

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.

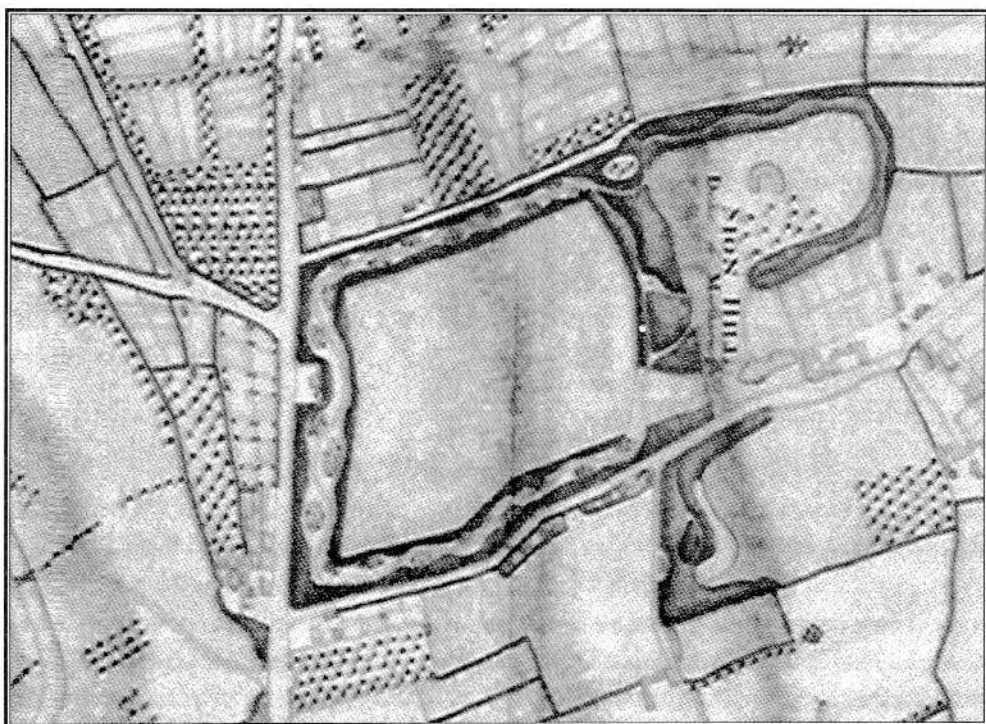
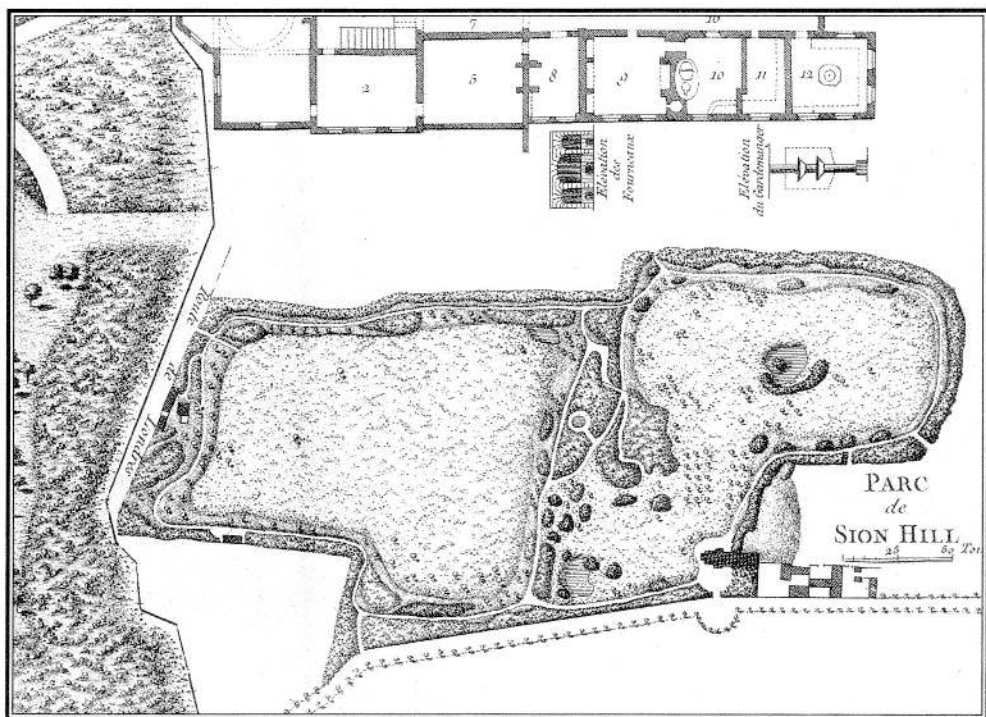
2. Bernard Korzus's study of Prince Bentheim's annotated Le Rouge will not only deal with the fascinating matter of how Le Rouge had access to so many unpublished drawings and surveys of gardens, but will include a *catalogue raisonné* of all Le Rouge's engraved work.

