

LADY MARY COKE'S GARDEN at NOTTING HILL HOUSE

By Tim Knox

In the summer of 1767 Lady Mary Coke, the eccentric and celebrated 'victim' of one of the most embarrassing and inconclusive High Society divorce cases of the eighteenth century, purchased the lease of Notting Hill House, a large villa on the summit of Campden Hill, to the north of the still-rural village of Kensington. Notting Hill House - or *Aubrey House* as it is known today - had been the suburban retreat of George II's Secretary at War, Edward Lloyd, who had purchased the property in 1744. It was a modest place, built of brick with a pedimented central block flanked by wings. Stables and household offices lay to the east of the house and the property was surrounded by useful and ornamental gardens. To the west were the gardens of Holland House, the palatial seat of the Fox family, Barons Holland, from which it was separated by a narrow public lane, while to the north, across some fields, the Uxbridge Road negotiated the wastes and gravel pits of Notting Hill. More fields lay to the south and east, beyond which sprawled the polite suburb of Kensington with its Royal palace surrounded by its famous garden. In 1767 Notting Hill House was a country villa, embosomed amidst healthful verdure, yet conveniently placed within striking distance of the bustle and excitement of the metropolis.

The new proprietress of Notting Hill House was the youngest daughter of John, 2nd Duke of Argyll and Greenwich, by his second wife, Jane Warburton. Lady Mary Campbell was born on 6 February 1726, and in 1747 was portioned off to Edward, Viscount Coke, the only son of Thomas, 1st Earl of Leicester, the great Norfolk magnate. The marriage was not a success, and after two years of acrimony and a mortifyingly public court case, the couple separated. Lord Coke, a vicious and unpleasant-sounding character, died worn out by his debauches in 1753, but Lady Mary never remarried. In later years she became a stately and increasingly eccentric *grande dame*, the *confidante* of Horace Walpole and other celebrities of the age, as well as a familiar figure at Court, moving in exalted circles both in England and elsewhere in Europe. (fig. 29)

Before her purchase of Notting Hill House,

Lady Mary had lived at Windsor but was doubtless attracted to Kensington by its proximity to Court and London high life. Moreover, Notting Hill House was *en route* to Gunnersbury, the country house of her great friend, the King's sister, HRH the Princess Amelia. According to Lady Mary's remarkable *Journal*, the negotiations for the purchase of Notting Hill House were complete by 7 June 1767.

Lady Mary's *Journal* - which takes the form of letters to her sisters, the Countess of Stafford and Lady Dalkeith, later Baroness Greenwich - exhaustively chronicles her occupation of the house and the improvements she made to its gardens. It is the principal source of the information which forms the subject of this article.¹

Notting Hill House had originally been the spa house of 'Kensington Wells', a medicinal watering place which had been established on the site in 1698.² John Bowack's *The Antiquities of Middlesex* (1705) described it as 'a famous chalybiat spring much esteem'd and resorted to for its Medicinal Virtues'; and according to Dr Benjamin Allen's *The Natural History of the Chalybeat and Purging Waters of Great Britain* (1711), Kensington water was

clearer than these [waters] usually are, and less bitter than Epsom, but of a more manifestly Saline Taste...most appropriate to take off the Acidity of the Juices and Blood, and to Incarnate, and suits in Heartburns and some sort of Phthisis, and may agree with the Cold and phlegmatick best.

The popularity and reputation of the 'Wells' seem to have waned by the 1730s when the property was leased to a Hammersmith 'pinmaker', Jeffrey Gillingham, and it was probably he who transformed the public place of resort into a private house. There is no mention of the health-giving reputation of the springs during the residence of Lady Mary, a notable hypochondriac and avid spa visitor, and by 1820 T. Falkner reported in his *History of Kensington* that the wells had 'fallen into disuse that it was only after the most diligent

1. I have made use of James A Home (ed.) *The Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke* (London 1896), 4 vols., and MS transcripts of the unpublished *Journal* of 1775-80 and 1786 in Kensington & Chelsea Public Library, Local Studies Collection. The original manuscript of Lady Mary's *Journal* is in the possession of the present Earl of Home at The Hirsell in Scotland. My article published in this issue of *The London Gardener* is a summary of a topographical history of the grounds I prepared for the owners in the spring of 1999.

2. For a full account of the history of Aubrey House see *Survey of London: Northern Kensington*, vol. XXXVII, (London 1973), pp.87-9.



29. Lady Mary Coke (1726-1811), mezzotint by J. McArdell after the portrait by Allen Ramsay of 1762.
 (By COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON)

enquiry that their situation could be ascertained'.

Edward Lloyd purchased the house in 1744, but it was doubtless his acquisition of the full freehold title to the property in 1750 that prompted him to rebuild extensively the house and embellish its surroundings. His work was largely complete by 1754 and the result can be seen in Joshua Rhodes's *A Topographical Survey of the Parish of Kensington* (1766).³ (fig. 30) Only part of the building and gardens are shown: the house is portrayed in elevation, and has an expanse of lawn to the south of it terminated by a rectangular sheet of water with 'D' shaped ends. The east and west garden boundaries are enclosed by hedges or rows of trees. To the east of the house is a much larger garden – possibly the 'Kitchen garden' – laid out in geometrical beds and terminated in the east by a long transverse canal. This was the property Lady Mary Coke purchased in the summer of 1767.

