

ruins was largely past. He reminded his audience of the sense of history and the 'nobler feelings of the sympathetic mind' stirred by Roman ruins but stressed that Gothic ruins were the most appropriate in an English setting and that for artificial ruins 'to produce pleasing sensations there must be an appearance of truth and they must recall to the mind the idea of real objects and not be considered as mere pictures'.¹⁴ Although not an archaeological reconstruction, he certainly followed his own recommendations in the construction of the artificial ruins in the Monk's Yard.

Amidst Soane's medieval ruinscape are a variety of other evocative elements: the Monk's Well and pump, cast iron vases and obelisks once used to support the oil lamps that lit Lincoln's Inn Fields before the advent of gas lighting. Fragments from the Bosanquet tomb in Leytonstone were used to form the *tomb of the monk*, and vases slightly larger but otherwise identical to the ones used to form the celebrated and controversial 'raisin jar' chimneys at Soane's own Surveyor's House at the Royal Hospital at Chelsea sit in the openings of the arcade. The floor of the Yard is formed of 'pebbles found amongst the gravel dug out for the foundation of the monastery' inset with patterns formed from bottle tops and bottle bottoms, including a cross at the foot of the Monk's Grave.¹⁵ As in the Monument Court, Soane constructed a series of picturesque skylines and vistas in the Monk's Yard designed to be seen from various windows and he created a passage linking the Monk's Yard to the Monument Court with the *pasticcio* and the column of Fanny's tomb on the axis. (figs. 6, 7)

The sentiment behind the Monk's Parlour and Yard seems to have been the creation of spaces primarily for amusement, speculation and pleasure, in contrast to the more educational tone of the Monument Court. The poetic description written by Soane's friend Barbara Hofland, which, since Soane intersperses it with his own text in the last edition of the *Description*, must have met with his approval, speaks of the 'pleasure we should receive' in the 'Monk's retreat'. Her tongue-in-cheek commentary notes luxuries in the

parlour which 'do not quite accord with the simplicity and voluntary poverty demanded of conventual life' and her description of the pebble and bottle-top paving of the yard, 'in constructing which the good old man amused his leisure', ends with the wry aside - 'but where did the good monk get so many bottles wherewith to aid his innocent labours?'¹⁶ Soane's own description concludes with the Latin quotation '*Dulce est desipere in loco* (it is sweet to be silly in such a place).'¹⁷

Despite the stress in Soane's description and in Mrs. Hofland's account on the pleasurable and satirical aspects of the Monk's Parlour and Yard, there may be an undercurrent of Soane's identification of himself as a lonely hermit figure, abandoned by his sons after the death of his wife in 1815. '*Padre Giovanni* the solitary hermit is, after all, an eponym on his own name and Fanny his own companion in his solitude.

Today Soane's courtyards are in a sorry state. The *pasticcio* was removed in 1896 (although three large sections survive) and the works of art are caked in many layers of paint or, in the case of the mediaeval ruins, crumbling gently into dust. Sir John Soane's Museum is applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund for monies to restore the sculpture and consolidate the ruins - without losing, it is hoped, their 'mouldering' picturesque quality. The result should be to re-open the courtyards to the public. The boiler room that currently blocks the passage between them will be removed and Soane's *pasticcio*, the symbolic centrepiece of his Monument Court, will be rebuilt. The two courtyards should in the future once again inspire the imaginations that Soane hoped would be stimulated by his union of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting in his Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

WHAT FUTURE for SEVERNDROOG CASTLE, SHOOTERS HILL?

By Ralph Hyde

Samuel Leigh, in his *New Picture of London* (1824), urged his readers to catch the coach from Charing Cross in the West End or Gracechurch Street in the City

14. David Watkin, *Sir John Soane: Enlightenment, Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures* (1996), p. 626.

15. *Description* (1835), pp. 26-7.

16. *Description* (1835), pp. 27, 28.

17. *Description* (1835), p. 27.

and make off for Shooters Hill. From its summit, 410 feet above low water mark, you could admire the fine view of London, as well as Essex, Surrey and even parts of Sussex. *London and its Environs, or the General Ambulator* (1820) promised that 'the Thames also exhibits a magnificent appearance'.