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.

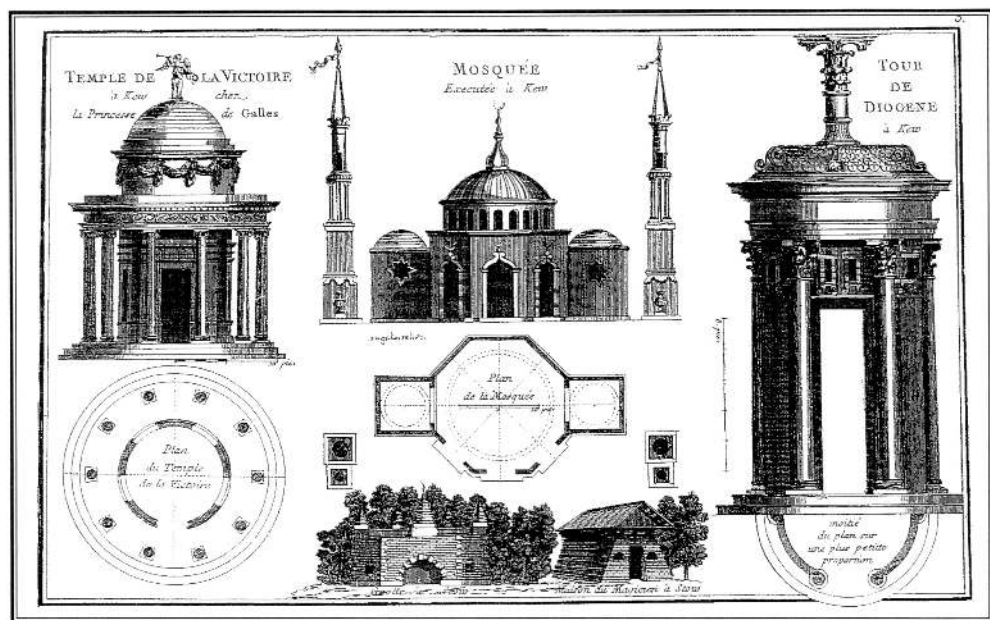
5. Le Rouge's plan is obviously incompletely presented. The rooms are enumerated, but no legend exists. He also includes three details: of *Fourneaux* or boilers; of a *Gardmanger* that must be a *garde manger* or form of meat or food safe; and a section through the *baquets* or laundry troughs.

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10. *Parc de Sion Hill* published in Louis Le Rouge's *Cabier* no. 2: *Détails de nouveaux jardins à la mode, or Jardins Anglo-Chinois à la Mode* (1775) (PRIVATE COLLECTION)

11. Detail of Sauthier's *The Manor of Ilseworth* (1780-85) showing the landscape plan of Sion Hill (COURTESY, HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND)



12. Ruins of Marlborough House, formerly *Sion Hill*, Isleworth (June 1829)
(HOUNSLOW LOCAL STUDIES LIBRARY)

13. The *Tour de Diogene à Kew* is illustrated in Le Rouge's *Cabier 2*, plate 3, accompanying images from Kew and Stowe.

A plan and elevation are reproduced as plates 7-8.

John Harris proposes that Diogene's Tower, based on Stuart's *Tower of Lynceus*, was actually at *Sion Hill*, and not at Kew.

