

## VI Time's Shipwreck

**O**f the six hundred and fifty monasteries in England seized by Henry VIII in the 1530s, a third have disappeared under grass. Another third are in ruins, abandoned to the elements. The remainder were converted into houses, such as Bindon or Byron's Newstead, or into workshops or warehouses. The churches of a lucky few became cathedrals – St Albans, for example – or were acquired by the townspeople for their own use as parish churches; in Bath, the glorious Perpendicular structure was rescued in this way. There was not to be such a sudden change in the architectural landscape of Britain until the Second World War.

The monasteries were not demolished for the sake of it, although Thomas Cromwell's henchmen smashed as many icons as possible. The Crown seized the properties and sold their materials and their lands to the highest bidder. Not only did the monasteries own a quarter of the land in England, but stone and lead were highly valuable. Lead was a precious commodity, while quarries were few and far between and carting the stone long distances was far more expensive than its actual extraction. At Lewes in Sussex Cromwell gave the cloisters of the Convent to his son Gregory as a wedding present, but the church was demolished and its remains only discovered when the

railway to London was cut through in the nineteenth century. Two 'plummers' from London were busy melting the lead, the site manager wrote to Cromwell in a letter remarkable for its dispassionate practicality. It was a question of measurements:

The high altere, that was borne up with fower great pillars, having about it v chapelles . . . All this is downe a Thursday and Fryday last. Now we are plucking downe a hygher vaute, borne up by fower thicke and grose pillars . . . in circumference xlv fote.

Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire was bought from the agents of Henry VIII by a clothier named Mr Stumpe and converted into a woollen mill. When the antiquary John Aubrey visited in the 1660s the Norman nave still clattered with looms, and Mr Stumpe's great-grandson – Mr Stumpe, Esquire – plugged the beer-barrels in his cellar with wads of illuminated medieval manuscripts. 'The manuscripts flew about like butterflies,' wrote Aubrey in a plangent *vanitas*. 'All musick bookes, account bookes, copie bookes &c. were covered with old manuscripts . . . and the glovers of Malmesbury made great havoc of them. Before the late warrs [i.e. the English Civil War] a world of rare manuscripts perished hereabout.'

The opportunistic businessman and the melancholy antiquary were just two of the characters who passed through the ruins of the abbeys in the years following their Dissolution. In the course of three centuries straightforward greed was followed by ignorance and indifference, and curiosity led to veneration. The changes in attitude to ruins

followed the same sequence as in Rome, but there the cycle required more than a thousand years to revolve.

Imagine an abbey in 1530, standing in cornfields or in a valley of the sheep-grazing uplands. Its bells toll the rhythm of the day, calling the villagers from bed and announcing prayer and noon and eventide. The monks are scholars illuminating manuscripts, or apothecaries tending the sick with herbs from their kitchen garden, or justices dispensing judgement in the courthouse – or, if you accept the reports by Henry VIII's agents, lazy gluttons who drink strong beer and stew on soft mattresses with the village slatterns.

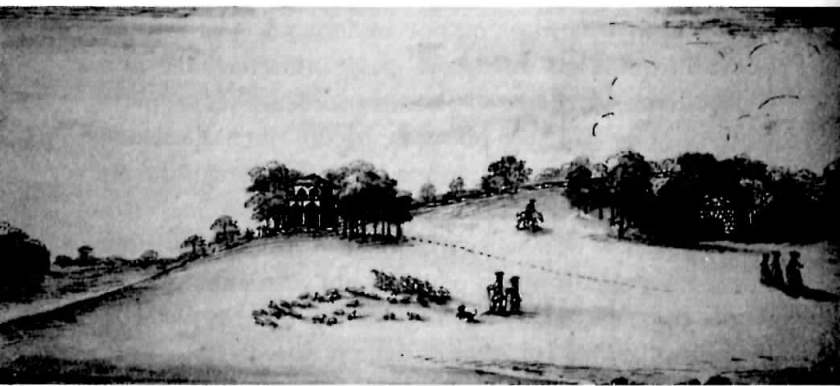
Ten years later. The monks have been expelled, and wind and rain whistle through gate, cloister and choir. The soaring stone vaults of the church are picked clean like the rib-cage of a whale. The bells toll no more, sold to be melted down for their value as metal; the stained glass and the lead on the roof have also been sold for scrap. The villagers in their hovels suddenly have a quarry on their doorstep and stone walls replace those of timber and mud. Simple, squared blocks are most highly prized. The rounded drums of columns are only valuable as mill-stones, while ornamental capitals, pinnacles, or awkwardly shaped arches are of no use to anyone. This practicality explains the distinctive silhouette of the ruin.

The property has been bought from the king's agent by a local merchant. Sir John, recently knighted, settles into the abbot's private quarters which occupied one range of the cloister. He enjoys the great hall and its hearth but has the frescos covered with whitewash, their biblical imagery perhaps a little too challenging to see every morning. No one approaches the ruins with any curiosity for a century.