The best spot on Shooters Hill for enjoying this magnificent view was the viewing platform on the roof of Severndroog Castle. This triangular-planned tower, erected in Shooters Hill woods in 1784 by Lady James of nearby Eltham, served to celebrate the exploits of her late husband, Sir William James. (*fig. 9*) In 1755-56, when Commander-in-Chief of the East India Company's fleet, Sir William attacked and took a strong fort belonging to Angria the pirate on Severndroog Island off the Malabar coast. Severndroog Castle on Shooters Hill, designed by Richard Jupp, Surveyor to the East India Company, features on prints from the River, and inspired a local poet, Robert Bloomfield, to muse:

This far-seen monumental tower
Records the achievements of the Brave;
And Angria' subjugated power,
Who plundered on the eastern wave.
I would not that such turrets rise
To point out where my bones are laid;
Save that some wandering bard might prize
The comforts of its broad cool shade!

Actually, Sir William James's bones are laid in Eltham Church, and the spot soon became a happy venue for picnic parties rather than wandering bards. Within the tower, visitors climbing the spiral staircase through three rooms, one above the other, could inspect a collection of trophies taken from the robber castle, and paintings of the East India Fleet and the assault on Severndroog on the vaulted ceiling of the first floor. By 1869, however, a Greenwich printer, Henry Richardson, found the interior whitewashed and complained that there was little left of its original design.

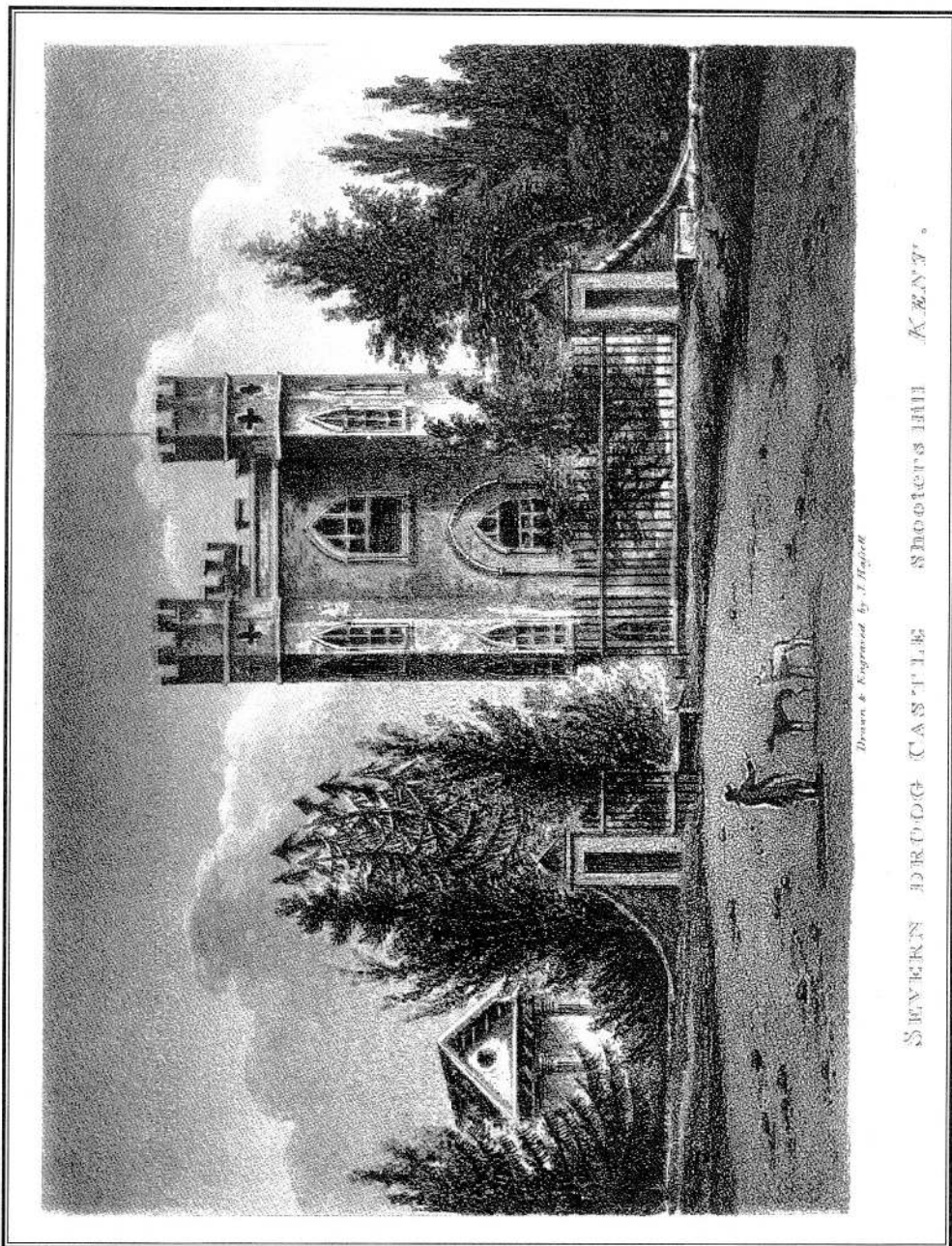
In the early years of the twentieth century Severndroog Castle and Castlewood belonged to Mr E. Proby Godson. In his will, Godson stipulated that the Castle and grounds should be offered to the London County Council for £21,000. When he died in 1915 the LCC balked at paying out such a huge amount of money, but the Metropolitan Boroughs of Bermondsey, Deptford, Greenwich,

