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**Studies and status: spaces for books in the seventeenth-century Penshurst Place,
Kent**

Susie West

‘such an eminent library that there were 3 thousand folios in it, besides others, and som MSS. Seven score years in collecting’.¹

Early modern book history is a flourishing field, with a widening scope that attracts political and social historians investigating major shifts in English society. For the seventeenth century in particular, the role of the press in the most politically contested decades is of central importance although scholars of political history and of the print trades have so far had more to say about the creation of printed texts and their distribution than have book historians who focus on reception and consumption of texts, as Kevin Sharpe points out. Sharpe makes the case for the study of reading practices as the study of interpretive communities, in this way putting the history of reading into the central concerns of political historians. He stresses the materiality of print and the variety of contexts for reading practices, noting in passing the ‘material culture of ideas’ that books as artefacts embody.²

¹ By 1671; Anthony Wood, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, at Oxford, 1632-1695, Described by Himself*, Andrew Clark (ed.), 5 vols, (Oxford 1891-1900), II, 213. I am indebted to Germaine Warkentin for excellent advice in bringing this paper to fruition and for permission to use her transcript of the re-dated inventory of 1623. I owe particular thanks to Lord and Lady De L’Isle for permission to consult the De L’Isle archive on deposit at the Centre for Kentish Studies (CKS), Maidstone, Kent, and for access to their home beyond the public face of Penshurst. The research was undertaken during my Munby Fellowship in Bibliography at Cambridge University Library.

² K. Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions, The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England*, (New Haven and London, 2000), particularly 39-46; the footnotes to chapter 1 offer an overview for the history of reading as it intersects with early modern history

Library furniture, however, is not part of Sharpe's material, and is probably the least considered material aspect of book history. It has taken a historian of design, Dora Thornton, to place the Italian Renaissance study and its non-book contents in an accessible work of cultural history; nothing comparable yet exists for the early modern library of the British Isles.³ The aim of this paper is to add a case study to the growing interest in the material environment of reading and collecting books in England.

The Sidney family of Penshurst Place, Kent, had a substantial library by the later seventeenth century. A broad range of evidence allows us to deduce where the books were kept and what role the creation of library rooms may have played in the display of family status. The nature of the material discussed here allows us to put the material contexts of reading, writing and collecting practices for one intellectually very active family on to the map of their activities which is steadily being drawn up. In doing this, a material history of the library can begin to address some of the wider historical themes of consumption and the representation of social identity. First, however, the inhabitants of these spaces need to be sketched in.

The Sidney family 1552-1870

Sir William Sidney received the manor from Edward VI in 1552. Sir William's son Sir Henry Sidney (1529-1586) was responsible for important architectural additions to Penshurst Place. His son Sir Philip (1554-1586) was born here, and died of his wound at Zutphen shortly after his father's death. Sir Philip had the benefit of his scholarly

³ D. Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, (New Haven

antiquarian father's book collection as did his brother Robert (1563-1626) who also bought books regularly.⁴ Robert married a Welsh heiress Barbara Gamage, and they completed Sir Henry's additions to the house. He became Baron Sidney then Viscount Lisle, finally receiving the revived title of Earl of Leicester in 1618. Despite this success, he was in such financial difficulty by 1623 that he handed over Penshurst Place to his son Robert, Lord Lisle, with a mortgage on the contents. The documentation of this event has provided an important insight into the history of books at Penshurst, as will be seen below.

Robert (1595-1677) 2nd Earl of Leicester's career was as a diplomat; he relied on his wife Dorothy, sister to the 10th Earl of Northumberland, to manage the estates while he was abroad. The Sidney library by now commanded the antiquarian Anthony Wood's admiration, quoted as the epigraph to this article. The 2nd Earl's reading and commonplacing place him in 'an intellectual lineage which links Hubert Languet, Justus Lipsius, and Hugo Grotius in the friendship of several generations of the family, tying them to currents of anti-absolutist thought.'⁵ This lineage culminates in the figure of his second son, Algernon Sidney (1623-1683), republican and political theorist.⁶ Algernon worked very closely with his father from 1648 to manage the complex estate and legal affairs of the family, until he left England in 1659; his older brother Philip quarrelled irrevocably with his father in 1652.⁷

and London 1997)

⁴ Sir Philip and Robert's books discussed in G. Warkentin, 'Sidney's Authors' in M. Allen et al. eds, *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements* (New York 1991), 68-89

⁵ G. Warkentin, 'The world and the book at Penshurst: the second Earl of Leicester (1595-1677) and his library' *The Library* 6th ser. 20:4 (1998) 341; the article details the archive sources behind the reconstruction of the 2nd Earl's intellectual life. See also a summary biography by F. Hull, 'Sidney of Penshurst – Robert, 2nd Earl of Leicester' *Archaeologia Cantiana* 111 (1993) 43-56, and G. Warkentin 'Humanism in hard times: the second Earl of Leicester (1595-1677) and his Commonplace books, 1630-1660', forthcoming

⁶ J. Scott, *Algernon Sidney and the English Republic, 1623-1677* (Cambridge 1988), 49

⁷ Scott, *Algernon Sidney*, 53-66

The 2nd Earl's daughter Lady Dorothy (1617-1684) returned to Penshurst with her children after her husband Henry Spencer, 1st Earl of Sunderland, died at the Battle of Newby in 1643. The poet Edmund Waller called her Saccharissa in his love poems.⁸ The apartment she occupied during her widowhood forms part of our account of books at Penshurst as it included a study. Philip, 3rd Earl of Leicester (1619-1698), is becoming better understood as an art collector.⁹ By the time of the 7th Earl the estate was in financial difficulties, resulting in sales of contents including the sale of the library to the bookseller Thomas Osborne.¹⁰ The 7th Earl died in 1743, his nieces Mary and Elizabeth became co-heiresses, and Elizabeth (1713-1781) moved into Penshurst with her husband William Perry. They instigated architectural changes to the house. It is also clear that the now empty library room was stripped of its shelves.¹¹

Decades of neglect after William Perry's committal for lunacy were succeeded by a revival of family pride in the old house, led by Elizabeth's grandson, Sir John Shelley-Sidney (1771-1849). He commissioned John Biagio Rebecca to restore the house, which resulted in some rebuilding and significant internal alterations, sweeping away many earlier features. Sir John's grandson Philip, 2nd Lord De L'Isle and Dudley (1828-1898) completed the restoration using George Devey, who was the architect for repairs and modernisations at Penshurst from 1851-70.¹² This was less invasive than Rebecca's work, but completed the transformation of the house into a

⁸ J. Cartwright, *Sacharissa, some account of Dorothy Sidney, Countess of Sunderland, her family and friends 1617-1684*, (London 3rd ed. 1901)

⁹ H. Maddicott, 'A collections of the interregnum period: Philip, Lord Viscount Lisle, and his purchases from the 'Late King's Goods', 1649-1660', *Journal of the History of Collections* 11:1, 1999, 1-24

¹⁰ Auctioned by Osborne February 1743; the catalogue is untraced: G. Warkentin, 'The world and the book', 346

¹¹ CKS U1475 A76/2 cited in G. Warkentin, 'The world and the book', 346

contemporary home equipped with a multitude of service rooms, corridors and extra stairs. The present library room was fitted out and decorated by the end of the campaign in 1870, which is a convenient conclusion to this summary.