Then one day a quiet, pale gentleman rides over from Oxford and begins to pace over the ground with a pen and parchment, stopping to scrape away the moss and dirt on the coffins which lie in the nave. The villagers watch, puzzled: he is searching for treasure – what else? – but the silver candlesticks and chalice were sold and the abbots' coffins ransacked long ago. But the young man is not looking for treasure: indeed, he is more excited to discover a skeleton, or Latin words on a monument, or to uncrumple the manuscripts which cork the wine vats in the cellar of the manor. Torn leaves in hand, he paces the wild grass of the nave, staring at the sky as if he is trying to visualise what has disappeared. Did any of the villagers' ancestors pass down information about the abbey? No, they shrug. All they can show him is the carved lintel which forms the chimneypiece in the inn, and a broken-nosed angel used to wedge open the doors of the threshing barn. Why he curses the good king Henry VIII they cannot understand. Leaving, he pockets some shards of stained glass, and a fragment of a wall-painting which he will place in a corner of his rooms at Oxford. There had been no such curiosity when the abbeys were intact, an irony understood by John Aubrey: 'the eye and mind is no less affected with these stately ruins than they would have been when standing and entire. They breed in generous mindes a kind of pittie; and set the thoughts a-worke to make out their magnificence as they were in perfection.'

The antiquary is followed by an artist, early in the eighteenth century. He is a more convivial man, who laughs at the monks' skeletons and wears a broad felt hat which shelters him from the sun as he sketches in pencil. He is not

interested in imagining what has disappeared, but he enjoys the way the light mottles the jagged, mossy stone, and the cattle munching their way across the foreground. For the villagers he is a new mystery: why paint this ruin? It is 'Picturesque', and he explains this novel word by indicating with his pencil the varied silhouette and jagged strokes of shadow. It is a pleasant change from painting the symmetrical, portico'd box which every gentleman seems to regard as a fashionable modern house. An architect enjoys symmetry, right angles and geometrical proportion but a painter does not. He has been commissioned by Sir John's descendant to paint views of his country manor to hang in the dining-room of his London house. Guests who dine at Grosvenor Square will admire how their host combines modern, classic taste with an ancient and honourable inheritance.



Design for landscaping at Esher Place, Surrey, by William Kent, c.1735. A flat agricultural landscape was transformed into Arcadia in Kent's design, inspired by the paintings of Claude and Poussin. Hills, trees and temples were created from scratch.

The next in line celebrates his marriage to a sugar planter's daughter by building a new house on a hill overlooking the ruins, sited where the artist had pitched his easel. The damp old Abbot's Lodging is let to a farmer. But the artist has cheated him, complains the owner, for the view of the ruin which is framed in his windows is less Picturesque than the scene in the painting. A landscape gardener is summoned, and he assures the family that the site has 'capability' for improvement: Nature's true beauty is latent, he explains, and like the proverbial angel in the block of marble can be extracted only by an artist. An army of labourers pitches camp in the ruins, and hundreds of shovels reveal the true beauty of the landscape. In the foreground the stream broadens into a glassy lake; hills rise to each side of the ruin, planted with trees whose dark foliage frames the scene. The horizontal bases of the arcades in the nave are buried, so that the columns seem to stand taller against the sky. The silhouette is still not quite right, however, and the designer dispatches a mason to hammer away until the wall is a little more rugged in profile. The mason is bemused, and so is the tenant farmer in the manor house. His herd of cattle is Picturesque, he is told, because they provide an element of 'movement' in the view from the house, their hides dappling with reflections as they graze at the water's edge. The slurry and hay do not belong in this Arcadia, however, and neither, unfortunately, does the farmer. The farmyard is relocated, and his front door is hidden from view. A new bridge is required for the widened river – but why not have it ruined? By this point the client is playing the game with gusto. The bridge is broken in two, and the void spanned by wooden planks. This elicits gasps and giggles from the ladies

who cross to picnic in the ruins and to sketch vignettes – a column entwined with ivy, a doorway of monkish shadows – which are passed around the drawing-room before dinner.

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, a young architectural student stands and watches these picnics with silent disapproval. He has the dust of London on his coat, and in his hand a printed copy of the manuscript records transcribed by the antiquary all those years ago. He represents a generation of architects for whom these sites have become sacred. Unable to travel to Italy because of its occupation by Bonaparte, he began to explore the ruins of his native countryside and fell in love with the ‘bare, ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang’.

He is a pupil in an architect’s office in London. On his drawing-board neo-classical columns are lined up like a row of skittles. He is assisting in the design of a terrace of houses in the suburbs, each porch a pair of Doric columns copied from a page in a pattern book. That afternoon he will be on site, arguing with the developer over the purity of the stucco which is plastered on to the spindly columns of London stock brick to give a semblance of stone. Sunday is his one day free from this drudgery, and as soon as the office closes on Saturday he takes a stage-coach to the countryside.

Its columns are six hundred years old, but underneath the ivy and lichen they feel far more alive to him than the new Hackney Doric. Each capital, each leering face or symbolic animal, is different from the next in line; each has the personality of its anonymous sculptor. This mason did not dispute his payment; indeed, the architect cannot imagine any exchange of coin in the construction of the abbey. The pages of his Sunday sketchbook show that he is not

interested in the superficial and haphazard charms of the Picturesque; as if mentally undressing the ruin of its moss and ivy, he reconstructs the original design. The columns met thus; the rood screen stood here, painted and gilded in a multiplicity of colours. Here the choir sang; here was the library, and here the infirmary for the sick; beyond the mill-wheel turned. We have come full circle.

