

THE PRIDEAUX COLLECTION OF
TOPOGRAPHICAL DRAWINGS
Edited by JOHN HARRIS

INTRODUCTION

One of the most charming of English pastimes is the habit of topographical delineation. In the late seventeenth, and especially the eighteenth century, it was not only landscape for landscape's sake, but landscape combined with a curiosity about the antiquarian relics of country and town. The lineage of English topographers may possibly be taken back to Inigo Jones, for according to John Aubrey:

'Mr Inigo Jones (Architect to King James I, and to King Charles I) was wont to wayte upon their Majesties when they went their Progress. . . . He designed admirably well: and in these Progresses he drew a great many Prospects of the old Gothick, or ancient Castles, in sheetes of paper. He bought the Manour of Burley [Butleigh] near Glastonbury (Once belonging to it; but very unfortunate to the late Possessors) where in a large Parlour, I saw these Draughts of Castles: they did furnish the Roome round; one of them was falln downe, and in a child's hands, which I rescued: and hung it up my selfe. I have often intimated this to our Gravers to make them publick: but I cannot perswade them to it. But had the ingeniose Mr Wencelaus Hollar lived, he would have donne it, upon my request. Of these once statly Castles, there is not now a stone left upon a stone.' (Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick, 1962, p. 93).

It is Aubrey's friend Hollar, however, who begins the true and certain lineage of English topographers. Scenographer and Designer of Prospects to Charles II, from the 1650's Hollar is found indefatigably recording the aspects of English building. Although one of his most evocative views was of Albury Place in Surrey, he was not predominantly interested in the country house. The same may be said of his acquaintance, Francis Place; of John Aubrey, whose antiquarian travels began as early as the 1670's; and of John Evelyn. The journeys of that other avid traveller, Celia Fiennes, were first made in the South of England from c. 1685, after which she travels the English scene for over twenty years. If she made topographical sketches they have been destroyed. The importance of Evelyn and Fiennes is their position as our earliest country house enthusiasts.

The country house 'prospect' had, however, already become a valid subject for the painter. Jan Siberechts, who came to this country in 1675, immediately offered his services to paint the nobleman's house. The tradition which he did so much to establish culminates in the ambitious survey of eighty houses published by Johannes Kip and Leonard Knyff in 1707-8 as *Britannia Illustrata or Nouveau Theatre de la Grande Bretagne*. Hollar, Siberechts Kip and Knyff were professionals; Aubrey, Place, Evelyn, and Fiennes, belong to that breed of English amateurs, curious about the antiquarian and architectural annals of England.

Edmund Prideaux (1693-1745) was another of these amateurs. He was brought

up in an East Anglian environment, where his father Humphrey Prideaux was Dean of Norwich from 1702. Humphrey had published the *Marmora Oxoniensis*, an account of the Arundel marbles, in 1676, so when Edmund entered Clare College, he was already a youthful antiquarian. By 1714 (the date of his earliest drawing of Clare College) he had probably developed an interest in country houses. The reason was not entirely architectural. Of the thirty three country houses drawn by him, at least twenty were Prideaux houses, or houses connected in some way with the family through ties of marriage. Seven more were in a special Norfolk group and only six west-country houses appear to have no Prideaux interest. Edmund travelled, therefore, to visit his family and to make a record of each house. In doing so he is the earliest amateur artist to prepare a consistent record of country houses.

His travels follow a logical pattern: one group of 1716, another of September and October 1727. On both these occasions he may have come from the east, for his views of Stonehenge are dated June 21, 1716, and the first view of 1727 is of Forde Abbey, on the Somerset border. The 1716 itinerary includes a group of houses in North Devon and Cornwall: Werrington and Dunsland are both dated, but Stow, Thuborough, and Solden were also probably drawn in this year. Further north, Edmund visits Portledge on the coast, Buckland Filleigh, and Heanton Satchville. None are dated but all three fit nicely into this tour. Then he appears in Cornwall at Bodmin and Padstow where he would have stayed at Prideaux Place. He is at Tavistock in the same year, probably near Wortham, and then in the south seeing a group of houses just south-east of Plymouth: Mothecombe, Newton Ferrers and Lyneham.

Because of his more accurate dating, the 1727 journey is easier to reconstruct. On September 2nd. he is at Forde, and three days later at Netherton progressing westwards. He would certainly have visited Exeter, and therefore probably Poltimore. He is in Cornwall on the 20th passing through Launceston; and the next day is drawing *The Hurlers* at St Cleer. On October 2nd he was at Prideaux Place – a house to come into his possession the following year – and then he sets off south to Roche on October 7th and to Trewarthenick on the 9th. He may then have gone even further south, to Caer Bran Castle near Redruth (*A North West Prospect of Carn Bray Castle near Redruth in Cornwall. The Gift of Benj. Prideaux, Esq, 1746, Oct. 30th.* is in Humphrey's hand – Society of Antiquaries, U2,73), but is then found to the north-east at Restormel; perhaps taking in Bake and Lanhydrock. Still eastwards, he is found at Glynn, Antony, and probably at Ince between the 14th and 19th. On the 20th he is at Plymouth and perhaps at Mount Edgecumbe. On the 24th he had passed the houses of his 1716 tour in this area, pushing on to Fallapit where his dated itinerary ends.

The third journey is undated but the houses group themselves into a logical sequence along the north Norfolk coast: Narford, Houghton, Raynham, Melton Constable, and Blickling. On the evidence to be afforded by the Houghton drawing this tour was made c. 1725. It might be related to a group of three other East Anglian places: Bury St Edmunds, Euston, and Thetford, but probably not to Earlham near Norwich and Caistor on the east coast above Great Yarmouth.

The other group of drawings relates specifically to Prideaux Place, being

topographical and designs for alterations in the 1730's. In terms of draughtsmanship they stand apart as carefully considered views, unlike the houses of his tour, when we can imagine Edmund standing in the middle of fields, or in woods on the slopes of hills, making the rough but charming prospects reproduced here in this volume.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank warmly Mr J. C. Prideaux-Brune for his courtesy in allowing me to reproduce the drawings in his possession. Mr Howard Colvin has read the manuscript and many amendments and additions are due to his perceptive reading. The Archive Offices of Devon and Cornwall have been most helpful and I thank Miss Margaret E. Cash and Mr P. L. Hull respectively. Finally I would like to acknowledge John Cornforth's friendly comments.

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