Materials for the early modern library room

As the title suggests, we are concerned with the spaces for books in the English elite house of the seventeenth century; spaces where architectural, design and cultural history converge. This is not a new topic, the history of the material forms of libraries was summarised over a century ago by J.W. Clark in *The Care of Books*, a text that is still relevant. The English private library as found within the country house was incorporated into Mark Girouard's influential social and architectural survey of the history of the English country house over twenty years ago. The necessarily brief account, heavily reliant on published sources, effectively offered an agenda that deserves to be re-examined by a new generation of historians. Yet published research on the English library room has barely increased since Girouard's survey.¹³ Although there is plenty of material to discuss the ownership of library collections and the prevalence of collecting and reading within gentry and aristocratic households during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, little has been fed back into the material environment for these practices.

The most famous visual representations of English book rooms for the period remain the Smythson design c. 1600 for a fully-fitted closet with open shelves, the extant

¹² Devey's work at Penshurst is documented by J. Allibone, *George Devey, Architect 1820-1886*, (Cambridge 1991) 37-41.

Kederminster parish library of panelled shelves enclosed by doors c.1620, and the later fitted library with open shelves of 1674 at Ham House, for the Duke of Lauderdale.¹⁴ We do not know who Smythson designed that closet for; the parish library is exactly that, a public memorial of a benefactor, rather than a private study; and the Duke's library is a lone survivor of a multitude of metropolitan-oriented aristocratic examples. This is rather slender material for reconstructing the private library. Institutional arrangements survive better in the form of collegiate libraries and the Arts End of 1612 in the Bodleian, Oxford, for example, all of which use open shelving. However, the collegiate examples from the seventeenth-century retain the medieval system of presses projecting into the room at ninety degrees from the wall, rising to an average of eight feet high in their original state. Collegiate libraries usually had larger collections to house, often in existing medieval gallery-like rooms lit by relatively low windows, and so the stall-system (as it has become known) suited the conditions. The options known from seventeenth-century European examples leave us with wall-cupboards or free-standing presses with doors; wall shelves; or shelf units projecting from the walls.¹⁵ We can not assume that the stall system applies to domestic settings, and need to be careful about using institutional examples for private contexts. However, contemporary institutional book technologies, as we might designate fittings and fixtures, do help when considering the archival evidence for private libraries.

One of the best known references to domestic book storage in the early seventeenth century has left us with a clumsy impression that needs to be revisited. Henry Percy,

¹³ M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, (New Haven and London 1978), see also P. Thornton, *Seventeenth-century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (New Haven and London, 1978) 303-315 for a rather haphazard account

¹⁴ RIBA Smythson drawings 11/13; all illustrated in Girouard, *English Country House*, 167-171

9th Earl of Northumberland, is famous for leaving his library of ‘chests of bookes of all sorts, fiftie two, and to fill twelve small chests besides’ at old Petworth House, Sussex.¹⁶ This very medieval-sounding housing of books was listed in a household inventory of 1632 and has perhaps been taken too literally; bear in mind that ‘chests of bookes’ might also embrace the same construction as ‘chests of drawers’. This is certainly the case for the Italian Renaissance study, where bookchests took the form of recessed wall cupboards or below-desk cupboards.¹⁷ If these really were portable trunks, the absence of inventoried books for his residence at Sion might suggest that these were books in transit, fixed shelving always remaining unlisted in inventories of movable goods. An unremarked but remarkable bonus from this inventory is the study closet belonging to Percy’s chamber. This held over 100 books and pamphlets, and an intriguing glazed cedar cupboard which clearly gave the inventory taker pause for thought: perhaps this was an early form of the Pepys-type freestanding bookcase? Petworth House, then, held both library and study rooms by the 1630s and offers a more sophisticated picture than we might expect for that date. Percy and his son the 10th Earl were well known to the Sidneys, the 2nd Earl married Dorothy Percy and Algernon spent much time at Petworth.

Household inventories thus offer us something of the contents of bookrooms, and the potential for discussing the spatial relationships of book rooms to other functions around the house. For book historians, the varied treatment of the presence of books is particularly frustrating: separate lists of volumes may never survive, fixed shelving is

¹⁵ J. W. Clark, *The Care of Books* (Cambridge, 1901)

¹⁶ G. R. Batho ed, ‘The Household Papers of Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632),’ *Camden Third Series*, 93, 1962, 118-119

¹⁷ Thornton, *Scholar in His Study*, 68-9

unrecorded, or the non-book contents of the library may be listed out of sequence at the end of the inventory.¹⁸

We can, however, gain access to one of the most elusive aspects of the early modern private library, the shelving arrangements, through the most underexploited sources: the surviving book catalogues themselves. Shelf mark evidence is available for some of the great seventeenth-century collections. The Lumley library catalogue of 1609 is a shelf list which suggests that sets of shelves held volumes of diminishing size, with four sizes to each block of shelves.¹⁹ The library consisted of c.3,400 titles. We might suggest that the folios and quartos within each division occupied up to two shelves each (50 titles), relative to the number of decimo sexto volumes that are listed, which would give presses of approximately five feet wide and four to six shelves high. A smaller gentry library of c.1400 printed books, Sir Thomas Knyvett's, is known from a mid 1630s catalogue with shelf marks. These were shelved in sixteen cases around the walls.²⁰ Like the Lumley collection, this suggests around 100 titles per case. Finally, a shelf list very close to the Penshurst catalogue in date, that of the library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, which was copied from an original of c.1651. This divides printed and manuscript works, and appears to include free-standing presses ('press next the dore' 'middle press' and 'innermost press'), cupboards and desks for large volumes, as well as wall shelving.²¹ The needs of D'Ewes' library were mainly to house the 7800 manuscripts, but like the printed books these were mostly shelved by

¹⁸ E.g. £10 of books in the library of Chastleton House by 1633, but unidentified room; J. Marsden, 'The Chastleton inventory of 1633', *Furniture History* 36 (2000) 23-42. The limitations of probate inventories are summarised in Glennie 1995, 169-70; household inventories generally in Cooper 1999, 274; a good case-study of multiple inventories and their problems is found in Appendix 1 to P. Marshall, *Wollaton Hall, An Archaeological Study*, (Nottingham 1996). Important British inventories appear in *Furniture History*, reflecting their dominant use as lists of contents.

