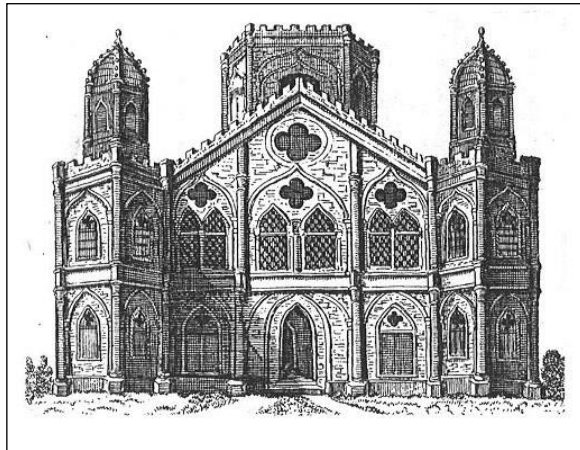


The Landmark Trust

THE GOTHIC TEMPLE

History Album



Written by Charlotte Haslam, 1994

Re-presented 2015

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KEY FACTS

Built	1741
Designed by	James Gibbs
Lease acquired by Landmark	1966
Architect for restoration	Hugh Creighton
Main contractor	Messrs Norman Collison of Bicester
Ceiling under dome restored by	Michael and Benjamin Gibbon
Work completed	1970

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Consult the genius of the place in all;
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall;
Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;
Calls in the country, catches opening glades,
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,
Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines;
Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs.

Still follow sense, of ev'ry art the soul,
Parts answ'ring parts shall slide into a whole,
Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
Start ev'n from difficulty, strike from chance;
Nature shall join you; time shall make it grow
A work to wonder at—perhaps a Stowe.

- Epistle to Burlington, by Alexander Pope

Summary

Stowe has been copiously written about since 1700, both in official guides, and in the impressions of its numerous visitors. Now in the care of the National Trust, the gardens are becoming ever better known and understood. Lord Cobham's Temple of Liberty, as this Gothic building was provisionally known, was built in 1741.

The Temple was one of the last additions to the famous garden formed by Charles Bridgeman and his successor, William Kent. The designer was James Gibbs, who had, with Kent, succeeded Vanbrugh as chief architect at Stowe. It seems that it stood empty for a few years, but by 1748 it had its painted glass (much of it from Warwick Priory), and the domed ceiling, with the arms of Lord Cobham's ancestors, was completed after his death in 1749.

Gibbs' original design which survives in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, was altered by the addition of the pepperpot lanterns on the lesser towers and the crocketed pinnacles on the main tower - additions which helped reduce the heaviness of the building. The new Temple was seen very much in ecclesiastical terms. The circular rooms in the towers were called chapels in contemporary guide books and many actually called it the Gothic Church. Entering it in the 18th century must have felt very much like entering some dusky early Christian basilica, which explains why Horace Walpole described it as the Venetian or Mosque Gothic.

As befitted its churchlike character, the Temple was only sparsely furnished, and, unlike many garden pavilions, it is unlikely that it was used for picnics and entertainments, as Stowe had plenty of other buildings for that purpose. It was mainly intended for brief visits in the course of the long tour of the gardens, to include taking in the magnificent views from the top of the tower.

Perhaps with the decorative scheme for the ceiling in mind, the name subtly changed in 1745 'to the Liberty of our Ancestors'. To make clear who these ancestors were, Lord Cobham moved the 7 Saxon deities, from whom he traced his family, from their original setting and arranged them around his new Temple where they stayed until 1771-2.

The landscape around the Temple evolved too. Walks of varying degrees of complexity were cut through the wood to the north, and on the east, Bridgeman's original straight walk and bastion disappeared under 'Capability' Brown's more informal style. The Temple's wooded setting survived even when the garden was extended further east in the 19th century, and it is only quite recently, with the loss of trees planted in the 18th century that the Gothic Temple has come to have its present more open setting.

Gothic for us today is largely an architectural label, but in the 17th and early 18th century it had a much more potent meaning. Gothic architecture was equated with the Anglo-Saxons, who had come to signify Liberty and Government by Constitution, as against the despotism of the Roman world. The Reformation was interpreted as Protestant Northern Europe's rescuing of humanity for the second time from the tyranny of Rome. So 'Gothic' came to imply all the moral and cultural values summed up in the term 'Enlightenment'. This whole amalgam of ideas found a home in the Gothic Temple.

Such a declaration was also underlined by the choice of a triangular ground plan, as this shape had come to be particularly associated with Medieval Romanticism, with overtones of a fight against oppression, both political and religious.

Restoration by the Landmark Trust

Since the 1920s, the Gothic Temple had been used by Stowe School as an Armoury. A wooden hut had been added on the north side and most of the first floor windows had been blocked. In 1966 a programme of repair for the garden buildings at Stowe was launched, and it was clear from the survey carried out on the Temple by the architect Hugh Creighton, that the school could not be expected to achieve this task on its own. The then recently founded Landmark Trust offered to take on a lease and pay for its restoration and conversion to a most unusual dwelling.

Once the Armoury had been moved, work started in 1969. The walls were in reasonably good condition, but the parapets and pinnacles needed attention as several of the stones had been broken or damaged by rusting iron ties. The turrets had to be partly taken down and rebuilt, with some new stone incorporated. The original roof had been replaced earlier this century with a bitumen one which was beginning to wear out. This was removed and replaced with a new slate roof, with new lead on the flat areas.

Traces could be seen of the weather vanes on the tower pinnacles, and by using old photographs and prints, five replicas were made. This work was all carried out with care and skill by our builders for the restoration, Messrs Norman Collison of Bicester.

The appearance was greatly improved by unblocking the upper windows, for which newly-made steel frames were inserted following the profiles of the openings. The windows in the tower and turrets were blocked with masonry as part of the original design, pierced only with small quatrefoil openings. To make the turret rooms lighter so that they could be used as bedrooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen, it was necessary to open up the least visible of these.

The central glass doors on two sides of the ground floor were also a new introduction to lighten the inside. Enough lead masks were salvaged from the outer faces of the two solid doors they replaced, to make up a complete set on the remaining door.

Inside, apart from introducing plumbing and electricity, the main task was the restoration of the painted ceiling under the dome. It was in poor condition, the paint decayed and flaking, but it was skilfully restored by Michael and Benjamin Gibbon in 1970.

It was thought, and later confirmed, that the stone walls were not originally painted, and the paint was therefore cleaned off, and only where the surface was plastered was new paint applied. The turret rooms were all completely redecorated, with the bedroom floors raised to bring them nearer the windows. The balustrade is original but repainted.

The Gothic Temple is one of the finest examples of the kind of building which the Landmark Trust was set up to help. It would be inconvenient to live in all the time, yet making it less so would require disfiguring alterations. On the other hand it is ideally

suited to short term occupation, when all the excitement of its architectural form can be enjoyed, without the lasting prospect of the practical drawbacks.

Film fans might be interested to know that in 1999, the Gothic Temple had a cameo role in the James Bond film *The World is Not Enough* starring Pierce Brosnan. The Gothic Temple stands in for a church where a funeral has taken place. The building also appeared in the 2010 remake of *Wolfman*, starring Anthony Hopkins.

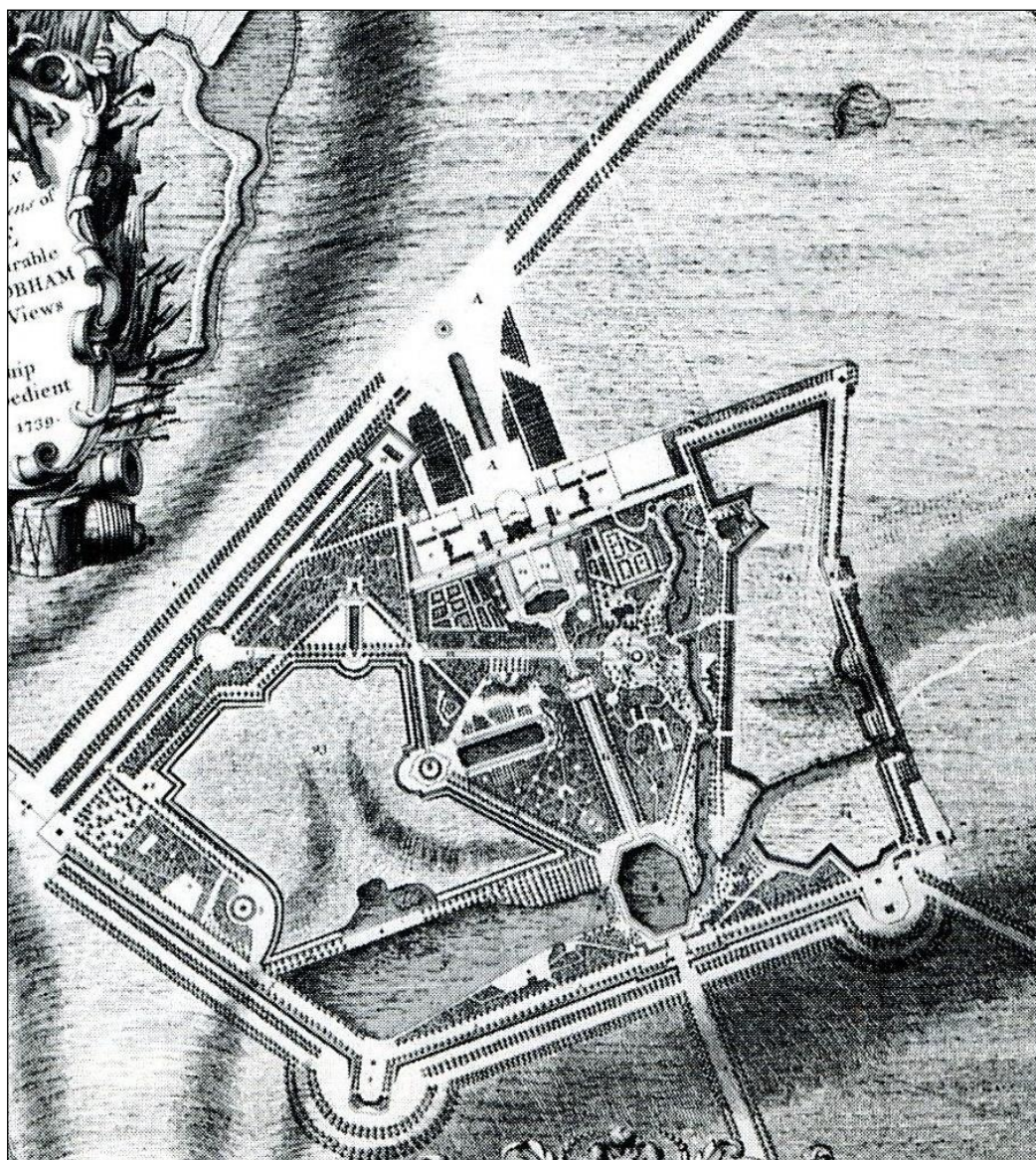
Introduction

Stowe has been copiously written about since 1700. In addition to actual guide books and published descriptions, every tourist visited the garden at some stage, and most of them recorded their impressions on paper. In this century and in the pages of *Country Life* alone, the coverage is considerable, and growing as the National Trust's revival of the garden gets under way. A selection of articles from there and from *Apollo*, which in 1973 devoted a whole issue to *The Splendours of Stowe*, is contained in a separate folder.

