

1.—MONUMENTAL PIERS AND SPHINXES FLANKING THE ENTRANCE TO THE FORECOURT

BRAMHAM PARK, YORKSHIRE—I

THE HOME OF COLONEL AND THE HONOURABLE MRS. LANE FOX & By ARTHUR OSWALD

Robert Benson, later Lord Bingley, built the house on a virgin site between 1700 and 1710 and also laid out the celebrated garden. He seems to have acted as his own architect with assistance, perhaps, from Gibbs and Archer

SOVEREIGN as a landscape park can be, it is with some resentment that one encounters the leering eyes of Capability Brown in Dance's well-known portrait of him, remembering how many great formal lay-outs of an earlier generation he swept away as though they were so much litter of dead leaves. At Bramham the visitor has the rare, indeed unique, enjoyment of seeing a fine Queen Anne house with a domain and garden planned and intended at the time it was built. Improvements in notions about "the picturesque" have been owed to take their ideas elsewhere. Avenues, eight vistas, rond-points, intersecting walks and rides, high clipped hedges, a canal, waterfalls, cascades are here all to be seen in

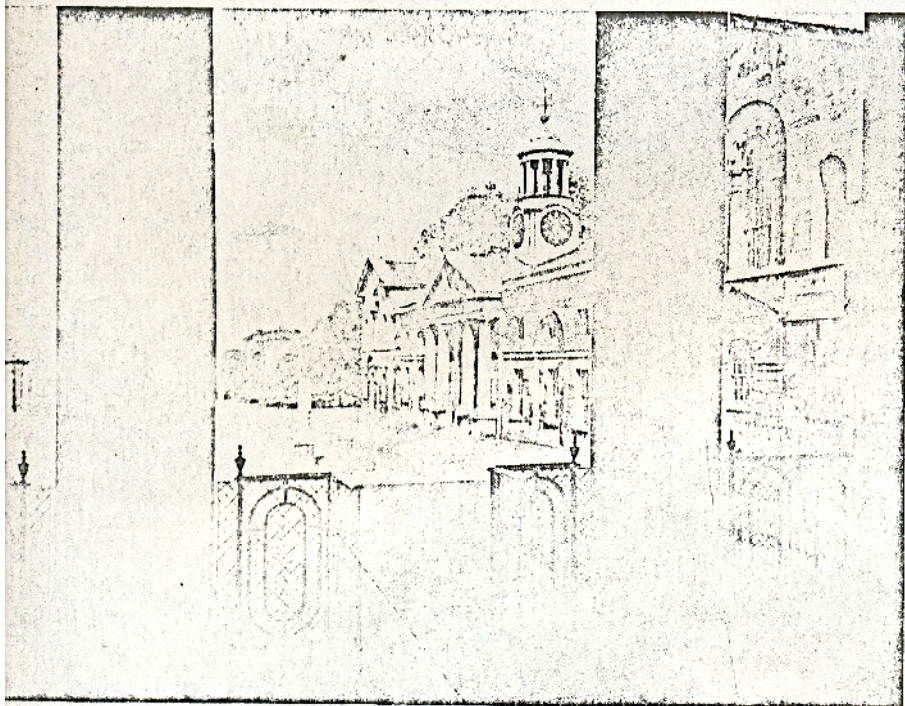
actuality instead of having to be imagined or inferred from engravings, descriptions or a few traces left in the grass. And the house, though severely damaged by fire in 1828, in its external aspect remains virtually unaltered, with its flanking colonnades and wings, spacious forecourt and monumental gate-piers.

The garden and its buildings will be illustrated in separate articles. Here we are concerned only with the house. Its builder, and the creator of the garden, was Robert Benson, who in 1713 became Lord Bingley. The site he chose was a virgin one, on a slope with a north-eastward aspect across a secluded valley, which, before it was enclosed, had formed part of the lonely expanse of Bramham Moor. The little

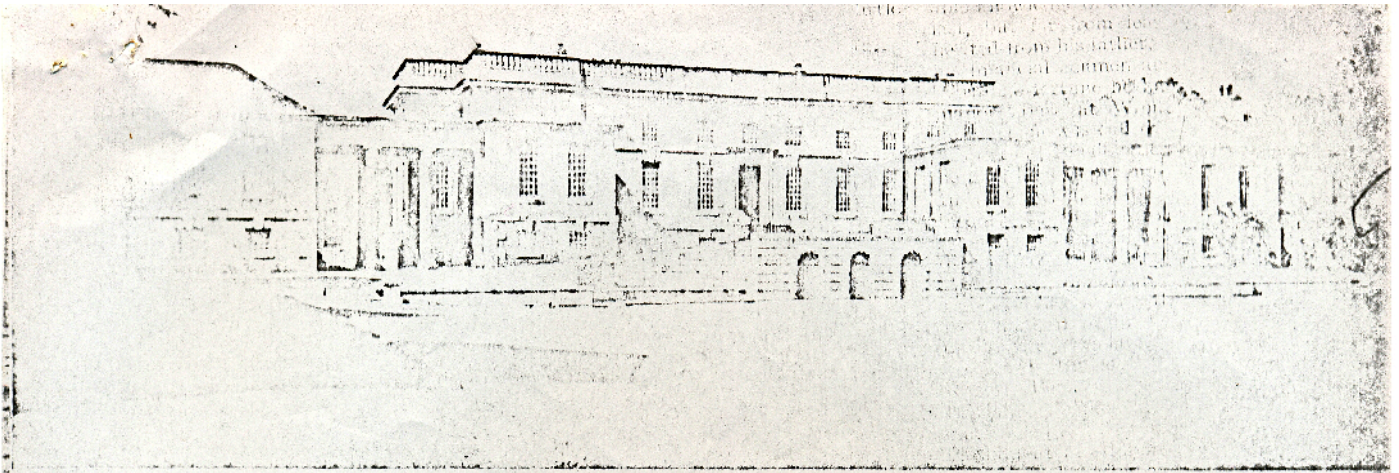
stream that flows through the park, and hollowed out the combe which the domain embraces, makes its way northward to join the Wharfe near Boston Spa. *En route* it passes the village of Bramham, through which also runs the Great North Road, crossing the Moor more than a mile east of the house, well out of sight and mind.

Robert Benson's contemporaries, at the time when he stepped on to the political stage, took delight in alluding to his "mean extraction." Although he could not produce a long pedigree, he had a number of compensating advantages: good looks, a command of several languages, a taste cultivated in Italy, considerable knowledge of and skill in architecture, and last, but far from least, a large fortune inherited from his father, which he augmented by his financial acumen and careful management. With the fortune he had also inherited an old manor house at Wrenthorpe, outside Wakefield, which was called Red Hall, and he had property at Bingley, near Bradford, from which he took his title when he was given his peerage. In 1702, when Ralph Thoresby made a tour into Lancashire, he rode through the already populous parish of Bingley and noted in his diary that "Mr. Benson of Wrenthorpe, near Wakefield, who is also Lord of the manor of Bingley" had a seat there. His new house at Bramham, if begun then, was not completed until eight years later.

Lord Bingley's father, who was also Robert Benson, son of Robert and Mary Benson of Wakefield, had done very well for himself. In 1673 he stood for election to Parliament at Aldborough, opposing Sir John Reresby, who after a double return had been made eventually obtained the seat. In his *Memoirs* Reresby describes the older Benson as "the most notable and formidable man for business of his time; one of no birth, and that had raised himself from being clerk to a county attorney to be clerk of the peace at the Old Bailey, to clerk of assize of the northern circuit and to an estate of 2,500 *l.* per annum, but not without suspicion of great frauds and oppression." Before the Civil War he was already of some local importance, and he served as a commissioner for raising money for the King's forces. He was, therefore, brought before the Committee as a delinquent and fined £200.



