



COWLEY GROVE : A GARDEN by HOGARTH ?
By John Harris

The name of William Hogarth and the principles he put forward in his *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) appear in almost every history of English gardening. Garden historians have, however, preferred to dwell upon his professional development and the origins and influence of his aesthetic theorising.¹ No one has asked the question 'did Hogarth ever design a garden?'

In so far as Hogarth was essentially a man-about-town, it would seem unlikely that he laid out gardens. He was not, moreover, known as a garden topographer, or 'delineator' of gardens.² There is, nonetheless, a tantalising reference in an early-nineteenth-century account to a garden whose layout is associated with Hogarth. This reference deserves our attention, even if only to be finally rejected.

In 1852 J. Bernard Burke published the first

volume of his *A Visitation of the Seats and Arms of the Noblemen and Gentlemen of Great Britain*.³ As a genealogist Burke travelled and corresponded widely. He had long wanted to compile a version of the old heraldic visitations describing the 'COUNTY SEATS' of Great Britain, so as to collect 'legends, anecdotes, and traditional reminiscences' from the families interviewed. It is obvious from his catalogue that hundreds of houses could only have been described through first hand examination. Exactly when Burke began these progresses is uncertain, but the first volume must have been compiled over the half a dozen years before 1852.

Calling at Cowley Grove near Uxbridge sometime in the mid-nineteenth century, Burke visited a professional acquaintance and friend. The proprietor, Benjamin Williams, FSA, was an antiquary and the editor of medieval historical manuscripts for the English Historical Society. Cowley Grove was celebrated in the annals of the theatre, having been the 'abode of two actors in succession': first of Barton Booth (d.1733) of the Drury Lane Theatre, and then of John Rich (d.1761) who had opened the Covent Garden Theatre in 1733.⁴

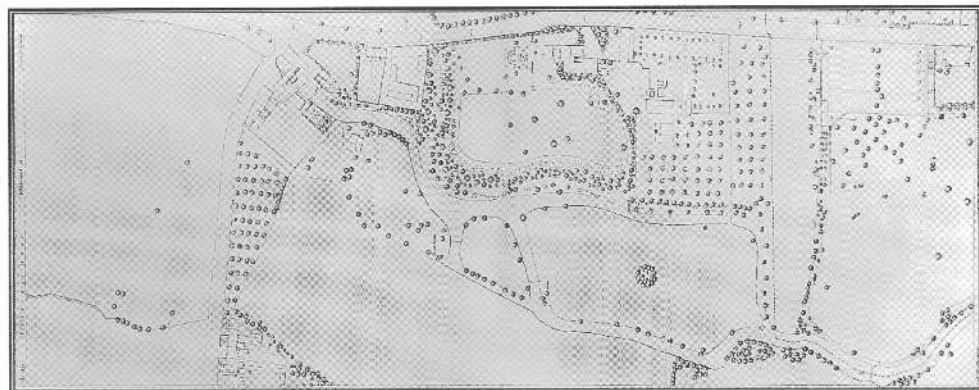
Not surprisingly Burke dwells upon Rich's intimate friendship with Hogarth, who had painted the *Marriage-à-la-Mode* series for him in 1745. Rich also owned two versions of the *Beggar's Opera*. Indeed, he consistently promoted and encouraged the theatrical side of Hogarth's work. Burke also alludes to having seen a picture by Hogarth which he describes

1. In 1963 Miles Hadfield could ludicrously claim that 'Hogarth worked under Kent' (*Gardening in Britain* (1963), p.203) while John Dixon Hunt in 1966 quotes Hogarth's 'eye [that] hath this sort of enjoyment in winding walks and serpentines' (*The Figure in the Landscape* (1966), p.191). Christopher Hussey is more circumspect and intelligent than Hadfield, seeing the serpentine line beginning 'its sinuous course through wilderness and lake to Hogarth's acclaiming it *The Line of Beauty*' (*English Gardens and Landscapes 1700-1750* (1967), p.16) and David Jacques in 1983 refers to Joseph Spence's preference for 'serpentine walks to straight ones', asserting that this had been promoted by Hogarth 'some years beforehand'. Douglas Chambers in 1993 observes that the serpentine line advocated by Hogarth had been put into practice by Lord Petre two decades before *The Analysis of Beauty* (*The Planters of the English Landscape Garden* (1993), p.105), apparently unaware that in 1984 I had demonstrated that the serpentine line was manifest in English gardens long before Petre. (See John Harris, 'The Artinatural Style', *The Rococo in England: a Symposium*, ed. Charles Hind, pp.8-20.) Finally Christopher Thacker in 1994 describes the visit of a poet to The Leasowes in 1756 who remarked that all its components 'combine to recommend [Hogarth's] WAVING LINE', implying that the recommendation was something of a novelty. (*The Genius of Gardening* (1994), p.171).

