1st May, 1695, including the provision of a marble chimney piece costing £3 10s. A William Parker appears in the Plaisterers Company Lists from 1677 until his presumed death in March, 1696, although his name was absent from 1693. The ceilings at Denham are dated: gallery of chapel 1692 and tapestry room 1693. Those with the painted landscape and naturalistic friezes are unique, revealing Parker as an original artist, and with the drawing-room ceiling, one of great virtuosity.

A large payment was made to "Mr Hiorn Plummer" of £228 2s. 9d. between 20th March, 1691, and 16th July, 1697. He may be the Alexander Hiorn, son of John Hiorn of Great Tew, Oxen, who was apprenticed to Edward Board for eight years from 29th June, 1672. His lead was supplied by Mr. Shaw from 5th November, 1690, to 25th November, 1692, costing £114 15s.

The remarkable ironwork screen and gates terminating the western part of the garden suggest an attribution to Jean Tijou, who appears associated with Osgood at Hampton Court, Chatsworth, and Sutton Court, Chiswick.²³ But for smith's work Henry Truman received £40 9s. 6d. from December, 1689, to December, 1691; Zach. Godmin £1 0s. 9d. on 24th August, 1691; and John Warren £21 9s. 8d. from 23rd April, 1692, until 30th July, 1694. The ironmonger was Dan Byfield, receiving from 19th June, 1690, to 30th July, 1694, £160 11s. Truman's larger payment might presume his responsibility for the ironwork, but early in the eighteenth century a "Mr Warren" executed at Clare College, Cambridge, the Bridge and Queens Road gates. For the latter the entry in the College Building Accounts Book reveals that he was paid £35 6th March, 1713, and 7th March, 1714.²⁴ The gates between St. John's College and Trinity Piece are also attributed to him,²⁵ comparing in type closely to Denham. If the Cambridge Warren is identical to his namesake at Denham, his sphere of practice may be further increased by the tradition that the Trinity and St. John's College gates are said to have come from Horsheath Hall, Cambs., where they were made c. 1720. The forecourt gates at Belton House have been attributed to Thomas Robinson, but it is not improbable that they are an early work by Warren, associated there with Stanton as he was at Denham. His payment seems insufficient for this Denham screen, but the nature of the account is summary and possibly Dan Byfield's large sum includes part of Warren's costs. Certainly Warren's payment coincides with that to Osgood for the figures on the gates.

The carpenter was William Woodhouse, receiving between 28th March, 1689, and 8th September, 1697, £457 18s. He may have been the son of Thomas Woodhouse who worked upon the fire monument in 1673.²⁶ Other minor carpenters were Messrs. Stadder and Thomson. Lime bricks cost £392 14s. and John Hudson, Bricklayer, was paid £601 17s. from 17th October, 1689, to 17th June, 1693. Anthony Gregory supplied the bricks, receiving a total of £527 10s. The sawyer was William Hall and the joiner Mr. Ball, to whom may be attributed the bolection panelling and competently produced back stairs. He received £964 17s. 1d. from 23rd November, 1689, until 29th December, 1697. Possibly he is identified with James Ball appearing in the Books of the Joiner's Company as Upper Warden in 1686.

The painting was done by Mr. Gardner between 30th September, 1690, and 20th May, 1701, at a cost of £362 2s. This provides a *post-quem* date in the account, although the actual erection of the house may be fixed as 26th July, 1694, when Andrew Brown was paid £10 8s. "ffor the copper Ball upon the house."

Many of the later alterations have been mentioned, but notably the interior was rearranged c. 1776, which is the date on a plan²⁷ for converting the hall into the present dining-room. The draughtsmanship is unidentifiable but of high quality. At the same time, the Great Stairs were inserted in place of the older type and many rooms were redecorated to conform with the prevailing manner of decoration.

¹ Benjamin Way came into possession of Denham in 1771.

² Vol. LVII, pp. 602, 642?. Article by Christopher Hussey.

³ To whom I am indebted for her kindness in allowing my perambulation of the house and gardens.

⁴ For the only summary of his work see: Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors, 1660-1851*, 1953, pp. 284-85.

⁵ It has been earlier presumed that these alterations occurred during the building of the structure c. 1690, but an examination of the interior reveals changes to the panelling when the top of the windows were lowered from the springing of the cove to their present level.

⁶ For a water-colour of the house c. 1800 see: *Country Life*, op. cit., 18th April, Fig. 13.

⁷ A search has so far revealed no parallel to this building, although it appears to derive from Dutch or Danish architectural sources.

⁸ For a water-colour of the house c. 1800 see: *Country Life*, op. cit., 18th April, Fig. 13. *Dictionary of English Architects, 1660-1840*, 1951, pp. 567-68.

⁹ Archives, Lord Brownlow.

¹⁰ Verbally, by Howard Colvin.

¹¹ Het Loo was popular enough to inspire a descriptive but little illustrative guide. See: Walter Harris, *A Description of the King's Royal Palace and Gardens at Loo*, 1699.

¹² *Records of Bucks*, Vol. XV, 1947, Plate 21.

¹³ *Records of Bucks*, op. cit., where the late Mrs Esdaile quotes from the List of Works of Edward Stanton supplied by him to Le Neve for the latter's *Monumenta Anglicana*. Waller's tomb may in fact have been the work of his father.

¹⁴ Information from Rupert Gunnis, to whom I am indebted.

¹⁵ Archives Childs Bank.

¹⁶ *Wren Society*, XI, p. 109.

¹⁷ D. Knoop and P. Jones, *The London Mason in the Seventeenth Century*, 1935, p. 77.

¹⁸ *Wren Society*, X, p. 95.

¹⁹ F. J. B. Watson, *English Villas and Venetian Decorators, R.I.B.A. Jnl.*, March, 1954, p. 174.

²⁰ F. J. B. Watson, Extract from *Arte Veneta* (1954), pp. 300-302. For Price's work see: J. A. Knowles, The Price Family of Glass Painters, *The Antiquaries Jnl.*, Vol. XXXIII, Nos. 3, 4.

²¹ *Gent's Magazine*, July, 1815, p. 28.

²² Quoted from MSS sources, now lost, by W. H. Wadham Powell. The screen, seats and some other fittings were said to have been brought to Denham from "a chapel in the old house at Bulstrode".

²³ An hypothesis by Rupert Gunnis.

²⁴ R. Lister, *Decorative Wrought Ironwork*, 1957, pp. 115-20.

²⁵ Warren, op. cit., Plates 15a, 15b, 16.

²⁶ *Wren Society*, V, p. 50.

²⁷ In the possession of the late Major R. Way, to whom I am grateful for his knowledge of Denham's history.