

HESTER THRALE-PIOZZI (1741–1821)
AT STREATHAM PARK AND BRYNBELLA
By Sally Miller

'Mr Thrale has a fruit garden and Kitchen gardens
that may vye with the Hesperians gardens for
fruit and flowers.'¹

When Elizabeth Montagu wrote this to a friend in August 1777, any educated person in polite society would have understood the classical reference to the golden apples of the Garden of the Hesperides (*fig. 69*). In the early eighteenth century the myth characterised the gardens of the wealthy where exotic plants and fruits were grown in heated houses, especially oranges and lemons which:

Were the fam'd Hesperian Fruits of old,
Both Plants alike, ripe fruit and Blossoms hold.²

Mr Henry Thrale (*fig. 70*) was indeed a wealthy man and his country villa at Streatham Park was where his wife Hester Thrale (née Salusbury) (*fig. 71*) presided over a salon whose leading member was Dr. Samuel Johnson (a semi-permanent guest at Streatham Park in the 1770s) and which included Elizabeth Montagu, Fanny Burney (Mme D'Arblay), Oliver Goldsmith, David Garrick, Edmund Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds and others.³ Thrale commissioned Reynolds to paint his family and their eminent guests, portraits which hung in the library at Streatham Park until they were sold in 1816.⁴

Streatham Park is remembered now only for its link to Dr Johnson and for Hester Thrale's record of her life. From 1764 until the death of her second husband in 1809, Hester wrote six volumes she called *Thraliana*: part diary, part commonplace book. The entries jump randomly from the day's events to reminiscence, poetry, moral tales, anecdotes of or by Johnson, the political scene and the gossip circulating among the members of her

salon.⁵

This article seeks to record the gardens at Streatham Park as Hester remembered or observed them and to explore her life in Wales after her second marriage to Gabriel Piozzi.

History of the gardens

Streatham Park reflected the lifestyle of the increasingly well-off middling classes in England in the second half of the eighteenth century. It occupied a triangle of land on the south side of Tooting Bec Common in what is now the London Borough of Lambeth. Previously part of the Manor of Tooting Bec (property of the Dukes of Bedford), a house and gardens existed there until the mid-nineteenth century. In 1880, the house gone, the last remaining vestige of the garden disappeared under suburban development.

The first half of the eighteenth century saw a dramatic expansion in commercial activity in England. The 'middling orders' were the immediate beneficiaries and material prosperity led to more social mobility and changes in lifestyle, fashion and manners.⁶ The wealthy merchants of London, rather than continuing to live above the shop, began to buy land in more salubrious areas while still within striking distance of their businesses.⁷ The districts of Tooting and Streatham surrounded by commons were 'wholesome, green and exceedingly rural'⁸ but crucially only six miles from London Bridge, the only river crossing until Westminster Bridge was opened in 1750. A villa with pleasure ground and modest park provided the appropriate setting for participation in polite society. At Streatham Park an early formal garden was swept away in the 1770s by a Repton-esque garden of shrubberies and winding gravel walks, and huge kitchen gardens.

Henry Thrale (1728–1781) was the only son of Ralph Thrale (1698–1758) who was Head Clerk of the Anchor Brewery in Southwark

1. Reginald Blunt (ed), *Mrs Montagu "Queen of the Blues", Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*, Vol.2, 1777–1800 (London, Bombay & Sydney: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1923).

2. Abraham Cowley, *Plantarum the third and last book in the works of Mr Abraham Cowley, including his six books of plants I*, (London, 1721), p.396.

3. Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com/ref:odnb/22309 accessed 20.05.2022.

4. Various letters dated May 1816 record preparations for the sale of the contents of the house. Archives of the London Borough of Lambeth, call no. iv/66/4.

5. Held at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. An annotated version (two volumes) edited by Katherine C. Balderston was published by Clarendon Press in 1942 and 1952.

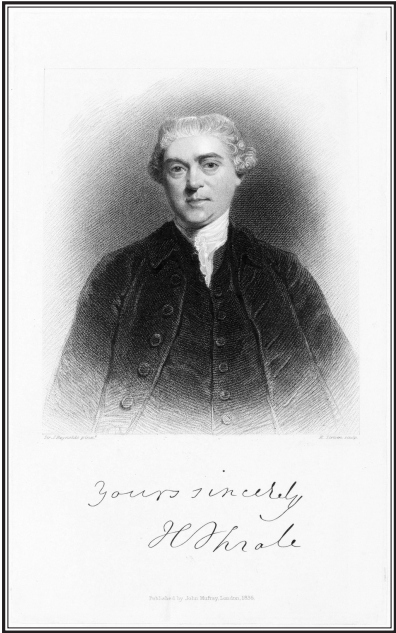
6. Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth century*, (London and New York: Arnold and Oxford University Press Inc., 1997), pp.109–110.

7. John Summerson, *Georgian London*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.321.

8. C.E. Vulliamy, *Mrs Thrale of Streatham*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), p.49.



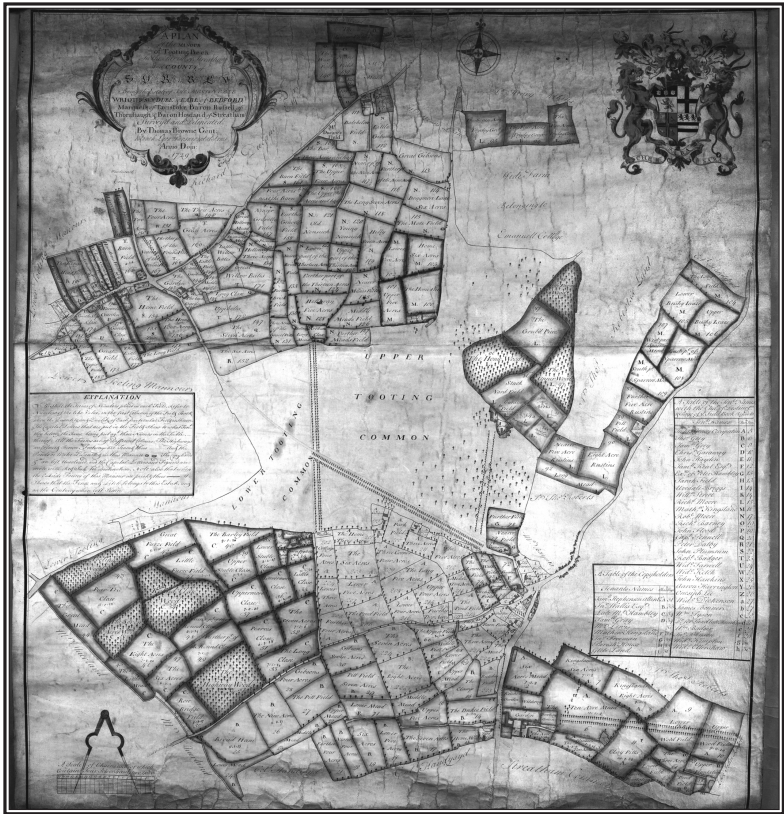
69. *The Garden of the Hesperides*, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, oil on canvas, c.1869-1873
(PUBLIC DOMAIN, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