Now the vanished past has become an inspiration for the future, for the followers of the Gothic Revival saw the paternalistic society of the monasteries as the cure for the ills of an industrialised society. The leading advocate of the Revival was the architect Augustus Welby Pugin, whose most easily recognised achievement is the neo-Gothic ornamentation he designed for the new Houses of Parliament. A devout Catholic polemicist who wore medieval clothes in his design studio, Pugin died hysterical and frustrated at the age of forty, in 1852. His novelty was to argue that the ‘true’ style of Gothic and the ‘true’ religion of Roman Catholicism were inseparable, and to blame the ills of modern society on the dissolution of the monasteries. In *Contrasts* (1836) he placed illustrations of past and present side by side. The bleak modern town is dominated by the prison, the poorhouse and the smoking factory chimneys, and its citizens are cogs in this industrial machine. The most succinct expression of Pugin’s belief in the revival of ‘Old England’ is a model farmyard he designed at Peper Harrow in Surrey. Seen when driving along the watery valley of the Wey from Farnham to Godalming, the scene he created is as seductive as a mirage: a farmhouse, a barn high with hay and a gate lodge stand around a pond, each built in a muscular medieval style. The farm is placed on the site

of a medieval abbey, the only remnant of which is a gabled end-wall pierced by the tracery of a window. Protected by Pugin with new buttresses and a defensive wall, this venerated relic was the symbolic centre of the new community.

Only a minority of his disciples were Catholics. *The Monastic Ruins of Yorkshire* (1843) is a collection of lithographs, the type one rifles through in a barrow on the Portobello Road. The introductory text written by the Rev. Edward Churton, an Anglican clergyman, is often discarded but explains the purpose of these images: Churton presents a description of Fountains Abbey and Rievaulx in their medieval prime in order to challenge the complacency of modern society. Had mankind been made happier by 'all the improvements of the nineteenth century . . . the new-found powers of machinery and steam, our Waterloo Bridge and chain pier across the Menai Straits?' Did the poor and elderly find the new poorhouses built on Benthamite principles as merciful as the refuge once provided by the abbeys, which were also 'the nurseries of education, the asylums of the afflicted, the seats of judicature, the record-offices of law? 'Our modern idea of freedom is to be subject to the fewest possible claims from the community.'

On a more positive note, Churton accepted that there had been a noticeable change in society's approach to the ruins themselves: 'Englishmen are no longer content to make mere excursions of pleasure to old sites, to spread their collation in the cloisters or aisle, and after a repast such as modern luxury can furnish, to rise up and abuse those pampered monks who passed their time in eating, drinking, and sleeping.' His picture might be drawn from one of



Fountains Abbey, photograph by Francis Frith, c.1859. The beauties of monastic ruins were rediscovered by poets and painters in the decade of the 1720s, and by the Victorian age the Gothic ruin was embedded in the romantic psyche.

the many guidebooks to Picturesque scenery published fifty years before. The Rev. William Gilpin, for example, concluded his description of Glastonbury Abbey with the assurance that we view monastic ruins 'not only with a picturesque eye, but with moral and religious satisfaction' because they had been 'great nurseries of superstition, bigotry, and ignorance: the stews of sloth, stupidity, and perhaps intemperance'.

Yet it was these pampered picnickers who rescued our medieval monuments from decay. The first attempt to defend a medieval structure from demolition was made for Picturesque not moral reasons, when in 1709 John Vanbrugh tried to persuade the Duchess of Marlborough to preserve the ruins of Woodstock Manor in the parkland at Blenheim Palace. Vanbrugh was the architect of Blenheim, built as the nation's tribute to the late Duke of Marlborough. In the foreground of the view from its windows rose a new stone bridge with the widest span in Britain, its epic scale designed to evoke the march of Roman legions and, by analogy, Marlborough's victorious armies. Across 'Pons Blenheimensis' was the dilapidated Woodstock Manor, and the duchess naturally assumed that this eyesore would be swept from view.

Vanbrugh wrote a letter giving two arguments for its preservation. The first was its relationship to literature and to legend. The manor house had been the trysting place of Henry II and Rosamund Clifford, as celebrated in the old ballad of 'Fair Rosamund'. Buildings of distant times 'move more lively and pleasing Reflections (than History without their aid can do) on the Persons who have inhabited them; on the remarkable things which have been transacted in

them'. The second was its relationship to painting. If trees were planted on either side 'so that all the buildings left might appear in two risings amongst'em, it would make one of the most agreeable objects that the best of Landskip painters can invent'.

The plea was unsuccessful, not least because the duchess discovered a third reason which Vanbrugh did not admit in his letter – at her expense, he had furnished several rooms inside the manor as a *pied-à-terre* for himself. 'All that Sir J.V. says in his letter is false,' she marked in the margin. Woodstock was demolished, but this letter was a turning-point in English taste. Vanbrugh had suggested that a real landscape could be composed like a painted canvas, and that the audience could step through a picture frame into a living scene. Nature could be improved by the eye of the artist, who adds living trees and rocks, sunlight, water and old ruins to his palette.

This Picturesque way of seeing is arguably England's greatest contribution to European visual culture. Its influence was seen as far afield as the *jardins anglais* of Marie-Antoinette at Versailles or Catherine the Great's palaces, or the deliberate wildness of Central Park in New York. In 1812, during the French occupation of Rome, it was proposed to landscape the Forum in the 'English taste', framing each ruin with clumps of trees. Napoleon's fall put paid to the scheme, but it would have been the final triumph of English tourists' claim to understand Rome better than the Romans. Before the Picturesque movement, thatched cottages and creaking windmills were not considered worthy of a designed landscape, nor were Gothic ruins, or gnarled oak-trees, or old walls covered in ivy. It is because of this

innovation that we buy calendars of countryside views, or those miniature ceramic models of cottages and water-mills. The Picturesque remains an inseparable element of English taste, although its last great exponent as an individual artist was John Piper (1903–82), who in 1941 wrote of how painting a brand-new house was as interesting as painting a young baby:

There's one odd thing about painters who like drawing architecture. They hardly ever like drawing the architecture of their own time . . . I know perfectly well that I would rather paint a ruined abbey half-covered with ivy and standing among long grass than I would paint it after it has been taken over by the Office of Works, when they have taken off all the ivy and mown all the grass.