¹⁹ S. Jayne and F. Johnson eds, *The Lumley Library, the Catalogue of 1609* (London, 1956) 10

²⁰ D. McKitterick, *The Library of Sir Thomas Knyvett of Ashwellthorpe, c.1536-1618* (Cambridge, 1978) 27

size (the total collection is expressed as 958 catalogue entries). In this shelf list, each single shelf was assigned a letter. Taking the assumption that folios were on the lowest shelves, each division has a maximum of six shelves, or four if all held folios. The capacity of these shelves is slightly below the other examples: divisions of six shelves held up to 80 items (bound volumes rather than individual titles).

Despite the differences in methods of assigning identifications to the shelves (Watson notes that Sir Simonds did not seem to use any, the alphabetical system being imposed after his death in 1618), these examples suggest an emerging pattern for a unit system of shelving in private libraries. It bears comparison with extant seventeenth-century collegiate examples, which we noted earlier tend to reach eight feet high. The latter were intended for the stall system, and contain two divisions at least four feet wide. The average capacity of each division, then, is similar to the domestic examples calculated above from their shelf marks. This should not be surprising, university educated collectors conversant with contemporary library design would be familiar with the unit divisions which would be easy to adapt to a domestic setting as a wall, not stall, system. Sadly, our case study of Penshurst offers a seventeenth-century catalogue that is alphabetical and lacks any shelf mark information.²²

How then can we deploy what we know to unlock the problem of how and where the Sidneys kept their books? A close examination of archive sources familiar to book historians, but under-used, and of standard architectural and design history sources, begins to offer a spread of examples for visualising the material form of the

²¹ A. Watson, *The Library of Sir Simonds D'Ewes*, (London, 1977) 45-6

seventeenth-century private library. With this background in mind, we can examine the specific features of book rooms at Penshurst Place.

Sources for locating the seventeenth-century library

The relationship of the present library room at Penshurst to its seventeenth-century or earlier incarnation is called into question in several ways. The present room is a long room on the ground floor, looking south into a quiet courtyard through the glazed arches of the stone loggia of 1579 (the subsequent glazing of the arcade being undated). Inside is an exclusively post-1870 interior, by Crace, leading to a smaller library on the ground floor of the tower that terminates the wing. The small library is beautifully fitted out with Devey's neo-Jacobean joinery. The seventeenth-century inventories make it clear that the loggia was not then used as a library but that there were other spaces for books around the house.

Given the great interest that the Sidneys hold for historians, the library sale by 1743 suggests a significant fracture in the role of books in the house, as well as in the family history. Knowing something of the value of literary culture to the family, we have to ask if we can determine the physical place of the library assembled by the Sidneys before 1743. If this is possible, we should then be able to consider how the components of the room also constitute statements about the values that scholars ascribe to the Sidney cultural and intellectual activities. In searching for the seventeenth-century room, we are necessarily invoking the material environment that framed the documented processes of collecting, reading, and writing. Ideally, we

²² The pursuit of volumes with Sidney provenance may help with this problem and that of subject order

would not only be able to visualise the 2nd Earl, checking his thousands of books while they were being catalogued, in a particular architectural space, but also fill that space with shelving, cabinets, curios and pictures.

The evidence for the location of the Sidney family library is found in sources which take us from the seventeenth century to the present. The scale of the Sidney collection is known from a catalogue copied in 1655 with later additions. The 2nd Earl had a library, study and evidence room by 1665 (named in a codicil of his third will), making it clear that he kept a room for the large book collection of c.5000 volumes, a room for personal use and a room for the accumulated legal and estate documents.²³ A most important document shows us the early seventeenth-century house that the young Robert took over from his father the 1st Earl in 1623. This is the previously overlooked household inventory of 1623, calendared with a misleading attributed date.²⁴ The redated inventory of 1623 names a study belonging to Sidney's lodgings, my Lord Lisle's study, and the study within the lodging at the end of the great hall: three distinct spaces for books. It is particularly interesting that the inventory maker recognised one of the book rooms as already the domain of the young Robert, Lord Lisle.

The house is shown at the end of the 2nd Earl's life in the post-mortem inventory of 1677. Considerable changes to the furnishings took place in the intervening decades, and some of the suites of rooms (known as lodgings) were renamed, but 'my Lord's

²³ The scope will be apparent in an edition in preparation by G. Warkentin, J. Black and W. Bowen; Warkentin, 'The world and the book', 329-30

²⁴ The circumstances of this redating and its wider potential are discussed by G. Warkentin, 'Jonson's Penshurst Reveal'd? A Penshurst Inventory of 1623', *Sidney Journal* forthcoming

study' remained. The two other studies were named as closets.²⁵ Readers will be familiar with the problems of using inventories to understand the contemporary layout of a building; the historian is at the mercy of the inventory takers' chosen route around and about the house, as well as their decisions over assigning names to rooms and omission of fixtures that include book shelves. Since Penshurst is an extant building, one might hope for an easy recognition of the sequence of rooms in the physical layout. However, as the summary family history showed, the house has subsequently had major interventions in its fabric. The problems of determining the changing functions of rooms over time are coupled with physical alterations, as the former tends to prompt the latter. While the state rooms are usually relatively unchanging as public entertaining spaces, family rooms may change roles quickly: from nursery to bedchamber, study or store room. Subdivision of larger rooms over time also complicates assessment of the original function, as closets, corridors and finally bathrooms are fitted in.