70. *Henry Thrale*, stipple engraving by Edward Scriven, after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1777), published by John Samuel Murray, London, 1836 (© NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON, D14412)

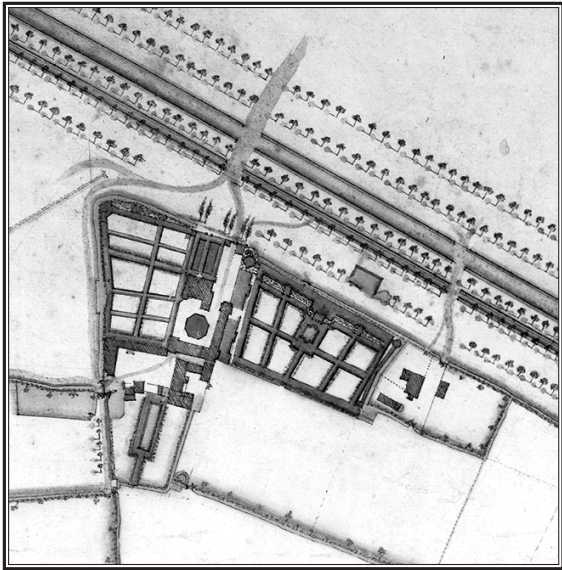
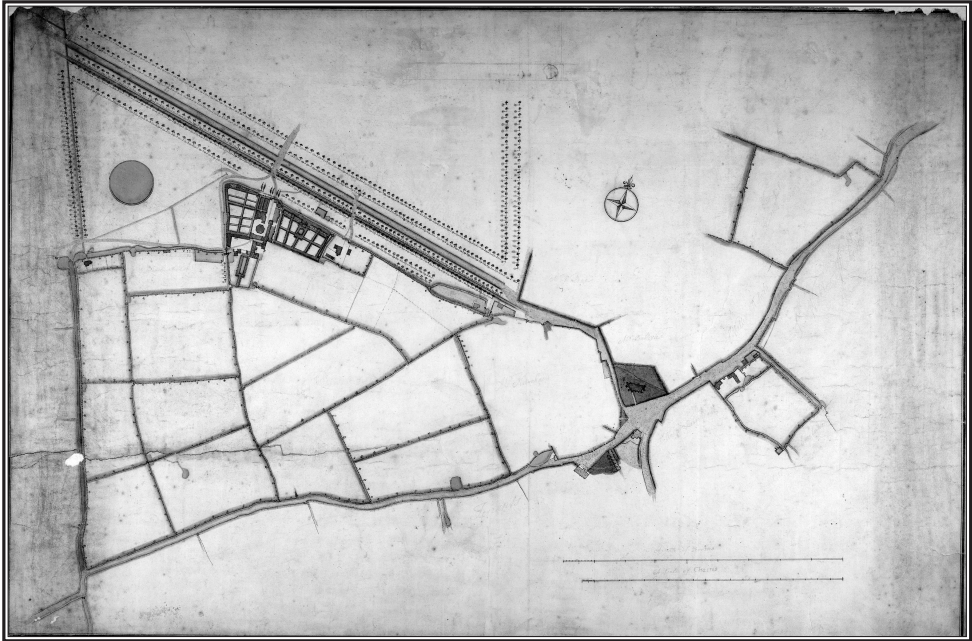
71. *Mrs Thrale*, engraving by E Finden, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, c.1774, (BY PERMISSION OF LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU - NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES)

HESTER THRALE-PIOZZI AT STREATHAM PARK AND BRYNBELLA



72. 'A Plan of the Manor of Tooting Beck in the Parish of Streatham and County of Surrey, Being the Estate of The Most Noble Wriothesley, Duke & Earl of Bedford... Survey'd and Delineated by Thomas Browne, Gent., 1729' (LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES, CITY OF LONDON, E/BER/S/E5/3/1, BEDFORD ESTATE COLLECTION)

73. Detail of FIG. 72 above showing the land that Ralph Thrale leased in 1735
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES, CITY OF LONDON, E/BER/S/Es/3/1, BEDFORD ESTATE COLLECTION)



74. 'Mr Thrale's Estate at Streatham', n.d. ?1770
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES E/BER/S/5/3/2, BEDFORD ESTATE COLLECTION)

75. Detail of 'Mr Thrale's Estate at Streatham', ?1770
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES E/BER/S/5/3/2, BEDFORD ESTATE COLLECTION)

until eventually he bought it outright. Henry was born into affluence: sent to Oxford with a generous allowance of £1000 a year and then on a Grand Tour with an aristocratic companion whose expenses were paid by his father.⁹

About 1735 Ralph Thrale purchased a lease on 100 acres of land in the Manor of Tooting Bec from the Bedford estate. A map of 1729 and the accompanying Field Book show there were already buildings on the site: Streatham House, Outhouses and Gardens, fields, meadow, plantations and clay pits totalling just over 87 acres.¹⁰ It is this land plus the triangle of common land between the prominent avenues that was leased to Ralph Thrale (*fig. 72*).

The west-pointing 'arrowhead' of trees is the most striking feature of the plan. The double avenue (diagonal) is said to have been planted to celebrate a visit by Elizabeth I in 1600.¹¹ The south boundary of Thrale's land is marked by the road from Streatham village (later Mitcham Lane). Streatham House is shown with a forecourt, between a Garden to the west (199) and Park Field to the east (200). Behind it are Outhouses and to the south of those is a rectangular feature: the map Explanation shows this as water, possibly a small formal canal associated with the garden (*fig. 73*).

Our next view is a plan entitled 'Mr Thrale's Estate at Streatham' undated but marked on the back 'circa 1770'¹² (*fig. 74*). The double avenue of trees still slices diagonally across the plan bordering the road from Streatham to Tooting with a footpath within the double row on the south. A track crosses the road towards a line of six trees in three pairs. Between the eastern pairs of trees there is an entrance flanked by small buildings and leading to a courtyard of service buildings at the rear of the house. There is a hexagon-shaped grass plat in the courtyard. More service buildings enclose another courtyard to

the south. The rectangular water feature is still there, enclosed by grass paths with an extension south to the field boundary: there are suggestions of planting along the paths and boundaries and it now looks more like a formal garden. In front of the house there is a small courtyard of two grass plats; a gate flanked by piers leads out to the common.