Knowledge of the development of the gardens has grown ever more precise, as landscape archaeology combines with scholarship. The great Stowe archive resides at the Huntington Library in California, and the Stowe historian George Clarke's visits with a team of helpers to sift papers there in the late 1960s and 70s, particularly added to understanding of the estate.

On the Gothic Temple itself, in addition to the article by Michael Gibbon in *Country Life*, its story is told by Michael Bevington, George Clarke's heir as chief Stowe historian, in Number VI of the series *Templa Quam Dilecta*. All this album does, therefore, is to provide a summary of that knowledge, together with a more discursive exploration of triangular buildings than Michael Bevington had space for; and an account of the Landmark Trust's restoration and conversion in 1969-70, under the architect Hugh Creighton.

From the point of view of someone focussing on a Gothic-Temple-Vision of Stowe, individual visitors had an annoying habit of referring to the garden buildings in the most general way, or of ending their letter or the page of their diary along the lines that so much had already been written there was no need to say more. However, guide books at various dates were more comprehensive, and a few visitors were more diligent - or more egocentric - and recorded their

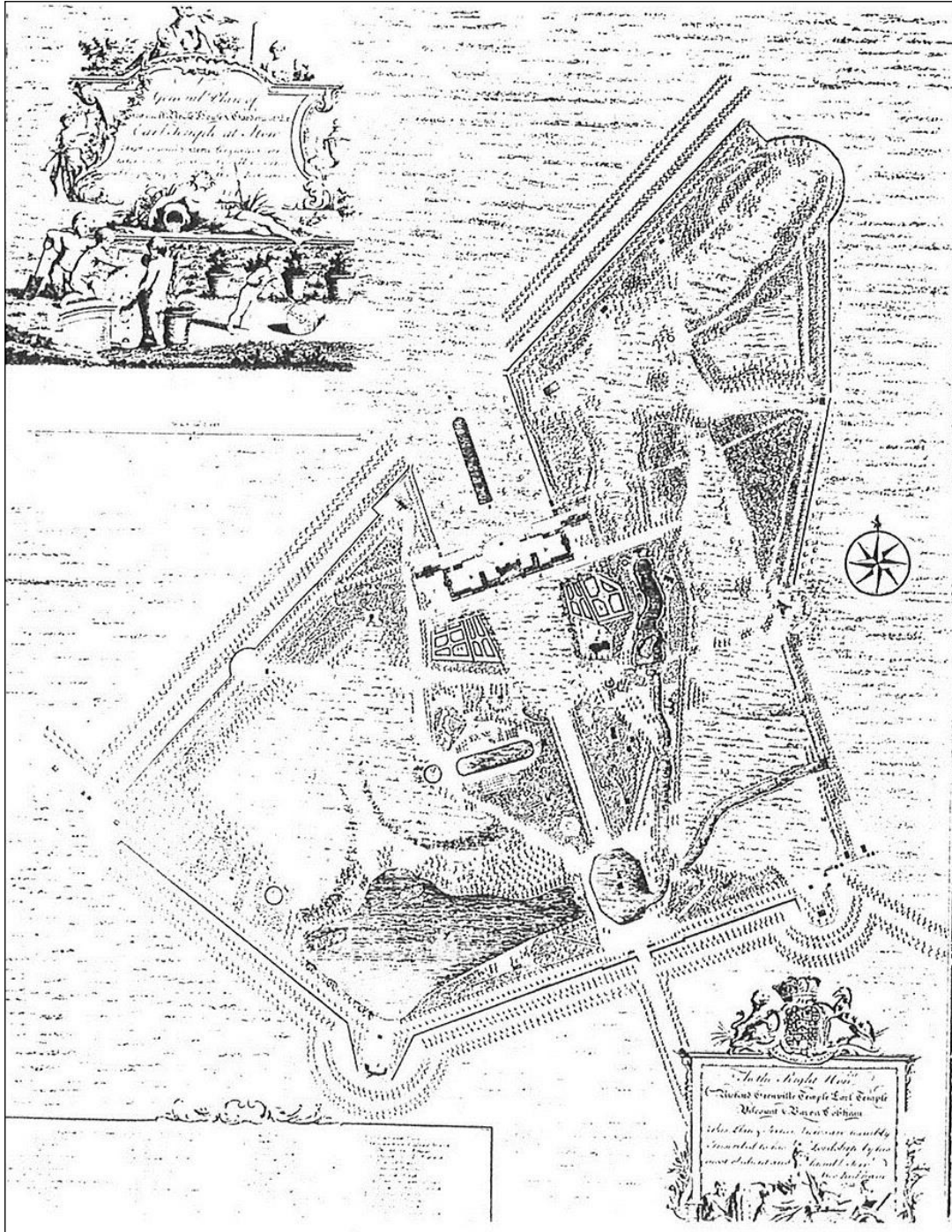


Sarah Bridgeman's Plan of 1739. This shows the original proposal for the east boundary of Hawkwell Field, which was already being modified when this plan was published.

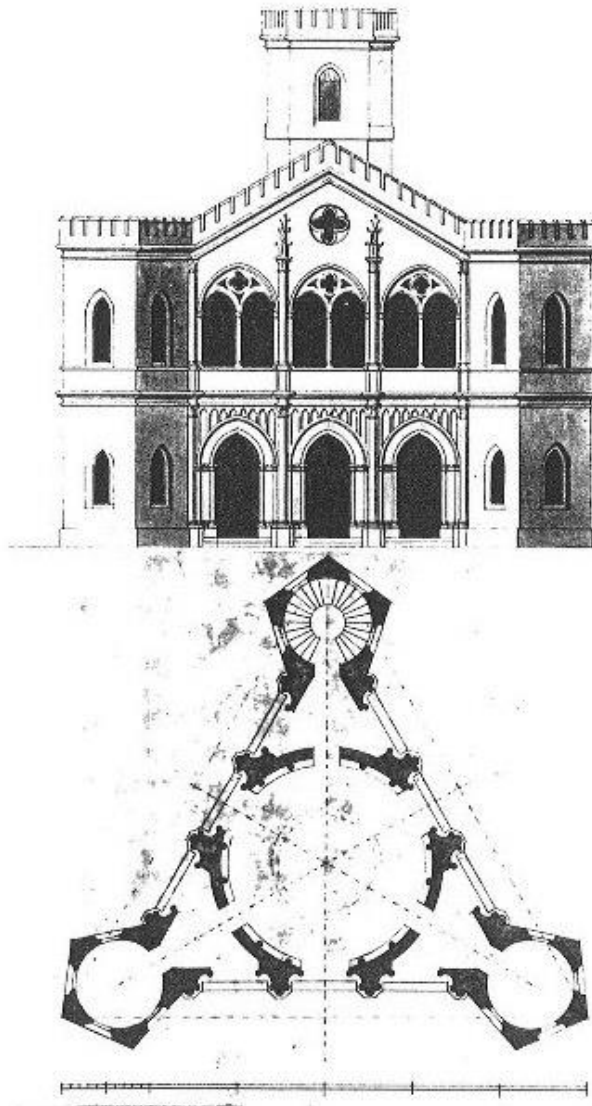
thoughts on everything they saw; other visitors simply described what impressed them most, and for some this was the 'Gothick building.'

Descriptions of Lord Cobham's Gardens at Stowe 1700-1750, edited by George Clarke, have been published by the Buckinghamshire Record Society (No.26 1990). Others are scattered round libraries and record offices. From such sources, as many as possible which relate to just this building have been

extracted. To this very selective literary and architectural anthology, entries from the building's Logbook should no doubt be added one day. From them all, we can learn the role that this particular building has played - and still continues to play - in the great dramatic entertainment that is Stowe.



George Bickham's Plan of 1753. The Gothic Temple and Palladian Bridge, together with the Queen's Temple and the Cobham Monument, have now all been built.



James Gibbs's design for the Gothic Temple, now in the Ashmolean.

In the central rotunda and symmetrical arrangement, even some of the detail, Gibbs's Classical training is clear, leading him to impose order on the Gothic motifs he employed. As Sir John Summerson says of Kent, he tended 'to reduce his Gothic material to familiar Classical formulas, articulating architrave, frieze and cornice when possible, or suggesting superimposed orders.' The fact that they had an incomplete understanding of Gothic architecture, did not mean that they regarded it as purely frivolous. Kent at Gloucester Cathedral and Hampton Court, Gibbs at Stowe and even Batty Langley in his book of Gothic orders, were all paying tribute to what was seen as the venerable architecture of their forefathers, whose rules were simply lost. It was naturally inferior to their own, but had its place in the scheme of things all the same. It could even suit certain moods better than the mathematically precise forms and clear thought of the Classical tradition, when the literary imagination was to be given a freer reign for example, or a whimsical effect was

The building of the Gothic Temple

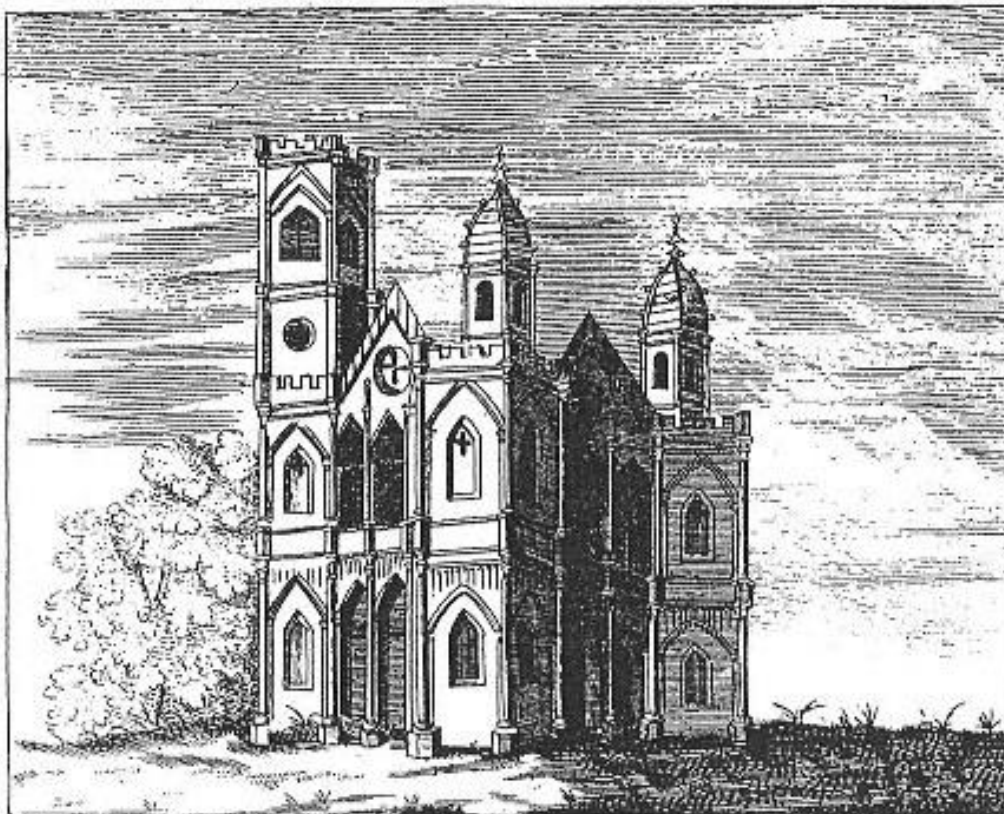
Lord Cobham's new Temple of Liberty, as the Gothic building was provisionally known, went up in 1741. The Elysian Fields had been completed in the valley bottom in the previous decade, and by 1739 attention had turned to the area beyond, Hawkwell Field, a rough pasture possibly already enclosed with a terrace walk, forming the eastern boundary of the garden. On this boundary the Gothic temple was sited, in a semi-circular bastion enclosed by a ha-ha, typical of Bridgeman's strongly geometrical style; and so placed to look over both the garden itself and the surrounding countryside.

