

## STOWE AND ITS "GARDENS."

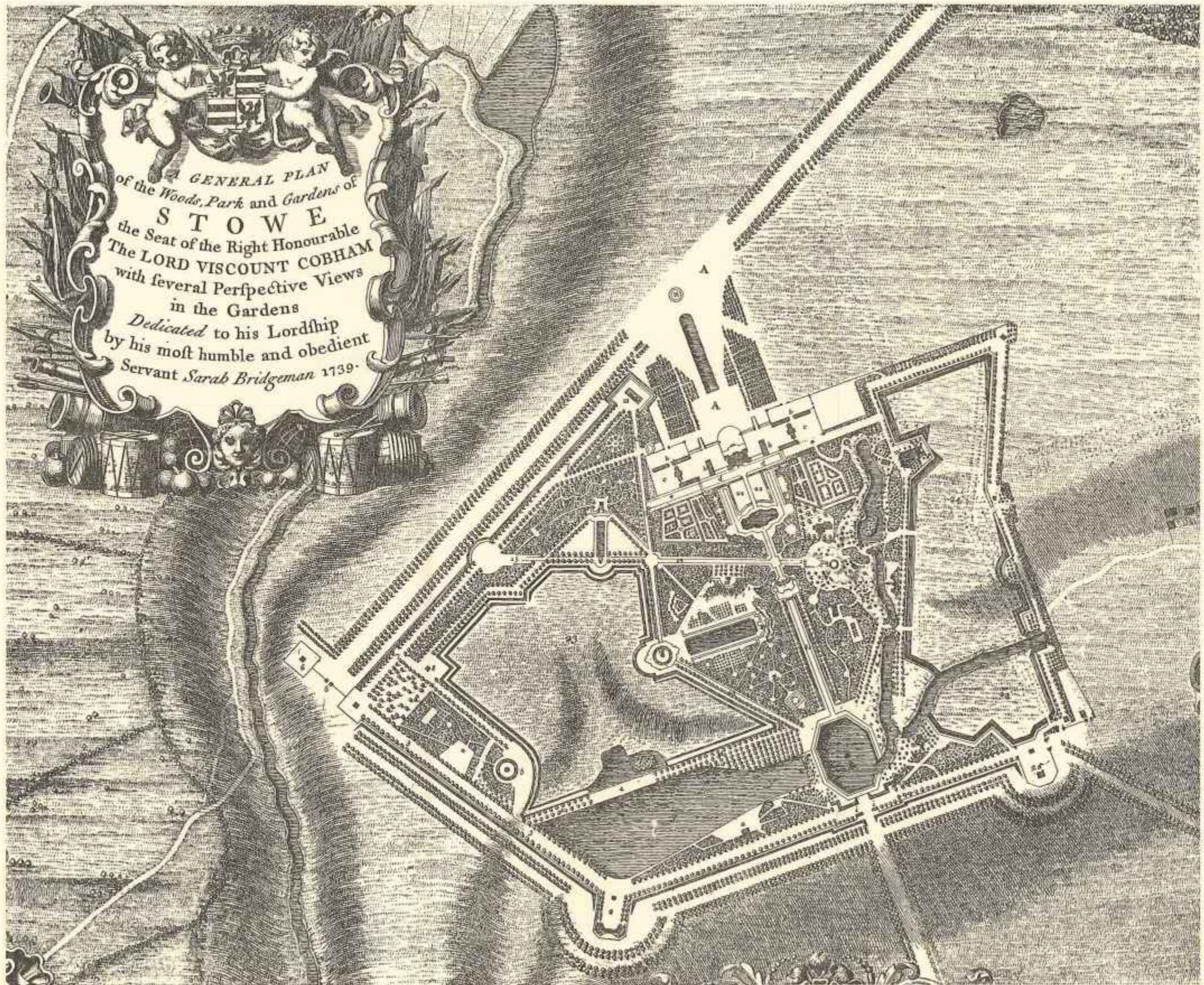
[By W. NIVEN, F.S.A.]

Within the small compass of this article it is not proposed to attempt a description of Stowe as it is to-day, but rather to take the reader back to the Stowe of the first half of the 18th century—of Alexander Pope, Lord Chesterfield, James Thomson, etc.—and with reference more to the famous gardens than the mansion.

Of the palatial homes of England, Castle Howard, Blenheim, Holkham, Wentworth House, Badminton surpass Stowe in grandeur and stateliness, and have this advantage over it, that they were mostly planned and carried out by one man and on one definite scheme, whereas Stowe, as we now see it, has been a growth and the work of several architects and able amateurs. But out of doors Stowe was unsurpassed. The Gardens were the wonder and admiration of the 18th century, and many books, and many editions of them, were printed describing and illustrating mansion and grounds, showing plainly how great and extended was the interest taken in this remarkable product of 18th century classicism and amateurism.