No sooner had Lady Mary taken the house than she determined to enhance the prospects from her grounds. Notting Hill House, built on an eminence rising 130 feet above the Thames, had the potential to command superb views to the surrounding countryside.⁴

She began her negotiations with the elderly Mr Phillimore, who owned the field to the south of her garden boundary⁵ which Lady Mary believed

would be very convenient for me to have, & I offer'd him anything he pleased to ask, either to buy it or rent it. His answer was he had let it a long time ago ... & that he could not sell it as it was intailed upon his Son, who was under age. I then ask'd if he had any objection to my taking it of his tenant. To this he did not care to make me an answer, but in conclusion said he would think of it & write me word...

Not easily dissuaded she then told him

I had another favour to beg, that he might Observe there was a tree in his grounds that very much interrupted my view, & that I should be very much obliged to him if he would cut it down. To this he agreed & said he would order it to be done, & I am not out of hopes of getting the field.⁶

3. Surveyed in 1762-64.

4. It should be noted that the lofty situation which made Campden Hill so attractive for prospects also made it vulnerable to the weather; there are numerous references in Lady Mary's *Journal* to the devastating winds which swept across her gardens and the damage they incurred. For instance, on 22 August 1768 she reflected: 'I found my garden in great disorder; some violent showers of rain & a great deal of wind had destroy'd the flowers terribly'.

5. Land now occupied by Holland Park School.

6. Lady Mary noted graciously 'I could not help liking the Old Man, he seem'd so disinterested.' *Journal*, 4 July 1767.

The business of opening up vistas began in November 1767 and corresponded with the building of new gravel walks. The first walk was formed by 5 November on the south side of the house, using 'a great deal of gravel, nearly fifty load.'⁷ This was answered a week later by a second gravel walk 'on the other side of my ground.'⁸ On 19 November she recorded how 'I have had a hedge cut that has much improved my view'. Five days later she remarked

I sent for Lord Holland's Gardener, & gave him half a guinea for cutting some trees that open'd me a View into my Lds grounds, which I had permission for before he went Abroad. Since that I planted trees in my fields.

She even prevailed over Mr Phillimore, presenting him with a haunch of venison for his trouble 'cutting down eight trees.'

Lady Mary continued her campaign in the spring of 1768, forging clearings through adjacent gardens and fields to open views southwards towards Chelsea. She was rewarded for her efforts some years later when she noted in September 1776 that 'the Parish of Fulham is repairing the church and has had the happy idea of building a steeple which is the greatest addition to my prospect that can be imagined'.

When Lady Mary acquired Notting Hill House its garden was in 'the most terrible disorder'. She reported in September 1767 that she had

nothing in my Kitchen Garden but cabbages and onions; the rest is occupied by as large a crop of weeds as I ever saw...My Court [the carriage sweep in front of the house] is so full of weeds & grass you w'd not believe there had ever been gravel, & as the gardener will do nothing, I have hired a woman to come to morrow that it may not look like an uninhabitable Place.

Moreover, her gardener – who she had inherited from Mr Lloyd – was 'a most good for nothing Creature.'¹⁰

Undaunted, Lady Mary described her preparations in a letter to her sister

The man has been with me again about the alterations in my Garden, but we have not quite agreed; tomorrow I am to determine. In a Walk now over grown with rubbish, & which I propose making fine, I have to day cut a view of Hamstead and Highgate & intend having a bench. I d assure you the prospect everywhere is delightful, & when it is in a little order I think you

7. *Journal*, 5 November 1767.

8. *Journal*, 13 November 1767.

9. *Journal*, 29 November 1767.

10. *Journal*, 25 September 1767.

will admire it. One of the tools I bought yesterday proves a very bad one; it is already broke. As soon as I had dined, I order'd my Chaise & went to Kenedy's; 'tis one of the greatest Nurserys about Town. I was very much amused with the great variety of Plants, & propose that he should furnish me with trees & shrubs when My ground is ready for Planting. He made me a present of a pot of *Heliotropium odoratisimum*, that he tells me will do as well in my room as in a green House; 'tis a delightful smell. You was last year very rich in Clethras; if you have any now that you can spare, you have a friends' Garden that will be ready to receive them, & if you bring the one, two, or more plants when you come up in November, it will be a good time to plant them. I shall be much obliged to L^d Strafford if he will bespeak me two stoves; I'll send him the dimensions of the Chimneys in my next journal.

The mysterious garden adviser was unable to take on the job and James Lee, a noted horticulturist and the proprietor of a nursery on Hammersmith Lane,¹¹ agreed to direct the improvements.¹²

One of the most endearing characteristics of Lady Mary is her enthusiasm for gardening - doing much of the planting and weeding herself. Numerous entries in her *Journal* attest to her industry. In October 1767 Lady Mary herself 'directed some plantations'¹³ and 'planted some Oaks in my fields';¹⁴ on 8 December of the same year she planted 'fifty shrubs in my new walk'; on 29 March 1768 she 'planted this evening three doz; of wall flowers'; and on 16 May 1768 she 'planted a large Cedar before I dined.' In July 1768 she remarked 'I am grown a great weeder. I am glad I like it better than my gardener. My garden wou'd otherwise be in great disorder'.