2.—THE STABLES SEEN FROM THE SOUTH COLONNADE



3.—THE WIDE-SPREADING ENTRANCE FRONT WITH THE RAMPED APPROACHES

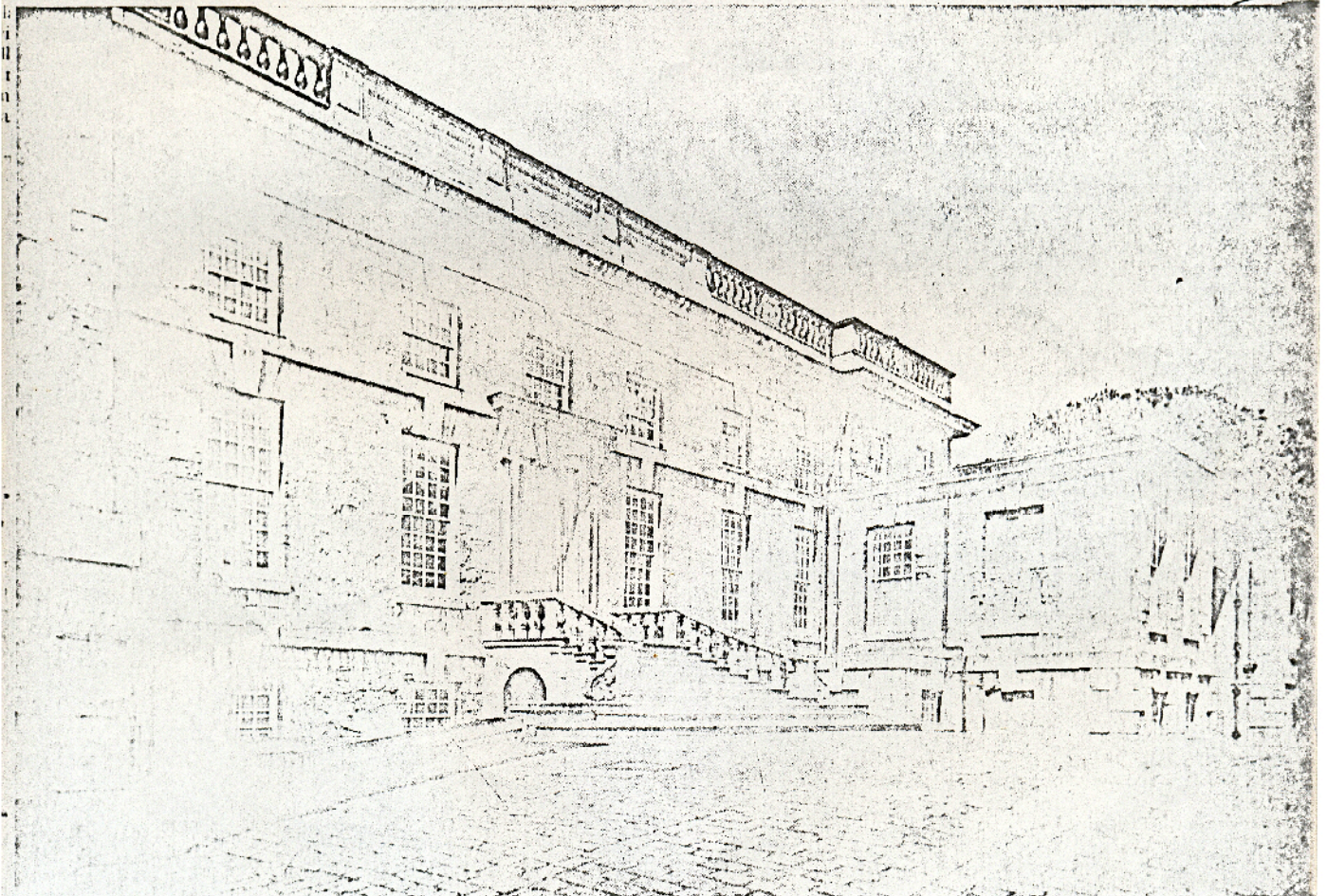
having previously been deprived of his place as Clerk of the Peace for the West Riding. This, however, was only a temporary check to his progress, for he seems to have submitted to, and prospered under, the new régime. He bought and resided at Red Hall, Wrenthorpe, until, after the Restoration, he transferred his activities to London, having ingratiated himself with Sir Thomas Osborne (later Earl of Danby and eventually Duke of Leeds). According to Reresby, when Osborne was made Lord Treasurer, he was attracted by Benson's schemes for increasing the revenue by such devices as "concealments, fines and forfeitures, &c." Benson was to be his assistant and hoped also to be made a judge. *Dis aliter visum.* "One day, as he was returning from his lordship's to his own chamber in Gray's Inn, it

pleased God to dispose of him otherwise; for as he was going up the stairs to the passage at the end of the hall, he was seized with a fit of apoplexy, and so died without speaking one word." This happened in 1676.

The future Lord Bingley was then only a few months old. He was brought up by his mother, who was a daughter of Toby Jenkins of Grimston. In 1690 she married Sir Henry Belaysse, later of Brancepeth, and died in 1696, being buried in Westminster Abbey, where her son was to be laid. It was presumably then, or soon after, having come of age, that he set off on his travels. For his earlier years we are dependent on *The Wentworth Papers* and, in particular, an account of him written by Lord Raby, who, when the Tory Government took office under Harley in 1710, penned a series of

brief "characters" of the new ministers. Mr. Benson is of no extraction. This gentleman has been a very good manager and has saved 5 or 6000 pounds or more. He has lived very handsomely in the country without being a drinker though very gallant amongst the ladies. He had travelled in Italy where he had good fortune to strike up a friendship with my lord Dartmouth, by whose means he married a daughter of Lord Guernsey's. He is always elected a burghess for the county of York . . . and is building a house 12 miles from thence.

The lady was Elizabeth Finch, Lady Dartmouth's sister, and her father on George I's accession became Earl of Aylesford. Although Benson's marriage had taken place in



4.—THE ENTRANCE DOORWAY AND STEPS GOING UP FROM THE PAVED TERRACE FOR COACHES

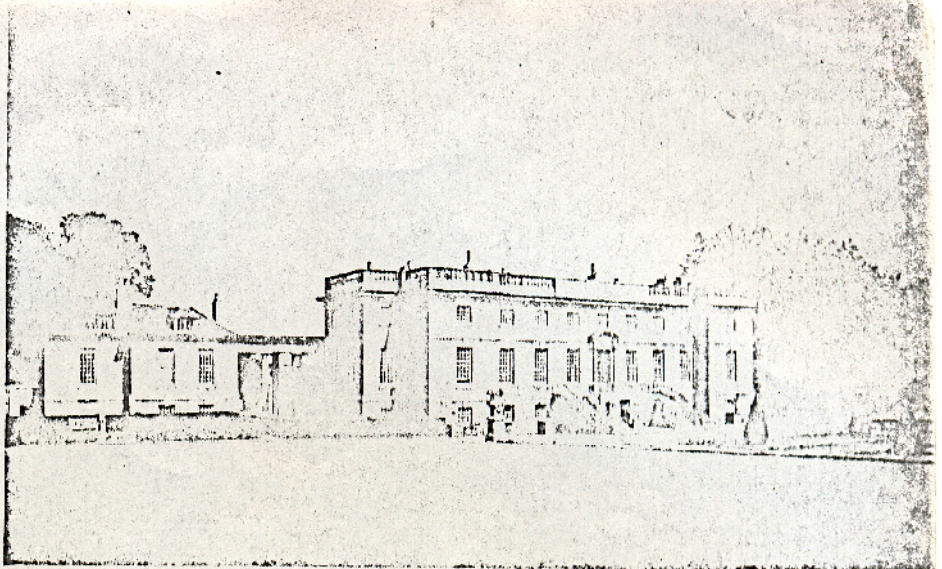
able match she thought Mr. Benson would make for her youngest daughter, Betty. To see the passage in her own erratic spelling:

Your brother Wentworth tells me Mr. Benson is to look after your buildin in Yorkshire. I have found him out to be an old aquantenc of myne, his father was your father's mortell ennemy, but his mother was particularly kinde to me when I was in Yorkshire. I have kist him many a time: he was a very prety boy, he has a good estate, I wish Betty had him, he wants noe mony, soe hee needs not a wife with a fortune.

How long the young Benson was in Italy is not known, but he was certainly back in England by 1700. In that year he was chosen one of the Deputy Lieutenants for the West Riding.

In 1702, he was elected M.P. for Thetford, from which seat he transferred to York in 1705, and he continued to represent York until he obtained his peerage. As a Tory he came to his own in 1710, when, through Harley's influence, he was made a Commissioner of the Treasury, and the following year, when Harley came Lord Treasurer and Earl of Oxford, Benson stepped into his old office as Chancellor of the Exchequer. In 1713, having been given a barony, he was persuaded rather against his will to go as ambassador to Madrid. The appointment came to an end on George I's accession, and thereafter he was out of office until 1730, when, a year before his death, he was made Treasurer of the Household to George II. For several years he was a director of the South Sea Company, and he came well out of the South Sea Bubble, selling before the crash occurred. In his later years he was able to devote himself to building a town house in Cavendish-square and perfecting the garden of his Yorkshire estate.

It is uncertain exactly when the land comprising the estate was acquired, but from evidence kindly communicated to me by Mr. G. B. Hutchings, the Leeds City Librarian, which will be given in the articles on the garden and park, it would appear that Benson purchased the bulk of the property in or very soon after 1699. Among some notes left by the late Lord Bingley is one giving 1698 as the date when the building of the house was begun. It would seem to be a year or two too early, as Benson already held the land on lease and had opened negotiations for its purchase.



