

# EYTHROPE HOUSE AND ITS DEMOLITION IN 1810-11

H. M. Colvin, F.B.A.

So many country houses, great and small, have perished during the last forty years that to most people the "demolition sale" may seem as regrettably characteristic of the twentieth century as the urban invasion of the countryside or the destruction of churchyard monuments in order to create "gardens of remembrance". Yet the demolition of unwanted houses has been going on relentlessly throughout our history. In the Middle Ages timber-framed houses were often uprooted and re-erected elsewhere: one instance is recorded in *Domesday Book*, and many others are known from later records or from the evidence of re-used timbers.<sup>1</sup> Royal houses in particular were constantly being abandoned or demolished at the whim of successive sovereigns. Free-mantle (Hants.) was pulled down in 1276 by order of Edward I: Queen Philippa sold Feckenham (Worcs.) to the abbot of Evesham in 1356 for the value of the materials, and Kempton (Middlesex) suffered a similar fate in 1374.<sup>2</sup> When Queen Anne of Bohemia died at Sheen in 1394 Richard II dramatically advertised his grief by ordering the house to be pulled down to the ground.<sup>3</sup> The biggest demolition sales in English history were the ones which took place in the reign of Henry VIII on the sites of the dissolved monasteries, where stone, glass, iron, woodwork and even gravestones were disposed of for the benefit of the Court of Augmentations—the special department which the king set up in order to cope with the "augmentation" of his revenues consequent on the Dissolution.<sup>4</sup> Nor were demolitions uncommon in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when so many new mansions were built. In Buckinghamshire alone at least a dozen old family residences were pulled down between 1730 and 1830, not in order to rebuild, but because for one reason or another there was no further use for them.<sup>5</sup>

One of these architectural casualties was the ancient seat of the Dormers at Eythrope, near Waddesdon, which was pulled down in 1810–11 by Philip Stanhope, 5th Earl of Chesterfield. Originally the home of the Darches family, it had passed to the Dynhams in the fifteenth century, to the Dormers in the

<sup>1</sup> *Domesday Book* i, f. 63. For a late example see *Records of Bucks.*, xi, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> *The History of the King's Works*, ed. Colvin, ii, pp. 938, 941, 967.

<sup>3</sup> *Op cit.*, p. 998.

<sup>4</sup> See the inventories printed in *Archaeologia*, xliii (1871), pp. 201–49.

<sup>5</sup> The principal Buckinghamshire houses demolished during these years were Quarrendon (1731–3?), Salden (1738–43), Over Winchendon (1758), Drayton Beauchamp (1760), Haversham (1792), Ascott (Wing) (final demolition c. 1800), Eythrope (1810–11), Hillesden (1825), and Weston Underwood (1827). The list could easily be extended.

sixteenth, and to the Stanhopes in the eighteenth.<sup>6</sup> It was Philip Stanhope, afterwards 3rd Earl of Chesterfield (d. 1726), who acquired Wing and Eythrope through his mother Elizabeth, daughter of Charles Dormer, 2nd Earl of Caernarvon (d. 1709), and who bequeathed them to his second son William, who held them until his death in 1772.

The house thus acquired by Sir William Stanhope (he was knighted in 1725) stood, Lipscomb tells us, "in a low situation, close to the northern bank of the Thame, which is here expanded into an embellishment of the demesnes". No engraving of it can be found in any of the topographical works of the eighteenth century, but Lipscomb gives some account of its buildings. Its most notable feature was a large hall covered with "a coved roof of timber, elaborately sculptured, and with corbels of angels bearing shields with the arms of the family". This he believed to be the work of Sir William Dormer, who died in 1575. Sir William's widow Dorothy made a second marriage to Sir William Pelham, Lord Justice of Ireland (d. 1587), but survived him many years, and "built a suite of rooms, to which the date 1610 remained attached until the demolition of the house". Finally "Sir William Stanhope completed the west front in a plain and substantial manner, but with little taste". His also were "the imitation of ruins of an amphitheatre, castles, and turreted buildings" which, "erected on the neighbouring eminences, gave an air of extent and magnificence to the grounds".<sup>7</sup>

A rather more informative account of the house is given by that discerning traveller Dr. Richard Pococke, who saw it in May, 1751.

