



Harewood House and the destruction of the Gawthorpe Hall

By Dr. Jonathan Finch, Reader, University of York

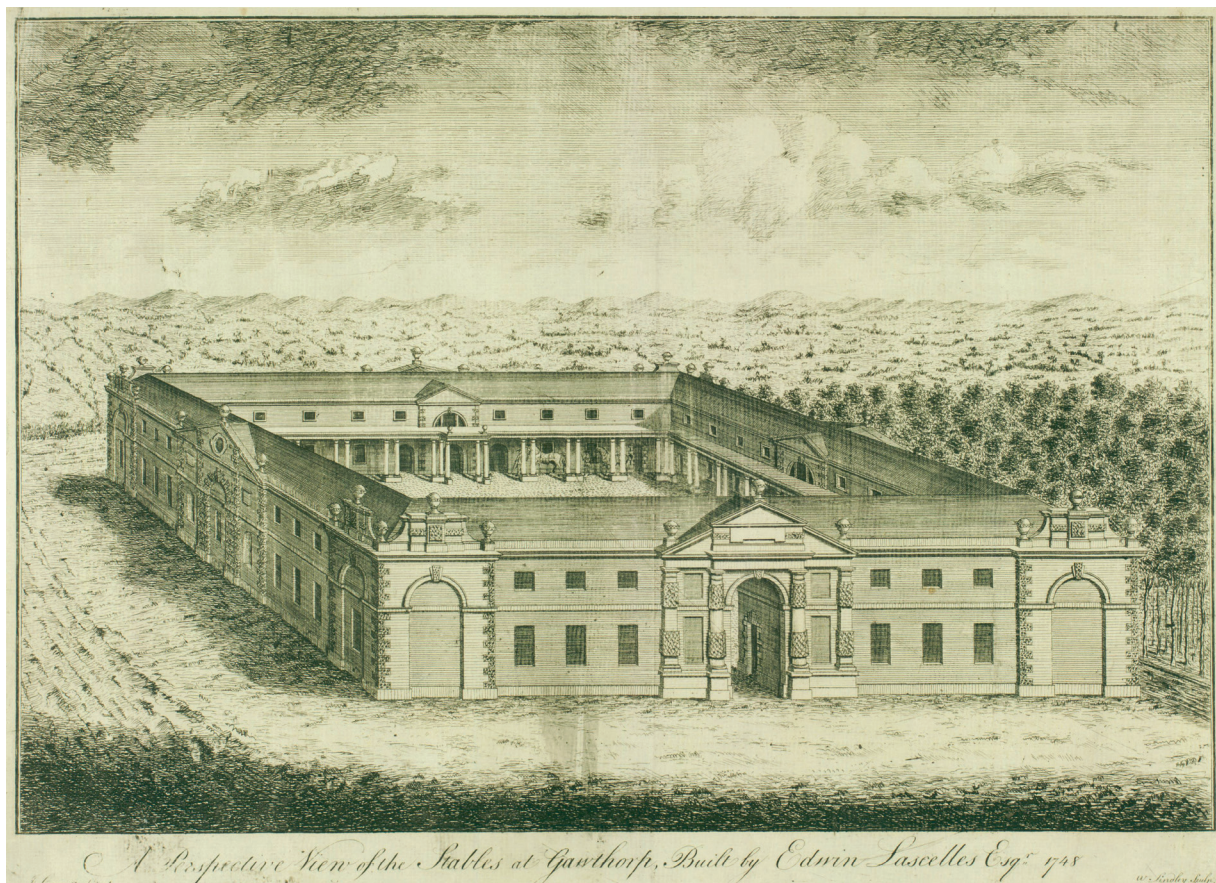
In 1771 Edwin Lascelles (1713-1795) took up residence at his ‘New House at Gawthorpe’ which he had named *Harewood House*. Yet below the spectacular southern front of the house lay the ruins of *Gawthorpe Hall*, the medieval manor house at the heart of the estate which Edwin’s father Henry had bought in 1739 to establish his eldest son as a member of the landed aristocracy. Today, *Harewood House* stands on the northern edge of Leeds, in West Yorkshire amidst the stunning designed landscape credited to Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown (1716-1783), the foremost British landscape designer of the eighteenth century.