It is, of course, difficult for us now to assume the connoisseurship of that time and find much admiration for some of the vanities here displayed. Why should temples to Venus, Bacchus, or even to Ancient Virtue be erected in an English park? Bacchus, indeed, seems to have been honoured here with two shrines, for the "Rotunda," of the Ionic order, by Sir John Vanbrugh, altered by Signor Borra, formerly contained a statue to him in addition to the temple specially dedicated in his honour, which seems also to have been designed by Vanbrugh. These and other classical temples, whether appropriate or not, were well designed and executed under the best architects of the day, and their sites admirably chosen; but what can be said for the "artificial Piece of Ruins," The Shepherd's Cove, An Egyptian Pyramid, St. Augustine's Cave, Dido's Cave, the (very spurious) Castle, the Gothic Temple (quite as





References (Letters and Numerals) Beginning at North, and Proceeding along East Side.

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| <p>A. Equestrian Statue of George I.<br/>b. House &amp; Outbuildings.<br/>(At extreme N.E. angle) Fane of Pastoral Poetry.<br/>(At next angle, E. side) Lord Cobham's Pillar.<br/>25. Temple of Friendship.<br/>ii. Great Arch and Pavilions.</p> | <p>2. Temple of Venus,<br/>5. Queen's Monument.<br/>6. Boycott Pavilions.<br/>8. Pyramid.<br/>12. Seat.<br/>10. Temple of Bacchus.<br/>S &amp; 14. Kitchen Gardens.</p> | <p>C. C. Orangeries.<br/>22. Parterre.<br/>r. Church.<br/>q. Temple of Ancient Virtue.<br/>m. Temple of British Worthies.<br/>16. Rotunda.</p> |
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good, however, as Horace Walpole's work at Strawberry Hill), the Witch House, the Temple of Modern Virtue, which, curiously enough, in the 1764 edition of the descriptive Guide is shown as in a sadly decayed condition?\*" Imitation ruins were much in vogue in the 18th century, and were set up, often at great expense, all over the country. Worse than their puerility was the fact that they often included genuine fragments, the spoil from ancient buildings robbed to gratify the vanity of someone who would be in the fashion, and "have a taste." The brilliant Horace Walpole, though he came on the field later, was himself a chief offender in this way, and influenced others, his inferiors.

Sir John Vanbrugh, William Kent, James Gibbs, Giacomo Leoni, and Borra were all employed here. The last-named seems to have been allowed to alter several erections by Vanbrugh and Kent. Kent was employed on the mansion itself, the hall, almost the only part of it which has not been altered or rebuilt, being due to him, as well as its painted ceiling; and, outside, he not only designed several of the buildings, including the Temple of Venus and that of Ancient Virtue, which seem to have escaped the attentions of Borra, the shrine of British Worthies, which does not rise above the grotesque, the shell bridge, the Hermitage, etc., but was also employed to lay out the gardens in the new taste. Plates II. and III. show Stowe House as Lord Cobham left it; and in the opinion of the writer Lord Cobham's building, as here shown, was better in design before the alterations and additions of Earl Temple were carried out; and this design was presumably by Kent. William Kent was born in 1685, and died in 1748. Lord Burlington met him in Rome, and took him back with him, and allowed him to reside at Burlington House till his death; and, through the patronage of the virtuoso earl, Kent became the fashionable architect of the day. Mr. R. Blomfield † speaks of the Temple of Ancient Virtue here (Plate VI.) as probably the best work of his, which is not fair of

\* Modern Virtue was originally a heap of ruins to contrast with Ancient Virtue's splendid temple. It has now completely disappeared! (Inform. The Hon. Richard M. Grenville).

† A Hist. of Renaissance Architecture in England, Vol II., 229.

the author of the Horse Guards, the front of the Treasury to the Parade, Holkham, and many other important buildings. But he truly remarks: "Kent had not the individuality of Vanbrugh or Hawksmoor." The same author wrote: "It seems almost inconceivable that a man like Kent, who could design fine and severe architecture, should have lent himself so abjectly to the fancies of the fashionable amateur. The essential principle that the garden, within its enclosure, is one thing, and the landscape outside it another, and that no attempt should be made to confuse the two," was lost sight of.† Horace Walpole wrote of Kent: "He was a painter, an architect, and the father of modern gardening. In the first character he was below mediocrity, in the second he was a restorer of the science, in the last an original, and the inventor of an art that realises painting and improves nature;" and elsewhere: "Kent leapt the fence and saw that all nature was a garden," which Mr. Blomfield characterises as probably his masterpiece in clap-trap.

James Gibbs (1674—1754) designed the column to Lord Cobham (115 feet high, Valdro afterwards adding the lions to the pedestal), and this is an instance of his skill, and the originality he always displayed in some departure from the recognised classical conventionalities; also the Belvedere, etc. The Radcliffe Library at Oxford is his best known work. He designed Ditchley, Oxon, and Milton House, Peterborough.

Sir John Vanbrugh (1672—1726), architect, dramatist, and government official, is said to have approached architecture from the scene-painter's point of view. As exemplified at Blenheim and Castle Howard, he was a master in the grouping of great masses. A man of great originality and grand ideas he must have been a most expensive architect to employ. Grimsthorpe (1724) was his latest important work. To him are attributed the Boycott Pavilions, the Rotunda, and the Temple of Bacchus.