To the west of the house is the area marked 'garden' on the 1729 map. This now appears as a partially-walled area divided by gravel or grass paths into ten irregularly sized compartments. This may have been a formal garden in 1729 but now seems to be a kitchen garden.

To the east of the house is the most interesting feature: a formal garden has appeared since 1729 on part of the Park Field (*fig. 75*). It is lozenge-shaped measuring 73 metres on the north by 60 metres on the south and about 40 metres across its central access. It is divided by what must be grass paths (if they are hedges there is no entrance into the garden) into eight large and four smaller compartments of varying sizes to fit the site. In the centre there is a small ornamental pond set in a rectangular grass plat. Overlooking the pool is a structure which may be a summer house. Leading off the north-west corner of this garden is a curious grass 'comma' surrounded by planting, which may indicate a small mount. In the north-east corner a small circle is linked to the south-east corner by an angled grass path.

This formal garden is intriguing but did it exist? It may have been made for Ralph Thrale (he was known to be a lavish spender, depleting the brewery's profits for some years before his death)¹³ but no supporting evidence has been found. Apart from the scale there is no other written information on the plan, which despite the detail is otherwise clearly unfinished. It may have been a 'vanity' project for Henry Thrale, but if the date is about right, the formality would make it a very old-fashioned garden to be planning in 1770. Just one reference in *Thraliana* suggests that it did, at least in part, exist.

9. *Henry Thrale, brewer and politician*, www.oxforddnb.com/ref:odnb/50467 accessed 20.05.2022.

10. Call nos. E/BER/S/L/009 and E/BER/S/Es/3/1, London Metropolitan Archives.

11. Conservation Area Character Statements: Streatham Park, Wandsworth Borough Council.

12. Call no. E/BER/S/Es/3/2, London Metropolitan Archives.

13. Peter Mathias, *Henry Thrale, brewer and politician*, odnb.

Hester arrives at Streatham

Hester Salusbury was born in North Wales to a well-connected Anglo-Welsh family, an ancestry of which she was very proud. She was intelligent, well-educated, vivacious and the acknowledged heir of a childless uncle; however, her prospects were blighted by the uncle's subsequent re-marriage. Her mother pressed an advantageous match on her, despite her father's determination she should not be 'exchanged for a barrel of porter'. His death removed the objection and Hester was bartered to wealthy London brewer Henry Thrale in 1763 at the age of twenty-two.

It was a loveless match which deeply embittered Hester. She resented the endless pregnancies, thirteen between 1764 and 1778, producing twelve children, only four of whom survived to maturity. Thrale was distant and continued his life as a man about town, based in his town house near the Brewery in Deadman's Place, Southwark.¹⁴ He installed Hester (and her mother) at Streatham Park where she was valued only as a vivacious and ornamental hostess. Shut away from the world, she lived, as Johnson later remarked, like Thrale's kept mistress. Her study was a solace and a retreat from the nursery, and her writing supplied both an intellectual and an emotional outlet.¹⁵

Much later in life Hester recalled her arrival at Streatham: 'and what a house it was then! A little squeezed miserable Place with a wretched Court before it, and all those noble Elm trees out upon the Common'.¹⁶ In 1791 she recalled it as it was when her eldest daughter was born in 1764:

Here there was *then* neither Lawn, nor Pond nor Shrubbery without doors..... but a little tidy Brick House with four walls and a little Garden before it up to the Great Elm Trees, and there a *Gate*. The Park divided into Fields or Closes and all the Pleasure Ground *Common*.¹⁷

This description fits with the house and forecourt we see on the 1729 plan.

Thraliana records very little about the gardens during Henry Thrale's life. Hester was occupied with those pregnancies and, after meeting Dr Johnson in 1764, with her salon. Hester's effervescent volubility was the perfect foil for Johnson's erudite pronouncements. Thrale also enjoyed Johnson's company, relishing instigating and provoking a war of words between clever combatants.¹⁸ It is clear from records and plans that through the 1770s Thrale was making many alterations to the house, in part to accommodate Dr Johnson's frequent visits. For sixteen years Johnson, an exhausting and demanding house guest, was highly dependent on the care and comfort given him by the Thrales.

A sketch dated in the early 1770s shows a plain three storey brick house with balustraded roof and attic dormers.¹⁹ By 1775 a bay of two new rooms had been added for Dr Johnson's use.²⁰ (figs. 76 & 77) Two wings were also added. There are several illustrations of the enlarged house and these accord very well with a photograph taken just before the house was demolished in 1863 (fig. 78).

Hester and the gardens

Thrale was also making changes to the gardens and Hester occasionally records her irritation, as on 10TH February 1779:

I am sorry that Mr Thrale has such a Spirit of Alteration; it vexes me to see the old Seats my Mother used to sit in taken away, and the Mount poor Harry used to crawl up levelled with the Ground; the place may look finer for ought I know but I can associate no Ideas to it in its present State.²¹

Harry was the eldest son who died in 1776 at the age of nine; Hester's mother died in 1773. The reference to a Mount may suggest that the formal garden did exist but was being demolished in the late 1770s.

The Bedford Estate papers contain a few sketch plans showing land transactions between the Duke of Bedford and Henry Thrale. Some are undated but all are estimated

14. The Brewery was situated in a 9-acre compound, with the clerks' quarters, store houses, vaults and vats, dung pits and stabling for nearly 100 horses.

15. Hester Lynch Piozzi www.oxforddnb.com/ref:odnb/22309 accessed 20.05.2022.

16. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana, The diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi), 1776-1809* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), p.782.

17. *Ibid.*, p.822.

18. Francis Burney, *Memoirs of Dr Burney*, vol. 2, 104-5, 1832.

19. Call nos. E/BER/S/E5/3/6 and E/BER/S/E5/3/3, London Metropolitan Archives.

20. Letter from Mrs Piozzi to Robert Elliot (last tenant at Streatham), 28 November 1820, Lambeth Archives, call no. IV/66/4/9/1.

21. *Ibid.*, p.369.

to date between 1770 and 1774. One records that the Thrales, father and son, had been taking in portions of the common over a period of time (*fig. 79*). The house and garden are roughly indicated but the dotted semi-circle indicates land wanted for a 'Sweep' in front of the house.