‘The New House at Gawthorpe’ later named Harewood House, in West Yorkshire. Built for Edwin Lascelles between 1758-1771 to designs by John Carr of York. The Palladian symmetry, classicism and sheer scale, seen here on the south front, were in marked contrast to its predecessor. Upper storeys were added to the pavilions and the balustrade to the main block in the mid nineteenth century when the Italianate terrace was also added distancing the house from the parkland. Photo: Jonathan Finch.

‘The New House at Gawthorpe’

After his father’s death in 1753 Edwin inherited a substantial fortune and set about constructing the new house. He employed a local architect John Carr of York (1723-1807), but consulted widely, seeking plans from prominent architects right up until the first stone was laid. Carr’s first assignment was to build a new stable block, an exercise designed to test the architect and workmen before committing to the house itself. Work on the stables was successfully completed in 1758, the same year the foundations of the new house were laid.

The house was in the Palladian style, demonstrating the new learning and classical aspirations of the landed elite in the latter part of the 18th century. In the designs for their country houses, they sought to emulate the cultural achievements of the classical past, through the structured and symmetrical architecture which demanded order, rationalism and balance within the political commonwealth. The interior designed by Robert Adam (1728-1792) and the elegant ceilings with matching carpets were part of his overall neo-classical design. The house was sump-



Edwin Lascelles' new classical stable block was formed around a courtyard. The scale and style of the block was a complete contrast to the medieval hall it stood near until the completion of the new house in the 1770s.
'A Prospect View of the Stables at Gawthorp, Built by Edwin Lascelles Esq 1748, J. Carr Architect, W. Lindley Sculpt.'

tuously fitted out, with the largest commission from Britain's foremost furniture maker, Thomas Chipendale (1718-1779).

The process of house building is carefully documented in the archive, which in addition to family papers, accounts, deeds and other estate records, includes

hundreds of letters between Edwin Lascelles and his steward, Samuel Popplewell. He was responsible for administering the building project, as well as the household and estate, especially when Lascelles was in London between January and May/June each year when parliament was sitting and the courts were in session. The accounts also shed light on the day to day activities with payments for the materials, including timber, stone, slates and iron as well as to the labourers and craftsmen.

The Designed Landscape

As work on the house took shape, a veritable army of gang labour worked on transforming the surrounding landscape. Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, renowned for his inspirational assessment of the 'capabilities' of a landscape for improvement, was appointed royal gardener to George 3 (1738-1820) in 1764. He first visited *Harewood* in 1758 and was paid the relatively small sum of £16, possibly for an initial assessment and plan of the site. However, another more established designer, Richard Woods (1715-1793), was initially engaged to landscape the parkland but he left abruptly in 1766, to be replaced by Thomas White (1739-1811), who had worked as a foreman for Brown. Both Woods and White planted thousands of trees in new plantations, buying trees from local nurseries and using those grown on the estate specifically for the new landscape. Much of the attention focused on the northern pleasure grounds where hundreds of pounds were spent physically altering

the topography to create a relatively level lawn area in front of the house.

Edwin Lascelles and his new wife were able to move into the house in 1771, although minor works continued into the 1780s. Brown returned to the site the same year to complete the most important aesthetic landscaping to the south of the house. Brown was paid £6,000 over the next ten years to complete this stunning landscape. It included his characteristic use of grass sweeping down a gentle slope from the house to a wide piece of water created by damming a small stream in the middle distance and on the horizon beyond, a plantation belt gave the impression of continuous woodland in the distance.

The architecture, interiors, and furnishings all combined with Brown's landscape to create a very modern cultural landscape, albeit one based on classical ideals. The purpose was to create an environment, both built and natural, which conveyed the owner's natural place in society at the apex of an ordered and harmonious society. The symmetrical architecture expressed the beauty of order and hierarchy; order that was inherent in nature and therefore ordained by God. However, to create the corresponding 'natural' environment around the house, an older, underlying landscape was erased, and once the new house was completed an older medieval hall, *Gawthorpe Hall*, was demolished.