The Picturesque only had such profound influence in eighteenth-century England, however, because it was the artistic expression of the new 'philosophy of association'. At the beginning of the century beauty was judged by classical rules, and architectural design was based upon certain mathematical proportions. Perfect beauty was considered to be an objective quality, a configuration of geometry which was visible to the eye of a man of taste in the same way as musical harmonies were recognisable to an ear tuned by education. The Picturesque was the first aesthetic to suggest that beauty could be subjective, translating to the visual arts the theory that the mind works by the association of accumulated memories, as explained in John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690). We associate

smoke from a cottage chimney with the warmth of a fireside, for example, and castle turrets with the romance of chivalry – or Woodstock Manor with the ballad of 'Fair Rosamund'.

These subjective associations had their own logic, as argued by Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756). Certain encounters directed the viewer's thoughts towards 'self-preservation': a dungeon, a dark grotto, a chasm of black rocks, or Mount Vesuvius. These were 'Sublime'. A meandering river, the gentle slopes of a smooth lawn, or a classical temple in a grove of cypresses suggested ideas of 'self-perpetuation'. These scenes were 'Beautiful'.

Burke was only codifying reactions which designers of Picturesque gardens had understood and exploited for several decades in gardens such as Stowe in Buckinghamshire, Painshill in Surrey and Stourhead in Wiltshire. By the lake at Stourhead, for example, ladies were expected to shiver with horror as the path disappeared into a cold, dark grotto with a waterfall thundering in the invisible distance. Emerging into a gentle valley grazed by sheep they paused on the steps of a classical temple, and a gentleman in the party might be moved to declaim Virgil's *Georgics*. These country gardens were designed as circular walks deliberately punctuated by such incidents, and in the eighteenth century were opened to all respectable members of the public.

No one 'invented' the Picturesque. In retrospect, it can be understood as a confluence of philosophers, poets and painters whose ideas flowed in the same direction. Vanbrugh was a soldier, spy and playwright before he became an architect, William Kent a painter who designed the landscapes at Claremont and Stowe. Joseph Addison of

Magdalen College, Oxford, was a disciple of John Locke, and he applied his mentor's theories of cognition to aesthetics in a series of influential essays on 'The Pleasures of Imagination' written for *The Spectator* in 1712. Why, he wondered, did the experience of a Gothic interior reach recesses of the psyche which were untouched by classical harmonies? And why, when strolling in the meadows beside the Cherwell, did he find the untrimmed trees noisy with birds more liberating to the spirit than the topiary 'Cones, Globes, and Pyramids' in the formal, French-style gardens which were the established taste? 'I would rather look upon a Tree in all its Luxuriancy and Diffusion of Boughs and Branches, than when it is thus cut and trimmed into a Mathematical figure; and cannot but fancy that an Orchard in Flower looks infinitely more delightful, than all the little Labyrinths of the most finished parterre.'

The perfect example of the Picturesque sensibility was John Dyer, a painter, poet, farmer and country curate. At the same time as he trained in the studio of the painter Jonathan Richardson he began to describe landscape in verse. Begun when he was just sixteen years old, in 1716, 'Grongar Hill' described his walk up this hill in Wales, and how his feelings fluctuated in response to the changing views over the Aberglasney valley. The ruined castle on the summit of the hill was a concluding *vanitas*:

And there the pois'nous adder breeds,  
 Conceal'd in ruins, moss and weeds;  
 While, ever and anon, there falls  
 Huge heaps of hoary moulder'd walls . . .  
 A little rule, a little sway,

A sunbeam in a winter's day,  
 Is all the proud and mighty have  
 Between the cradle and the grave.

Published in 1725 'Grongar Hill' was the first English poem to approach an actual landscape as a sequence of framed images. As with Vanbrugh, Dyer's originality can be explained by his leaping the boundaries between disciplines. It was as a painter that he travelled to Rome in 1724, where he wrote in a letter home:

I am not a little warmed, and I have a great deal of poetry in my head when I scramble among the hills of ruins, or as I pass through the arches along the Sacred Way. There is a certain charm that follows the sweep of time, and I can't help thinking the triumphal arches more beautiful now than ever they were, there is a certain greenness, with many other colours, and a certain disjointedness and moulder among the stones, something so pleasing in their weeds and tufts of myrtle, and something in them altogether so greatly wild, that mingling with art, and blotting out the traces of disagreeable squares and angles, adds certain beauties that could not be before imagined, which is the cause of surprise no modern building can give.

Dyer has stumbled across a major discovery: a building can seem more beautiful in ruins than when its original design is intact. Dyer published his poem on *The Ruins of Rome* in 1740, by which time he was a gentleman farmer in Higham in Leicestershire. In a naturalistic garden



ornamented by 'a rustic temple, a bower on a hill, and a Doric temple near the fish-pond' he fattened the sheep which would be the subject of his last great poem, *The Fleece* (1757), an adaptation of Virgil's *Georgics* to the woollen industry of modern Britain. Dyer was no eccentric but, in the parlance of the time, a 'man of feeling'. His passages of melancholy were, like a ruin seen by the wayside, passing episodes in a search for spiritual contentment, and the reconciliation of the virtues of classical antiquity with a nation of farmers, merchants and shopkeepers. While he was polishing *The Ruins of Rome*, he was simultaneously at work on a 'commercial map' for the improvement of Britain's inland navigation.