It is situated on the Thame, and is an old house consisting of two corpses of buildings, one joyning to the other at the angle, so as to make an oblong square court between, and tho' additions are made to it there are three old fronts to one and two to the other. To the west is an handsome new front before the court of good architecture, designed by Harris. In a line within it are stables, with a very fine Roman front, but backwards it is Gothick, to answer the house. This is the design of Ware. There are two very handsome lodges leading to the house. All the new buildings are of a fine freestone from Tatternel, about twelve miles off towards Dunstable. There is a good old hall and gallery in the house, a handsome apartment, and much convenient room. The gardens are very fine; the Thame is made to wind, and is enlarged with great expense, running to the south of a fine lawn, adorned with clumps of trees and two buildings. To the north a hill is planted, on the summit of which is a temple; the prospect is improved by two clumps of trees; there are walks in them, being at a distance on a rising ground to the south, and also with an obelisk to the west.<sup>8</sup>

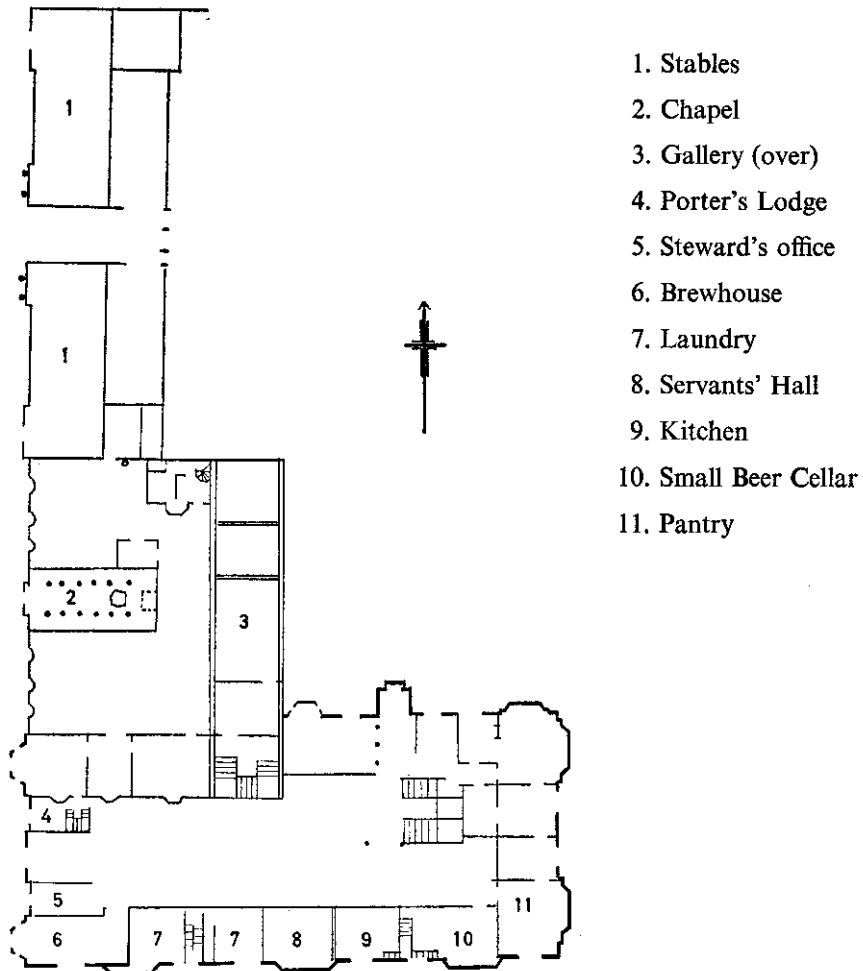
Without a ground-plan this account is scarcely intelligible. Fortunately, a sketch-plan of Eythrope has recently come to light at Nether Winchendon House among the papers of Scrope Bernard, who, as we shall see, set out to acquire some of the more interesting features of the house at the time of its

<sup>6</sup> *V.C.H. Bucks.*, iv, pp. 110-11.

<sup>7</sup> *History of Buckinghamshire*, i (1847), pp. 482-3. According to Scrope Bernard's notes at Nether Winchendon, Dorothy Pelham's "additional rooms" were "at the west end of the House" (PFG2 /31).

<sup>8</sup> *Dr. Pococke's Travels through England*, ed. Cartwright (Camden Soc., 1888), i, p. 162.