This *hands-on* approach was essential as her gardeners appear to have been highly unreliable. For instance, on 10 April 1769 she reported that she found her gardener 'very drunk & incapable of doing anything' and 'was obliged to transplant some stocks myself; worked very hard until it was dark'. Lady Mary's staff were notoriously degenerate. For instance, after a protracted visit to Paris in the summer of 1775 she returned to find

My garden grown absolutely wild with no appearance that there had been a days work done since I left England. The grass I believe would have been sufficient

to have fatted an ox when it was cut, had I allowed it to remain upon the ground would have made very good hay, not one crop sowed in the kitchen garden since I went & those I had seen sowed before I went so choked up with grass and weeds they are almost destroyed. These things are very vexatious for I now despair of ever having servants to do my justice. At the same time I am obliged to Mr Hall for I know he sent a message to the gardener to desire him to be sober & industrious, & not to get into bad company. Had he taken this advice it would have been better for himself and me. However, I shall not turn him away immediately & he promises to do better for the future, though I have little hopes after what I have seen of his minding. He gathered all my pears three weeks before I came home though they should not have been gathered till some time next week. When I asked what was become of them he told me they were all rotten. My ducks are said to be flown away. Many of my fowls are said to be killed but they don't know by what. My poor dear white cat they tell me is dead. I hope it is so and not that they have sold her. I could tell you much more but it can be no entertainment & may be tiresome.¹⁵

Although Lady Mary experienced a consistent lack of enthusiasm, dereliction of duty and even dishonesty from her menials, she consoled herself by taking an extremely active interest in her garden - a fact which bemused her grander friends. Her *Journal* entry for 9 October 1768 relates how she made the Marchioness of Blandford

laugh by telling her that I had got a great many sore fingers with pruning my rose trees, & that some of the thorns had got so deep into the flesh, that I had consulted Doctor Hunter [the famous gynaecological surgeon], as I thought he might be as skilful in delivering one of a thorn, as he was on some other occasions. She said it was the first time She had ever heard of his being consulted about fingers.

Although Lady Mary's *Journal* provides us with a meticulous record of her gardening activities at Notting Hill House, there are no known contemporary plans or illustrations which document the layout of her garden. However, something of its disposition can be gleaned from J. Osborn's *Survey of Notting Hill House* (fig. 31), which was drawn up in connection with the sale of the freehold in June 1823. Although produced some thirty-five years after Lady Mary's departure, the survey probably shows the house, its garden and environs much as she had left them in 1786.

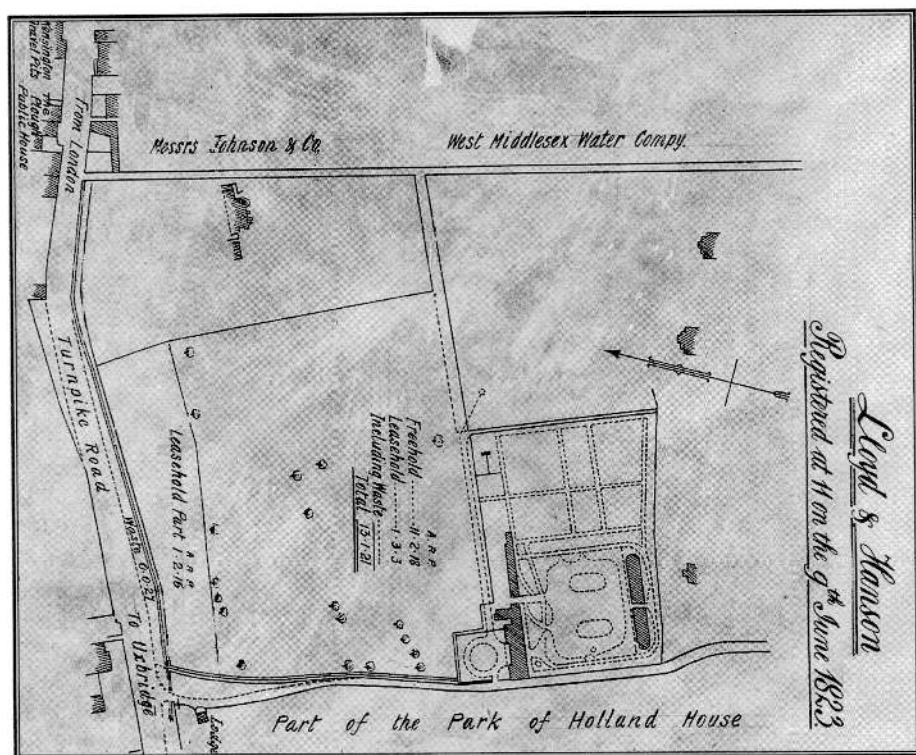
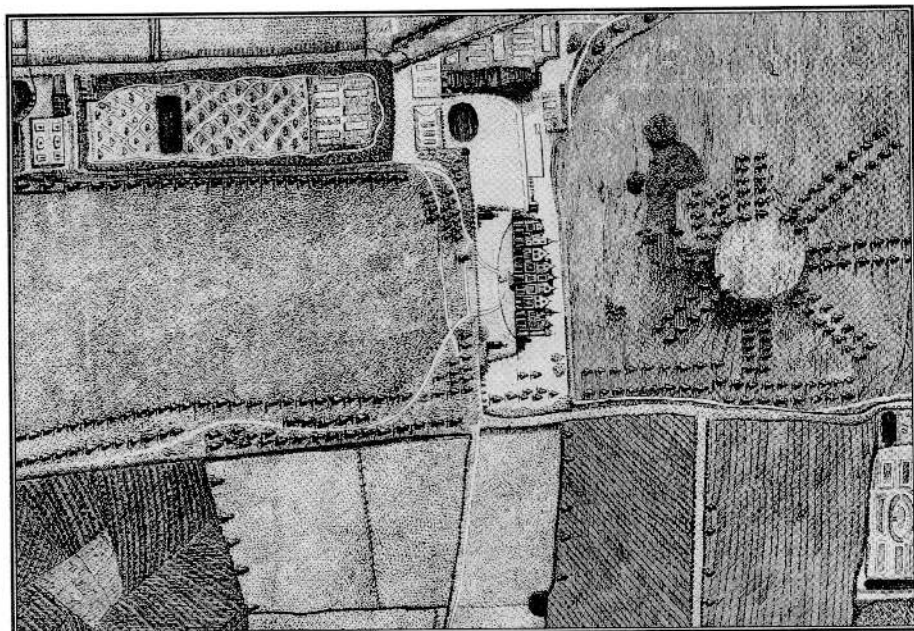
11. On the site of the *Olympia* exhibition ground.