In 1822 an estate plan was drawn to accompany articles of sale: Hester had died in 1821. (*fig. 80*) It shows the enlarged house with a wide sweep (added in the late 1770s) fronting the common, the service buildings and courtyards behind as before. All earlier gardens have been succeeded by an extensive informal pleasure ground with perimeter paths winding through shrubberies and boundary tree belts. The tree lines in the park mark old field boundaries.

The dominant features of the estate are now the kitchen gardens and the lake. The walled gardens are huge: 200 metres long, 60 metres wide at the yard end, 100 metres wide at the other. The area nearest the yard is subdivided into four plots and labelled 'kitchen garden'; the middle section is divided into ten and the last section into six and both areas are labelled 'Walled gardens and Graperies'. South of the kitchen garden there is a wedge-shaped plot marked 'Orchard'.

The lake (romantically labelled 'moat') is 300 metres long and 40 metres across at its widest, with an island in its north-east corner. There is one reference to a drawbridge, which would be a suitably picturesque feature. By the lake Dr Johnson's summer house was sited on a small mound. There are several images of this rustic summer house, typical of the 1770s (*fig. 81*). In 1780 Hester records that Dr Johnson's birthday is close to her eldest daughter's:

We always have a Dance on her Birthday for the Servants, and they shall have it this Year too.... Mr Johnson's Birthday is the next day to hers, & we keep them together, and fill the Summer House with Food, Fiddles &c, today being Sunday, the Balls must be tomorrow & Tuesday.²²

The structure does not look big enough for a party so there may have been another

summer house.

Elizabeth Montagu's description suggests that this garden certainly existed in 1777. We know it existed by 1792 because Samuel Lysons described it as having 'remarkably spacious kitchen gardens, surrounded by brick walls 14 feet high with forcing frames producing heavy crops of fine fruit.'²³ The park was about 100 acres surrounded by a shrubbery and a gravel walk of nearly two miles in circumference. This description accords very well with the 1822 plan and as he was a known correspondent of Hester it is likely to be reliable. No records have been found indicating who laid out and planted this garden. Hester only records that one Sir Philip Clarke, who had 'good taste in gardening', had been consulted about the alterations.²⁴

From 1779 Henry Thrale suffered a series of strokes and died in 1781. What is unclear is whether the 'Alterations' to the gardens (seen in the plan of 1822) were broadly complete by then. It seems likely: the property was let in 1782 to Lord Shelbourne until Hester and her second husband Gabriel Piozzi returned to Streatham in 1790.

Life as Mrs Piozzi

Having married the first time to please her mother, she determined, despite the opposition of her daughters, to marry Gabriel Mario Piozzi (1740–1809) and brave society's prejudice against an Italian, Roman Catholic singer and musician (*figs. 82 & 83*). Initially, convinced that her duty lay with her four surviving children, Hester sent Piozzi into 'exile' in Italy in 1783 and she retired to Bath. But she sent for him in 1784 and they were married in Bath in July 1784, first by a Catholic priest and two days later in an Anglican service.

They embarked almost immediately on a three-year tour of Europe. In September, leaving for Italy, she wrote:

I have now been six weeks married and enjoyed greater and longer Felicity than I ever yet experienced.....and tomorrow I set off for the

23. Daniel Lysons, *The Environs of London*, vol 1, *County of Surrey* (1792), pp.478–9.

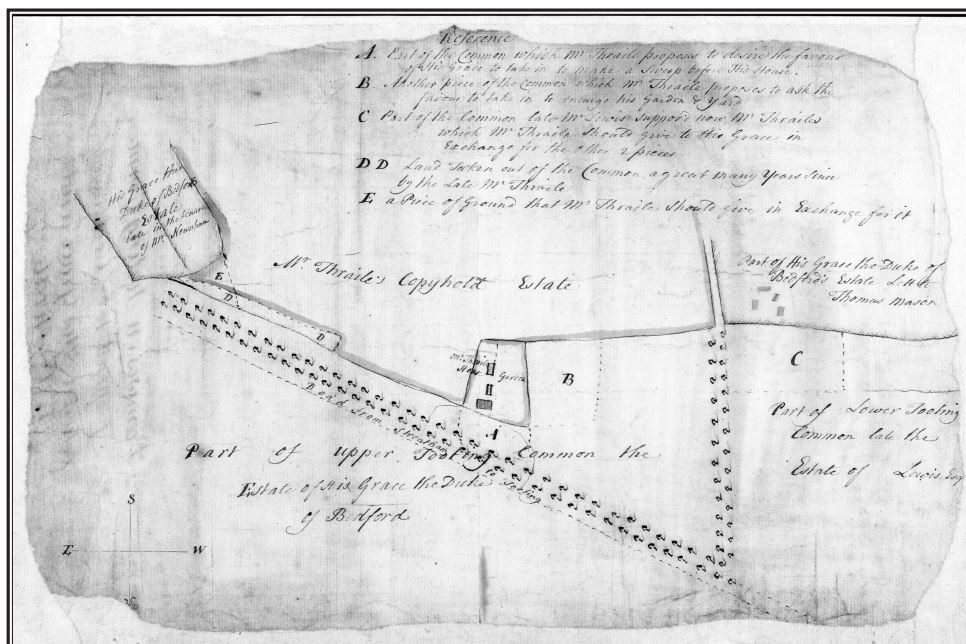
24. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana*, *op.cit.*, p.373.

22. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana*, *op.cit.*, p.455.



76. *Mr Thrale's House, Streatham*, C. Stanfield R.A., Engraved by E Finden, published c.1775.
Perhaps showing Dr Johnson & Mrs Thrale in the garden!
(COPYRIGHT LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH)

77. *Streatham Park*, engraved by T. Higham from a Drawing by H Gastineau
for *The Excursions through Surrey*, by Thomas Cromwell, 1821
(COPYRIGHT LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH)