Fortunately, the Penshurst archive holds a document listing rooms with their measurements, from the early seventeenth century.²⁶ The measurements for named lodgings allowed a confident match between the apartments listed in the 1623 inventory and the physical plan of the house. Rooms attributed to Sir Henry's time by architectural historians proved to be a good match; those within the heavily altered ranges of Rebecca's era suggested that internal walls had been moved. We can compare these conclusions with two eighteenth-century sources, one a travel diary

²⁵ An Inventory of the Household Goods of Robert, Earl of Leicester, 1677. November 16. Penshurst. Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley preserved at Penshurst Place*, 77, VI, (London, 1925-66) 634-647

²⁶ CKS U1500 E122 *Measure of rooms at Penshurst [n.d.]*. Calendared as c.1700, but internal evidence suggests this can be redated to the early seventeenth century. The reconstruction of the seventeenth-century plan of the house will be discussed in detail in a forthcoming article

giving dimensions for a wing subsequently heavily altered by Rebecca, and the other a sketch plan probably made when the Perrys were intending to let the house.²⁷ A range of exterior views in engravings and watercolours amplify the information on the sketch plan.

An introduction to the nineteenth-century appearance of the house is provided through the published ground plan of the house by 1864, which represents the house in its present form and is the high-water mark of alterations (Plate 1). The shaded walls indicate Devey's opinion of the phases of the house: black as fourteenth century, deep tint as Elizabethan and earlier, light tint as '30 years ago' i.e. Rebecca's alterations. This published plan is complemented by Devey's original architectural plans which also colour walls by date, and show that Rebecca moved internal walls and added many subdivisions.²⁸

The final, and dominant, source remains the present fabric of the house, a palimpsest of at least seven centuries. It too revealed unremarked information in the hunt for the book rooms. Family tradition names the room over the north porch to the great hall as a study; the other studies, and their identification with the old library room before 1743, are no longer discernible. The history of these variously named spaces can only be disentangled with a thorough approach to the house plan as a whole. The somewhat surprising result of this total approach to the problem produced a location for the seventeenth-century library, as the main book room will be called, that is in keeping with the courtier status of the house.

²⁷ Beinecke Library, Yale University, *A Description of Penshurst Place in Kent, 1749*, by R.W. Osborn Mss 480; CKS, De L'Isle Mss U1500 E164 *Description of Penshurst Place* [n.d]

²⁸ Ground floor plan in F T Dollman and J R Jobbins, *An Analysis of Ancient Domestic Architecture...*, vol. 2, (London, 1864); Devey plans in CKS De L'Isle Mss U1500 P5

The nature of the evidence for book rooms at Penshurst

A review of the available evidence for the various studies begins with the large-scale, the architecture of the house, and will end with the small-scale portable contents. The house reached its greatest extent by c.1610. While it gained the comforts of contemporary elite living, the medieval origins survived as important influences on the layout. As Kips' view of the house, made by 1719, shows, it looked something like a fortified village, with battlemented towers at each corner and in the intervals of each side (Plate 2). Within this framework, at least six courtyards are visible, some elaborately planted and others more functional for stables and kitchen yards. The driveway to the entrance is shown to the left, north, and runs under a great tower with high stair turrets call the King's Tower. The heart of the house is the great hall, in the centre with roof lantern. The high status public and family rooms are all to the west (bottom of the view) of the King's Tower and great hall. For ease of identification, the entrance courtyard is called the great court, the court to its west is the President's court after the north-west President's tower, and the south-west court will be called the long gallery court.

The first phase of building from 1338 to 1341 resulted in the great hall, solar block (west) and service block (east), and the second phase from 1392 enclosed the manor house with the towers and battlemented curtain wall of which fragments still survive. All this building was in stone.²⁹ Penshurst was sufficiently desirable to become a

²⁹ E. Hasted, *The History and Topography of Kent*, 2nd ed. 1797 (facsimile Wakefield, 1972), vol. III, 231 and 233. Summary architectural development is in J. Newman, *West Kent and the Weald, Buildings of England* (Harmondsworth, 1976) 454-9; pamphlet by M. Binney, *The Architectural*

royal residence when the manor was acquired by John, Duke of Bedford (1389-1435), third son of Henry IV, in c.1424. A major component of the medieval house has been attributed to Bedford, namely the block to the south-west of the solar known as the Buckingham building (with later gables). This formed a wing of lodgings and state rooms, between the President's court and the long gallery court, and may need to be redated to before Bedford's time.³⁰

Penshurst reverted to the crown, and no firm attribution of subsequent phases is possible until Sir Henry Sidney's work in the 1570s. Before then, a three-storey lodgings block in brick was built behind the solar, looking in to the President's court. The 3rd Duke of Buckingham entertained Henry VIII at Penshurst in 1519, which might signal the occasion of the extra lodgings.³¹ Following the line of the defensive wall encircling the house, Sir Henry Sidney rebuilt the entrance gateway now known as the King's tower (1585), and added (or remodelled) matching wings either side looking in to the great court. He joined this north range to the existing lodgings behind the solar block with a new west range dividing the great court from the President's court. He linked the existing President's tower to the north range with the famous open gallery or loggia (notable for its Tuscan colonnade of 1579) and room above. The Buckingham building was joined to the southern Record tower by the two-storey gallery wing of 1584. This completed the high status family and guest rooms to the west of the great hall.

Development of Penshurst Place (Dunstable, 1975) developing his *Country Life* articles (9 March – 4 May 1972)

³⁰ Based on the introductory discussions and Note 3 to Inventory C 101 (pp359-60) by Jenny Stratford, *The Bedford Inventories, The Worldly Goods of John, Duke of Bedford, Regent of France (1389-1435)*, (London) 1993.

³¹ H. Ellis, *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (London 1824-46) third ser. vol I, 195-6

Although there are problems of detail in this broad sequence of building, the general evolution is apparent and the fabric of the western half in particular survives today. The great kitchen and service wings to the east were probably demolished after 1843. Despite this clarity of exterior fabric, substantial alterations to the interiors have taken place, particularly since 1816. This is why the problem arises of reconstructing the seventeenth-century arrangement and use of space. The seventeenth-century sources introduced earlier can only be understood in the context of subsequent changes. After a process of reversing the modifications observable from the nineteenth and eighteenth-century sources, a reconstructed plan of the seventeenth-century house was created. The next problem was to identify the sequences of rooms found in the two seventeenth-century inventories with this interpretive plan. While the great hall, great chamber, and long galleries were easily mapped, the bedchamber apartments bearing personal attributions (King's, Leicester, Gloucester, Sidney and Sunderland) were problematic. However, it was possible to match the room names from the inventories to the sizes of named rooms in the early seventeenth-century list of measurements. This allowed confident identification of the main lodgings on the interpretive plan. Two of the studies were listed as part of named lodgings, but 'Lord Lisles' study is not described in this way. The remaining areas of the house which were unaccounted for proved to be significant in determining where we might place this remaining study.