12. *Journal*, 26 September 1767.

13. *Journal*, 13 October 1767.

14. *Journal*, 30 October 1767.

15. *Journal*, 4 October 1775. In June 1779 she was 'away but five days' and returned home to find 'all my strawberries are eat & I am afraid by my servants'.



30. Detail of Joshua Rhodes's *A Topographical Survey of the Parish of Kensington* (1766; surveyed 1762-64), showing Notting Hill House and its garden (bottom right) shortly before the arrival of Lady Mary Coke in 1767. (THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA LIBRARIES AND ARTS SERVICE)

31. J. Osborn's *Survey of the grounds of Notting Hill House* made in connection with the sale of the property in June 1823. (THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA LIBRARIES AND ARTS SERVICE)

The house was approached by a track - the present *Aubrey Walk* - leading off what is now Campden Hill Road. The so-called 'field' at the north end of Lady Mary's property extended northwards from the house to the 'Turnpike Road to Uxbridge'¹⁶ and was grazed, with the exception of her 'North Walk' - a narrow strip running up along the eastern margins of Holland Walk. The gardens to the south of the house were bounded by meandering paths enclosing two oval beds and terminating in an oblong pond traversed by a bridge - doubtless that delineated on the 1766 map. The western boundary of the property is defined by Holland Walk. The Kitchen Gardens to the south-east of the house were divided by paths into six compartments.

Notting Hill House was entered via the 'Court' which lay before the north or principal front of the house. This was the area which Lady Mary referred to as being 'full of weeds and grass' when she moved into the house in 1767. The Court was subsequently gravelled, presumably with some of the 'fifty four load of gravel' that she bought in November 1767.

The principal ornament of the garden was the North Walk: it was the area of the garden upon which Lady Mary lavished the most expense and attention. The feature lay, as its name suggests, on the north side of the house and ran alongside what was then known as Lord Holland's Lane (Holland Walk) up to the Uxbridge Road (Holland Park Avenue).¹⁷ It was probably adapted from an earlier feature - possibly the avenue which can just be made out on John Rocque's *New and Accurate Survey... of Kensington* of 1745.

The restoration of the 'new Walk' was begun in November 1767 when 'the frost being gone I planted a good many new shrubs'. Many flowers, plants and shrubs were subsequently planted in December as the weather continued 'fine & pleasant'. No sooner was the work complete than the new plantations were eaten up by one of her cows,¹⁸ and in March 1768 the easterly winds inflicted 'considerable mischief' killing many of her remaining shrubs. It was, Lady Mary remarked, 'a melancholy appearance'.¹⁹ And if these misfortunes were not enough to deter her, on 20 April she

reported that 'a thing called couch grass... plagues me excessively; it has overrun the border of shrubs in my North Walk'.²⁰

In May she resumed work on the Walk, sowing annuals along its length and raising a Mount at its north end. The 'Walk around' the Mount was 'made easy and turf'd' - adorned with a seat from which to watch the passing traffic along the Uxbridge Road.²¹ Horace Walpole, who visited Notting Hill House in June 1768, found Lady Mary at 'work in my North Walk ... in my garden Equipage, a paddle and a great basket. He seem'd to approve of the alterations I had made, & was charmed with the views'.²²

Sadly, the isolated location of the walk and its proximity to a public footpath made it the easy prey to vandals. On 24 June 1768 Lady Mary wrote:

this place looks in greater beauty then you have seen it, notwithstanding the malice of some unknown enemy, who has cut down all the roses and honeysuckles that were planted in my North Walk near the benches even with the ground, and done the same to all the flowers that were in bloom. I wonder they think I have too many pleasures, as they seem desirous of depriving me of all that is in their power.²³

In August Lady Mary resolved to contrive 'a genteel fence for my North Walk' - presumably to help keep out the vandals²⁴ - and by November her 'improvements' were complete. She wrote to her sister, Lady Strafford, telling her of her innovations:

I beg you will inform Lord Strafford that it [the Walk] is terminated by a Cedar of Libanus, thirteen, if not fourteen, feet high, which there has been such care in planting, that I really believe it will live & do well. The quantity of sweets that are planted in my garden and North Walk will, I am persuaded, perfume the road through Lord Holland's Park, by which I shall benefit all those who pass that way next summer. Among other things I have planted twelve dozen of honeysuckles, which, added to those of the last year, will make a very great quantity.²⁵

20. She instructed Mr Lee to send someone 'to take it all up by the roots; 'twill be the employment for some days'. *Journal*, 20 April 1768.