The Temple's designer was James Gibbs, who had, with William Kent, succeeded Vanbrugh as chief architect at Stowe. Gibbs's original proposal is with the rest of his drawings in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. It was just one of a group of buildings in this eastern part of the grounds for which he was responsible, beginning with the Temple of Friendship, built in 1739, and concluding with the tall Cobham Monument of 1747. It has been suggested that Gibbs was also responsible for adapting the Palladian bridge for Stowe, forming an architectural counterpoint with the building above it.

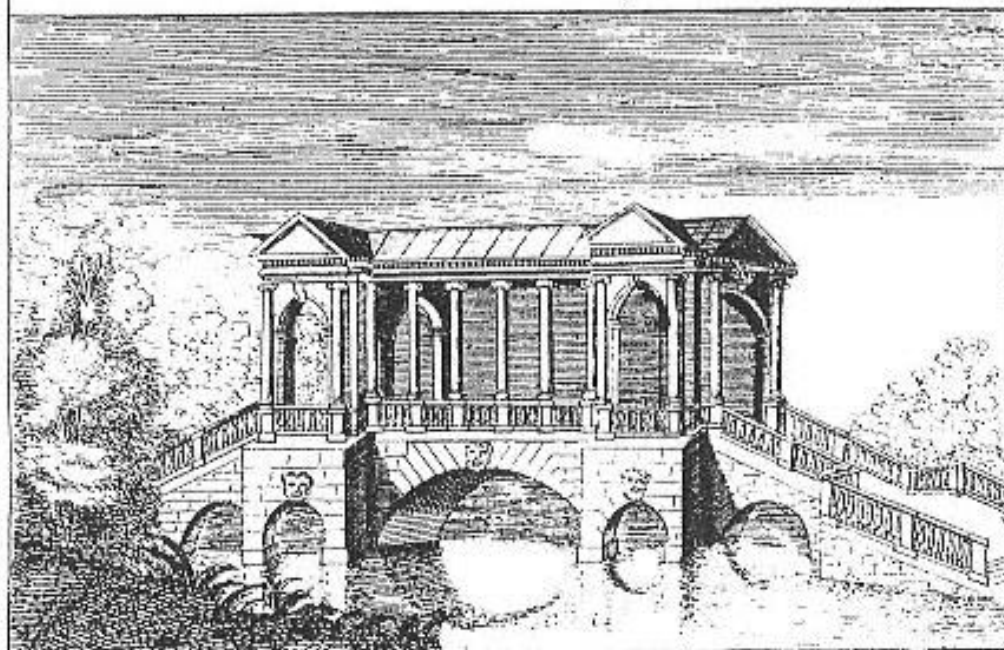
The Gothic Temple was ready for the joiner, John Smallbones, by August 1741. Records show him working there on the 8th, presumably constructing the roof. After that, it seems to have stood as a shell for some years, which might explain why none of the guidebooks or descriptions for the earlier 1740s mention of its interior.

Then, in 1748, visitors comment on its windows of painted glass, possibly that for which William Price was paid in 1747. The painting of the ceiling with the arms of Lord Cobham's ancestors began the same year, to be completed only after his death in 1749.

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The Gothic Temple.



The Palladian Bridge.

B. Seeley delin

Published according to act of Parliament, 1750.

Two engravings show the building in 1750, one by Seeley and one by Bickham, rival publishers of guidebooks to Stowe. These show the realised work to have evolved from Gibbs' original design in two ways: by the extension of the Gothic decoration of the main fronts to run right round the towers; and by the happy addition of pepperpot lanterns to the lesser towers.

Further additions were made by Sanderson Miller. His diary for 15 July 1756 records that he was at Stowe "contriving a finishing to Gibbs' building." This might refer to internal decoration, such as the plasterwork of the turret rooms, or to final details of the exterior. Since the lanterns were already there by 1750, unless he was involved at an earlier date as well, Miller can only have added the crocketed pinnacles on the main tower, topped by weather vanes, which appear in views of the 1760s. These again help to reduce the heaviness of the building and give it the soaring quality of a church tower.

The new Temple was seen very much in ecclesiastical terms, not only in the design of its interior, which was derived from the actual Temple church. The circular rooms in the towers were called chapels in the Guide Books, and as described by Walpole the entire building "was consecrated with painted glass", much of it genuine church glass from Warwick priory. Others, from Lady Newdigate in 1748 to J.C. Nattes in 1807, actually call it the Gothic Church.

Entering the Gothic Temple in the 18th century must have felt very much like entering some dusky early Christian basilica. On the ground floor the central opening on each side was filled with a solid door, with only the small glazed light above. Some borrowed light came from similar lunettes in the lobbies leading to the chapels. If the light from these, and from all the upper windows, was filtered through reds and blues and golds, the effect, after the bright light outside, must indeed have been mysterious and venerable, with the dark stone walls and the seemingly mosaic ceiling glowing dimly far above. It was surely this sanctified atmosphere which prompted Horace Walpole to use the terms

Venetian or Mosque Gothic in describing it, a style which is not the first to spring to mind otherwise.

The chapels must have been darker still. The evidence of engravings and sketches is far from clear, but the evidence of the building itself is that all the turret windows were from the beginning blocked with stone, with only small quatrefoil openings pierced in them. These too were filled with painted glass or, Michael Bevington suggests in the case of the chapels on the upper floor, with painted copper.

As befitted its churchlike character, the Temple was only sparsely furnished. 'J de C', the unknown author of a guidebook written in French and published in 1748, speaks admiringly of its absolute simplicity. Unlike many garden pavilions, it can rarely have been used for picnics and entertainments of that kind - Stowe had plenty of other buildings for that purpose. The Gothic Temple must have been intended mainly for brief visits in the course of the long tour of the gardens. Benches were provided at the top of the tower, for those who wished to spend a few minutes contemplating the surrounding scene, and there were more around the outside: views by Medland and Nattes show visitors taking full advantage of these.

Seats were provided inside, too, for the weary or for those, like Callophilus and Polyphthon in William Gilpin's *Dialogue* who might shelter there during a shower of rain. One such seat can be seen beside the door in Nattes' drawing of the interior. In 1921, the sale catalogue listed the contents as two oak settees of a Gothic design and three oak seats.

Later changes

The Gothic Temple did not escape the process of constant development which characterised the whole of Stowe until well into the 19th century. In addition to changes in the design of the building itself as it went up, there was a slight change in its dedication. In 1742, Richardson's appendix to the third edition of Defoe's *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* noted that the Gothick building was "intended to be dedicated to Liberty", and in the first edition of Seeley's Guide Book in 1744 it is accordingly described as The Temple of Liberty.

The following year, this has subtly changed. The inscription of dedication is recorded by Seeley as "To the Liberty of our Ancestors." Lord Cobham is being more specific in his symbolism, perhaps already having had the idea for the decoration of the ceiling. To make it clear who these ancestors were, and from whom he traced his family, he had moved the seven Saxon deities from their original setting, and arranged them around his new Temple. While to make the point even more strongly, he put up a year or two later an inscription over the door taken from Corneille, 'Je Rends Graces aux Dieux de nestre pas Romain' ('I thank the gods not to be Roman'). This can be interpreted as a general moral comment (the next line declares 'Pour conserver encore quelque chose d'humain' – 'in order to salvage something of being human') or as Michael Bevington suggests, as having a strictly religious meaning - Saxon in Lord Cobham's terms also meant Protestant.

Giving it a name himself was one thing. Persuading others to call it by the same one was another. Referred to variously as the Gothick Building, the Gothick Church, the Chateau Gothique or the Gothick Temple, it was the last which stuck, partly perhaps because Seeley gave it this name in his popular *Views of Stowe*, first issued in 1750 - and also no doubt because Temple was in any case a contagious title at Stowe.