The first half of the eighteenth century was the springtime of the Picturesque. It was as if the corpses of abbeys and castles had been given a second life by artists and 'men of feeling'. In the 1720s John Aislabie, who as Chancellor of the Exchequer had been disgraced by the South Sea Bubble scandal and imprisoned in the Tower, was required to retire to his country estate. An 'outlaw myself and surrounded by impenetrable obscurity', as he joked to a fellow exile, he busied himself with transforming into a garden the rocky valley of the River Skell, which twisted and turned from the ruins of Fountains Abbey to his own house at Studley Royal. The site would have been rejected by a French garden designer, but its very wildness was a virtue in the decade of 'Grongar Hill'. Paths wound between pavilions placed on the outcrops of rock, and by the careful planting of trees Aislabie created a multiplicity of vistas framing temples across the valley, and focused on the statues and ponds placed on its grassy floor. After the second turn in the valley

the silhouette of the 'Queen of British ruins' rose before your eyes. The abbey stood on a neighbour's land, in fact, but the visitors enjoying the vista were not to know.

Fountains was the first of several abbeys to be incorporated into the views from modern gardens. At Duncombe Park in Yorkshire, a grass terrace runs from a statue of Father Time on the lawns in front of the house to a rotunda on a distant promontory. The terrace was created in 1758 to allow views of Rievaulx Abbey in the Ryedale below, built on a curve so that the twelfth-century ruins are never seen from the same angle; in the viewer's eye they revolve like an object turning on a potter's wheel. Trees were planted to allow only occasional glimpses, and to Arthur Young riding over the turf in 1768 the flickering views through the trees were like glimpses into a magical kingdom. It was in the ruins of Rievaulx that Dorothy Wordsworth rested that evening in 1802, listening to the thrushes singing in the green hillocks.

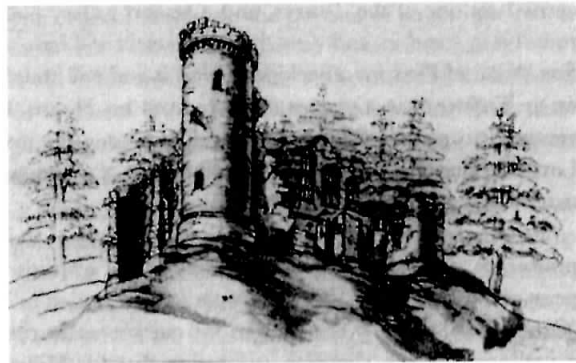
Roach Abbey, again in Yorkshire, lay a mile from the Earl of Scarborough's newly-built house of Sandbeck Park. In the 1770s Capability Brown was commissioned to landscape the scene, agreeing in the legal contract 'to finish all the Valley of Roach Abbey in all its parts (With Poet's feeling and with Painter's Eye)'. A stream beside the cloisters became a cascade, and the low horizontal walls were grassed over in order to emphasize the verticality of the columns.

It was also in the eighteenth century that medieval castles began to be incorporated into Picturesque gardens. The Arundells' stronghold of Wardour Castle in Wiltshire was one of many ruined in the Civil War, and this battered, split hexagon of the greenish local stone preserves a certain

poignancy. First, it was besieged by Parliamentarians: in Lord Arundell's absence his wife Blanche commanded an heroic but futile resistance. Arundell returned to recapture the castle, but was forced to tunnel into his own cellars and detonate a mine in order to expel the enemy. After the Restoration his descendants were too impoverished to rebuild, for as devout Catholics they were barred from holding public office. They lived in farmhouses on the estate, until the 6th Lord's advantageous marriage to the heiress to the land on which Soho was built – hence Wardour Street – enabled him to build New Wardour Castle in the 1770s. The house was in the latest neo-classical style but sited to enjoy views of the old castle from the windows of the saloon, for its ruin was a monument to the ancestry of the Arundells, to their loyalty to the king and to a persecuted faith.

Families whose estates were bare of antiquities could erect artificial ruins, and the two earliest can be dated to around 1729: a hermitage named King Alfred's Hall in Cirencester Park, and a sham church at Fawley Court, near Henley. More than thirty mock-ruins of abbeys and castles were erected in English landscape gardens in the eighteenth century, so I shall describe the example which for me encapsulates their charms and also their complexities: the sham castle at Wimpole Hall, near Cambridge.

Its architect was a gentleman amateur named Sanderson Miller who designed eye-catching follies for the estates of his friends, such as the castle at Lord Lyttelton's Hagley Hall (1747–8) which was described by Horace Walpole as bearing 'the true rust of the Barons' Wars'. Two years later Lyttelton wrote to Miller on behalf of Lord Hardwicke of



Design for a Sham Castle at Wimpole Hall, near Cambridge, by Sanderson Miller, c.1749–51. Miller was a country gentleman who never refused an invitation to visit a friend's estate and design an ornamental 'folly'.

Wimpole Hall, requesting a design from the 'Grand Master of Gothick':

he wants no House or even Room in it, but merely the Walls and Semblance of an Old castle to make an object from his house. At most he only desires to have a staircase carried up one of the Towers, and a leaded gallery half round it to stand in, and view the Prospect. It will have a fine Wood of Firs for a backing behind it and will stand on an Eminence at a proper distance from his House. I ventured to promise that you should draw one for his Lordship that would be fitt for his Purpose . . . I know that these works are an Amusement to you.