21. *Journal*, 6-10 May 1768. There may also have been a seat westwards into the park of Holland House which Lady Holland had obligingly cut through for her in 1769.

22. *Journal*, 30 June 1768.

23. This damage was not as extensive as that caused in November 1774 when 'a pack of hounds ... & several men on horseback broke into my grounds, leap'd into my North Walk, & from thence into Ld Holland's lane', prompting Lady Mary to remark ruefully how 'these things are disagreeable, and so near London was not to be expected'.

24. The fence was erected by her architect and master carpenter John Phillips. *Journal*, 24 August 1768.

25. *Journal*, 3 November 1768.

16. Now known as Holland Park Avenue.

17. It is not shown on Osborn's *Survey*.

18. *Journal*, 8 December 1767 & 15 January 1768.

19. *Journal*, 25 March 1768.

The following spring a 'cover'd seat' was placed on the Mount, a feature which was much admired by her sister Lady Greenwich, who declared that the garden 'extremely well kept'.²⁶ Unfortunately, a few days later Lady Mary recorded how 'Mr Phillips has made a mistake in the Seat he has put up in the North Walk, & the workmen has demolish'd all my Shrubs & flowers that are near the place'.²⁷ Even Lady Mary's philanthropic gesture of planting sweet smelling plants along her boundary with Lord Holland's Walk eventually landed her in trouble, as on Sunday 23 April 1769 'twas a charming evening. Some of my plants seem'd to droop, which oblig'd me to water them, tho' it was Sunday. While I was so imploy'd, some people walking in the road that goes through Lord Holland's Park [Holland Walk], told me they wou'd not thrive. I suppose they meant it was improper to work on that day. I was pleased with the reproof'. A few days later, again on the Sabbath, she guiltily confessed how she 'walked in my Garden till dinner & cou'd not help watering some sick plants, but I was quite afraid of being seen, as I did not think it right'.²⁸

The strategic vantage point of her North Walk proved useful on another occasion when, on 5 June 1769 at

about seven O'clock, when I was very busy working in my North Walk, I saw a servant of the Princess Amelia's come in at Ld Holland's Gate. Thinking it might be HH said I threw off my working apron, run up the Walk, & just in time enough to receive the Princess as she got out of her Coach. Lady Anne Howard and Ly Lothian were with her. HH said She shou'd hardly have known it again, & I believe it must appear quite a new place, for, besides all that has been done since the Princess was here, every time She was here before the Weather was bad.²⁹

However, even visits from Royal personages did not deter the mischief-makers, for she concludes her letter with the remark 'I forgot to tell you that *good natured* people broke all the windows in my new Seat in the North Walk'.

Vulnerable and difficult to maintain, the North Walk was probably abandoned after Lady Mary's departure from Notting Hill House in 1786. It has utterly disappeared in

Osborn's *Survey* of 1823, although some of the trees shown on the western margin of the field may be survivors of her planting.

The open field which abutted the North Walk was a constant concern to Lady Mary. In September 1767 she considered acquiring 'an Ox or two' as she had 'so much more grass than my Animals will eat, that I do not know what to do with it'.³⁰ Later she kept here a cow – a black and white beast called *Miss Pelham* – a gift from her friend the Duchess of Norfolk. It may have been 'one of the Cows' who on 15 January 1768 'broke into the new walk, & had eat up almost all the shrubs'. Philosophically Lady Mary considered the event 'vexatious, but these things are trifles'. Nevertheless, in September 1772 Lady Mary recorded that 'the Duchess of Norfolk has given me permission to part with the Cow, which I joyfully accepted. 'Tis incredible the mischief it has done me since I came home'.³¹

Lady Mary's other livestock kept on the field were no less troublesome – particularly her herd of thirty sheep.³² She noted on 31 August 1768 that she was 'very impatient for the fence in the North Walk being finished: the sheep broke in again last night & done me more mischief.' The field was also probably home to the 'two hares' which Lady Mary discovered living in her grounds,³³ noting 'I tremble for them every day as my servants tell me there are people in the neighbourhood frequently out with intention to shoot them'.

One of Lady Mary's letters mentions her 'farm Yard'³⁴ and a small establishment of this kind seems to have formed a useful adjunct of the property. It was probably located to the east of the house on the northern margin of the Kitchen Garden. Its principal occupants appear to have been a collection of fowls – chickens, turkeys and ducks – whose welfare was a constant worry to Lady Mary. The most 'melancholy accident' to beset her poultry occurred on 16 March 1768 when 'the fine hen that came from Germany had her head bit off by some vermin last night in the Hen House'. In April 1769 it was reported that 'all my turkey eggs are stole'. The keeping of fowls was considered a ladylike activity in the eigh-

26. *Journal*, 27 March 1769. 27. *Journal*, 3 December 1769.

28. *Journal*, 7 May 1769.

29. On another visit the Princess actually 'sat a considerable time in the seat upon the Mount'. *Journal*, 18 August 1777.

30. *Journal*, 22 September 1767.

31. *Journal*, 14 September 1772.

32. *Journal*, 24 August 1768.

33. *Journal*, 17 September 1776.

34. *Journal*, 4 August 1768.



32. Paul Sandby painted this view of Holland Walk showing Notting Hill House in 1795.
(PRIVATE COLLECTION, COURTESY COUNTRY LIFE PICTURE LIBRARY)

33. Mrs Louisa Goldsmid's watercolour of 1817 showing the entrance or north front of Notting Hill House.
(THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA LIBRARIES AND ARTS SERVICE)

teenth century, even for women of high rank. Lady Mary's 'farm Yard' probably served as a *ferme ornée*, providing a place of recreation rather than supplying vital household provisions.