Giacommo Leoni designed a handsome gateway leading from the entrance front towards the orangeries. He was the architect of Moor Park, Rickmansworth, and Lathom House, Lancs.

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† The Formal Garden in England, 1892.

At a later period Signor Borra, architect to the King of Sardinia, was much employed here, and altered the work of some of his predecessors. The design of the great Corinthian Arch is given to an amateur, Thomas Pitt, Lord Camelford. Rysbrack and Scheemaker executed many statues here.

In concluding this list of architects employed here, reference should be made to Launcelot Brown, gardener, who later on actually practised as an architect. He was employed here for some 13 years, rising from the humblest position to be head-gardener. Stowe, in fact, was the making of "Capability Brown," who exploited the new craze for "landscape" very much to his own advantage. At Croome, Worcestershire, he is said not only to have turned a level waste into hill, dale, and water, but to have designed the mansion itself—a very creditable performance. On the other hand we read\* that he set up for the art-oracle of his day, so that, being consulted by Josiah Wedgwood as to the colour of a ground for some of his reliefs or vases, he pronounced against any colour "unless it was an exact imitation of some natural stone," which seems some justification for those who condemn him as a quack. Before leaving Stowe Brown married Mary Holland, a young woman of the village.

No other gardens in England approached Stowe in the number and costliness of its garden buildings, the temples, pavilions, columns, obelisks, and other fancies and vanities of Lord Cobham, but his friend and kinsman, Lord Lyttelton, at Hagley, Worcestershire, indulged similar tastes on a more modest scale, and was another patron of the poets. Thomson called Hagley the British Tempé; and he, Pope, and other men of letters, were all welcome there.† It had its Temple of Theseus, its Octagon Temple, Ionic Rotunda (a favourite ornament to English parks of which instances in this county will be recalled), a Doric Temple dedicated "QUIETI & MUSIS," a Hermitage of roots and moss, a Ruined Tower, which was described at the time as "a masterly deception," clothed in ivy, its Palladian Bridge—of which there

\* Mansions of England. J. P. Neale, 1847.

† Old Wedgwood, by Rathbone, 1898.



are several similar, and I believe that at Wilton was the original—and a column to Frederic, Prince of Wales. But at Stowe there seems to have been about *forty* such erections, of which a list follows, taken chiefly from the 1749 Guide-book.

The following seem to have been standing in 1749, without including all the detached statues, fountains, etc. Some few of these no longer exist, but others have since been added:—

Temple of Concord & Victory.*	The New Bridge
Gothic Temple	The Obelisk (a fountain)
Ladies' Temple	An Artificial Piece of Rock-work
Temple of Friendship	The Belvedere (by Gibbs)
"  "  Ancient Virtue	St. Augustine's Cave
"  "  Venus	Concher's Obelisk
"  "  Bacchus	Column with Statue to K. Geo.
"  "  Pastoral Poetry	II.
"  "  Brit. Worthies	Mon't. to Q. Caroline
The Rotunda	The Sleeping Parlour
Egyptian Pyramid	The Witch House
Pavilions at Entrance to Gardens	Temple of Mod. Virtue
Do. do. at Entrance to Park	Shell Bridge
Dido's Cave	Chinese House (in lake)
The Hermitage	Temple of Contemplation
Garden Seat	Pebble Alcove
The Grotto	Congreve's Mon't.
The Cold Bath	Grecian Temple
The Palladian Bridge	Capt. Grenville's Mon't.
The Shell Bridge	Imperial Closet
	Equestrian Statue of George I.

Of the first building in this list we read in the *Beauties of England and Wales* † (Lond., 1801, Vol. I., 286): "The Temple of Concord and Victory is a large, handsome building, of an oblong shape, decorated with 28 fluted Ionic columns. This is acknowledged to be one of the most chaste and elegant ornamental structures in the kingdom; and as long as it continues to exist the architect will need no other monument to record his taste and judgment. It was originally designed by Kent, who nearly followed the shape and measurements of the *Maison Quarrée* at Nîmes; but the internal decorations were completed by Borru in 1763, when the late Lord

\* Of the above list of buildings the first 21 enumerated are illustrated by plans engraved on copper plates in *Stowe: A Description of the Magnificent House and Gardens of the Right Hon. Richard Earl Temple*. A New Edition, with all the Alterations to the present Time. B. Seeley, Buckingham; T. Hodgkinson, at the New Inn at Stowe, 1766.

† Written presumably by John Britton, and containing as good an account of Stowe as is to be found.

Temple gave it the appellation it now bears, to perpetuate the remembrance of the peace then ratified at Fontainebleau. The front pediment has an alto-relievo by Scheemaker, representing the four quarters of the world bringing their various products to Britannia. On the top of the building are six statues. The inside contains two gilt vases, a statue, and sixteen medallions commemorating the principal victories in the war of the year above-named. This Temple overlooks a most beautiful scene, called the Grecian Valley."