The resulting interpretive plan is shown with a key to the room names (Plate 3). A brief comparison with the 1864 ground plan suggests that most change occurred in the southern half, although the first floor of the entire north range also changed substantially. More important than physical change, however, is the degree of

functional change between the two centuries. Devey's architectural plans show that the north range was altered by Rebecca to hold the family bedrooms and other private rooms. The emphasis on bedrooms and bathrooms for the north range is however particular to the nineteenth century: it is a misleading reflection of the seventeenth-century room sizes and uses. Likewise, the ground floor long gallery lost its high status function to become a warren of pantries and game larders. The rooms with bay windows looking into the great court were effectively reversed by Rebecca to look into the President's court, which has a view across open country. These changes are a product of evolving expectations about privacy, comfort, hospitality and the relationship of the house to its landscape.

An account of the seventeenth-century house must reflect a historically specific understanding of the functions of an elite house, a point so effectively discussed by Girouard. The arrangement and use of space at Penshurst needs to be understood in the context of contemporary expectations as well as within the constraints of the medieval fabric. Elizabethan and Jacobean courtier houses incorporated a standard set of rooms intended to support the prestige and honour of the owners and guests. These houses retained the medieval form of the central great hall, but used the medieval solar as their dining chamber. The best rooms led away from the dining chamber, through withdrawing rooms to a state bedchamber and closet. Long galleries were important components, not just for recreation but for further display of collections and for facilitating political or business discussions. Newly built courtier houses were symmetrical; the medieval buildings at Penshurst limited the Sidneys in this respect, but they capitalised on the gravitas of the ancient house. We can now identify how the Jacobean Penshurst presented itself as a courtier house.

By the end of the building programme c.1610, Penshurst had all the elements of a contemporary prestige house. The great court, entered under the King's Tower (6 on Plate 3), led to the great hall and was the most prestigious courtyard. Today, only the great hall retains its original status within the courtyard ensemble. Originally, the west range looked directly into the court through large bay windows of the great parlour (9) and its bedchamber (8). The north range stretched across two courts as it does now, but with a very different architectural emphasis. The north rooms once looked into the great court through high mullioned windows, now blocked, and held the most prestigious withdrawing room and state bedchamber apartment known as the King's Lodgings (4), which completely disappeared in Rebecca's remodelling. In terms of status, this court balanced the other state rooms leading off from the far side of the great hall through the Buckingham building (13) and terminating in the long gallery wing. The President's court was much quieter, the state rooms in the west range had their backs to it, although lodgings occupied by the family (11 and 12) looked into it. It is this court and its northern range that is of great significance for the books at Penshurst.

The rooms away from the state route, away from dining chambers, state beds and long galleries, are the interesting places for hunting the library. We can firmly identify one of the two studies named in the inventories. The 1623 inventory lists a lodging at the end of the great hall, consisting of three rooms with a study. These are unambiguously the bedchambers over the buttery and pantry on the far side of the screens passage, the present Sunderland room suite (20 to 24): they form the lodging attributed to Lord Sunderland in the 1677 inventory. It contained an extremely high-value suite by then,

which concurs with the family legend that the widowed Countess of Sunderland occupied it in the mid seventeenth-century.

The study was considered to be the room over the north porch in the commentary to the 1864 plan. In 1863, it was reported to have been fitted up as a study ‘in the time of Elizabeth’ for a studious young lady. Both these reports must have resulted from conversations with the 2nd Lord De L’Isle and Dudley in the 1860s. We should remember that a late seventeenth-century suite of chairs in the Buckingham building was attributed to the time of Elizabeth in the nineteenth century, and not place undue weight on the sixteenth-century attribution. The room was not accessible in the 1860s as the chamber leading to it was floorless and awaiting restoration, but it was said to contain bookshelves and other furniture.³² In 1677 the closet, as the study was then called, contained ‘two backt presses’ and no hangings, although the room was not panelled. Today, the porch room walls retain their original plaster, but there are no fittings, even the wall cupboard has lost its door. However, dust shadow marks on the west and north walls suggest the outline of a set of shelves (backless) that stood on the floor approximately six feet tall and wide.³³ The shelves were of diminishing height, the lowest being suitable for folios. The Sunderland room was finally floored over in the 1950s, which may mark the removal of the porch room furniture.

It is possible that the second study was in the family lodgings called Sidneys lodgings, which encompassed the three-storey block behind the solar (10 to 12) and wrapped around to the lobby tower (16). In a description of 1749, a dressing room in ‘Lord

³² Kent Archaeological Society Sixth Annual Meeting, paper read by J. H. Parker, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, August 1863, 184

³³ A remarkable photograph of dust marks recording the original shelf ends in Duke Humphrey’s library is in G. Barber, *Arks for Learning: a short history of Oxford library buildings* (Oxford 1995)

Robert's Tower' refers to the same lobby tower.³⁴ The 1677 inventory suggests that the 2nd Earl slept in the first floor of the President's tower (1) while Lady Leicester had occupied Sidney's lodgings. In 1707 Anne, Countess Dowager of Leicester (her husband the 5th Earl had died in 1705), had a bookcase made of wainscot, which required a new lock in 1709. Lady Anne appears to have had two closets, one on the first floor (as was her bedroom) and one on the second floor, which strongly suggests that she too occupied Sidney's lodgings.³⁵ The changes in floor levels within Sidney's lodgings suggests an interpretation of the study closet as the original fifteen feet square room on the first floor room in the lobby tower (16, now subdivided). It retains an overmantel with an earl's coronet and RB for Robert and Barbara, and thus dates to c.1618. This room commands a fine view into the great court, as does the north porch study.

Thus far, the identification of studies within Penshurst has relied upon the successful identification of the lodgings to which they were attached. The physical spaces are too small for housing the 5000 volumes of the collection, however, and this suggests that 'Lord Lisle's study' is on a rather larger scale. The main library, as we must think of it, sets a different problem in not being clearly related to any chamber suite in the inventories. The process of matching the sequences of state rooms and bedchamber apartments against a reconstructed seventeenth-century house plan for Penshurst leaves the eastern half of the house for most of the lower status functions associated with the household economy and servants lodgings. Spaces unaccounted for in the western half can be tentatively matched to inventoried rooms such as the wardrobe, armory, or audit chamber (the latter might be expected to be in the Record tower as an

³⁴ Beinecke Library, Yale: *J.W. Visitor to Stately Homes, 1742-50*, Osborn shelves C480, p. 21

evidence room, top floor of 15). These fall into a class of rooms intended neither for habitation or display, in garrets or the dark undercroft beneath the solar (17). Lord Lisle's study is not of this class, as the inventoried contents demonstrate. We are looking for a room not only physically suited to the role of housing valuable collections, but also spatially integrated into an area of the house appropriate to the dignity of an earl.