5.—THE GARDEN FRONT AND NORTH WING, FORMERLY THE CHAPEL

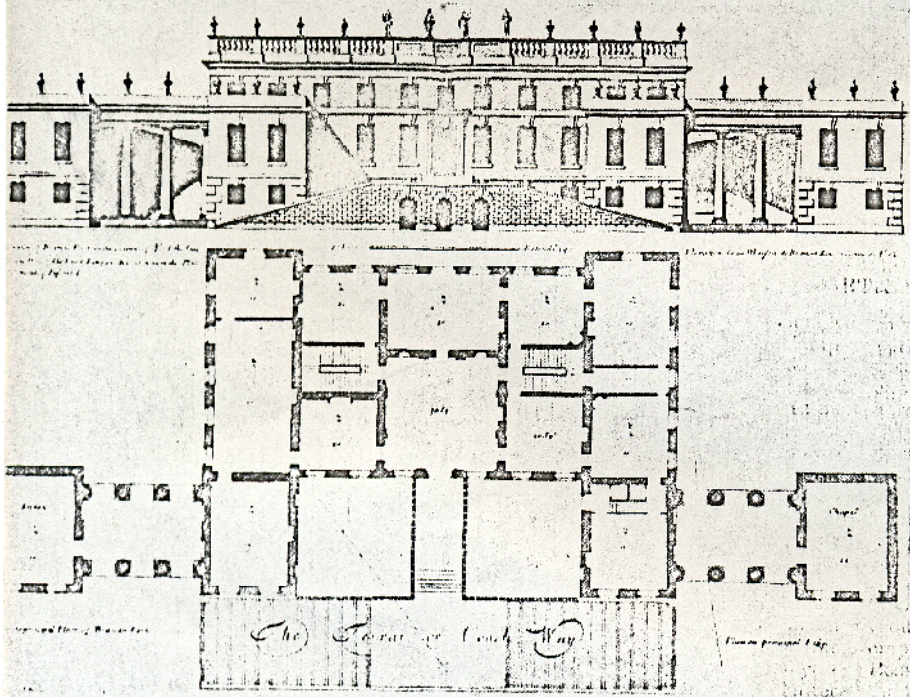
Building and decoration of the house probably went on over a period of ten years. Colin Campbell included a plate with plan and elevation of the entrance front in the second volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* published in 1717. In his brief description he says nothing about the architect but concludes: "Here are curious Gardens laid out with great Judgment, and all the other additional Improvements were happily finished by the noble Patron, Anno 1710."

There can be no question that the young Robert Benson was regarded by his contemporaries as extremely knowledgeable on architecture, and as a result there has been some confusion of him with his namesake, William Benson, of Wilbury, the supplanter of Sir Christopher Wren in the office of Surveyor-General, from which post he was dismissed after a year for incompetence. William Benson, a Whig, was one of the initiators of the Palladian movement which came to revolve round Lord Burlington; Robert Benson belonged to the Tory group, whose taste turned to Gibbs with his knowledge of Italian Baroque. There is a letter from Lord Bute to the Earl of Strafford (as Lord Raby had become) in which

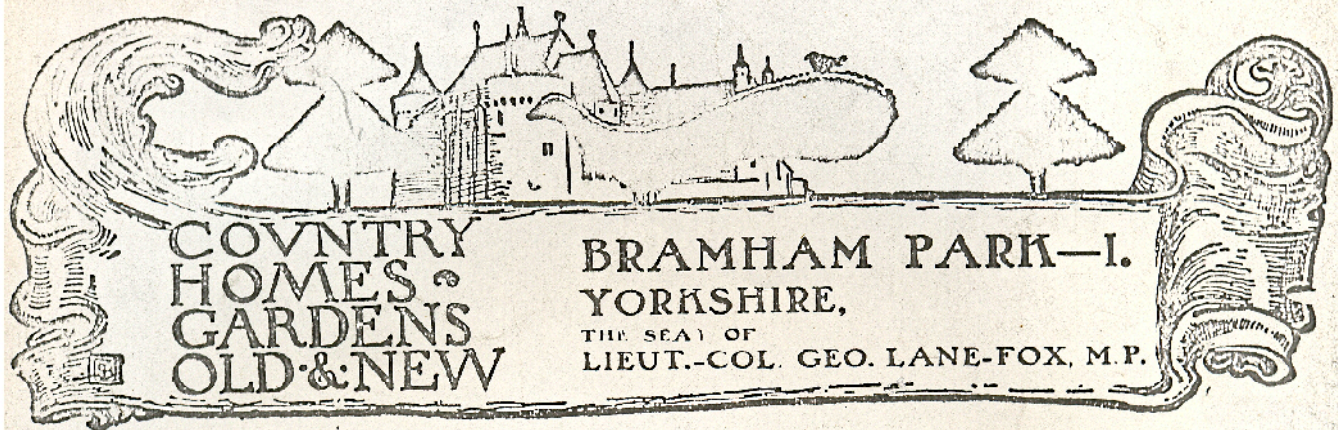
Strafford is rallied with having been "so merry with your humble Servant as to prefer my low taste in architectur to the consummated experience of Bingley." The building of Stainborough, or Wentworth Castle as it came to be called, was an involved business further complicated by the absence of Lord Raby during much of the time as ambassador in Berlin where the services of the King of Prussia's architect, von Bott, were enlisted to provide a design for the east front. In this long-range conduct of building operations Raby had some help and advice from Benson, who agreed to "look after" the building as far as he could, though Benson was always urging him to employ a permanent surveyor. This faith in Benson must have rested on something more than a virtuoso's taste and doubtless was a tribute to his knowledge of architecture and sound, practical sense, both put to the proof in the building of Bramham. Later the Duke of Chandos consulted Bingley over the design of Cannons.

Neale is responsible for the statement that the creator of Bramham employed an Italian architect. This, like similar statements about other houses made over a century after they were built, may have been no more than a vague tradition, but it led to the over-hasty identification of the architect as Leoni. Improbable on grounds of style, the attribution can be dismissed because Leoni is not known to have come to England much before 1715, and when Bramham is likely to have been begun he was only a boy. Mr. Marcus Whiffen has put forward Thomas Archer as a candidate. Archer certainly designed the house which Lord Bingley built for himself on the west side of Cavendish-square. This, later known as Harcourt House, was begun in 1722. Roque's engraving of it shows that its ill-designed front had several of Archer's peculiarities worked into it, and it is difficult to believe that the same architect could have produced the distinguished elevations of Bramham so remarkable for their reticent handling. When the second Earl of Oxford visited Bramham on his northern tour in June, 1725, he remarked of the house that Lord Bingley "may think it no great compliment to the architecture of it, to say that it makes a better appearance on the outside than that of his Lordship's in Cavendish Square." If Archer was concerned with the design of Bramham, he must have been kept very strictly under control.

It is altogether more reasonable to conclude with Mr. Tipping, who described Bramham in those pages in 1921 (*COUNTRY LIFE*, Vol. I, p. 416), that Benson was his own architect at least to the extent of choosing the site, sketching a plan and elevation and, perhaps, specifying some of the details. At the same



ELEVATION OF THE ENTRANCE FRONT AND PLAN FROM *VITRUVIUS BRITANNICUS*, VOL. II (1717)