So far as I know, the set of 15 large engravings by Rigaud and Baron, published in 1730 (not in 1737, as stated by Lipscomb), and again in 1739, give the best idea of these gardens at that time. Plates I., II., III., and VII. are reproductions from the set in the Brit. Mus. and are, I think, admirable, both as photos\* and process-work. The other four plates are by the Buckingham firm of Walford and Son, and show temples, etc., by Kent, Gibbs, and Vanbrugh which still remain in good preservation.

The "Gardens" of Stowe are really an inner park extending to nearly 400 acres. † At the present time certainly *park* describes them better than *garden*. But an examination of these reproduced views will show, first, that in 1730 their name was quite appropriate, and, secondly, that at this date the work of obliterating straight avenues, making formal fountain basins to look like casual ponds, and removing the trained yew hedges, with their arches and niches, which enclosed the Parterre, had not, as late, presumably, as 1739, the date of the second issue of these views, been begun.

Neither mansion nor grounds were formed *de novo* by the first Viscount Cobham. The house, according to *Magna Britannia*, 1806 (Vol. I., 641), was built originally by Peter Temple, Esq., regn. Eliz., and was re-built by Sir Richard Temple, who died 1697. The reader is referred to the paper (RECORDS V., 349) read by His Grace the late Duke of Buckingham,

\* By Mr. Donald Macheth, of the Brit. Museum.

† A familiar instance of the same application of the term to a large planted area (which, happily, has been rather more conservatively treated) will occur to all in "Kensington Gardens."

President of our Society, on the occasion of the excursion in 1884, which gives an earlier date for the first house. He told us: "The original house of the Temples, circa 1520, remained till early in the 18th century. It was a centre block with two detached wings, in a straight line," and that parts of this building remain within the present mansion. Sir Richard Temple, Bart., M.P. for Buckingham, Lord Lieutenant 1703, a Lieut.-General in the Army, was, on the accession of Geo. I. (1714), created Baron Cobham, and in 1718 Viscount and Baron. To him has been attributed the first carrying out on a large scale the new ideas in gardening. Whether he was the prime mover, W. Kent and others obediently carrying out his directions, or whether he accepted and followed professional advice, must remain uncertain. Probably the former, for a trained architect such as Kent would, one would suppose, have only reluctantly yielded to the fashionable craze, and consented that his purely formal buildings should have a setting which was independent of and inappropriate to them. The change in taste seems to have begun as early as 1718, when Switzer brought out *Ichnographia Rustica*, and invented what he called "rural and extensive gardening," by which a garden of 20 acres should look to be 200. The old engravings here reproduced are evidence that formality and the older taste prevailed here 20 years after this book appeared. In the "Beauties of England and Wales, 1801" (Vol I.) we read: "The first professional artist employed to lay out the grounds was Bridgeman, whose plans and drawings of their features at that period are still in possession of the Marquis."\* It may be assumed, I think, in the absence of these plans, that the lay out shown in the plan and views here reproduced is Bridgeman's. A comparison of this 1730 plan with that which accompanied the Guide-book of 1777 shows the alterations made to the latter date. The formal Parterre (Plate III.), with its enclosing yew hedges and its fountain basin,

\* Having enquired if these are still preserved at Stowe, the Hon. R. Morgan Grenville has very kindly searched the library for these plans and drawings, but, unfortunately, without success so far.



had been improved away. The "canal" in front of the Rotunda (Plate VII.) had also been filled in, and the large octagonal pond, near the Great Arch, had been enlarged to a "natural" shapelessness, and two other smaller ponds or basins filled in. The quadrant colonnades had, with good judgment, been added on the foundations of the former screen walls flanking the north-west entrance, increasing the dignity of the *cours d'honneur* on that side; the canal and plantations between the equestrian statue of George I. and the entrance portico being destroyed. Reference to the largest scale Ordnance map will show the further alterations made since 1777 to the present time.

The mansion itself would seem to have passed through no less than five phases. First, there was the 16th century house, as described by the late Duke of Buckingham. Then that of Sir Richard Temple, who died 1697; followed by the house as modified by Kent for Viscount Cobham, which is presumably that which is represented in two of the Rigaud views (Plates II. and III.). Between this very pleasing design and the palatial buildings, as altered and added to by Lord Temple (1760—1780), which we now see, and which seem to have been designed mainly by the earl himself, there was an intermediate house, which is shown in B. Seeley's Guide of 1766. While free from the crushing largeness of Earl Temple's additions, there was a feebleness about this very extended front which justified him in his desire to improve upon it. The approach to the great south portico was from the sides, the steps being broken into several short flights. The imposing elliptical saloon had not yet been built; its place was occupied by the great oblong "Stucco Gallery," measuring about 58 feet by 22, from which opened at one end the dining-room and at the other the drawing-room, both of moderate dimensions, and beyond them again the great galleries.