Le Rouge may have labelled the drawing incorrectly on his return to France
(PRIVATE COLLECTION)

1819.⁶ (fig. 11) Both confirm the authenticity of Le Rouge. South of the London Road between Hounslow and Brentford is Lord Northumberland's Syon Park. North of it, opposite the present junction with the Twickenham Road, is the southern edge of Sion Hill. In fact, the modern Syon Lane now cuts through the site of Sion Hill, and Syon Lane station is in the centre of its park. Indeed, the school playing fields here are designed by Brown! According to Cary's *Actual Survey of the Country Fifteen Miles Around London*, in 1800 three estates conjoined: Sion Hill, then belonging to the Duke of Marlborough, Wyck House, to 'Robinson Esq', and Osterley, to Lord Westmorland. By the 1829 edition of Paterson's *Roads*, Sion Hill was unoccupied. In fact, 1829 is the date inscribed on Almond's lithograph view of the 'Ruins of Marlborough House. Adams, Isleworth, June 1829'. This provides a unique view across the park from the west showing the canted front of the house in ruins.⁷ (fig. 12)

To understand Sion Hill better, Le Rouge's map needs to be turned vertical with the *Route de Londres* at the bottom. Two entrances off the London Road may have served the farm. This is the southern end of a large two-part pleasure ground surrounded by a peripheral walk. An oblong building on the south east walk could be a greenhouse. What is striking is the unusual ornamental variety in the planting. The walks are all enlivened on the inner sides with shrubberies, presumably with flower planting, to be seen in a little more detail on Sauthier's survey. Between the path and the inner rougher lawn seem to be low trees planted on closer cropped grass. In the northerly end of the garden a club-foot-shaped pond of 'not well coloured water' is shown. This area opening from the house may be what the Duchess of Northumberland described as a 'walk round the field taken off with a rope & a border of flowers on ye country side', whereas the southern area on the London Road may be what she described as a 'Hay field' with a view 'entirely rural & pleasing'. She also refers to the 'Dutch gardener' and the 'prodigious

amount of kitchen gardening [in the] Dutch style', as would behove Lady Holderness – born Mary Doublet of Groeneweldt.⁸ It is evident from Arthur Young's *Farmer's Tour through the East of England* (1771) that Holderness was an enthusiastic agriculturist, and expert in the use of 'cleaned dressed hay seeds, white clover and trefoile', and a grower of prize Newbury cabbages. It would appear that Holderness and Brown collaborated to create a true *ferme ornée*.

At Syon House across the Brentford Road, the earliest payments to Brown are recorded in 1754–55.⁹ Thus he was *in situ* when Holderness became a neighbour in the latter year. Between 14th September 1756 and 27th April 1762, Holderness had paid Brown the very large sum of £1,525.¹⁰ Of course, this might not all be for Sion Hill, but it is likely since this novel Brownian garden is a new one. In August 1757, William Chambers was appointed architect to Augusta, Dowager Princess of Wales at Kew Gardens, and architectural tutor to George, Prince of Wales. By September, active plans were being drawn up for the making of the Princess's new garden – all under the superintendence of her advisor, John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute. (fig. 13) In its two-part peripheral arrangement and in the *gardenesque* character of the planting and content, Sion Hill would seem to prefigure Kew – and like Kew it is a relatively small garden, just 800 yards from north to south. However, such suggested priorities might be described as a 'close run thing' because Brown was already involved with Lord Bute.

Presumably, if garden works began about a year after purchase, the new villa must have been commenced around the same time. But what of its architect? Later, at Holderness House in Hertford Street, Lord Holderness employed James Stuart, as he did in Yorkshire at Hornby Castle (c.1760–65), where the redecoration of the Great Hall was in his idiosyncratic style. As Le Rouge shows, the incoherent planning at the rear of the villa may reflect

6. Sauthier's Map is at Syon House. For an analysis of Greenwood's Map see John Harris, 'A Soliloquy on a Middlesex Map', *The London Gardener*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, pp. 17–18.

7. I am grateful to James Marshall, Local Studies Librarian at Hounslow Library, for access to his files. The inscription on the Almond lithograph is modern.

8. The Duchess of Northumberland's comments are cited in Victoria Percy and Gervase Jackson-Stops, 'From parterres to precipices' (the travel journals of the 1st Duchess of Northumberland), *Country Life*, 14 February 1974. Her visit to Sion took place some time between 1755–1763.

9. Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (1975).