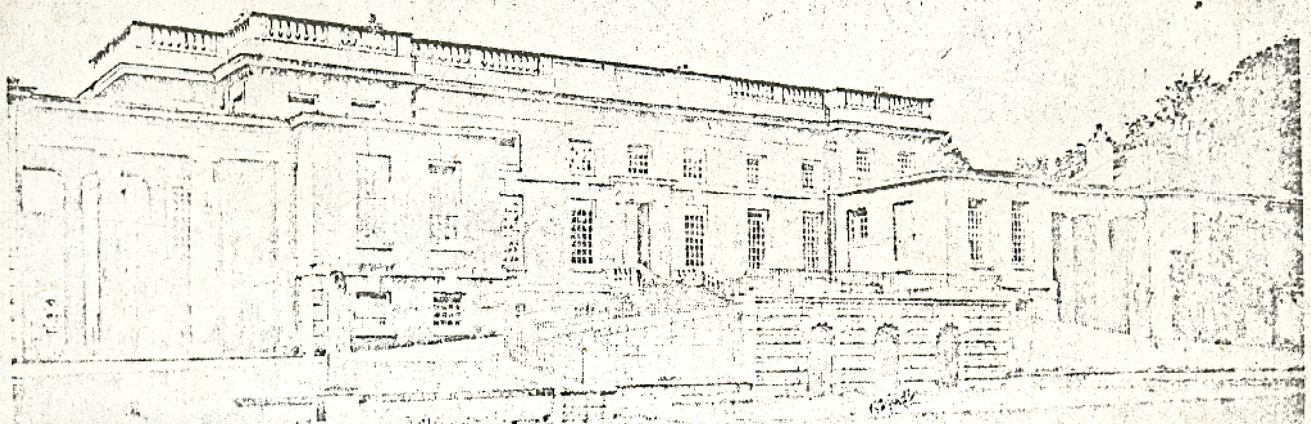


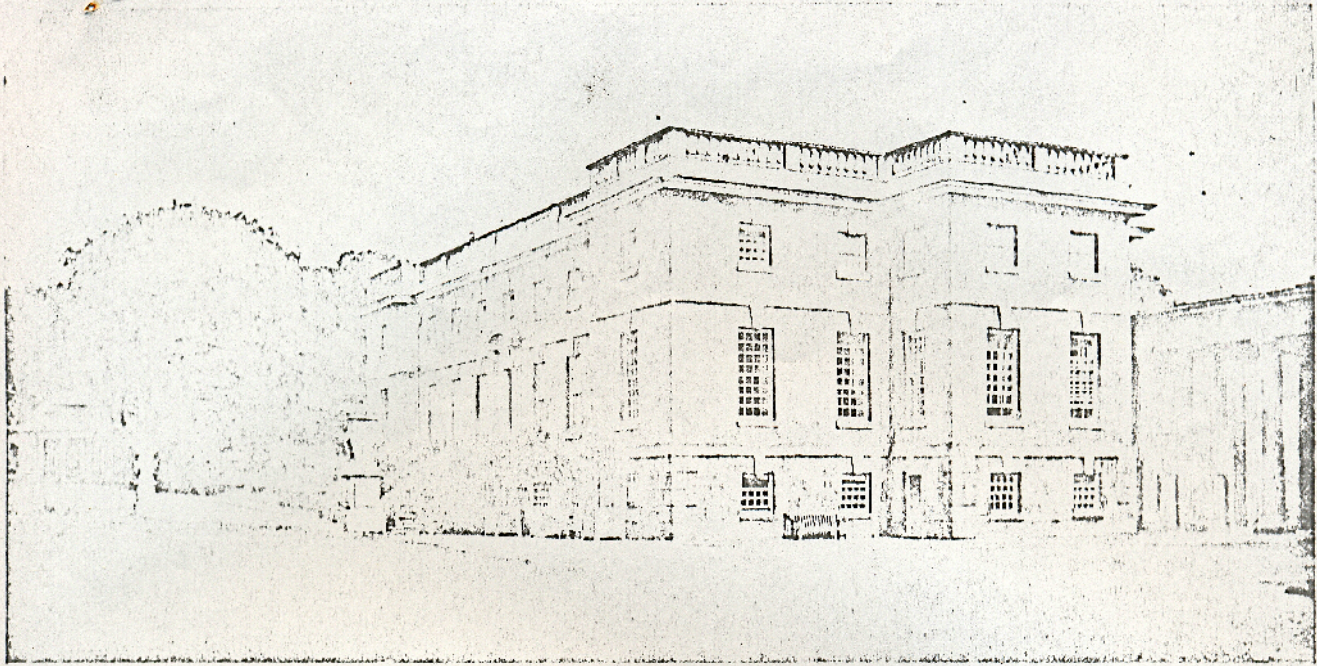
BRAMHAM remains a very complete and little altered expression of the spirit in which a large country house and its environment were conceived and executed by the wealthy amateurs and studious professionals who ruled architecture in England during the first half of the eighteenth century, drawing their inspiration from Italian travel and the study of Palladio's writings. Of such lordly seats Bramham is not among the big and grand, yet is quite of the type and an early example. Adoption of the Italian manner of house planning and garden making had distinguished Inigo Jones in the first half of the seventeenth century, and in the second half had largely influenced Wren and his contemporaries. But with them it did not completely oust native tradition and render them oblivious to racial habits and climatic conditions. That was reserved for the group which formed itself around the Earl of Burlington after he returned from Italy and came of age in 1716. It soon controlled design both of fabric and decoration, and such places as Mereworth and Chiswick, Moor Park and Houghton arose. But Bramham, although dating from the reign of Queen Anne, is clearly the work of a convinced exponent of the full Italian school, who, moreover, must have seen and studied its principles of garden making as interpreted and developed by Le Nôtre and carried out by him in grand manner around the palaces of Louis XIV and his wealthy subjects.

That being so, it is curious that Bramham finds no mention either in Belcher and Macartney's "Later Renaissance Architecture," or in Inigo Triggs' "Formal Garden." The former omission is explained by the fact that at the date of publication

the house at Bramham was still the roofless shell to which the fire of 1828 reduced it. But it is a loss that Mr. Triggs did not survey the Bramham lay-out and include a measured plan of it in his book to accompany those of Hampton Court and Melbourn Hall, of Canons Ashby and Drayton, which, with Bramham, are among the more striking survivals of the age of formal gardening in England. Except William III's palace by Thames side, Bramham is by far the largest of these survivals, and was akin to the outstretching and many-avenued grounds which at Badminton and Boughton the Dukes of Beaufort and Montagu created and Kip engraved. The Bramham lay-out, particularly, wants careful surveying and measuring as it is not obvious—was not constructed on a drawing-board with T-square and rule and given symmetrical radiations and balanced incidents, but grew up on the spot and was dominated by geography, by the quite rolling and broken character of the many aced area that it occupies. Thus, despite strict formality in principle and in general form, it has something of the accidental and unexpected. The scheme is restful in its straight lines and broad effects, and yet exciting and mysterious by the involved assemblage and disposal of its parts. I have paced its alleys, contemplated its vistas, noted its water works, marked its corners, angles and radiations, comprehended its extent and the relationship of its parts. But yet, except in a very rough and inaccurate manner, I should not be able to set down on paper their relationship to the house and to each other.

The whole place is evidently the arresting creation of a remarkable man, and information that let one into the secret of his





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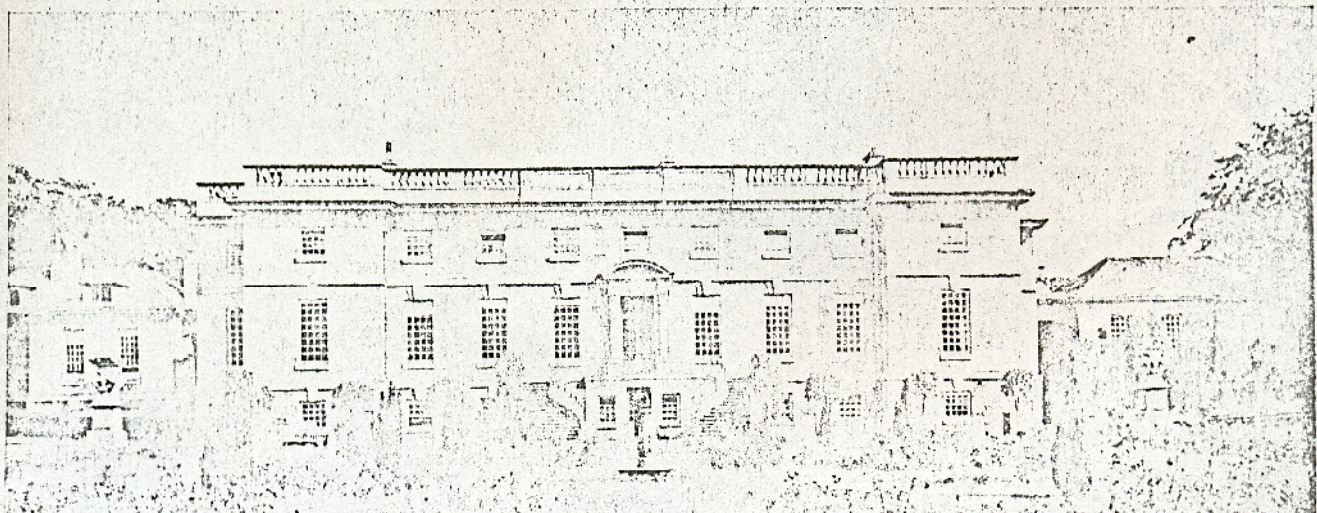
3.—THE SOUTH AND WEST ELEVATIONS.