FIG. 1. SKETCH-PLAN OF EYTHROPE HOUSE, BUCKS.  
Made in 1811



The Hall was evidently the room to the west of the North Porch. The centre of the house is left blank on the plan, but it appears from the Sale Catalogue that part of it was occupied by an open yard, across which there was a covered way from the Hall to the Kitchen. There were seven bedchambers over Rooms 6-11.

*Dimensions:* East front, 88 ft. 3 in. South front, 197 ft. 6 in. Screen-wall between Stables and House (including west front of Chapel), 100 ft. 9 in. Gallery, 123 ft. 6 in. West front of Stables, 155 ft. 6½ in. from north to south. Width of Stable Entrance, 12 ft. 2 in.

demolition. Drawn partly in ink and partly in pencil on a much-folded sheet of foolscap, his plan is not suitable for reproduction, but a careful tracing will be found on page 221 (Fig. 1).<sup>9</sup> One of Dr. Pococke's "two corpses of buildings" is evidently the main body of the house with its projecting gallery, the other being the imposing stable block to the north. In between is the "oblong square court", in the middle of which we recognise the "superbly furnished chapel" which Lipscomb tells us took the place of a medieval chapel pulled down by Sir William Stanhope in 1738. To the west is the "handsome new front of good architecture" designed by Thomas Harris (d. 1763), the joiner architect from Cublington whose plans for the County Hall at Aylesbury were approved by Sir John Vanbrugh in 1720,<sup>10</sup> and to the north are the stables designed by Isaac Ware (d. 1766), whose other works included the London house of Sir William Stanhope's elder brother, Lord Chesterfield.<sup>11</sup> A series of niches, three on either side of the chapel doorway, was evidently one of the principal features of Harris's screen-wall, while the coupled columns of Ware's "Roman" (i.e. Palladian) stable-front are clearly indicated on Scrope Bernard's plan. The Gothic dress which the stables assumed to the east, in deference to the house, is less obvious from the plan, but among the King's Maps in the British Museum there are two designs for a Gothic building at Eythrope which are very likely in Ware's hand and may therefore afford some idea of the character of his stable façade.<sup>12</sup> One (Plate Ia) is inscribed "27th June 1751, Design approved by S<sup>r</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Stanhope at Twittenham for Ethrupe: Shortned two windowes at Each End", and the other (Plate Ib), duly contracted at either end, "July 3<sup>d</sup> 1751 S<sup>r</sup> William Stanhope's, Ethrupe". As the design was not approved until July, 1751, it cannot have anything to do with the Gothic front of the stables seen by Dr. Pococke two months earlier, and it may perhaps represent a project for one of the "turreted buildings on the neighbouring eminences" which gave consequence to Stanhope's park. The Gothic details are of a kind favoured by the Georgian Office of Works (of which Ware was Secretary), and are very similar to his own recent work for Sir Danvers Osborne at Chicksands Priory, Bedfordshire.<sup>13</sup>

Ware also designed the existing bridge over the River Thame (now unhappily shorn of its parapets), the domed temple which stood on "Finch Hill", and another garden building in the grounds, all of which are illustrated in his *Complete Body of Architecture* (1765).<sup>14</sup> Ware's bridge may have been the one built in 1738 by Banister Watts, a High Wycombe mason whose account-book shows that he "began the bridge work att Etrope" on 5th June, 1738, and that he did other work there for Stanhope, including the library chimney-piece

<sup>9</sup> Spencer-Bernard Papers E 23/25.

<sup>10</sup> G. R. Crouch, "The Building of the County Hall, Aylesbury", *Records of Bucks.*, xii.

<sup>11</sup> It stood in South Audley Street and was demolished in 1937. See Woolfe and Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, iv (1767), pls. 67-9 and *Country Life*, 25th February to 4th March, 1922.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Maps, King's Maps, xxx, 19 u and w. The notation of the scale should be compared with pl. 104 of Ware's *Complete Body of Architecture*. The semi-octagonal buttresses flanking the gateway appear to have been repeated in the Gothic stable-front, for in the sale catalogue of 1810 two "half-octagon columns" are referred to as features of its façade (lots 423-4).

<sup>13</sup> I. D. Parry, *Select Illustrations of Bedfordshire* (1827).