A documentary clue comes from the 1623 inventory, which deals with the study and the loggia in sequence. The loggia (2) looks into the President's court, as do all of the high status family lodgings except the Sunderland rooms. The process of matching the room names to the interpretive plan leaves a glaring hole over the loggia once the decision was made to keep the King's lodgings together on the two floors of the north range looking into the great court. The space over the loggia, with a central fireplace and lit by the three great south-facing windows and two to the north, remained one big room until 1818, functioning as a billiard room on the eighteenth-century sketch plan. A consideration of the role of this side of the court reveals that the President's tower and the loggia were private retreats away from the formal state route through the house. The processional route for visitors terminated either side of the great hall in the King's lodgings and the long galleries (14). The north-west range enjoyed a private court as far from the service side of the house (east of the great hall) as possible. Both the 1623 and 1677 inventories offer no other obvious candidate for the space *over* the loggia in terms of status or function. A first floor position is also desirable for avoiding rising damp. For all these reasons of size, access, relative location and architectural status, the strongest candidate for Lord Lisle's study, the seventeenth-

³⁵ CKS De L'Isle mss U1475 A70 *Bill for a bookcase*, May 7 1707

century library room holding most of the 5000 volumes, is the great room over the loggia.

Before moving on to consider the implications of this conclusion both for the role of books at Penshurst and as a manifestation of an aristocratic library, we need to address the documented contents. In 1623 'Lord Lisle's study' was hung with six tapestries 11 feet deep (although they could have been narrower than this dimension; present ceiling height c.15 feet). A chair and four stools upholstered with cloth of gold, a square table and a court cupboard were the few pieces of furniture, compared to the other family rooms. There were three window curtains (with iron rods), of green woollen twill. Windows were covered by single curtains until the mid-century. The table was covered by a green carpet, and the cupboard by a carpet in the Turkish style.

By 1677, the contents of 'my Lords Studdy' had increased. The table and four stools were still listed, but now there were three chairs, three court cupboards and two cabinets, as well as one book press. Cabinets seem to be a feature of this inventory, the room over the parlour included two: one of ebony and one inlaid cypress. Cabinets in the form of chests of little drawers and cupboards, raised up on a stand, have a long history as receptacles of precious objects and valuable papers; their importance increased from the mid-sixteenth century when they were themselves designed as art objects. Dora Thornton reminds us that the Renaissance cabinet was far more than a useful piece of furniture; the cornucopia of curiosities within represented a little world

of the good things in life.³⁶ We do not know what the 2nd Earl's interests in non-book collections ran to, he is not known as an art collector and may have preferred to fill the cabinets with papers. He or his forebears certainly purchased quantities of silver plate, some of which we find in the library (below). The 1623 tapestries have been removed in favour of twenty two pictures (the tapestries may be listed in the wardrobe contents as the 'six peeces of imagery fforrest worke hangings full of silke').³⁷ The 1677 inventory demonstrates an almost total change in the textiles in the house from that of 1623 although the high-status rooms still have tapestries and textile hangings. The change in the library wall-coverings may be connected with further shelving.

Finally, some small details that remind us to consider the unlisted contents of the cabinets and court cupboards. The 1677 entry is unusual in noting some of the small items in the room beyond the usual fire equipment: eight candlesticks, one wax candle box, one hand candlestick, three tumblers, one standish (desk accessory for pens, ink pot, sand), one 'chaffing dish' (for heating food), one pick-tooth case and one gilt spoon. These are evidently all made of silver as they weigh 291 ounces together, and are distinct from the plate valued in the scullion's office and pantry. The silver standish 'was an essential adjunct to aristocratic life which was often highly decorated but rarely survives': even the Victoria and Albert Museum lacks a pre-Restoration example.³⁸ If the silver value at £72 is deducted from the contents, the library room is valued at £10 excluding the books, a reminder that textiles (particularly bedhangings), not furniture or pictures, were the high-value items of the day.

³⁶ Cf. the decorated cypress chest of c.1600 still at Boughton (Murdoch, *Boughton*, 138-9); Thornton, *Scholar in His Study*, 74

³⁷ HMC 77, vol. VI, 644, 646

Whatever was contained within the cupboards and cabinets was not listed, just as the personal items scattered around the family chambers are invisible in the inventories. In remembering to add small objects to our picture of the room, the mingling of art objects and curiosities invokes the Renaissance study again. Some insight into the collections of the 3rd and 4th Earls is given through the sale of pictures and art objects in 1703.³⁹ This included 83 lots of bronzes, wax, marble, plaster and alabaster busts, and bas reliefs. Most of the identified subjects were classical, mythical or historic: Homer and Marcus Aurelius mingled with Hercules and several personifications of Venus. It is reasonable to assume that their predecessors complemented the rich array of furniture and textiles documented throughout the house with comparable works of art. Any reconstruction of the Sidney library needs to include the lustre of bronze and marble, the glint of silver against the verdure of tapestry, as well as the subdued gleam of yards of leather on wood.

The seventeenth-century library room at Penshurst

Locating the main library in such a large and prestigious space is unusual in the case of a private collection of this date. The two other studies in the house occupied typical spaces for what we know of domestic libraries of the time: relatively small rooms adjacent to bedchambers, often called closets, and associated with private devotion. There is no indication of how the collection was divided between the rooms, although presumably the north porch held the personal collection of the Countess of

³⁸ P. Glanville *Silver in Tudor and Early Stuart England, A Social History and Catalogue of the National Collection 1480-1660* (London, 1990) 359

³⁹ *A Most Excellent and Curious Collection of Paintings, drawings, and prints, marble statues, and heads...of the Right Honourable Philip and Robert, late Earls of Leicester, 15 April 1703*, British Library Cup.645.e.5 (12). See also Maddicott, 'A collection of the interregnum period', 1-24, on the 2nd Earl's son and heir Philip's collecting and building activities.

Sunderland during her occupation. Her aunt, Lady Mary Wroth (?1587-?1651; the first English woman to publish her prose fiction) could also have had a study closet at Penshurst but we have no way of identifying this at present. The study in Sidney's lodgings may always have been used by the Leicester countesses.⁴⁰ If so, we are in the happy position of identifying two studies used by early modern women.