10. I am grateful to Giles Worsley for information from Holderness accounts in preparation for his account of James Stuart's work at Hornby Castle, Yorkshire (*Country Life*, 29 June 1989).

a conversion into offices of an earlier house. However, it is possible that as at Nuneham Park, Oxfordshire, built by Stiff Leadbetter for Lord Harcourt (from 1756), Stuart was making internal improvements for Holderness only a few years after this new house had been begun. Indeed, the villa plan of Sion Hill with its canted bay and conventional staircase is a plan favoured by Leadbetter.¹¹ Robertson in his *Topographical Survey of The Great Road from London to Bath* (1792) described the house as 'built at great expense, though without any magnificence or show'. It is possible that Stuart's work at Sion Hill fits in between September 1755 when he was at Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire, and 1758 when he was at Hagley.¹²

We know from Almond's revealing lithograph that by 1829 the house was a ruin. (fig. 13) The Marlboroughs had long fled before the South Western Railway was extended to include Isleworth in 1849, bisecting the park. In 1850 there was no house or park for William Keane to describe in his *Beauties of Middlesex*.

LONDON'S RUN-DOWN PARKS

by Dame Jennifer Jenkins

London's municipal parks have suffered from the neglect and under-funding that has afflicted those in other parts of the country, the position made worse by the transfer of parks owned by the Greater London Council to the Metropolitan Boroughs with smaller resources in money and professional staff. In this article I look at four parks which have fallen into decay, but are soon to be restored with the help of grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Among the earliest concerns of the Metropolitan Board of Works, which was set

up in 1855 to provide services for Londoners, was the lack of open spaces. Finsbury and Southwark, densely packed parts of the city, were identified as the districts in greatest need and in 1869 the two parks were opened. Both were the responsibility of Alexander McKenzie, who had landscaped the grounds of Alexandra Palace before moving to the Board. He saw his duties in a wide perspective, writing that he had 'devoted much attention to the best mode of improving the British Metropolis, with a view first, to the health of its dense population, and next, in order to render it somewhat more worthy of comparison with France than it is at present.' Aware no doubt of Haussmann's spectacular public works in Paris, he published proposals for a vast increase in the number of suburban parks and for a network of tree-lined avenues throughout the capital.

A park had been planned north of Finsbury in 1850 but it was sixteen years before work started and then on forty-seven hectares, a smaller area than had been envisaged. It included pleasure gardens, which had been advertised for sale some years earlier as 'commanding one of the most delightful panoramic views...pleasingly varied with finely and stately grown trees...and a beautiful expanse of water, well stocked with fish and bounded on one side by the far-famed sylvan retreat, Hornsey Wood'. Within boundaries formed by the Great Northern Railway to the west and main roads to the south and east, the land was still farmed. The New River, constructed in the seventeenth century to bring water into London, ran through the north east corner.

McKenzie planned a fairly simple layout, enlarging the lake on the high ground in the centre, incorporating parts of Hornsey Wood, and creating large expanses of open parkland punctuated by carefully sited clumps of trees and shrubberies, all encircled by tree-lined carriageways. (fig. 14) Within this informal landscape were a refreshment room, a playground, a flower garden with an 'American Garden' of rhododendrons and other large shrubs. (fig. 15) A cricket pitch was sited on the further side of the New River. By the outbreak of World War I a number of popular attractions had been added, including a bandstand, a chrysanthemum house, a conservatory and a small aviary. Almost every conceivable sport was catered

11. For instance, Langley Park, Bucks, 1756.

12. As Worsley observes in *Country Life*, in correspondence dated 4 October 1990, Stuart had certainly designed the chimney piece in the drawing room (maybe the same as the domed room?) c.1760. Arthur Young is more descriptive of the interior: 'the apartments are excellently disposed: a dining room 22 by 18...drawing room 15 by 20, with a bow; the chimney [by Stuart] of white marble...Ionic pillars of Siena Marble...breakfast room, and a handsome library. In the attic stor[e]y are three bed-chambers and three dressing-rooms. Lady Holderness's is elegantly furnished: the chimney piece white marble, with fluted Ionic pillars of Siena[a]; in the frieze a tablet, representing painting and sculpture, neatly executed. Over it a glass in gilt ornaments, very light, intermixed with porcelain figures...Her ladyship's dairy is extremely well contrived for coolness'. The Duchess of Northumberland remarked that Lord Holderness's dressing room opened in to the garden. Arthur Young, *Farmer's Tour through the East of England* (1771).