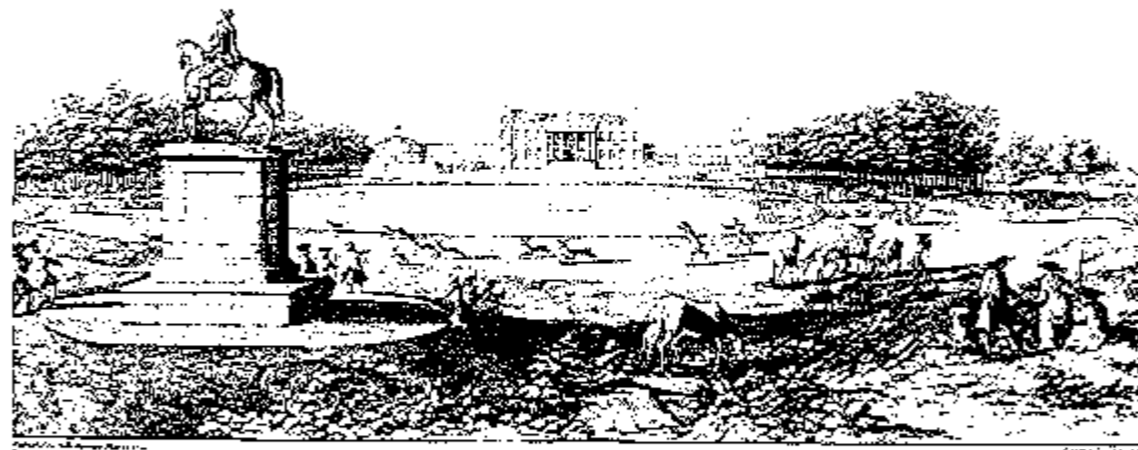
Finally, since Earl Temple's time, somewhere between 1780 and the end of that century, the Marquis of Buckingham completed the fittings and decorations, internally, of his predecessor's costly additions and alterations.

It will thus be seen how strong was the love of building in the Temple-Grenville family. It was then accounted for honour to "build splendidly," and, in this respect, no family surpassed them. Horace Walpole expressed, with some truth, the opinion that were there at Stowe but half the buildings in the grounds there would still be too many, for no great event and no visit of a great personage was suffered to pass without some memorial of it in stone or marble being erected; but the Walpoles themselves—as evidence Houghton and Strawberry Hill—did not escape the same epidemic.

A year ago the writer expressed the hope—*à propos* of the visit to Chenies—that a worthy monograph might be produced on those superb and admirably-preserved monuments and the distinguished family they commemorate. Here at Stowe is ample material for another: a remarkable family, literary associations, the works of the best architects and amateurs of their day, the change of taste in gardening from the older style (to which we are now reverting), the works of art, though many are now dispersed, collected there, the visits of royalty and statesmen, etc. The admirable example of the Verney Memoirs should serve as a stimulus.

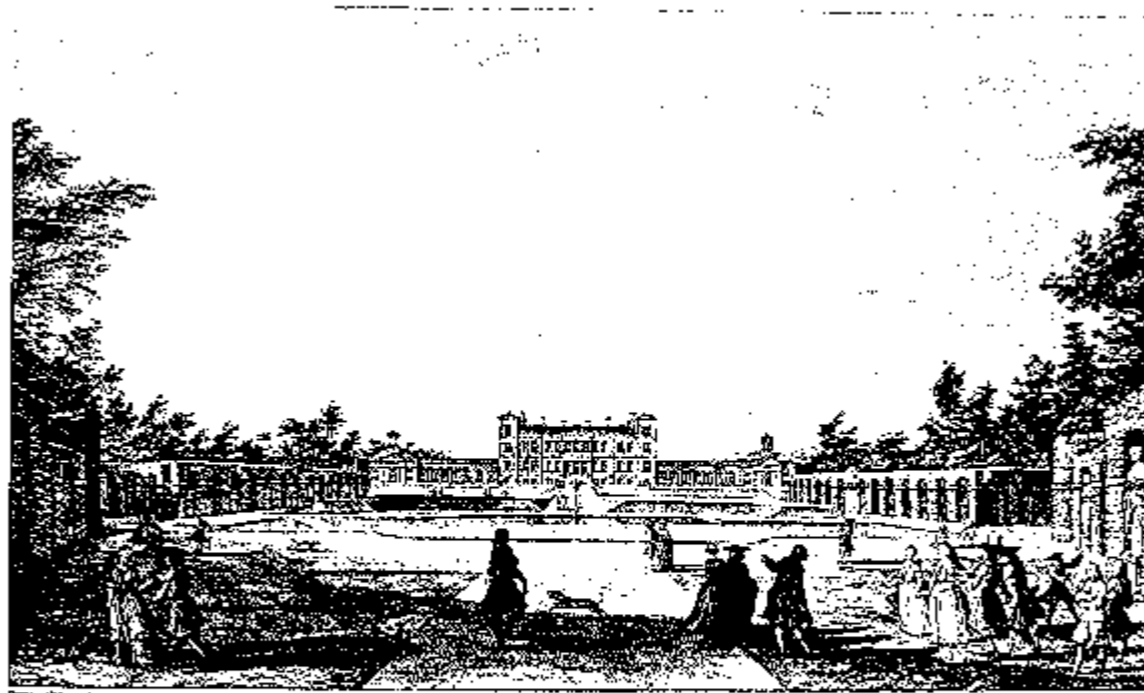


PLATE II.