The Kitchen Garden, which Lady Mary inherited from Mr Lloyd, was originally inhabited only by cabbages and onions and 'as large a crop of weeds as I ever saw'.³⁵ It lay to the east of the house but was doubtless uncomfortably visible as one approached the house. When Lady George Sackville paid a visit on Friday 23 December 1768, Lady Mary recorded how 'she wonder'd, She said, I did not take the Kitchen Garden away, but that I cannot do, for many different reasons'.

Much of our knowledge of what lay within the Kitchen Garden comes from the constant and despairing references in the *Journal* to it being plundered. On 24 August 1768 Lady Mary wrote 'My garden has been robbed; they have stolen all my fine plumbs, of which I had great quantities', while on 7 April the following year she wrote

I received a letter from my Gardener this morning to let me know my Garden has been robbed, the frames broke open, three & twenty Tuberose taken away, all my bell glasses & other things. 'Tis very vexatious.

After this raid she seriously considered laying down man-traps to deter further depredations.³⁶ These could not, however, prevent the encroachments of lesser vermin.

I had a fine Mushroom bed to have served me all winter; about a fortnight ago when it was uncovered there were the finest shew of mushrooms that could be seen, since which a swarm of mice have devour'd them, & have lodged themselves so far in the bed that they cannot be destroy'd.³⁷

As well as fruit trees, frames of tuberose, and beds of strawberries and mushrooms, there was also a piece of water in the Kitchen Garden, of which Lady Mary wrote on 26 March 1768: 'the Gardener very sillily had almost filled [it] with rotten cabbages & all sort of dirt, which began to be very offensive'.³⁸

Most of the garden of Notting Hill House lay, as it does today, to the south of the house. The south garden comprised a large lawn sur-

rounded by paths and shrubs and flower beds,³⁹ and was enclosed by hedges and palings – necessary defences which were regularly torn down and breached. On 16 June 1779 Lady Mary reported that 'my benches are broke & my hedges in many places destroyed no doubt by my enemies from without'; and on 13 July 1786 she recorded that 'above a yard of paling taken away from the garden'.

Several references are made to the garden ponds in the *Journal*. Most it would seem refer to the rectangular sheet of water which lay at the bottom of the south garden. This ornamental water was probably devised by Mr Lloyd and is first shown on Rhodes's *Survey* (1766). It was doubtless fed by the springs which had once fed Kensington Wells but the supply was somewhat erratic. In the summer of 1772 Lady Mary reported that 'almost all the little pieces of water in my grounds are near dried up, that in the garden is now so low I fear I shall lose all my gold and silver fish, & if the Springs don't rise soon I shall have a more lamentable story to tell'.⁴⁰ On the other hand on 18 August 1768, incessant rain caused extensive flooding: 'Every thing was under water; the ducks were swimming upon the grass; think how disagreeable'.

The gold and silver fish that lived in the pond were not purely ornamental, as Lady Mary reported to her sister:

Well, my Dear Lady Strafford, You give a pompous account of your fishing, but I can out do you: this morning I caught fourteen gold and silver fish, & of a size that would have surprised you; it proves that I have such great quantities in that little piece of water, that I kept out half a dozen, which Jane & I eat at dinner; they have but few bones, & are very good. I'll give you a dish of gold and silver fish whenever you please.⁴¹

Not everyone thought the water an object of beauty. Lady Mary's informal garden adviser, Mrs Pitt, professed to admire 'the situation and the views' of the garden in general, 'but she could not help taking notice of the water at the bottom of the garden, in short, shew'd a disposition to find fault'.⁴² The pond survived until the 1820s; Osborn shows it traversed by a little bridge.

Lady Mary's demesne contained a number

35. *Journal*, 24 September 1768.

36. *Journal*, 8 April 1769.

37. *Journal*, 25 October 1772.

38. This was probably the long canal-like piece of water that can be seen to the east of the formal beds in Joshua Rhodes's *Survey* of 1766. This map also seems to indicate that another piece of water, a small oval pond, formed a feature in the middle of the formal layout of the Kitchen Garden.

39. Much of this lawn still survives. An ecological appraisal of this feature (1998) suggests that it has the character of relict 17th unimproved pasture.

40. *Journal*, 29 August 1772.

41. *Journal*, 27 August 1768.

42. *Journal*, 7 August 1768.

of other features, although none can be certainly identified in Rhodes's or Osborn's *Surveys*. The most useful was the 'House of Office' or lavatory. No less utilitarian, but very handsome, was the ice house erected in 1769. The brick structure was covered with thatch, which in 1772 was eaten by *Miss Pelham*. At one juncture Lady Mary toyed with the idea of building a 'Cottage' – presumably an ornamental lodge or tea house, entrusting its design to her brother-in-law, Lord Strafford, an amateur architect, for whom she had 'so high opinion of his taste'. It is not known if and where the cottage was erected.