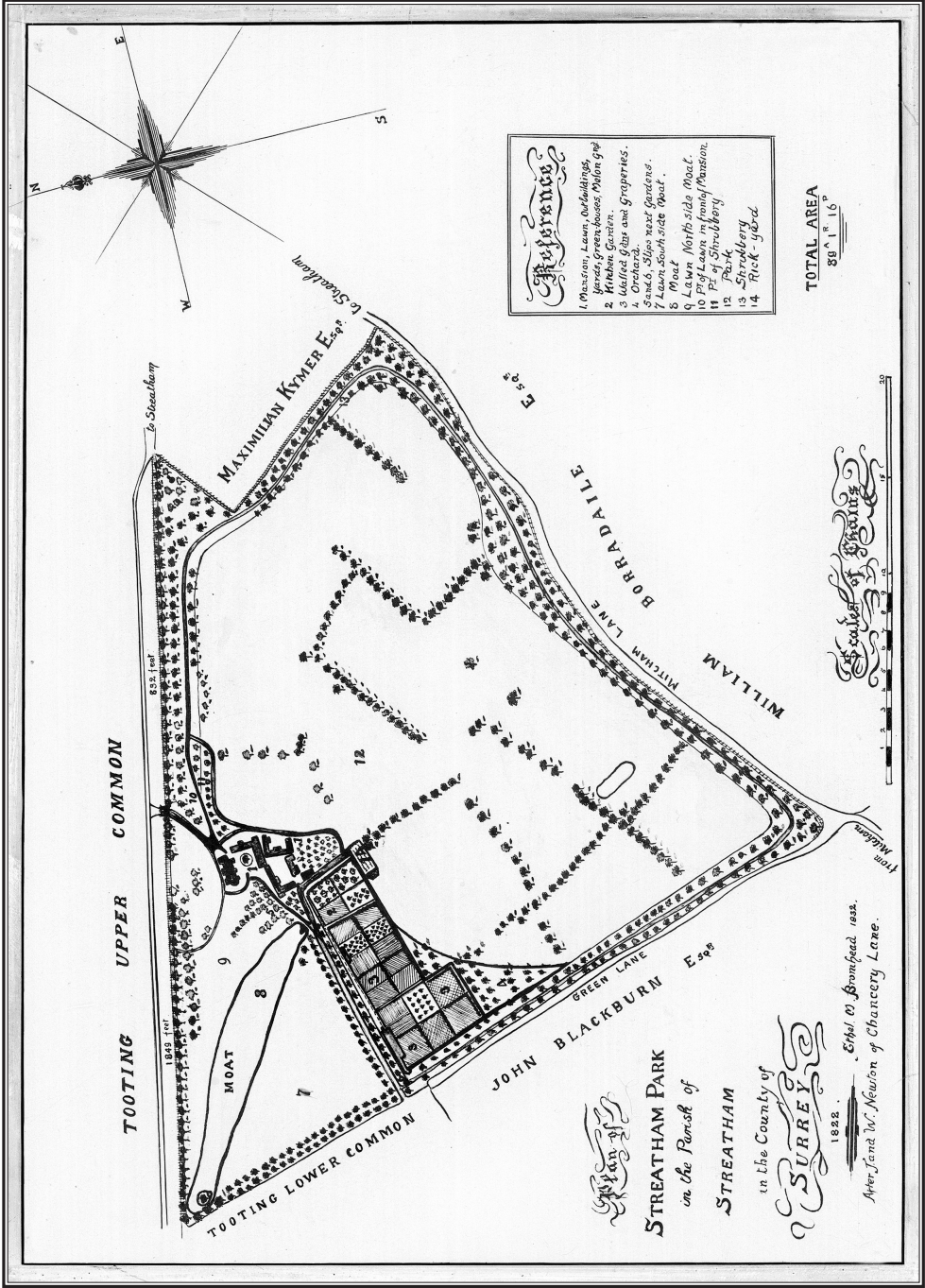


78. Streatham Park, 1863, shortly before it was demolished. Photographer unknown
(COPYRIGHT LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH)

79. 'Premises on Tooting Common proposed to be exchanged between His Grace and Mr Thrale'. N.D. ?1774
(LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES E/BER/S/E/5/3/4, BEDFORD ESTATE COLLECTION)

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE LEGEND IN THE ABOVE PLAN:

- A: Part of the Common which Mr Thrale proposes to desire the favour of his Grace to take in to make a Sweep before his House.
- B: Another piece of the Common which Mr Thrale proposes to ask the favour to take in to enlarge his Garden and Yard.
- C: Part of the Common, late Mr Lewis, supposed now Mr Thrale's which Mr Thrale should give to his Grace in exchange for the other two pieces.
- DD: Land taken out of the Common a great many years since by the late Mr Thrale.
- E: A piece of land Mr Thrale should give in exchange for it.



80. 'Plan of Streatham Park in the Parish of Streatham in the County of Surrey', 1822.
Copy of original made by Ethel Bromhead, 1932, after J & W Newton, Chancery Lane
(COPYRIGHT LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH)

finest Country in the World in Company with the best Man in it.²⁵

Back at Streatham in 1790, Hester brings the 1770s garden to life in *Thraliana*. It is striking how her earlier silence ceases after she returns, a much happier woman. She records in 1791 that Piozzi is an excellent manager and the nursery garden, shrubbery and plantations are all in the finest order.²⁶ This implies active husbandry but not capital works, which seems to confirm that the 'Alterations' had been completed before Thrale's death.

Hester now takes more interest in the gardens. In April 1795, she records the garden casualties after an especially hard winter. She reflects that everyone is 'equally ill off, and the rich Nursery Men near London become all bankrupts'. She adds in a footnote: 'Old Malcolm swears he lost £1000 in Laurestinus only.'²⁷ This was probably William Malcolm who had a nursery in Kennington from 1757 to 1788 when he moved southwards to establish a new nursery with large hot houses and conservatories on 50 acres of land in Stockwell.²⁸ The nursery continued there until 1815. As Hester clearly knew him well we can speculate whether in the 1770s he supplied plants for the new garden at Streatham.

Her observations encompass the weather, the planting, the produce of the kitchen gardens and the costs of maintaining them: 'December 1790, I hope we shall let the London house this winter for our expenses grow very high here: that vast Kitchen Garden eats one's income quite up'.²⁹ From the evidence it contained at least one hothouse, a pineapple pit, forcing frames and espaliered fruit trees on the walls producing luxury fruits out of season, which delighted her.

In December 1791, in deep snow, '....the Pears and Grapes last still and Piozzi has sold fruit for £70 he says and kept our table *profusely* supplied all the Time.'³⁰ In February

1794, in another forward spring: 'Peaches and NeCtarines and Grapes set firmly in the hothouse and my old Plumb [sic] Tree pushing out blossoms already.'³¹ The luxurious hothouse produce pricked her conscience too. In July 1795 after writing extensively about the French war she adds '...serious Distress hemming Mankind in on every side. It is a shame to be eating Pine Apples and hot house Peaches – nay, nay, 'tis a sin too.'³²

Other entries show that Hester monitored and compared what was early or late year by year – a Gardener's Almanac:

Streatham 19: April 1791. There has been much Talk about this Spring as unusually forward, but I see on looking over the third Volume of *Thraliana* that in 1779 it was forwarder still: the Swallows are not yet come, and the Cuckoo has been heard, — but faintly. Turkeys ³³ &c are very backward for ought I see, and my Apple Trees not yet in Bloom: only Pears & Cherries, but there is a vast Show for Fruit.