*View of the Road from the Equeller's Statue.*

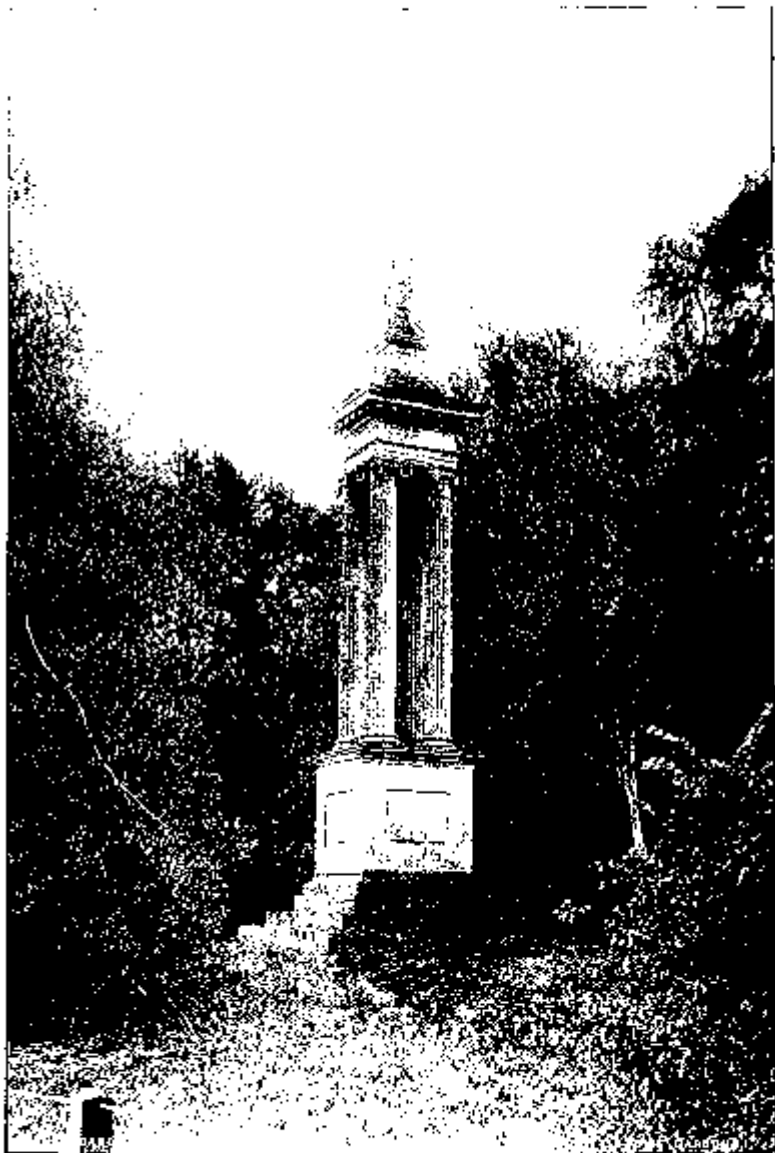
*Vue du Château prise à côté de la Figure Equelle.*



