

Sybil Campbell Library Monograph Number 3

Horace Walpole and Strawberry Hill

Summary of a talk by Nancy Edwards, 8 March 2005

Horace Walpole (1717-1797), author, politician and patron of the arts, was the youngest child of the statesman, Sir Robert Walpole. Educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, he went on the Grand Tour between 1739 and 1741 accompanied by the poet, Thomas Gray. In Florence, Horace met Horace Mann, minister there, who became one of his chief correspondents, and John Chute, who inherited The Wyne, Hampshire, and became one of the Committee of Taste at Strawberry Hill, at first with Richard Bentley. Horace catalogued his father's collection at Houghton (now mostly in the Hermitage), publishing **Aedes Walpolianae** in 1747. He entered Parliament in 1741, serving for 21 years in three different seats. His political career and letters, returned at his request, provided material for **Memoirs of George II*** and **Memoirs of George III***, both published posthumously. His income from public sources has been estimated at £3,000 p.a. Mrs Helen Paget Toynbee edited the first collected edition of his correspondence (1903-1908)*. W.S. Lewis edited the letters in 48 volumes (Yale edn. 1937-1983). Walpole's women correspondents included the blind Madame du Deffand (d.1780); these 800 letters, edited by Mary Berry in 1810*, with an enlarged edition by Mrs Paget Toynbee in 1912*, were sold in 1842, but are now with a large part of Horace's library and collections at Farmington, Connecticut.

The enthusiasm of Ivy Davison, cousin of Sybil Campbell, the first woman to edit **The Geographical Magazine** and one of the Library's greatest benefactors, resulted in the Library holding Walpole's **Description of Strawberry Hill**, 1784, and the catalogue of the sale, 1842, plus her unpublished typescript, **At the Country Villas**.

In 1747 Walpole bought a house in the last undeveloped riverside area in fashionable Twickenham, south of the gardens of Pope's villa. In 1753-4 the house was painted white to conform with the other Thameside villas. The Library, arguably the most remarkable room, was the first to incorporate serious medieval imitations, taking the design of the bookcases from the choir screens of Old St Pauls and the chimneypiece from a tomb in Westminster Abbey. Further work in 1760-62 doubled the size of the house. The Gallery, another outstanding room, has fan vaulting from Henry VII's chapel, but the wall recesses derive from Archbishop Bouchier's tomb at Canterbury. Walpole's greatest treasures were housed in the Tribune, given the solemn air of a rich chapel by a central square of yellow glass.

After Horace's death in 1797, Strawberry Hill passed first to his cousin, the sculptress Anne Damer, and then to the Waldegraves, descended from his illegitimate niece, Maria. The 7th earl demolished part of the house and auctioned off most of the treasures in 1842; the sale realized over £33,000. However, in 1860-2 his widow, Frances, built a wing south of the Round Tower. In 1923, the house was bought by a religious order for use as a teacher training college (St Mary's College), becoming part of the University of Surrey in 1992. The Strawberry Hill Trust, founded in 2002, aims to restore the house and open Walpole's villa to the public.

Walpole compiled a **Description*** for his friends, which was printed at the Strawberry Hill press in the grounds; a shorter version was used by the servants who conducted guided tours. The house was intended to exhibit 'specimens of Gothic architecture... shewing how they may be applied to chimney-pieces, ceilings, windows... etc.' It served as a catalogue raisonné of the collection, whose strengths lay in miniatures, portraits of remarkable persons, including royalty, and stained glass. The miniatures included those of the Digby family by Peter Oliver, purchased in 1842 for Sherborne Castle. Horace's skill in identifying portraits sometimes failed, as in the cases of the marriage portraits of Henry VI and VII, now shown to be religious subjects. Some of his antiquities came from Italian collections or excavations; Mann gave him the bust of Caligula from Herculaneum. Several of his much prized curiosities were gifts, including the clock with an obscene pendulum given by Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn, bought by Queen Victoria for £110 5s. Walpole was an enthusiastic collector of stained glass. Amazingly, much of it survives at Strawberry Hill, together with all of his chimneypieces.

Walpole's **Castle of Otranto**, the first true Gothic novel (1765), has associations with Strawberry Hill. He told the Revd. William Cole that the moving portrait was based on one in the Gallery and about his dream of a giant hand in armour on the staircase with its Gothic balustrade.

Strawberry Hill has a significant place in the Gothick Revival. Most architectural historians consider its asymmetrical plan to be the major innovation, although it is true that he started with an L-shaped house. In his **Description** he was the first to show an archaeological approach in his stress on the correct application of actual Gothic examples to the design of features such as chimneypieces, inappropriate as this might have seemed to Pugin and to our eyes.

*In Sybil Campbell Library