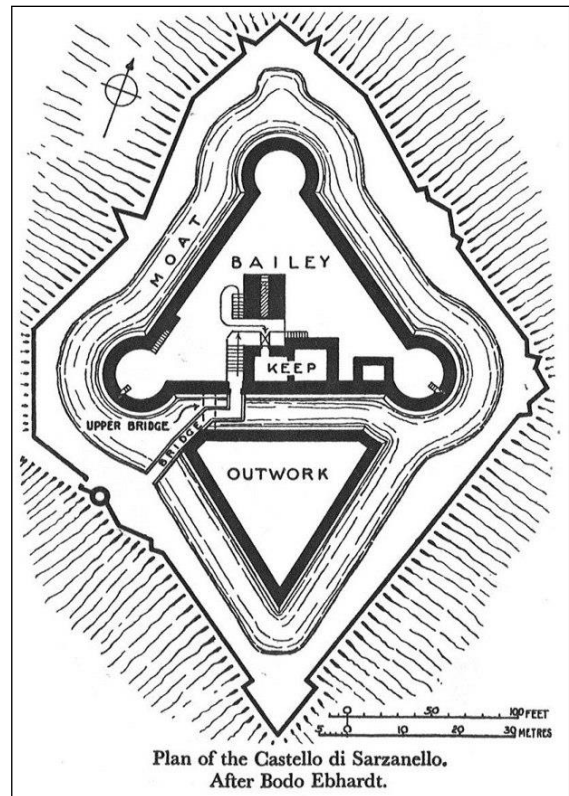
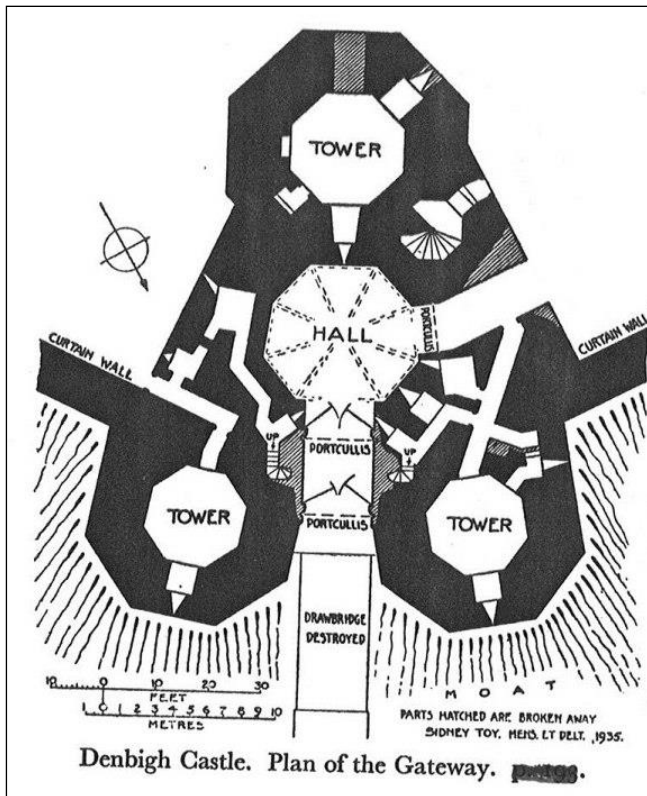
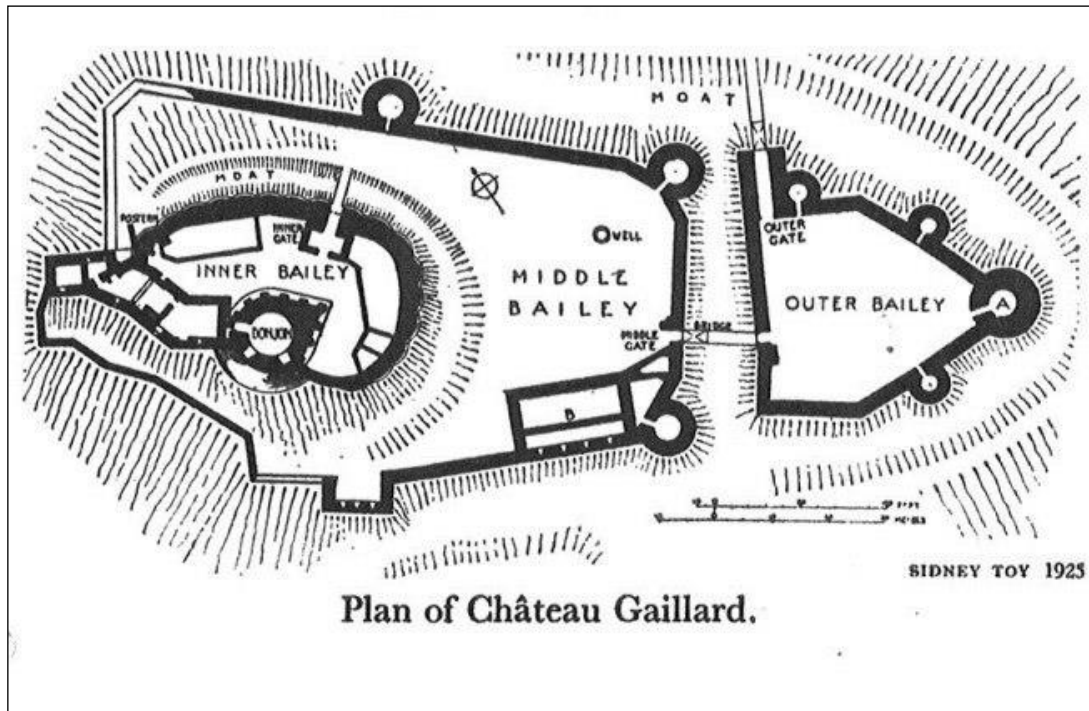
Sketch by J.C. Nattes dated 1805.



Gothic Temple, c.1905-10, J. Gough

The landscape around the Temple evolved too. Walks of varying degrees of complexity were cut through the wood to the north. On the east, Bridgeman's original straight walk and bastion disappeared, being almost invisible on plans at the end of the 18th century. The Saxon deities moved away again in 1771-2.

In the 19th century, plans show new arrangements of paths around the building, but it remained backed by trees on its north and east, with more scattered planting around it, including cedars probably planted in the 1740s. This wooded setting survived even when the garden was extended further east again in the next century. Only quite recently, with the gradual loss of trees planted in the 18th century, has the Gothick Temple come to have its present more open setting, prompting an echo of Polypthon's comment that 'This Hill think appears rather too naked'.



Medieval buildings with triangular elements.

Other Triangular buildings

Writers on the symbolism of Stowe in general and the Gothic Temple in particular, have shown that when Lord Cobham chose a Gothic architectural style for this latest addition to his garden, he was alluding to certain clearly understood political ideas. Understanding of this "statement" lay in the popular equation of Gothic architecture with the Anglo-Saxons, who had come to signify Liberty and Government by Constitution, as against the despotism of the Roman world. In the lucid words of George Clarke, writing in *Apollo* in 1973 on *Grecian Taste and Gothic Virtue*:

For us today the word Goth is little more than a synonym for Vandal, and Gothic only an architectural label. But in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries they were words of potent meaning. This was due to the efforts of antiquarians and propagandists. Giving the name of one Germanic tribe, the Goths, to all the barbarian invaders of Rome, and assuming that Jute and Goth were different versions of the same name, antiquarians deduced that when Hengist landed in Thanet he brought with him the democratic procedures described by Tacitus as typical of Germanic assemblies; thus England's mixed government could be, and frequently was, called 'our old Gothick Constitution'. It was also argued that after wandering for centuries in the frigid northern regions the Gothic folk had acquired a vigour, hardiness and love of liberty wanting among the spineless Latin peoples, who were in contrast enervated by their hot climate. Furthermore, the Reformation was interpreted as the North's rescuing of humanity, for the second time, from the decadence and tyranny of Rome, so that 'Gothic' came to imply all the moral and cultural values summed up in the term 'Enlightenment'. Liberty, the Constitution and Enlightenment - the whole amalgam of ideas contained in these words found a home in the Gothic Temple.

This declaration was also underlined by the choice of a triangular ground plan.

The triangle had come to be particularly associated with Medieval Romanticism, with overtones of a fight against oppression, both political and religious. It first appears in actual fact in military architecture in the Middle Ages, as a practical, and formidable, shape for defence. The outer bailey of Richard I's acclaimed Chateau Gaillard in the 12th century, the gatehouse of Denbigh Castle in the



The Triangular Lodge at Rushton, Northamptonshire, built 1595.



Longford Castle near Salisbury, completed 1591.

13th, and most perfectly the North Italian Castello di Sarzanello of 1325 were all triangular. The form was popular during the Renaissance when several architects produced works on the theory of military engineering, advocating strongly geometrical shapes. A treatise by Francesco di Giorgio of c.1490, for example, includes a number of small forts based on star, diamond and triangular plans.

Such plans were introduced to this country in the coastal forts built during the reign of Henry VIII, of which at least one, Hurst Castle, on the Solent, was triangular. Triangular forts appear again in the American colonies in the late 16th and 17th centuries, and also in defended settlements in Ireland of about the same date. The shape makes a late appearance in the 1880s in forts built by General Brialmont around Liège.

Against this background of military theory arose the first phase of neo-medievalism, in Elizabethan England. A most notable product of this thirst for the romantic was Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, peopled with questing knights and endangered ladies, travelling through wild woods to arrive at noble castles. It was clearly in this context, as a realisation of the Castle Joyous perhaps, that the triangular, and non-defensive, Longford Castle was built. Michael Bevington points out that its builder, Sir Thomas Gorges, had been Governor of Hurst. He was also related, through his wife, to Sir Thomas Tresham, builder of the most famous of all triangular buildings at Rushton in Northamptonshire.

There, carried over into religious symbolism, with overtones of a resolute Catholic faith, the triangle of defence results in Tresham's extraordinary Triangular Lodge, with its additional references to the Trinity. Michael Bevington has again found evidence of a connection by marriage between the Treshams and the Temples of Stowe, which would have given an additional relevance for Lord Cobham in choosing a triangular plan for his own fanfare of protest at wronged liberty, in another era of literary medievalism.

From the earliest 18th century there was a revival of interest both in Elizabethan literature, especially that of Shakespeare and Spenser, and in medieval architecture. The two were thought of very much in unison, as shown by the following two passages, the first of which contains the views of Alexander Pope on Shakespeare:

One may look upon his works in comparison to those that are more finished and regular, as upon an ancient and majestic piece of Gothic architecture, compared with a neat modern building; the latter is more elegant and more glaring but the former is more strong and more solemn.

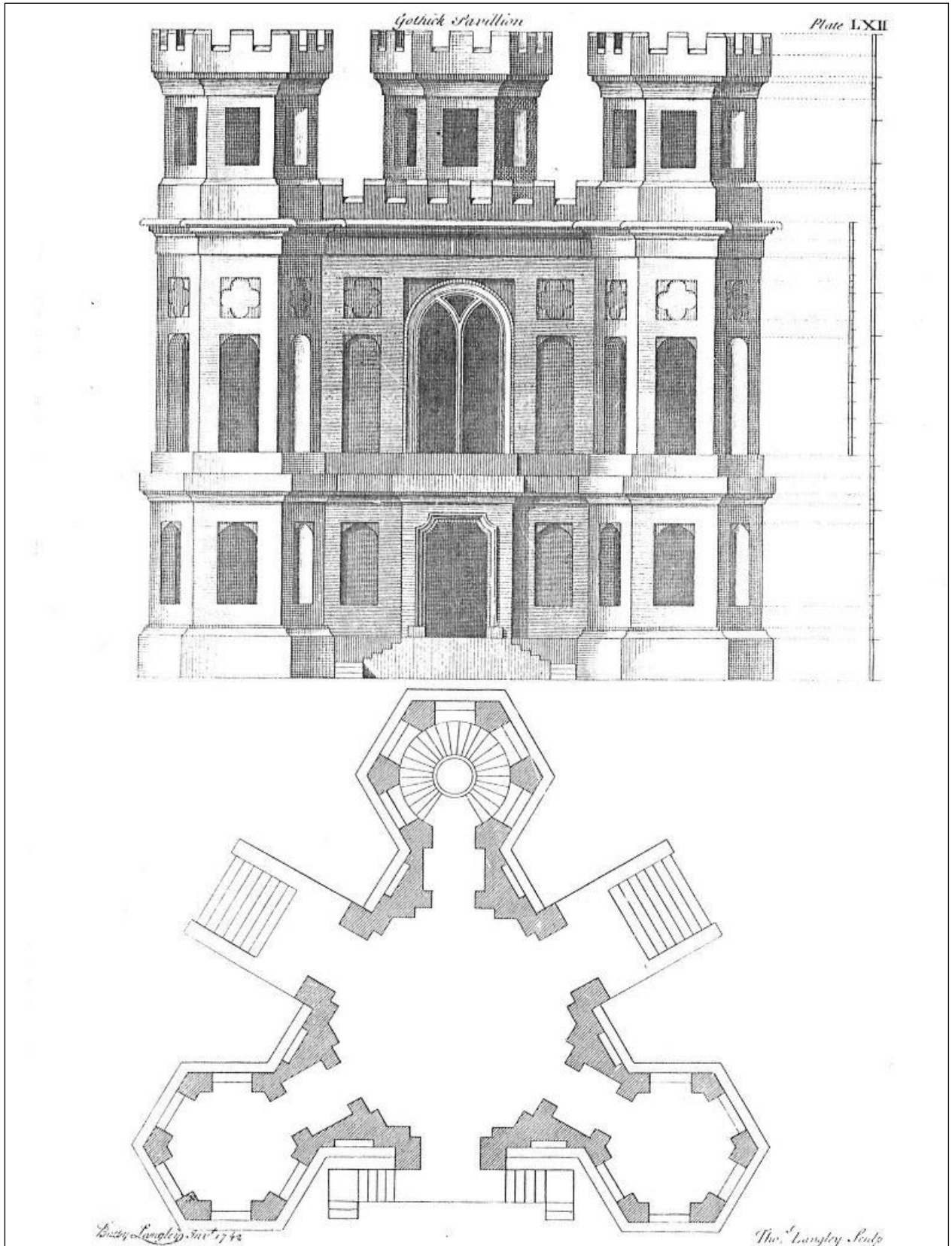
Then, according to John Hughes, to compare *The Fairie Queene*:

With Models of Antiquity, wou'd be like drawing a parallel between the Roman and Gothick Architecture. In the first there is doubtless a more natural Grandeur and Simplicity; in the latter we find great Mixtures of Beauty and Barbarism, yet assisted by the invention of a variety of inferior ornaments, and though the former is more majestick in the whole, the latter may be more surprising and agreeable in its Parts.