The gardens also hold memories of her mother:

....the Plantation in full Bloom; My poor dear Mother's Trees, that She said would one Day be the ornaments of this Place, now turn out truly so; her Shrubs are all alive, all thriving, all in Beauty, why was this ? She would set none but valuable, rational Plants; Fruit or Forest Trees: so the Oak, the Apple, and the Cherry defied my Enemies, and have lived to delight their poor Orphan Mistress with their Blossoms, Shade & Fruit.³⁴

In February 1793 there is a very forward spring and in warmer soils she 'doubts not of the Almonds being out – but Streatham is a cold clay ground and always backward compared to Fulham, Richmond et cetera.'³⁵

She gives us a flavour of the planting in the shrubberies and park by recording flowering times: limes, lilacs, mulberry, arbutus, laurel, daphne, honeysuckle, mazerion (*Daphne mezereum*), roses red and white, primroses, polyanthus, all very typical shrubbery planting of the late eighteenth century.

In 1794 a 39-year-old weeping willow falls, planted when 'a foolish fellow one Shadrach Singleton persuaded Mr Thrale to

25. Charles Hughes, *Mrs Piozzi's Thraliana*, p.39 (London, Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd, 1913. Reprinted: Leopold Classic Library).

26. *Ibid.* p.797.

27. *Ibid.* p.920.

28. John H Harvey, *Early Nurserymen*, (London and Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1974), p.88.

29. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana*, *op.cit.*, p.790.

30. *Ibid.* p.828.

31. *Ibid.* p.869.

32. *Ibid.* p.932.

33. Hester is referring to Brown Turkey fig trees.

34. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana*, *op.cit.*, p.767.

35. *Ibid.* p.855.

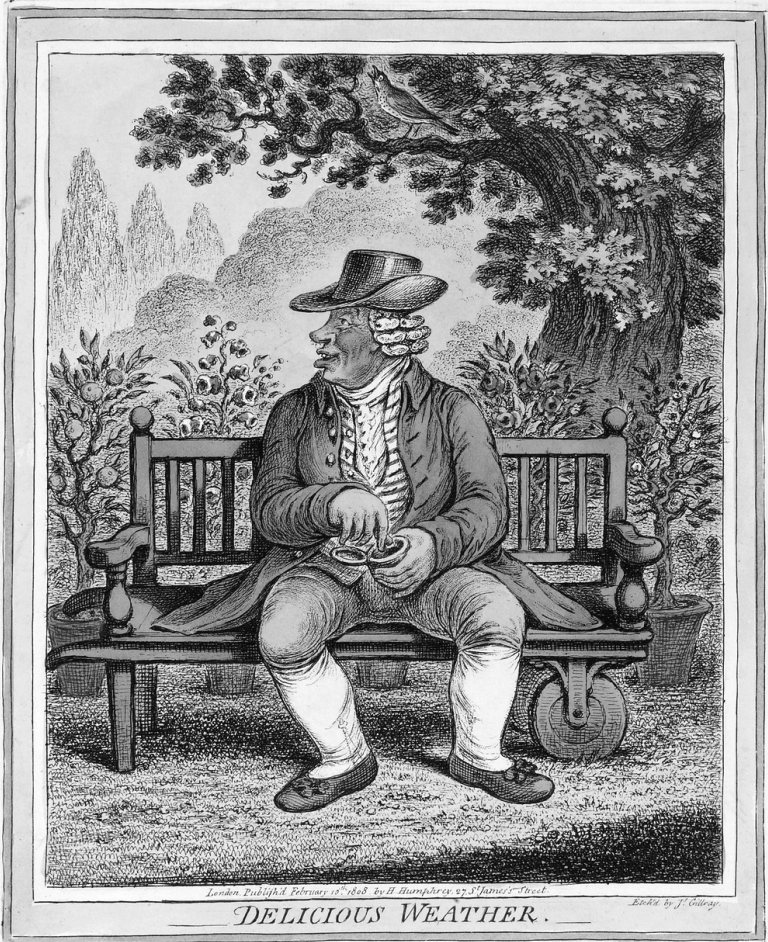


81. *Summer House at Streatham Park*, George Frederick Prosser, 1777
(COPYRIGHT LONDON BOROUGH OF LAMBETH)

82. *Gabriel Piozzi*, George Dance, pencil drawing, 1793
(© NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON, 1152)



83. *Hester Lynch Piozzi*, unknown Italian artist, oil on canvas, 1785-1786.
Painted while she was in Italy with Piozzi shortly after their marriage
(© NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON, 4942)



84. James Gillray, 'Delicious weather', hand-coloured etching, 1808, published by Hannah Humphrey after John Sneyd. Here, Gillray is also mocking the middle class villa owner
(© NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON, D12900)

buy a few *Aquackicks* as I remember he called them, meaning aquatic plants I suppose.³⁶ The weeping willow was a fashionable planting in the 1760s.

Life at Streatham was much more enjoyable now. In July 1790 there is a large dinner with a wind ensemble which afterwards ‘.. performed upon the water in our new boat that makes such a beautiful, such an elegant Figure.’³⁷ A boat on one’s lake for entertaining was very fashionable: it is pleasing to imagine that it might have been a gondola!

In 1795 the Piozzis moved to Wales and Streatham Park was let to Mr Gyles, a wealthy London corn factor. They returned frequently as visitors and in 1801 Hester records that their tenant had been spending liberally on the garden, although his lifestyle attracts comment too:

The Garden gains surprisingly by our Tenants heavy Purse & liberal Hand; He has new planted the Espaliers — new clothed the Wall & even brought Earth at an immense Expence [sic] to promote the Growth of Trees he takes no visible Delight in.... He goes not round His Plantations twice in a Season — lives in London getting Money all Morn and comes home on a Saturday to drink hard & play Billiards till 5 or 6 o’ Clock o’ Monday — when the earliest Workman’s Bell rings not till he has been arrived in Town some Moments, & been busied in the Corn Market: — leaving old Streatham Park a Brothel for his Servants.³⁸

