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## 'Penshurst Place and Leicester House'

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## CHAPTER 19

# PENSHURST PLACE AND LEICESTER HOUSE

SUSIE WEST

### **Introduction**

The Sidney family came to Penshurst Place, Kent, in 1552 and have retained the house and its landed estate to the present day. Penshurst Place has been celebrated as the birthplace of Sir Philip Sidney and as the scene of inspiration for Ben Jonson and Edmund Waller; as a literary and historical site it has accrued a lengthy tradition of representation and interpretation. This chapter focuses on its architectural history, as a great medieval fortified residence adapted for early modern living. The Sidneys built a new house, as their London residence, in the 1630s. Leicester House, Leicester Square, was demolished in 1792 and as a result of that loss and a slender archive the significance of this major London house has received little attention. However, this chapter discusses the cultural achievement that Leicester House represents as an example of advanced architectural design for the 1630s. Leicester House can be incorporated with the Sidney family's history of collecting that is better understood for Penshurst Place. Together, the two principal residences offer the basis for stronger readings of the cultural significance of the Sidney family. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of the material world of the Sidneys, exploring themes that, like Jonson's masque characters, display "poesie, historie, architecture and sculpture" on the same stage.

### **Penshurst Place 1500-1700**

Penshurst Place, Kent is famous for many reasons: to literary scholars it is primarily the birthplace for key members of the English literary Renaissance and the inspiration for visiting poets. Ben Jonson saw the house at a high point; by the early nineteenth-century the decayed state of the great house was lamented in the press and only just saved by extensive renovations. Each century of occupation has reshaped the house to suit the prevailing requirements of the household, the social uses of space at the time, and the funds available. The house was centuries old before it came to the Sidneys and would be reshaped to suit their rising fortunes.

### **The Medieval Penshurst Place**

Penshurst Place displays its medieval origins proudly. It is still recognizably a fortified house, in plan as well as from the surviving details of stone walls, battlements and monumental towers (Newman, *West Kent and the Weald* 454-59). The form of the house is based on the medieval use of courtyards, enclosed by building ranges or defensive walls. All medieval houses of any degree of rank required a central great hall, with the lord's living quarters attached at one end and the kitchen and service rooms attached at the other. At Penshurst Place, the first main phase of building from 1338 to 1341 resulted in the great hall, solar block and service block, for a wealthy City of London merchant, Sir John de Pulteney (d. 1350). The second phase from 1392 enclosed this manor house with the towers and battlemented curtain wall. The great scale of the hall and solar, or upper chamber (now the state dining room), expressed the wealth and status of the early owners: Sir John Devereux (d.1394), who added the fortifications, probably also added the Buckingham Building, since it is physically tied in to the curtain wall (Hasted, *Kent* 3:231-33). The addition

of fortifications to the manor house created the appearance of a castle, in a period when fortified houses of the elite were intended for luxurious if highly protected occupation, and houses of any scale provided lodgings for numerous armed retainers (Emery, *Medieval Houses* 386-93).

Penshurst became a royal residence when the manor was acquired by John, Duke of Bedford (1389-1435), third son of Henry IV, in c.1424 (Stratford, *Bedford Inventories* 359-60). Penshurst then came to Bedford's younger brother Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (Stratford 28). The manor reverted to the crown three times after Gloucester's death; the longest holding was under the Dukes of Buckingham from c. 1447 to 1521, when the third Duke was attainted and executed. Penshurst Place continued to evolve: the solar block was backed by a three-storey lodgings block looking in to the President's court, known as Sidney's Lodgings. These lodgings are built of brick with diaper work and ragstone windows, quite unlike the later sixteenth-century brick buildings of the Sidney era. Buckingham had entertained Henry VIII at Penshurst in 1519, which might signal the occasion of the extra lodgings.

By the time that Edward VI granted the manor to Sir William Sidney in 1552, it is clear that Penshurst Place was an extensive house to grant to a knight, even one who was a highly valued courtier. William had no time for major alterations to his generous gift, but his son and heir Sir Henry Sidney (1529-1586) initiated important additions to the house that would be completed by his son Robert, later first earl of Leicester.

### **The Growth of Penshurst Place, 1500-1700**

The medieval house was of stone; alterations of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are clearly distinguished by being built in brick with stone finishes. Sir

Henry made considerable additions to the layout of the house, by building against the defensive walls and incorporating the medieval towers into the bulk of the house (Figure 1). Following the line of the defensive wall encircling the house, Sir Henry rebuilt the entrance gateway now known as the King's tower (1585), and remodeled matching ranges either side (the great court north range, remodeled again in the nineteenth century). He joined this north range to the existing lodgings behind the solar block with a new west range dividing the entrance court from the President's court. He linked the President's tower to the north range with an open gallery or loggia (notable for its Tuscan colonnade of 1579) and room above. He is said to have created the subdivisions of the present state rooms in the first floor of the Buckingham building in 1575, and he linked this block to the southern Record tower, probably also originally free-standing, by the two-storey gallery wing of 1584. This completed the high status family and guest rooms to the west of the great hall; to the east, a new wing of service rooms and lower status chambers was probably completed in the early seventeenth century (Figure 2).