<sup>14</sup> Plates 104, 105, 107. The sale catalogue description (lots 441-9) of the "Temple on Finch Hill" corresponds exactly to the building shown in Ware's plate 104.

(1740) and “new working and setting the Temple in the Garden” in 1743.<sup>15</sup> But Watts’s work on the bridge was “measured & allowed by Mr. Morriss”, and this may indicate the employment of Roger Morris (d. 1749) before Isaac Ware. Further, and not very complimentary, references to Sir William Stanhope’s architectural activities are to be found in the Verney letters at Claydon House. In June, 1744 Lord Fermanagh wrote to his father, Earl Verney: “We passed by Sir Wm. Stanhope’s, who is laying outt a very large sum upon a House and Garden to very little purpose.” In the following year his sister reported that the family had “call’d to see Sir Wm. Stanhope” and found the house “full of Workmen”. She did not “much like it, ’tis so under ground”. In another letter she says that the house has been “new fronted with Portland stone or freestone”, and adds that Sir William “has only 2 good Rooms in the House, viz. the Dining Room and Gallery”.<sup>16</sup>

Harris and Ware were not the only architects who contributed to the adornment of Eythrope. In about 1750 Sir William was also in touch with Sanderson Miller, the amateur specialist in Gothic ruins and “eyecatchers”. Among Miller’s papers in the Warwickshire Record Office is a letter from Stanhope, dated “Etherup, Sept. ye 7”.

Sr.

I approve extremely of y<sup>r</sup> Plan for my farm, w<sup>ch</sup> I receiv’d yesterday, but as I am now very Deep in Mortar with my Kitchen-Garden walls, I cannot begin any Building this year. Early in the next Spring, if you will favour me with y<sup>r</sup> Company & advice, you will lay a very Great Obligation upon

S<sup>r</sup>

Your most obedient  
& oblig’d Hum: Servt.  
W. Stanhope

After Stanhope’s death in 1772 the estate reverted to his nephew the 5th Earl of Chesterfield, whose principal seat was at Bretby in Derbyshire.<sup>17</sup> In 1780, however, he proceeded to demolish the magnificent seventeenth-century house at Bretby, and it was not until 1813–15 that he demonstrated what the *Dictionary of National Biography* calls his “normal lack of taste” by rebuilding Bretby in a somewhat bald style of castellated Gothic. It may perhaps have been the anticipated cost of this operation which induced him to pull down Eythrope and make the most of the high price of building materials then prevailing owing to the Napoleonic Wars. In August, 1810, Mr. Hermon of Conduit Street accordingly issued

<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Mr. E. Harris of Aylesbury for allowing me to see Banister Watts’s account-book.

<sup>16</sup> *Verney Letters of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Margaret Lady Verney, ii (1930), pp. 195–6, 247.

<sup>17</sup> For evidence of his occasional residence at Eythrope, see “Lord Chesterfield at Eythrope”, *Records of Bucks.*, xii (1927–33).

# A CATALOGUE

OF THE VALUABLE

## Building-Materials,

OF

*Eythrope Mansion-House,*

Near AYLESBURY, in BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Which will be Sold by Auction,

By Mr. HERMON,

ON THE PREMISES,

On WEDNESDAY, the 15th of AUGUST, 1810,

*And Two following Days, at 11 o'Clock,*

(ON ACCOUNT OF THE NUMBER OF LOTS):

The First Part of the Valuable Building Materials of

### **THE MANSION-HOUSE**

Stables, Coach-Houses, Chapel, Temple, Ice-House and Offices.

*(To be Taken Down and Cleared away by the Purchasers)*

CONSISTING OF

Excellent Brick-Work, Stone Ashloring, Cornices, Copings Window-Cills, Paving, Stone-Pitching, Marble and Stone Chimney-Pieces, Black-and-White Marble Paving, Slating, Boarding, Plain Tiles, Glazed Pan-Tiles, Dutch Galley-Tiles, Mahogany, Oak and Deal Sashes, Frames and shutters, Doors, Mouldings, Skirtings, Architraves, Stone and Wood Columns, *capital Oak and Deal Floors*, Fir, Oak, and Elm Timber, in Girders, Rafters, Joists, and Quartering;

### Several Tons of Lead,

In Gutters, Cisterns, Pipes, Pumps, Flushings, &c.