Noticeably, two prominent buildings remain from the medieval landscape. *Harewood Castle* was built



Harewood House from the Lofthouse coach road. The coach road was laid out by ‘Capability’ Brown to give a series of framed views of the house in its landscape setting. From the start of the drive the house is seen in the middle distance framed by the trees of the northern pleasure ground beyond. The road then dips down, crosses the stream which feeds the lake Brown built, and presents dramatic views of the house from below. Photo: Jonathan Finch.

in 1366 and stands high above the river Wharfe as a symbol of lordly power, surrounded by a small deer park. Built as a fortified house, it combined wide domestic windows on the upper floors with the imposing walls of a stronghold, but it stood ruined by the seventeenth century after the family had died out and the estate was united with the smaller and later manor of *Gawthorpe*. By the early nineteenth century the romantic ruin had been incorporated into the northern pleasure grounds surrounding the Lascelles’ classical house. Within the same northern grounds between the castle and the new house stands the medieval parish church, isolated and at some distance from the village. The church fabric is largely fifteenth century, and within it is a unique collection of alabaster tombs from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, including the armoured effigies and bejewelled ladies of the Redman and Ryther families who owned *Harewood Castle*; their armour reflecting the feudal roots of their status as lords of the manor, and providing a convenient history by association for the recently enriched Lascelles family.

The Gascoignes of Gawthorpe Hall

The earliest monument in the church, however, is to William Gascoigne (c. 1350-1419) who was Lord Chief Justice and who is depicted in his judge’s robes. He was responsible for building the medieval manor house at Gawthorpe, within the parish of Harewood, in the 1480s. Three acres of land had been enfeoffed in 1382, but there is no evidence of

what building, if any, occupied the site. William’s licence demonstrates that major rebuilding had been undertaken, and it also included the right to em-park around 3000 acres of land creating the ideal setting for the house. It was *Gawthorpe Hall* that succeeded *Harewood Castle* as the seigneurial centre of the estates.

The earliest image of *Gawthorpe* is badly degraded as it filled a corner of the 1698 estate plan, opposite an image of the castle in a state of ruin. However, there is enough to conclude that it was largely unaltered in two views of the hall, one from the south and one from the north, published in the 1720s. The images show a three sided courtyard complex with the main hall range flanked by a service wing on one side and with lodgings and the parlour probably contained in the other. Medieval halls kept to a fairly standard pattern, so there can be some certainty as to how the space was generally used. The hall itself was where the household would assemble and served to reinforce the relationships between the lord and his feudal tenants.

To the east of the medieval ranges is a very distinct extension in the classical style. It is built of brick, rather than stone, with large symmetrically arranged windows above half windows lighting a cellar or basement. The evidence suggests strongly that this was added by Sir Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641) in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The estate was inherited by the Wentworths through marriage into the Gascoigne family



The remains of Harewood Castle overlooking Wharfedale. Built in 1366 for the Aldeburgh family, whose heraldry can be seen decorating the upper window of the chapel above the main entrance. Its large windows demonstrate a growing concern for domestic comfort over defensive capabilities, but its towers, height, and position still recall its military antecedents.

Photo: Jonathan Finch.

around 1580, when the Gascoigne's failed in the male line. Several changes were made at that time, notably the surrounding land was disemparked and the manors of *Harewood* and *Gawthorpe* were united. Sir Thomas, who inherited from his father in 1614, was a patron of architecture and built classically inspired ranges at *The King's Manor* in York after he was appointed President of the Council of the North in 1628. Four years later, after he had been appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1632, he commissioned a huge palace in Ireland at Jigginstown, *County Kildare*.

Several characteristics of the extension to *Gawthorpe Hall* such as its classical style, the use of bricks, and the basement level, suggest it was built by Sir Thomas Wentworth. From his letters it is known that Wentworth enjoyed *Gawthorpe* as a rural retreat from the intrigues of court life. Its combination of medieval and modern architecture, ornamented with heraldry that demonstrated his family's pedigree and links to established families in the region were all valued by the courtier, as was the abundant landscape around it.

Sir Thomas Wentworth was famously executed on the orders of King Charles 1 (1600-1649) in 1641 in an attempt to prevent the impending civil war with parliament. Wentworth's estates were heavily indebted as a result and his son sold *Gawthorpe* to a partnership of London businessmen in 1657. It was inherited by the Boulter family in 1697, but the debts and running costs were prohibitive and forced

the estates sale again in 1739, when it was bought by Henry Lascelles for £63,827.