A further two rooms in 1677 had book furniture: a press and a writing desk in the room over the drawing room (8), and a press for books in the room over the parlour (9), both with high value contents (and located in the west range looking into the great court). Yet these rooms were not named as studies, and can only be identified through the presence of portable book furniture. Their prestige furnishings make it possible that they were used by the 2nd Earl as his study, away from the library, as he distinguished between the book rooms in his will . They would have been piled high with chancery documents and estate papers as he and Algernon worked through the complexities of finances and legal suits in the 1650s. It must be remembered, then, that the small village that Kip's view resembles was well-populated with books by the end of the seventeenth century.

There is much more to say about the main library if we look for contemporary parallels in furnishings and for the shelving. In visualising the Penshurst library as built space, its length gave it a gallery-like nature (a maximum 43 feet long). We should factor in an elaborate ceiling design and chimneypiece, although ones suitable to the 1570s. Two widely reproduced paintings of the period evoke the details to bring the room back to life.

⁴⁰ The books of the 2nd Earl's Countess, Dorothy, were inventoried on her decease in 1659, CKS U1500

The full-length self-portrait of Sir Nathaniel Bacon (1585-1627) c.1620 depicts the artist sitting in a fashionable upholstered chair at a table covered in a luxuriously trimmed cloth. The table is piled with folio volumes, an atlas is propped open, and beneath the table sits an attentive dog. Although the background of the scene tells us little about the room, it is a setting appropriate to the serious gaze of Sir Nicholas who is presented primarily as a gentleman exercising connoisseurial judgement on the prints and texts in front of him.⁴¹ He is our model for Lord Lisle at his green-covered table (as is the portrait of Sir William Sidney d.1612 with green cloth table and turkey carpet, hanging in the Penshurst solar today). The Penshurst library's tapestries with figures, framing a contemporary mullioned window, with the Turkish table carpet, are echoed in the painting of *The Somerset House Conference, 1604*, commemorating delegates for the peace treaty between England and Spain.⁴² Sir Nathaniel Bacon was made a Knight of the Bath at the coronation of Charles I, and the delegates of 1604 were of the highest status including Thomas, 1st Earl of Dorset, who spent so lavishly on his house at Knole, neighbour to Penshurst. These images convey the quality of the textiles to be found in the courtier house.

The growing collection in the Penshurst library was probably housed on open shelving below the tapestries. The six tapestries listed in 1623 could have hung from the doorcases in each of the end walls round to the chimneybreast. Indeed, the remaining problem is the nature of the bookshelves. We have to assume they were fitted shelving, and that they were supplemented by the addition of a free-standing

case by 1677, which would be understandable for an expanding collection. By 1677, however, the tapestries had been removed, which strongly suggests that the remaining wallspace was required for shelving; the three court cupboards and the book press may then have been placed on the south window wall or were free-standing within the room. Deducting five windows and the chimney breast at six feet each, plus two doorways, the great room over the loggia can allow c.80 linear feet for presses. The twenty two pictures would have been displayed around the room over the shelves and on the chimney breast. The fortunate existence of the two inventories shows us that the room was subject to change and development in line with the expected expansion of the book collection.

The great interest of Penshurst as a case-study for the seventeenth-century library comes from the detail and variety of the sources available. Perhaps as a result of this unusual richness, the great library room library is an atypical space for what we currently know of English Renaissance or early modern library rooms. To better understand it, we need to ask how it can be understood in a wider cultural context. The preceding discussion of the house as a whole by the seventeenth century has sought to emphasise its role as a courtier's house, able to host a visiting monarch by virtue of its scale and provision of state apartments. The inventories and surviving collections also gesture towards the luxurious furnishings and art collections that welcomed visitors. A collection of five thousand volumes by the mid-seventeenth century is also atypical for gentry and aristocratic libraries, but it errs in the direction of grandeur rather than poverty.

⁴² Reproduced in Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean*, vol. 1, 351-3, vol. 2 pl. 380 and as NPG 665 on

We can not know if Sir Henry Sidney used the room over the loggia as a library when it was built in 1579, but it was certainly in use as such by the next generation. Sir Henry would have been familiar with the idea of creating a library room as ‘a virtuous space of unique moral and aesthetic worth. [A property which] resided in the room itself as much as in its owner’, as Dora Thornton expressed the concept within Renaissance Italy.⁴³ The material environment that housed the Sidneys’ world of print was more than a comfortable room in which to read. The discernment shown in assembling and displaying a range of objects as well as books was an essential factor in the creation of what in England is known as the character of a gentleman. The studies and their contents in fifteenth and sixteenth-century Florence and Venice were formed under particular social and political conditions not replicated in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Kent, but pan-European cultural values of civility and learned leisure do manifest themselves in regional forms. Thus an early seventeenth-century English library room may be the result of very different social, political and economic structures, but still aspire to represent many of the broad cultural values embraced as virtuous. In reconstructing the library room, we are looking for something of the owners’ aspirations to a morally worthwhile life.

The emphasis on the moral dimension of material consumption is important; as an historically specific construct, it is not part of our own understanding of post-industrial consumerism. The considerable increase in quantities of luxury goods to be found in the homes of the nobility and gentry during the early modern period applies to the Sidney family, and their consumption deserves detailed consideration. Early modern luxury was put to use for cultural ends beyond the cultivation of the mind: the

maintenance of peer group relations, affirmation of political status, the expression of ambition.⁴⁴ To fulfil these ends, material luxury carried multiple meanings found within materials and decoration that supported visual statements about status, hospitality, lineage, and their moral foundations (for instance, in the transformation of printed images into furnishings and fittings).⁴⁵ The qualities invoked by the seventeenth-century interiors at Penshurst are less easily ascertained as the plaster ceilings, chimneypieces, much of the panelling and many of the tapestries the house was noted for have gone, hence the great interest of the inventories.⁴⁶

Generations of Sidneys invested their years of interaction with the English court and foreign diplomatic missions in remaking Penshurst Place. The outstanding achievement that the book collection represented to Anthony Wood was not a singular result but needs to be placed in a context of a range of cultural activities requiring a cultivated taste and significant expenditure. The beautiful simplicity of the library façade with the classical loggia survives as an architectural embodiment of Jonson's contention that the house was 'not built for envious show', but the high-expenditure codes of virtue are apparent in the library room's contents. As Germaine Warkentin points out, the more the Sidney archive is explored, the more we should question the balance the Sidneys attempted to make between revenue and expenditure that 'honour' in their position required.⁴⁷ One aim of this paper has been to show that the

⁴³ Thornton, *Scholar in His Study*, 176; the moral purpose of the visual arts in 1630s England, D Howarth *Lord Arundel and His Circle* (New Haven and London, 1985) 79-81