2. Except for the curiosity of his subscription ticket for his painting of *Sigismunda* which shows Hymen and Cupid in the foreground of the garden and terraces of Cliveden House, Buckinghamshire. This is said to be dated 1748.

3. Burke, *A Visitation*, 1 (1852), p.213. Volume two was published in 1853, and a second series in 1854 and 1855.

4. Rich's handsome tomb can be seen in Hillingdon churchyard. Roger Bowdler has recently observed that this now partly-dismantled monument is of exceptional architectural significance citing the likely architect as James Stuart, a view with which I concur.



1. 'Garden Scene at Mr Rich's Villa at Cowley' reproduced in John Nichols and George Stevens's *The Genuine Works of William Hogarth* (vol. II, 1810).
(MELLON CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN BRITISH ART, LONDON)

2. First edition *Ordnance Survey* (1881) showing Cowley Grove and environs.
(LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON LOCAL HERITAGE SERVICE, CENTRAL LIBRARY)

as 'A Garden Scene at Cowley' (fig. 1) and ends his account with the startling comment that 'the grounds of Cowley Grove are extremely beautiful, an advantage they owe in great measure to the inventive taste of Hogarth, under whose direction they were laid out and arranged as we now see them'.⁶

We might regard this comment with scepticism. Nevertheless, it is a statement that clearly originated with Williams, whose father had bought the estate in about 1830 from Henry Champernoune of Dartington, Devonshire. Although Rich was succeeded by numerous owners or tenants of short duration – including Henry Michael Evans, General Tatton, David Ansthruther and Thomas and Benjamin Lane – the fifty year interval between the occupation of the families of Rich and Williams is not so long as to diminish the substance of the legend of Hogarth's involvement in the garden layout.

In the mid-eighteenth century, Iwer, Cowley, Uxbridge, Harefield and Rickmansworth were prosperous villages within easy reach of the metropolis. Here many a Londoner chose to build a modest suburban villa on the banks of the Rivers Colne and Frays on the West Middlesex border. The houses were never grand and their farming acreages were small. The picture auctioneer Christopher Cock, who lived at Rickmansworth on the banks of the Colne, was a typical villa owner. In the view by George Lambert,⁷ painted in 1742 with figures reputedly by Hogarth, Mr and Mrs Cock are said to be dancing in the hayfield.⁸ The two families of Rich and Cock may have been friendly neighbours, but this is uncertain. However, they are almost certainly linked by Lambert. If Lambert painted Cock's Rickmansworth house, he also painted the

landscape in Hogarth's portrait of 'Mr. Rich's Gardener at Cowley - The Landscape by Mr. Lambert'.⁹ He did more, for as Elizabeth Einberg has pointed out to me in correspondence, in Lambert's sale (Langford, 18 December 1765), lot 45 is 'A View of a mill near Cowley', even if an unknown hand has crossed out the title and substituted it with the unlikely attribution 'Dover by Skelton'. The Cowley mill could never have been invented, as it existed as Babb's Mill. It is likely that Hogarth visited both Rich and Cock in these watery lands of the Frays and Colne. After all, both were promoters of Hogarth's work, and Cock was his dealer-agent. Hogarth is recorded at Cowley in June 1753,¹⁰ when he could have painted Rich's gardener, and indeed involved himself in gardening matters.

Until its demolition in 1963, Cowley Grove stood barely half a mile south of Uxbridge Market House, just below the junction of Cowley Mill Road – the site of Babb's Mill.¹¹ The house is reputed to have been built (or rebuilt?) by Mrs Booth, whose husband Barton died in 1733. John Rich paid rates in 1738 and may have already owned the property in 1735.¹² To Rich must belong the segmental windowed bays on the north and west fronts. It was of moderate size, five windows wide and two and a half storeys high with a Palladian doorcase. The adjacent stables were of earlier, maybe Booth, vintage. The River Frays served Babb's Mill and watered the ornamental grounds of Cowley Grove. Two maps delineate the gardens: an Enclosure Award of 1825¹³, verified in far more detail by the 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1881¹⁴. (fig. 2) The River Frays, after passing southwards under Babb's Mill, skirted Rich's farm buildings on the Cowley Road and was then artificially divided into twin channels, where a timber bridge led to a boathouse on a *cul-de-sac*. The divided water surrounded a curvaceous island with a

5. It may surprise some historians, not the least Richard Dormant, that I am going to omit any reference to this picture. It will be published in the near future, and has been satisfactorily demonstrated to me by the *Cowley Grove Hogarth Scholars* as having no relevance whatsoever to Cowley.

6. *A Visitation*, p.213.

7. John Harris, *The Artist and the Country House*, rev. ed. (1985), no. 280, p.263 – a picture that according to the *Cowley Grove Hogarth Scholars* was destroyed in a fire in New York. That this was Cock's house is also in dispute. This association may well be due to the fancies of Samuel Ireland in his *Graphic Illustrations of Hogarth*, vol. 1 (1794).