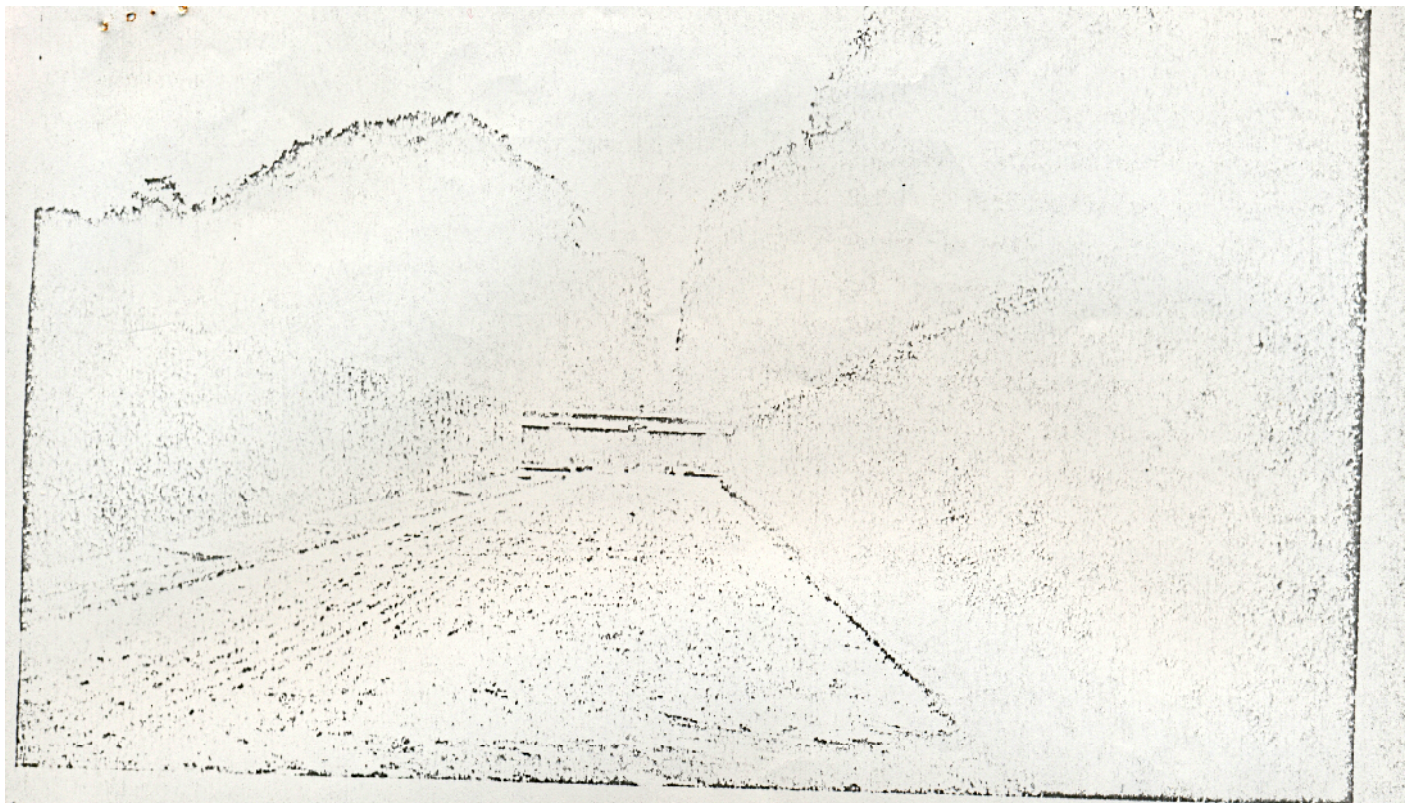
"COUNTRY LIFE."

The broad walk is seen running up to the north garden house. The width of the parterre is marked by the stately stone urns.

character and training, his accomplishments and methods would be welcome. It is, unfortunately, almost entirely wanting, and it is only by a careful collection and weighing of scattered crumbs that any estimate can be formed of what manner of man was Robert Benson, Lord Bingley, and how he converted a moorland waste into splendid pleasure grounds surrounding a stately house. Of his ancestry we hear no more than that he was the son of one Robert Benson of Wrenthorpe by Dorothy, daughter of Tobias Jenkins, M.P. for York City, and of this elder Robert Benson we are told nothing praiseworthy. His Yorkshire neighbour, Sir John Rezesby, calls him "a man of mean extraction and of little worth," while Lord Raby (afterwards Earl of Stafford), who had close political and neighbourly relations with the son, speaks of the father as "an attorney, and of no great character for an honest man." He practised the law in York, and being, no doubt, of a prudently thrifty and keenly acquisitive nature, he profited largely by managing the affairs and, for a consideration, meeting the temporary needs of impecunious and extravagant clients. As was the habit of his day, he invested much of his gains in realty, acquiring, among other acres, the Wrenthorpe estate near Wakefield, and a large tract of the lands bordering on or included in Bramham Moor, which lies

to the west of York City. Thus he was in a position to give his son a broader field for a career than he had enjoyed. Foreign travel, with Italy and its arts, antiquities and architecture as a special bourne and study, was the completing educational stage of the golden youth of the age, and this the obscure York attorney must have afforded to his son, who would meet at Rome and other cities the heirs and scions of noble families, and poor but keen students, such as James Gibbs. No more than this is known of the young days of Robert Benson junior, who was born in 1676 and was, therefore, nearing the age of thirty when he was first returned as a Member for York City in 1705. That is the earliest public mention of him, but a glimpse of his home life as a boy we do get from a letter written in 1709 by Lady Wentworth to her son Raby, who was the male representative of the Wentworths of Wentworth Woodhouse and resented the passing of the family place through the female line to the Watsons of Rockingham Castle. He therefore purchased a neighbouring estate, rechristened it Wentworth Castle and added to the house so as to make it quite equal to the Wentworth Woodhouse of that day. But as he was, at this period, mostly resident at Berlin, as Ambassador to Frederick I of Prussia, his brother Peter Wentworth, who managed for him in England, begged the





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11.—THE BROAD WALK, LOOKING SOUTH.

The water basins appear, and beyond them the park and the Black Fen continue the vista.

"COUNTRY LIFE."

as the garden architecture, are carried out in the splendid ashlar that this part of Yorkshire liberally supplies.

The forecourt opens straight from the park, its ha-ha being linable with the eastern boundary of Benson's formal lay-out, which is not suspected till the western side of the house is reached. Nor, as already implied, is its size and scheme fully comprehended then, for the house centre does not, as in most of Kip's bird's-eye views, focus and act as the pivot of the whole scheme of parterres, avenues and vistas. The only vista seen from the windows is one at an angle and taking a south-westerly direction. A glade framing a direct western prospect will certainly have been projected, if not carried out, as an extension of the line of the parterre and waterworks facing the house which have in measure survived. Beyond these there is now no outlook, but a deep backing of tall trees. A cut through these to carry the eye out at this point beyond the 100-acre garden enclosure is expected. Whether from the first it was omitted as affording a poor vista owing to the rise of the ground and as letting in the impetuous west winds, or whether it was afterwards filled in for other reasons, is uncertain.

The parterre (Fig. 4) is rather wider than the length of the house and some 60yds. in depth. It is cut out of rising ground and, therefore, backed by a wall enriched with niches for statues and pilasters for vases. In the centre is now a shapeless mass of stone, where originally was an architecturally treated gush of water falling into a shapely stone edged basin, the outline of which still shows in the grass, which, with rose beds, Irish yews and a circular, now occupies the whole level area. The water conveyed to the parterre previously served other basins on the level above and behind the parterre, their site being still discernible there, so that the scheme was, no doubt, as complete and highly wrought as that which still exists south of the house.

Parallel to the front of the house runs a broad gravel way stretching its length north and south. To the north (Fig. 3) it leads, some 100yds. beyond the house front, with a pedimented porticoed garden house, containing a room, now fitted as a parlour of fine proportions and good stuccowork. The illustration (Fig. 7) of this building is taken from south-east and shows an alley, typical of the Bramham scheme, of tall clipped beech trees backed by lofty trees. It runs west for fully 350yds., with others coming into it at a space centred by a statue, and

ends in a cut greenery alcove. Here it meets another and greater alley that stretches, at a somewhat oblique angle from end to end of the lay-out, with open ends framing views and architectural objects and having incidents in its course. One of these is the most important meeting of alleys punctuated by a huge urn (Fig. 10). Another is the head of the T canal (Fig. 8), which is a good example of the spirit of compromise which the business-like Benson, who had undertaken a job quite as big as his resources warranted, introduced as the leading factor in his water scheme. This was to be extensive, varied and formal, but yet not very expensive or calling for immense earth moving and embankments. To reach this end every advantage must be taken of nature's levels, and these were not so obliging as to fit in with any entirely geometrical scheme. The popular T canal, giving two way vistas along and beyond a long line of water, was certainly to be introduced, but the head must be set at anything but a right angle with the stem. The latter runs along the centre of the further end of the one alley that gives a vista from the house, but the rise of the ground up to the point where the canal begins hides the presence of water from the lower end, and we have almost reached the margin of the 100yd. length of the head before we suspect its presence. This alley is wide and unhedged, the ample expanse of grass stretching across the goft. that lie between one row of tall beech stems to that opposite.