Most of Lady Mary's plants were obtained from James Lee's nursery in Hammersmith Lane and Lee is constantly mentioned in the *Journal* as the source of plants and advice, paying regular visits to Notting Hill House to assist with the work of planting. Mr Lee, she remarked in August 1769, 'could be relied upon to stock interesting plants.' On one occasion she

called at Mr Lee's as I came home, & saw some of the plants which are already come up from the seeds brought by Mr Banks & Doctor Solander, & two bulbous rooted flowers of the most monstrous size I ever saw; if the flower of them answer they must be fine. They come from two warm a climate to grow in the open air, but Mr Lee thinks they will be green House plants, & not require a Hot House.⁴³

Friends and relations were another useful source. For instance, Lord and Lady Strafford supplied cedar trees⁴⁴ which were brought to Notting Hill 'perfectly safe' by coach, and the Duchess of Norfolk presented her with a variety of other plants. Sometimes Lady Mary was called upon to supply specimens herself. On 27 October 1774 she reported to her sister:

I have had a letter from the Duchess de la Tremouille. I promised to send her some plants, & the letter is relating to them. You know I am generous: I send her two hundred and fifty plants, all from Mr Lee and none of them common. She desires I would send my Gardener with them, but that request I can't comply with. Mr Lee is however to write particular directions about the culture. Had I known the dearness of the *Clethras* I should have desired you would have supplied me, but 'tis too late now: they must be embarked next week, but if you have any to spare when you leave Yorkshire, they will be very acceptabel in my little Garden, & I beg You will tell your Gardener to put moss about the roots.⁴⁵

The *Journal* gives us an idea of the range of species of plants grown in the gardens of Notting Hill House. Trees mentioned include cedars 'of Libanus', limes and oaks, and there are many purchases of unnamed 'shrubs'. Flowers planted included roses, pinks, carnations, wall flowers, jessamines, stocks, narcissus, heliotrope, 'clethras', 'Azalia', 'sweets', tuberoses and honeysuckles, as well as other 'annuals' and 'perannuals'. The Kitchen Garden supplied pears, plums, mushrooms, strawberries and cabbages for the table.

During her residence Lady Mary received a host of distinguished visitors in her gardens at Notting Hill House. Perhaps the grandest caller was her friend, HRH Princess Amelia who made a number of visits. Horace Walpole was another regular, until a great quarrel severed their stormy friendship forever. Most were impressed by Lady Mary's establishment. Lady Sackville, who came on 25 August 1768, went so far as to say that the situation of Notting Hill House was superior to that of Holland House, while Lady Temple [who lived at Stowe, so should have known] was 'quite charmed ...[and] ... could not believe there had been so pretty a place so near London'.⁴⁶ And a foreign visitor, 'Madame the Chanoinesse', pronounced the ensemble to be '*un petit palais enchantée*'.⁴⁷

In the summer of 1786, after nineteen years of improving Notting Hill House and its grounds, Lady Mary decided to move, telling her friends that she felt increasingly isolated and worried by the lawlessness and thievery in the neighbourhood. It is also said that she decided to move when she realised the hopelessness of her desire to purchase the freehold of the property from Sir Edward Lloyd. In any case, she had had enough of pioneering in Kensington. On 13 July 1786, as she prepared to move to a property in Chelsea, she noted resignedly in her *Journal* 'I think I shall have more comfort there than I ever had here'. Unable to extricate herself from the obligations of her leasehold agreement, Lady Mary kept on Notting Hill House empty until the expiry of the lease in 1788. She died at Chiswick on 30 September 1811, in her eighty-

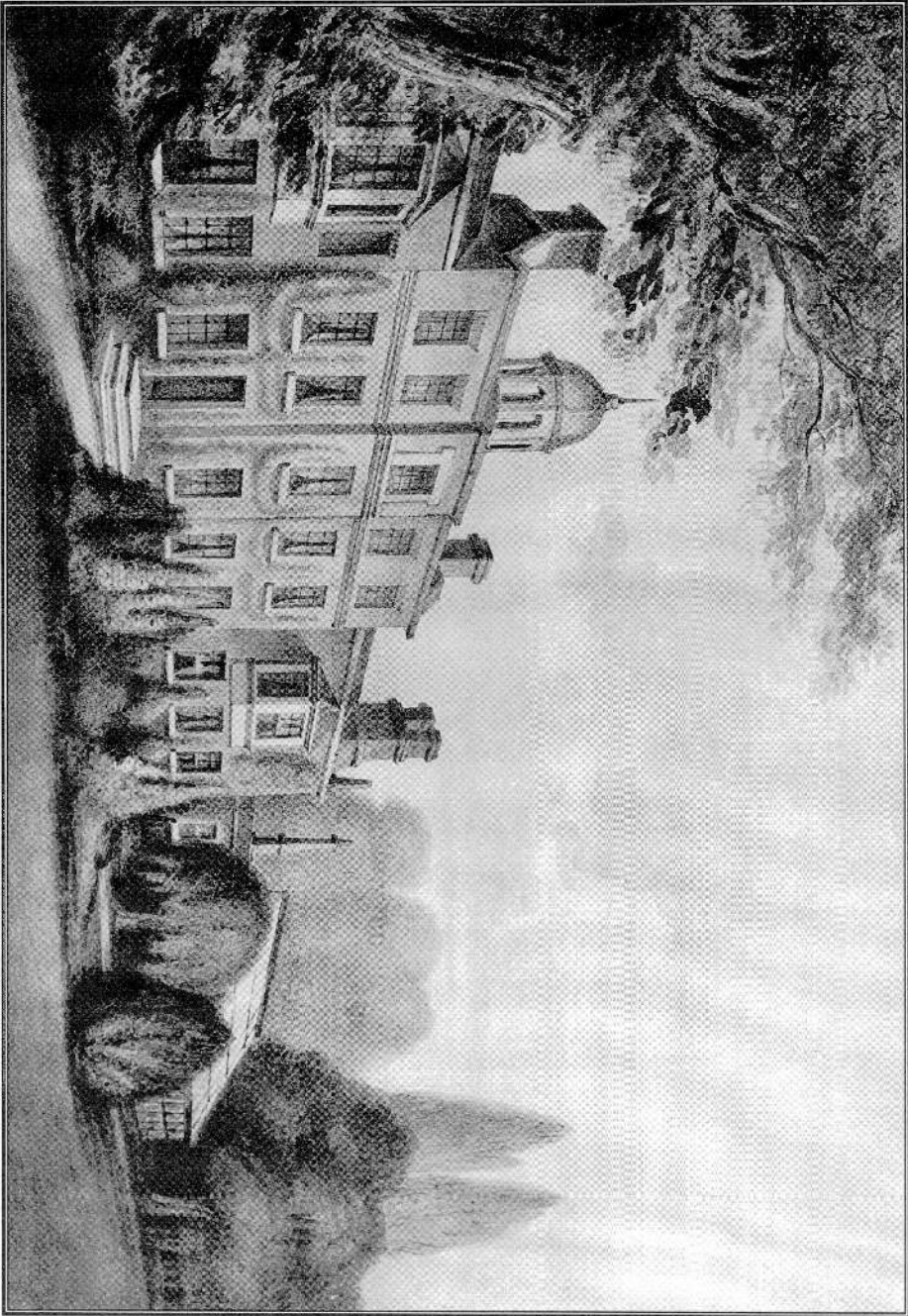
45. The plants (unaccompanied by the gardener) arrived at the Duchess's chateau, which was some forty leagues from Dieppe, after many adventures on the 27 January 1775.