Like Wentworth before them, the Lascelles, as new owners, set about altering the house and landscape to their taste. In 1749 Francis Richardson was paid £16 16 shillings for six days attendance and for a „...fair design of the plantations...about *Gawthorpe House*“. Work also began on the kitchen garden and hot houses (greenhouses) in 1750, with scaffolding, bricks, and plastering all paid for during the summer months. By 1752 the hot house was glazed and stocked with pineapples. In March 1753, over 1,000 fir trees were bought to create the plantations. The most significant change to the house was a portico designed by John Carr, who was paid for ten visits, and which suggests an attempt to dramatically change the exterior of the house.

However only a couple of years later, Lascelles was planning an entirely new house, on a grand scale, on a new site towards the top of the hill behind *Gawthorpe*. After a lengthy process of consultation with top architects, work began on the new stable block in 1755, followed by work on the new house in 1758, and *Gawthorpe Hall* was demolished in 1774, once the 'new house at *Gawthorpe*' – *Harewood House* – was completed.

Excavations at the site of the old hall revealed part of the footprint of the medieval house with substantial walls, hearths, and ovens in one of the wings. Further evidence to the west showed how

the service yard was in fact a series of three cobbled terraces. So why was *Gawthorpe* no longer appropriate for the needs of the Lascelles? Why was a manor house which had served landowning families for over three hundred years demolished? Part of the answer is evident in the material culture that was recovered.

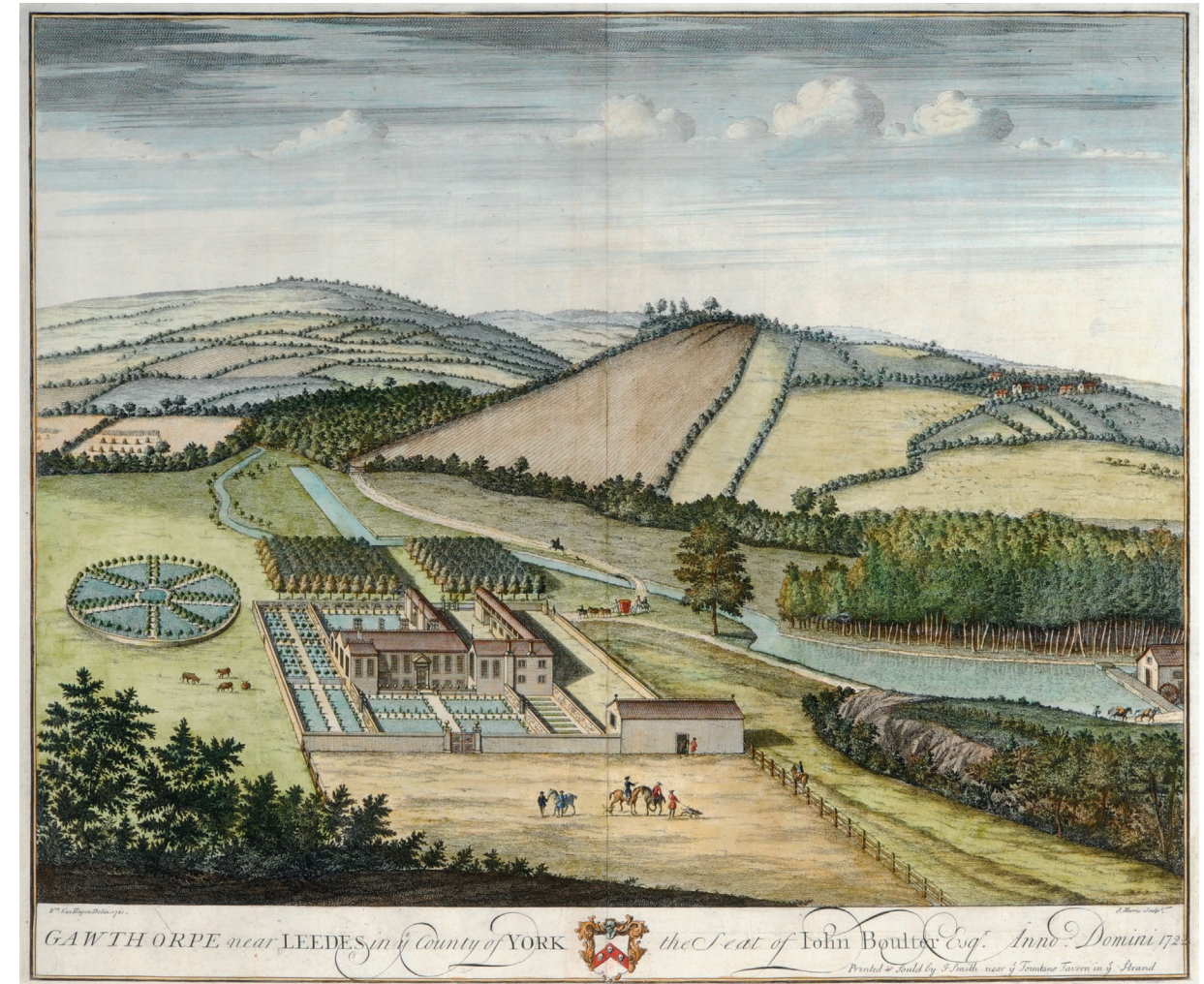
A huge amount of glass and ceramic tablewares were recovered which had been discarded as part of the demolition process. These included fragments of wine glasses from Germany, and containers from the Low Countries, as well as wine bottles with the heraldic crest of the Lascelles. The ceramics included a mix of kitchen wares, but there was also a significant amount of imported Chinese porcelain. The assemblage shows the transition between the traditional manners of the English household and the impact of the global networks of commerce that had developed by the eighteenth century. Discarding imported Chinese porcelain also demonstrates the incredible wealth of the Lascelles family. Their money came, not just from rents and office holding in Britain, but from a sustained involvement in the Caribbean colonies where they held lucrative customs posts, lent money, and owned ships and warehouses as well as land and slave labour.