Large Coppers, and Brewing Utensils, and numerous useful Materials, deserving the particular Attention of Gentlemen & Builders.<sup>18</sup>

One gentleman whose attention was particularly drawn to the sale was Mr. Scrope Bernard (afterwards Sir Scrope Bernard Morland), the squire of the neighbouring village of Nether Winchendon. A person of antiquarian tastes, Scrope Bernard had had his eyes on Eythrope ever since the 1790s, when he had begun to make those delightful Gothic additions to his own house which for a time earned it the name of "Winchendon Priory".<sup>19</sup> In 1800 he had approached Lord Chesterfield in the hope of being allowed to purchase "several Articles at Eythorpe, which his Lordship has not ordered to be removed, and which are useless there, and subject to decay", particularly "the old Armour in the Entrance Hall, which he is told is not to be cleaned

<sup>18</sup> There are two copies of the Sale Catalogue in the Spencer-Bernard papers (E 14/3 and 5), also two copies of the catalogue of the sale of the contents on 13th August (E 14/2 and 4).

<sup>19</sup> For a full account of the house, see Arthur Oswald's articles in *Country Life*, 28th April, 5th-12th May, 1960.

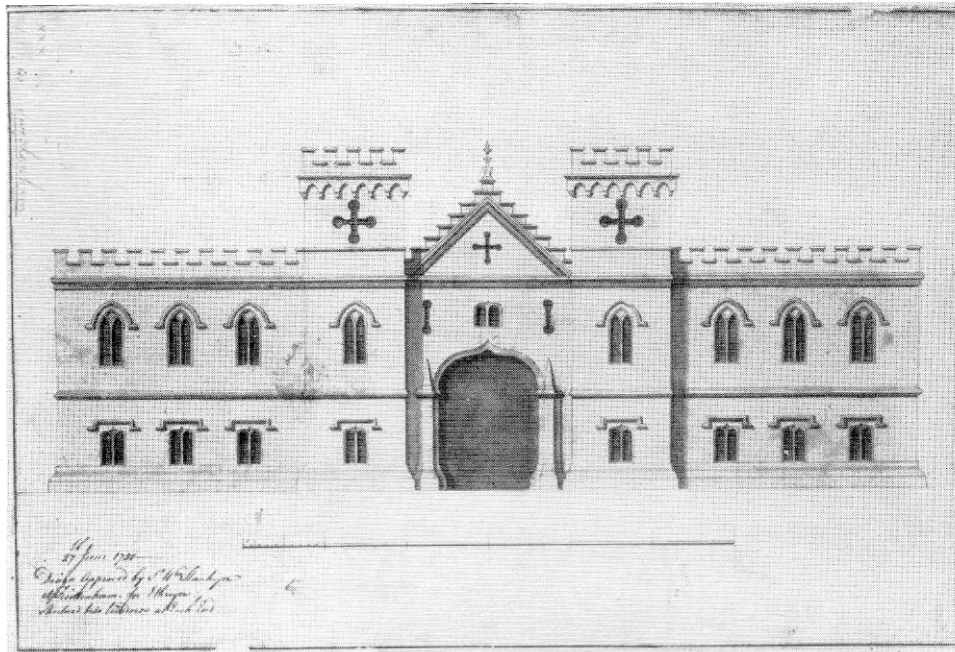


PLATE I (a). Preliminary design for a Gothic building at Eythrope dated 27th June, 1751, and attributed to Isaac Ware.