Miller drew an impression of the castle on its wooded

knoll, and a series of elevations whose raggedness he sketched with the zest of someone tearing a piece of paper. Certainly, he used no compass or set-square. Construction did not begin until 1767, however, by which time Miller had gone mad. His drawings were handed to the landscape gardener Capability Brown and to an architect, James Essex. The end-result was a little solid, a touch too professional, complained Lady Hardwicke:

The Tower is better for being raised, but the additions Mr Brown has quite changed from our plan, though he undertook to follow it and said he liked it. That is, he had 'Unpicturesqued' it by making it a continuous solid object, instead of a broken one. The wall . . . is continued entire at the bottom from the whole Tower to the Broken one, and is to be fractured only in the upper half of the Gateway.

In the 1990s a version of the Wimpole Folly was commissioned by John Paul Getty Jr. for a hilltop on his estate at Wormsley in Buckinghamshire, in order to conceal his satellite dishes. Did Lord Hardwicke also have a hidden agenda, beyond the natural desire to enliven a flattish East Anglian landscape? He was a parvenu, a lawyer from a middle-class family who rose to become Lord Chancellor and bought his country estate in 1740. Like an assumed coat of arms a castle on the skyline endowed his seat with an instant lineage. That is one suggestion. The castle has also been interpreted as a political symbol, noting the praise for 'manly Virtues of the Norman line' which is expressed in a poem dedicated to the folly: 'Free, hardy, proud, they

brav'd their feudal Lord / And try'd their rights by ordeal of the Sword.' In a period preoccupied with the respective rights of monarch and Parliament, politicians in the Whig Party admired the barons of the Magna Carta as the defenders of English liberties. This political symbolism worked hand in hand with the Picturesque in the rise of appreciation for the nation's medieval heritage: at Stourhead, for example, the lakeside walk passed scenes of classical mythology while an outer circuit on the encircling hilltops encompassed monuments to defenders of British liberty, including a tower in the Saxon style which was dedicated to King Alfred.

There is a third theory, however. Hardwicke and Lyttelton were leading figures in the government which crushed the Jacobite rising of 1745, and in their propaganda they claimed that Bonnie Prince Charlie wished to restore the feudalism and superstition of the barbaric Gothic age. After the battle of Culloden it was Hardwicke, as Lord Chancellor, who put his signature to the Acts of Parliament that abolished the 'baronial' institutions which had survived north of the border. Did the ruin on the skyline remind him of his achievement in destroying the last traces of medievalism?

Whichever is the correct interpretation, the uncertainty demonstrates that 'Gothic' was a double-edged sword. The word had been introduced in the Renaissance as a synonym for 'barbaric' and for the majority of educated people in Georgian England it continued to be a term of opprobrium. When Byron swore that Lord Elgin was a worse vandal than Alaric the barb only struck home because of Britons' pride in being heirs to the ancient Romans.

In 1789 a parson named William Clubbe erected a pyramid in the garden of his vicarage at Brandon, in Suffolk. It was assembled from fragments of medieval wall monuments which had been destroyed in the modernisation of the church in the nearby parish of Letheringham. Infuriated, Clubbe had collected the wreckage and composed an epitaph in which the mutilated stones hurl a final insult at the neighbouring parson:

FUIMUS!

Indignant Reader! These Monumental Remains are Not

(As thou Mayest Suppose)

The Ruins of Time

But

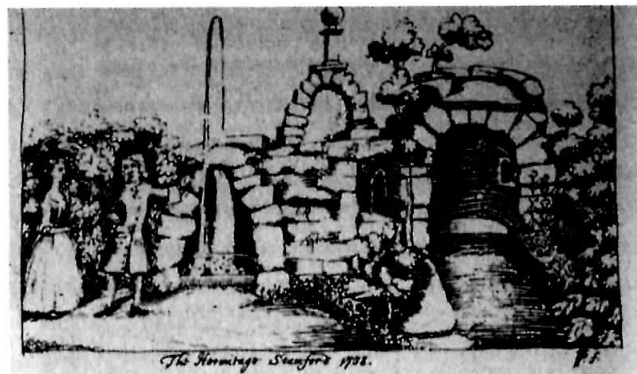
Were Destroyed in an Irruption of the Goths

So late in the Christian Era

As the Year 1789

CREDITE POSTERI!!!

Clubbe's pyramid was not the first folly to use genuine fragments in order to comment on the vandalism of a supposedly civilised age. The first of this genre was also a vicar's private revenge on his peers. Recently ordained, the antiquary William Stukeley arrived in Stamford in 1730, his parish church of All Saints' being one of the many medieval churches whose spires grace the Lincolnshire skyline. His delight in the benefice was upset when he discovered that the vicars in the neighbouring churches were busy whitewashing medieval frescos, removing stained glass, and installing new, pinewood pews. Stukeley's protests were in vain, and his only consolation was the news that owing to



The hermitage at Stamford, drawn by William Stukeley. The hermitage built by the Rev. William Stukeley in his garden at Stamford, Lincolnshire, in 1738 was decorated with stained glass and sculpture rescued from local churches undergoing 'modernisation'.

the dazzle of the new glass the Rev. Popple of St Martin's was forced to wear dark spectacles when preaching – that, and being able to purchase a few colourful shards from the glazier who was carting away the smashed medieval glass. He installed these pieces in the windows of a mock-ruin built at the end of his garden, a composite of salvaged medieval fragments which was as fantastic, self-absorbed and fragile as a child's sandcastle. Like Clubbe's pyramid it has disappeared but its reappearance is recorded in Stukeley's own pencil drawing. It was a three-dimensional representation of Francis Bacon's metaphor: 'antiquities are history defaced, or some remnants of history which casually have escaped the shipwreck of Time'. Indeed, the course of Stukeley's life seems to illustrate that haunting image.