A new type of landowners

The Lascelles represented a new generation of landowners. Their wealth was drawn from the cap-

italist networks that evolved around the globe from the seventeenth century, and their investment in land was a necessary route into the established elite and political power. The new classical house provided grand rooms in which to entertain polite society, the emerging mix of haute bourgeois and landed elite that consolidated its grip on power over the mid-eighteenth century. The new social mix brought with it new manners, sensibilities, and tastes expressed through the architecture and spaces within classical buildings and the informal naturalistic landscapes that surrounded them. The resulting combination of classical house and informal landscape was the result of specific historical processes and was designed to project a particular image of a timeless place imbued with classically inspired virtues of learning and art, with nature in perfect harmony under the governance of the landed elite. The natural order was mirrored in the political order and both were in balance.

One of the key differences between the landscape around *Gawthorpe Hall* and the modern landscape of *Harewood House* was the relationship between the main house and the productive landscape. *Gawthorpe* was surrounded by its barns, stables and mill and sat within orchards, nut groves and a kitchen or herb garden. By the time *Harewood House* was built in the late eighteenth century these amenities had been moved out of sight leaving the main house isolated within the landscape.



The view from the north, showing a rather compressed medieval core (right), with a large east facing window, and wings extending to the south. The seventeenth century extension is given prominence, surrounded by formal gardens. 'GAWTHORPE near LEEDES in ye county of York the Seat of John Boulter Esqr Anno Domini 1722 Printed and Sould by J. Smith near ye Fountane Tavern in ye Strand. Wm Van Hagen Delin. 1721. J. Harris Sculpt.'



Glassware recovered from the excavation of Gawthorpe Hall, including (clockwise from top) a mallet bottle with the Lascelles' seal (c.1750), two handled punch cups (mid-18th century), two stems from drinking glasses with air twist patterns (c.1745-50), and a fragment of a jelly glass (c.1730-50). Credit: Jeremy Kemp.

This move contrasts the situation in Denmark, for example, where even newly built manor houses were still closely connected to these facilities as signs of their manorial privileges in the eighteenth century. In England, where manorial rights had been commuted to cash from the fifteenth century, the spatial arrangements in the landscape reflected new relationships between owners, land and power. The demolition of *Gawthorpe Hall* and the construction of *Harewood House* and the associated re-landscaping of the estate was the epitome of the new relationships of a modern, capitalist society.

Further reading:

David Brown and Tom Williamson, 2016 *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men: Landscape revolution in Eighteenth-Century England*, London Reaktion Books.

Jonathan Finch, 2016, 'Atlantic Landscapes: Connecting Place and People in the Modern World' *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, vol 5, no. 1, pp. 1-19.

Jonathan Finch, 2008, 'Three Men in a Boat: biographies and narratives in the historic landscape' *Landscape Research*, vol 33, no. 5, pp. 511-530.

Mary Mauchline, 1974 *Harewood House*, Newton Abbot; David and Charles.