8. Probably also fanciful, as Cock was a much older man, dying in 1748.

9. Sale of the Rich collection, Abraham Langford, 2 April 1762, lot 88. When, as my *Cowley Grove Hogarth Scholars* observe, both Hogarth and Lambert were still alive.

10. Paulson (1971), vol. 2, p.184; but also Paul Sawyer, 'John Rich: A Biographical Sketch', *The Theatre Annual*, vol. 15 (1957-58), pp.55-68.

11. The *Hillingdon Mirror*, 14 March 1967, records the house as 'being demolished'. From this demolition there survived a large fragment of mural painting, the subject Pomona with a cornucopia of fruit and flowers. This was at one time in the Hamson Museum, Uxbridge, but seems to have been taken away by either a Greater London Council curator or a conservator from English Heritage! It remains unlocated.

12. Rich's second wife Amy died in 1737 and is buried in Hillingdon churchyard.

13. Hillingdon Central Library (Uxbridge), Maps 230 & 230(a). I am grateful to Carolynne Cotton for her kind help.

14. Hillingdon Central Library, Maps 493 q & t.

circular grove of trees at its centre. A 'pillar' is marked at its northern extremity and dots might indicate urns. Between the house on the Cowley Road and the island was an asymmetrical lawn surrounded on two sides by a broad planting of ornamental shrubberies with serpentine walks and at least one statue. The area south of the stable block with orchards and greenhouses may survive from Barton Booth's older garden. Today the watercourses and this artificially formed island still exist in an industrial estate.

Cartographic evidence demonstrates that the garden mapped in 1866 was the same as mapped in 1825, although in less detail. The style of garden layout is neither Reptonian of pre-1825 date, nor of the earlier Brownian period. The composition of the island with its sheep pasture and central coronet of trees and the lawn with its belt of ornamental planting is reminiscent of mid-eighteenth-century layouts – indeed, we would not be surprised to find such a plan among Joseph Spence's garden designs from the 1760s.¹⁵

Despite creeping industrialisation, some elements of Cowley Grove remain. The garden with its island and lawn is still there – so, too, are the water channels and the boathouse tributary, and Babb's Mill (although rebuilt in recent times, it was still the mill seen by Rich when my Uncle Sid lived in Cowley Mill Road in the 1950s).¹⁶

This author leaves it to others to decide whether Hogarth applied his theory of the waving line to Cowley Grove.¹⁷

MAJOR MUNTHE'S GARDEN at SOUTHSIDE HOUSE, WIMBLEDON COMMON

By Barnaby Rogerson

For a rich density of imagination, style and faded whimsical charm, the interior of Southside House stands in an inspiring league of its own. In London only the Soane Museum can surpass it in magic and inventiveness. The pleasure of visiting Southside is soon to be intensified by access to its hidden garden.

It was Major Munthe's dream to return the garden to the splendour of its pre-war form – a garden which had been lovingly nurtured by his English mother, Hilda Pennington-Mellor and his celebrated father, the writer and healer, Axel Munthe. They worked within the parameters of a mature English garden, gradually weaving references to their various other properties. In the unlikely setting of a house overlooking Wimbledon Common can be found echoes of Capri, Sweden, Biarritz, Rome and the ancient manor of Hellen's in Hereford. This intriguing collage was to be all but destroyed by bombs, allotments and bomb-shelters. After the war Major Munthe laboured quietly but determinedly to restore this lost vision from his childhood. He was hampered by lack of funds, but made up for it with a beguiling charm that allowed him to recruit many an unsuspecting friend or relative as a day-labourer.

Visitors enter the precincts of Southside House through one of a pair of black gates into a paved and tree-shaded forecourt. A pair of carriage houses, connected to the house by arcades and yew hedges, define this formal space. Against the external street-wall a trickling fountain disturbs the pool built to catch a reflection of the long, reclining statue of Peter Munthe. Though he was Major Munthe's older brother, he disinherited himself from his tangled obligations in order to concentrate on his painting. He lived alone in a North London garret, amid cats and capes, but is here represented as writing verse. Opposite him, set on plinths right against the house, stand the firm muscular forms of Peace and Plenty, said to be carved for the house in the late seventeenth century by a Dutch sculptor.

The imposing front door of the house is barred. Entrance is effected over the hard flint

15. For example, Mark Laird suggests a similarity with the *Queen's Shrubbery* at Buckingham House in 1769 (although this was a shrubbery of 15 acres). See London School of Economics Library, Parnell Coll. Misc. 38, vol. 1, f.119e and f.120.

16. John Harris, *No Voice From The Hall, Early Memories of a Country House Snooper* (1998).

17. I owe a debt of gratitude to my friends the *Cowley Grove Hogarth Scholars* who have been so free with their information.