46. *Journal*, 5 May 1769.

47. *Journal*, 17 June 1771.

43. *Journal*, 26 August 1771.

44. *Journal*, 18 March 1768.



34. Mrs Louisa Goldsmid's watercolour: of 1817 showing
the garden or 'south front of Notting Hill House'.
(THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA LIBRARIES AND ARTS SERVICE)

sixth year, and was buried in the Argyll vault in Henry VII's Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

What became of the house after Lady Mary's departure is unknown but in 1790 it was leased for ten years to a Miss Catherine Tutty. During her tenure it would appear that a certain retrenchment took place in the gardens, and outlying features such as the 'North Walk' were dismantled at this time.

A watercolour view by Paul Sandby looking northwards up the shady public thoroughfare of Holland Walk provides the only surviving visual evidence of the appearance of the gardens of Notting Hill House at the end of the eighteenth century. (fig. 32) The view shows the form of the south-facing bay window of the west wing visible beyond the trees that line the walk. A split-pale fence separates the pleasure from the lane, and the garden perimeter is well planted with shrubs and trees. Near the house the fence turns into a high close-boarded fence to prevent passers by looking in at the ground floor windows. Clearly little attempt had been made to improve the flimsy garden defences since Lady Mary's time.

The front court and the back garden of Notting Hill House some thirty years after Lady Mary left it are commemorated in two watercolour views painted in 1817 by Louisa Goldsmid, the married daughter of Philip de Visme who lived in the house between 1808-19.⁴⁸ The view of the entrance or 'north front of Notting Hill House' (1817) shows the house with its original pedimented doorcase and the dome of its cupola visible above the parapet. (fig. 33) To the east of the door a service wing is hidden by a shrubbery. A gravel drive leads to the entrance gate which is flanked by two tall pyramidal trees. Iron railings with arrow-head finials are visible amidst the planting around the gate.

Its pendant, Mrs Goldsmid's sketch of the garden or 'south front of Notting Hill House', shows the house with its cupola⁴⁹ and two bay windowed wings. (fig. 34) A vinery is visible to the east, and a tall chimney rises behind it. Shrubberies lie beneath the windows of the wings and a broad path runs in front of them. A large bed of shrubs lies on the lawn directly in front of the central doorway and various

trees are shown in the background, masking the service range.

In 1830, after a bewildering succession of tenants, Notting Hill House - like many large houses in Kensington - declined to the status of a girls' boarding school, which it remained until 1854. During this time the pond was filled in, most of the Kitchen Garden was appropriated by a neighbouring property, and the field to the north of the house was sold off for development. In 1851 the house once again became a private residence and was bought by Peter Alfred Taylor MP, a noted radical and philanthropist, who greatly remodelled the house renaming the premises *Aubrey House* - the name 'Notting Hill' then conjuring up insalubrious associations with slums and gravel pits.

The house changed hands again in 1873 when it was purchased by William Cleverly Alexander, the eminent banker and patron of Whistler. Alexander and his daughters - one of whom lived on at Aubrey House until 1973 - made many tasteful improvements to the garden, introducing a loggia, terraces and seats, as well as herbaceous borders celebrated for the profusion and vigour of their hollyhocks.

Although reduced in size and defended by high brick walls, the garden of Aubrey House - one of the largest private gardens in central London - remains much as it was in Lady Mary's day. It is a remarkable survival, just minutes from the urban hurly-burly of Kensington High Street, of over two acres of the historic demesne of Lady Mary's rural 'villa at Nottin' Hill'.



48. Kensington & Chelsea Public Library, Local Studies Collection, x13 (1817) & x12 (1817).

49. The cupola was removed in the late 19th.