In this literary sense it is difficult to distinguish between what is Gothic Survival and what becomes Revival. Gothic was still considered appropriate for certain circumstances, such as additions to outstanding medieval buildings, and above all to suit a particular mood of seriousness and patriotism, or in less formal circumstances, of melancholy and valour. William Kent, in his own way, followed this approach, matching Gothic with Gothic where it seemed right to do so, but introducing the style on its own to conjure up a set of associations. Perhaps the first architect to use the medieval style in this evocative sense, albeit in a Baroque manner, was Vanbrugh, particularly in his own house at Greenwich, Vanbrugh Castle. A building which also reflected his influence was the vanished triangular tower at Whitton Place, Middlesex, possibly designed by Gibbs himself in the 1720s as part of a formal garden.

With this considered view, there co-existed the purely decorative character of Rococo Gothick, which lasted throughout the middle decades of the 18th

century, and beyond. In the 1740s, the style was taken up in a new and entirely frivolous way. According to *The World*, for a short time everything was Gothic,



A triangular Gothick Pavilion from *Gothic Architecture Improved* by Batty Langley, 1742.

'our houses, our beds, our books, our couches were all copied from some part or other of our old cathedrals.' The buildings came out in a variety of forms, but the triangular plan had a definite place among them, now bereft of any overtones other than decorative ones. This despite the solemn title given to his book by Batty Langley in 1742, in which he included his own version of the Gothic Temple: *Gothic Architecture improved by Rules and Proportions, in many Grand Designs of Columns, Doors, Windows, Chimney-pieces, Arcades, Colonnades, Porticos, Umbrells, Temples and Pavilions* etc. Later there was a whole run of triangular towers, from the Racton Tower, Sussex, of 1772, through Sevendroog Castle, Greenwich, and Haldon Belvedere, Devon, to Paxton's Tower, Carmarthen, of c.1808.

With these last, we have arrived at the Picturesque, a movement with a different kind of romanticism to that of the Humanists of the earlier 18th century, as well as a more developed understanding of medieval architecture. At the same time, while irregularity and a semblance of organic growth were seen as important for historical reasons, the wholly symmetrical triangular plan had acquired its own medieval pedigree. Moreover, it gave opportunities for that other essential ingredient of the Picturesque, an interesting silhouette when seen from a series of different angles, and a wide variety of views from within.

John Davenport, who in 1790 designed Clytha Castle near Abergavenny for the grieving widower William Jones, fulfilled both requirements - the castle (another Landmark) is based on an open triangle, but asymmetry is provided by adding a single stair turret to the corner of the main tower. John Nash, in planning the triangular Castle House, Aberystwyth, for Uvedale Price in about 1795, was especially commissioned by his client to consider the siting of the house in similarly Picturesque terms.



Clytha Castle in Monmouthshire.

These Gothic builders of the Picturesque could still be 'frivolous' in the eyes of the Revivalists of the next century. The designs proposed by James Malton, for example, in his *Designs for Villas*, published in 1802, are scarcely more medieval than the works of Kent - and indeed Malton dresses up a triangular villa in alternative Gothic and Classical costume. But by and large, by 1800 Gothic architecture had entered a new phase, in trying to imitate the intentions as well as the detail of medieval builders. As Sir John Summerson says, 'the Gothic of Kent and of Batty Langley' (and Gibbs was neither more Gothic nor less decorative than they) 'was fundamentally a free variation of Classical forms constituting not an imitation but an equivalent of Gothic'. George Clarke calls it Gothic fancy dress: the Grand Whigs of the early Georgian period had much in common, in fact, with the Elizabethans whom they read.

Unlike the later Romantics, who revered the God's Natural World above all, and wished to emphasise its perfection, the Whigs and the Elizabethans shared an absolute belief in the superiority of the human race, and its ability to improve on Nature by the use of an inspired imagination. They also shared a love of symbolism, and an enjoyment of tortuous plays on words and names. Most of

all they believed in Wit. They didn't mind if in the exercise of this agreeable and learned game the result was not `archaeologically' correct - that was a concept

Triangular Towers



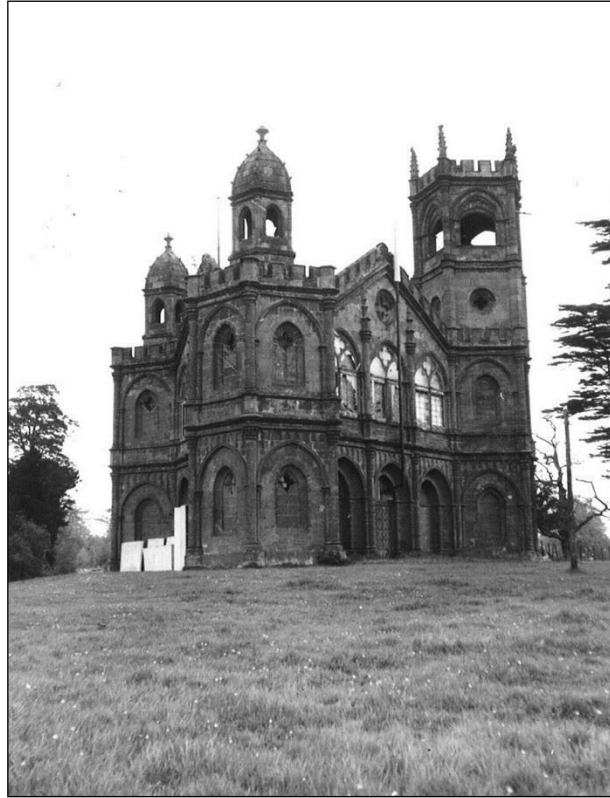
Haldon Belvedere, Devon.



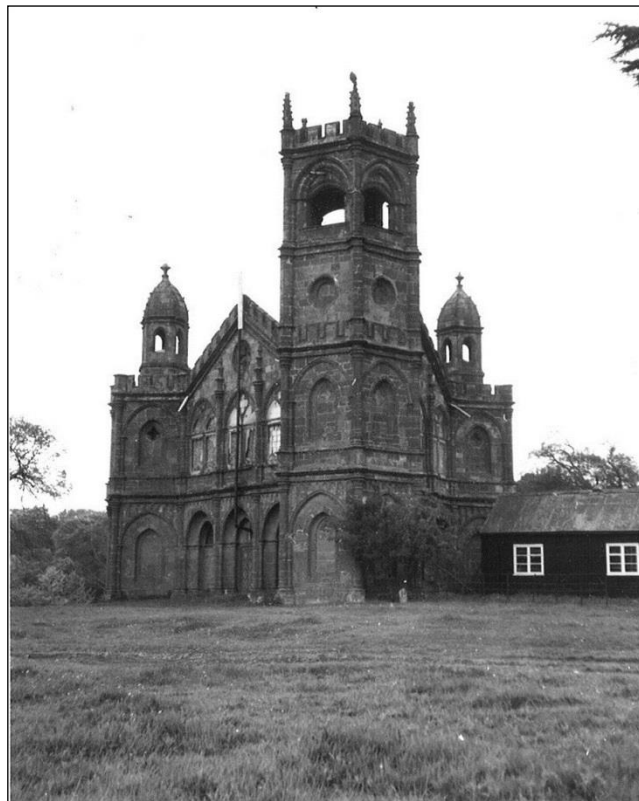
Sevendroog Castle, Greenwich.

which only developed in the mid 19th century, with A W Pugin's emphasis on the pointed as the 'only true Christian architecture.'

Christopher Hussey in his articles on Stowe in *Country Life* pointed out that Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was well-known to William Pitt - and to Kent who drew illustrations for it - and that imagery from it appeared in the Arcadian landscape at Stowe. It was entirely in keeping, therefore, that a building should be included there which had the same capacity to symbolise chivalry and enlightenment as had been implied in the use of the triangular plan, under the influence of the same philosophy, in the Elizabethan era.



Gothic Tower in 1963 before restoration.



The Restoration of Gothic Temple

In 1966 a programme of repair for the garden buildings at Stowe was launched. A survey had already been carried out by the architect Hugh Creighton, to assess both the work that was required, and what it would cost. It was clear from the start that the school itself could not possibly be expected to achieve this task on its own. Accordingly, the recently-founded Landmark Trust offered to take on a lease of the Gothic Temple, and to pay for its restoration and conversion to a most unusual dwelling.

The building had, since the 1920s, been used by the school as an Armoury. A wooden hut had been added on the north side to provide storage space, and most of the first floor windows had been blocked. There were already plans to move the Armoury nearer to the main school buildings, but it was some time before this was accomplished, and work did not start on the Gothic Temple until 1969.

First to be dealt with was the stonework. The walls themselves were in reasonably good condition, and only required repointing, but the parapets and pinnacles needed more attention; several of the stones were broken or damaged by decayed iron ties. The turrets also had to be partly taken down and rebuilt, with some new stone incorporated. This work was carried out with care and skill by Messrs Norman Collison of Bicester, the builders for the Temple's restoration.

The original roof had been replaced earlier this century with one of bitumen, which was beginning to wear out. This was taken off and a new slate roof laid instead, with new lead on the flat areas.

Traces could still be seen of the weather vanes on the tower pinnacles, and old photographs showed that these had survived until quite recently. Using these, and old prints, five replicas were made, and fixed in position.



1968

The greatest effect upon the appearance of the building, after the removal of the hut, was achieved by unblocking the upper windows. There were some remains of wooden casements, but these were not original and were badly decayed. Newly-made steel frames were inserted instead, following the profiles of the openings.