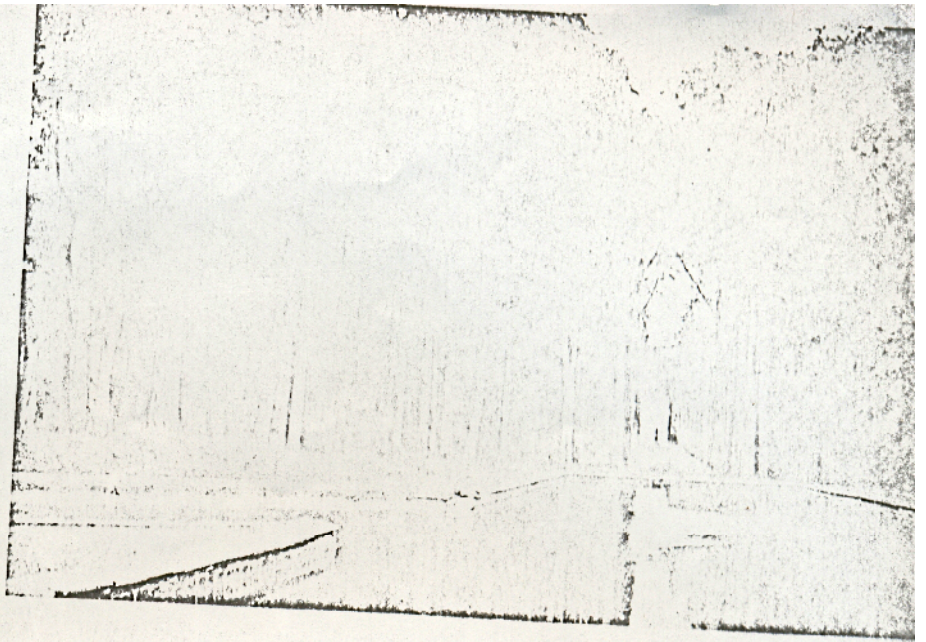
Returning to the garden house we stand in its portico and look straight before us down the broad walk. Although level in its section fronting the house, its inclination for three or four hundred yards is downwards. Then Nature gave a slight swell, followed by a more rapid descent. It was the top and sides of this swell that Benson chose for his most elaborate and architectural water scheme. A great basin, 70yds. across along the line of the vista and 58yds. wide, occupies the upper level, and was flanked north and south by smaller basins at lower level. Thus from the garden house the gleam of its water was visible, and pouring through the mouths of masks in the plastered retaining wall the water was seen brimming great conch shells and flowing over their edges into the lower basin, now filled up and set with flowers (Fig. 11). From the level of the great basin itself the full water scheme could be enjoyed. Westward of it the ground rose, and it was from this point that, along a small basin and down steps, the water flowed into it. Looking south (Fig. 9) we see the

extended end of a great basin with a breach in moulded stone coping. This reaches to the end of a ravine like hollow at the bottom of which we see traces of further basins, while at its other edge the park begins. Yet the formal layout is by no means ended. The line of the broadwalk is continued by a beech avenue of which a few trees still stand till on the high ground a great plantation or wood called Black Fen is reached, its edge terraced with a wrought stone ha ha, and on the terrace stands a classic temple. The whole of several hundred acres of Black Fen is cut by alleys radiating from centres marked by architectural object, the latest being the Obelisk erected by the 2nd Lord Bingley to his dead son in 1769.

In Black Fen rises the spring made use of to supply the southern water scheme while another spring west of it, and at a somewhat higher level, was brought into requisition for the T canal overflow of which probably served the basins above and in the parterre. Those were not the days of cast iron and earthenware pipes. A reservoir was formed at the spring and thence water was taken in open channels that had to follow the contours. The scarcity of water and expense of maintenance no doubt led to the abandonment of the parterre water scheme.

It is not likely that Robert Benson permitted such retrenchment for we find him 3 years before his death, still water collecting and ditch making with a view to full maintenance and further increase of his lavish and tasteful use of cascades and basins, cascade and fountain.

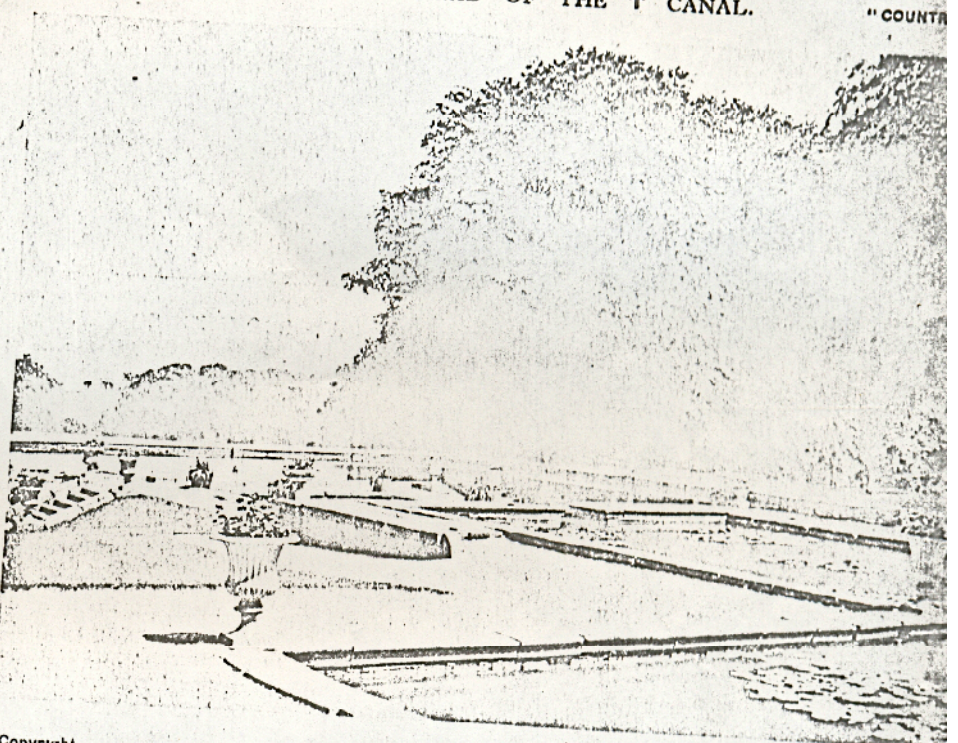
is concerned, as independent of the central block and each other, every section having its own plinth and string-course. This accommodation to the slope of the ground satisfies the eye better than would a continuous plinth, rising to great height at the lower end, because Bramham, despite its strong leaning towards Italian pomposity and classic accuracy, has not finally lost all native flavour, as did Mereworth and Houghton, Holkham and Wentworth Woodhouse, but retains a measure of domesticity. Nevertheless, studied dignity and complete symmetry prevail throughout the main building (Fig. 2), and the central block at once reveals its adhesion to the exotic *piano nobile* principle, the windows of the middle storey being fully twice the height of those of the undercroft and of the attic floor, although on neither of these are the rooms unduly low. The position of the front main entrance at first floor height and the sloping ground before it would have made a stairway rising from forecourt level an ascent excessive both for appearance and convenience, and so the carriageways were made to mount by an easy gradient on to a three-arched "pervise" half a dozen feet above the undercroft floor, and thence the front door is reached by a straight flight of steps (Fig. 1). Standing on the top of them, the fine eastern panorama is disclosed, the unusual and not easily definable stonework objects flanking the forecourt gates (Fig. 6) alone standing up and cutting silhouettes against distant hill and sky. Iron gates and posts are supported by massive plinths on which recline lion-bodied females, modestly resembling the big stone piers surmounted by Cibber's sphinxes that terminated Tjouw's clairvoyée at Chatsworth. Beyond these plinths rise lofty piers, with detached columns jutting out on three sides, and with heraldic bears as terminals. The effect is good and sufficient, although it suggests part of rather than the fulfilment of a composition. The house itself, on both east and west elevations, consists of a seven-windowed centre, set between single window projections, and similar projections occupy the centre of the north and south ends. The east projections have, set in advance of them, lower wings stretching as far forward as the side or office pavilions, which are connected with them by colonnades, very short, but of such loftiness as enables their cornice to be continuous with those of pavilions and wings. The



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8.—THE HEAD OF THE T CANAL.