In the 1803 Valuation of Streatham Parish the premises are listed as Streatham Park House, Offices, Stables, Coachhouses, Farm Buildings, Yards, Walled Kitchen Gardens, Pleasure Grounds, Temples, Icehouse and Park.³⁹ This is the only mention of temples and an icehouse in the gardens. Garden buildings such as temples were common even in quite small gardens. Hester wrote of a neighbour’s garden that it was so crowded with temples, statues and summer houses that it was difficult to get round it, which has echoes of ‘Squire Mushroom’, satirized in *The World* in 1753 for having a two acre garden into which had been crammed a ‘river’ nearly 20 yards long, a bridge in the ‘Chinese Manner...and a little ship...an old hermitage built with tree roots’, a gilded

Temple ‘consecrated to Venus’ and much more. (*fig. 84*)

Henry Thrale left Streatham Park to Hester for her lifetime only. After her death in 1821 the estate was sold to a family named Phillips. There was at least one more sale in 1831, which anticipated the site’s potential for development before the house, by then largely derelict, was demolished in 1863. The suburban development which then overtook Streatham Park was largely complete by 1893. The lake on which the musicians had played became a popular local site for fishing and ice-skating but it was drained around 1880.

Streatham Park was just one of a number of suburban villas with pleasure gardens and small parks that wealthy businessmen built around the commons south of London in the mid-eighteenth century. We know about it because Henry Thrale was rich enough for his wife to be part of a fashionable social and intellectual set. While recording her life there she has given us a tantalising glimpse of the house and gardens.

Hester and Wales

Hester always stayed attached to the land of her birth. In 1774 she had set off on a tour of North Wales with Thrale, Johnson and her eldest daughter ‘Queeney’ to visit her Welsh property and experience the landscape, then becoming fashionable for a Tour. The combination of picturesque and sublime landscapes and an abundance of antiquarian sites and ruins was the North Wales ‘package’. The tour was not a success: Johnson was crabby about the whole experience. Back in London, he wrote to Boswell ‘Wales is so little different from England that it offers nothing to the speculation of the traveller.’⁴⁰

Hester, however, was more in tune with the picturesque sensibility. At Beaumaris on Anglesey she described ‘the straits and the mountains an assemblage scarcely to be mended even by the imagination’.⁴¹ At Gwynnynog near Denbigh, she described features ignored by Gilpin a few months earlier. ‘Seats, Cottages and mottoes are interspersed among the woods, have to my mind no displeasing effect though I have heard

36. *Ibid.*, p.855.

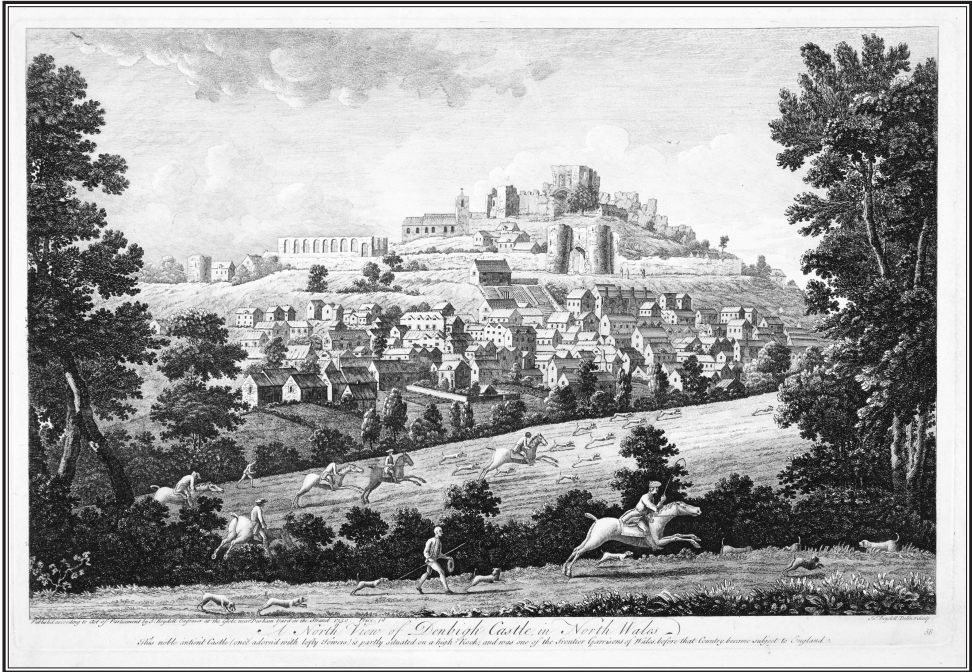
37. *Ibid.*, p.775.

38. *Ibid.*, p.1012.

39. *The Survey & valuation of Streatham Parish 1803-1894*, Wandsworth Local History Library.

40. Adrian Bristow (ed), *diary of a journey into North Wales, 1774, by Samuel Johnson LLD*, (Wrexham, Clwyd: Bridge Books, 1995), p.26.

41. *Ibid.*, p.111.



85. *A North View of Denbigh Castle, in North Wales*, John Boydell (artist/engraver), published in 1750
(BY PERMISSION OF LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU - NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES)

86. *Brynbellia, the Seat of G. Piozzi Esqr.*, J. Baker (artist) J. Bluck (engraver), 1795
(BY PERMISSION OF LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU - NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES)



87. *Sea bathing at Scarborough, 1813*, Thomas Rowlandson
(HIRARCHIVUM PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO)

them censured as foppish and foppish I think they are'.⁴² Censured no doubt by Dr Johnson, but a piece of information that suggests a design rather like The Leasowes (Worcestershire), which she had also visited with Johnson.

Her observations are acute and knowingly pointed. Denbigh Castle doesn't conform to her expectations of a castle: 'the *tout ensemble*....too delicately pleasing Upon the whole it looks like a ruin built on purpose in the midst of a delightful garden belonging to a man of exquisite taste'.⁴³ (fig. 85) This must be a reference to Hagley where George Lyttelton (an acquaintance of Hester) commissioned Sanderson Miller to do exactly that.

She took Piozzi to Wales with a much better result and in 1795 they moved there, building a neoclassical villa in a small park near her ancestral home of Bachegaig in Denbighshire. They named it *Brynbella* (a mash-up of Welsh and Italian meaning 'beautiful hill') (fig. 86). It was her happy place and she hated to leave it:

Xmas Day 1796 Brynbella. We are going to Streatham Park.....My heart is sorry to leave this Majestic View of Nature. Soft & rich Prospects of a full Fore Ground &c are heavenly in Spring, & the early Part of Summer — but at this Season all their Charms are flown, like an old Coquette who never had any Merit but Beauty to boast Adieu! ever charming Valley! lovely in the gay Season, sublime in the severe one — Adieu dearest Brinbella [sic] — Adieu!⁴⁴

Living again in Wales seems to have re-awakened Hester's love of the landscape. In the summer of 1803: 'If I dye tomorrow — I have now seen S.Wales, and very surprizingly beautiful it is.' Cader Idris and the other peaks are 'Places beyond all Praise, and nearer than the Tyrol Alps nothing can exceed them'.