The hope of an impoverished genteel family, William had

matriculated at Cambridge at the age of sixteen, in 1703. He was a student of medicine but was seduced by ruins as an undergraduate, walking alone over the Fen meadows to 'sigh over the Ruins of Barnwell Abbey, and [I] made a Draught of it, and us'd to cut pieces of the Ew trees there into Tobacco Stoppers, lamenting the Destruction of so many monuments of the Piety and Magnificence of our Ancestors'. This adolescent loneliness was the beginning of a career in which he became Britain's foremost scholar of Druidic and Roman Britain. The sheer physical exhilaration of belonging to the generation which rediscovered ruins in the 1720s is evident in a memoir of his travels across the country. Staying at a friend's house in Northamptonshire his companion in exploration was the younger sister, a girl of 'an airy temper':

she accompanied me in several of my Rambles in that Country to view Antiquitys, Roman Camps, and the like. We traveld together like Errant Vertuosos, and when we came to an old ruind castle, etc., we climbed together thro' every story and staircase . . . pulling each other over the gaping arches and rugged heaps of rubbish, and when I had occasion to draw a view of them out . . . she held my ink horn or my paper . . . and all without reserve or immodesty; nor could any aged Philosophers have conversed together with more innocent familiarity or less guilt even than in thought or intention.

He was appointed to be the first secretary of the Society of Antiquaries at its foundation in 1717, and four years later

he paid 4s. for wooden bollards which protected from road traffic the monument at Waltham Cross, erected by Edward I to commemorate where the body of his wife Eleanor had rested overnight on its way to Westminster Abbey. Returning in 1757 he was furious to discover that the commissioners of turnpikes had removed the bollards, in order to quicken the journeys of market wagons and stage-coaches. He ordered the construction of a brick wall, and in a public address lamented: 'with grief I discern us dropping into Gothic barbarism.'

Like John Dyer Stukeley was a 'man of feeling'; unlike Dyer, however, he fled the present day, escaping modern society and its speeding carriages to find a lonely solace in the fragments he could rescue from Time's shipwreck. Before Stamford he lived at Grantham, and, in 1728, in the garden he also created a hermitage which was a scrapbook of personal memories. Most oddly, after his wife miscarried:

The embrio, about as big as a filberd, I buryd under the high altar in the chapel of my hermitage vineyard; for there I built a niche in a ragged wall overgrown with ivy, in which I placed my Roman altar, a brick from Verulam, and a waterpipe sent me by Lord Colrain from Marshland. Underneath is a camomile bed for greater ease of the bended kneec, and there we enterred it, present my wife's mother, and aunt, with ceremonys proper to the occasion.

In the Stamford hermitage he included a small niche with room to seat one person only. I imagine that he re-created the introspective solitude of Barnwell Abbey, smoking a

pipe and perhaps – like the man in his garden shed in cartoons from the 1950s – hiding from his wife. ‘Stukeley, it is well-known, married Discord’, wrote a historian of the time.

There is a more imposing ‘folly’ ruin built on marital discord: the Jealous Wall at Belvedere House in Ireland, on the shores of Lough Ennell. Erected *c.*1760 by Robert Rochfort, Lord Bellfield, the jagged stone wall is 180 feet in length and the height of a three-storey house, and was designed to appear to be crumbling from the parapet downwards. In 1736 Bellfield had married, at the age of twenty-eight, a sixteen-year-old girl from Dublin named Mary Molesworth. He spent much time in London, where he was prominent in the representation of Irish affairs at court. Left alone with the children, Mary fell into the arms of her young brother-in-law, Arthur. Bellfield discovered her infidelity; she confessed, and Arthur took to his heels. The courts awarded Robert £20,000 damages and poor Arthur died in the debtors’ prison. Robert placed Mary under house arrest for the next thirty years, and forbade any visitors but their children. He once encountered her in the gardens without warning, and was so upset that he instructed a servant to walk in front of her in future, ringing a bell. Mary was released at her husband’s death in 1774, but she had long since gone mad.

Bellfield built the Jealous Wall to block the sight of the house where his wife had been seduced; it is a bitter inversion of the romantic vista suggested by Vanbrugh for Fair Rosamund’s Woodstock Manor. That is the legend; the truth is more mundane. Robert built the wall in order to conceal from view the house of a second brother, George,

with whom he had quarrelled about money. The interest of a ruin rarely lies in its reality. But tell that to the council official who erected a sign in front of a Gothic folly in a park in Abingdon. Sightseers beware, the sign read: THESE ARE NOT REAL RUINS.

*Prometheus Unbound* is in *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974), pp. 489–509.

Flaubert's letter on Thebes was written to Louis Bouilhet on 2 June 1850 and is published in *Selected Letters*, ed. Geoffrey Wall (Harmondsworth, 1997), p. 149.

The rebuilding of Noto is the subject of an excellent book by Stephen Tobriner (1982).

*The Roman Journals of Ferdinand Gregorovius* (1821–91) were translated into English by Mrs Gustavus Hamilton in 1911.

#### V *An Exemplary Frailty*

The relationship between architectural decay and human mortality is analysed by Dr Roger Bowdler in 'A Sad Prospect to the Soul' in *The Cult of the Ruin*, the Proceedings of the Georgian Group Symposium of 1998 (2001: to be published). The discussion of the seventeenth century is based on Bowdler's work.

The Tate's picture of Hadleigh Castle is a full-size sketch, and the final version which he exhibited at the Royal Academy is in the Paul Mellon Center for British Art, Connecticut. The episode is described in *The Later Paintings and Drawings of John Constable* by Graham Reynolds (Yale, 1984), pp. 199–202. The castle is on the Thames shore, near Southend-on-Sea.