⁴⁴ For instance, the social importance of silverware for rituals of gift-giving and display; Glanville *Silver in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 19-46

⁴⁵ The moral content of emblems is the most obvious example, M. Rovelstad and E. Camilli, 'Emblems as inspiration and guidance in Baroque libraries', *Libraries and Culture*, 29:2, 147-65. Print sources are discussed by A. Wells-Cole, *Art of Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: the influence of Continental prints, 1558-1625* (New Haven and London 1997)

⁴⁶ Pre 1630s interiors are extremely rare in England, P. Thornton, 'The Furnishing and Decoration of Ham House' *Furniture History* 16 (1980) 4-6

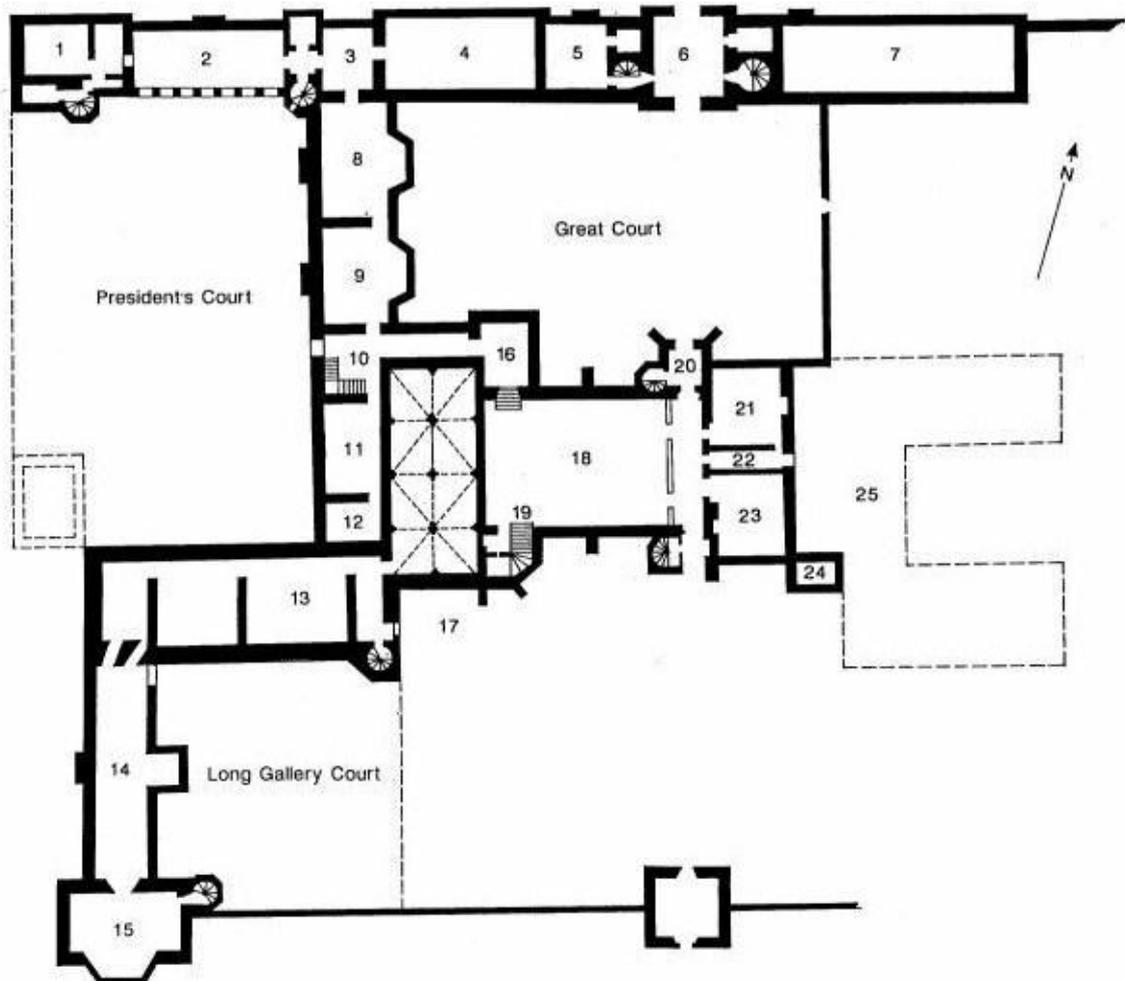
⁴⁷ Warkentin, 'Jonson's Penshurst' *Sidney Journal*, forthcoming

library can also be discussed in the wider historical context of material consumption. It is in the seventeenth century that book collections are increasingly visible as heirlooms in wills, and take their place as cultural assets within dynasties: the 2nd Earl treated the family library as an heirloom in his codicil of 1665. This is not to shake the intellectual achievements which began this exploration of the family books. The Sidneys certainly made good use of their library. A wider appreciation of what their usage embraced allows us to extend the range of meanings for the history of libraries.

Plate 1. Ground floor plan of Penshurst Place by 1864 (F T Dollman and J R Jobbins, *An Analysis of Ancient Domestic Architecture...*, vol. 2, (London, 1864), copyright Courtauld Institute). Black indicates the medieval house around the great hall. Dark grey shading indicates pre-1818 walls (medieval and Sir Henry Sidney). Pale grey shows Rebecca's extensive rebuilding, particularly of the north ranges.

Plate 2. A view of Penshurst Place from the west, engraved by Kip for *J. Harris, A History of Kent*, (London 1719), p. 236 (copyright Cambridge University Library).

Plate 3. An interpretive plan of Penshurst Place for the seventeenth century (copyright the author).



Key:

- 1 President's tower
- 2 Loggia with library over
- 3 Anteroom
- 4 King's lodgings
- 5 Chamber
- 6 King's tower
- 7 Service wing
- 8 Bedchamber then dining parlour, room with book furniture overhead
- 9 Parlour, room with book furniture overhead
- 10 Great stairs
- 11 Former chapel, Sidneys lodgings over
- 12 Chapel closet, Sidneys lodgings over
- 13 Buckingham building: Leicesters lodgings with Gloucesters over
- 14 Nether gallery, upper hall (long gallery) over
- 15 Record tower
- 16 Lobby tower, first floor study to Sidneys lodgings
- 17 Undercroft, solar or great chamber over
- 18 Great hall 1341
- 19 Medieval stairs to solar
- 20 North porch, study over
- 21 Pantry, Sunderland lodgings over
- 22 Passage, Sunderland lodgings over

- 23 Buttery, Sunderland lodgings over
- 24 Sunderland lodgings
- 25 Kitchen and service area