But, as at Streatham, Hester is more often focused on the nearer landscape, recording the weather and plants month to month and year to year, and the impact on the working population. For example, May 1799 is very cold with sharp frosts, no grass growing, no birds singing. 'The poor Farmers Horses drop down dead in the Carts, unable to drag Weight for want of Food — Cattle perish, &

Sheep run from their Lambs — 100 Ewes perished in the Neighbourhood.....'.⁴⁵

The weather did not improve. After the longest winter and coldest spring, in June:

It blows, rains, hails, everything — The Caernarvonshire Mountains are white with Snow.....I really expect a famine. These long days with Howling winds like Nov'r & no leaves out — is so terrifying that my Courage begins to give way.....the primroses and violets peep out — and the Tacamahacs⁴⁶ try to push — but nothing else makes the Smallest Attempt. There will not be one Oak Leaf out.⁴⁷

These and other entries are the only clues she gives us about the gardens at Brynbella. In February 1804:

Here is a forward Spring indeed after a sharp Winter.....the Honey Suckles are out in Leaf, & Weeping Willows have a Green Tint on them. I have no Mazerion but a single Bush.....no forwarder than the Black Currants : but the Weather is very Mild. Oh but on the 31st. Bloody Wallflow'rs were enjoying themselves, & all the Pears bursting their Buds. ⁴⁸

One long passage in *Thraliana* encapsulates Hester's spirit, sense of adventure, enjoyment and the ridiculous — and how to express all that in a good story that describes the Welsh landscape in sublime terms. In September 1804 she records a visit to Prestatyn for Sea Bathing (fig. 87):

Not wholly unaccompanied by Danger — just enough for the Sublime I think, is the Act of dipping in these rough Billows at the Equinox — for scarce a Machine can resist the Fury of such North Westers, as we saw & felt driving Old Ocean before them this, & Yesterday Morn. Nor was our Journey home a safe one, crossing the Ford at Rhydland, where The two Rivers tried [?] — but in vain — to lose themselves out in the Irish Channel; while the high-flowing Tide set in so fierce against them, that our new Carriage filled apace with Salt Water; & but for strong Cattle & courageous Drivers, We had been surely lost! Well! our Escape serves us to chat about; & so when Conversation's Stream runs low, we may recur — not to the Passage of the Rhine — but to the crossing of the Ford at Rhydland; where Mr Piozzi swears we suffer'd a much nearer Approach to drowning. It may be so, but I was Not afraid.⁴⁹

Hester was sixty-four years old at the time of this adventure; Piozzi, in ill health for

42. *Ibid.* p.110.

43. *Ibid.* p.104.

44. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana*, op.cit., p.971.

45. *Ibid.* p.996.

46. Balsam poplar.

47. Katherine C. Balderston (ed), *Thraliana*, op.cit., p.997.

48. *Ibid.* p.1048.

49. *Ibid.* pp.1057-8.

a long time, died five years later. After his death Hester channelled all her energies into the education and naturalisation of John Salusbury Piozzi, her husband's nephew whom they had adopted in 1798. Determined to continue the Salusbury line, in 1814 she made Brynbella and all her Welsh property over to him as a wedding gift, establishing herself in Bath in reduced circumstances.⁵⁰ It remained in the Salusbury family until 1920 although often let and often in poor condition. The house was much altered in the late nineteenth century: the gardens are open to the public.

Conclusion

Thraliana is a spontaneous flow of events, observations and personal reflections shaped by Hester's immediate emotions and experiences. From moment to moment her moods switch: witty, funny, sad, happy, unhappy, sarcastic, pensive, angry, joyful. Never detached or indifferent, she observed closely the things that interested her.

There is no evidence in *Thraliana* that she was interested or actively engaged in the design of her gardens at Streatham or Brynbella, although she did comment briefly on other gardens. But she clearly enjoyed and was knowledgeable about plants. Through two very different marriages and two very different homes she was always interested in the natural world of her immediate surroundings.

WILLIAM PAMPLIN: NURSERYMAN OF LAVENDER HILL

By Thomas Rutter

William Pamplin the Elder (1765–1844) is nowadays a rather shadowy figure in the history of London gardening. This was not always the case: he was in his day a reasonably celebrated nurseryman and was acquainted with some of the leading lights in the horticultural world.¹ Fortunately, Pamplin's diaries have come down to us, donated to the Garden Museum Archive. The diaries, of which there are several, cover the period 1827–1841 and paint a vivid picture of the life and times of a Regency nurseryman (*fig. 88*). They describe not only his growing and purveying of plants but document a range of activities that suggest that metropolitan nurserymen were imaginative and resourceful at a time of great horticultural extravagance. Pamplin was, moreover, like other successful contemporary nurserymen, a shrewd entrepreneur, as all successful nurserymen of the time had to be, seeking patronage and business through any number of different means to overcome the financial challenges that came with running a London plant nursery.²

Pamplin came from a family of London nurserymen. His father, also known as William Pamplin (1741–1805), had a nursery in Walthamstow, where Pamplin the Elder spent his formative years. Here he would have learnt much from his father, as well as from being part of the nursery workforce. Before setting up his own nursery in London, Pamplin migrated west, working in South Wales for nine years as head gardener to Richard Crawshay, the Ironmaster of Cyfartha.³ How he came to work for Crawshay is unknown, yet it proved a smart move, as he was able to

1. E. J. Wilson, *West London Nursery Gardens* (1982), p.100. As I discuss three generations of William Pamplins within this article I shall refer to them as William Pamplin Senior (1741–1805); William Pamplin the Elder (the focus of this article; 1765–1844), and William Pamplin, Junior (1806–1899).

2. The Pamplin Archive is made up of several diaries covering the period 1827–41. There are some missing diaries so this time period does have sections which are not covered. The Pamplin Archive is held by the Garden Museum, London. It was donated by Rev. Wendy Carey, acting as executor for Rev. Denys Ruddy, a descendant of William Pamplin the Elder.

3. Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London, 1893, p.80.

50. Hester Lynch Piozzi, www.oxforddnb.com/ref:odnb/22309 accessed 20.05.2022.