For Walter Scott and Williamina Forbes I paraphrase A. N. Wilson, *A Life of Walter Scott* (1996 edn.), pp. 60–64.

#### VI *Time's Shipwreck*

*Goths and Vandals* by M. S. Briggs (1952) remains the best overview on how attitudes to medieval buildings have

changed in the centuries since their Dissolution, and is particularly vivid on the sixteenth century; he quotes the letter from Lewes.

It would be tedious to list all the examples from which I tried to construct a composite, but I would mention a few. John Aislabe of Studley Royal also built a house overlooking the ruins of Waverley Abbey, Surrey, which he landscaped, and he collaborated with John Vanbrugh on the campaign to save the Holbein Arch on Whitehall (see C. Woodward, 'A Pre-History of Conservation', in *Transactions of the Society for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings*, 1995). Rev. William Gilpin found the gable ends of Tintern Abbey too 'regular' and suggested that a 'mallet judiciously used (but who durst use it?) might be of service in fracturing them'. This was not done, although the stone pulpitum across the nave was removed in the nineteenth century in order to open the vista. The only examples of the smashing of window tracery in order to enhance a vista are at Guisborough Priory and Kenilworth Castle: see Joe Mordaunt Crook's introduction to the reprint (Leicester, 1970) of Charles Lock Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival*, 1872. Examples of the re-erection of Gothic ruins are at Shobdon in Herefordshire, and the removal of pieces of Netley Abbey to Cranbury Park in Hampshire (see C. Woodward, 'Ruins as Follies', *Country Life*, 8 October 1998).

*Great Romantic Ruins of England and Wales* by Brian Bailey (New York, 1984) is a gazetteer of historic ruins of all types, including abbeys, illustrated with excellent photographs by his wife Rita. For a thorough study of twentieth-century attitudes to the preservation of ruins by archaeologists, see Gill Chitty, 'A Prospect of Ruins' in

*Transactions of the Society for Studies in the History of Conservation*, 1993, pp. 43–60.

There are many books on eighteenth-century gardens but the most eloquent and incisive overviews are *The Picturesque* by David Watkin (1982) and Mavis Batey and David Lambert, *The English Garden Tour* (1990). Watkin explains the fictive way of seeing, Batey and Lambert the visitors' participation in its delights.

Sir John Vanbrugh's letter is transcribed in *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh*, ed. Geoffrey Webb (1928), pp. 29–30. For a brief account of the Woodstock Manor episode, see *The Work of John Vanbrugh* by Geoffrey Beard (1986), pp. 37–50.

There is a literary analysis of John Dyer and a succinct biography in Belinda Humphrey, *John Dyer* (Cardiff, 1980). *Grongar Hill* was reprinted by Stourton Press in 1983 with illustrations by John Piper.

The best single studies of individual ruins are of the folly at Fawley Court by Geoffrey Tyack (*Country Life*, 20 April 1989) and by David Adshead, 'The Design and Building of the Gothic Folly at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire' in *The Burlington Magazine*, February 1998, pp. 76–83. The suggestion that the latter castle was built to celebrate the fall of a 'Gothic' political order was made by David Stewart in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of America* (1997).

The Rev. Clubbe as antiquarian and wit is the subject of 'John Clubbe and the Antiquities of Wheatfield' by Alison Shell in *The Book Trade and its Customers 1450–1900*, ed. Arnold Hunt (Winchester, 1997). Stuart Piggott wrote the biography of William Stukeley (2nd edn., 1985).

Bacon's metaphor of 'Time's Shipwreck' is in *Advancement of Learning*, II, section 1. The metaphor is that of Vossius in *De philologia liber*, 'Antiquities are the remains of ancient times, similar to the debris of a shipwreck'.

For the Jealous Wall at Belvedere see the chapter on 'Ruins and Eye-Catchers' in *The Follies and Garden Buildings of Ireland* by James Howley (New Haven, 1993), and *Titles* by Leo Daley (1981), pp. 42–67, for an accurate account of the scandal.

#### VII *Serious Follies*

Virginia Water is studied in Jane Roberts, *Royal Landscape: The Gardens and Parks at Windsor* (New Haven and London, 1997), pp. 457–61, and the most detailed study of the stones from the archaeological point of view is by G. E. Chambers, 'The "Ruins" at Virginia Water' in the *Journal of the Berkshire Archaeological Society*, 1953–4.

The catalogue of an exhibition, *Visions of Ruin*, which I curated at Sir John Soane's Museum in 1999, with essays by David Watkin, Helen Dorey and myself, studied English 'follies' in greater detail.

The artificial ruin in the Duke of Urbino's park at Pesaro – long vanished – is described and illustrated in Antonio Pinelli and Orietta Rossi, *Genga Architetto* (Rome, 1971), pp. 246–51. The unexecuted project of c.1730 for the backdrop to the Trevi Fountain is recorded in a drawing in the Kunstbibliothek, Berlin, reproduced in Bruce Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture* (1998), p. 107.

The ruin room at Sta Trinità dei Monti is on pp. 103–12 of Thomas McCormick's monograph on the artist, *Charles-*



*For Michael and Isabel Briggs*

# In Ruins

Christopher Woodward



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For I know some will say, why does he treat us  
to descriptions of weeds, and make us hobble  
after him over broken stones, decayed buildings,  
and old rubbish?

Preface to *A Journey into Greece*  
by George Wheeler (1682)

## In Ruins