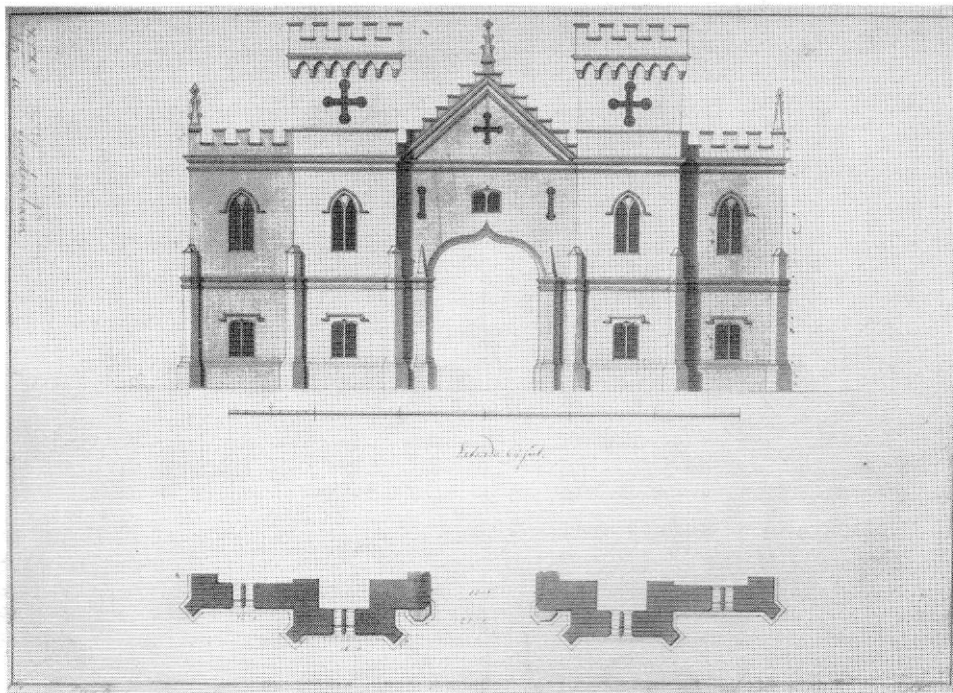


PLATE I (b). Final design for a Gothic building at Eythrope dated 3rd July, 1751, and attributed to Isaac Ware.



PLATE II. Chimney piece from Eythrope House, now at Grove Park, near Warwick.



annually as before, and a large stove in the Gallery”.<sup>20</sup> Despite the diplomatic politeness of his request, it was evidently not granted, for the stove and the armour duly appear in Mr. Hermon’s catalogue in 1810. By now the remodelling of Nether Winchendon was nearly complete, but Scrope Bernard was about to build another house on an estate which he had bought at Little Kimble, and he was on the look-out for materials which would give it a suitably Gothic character. So, catalogue in hand, he went round the condemned mansion at Eythrope, marking those items that attracted him. “Old-fashioned—good” was his comment on the veined marble chimney-piece in the Long Gallery; “includes Gothic chimney-piece”, he wrote against lot 59, the chimney-piece in the State Bedroom. The “Back Front” of Ware’s stables he also noted as “Gothic” and therefore desirable. But what appealed to him most was the Tudor roof of the hall, with its heraldic adornments. As the shell of the house was reserved for a later sale, only the decorative parts of the roof were offered on 15th August, and these he duly purchased, together with the Gothic east front of the stables, for which he paid £64 11s. 6d. The chimney-piece in the State Bedroom did not pass into his possession, for it was successfully bid for by Lord Dormer (head of another branch of the family), who intended to re-erect it in his house at Grove Park near Warwick. Thinking, no doubt, that Lord Dormer also coveted the roof bearing his ancestor’s arms, Scrope Bernard courteously wrote to offer it to him. Lord Dormer was away, and his brother answered on his behalf. He admitted “that it would have been a considerable gratification to my Brother and to myself to have possessed the panelled roof of our ancestors’ old Hall”, but declined the offer, as “we have not space in our old Mansion here, to have done it justice”, and assured his correspondent of their pleasure that “so perfect a specimen of Gothic grandeur” had “fallen into hands that so well knows how to appreciate its value”. However, he accepted a subsidiary offer of “four shields of quarterings”, and expressed his gratification at securing the chimney-piece, “being in possession of some curious manuscript letters, in one of which the cause for which it was erected is given, & which is most singular, & much accords with the superstition of the then times”.<sup>21</sup> The story told by the letters has long been forgotten, but the chimney-piece itself was preserved when Grove Park was rebuilt in 1833, and it now forms the principal adornment of the Drawing Room there (Plate II). It bears the date 1615, and its most prominent feature are the two heraldic supporters, whose stance and style proclaim them as the descendants of Tudor King’s Beasts such as those in King’s College Chapel.

Meanwhile Scrope Bernard was negotiating with the auctioneer for further portions of the house, and eventually secured

The stone Gothic Pedestals at the North front door	£8	0s.	0d.
The stone urns in the Garden	£8	8s.	0d.
The Timber of the Hall Roof including five pair of Principal Rafters and Braces and all the small Rafters and Plates	£23	15s.	0d.