Lewisham and Woolwich came to the rescue, each contributing modest sums. Castlewood was transferred to the LCC in November 1922 and Jackwood, abutting to the east, was acquired the following year. With Eltham Common, the combined area is generally referred to nowadays as Oxleas Woods. Since the break-up of the Greater London Council, Oxleas Woods have been the responsibility of the cash-strapped London Borough of Greenwich.

So, what of Severndroog Castle now? When the LCC and the GLC managed the Castle, its entrance vestibule served in the summer months as a refreshment bar. For a spell there was a tearoom on the first floor. In the 1930s you could still buy a penny ticket from the refreshment caterer, Mr Spiceley, and climb the spiral staircase to the ramparts and admire the view. Sadly, not now.

Severndroog Castle is today boarded up. Graffiti must periodically be scrubbed off its outside walls. Monitoring the building at night is impossible, so vandals are free to do their worst. Although the roof and the three floors are sound, the interior is in a lamentable decorative condition. The building is listed, and the London Borough of Greenwich, chivvied by the Eltham Society and working with a Shooters Hill Woodland Working Party, is now seriously looking for a partnership to take on this awkward-shaped tower and run it as an amenity. A report listing options from the Property Manager to the Council's Executive Committee is due to be considered in the spring of 2000.

Discussion with Council Officers convinces me that the London Borough of Greenwich is anxious to do the right thing. The Castle really ought to be what it was originally intended to be – an observation point for admiring the panorama of London. Whether it could ever be made regularly accessible for that purpose is highly unlikely: fire regulations would call for an exterior fire escape, which would mortally injure its appearance. Not long ago the Council considered allowing its conversion into a residence, but there were no takers. How do you furnish triangular rooms? And who would want to live in such a creepy spot? Provided funding can be found, perhaps it could be made into a local history exhibition venue, as some have been suggesting for the



9. 'Severn Droog Castle, Shooters Hill, Kent.' (c.1820-25)
(COURTESY GUILDHALL MUSEUM)

last sixteen years – or a natural history interpretation centre? There seems to be no easy answer.

Since this article was written, the London Borough of Greenwich has put Severndroog Castle up for sale inviting offers above one pence.