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9.—LOOKING SOUTH OVER THE WATER BASINS. "COUNTRY L They are at the south end of the broad walk and on different levels.



advice and assistance of a neighbour of established reputation in matters architectural, and thus the letter referred to, dated April, 1709, gives us the following information:

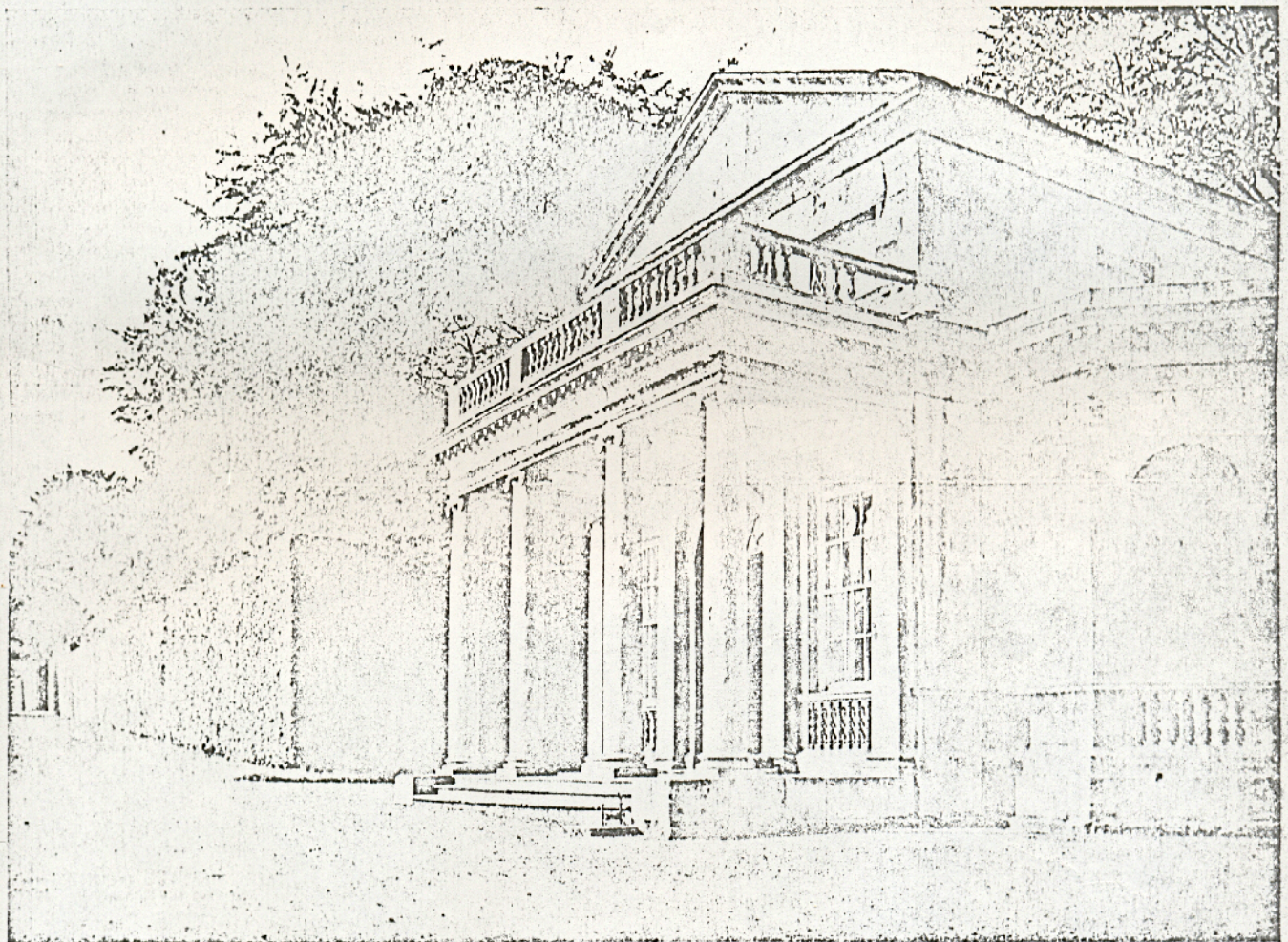
Your brother Wentworth tells me Mr Benson is to loock after your buildin in Yorkshire. I have found him out to be an old aquantene of myne, his father was your father's mortell enemy, but his mother was particularly kinde to me when I was in Yorkshire. I have Kist him many a time; he was a very prety boy, he has a good estate. I wish Betty had him he wants noe money soe hee needs not a wife with a fortune.

Lady Wentworth was an ardent match maker, but was much behindhand when wishing Benson as a husband for her daughter in 1709, for six years previously he had improved his social and political position by a marriage with the Earl of Aylesford's eldest daughter, having been introduced to the family by his friend, Lord Dartmouth, the husband of one of the younger daughters. It may well have been to house the aristocratic wife that Bramham was built, but we have no exact date of when it was begun or whether an architect was employed—probably not, as Benson was himself a student of Italian architecture. He would sketch out a plan and elevations and oversee details, but for the business

by Dartmouth. The "Character" concludes with the information:

He is always elected a burress for the City of York, where he used to go constantly every assize and is building a house 12 or 14 miles from thence.

Thus we learn that Bramham was still incomplete in 1710. But it may well have been begun considerably earlier, for if Raby's estimate of Benson's means is not too modest, it will have taken much "management," spread over a long time to create so fine a country seat, even where every advantage was taken of labour conditions then ruling. That Benson, despite his more liberal education and wider outlook on life, inherited his father's aptitude for making his sixpences go as far as other folks' shillings is made clear by a study of his one surviving letter book. Unfortunately, it only covers the eleven months from October, 1727, to September, 1728, and yields little information as to the making of Bramham. The businesslike habits and careful oversight of all details which it reveals causes special regret that no trace can be found of its fellows of the building period. Had they survived, it is quite certain that we should have known even more of how



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7.—THE NORTH GARDEN HOUSE, NOW THE CHAPEL.

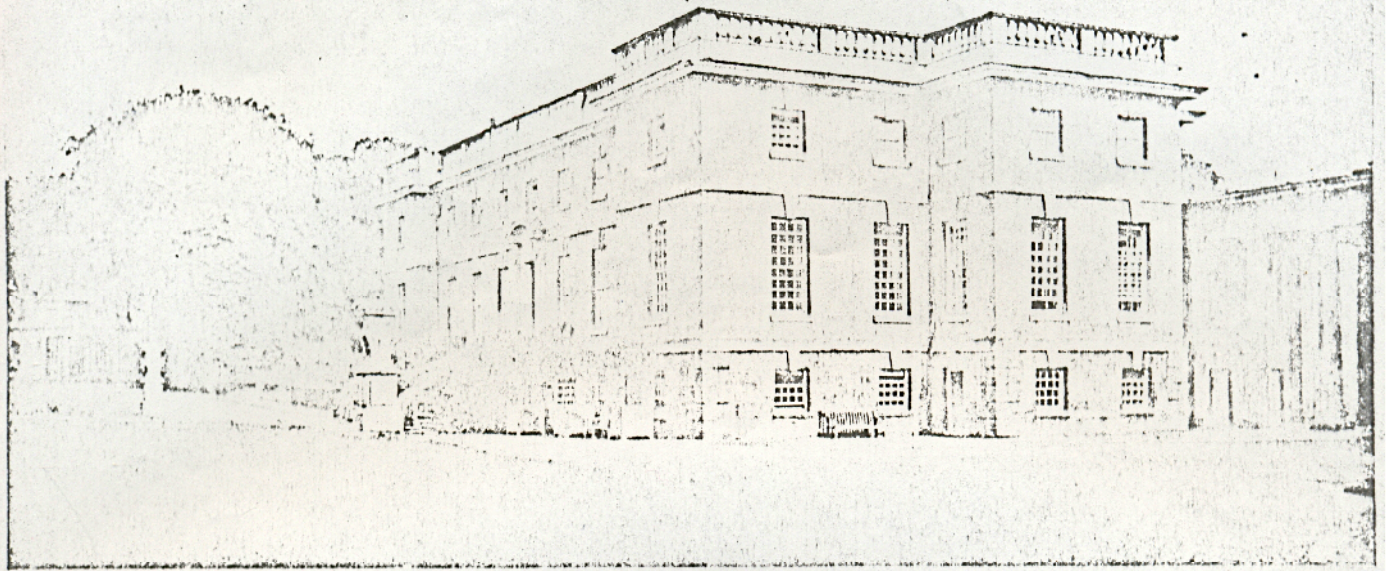
"COUNTRY LIFE."

of building would employ a "surveyor," as Peter Wentworth reports that he advised in the case of the Wentworth Castle rebuilding.