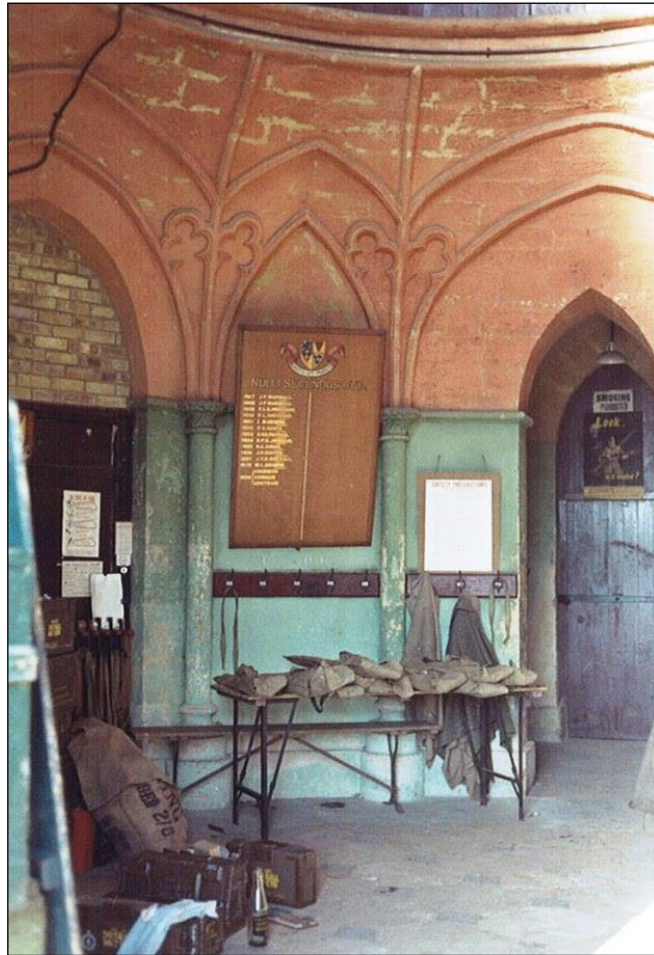
The windows in the tower and turrets were blocked with masonry as part of the original design, pierced only with small quatrefoil openings. To make the turret rooms lighter, so they could be used as bedrooms, bathroom and kitchen, it was necessary to open up the least visible of these. Once again they were fitted with simple metal framed casements. Some coloured glass survived in one bathroom window.

The central glass doors on two sides of the ground floor were another new introduction, again with the aim of making the building lighter and more agreeable inside. Luckily, enough lead masks were salvaged from the outer faces of the two solid doors they replaced, to make up a complete set on the remaining door.

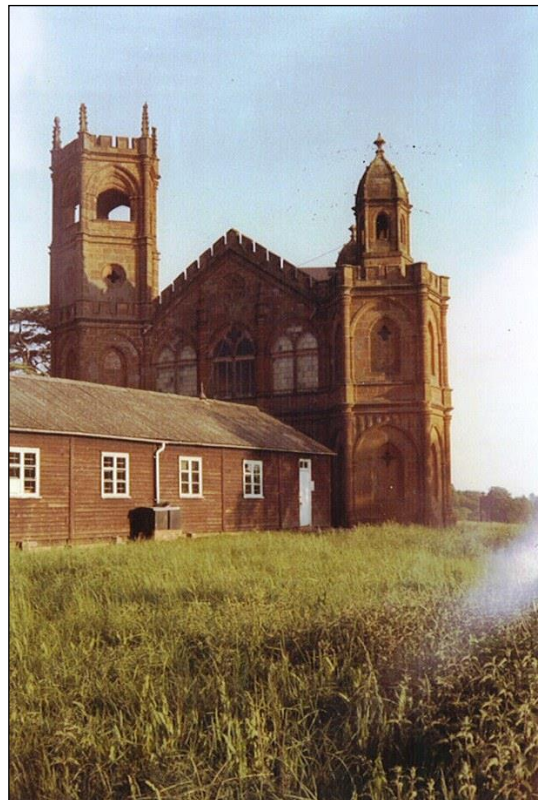
Inside the Gothic Temple, apart from the work required for the conversion of the building, such as introducing plumbing and electricity, the main task was the restoration of the painted ceiling under the dome, depicting the arms of Lord Cobham's ancestors. It was in poor condition, the plaster badly cracked and the paint itself decayed and flaking. It was most carefully and skilfully restored by Michael and Benjamin Gibbon in 1970.

The walls of the central rotunda had been painted in the colours of which traces remain, probably by the school. Because there was no trace of plaster on the walls, it was thought that they would not have been painted originally - and Nattes' drawing of the interior, which was only discovered later, confirms this. Where the paint went straight onto the bare stone, therefore, it was cleaned off,

and only where the surface was plastered was new paint applied. In some places,



1968

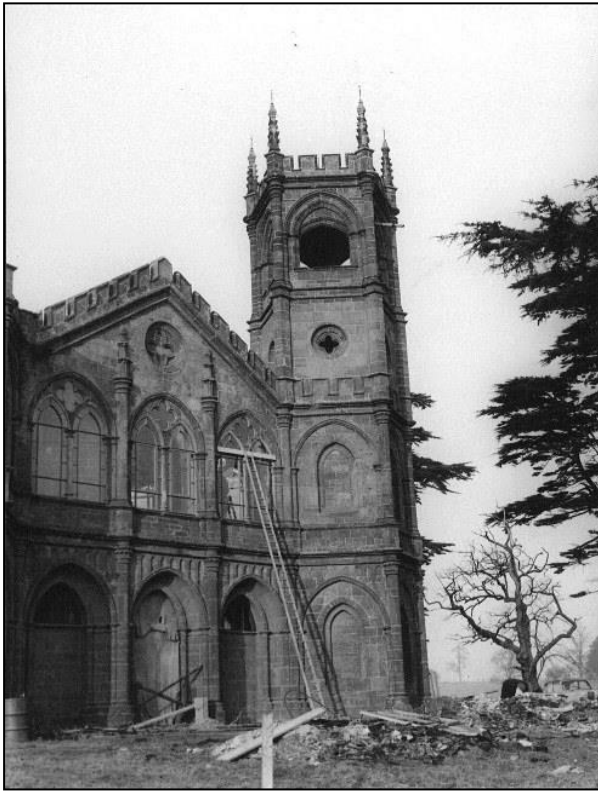


rather messy pointing was revealed on the stonework. Although not original, the mortar is quite old, which might indicate that the painting of the interior as a whole happened slightly earlier than was thought - in the late 19th century perhaps. The turret rooms were all completely redecorated.

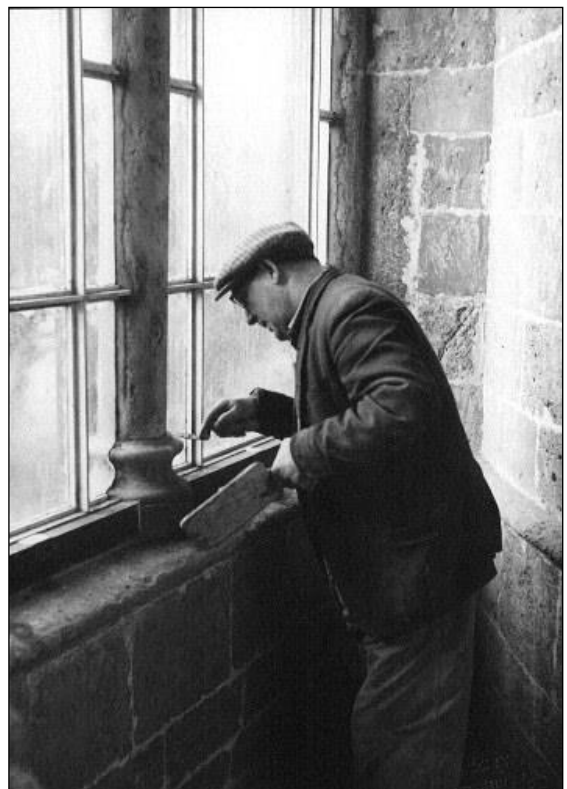
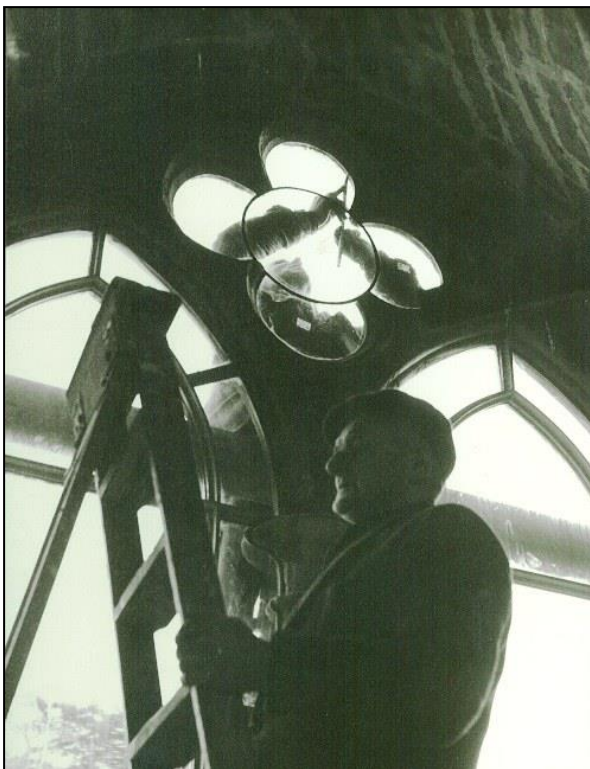
The stone floors downstairs are mainly original, although some tiles needed replacing. On the gallery the original floor had been replaced with concrete, probably at the same time that bitumen was laid on the roof. In the two bedrooms the floors were raised to bring them nearer the windows.

The gallery balustrade is original, though painted in a new colour. The marks of the rifle name plates and fixings from Armoury days can still be seen on it. All the internal doors, like the glass outside doors, were fitted in 1970. The kitchen fittings were also designed by Mr Creighton, to make best possible use of the very restricted space.

The Gothic Temple is one of the very finest examples of the kind of building which the Landmark Trust was set up to help. It would be inconvenient to live in all the time, yet would require disfiguring alterations to make it less so (as even recent attempts to improve the heating sadly show). On the other hand it is ideally suited to short term occupation. Under these circumstances all the excitement of its architectural form can be enjoyed, without a lasting prospect of the practical drawbacks.



Work in progress.





Japhthah's Return, a watercolour on silk, painted by Betsy B. Lathrop, of New York, in 1812, and now in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection in Williamsburg, Virginia.

The scene illustrates the 11th chapter of Judges, verses 31 and 34. Japhtha returns to his home having vowed unto the Lord that, 'whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. And Japhthah came to Mizpah unto his house, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrel and dances ...'

To give her painting an oriental touch, Miss Lathrop added the Gothic Temple, described by some as being in the 'Moorish Gothic'. It appears exactly as it does in the updated engraving in Seeley's guides to Stowe of the 1760s on. Whether she had been to Stowe herself or not, she must surely have possessed, or had access to, a copy of the guidebook.

The Seven Saxon Deities



Originally displayed by Lord Cobham around his Temple to the Liberty of our Ancestors (Gothic Temple), these seven figures by John Michael Rysbrack now stand in a dell in the gardens. Below, clockwise from top left: Sunna, Mona, Tiw, Seatern, Friga and Woden. The seventh is Thuner, and they give their names to the days of the week. Carved of Portland stone in 1727, they were moved to their present location in 1773, (although the current the sculptures are copies of the originals, sold in 1821-2)



A Gothic Temple Anthology

The Gothic Temple is first described in 1742 in Richardson's revised third edition of Daniel Defoe's *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*:

A Gothick building, 70 feet high, presents itself on the Summit of a fine Hill; which, we were told, is intended to be dedicated to Liberty.

The Buckingham printer, Benton Seeley, goes into a little more detail in his first, pioneering, guide book to Stowe, called *A Description of Stowe*, which he published in 1744.