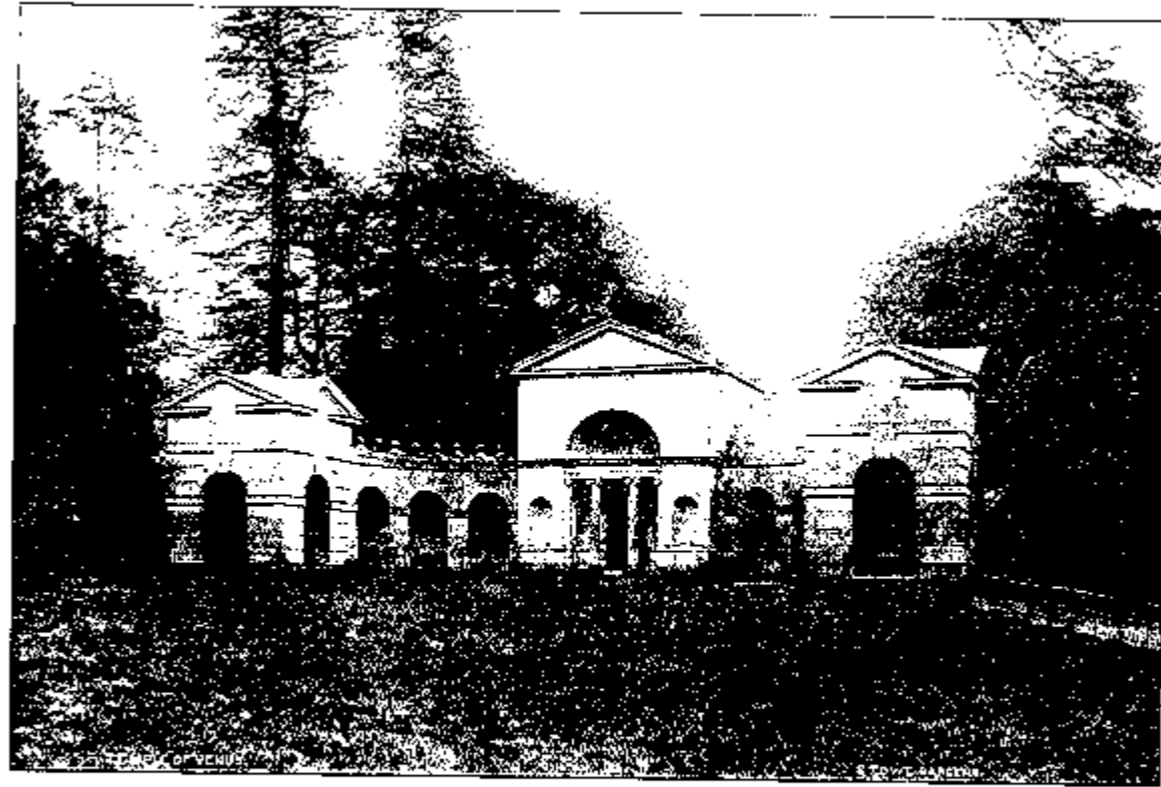
*View of the Boule from the Parterre*

*View of the Façade of the Château de la Ville de Paris.*



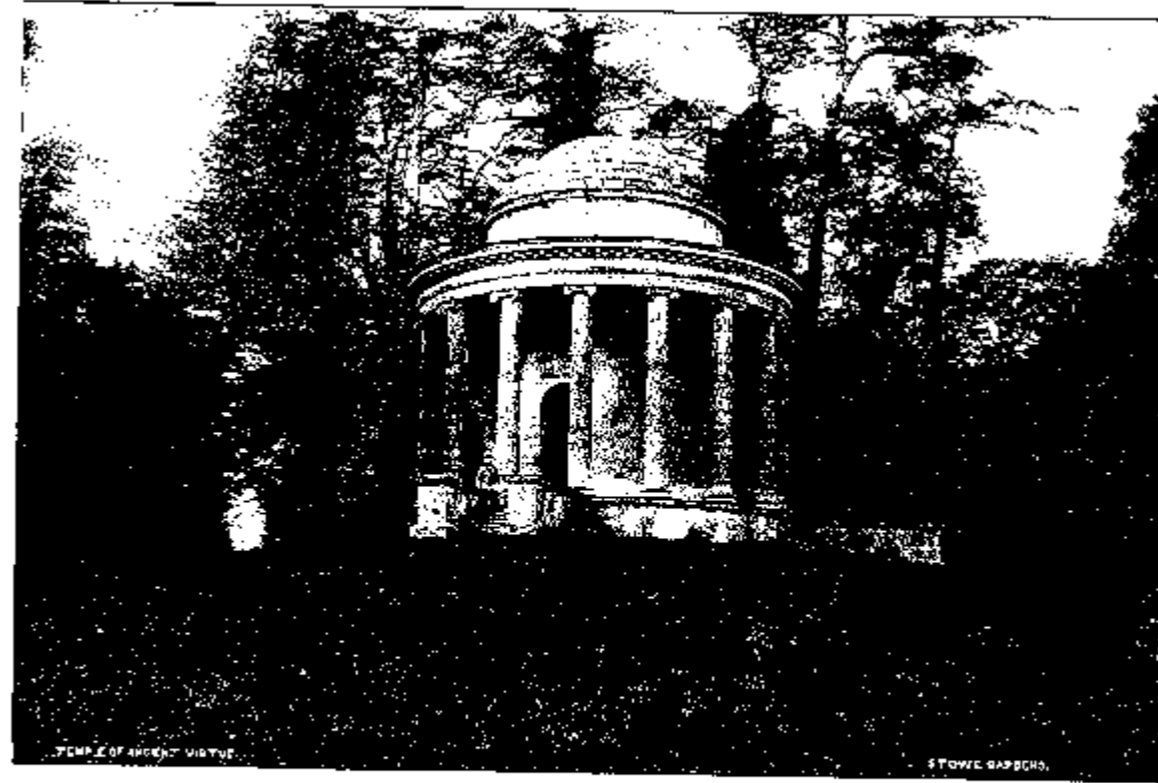


QUEEN CAROLINE'S MONUMENT, STOWE.