Hitherto Benson had been a Whig, but with the advent of the Tories to power in 1710 he saw his chance of office, and Harley, who was the new Chancellor of the Exchequer and the most influential of the Ministers, appointed him a Lord of the Treasury. It was then that Raby, himself a Tory and home from Berlin, wrote terse and pithy "Characters" of the new Ministers, and says of Benson that his father—

left him a good estate in Yorkshire of about 1500*l.* a year and an old seat just by Wakefield. This gentleman has been a very good manager and has saved 5 or 6000 pounds or more. He has lived very handsomely in the country without being a drinker, though very gallant amongst the ladies. He had travelled in Italy where he had the good fortune to strike a friendship with my Lord Dartmouth.

Bramham came to be than is revealed as to Chatsworth by the Wheldon account books covering the years 1686 to 1706. In their absence, a study of house and grounds as they now are forms the chief, indeed, almost the only, material on which to base a description of how and what they were. The area of the park, demesne and grounds, covering over a thousand acres, is a fairly high and very rolling stretch of country, now well wooded, but originally, no doubt, largely a bare moorland. The present owner knows nothing of the oft repeated tradition that it was crown property granted under William and Mary to the Bensons. The somewhat obscure York attorney will certainly have paid for it as well as for the other Yorkshire lands which came to his son, who chose, as the site of the new house, a plateau by no means level, and having decided slopes at its east and south edges. The view eastward from the front door over a wide, well timbered region is fine, and not interrupted by any forecourt wall, for the rise of



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3.—THE SOUTH AND WEST ELEVATIONS.

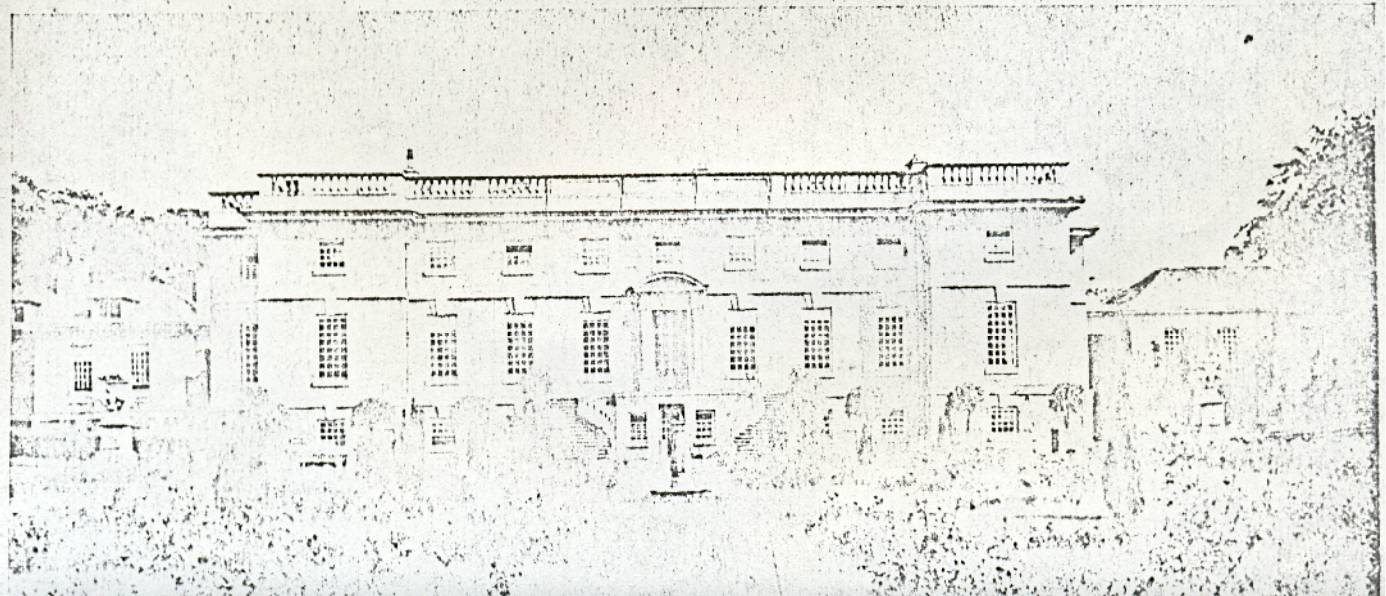
"COUNTRY LIFE."

The broad walk is seen running up to the north garden house.

The width of the parterre is marked by the stately stone urns.

character and training, his accomplishments and methods would be welcome. It is, unfortunately, almost entirely wanting, and it is only by a careful collection and weighing of scattered crumbs that any estimate can be formed of what manner of man was Robert Benson, Lord Bingley, and how he converted a moorland waste into splendid pleasure grounds surrounding a stately house. Of his ancestry we hear no more than that he was the son of one Robert Benson of Wrenthorpe by Dorothy, daughter of Tobias Jenkins, M.P. for York City, and of this elder Robert Benson we are told nothing praiseworthy. His Yorkshire neighbour, Sir John Rezesby, calls him "a man of mean extraction and of little worth," while Lord Raby (afterwards Earl of Strafford), who had close political and neighbourly relations with the son, speaks of the father as "an attorney, and of no great character for an honest man." He practised the law in York, and being, no doubt, of a prudently thrifty and keenly acquisitive nature, he profited largely by managing the affairs and, for a consideration, meeting the temporary needs of impecunious and extravagant clients. As was the habit of his day, he invested much of his gains in realty, acquiring, among other acres, the Wrenthorpe estate near Wakefield, and a large tract of the lands bordering on or included in Bramham Moor, which lies

to the west of York City. Thus he was in a position to give his son a broader field for a career than he had enjoyed. Foreign travel, with Italy and its arts, antiquities and architecture as a special hourne and study, was the completing educational stage of the golden youth of the age, and this the obscure York attorney must have afforded to his son, who would meet at Rome and other cities the heirs and scions of noble families, and poor but keen students, such as James Gibbs. No more than this is known of the young days of Robert Benson junior, who was born in 1676 and was, therefore, nearing the age of thirty when he was first returned as a Member for York City in 1705. That is the earliest public mention of him, but a glimpse of his home life as a boy we do get from a letter written in 1709 by Lady Wentworth to her son Raby, who was the male representative of the Wentworths of Wentworth Woodhouse and resented the passing of the family place through the female line to the Watsons of Rockingham Castle. He therefore purchased a neighbouring estate, rechristened it Wentworth Castle and added to the house so as to make it quite equal to the Wentworth Woodhouse of that day. But as he was, at this period, mostly resident at Berlin, as Ambassador to Frederick I of Prussia, his brother Peter Wentworth, who managed for him in England, begged the



ENTRANCE HALL:

Oil paintings;

1. "Off Duty" by Charles Beaton

2. "Maria Magdalena" Spanish School, early 18c

3. "Stuart Lady with miniature", Anglo-Dutch School 1648
said to be Mary Fownes & John Fownes

4. "Stuart Gentleman", Anglo-Dutch School 1648

Pelmet; Original to the House

Note the size & thickness of the doors.

Note the linen-folded panels, which appear again in the Great Hall.

GREAT HALL:

126 shields 45 in great hall area.

All of the stone work at the top was crumbling, the entire section was scaffolded to enable work to be carried out and to protect damage from falling masonry. All Stained Glass removed and repaired re-leaded and replaced as necessary, stone mullions re-carved and fitted, Shields were then evaluated, many of which had faded beyond recognition or had crumbled due to rain pouring over them. Advice sought from a member of the Heraldic society, Repainted.

Angels and Frieze treated as a work of art, carefully cleaned and varnished, and not just re-painted as is often the case.

Woodwork: The woodwork was cleaned several times prior to either reviving the french polish or re-french polishing, due either to other building work or the building being too cold or damp, only a few weeks each year have been suitable for french polishing. It has taken almost 4 years to bring the Great Hall to the state you see it in now, (There is still some work to be carried out, mainly carving missing sections around the Hall).

Note that each of the little plaques around the Hall is different.

The door directly opposite Library is a dummy, positioned for balance.

The Fire Dogs, the Stourton Sea Dog and Lion supports, either side of the fireplace have been cast using the originals as a pattern which we were fortunate enough to borrow from the Stourton Estate in Scotland.

Bracket Lights: to be taken down re-wired and cleaned.

Carpet: One of four carpets made for the house in Rumania, ^{Bucharest} one of two countries remaining with looms large enough to make these hand made Persian carpets. (The other carpets are in front of the fire, the Dining Room and the Morning Room, this in the Great Hall being the largest. Persian family sought out after fleeing during the uprisings)

The Elephant: carved from a solid piece of Rosewood, once in an Indian Prince's Palace? ^{MAHARAJAH OF MYSORE}

[continued]