The Temple of Liberty is a large Gothic building of red Stone, 70 feet high, on the Brow of the Hill; round which are placed the Seven Statues [the Saxon deities] mentioned before.

1748 saw the publication by Seeley of a fuller commentary on the garden, now known to have been written by William Gilpin. *A Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Rt. Hon. Lord Viscount Cobham at Stowe in Buckinghamshire* consists of a leisurely stroll around the grounds, accompanied by much conversation and with many stops both to study and admire each building and then to discuss the various ideas to which it gives rise, whether political, literary or aesthetic. The two characters, Polyphth, a visitor to Buckinghamshire, and Callophilus, his host, have differing shades of opinion on the beauties of landscape, and conduct one of their longest discussions on the subject, during a shower of rain, inside the Gothic Temple (and a rainy day will be needed to read it all):

Polyphth. In several Parts of the Garden, I have had various Views of that old Gothic Building; we are now at last I hope moving towards it. I am so wonderfully pleased with its outward Appearance, that I shall be disappointed if I don't meet something answerable within.

Calloph. Why, Sir, as old as it looks, I assure you it is not yet finished. You will meet with nothing ornamental in the Inside; so I would have you persuade yourself it has already done all in its Power to entertain you. And upon my Word I think it has done a great deal: Without it, I am sure this Part of the Garden would be quite naked and lifeless; nor would any other Part appear with so much Beauty. It puts one in Mind of some generous Patriot in his

Retirement; his own Neighbourhood feels most the Effects of that Bounty, which in some measure spreads itself over a whole Country.

Polypth. I like this Disposition within, I assure you, altogether as well as its Form without. - There are two or three Pieces of the best painted Glass that I have anywhere met with: Those little historical Pieces are exceedingly beautiful; and so are those Landskips likewise. This Hill I think appears rather too naked.

Calloph. Throw you Eye over it then, and tell me if you are not ravished with the View before you. Nothing certainly in the kind can be more beautiful or great, than that pompous Pile rising in so magnificent a manner above the Wood. The Building cannot possibly be shewn to greater Advantage: The Appearance it makes, presents you with an Idea sufficiently grand; yet your Imagination cannot be persuaded but that it is in fact much grander, and that the Wood hides a great Part of what is to be seen from your Eye [the South front of Stowe House was then still in its earlier form - 1680 adapted and enlarged by Vanbrugh and Gibbs]. This is a most delightful manner of pleasing: A grand Object left to a good Imagination to improve on, seldom loses by its Assistance. Our View likewise is greatly added to in point of Beauty, by those several other smaller Buildings which offer themselves, some only half hid amongst the Branches, and others just peeping from amongst tufted Trees, which make very beautiful little garnished Dishes in this most elegant Entertainment.

Polypth. As you have thus painted the near Objects, let my Pencil, I beg, come in for a few rough Touches in the backgrounds: Without something of an Offskip, your Man of Art, you know, seldom esteems his View perfect. And in this Landscape there are as many beautiful Objects thrown off to a Distance as can well be imagined: That Variety of fine Wood; that bright Surface of Water, with the pointed Obelisk in the Midst of it; those two Pavilions up on the Banks of the Canal; and the still more distant View into the Country, are Objects which, in my Opinion, make no small Addition to the Beauty of your Landscape; or, to carry on your Allusion, may very well come in as a second Course in your Entertainment - Our Attention, I think, in the next Place, is demanded by this venerable Assembly. That old Gentleman there sits with great Dignity: I like his Attitude extremely: If I understood the Runic Character, I might have known probably (for this Inscription I fancy would inform me) by what Title he is distinguished. But the gracefulness of his Posture discovers him to have been nothing less than an Hero of the first

Rank. He puts me in Mind of a Roman Senator, sitting in his Curule Chair to receive the Gauls.

Calloph. Why, Sir, you have done him great Honour I must own; but you have not yet honoured him according to his Dignity: He is nothing less, Sir, I assure you, than the Representative of a Saxon Deity. You see here: `Thor and Woden fabled Gods' - with the whole System of your Ancestor's Theology. Walk round the Assembly, they will smile upon a true Briton, and try if you can acknowledge each by his distinct Symbol.

Polypth. I must confess they do not to me seem accoutered like Gods: For my Part, I should rather suspect them to be Statues of Heroes and Lawgivers, metamorphised into Divinities by the Courtesy of the Place: I shall not however go about to dispute their Titles; but like my good Ancestors before me acquiesce piously in what other People tell me...

Calloph. We have a good View into the Country from hence. Those Woods are extremely elegant in their kind; we must certainly contrive to take a Ride thither some Evening. They are laid out in a very fine Manner, and cut into very beautiful Ridings.

Polypth. Ay, that is the kind of Improvement that takes most with me (let us step in here for a Moment, we are caught I see in a Shower) I am altogether of the Poet's Opinion, that 'Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expense'. Were I a Nobleman, I should endeavour to turn my Estate into a Garden, and make my Tenants my Gardeners: Instead of useless Temples, I would build farm-houses; and instead of cutting out unmeaning Vistas, I would beautify and mend Highways: The Country should smile upon my Labours, and the Public should partake in my Pleasures. What signifies all this ostentatious Work? Is any Man the better for it? Is it not Money most vilely squandered away? Calloph So far from it, that I assure you, considered even in a public Light, I look upon it as an Expense that may very properly be said to be sanctified by Use.

Polpth I suppose you are going to tell me that it feeds two or three poor Labourers; and when you have said this, I know not what more you can say to defend it. But how is it possible for a Man to throw away his Money without doing some Service in the World?

Calloph. How? Why be spending it in gaming, to the encouragement of Cheats and Sharpers: By squandering it away upon Lusts and Appetites, in the Support of Stews and Bawdy-houses: Or by Dealing it out in Bribes, in opposition to Honesty, and to advance

Corruption. In Arts like these, what numbers consume their Wealth! It is not enough for them to prevent Mankind's being benefitted by their affluent Circumstances; but they do their utmost, while they diminish their Fortunes, to make all they can influence as worthless as themselves. So that I assure you I should look upon it as a very great Point gained, if all our Men of Fortune would only take care that their Wealth proves of no Difference to Mankind. Tho' I am far from desiring they should stop there: I would have them endeavour to turn it into some useful Channel. And in my Opinion, it is laid out in a very laudable Manner, when it is spent, as it is here, in circulating thro' a Variety of Trades, in supporting a Number of poor Families, and in the Encouragement of Art and Industry.

Polyphth. Well, Sir, I confess Wealth thus laid out, is beneficial to a Country; but still you keep from the Point: I ask whether all these good Ends would not be answered, and more too, were this Wealth laid out according to my Scheme, in public Works, or something of an useful Nature.

Calloph. And so you have no Notion of any Use arising from these elegant productions of Art: You cannot conceive how they should be of any Service to the Public. Why you are a mere Goth, an unpolished Vandal; were you empowered to reform the Age, I suppose I should see you, like one of those wild misguided People, coursing furiously round the Land, and laying desolate every beautiful thing you met with. But in my Opinion, Sir, these noble Productions of Art, considered merely as such, may be looked upon as Works of a very public Nature. Do you think no End is answered when a Nation's Taste is regulated with regard to the most innocent, the most refined, and elegant of its Pleasures? In all polite Countries the Amusements of the People were thought highly deserving a Legislator's Inspection. To establish a just Taste in these was esteemed in some measure as advancing the Interest of Virtue: And can it be considered as a Work entirely of a private Nature, for a superior Genius to exert itself in an Endeavour to fix a true Standard of Beauty in any of these allowed and useful kinds of Pleasure? In the Way of Gardening particularly, the Taste of the Nation has long been so depraved, that I should think we might be obliged to any one that would undertake to reform it. While a Taste for Painting, Music, Architecture, and other polite Arts, in some measure prevailed amongst us, our Gardens for the most Part were laid out in so formal, awkward, and wretched a Manner, that they were really a Scandal to the very Genius of the Nation; a Man of Taste was shocked whenever he set his Foot into them. But Stow, it is to be hoped, may work some Reformation: I would have our Country Squires flock hither two or three times in a Year, by way of

Improvement, and after they have looked about them a little, return Home with new Notions, and begin to see the Absurdity of their clipped Yews, their Box-wood Borders, their flourished Parterres, and their lofty Brick-walls - You may smile but I assure you such an improvement of public Taste, tho' there is no Occasion to consider it as a matter of first Importance, is certainly a Concern that ought by no means to be neglected. Perhaps indeed I may carry the Matter farther than the Generality of People; but to me I must own there appears a very visible Connection between an improved Taste for Pleasure, and a Taste for Virtue: When I sit ravished at an Oratorio, or stand astonished before the Cartoons, or enjoy myself in these happy Walks, I can feel my Mind expand itself, my Notions enlarge, and my Heart better disposed either for a religious Thought, or a benevolent Action: In a Word I cannot help imagining a Taste for these exalted Pleasures contributes towards making a better Man.

Polypth. Good God! what an Enthusiast you are! Polite Arts improve Virtue! an Assertion indeed for a Philosopher to make. Why are they not always considered as having a natural Tendency to Luxury, to Riot, and Licentiousness?

Calloph. No more, in my Opinion, than a wholesome Meal has to a Surfeit, or reading the Scriptures to Heresy: All things are capable, we know, of Abuse; and perhaps the best things are the most capable: And tho' this may indeed argue a Depravity in us, yet it by no means, I think, argues a Tendency in them to deprave us. However, (to let what I have yet said stand for nothing) I can tell you one very great Piece of Service arising to the Country from Wealth laid out in this elegant manner, which you seem so much to grumble at; and that is, the Money spent in the Neighbourhood by the Company daily crowding hither to satisfy their Curiosity. We have a kind of a continual Fair; and I have heard several of the Inhabitants of the neighbouring Town assert, that it is one of the best Trades they have: Their Inns, their Shops and their Farms, and Shambles, all find their Account in it: So that, in my Opinion, viewed in this Light only, such Productions of Art may be considered as very great Advantages to every Neighbourhood that enjoys the lucky Situation of being placed near them - To this Advantage might be added, the great Degree of Pleasure from hence derived daily to such Numbers of People: A Place like this is a kind of keeping open House, there is a Repast at all times ready for the Entertainment of Strangers. And sure if you have any Degree of Benevolence, you must think an useful End answered in thus affording an innocent Gratification to so many of your Fellow-creatures. A Sunday Evening spent here, adds a new Relish to the Day of Rest, and makes the Sabbath appear more cheerful to the Labourer after a toilsome

Week. For my Part, I assure you I have scarce experienced a greater Pleasure than I have often felt upon meeting a Variety of pleased Faces in these Walks: All Care and Uneasiness seems to be left behind at the Garden-door, and People enter here fully resolved to enjoy themselves and the several beautiful objects around them. In one Part a Face presents itself marked with the Passion of gaping Wonder; in another you meet a Countenance bearing the Appearance of a more rational Pleasure; and in a third, a Sett of Features composed into serene Joy; while the Man of Taste is seen examining every Beauty with a curious Eye, and discovering his Approbation in an half-formed Smile. - To this I might still add another Advantage of a public Nature, derived from these elegant Productions of Art; and that is their Tendency to raise us in the Opinion of Foreigners. If our Nation had nothing of this kind to boast of, all our Neighbours would look upon us a stupid tasteless Set of People, and not worth visiting. So that for the Credit of this Country, I think, something of this kind ought to be exhibited amongst us. Our public Virtues, if we have any, would not, I dare say, appear to less Advantage when recommended by these Embellishments of Art.