<sup>20</sup> Spencer-Bernard Papers E 14/1.

<sup>21</sup> Spencer-Bernard Papers E 14/7. See also PFG 2/31.

The stone Octagon Tower at the South End of the Gallery, including all the Timber of the Stair Case down to the Gallery Floor, the Lead Weather Cock and Copper Ball, Stone and Slate	£40 0s. 0d.
The North Octagon Tower, including the Timber to the Door into the Gallery and Door Frame, Weather Cock, Ball and Lead	£15 15s. 0d.
The stonework of the North and South fronts	£165 3s. 6d.
The Iron Railing from the South End of the House to the Water	£112 13s. 0d. <sup>22</sup>

In addition he was able to acquire from its purchaser the “spire at the south front”, 12 ft. 8 in. in height, which he converted into a clock-turret for Little Kimble Church. The other materials, including the entire hall roof, were, he told Daniel Lysons, removed to Little Kimble, “where they are to be erected nearly in the same state, & to form part of my new Mansion there, which is planned in a suitable stile of Architecture”.<sup>23</sup> This new mansion was begun in 1811, to Bernard’s own designs, and incorporated materials from other houses besides Eythrope. For during the next two or three years he sent someone to bid on his behalf at every sale in the neighbourhood. When Bulstrode Park was pulled down in 1814, he bought 14 lots, including “2 circular and 5 other doors”, 48 locks, and a quantity of iron casements and leaded lights. At the Butler’s Court sale he spent £66 4s., and at Tring Grove he secured a fine marble chimney-piece at a bargain price. Even the “Nag’s Head” on the Missenden Road contributed its quota of stone and brick when it was opportunely demolished in the same year as Bulstrode.<sup>24</sup> Of Scrope Bernard’s house nothing now remains, for in its turn it was pulled down soon after his death in 1830. No view of it has so far come to light, so we do not know with what degree of success its enthusiastic owner succeeded in incorporating the *disiecta membra* of Eythrope House into its fabric.

As for the remaining portions of Eythrope, their fate is uncertain. Scrope Bernard’s papers do not tell us who purchased the materials of the chapel, with its marble floor of “veined and black squares”, its twelve columns, complete with capitals and bases, and its “altarpiece consisting of enriched pediment entablature, two columns, pedestals, table, and plinths”. Nor do they tell us what became of the Palladian west front of the stables. There is, however, an unauthenticated tradition that the porch of Ceely House, Aylesbury, now the County Museum, was brought from Eythrope, and in his *History of Aylesbury* (1885) Robert Gibbs states that the front of the “White Hart” Inn in the Market Square (demolished in 1864 to make way for the Corn Exchange) was constructed of materials purchased at the Eythrope sale.<sup>25</sup> The “White

<sup>22</sup> Spencer-Bernard Papers E 14/8–28.

<sup>23</sup> British Museum, Add. MS. 9411, ff. 218, 222. The demolition of Eythrope and Scrope Bernard’s purchases were duly noted in D. and S. Lysons, *Additional Plates with further Additions & Corrections for the first volume of Magna Britannia* (1813), p. 739.

<sup>24</sup> Spencer-Bernard Papers E 7–9. What is probably a sketch for the front survives among his papers (E 23/16).

<sup>25</sup> R. Gibbs, *History of Aylesbury* (1885), p. 418. A photograph of the “White Hart” is preserved in the County Museum at Aylesbury.

Hart” was built in 1814, and according to Gibbs the façade was of Bath stone. Dr. Pococke says that all the new buildings at Eythrope were of Totternhoe stone, and it is very unlikely that Bath stone would have been used as far inland as North Buckinghamshire in the middle of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the statement that materials from Eythrope were employed may well be correct, though it may be doubted whether the plain Georgian front of the inn represented any specific feature of the demolished house.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Mr. J. G. C. Spencer-Bernard for kindly allowing me access to his family papers, and for permission to reproduce the plan of Eythrope House. I am also grateful to Lord Dormer for allowing me to visit Grove Park and photograph the chimney-piece, and to Mr. C. N. Gowing of the County Museum for information about Ceely House and the “White Hart” Inn at Aylesbury.