LE ROUGE'S SION HILL:

A GARDEN by BROWN

by John Harris

Very rarely is a house and its estate entirely obliterated by urban development; at the very least new roads may follow the configuration of a park wall. If we stand on the London Road with our backs to Robert Adam's grand gateway to Syon House, old Syon Lane opposite has some stretches of Georgian wall. A few hundred yards further westwards is Marlborough Park Cottage, so named after the family who bought the Sion Hill estate in the 1790s, and further along still is the Pine House, built c.1760 for Lord Holderness's steward. In fact, we are at the southern edge of an unsung garden by Capability Brown, and large areas of his grassy sward are to be found in the triangle of the Marlborough Training Centre and its playing fields. The gateway to Sion Hill house is on Syon Lane and a conduit is on Rothbury Gardens.

Prior to Brown's improvements, Sion Hill was the favourite summer garden of James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos, who lived here until 1704 on lease from the 6th Duke of Somerset, delighting in his garden which contained a celebrated fountain.¹

Georges-Louis Le Rouge's great engraved compendium of twenty *cabiers*, *Détails de nouveaux jardins à la mode*, or *Jardins Anglo-Chinois à la Mode*, first began to appear in 1775. The second *cabier* (also published in 1775) was mostly devoted to British gardens: Kew, Esher, Claremont, Wimbledon, Wilton, Blair Castle, and, as plate 8, a unique engraved sur-

vey of Sion Hill, Middlesex.² (fig. 10)

The story behind some of Le Rouge's British gardens has never been told.³ In the first *cabier* M. Boutin's English garden at Tivoli near Paris of c.1771 is followed by the design of an English garden made by the Prince de Croy 'à son Retour de Londres'. Then in the second *cabier* the Comtesse de Bouffler's garden at the Hôtel de St Simon near the Temple in Paris – a Brownian-style garden that must take priority in France – is preceded by a plan of Sion Hill made by Jean Baptiste André, architect to the Prince de Conti.⁴ This latter garden is unusual in that the survey of the garden was accompanied by a detailed plan of the house.⁵ This can be reconstructed by the amalgamation of several documents. It possessed a westerly, villa-style front, fenestrated one-three-one with the central three projecting as a deep canted bay, behind which was a feature unique in English Georgian planning – a three-part saloon or drawing room domed in the centre. Wright's Post Map of 1801 shows a tall cylindrical cupola with a domed top and the whole southern flank of the house as a plain pedimented astylar villa front of five bays and three storey and a lower five-bay, two-storey extension for the offices extending to the east. Le Rouge's *Milord Holderness* was Robert Darcy, 4th Earl of Holderness, who is known to garden historians as a signatory supporting Capability Brown's petition in 1758 for a royal appointment. Without any doubt, Le Rouge shows a plan of a garden by Brown.

Le Rouge is not the only source for a plan of Sion Hill. Two other surveys can be consulted: Sauthier's made in c.1787 and C. Greenwood's *Map of the County of Middlesex from an Actual Survey made in The Years 1818 &*

1. Stephen Switzer refers to a water pump engine which made a fountain play at Sion Hill. See *Hydrostatics* (1729), vol. II, p. 334. For a description of Brydges's house and garden see C.H. Collins Baker and Muriel I. Baker, *The Life and Circumstances of James Brydges First Duke of Chandos* (1949), pp. 63-5.

2. Bernard Korzus's study of Prince Bentheim's annotated Le Rouge will not only deal with the fascinating matter of how Le Rouge had access to so many unpublished drawings and surveys of gardens, but will include a *catalogue raisonné* of all Le Rouge's engraved work.

3. This will be remedied in John Harris's study of the British gardens included in Le Rouge's *Cabiers* as part of Bernard Korzus's work.

4. The Comtesse de Bouffler's garden at the Hôtel de St Simon was laid out by the Scottish gardener Mr Prescott. The Comtesse had another English garden at Auteuil, described by Walpole in 1775 as 'strictly English'. André also drew details at Kew, had access to unpublished material on Wimbledon Park, and copied unpublished designs by Brown for Buckingham House. The intermediary was almost certainly Sir William Chambers.

5. Le Rouge's plan is obviously incompletely presented. The rooms are enumerated, but no legend exists. He also includes three details: of *Fourneaux* or boilers; of a *Gardmanger* that must be a *garde manger* or form of meat or food safe; and a section through the *baquets* or laundry troughs.