Polypth. I wonder you should not know me better than to imagine I am always in earnest which I find fault. My thoughts and yours, I assure you, agree exactly upon this Subject. I only wanted to engage you in some Discourse till the Shower was over; as the Sky seems now quite clear, if you will, we'll venture out, and visit what we have yet to see.

It is tempting to imagine a contemporary version of this dialogue, perhaps between representative of the National Trust and a visiting friend who works for Friends of the Earth.

Most descriptions of the Gothic Temple now include some mention of its interior. That by 'J de C' in the first French guidebook, *Les Charmes de Stowe* (1748), was particularly admiring. In [rough] translation it runs:

Near this notable bridge rises a most curious and elaborate Gothick Building. One could not more happily imitate the Ancient Style of Architecture, than has been achieved in this case. It is a kind of Castle, on several stories, which looks over almost the entire garden. The view from it is both admirable and entirely captivating. One cannot tear oneself away from so great and so agreeable a variety of objects ... But to return to our 'Chateau Gothique', all the window panes are painted in the old way, and among them are some of great beauty. Inside there is not the least

ornament; but for all that one takes pleasure in such venerable simplicity. The whole building appears ancient and yet it is scarcely finished. In this there is great skill. To complete the scene, they have placed around it, on pedestals, a great many statues representing the gods of the Ancient Saxons; figures which are seemingly of great age while being in fact completely modern.

Two years later, George Bickham gives what is in effect another translation.

The Beauties of Stow, which he published in 1750, was an attempt to move in on the Stowe guidebook market, and a fairly unprincipled one, in that he did not go there himself, but copied his text entirely from *Les Charmes* and Seeley's *Description*. As George Clarke points out in his introduction to the version of it printed by the *Augustan Reprint Society* in 1977, this led to such splendid howlers as describing the Gothic Temple as built of brick, wrongly cribbed from Seeley's 'red stone'; as well as repetitions of the same information. It is fair to say, however, that he corrected these errors in the next edition.

We come to a Gothic Building, call'd The Temple of Liberty It is an Imitation of a large antique Building of Brick, finely Mimic, Seventy Feet high on the Summit of an Hill. It is impossible to make a better Imitation of the Antient Taste of Architecture. This is a kind of Castle, several stories high, which commands the whole garden: one can never be tired with beholding so vast and so pleasing a variety of objects. The windows are adorned with curious paintings upon Glass in the antique Taste, and beautifully performed. On the inside of the Dome are the Arms of the Family, from the beginning to the present time; and round it, on the Outside, are the Seven Statues mentioned before ... Here we have a boundless prospect round the building, out of the Turrets, and on the Ground likewise ... But to return to our Gothic Castle, within you see not the least ornament; and yet there is an extraordinary Pleasure in this antique Simplicity. The whole Edifice seems old and is left unfinished: in this a great deal of Art is discovered. Round it are placed on Pedestals a vast Number of busts representing the old Saxon Deities; and these busts seem quite Antique, tho' they are entirely modern.

Individual visitors were also ready to be impressed by the building, especially if they were already disposed to admire Gothick taste, as were the Newdigates of Arbury Hall in Warwickshire, friends and disciples of Sanderson Miller.

In 1748, Lady Newdigate had recorded in her Journal:

The Gothick Church is now compleat, in which Uniformity of Taste is more apparent than in any other building among the numbers here, the windows are painted Glass, some of which is extremely fine.

Even those most doubtful of the contrived perfection of Stowe found something to admire in this building: Jemima, Marchioness Grey, thought Stowe the place 'what I would least chuse to live at of any I ever saw ... Nature has done very

little for it, and Art so much that you cannot possibly be deceive'd'. The lack of surprise, the `stiff set Plan', the overcrowded buildings, `all small and trifling and clumsy ... dirty and decaying already', and the lack of retirement or privacy, all offended her new Naturalistic taste. But, she wrote in a letter in 1748:

The Gothic Building half Church half Tower in Appearance, is the most Uncommon and best in its Way. It stands very high and expos'd, but in return makes a good Point of View, and has the finest Prospect over the Garden and Country of any. It is built of Reddish Stone, and the Windows are filled with Painted Glass, it looks quite over the Garden, with the most inclos'd woody Part of it lying underneath with Buildings rising among the Trees, and over them the House which has now the longest Front (they tell you) in England.

Horace Walpole had decided, and not necessarily predictable, views on the Gothic style, so that Lord Cobham's nephew and successor, Richard Grenville, must have felt a little nervous when he paid him a visit in August 1753. He was safe however. Walpole wrote to John Chute:

The Grecian temple is glorious, this I openly worship: in the heretical corner of my heart I adore the Gothic building which, by some unusual inspiration, Gibbs has made pure and beautiful and venerable. The style has a propensity to the Venetian or Mosque Gothic and the great coloumn near it makes the whole put one in mind of the place of St. Mark. The windows are throughout consecrated with painted glass; most of it from the priory at Warwick, a present from that foolish Greathead, who quarreled with me (because his father was a gardener) for asking him if Lord Brook had planted much.

As the years progressed, tastes changed dramatically, but Stowe evolved with them, and as many people continued to visit and admire as ever. In the 1760s, Seeley won the battle of the guidebooks, forcing Bickham to withdraw. His own he continued to improve with new and updated engravings, and a fuller and more descriptive text. After the edition of 1777 the description of the Gothic Temple changed little however:

a large building of yellow stone, 70 feet high, adorned in the Gothic stile with carved work, and a very fine collection of old painted glass, consisting of sacred subjects, and of great variety of armorial bearings; some of which are very finely executed. The disposition within is very finely executed: the principal room is circular, the dome of which is ornamented with the

descents and inter-marriages of the Temple family, in a regular series of armorial bearings from the Saxon Earls of Leicesters to the late Lord Viscount Cobham, and to his sister and heiress Hester, Countess Temple. - On each side is a small circular chapel with painted glass of armorial bearings of different families; and at the upper end a circular staircase leads to a gallery on the second story, where there are likewise two other chapels with the arms of the Saxon heptarchy. - The Tower affords a very extensive view round the country.

It is a measure of Gibbs's - and Lord Cobham's - skill that the Gothic Temple did not appear outrageously anachronistic to later eyes, but, indeed, admirably Picturesque. But to many of the generation to which Baron Johan van Spaen van Biljoen belonged, it must have seemed whimsical at least in terms of its detail. The Baron visited Stowe in 1791, (his description is printed in *The Journal of Garden History II* 1982), and was clearly an uncritical man: in a list of different buildings to be admired, he mentions simply that the Gothic Temple is 'noticeable for the exact observation of ornament'. In contrast to Lady Grey, he was impressed most of all by how expensively-built all the Stowe temples were: 'we were shown several which had cost more than £3000 each.' J. Britton and E.W. Brayley, in the first volume of *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1801) took most of their description of the interior directly from the guide book, but went into almost Pevsnerian detail in describing its exterior:

On the opposite side of a deep valley [from the Queen's Temple] is the most picturesque and curious building in these gardens, denominated the Gothic Temple. This is a triangular building, with a pentagonal tower at each corner, one of which rises to the height of seventy feet, and terminates with battlements and pinnacles: the others are surmounted by domes. The whole is constructed with a brownish stone and being seated on the brow of a hill, forms an interesting object from many parts of the gardens. The inside is richly ornamented with light columns and pointed arches; and the windows are glazed with a fine collection of painted glass

Compare this to Pevsner himself (*Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire* 1960):

The Gothic Temple cannot be missed. It is one of the most prominent of the furnishings of the grounds - and also one of the most interesting. For one thing it dates from after 1739 and before 1745, and the Gothic fashion was at that time only in its beginnings. Horace Walpole did not chose it at Strawberry Hill until 1749. Kent had practised it, it is true, as early as the 1730s (Hampton Court 1732, Esher Place circa 1730), but - and this is the

other remarkable fact - it is not by Kent but by Gibbs. The Gothic Temple is surprisingly big, it is built of ironstone, and it is also lively in its composition and details and remarkably ignorant. The plan is a triangle with pentagonal towers at two angles and a higher square [sic] one at the third, which is at the back. The pentagonal towers have recessed little turrets and cupolas, the square tower has a flat embattled tower and pinnacles. The front between the pentagonal towers is divided into three bays by what can only be called Gothic pilasters, with palm-leaf capitals. They appear in two orders, below set between arched openings, above between two- light windows with a quatrefoil in the spandrel. A similar arrangement on the other sides. The front ends in a castellated gable. Circular interior with a balcony all round. Stuccoed Gothic dome.

Most writing about Stowe in this century has been inevitably historical, either strictly academic art history, or of a slightly more nostalgic kind. An example of the latter is *The Dynasty of Stowe* by G. Wilson Knight, published in 1945. The author had been a schoolmaster at Stowe School during the War and one chapter is devoted to a tour of the garden in the manner of Gilpin's *Dialogue*, except that this time the companion is imaginary, based on a particularly gifted boyhood friend, recently killed in Libya, 'an angel and a boy of thirteen and a soldier - he is none of these and all.' This time, however, the Gothic Temple is not chosen for a philosophical debate, and indeed is rather summarily dismissed: 'The queer building on the crest is the Gothic Temple, used as a school armoury. It's a Grottesque building, Saracenic Gothic they call it.' And that's that.

The ideas embodied in this building are still relevant however, and can even give rise to poetic inspiration. Just as it is impossible to talk of the revival in Stowe's fortunes in the last few decades without acknowledging the contribution of George Clarke, now Chairman of the National Trust's Stowe Committee, this collection would not be complete without a final word from him. The following exchange took place after badinage at the Stowe Symposium in 1992 on the consistency of Lord Cobham's anti-Roman stance, in the course of which George Clarke suggested that the original inscription from Corneille be

once again raised over the door, prompting one committee member to taunt the Chairman with a quatrain:

Lord Cobham, thanking pagan Gods
Professed his Northern view of Rome
His architect defied the boss -
The Gothic Temple's got a dome!

This soon produced a response – *To R.H. on the Gothic Temple, in reply, G.B.C.*

As soon as I'd said it,
I saw my mistake
That folly prompts errors
Which all of us make,
For it's not quite a fane,
And it's not quite a fake.

Was the Temple of Liberty,
Gothic in name,
Just a move in Lord Cobham's
Political game,
A fancy dress pose
On reactionary frame?

Or does it embody
Themes of more worth -
Honour, integrity,
Moral rebirth -
Which returned to the world
From the Protestant North?

Such issues of style
And of faith are the sort
To provoke any resident
Landmarker's thought:
Over both in the past
Bitter battles were fought.

Charlotte Haslam

January 1994

Gothic Temple on film

Film fans might be interested to know that in 1999, the Gothic Temple had a cameo role in the James Bond film *The World is Not Enough* starring Pierce Brosnan. The Gothic Temple stands in for a church where a funeral has taken place and appears shortly after the opening action sequence. The building also appeared in the 2010 remake of *Wolfman*, starring Anthony Hopkins.