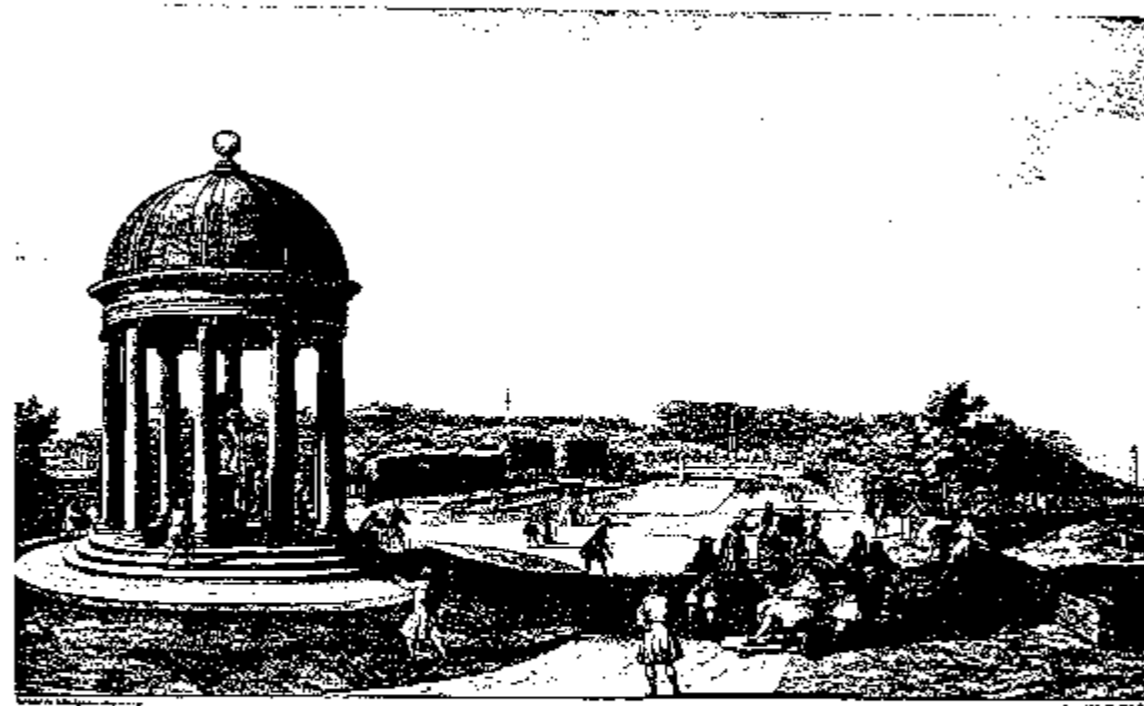


TEMPLE OF VENUS, STOWE.





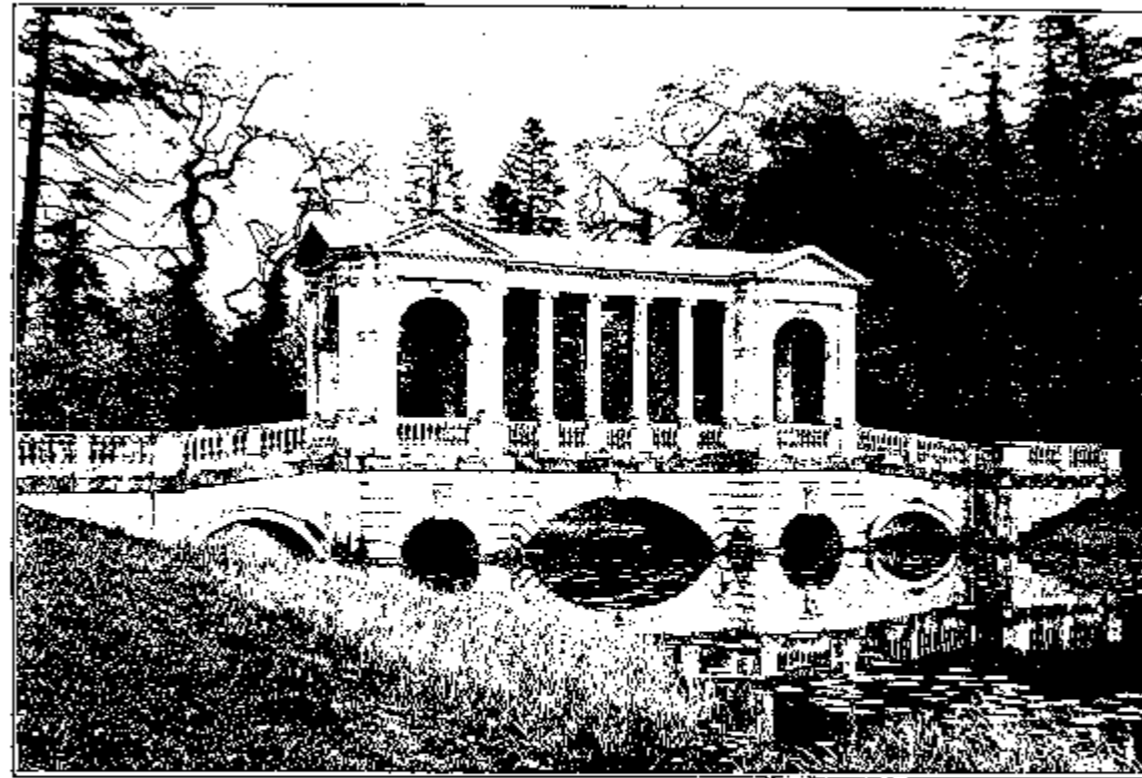
TEMPLE OF ANCIENT VIRTUE, STOWE.



*View of the Queen's Theatre from the Rotunda.*

*Vue du Theatre de la Reine prise a coté de la Rotonde.*





THE PALLADIAN BRIDGE, STOWE.