Sir Henry saw the interiors fitted out for the upper hall (solar), minstrels' gallery (in the great hall) and the great hall screen, from 1573 (*De L'Isle and Dudley* 1:260-61). The great hall screen was carved with the heraldic symbol of the Dudley bear in tribute to Sir Henry's wife, Lady Mary Dudley. Its design is notably Gothic, in acknowledgement of the fourteenth-century hall and in contrast to the classical influences in the upper hall paneling.

Sir Henry also remodeled the gardens, beginning in 1560 by leveling the gardens to create new enclosed courts, in the Italian Renaissance manner. Work continued in 1575, with the great pond and a terrace. Each year, several hundred pounds were spent on the house, gardens and surrounding grounds (*De L'Isle and*

*Dudley* 1:250 ff.). Robert Sidney continued to improve the gardens, writing from Flushing (Vlissingen, Netherlands) in 1596 of his pleasure on hearing that work was going well and promising to send some trees over (*De L'Isle and Dudley* 2:226; Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan 2005:83 Letter 99).

Robert Sidney's diplomatic career included his appointment as Governor of Flushing from 1589, which kept him out of England for half his time each year until 1603. His wife Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester, took over the daily decisions for the remodeling at Penshurst. Robert wrote in 1594: "I need not send to know how my buildings goe forward; for I am sure you are so good a housewyfe you may be trusted with them" (*De L'Isle and Dudley* 2:153, 156-7; Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan, 2005:49 Letter 44). Barbara Sidney also undertook some entrepreneurial activity, supplying stone for Robert Cecil's new London house, Salisbury House on the Strand, in 1601 (Guerci, "Salisbury House" 39). Paying for the work remained a problem, and was clearly drawn from annual rentals rather than any other source of capital (2:155). In 1600 the gatehouse chambers (King's Tower) were paneled with wainscot reused from elsewhere in the house, and a little chamber at the "chapel end" was floored (2:426). A major building campaign continued that year, when the stone finishings to the battlements and stone window surrounds were cut, for stables and a tower, at a cost of £500 (2:437, 482). More work was done on the nether gallery in 1605, when the windows were glazed and the "great wyndow next the garden" (a bay window removed in the eighteenth century) was waiting to be finished (3:147). The existing medieval tower in the south-west corner, now joined to the main house by the long galleries, was remodelled and renamed in Barbara's honour (although known now as the Record Tower). The ground-floor room at the termination of the nether

gallery may have been Barbara's personal space, and is adorned by the heraldic Gamage griffin over the arched doorway.

By 1607 the nether gallery paneling was being painted with the Sidney device of the broad arrow, and the upper gallery was ready to have mats on the floor (3:374). The stables were completed by 1612 and some work was undertaken within the President's Tower, where seventeenth-century paneling remains today (5: 25, 45). The long process of building seems to have begun in the 1570s and drawn to a close by 1612, the occupation of two generations of husbands and wives.

The term "King's Lodging," which occurs in the 1623 and 1677 inventories, does not seem to be in use in this phase of finishing the house, for example it is not used in an early document (c.1610) noting the fitting out of many of the new interiors (West, "Studies and Status" 275). Instead, the apartment in the great court is described as the "new bedchamber" with a platform for the bed, the inward chamber and a drawing chamber with inward chamber. This sequence is suitable for a state bedchamber apartment; the later dedication of this suite as the King's Lodging presumably refers to the spontaneous visit of James I celebrated in Ben Jonson's poem, shortly before 1612 (Rathmell, "Jonson" 251).

Although there are problems of detail in this broad sequence of building and interior work, 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 since 1700. However it is still possible to reconstruct the seventeenth-century arrangement and use of space that contained the Sidneys' pattern of life at Penshurst Place.

### **A Tour around the Seventeenth-century Penshurst Place**

It is possible to read the seventeenth-century Penshurst plan as an ideal of aristocratic household requirements imposed on an imperfect reality. The scale of a noble household was immense; the rank of the owners required high status household officials as well as servants for indoor service, creating a small community wherever the family was staying. For example, Barbara Sidney was encouraged to trim her London household expenses in 1595: “we must not keepe 60 in our hows at London” (*De L’Isle and Dudley* 2:185; Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan 2005:77 Letter 89 ).

The years in which the house was extended, roughly 1570-1610, covered a fairly stable “ideal” layout for the houses of the elite (Girouard, *English Country House* 80-118). English architecture was increasingly influenced by Italian style and planning, and beginning to experiment with new ideas about symmetry, both on the facades and within the plan. A good example would be the late Elizabethan house, Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire (c. 1597), which is designed without a courtyard and has a central front door leading into a central great hall (Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture* 112-123).

Robert Sidney, and presumably Barbara, knew Inigo Jones from his early role as a masque designer, working with Ben Jonson; Sidney and Jones travelled in the official escort party that conducted the Elector Palatine and his new wife, the Princess Elizabeth, back to Heidelberg in 1613. This is too early in Jones’s architectural career to suggest any influence on Penshurst, and there is no evidence to suggest that Jones was directly involved with the Sidney’s London home. But the visual richness of the court masques, and the surviving designs that mix fantasy, Renaissance Classicism and Gothic elements, are reminders of the treatment of architecture as spectacle that was familiar to Leicester.

The medieval form of the great hall remained at the centre of these houses, but within a new symmetry that increasingly disguised the off-centre entrance through the screens passage. The high-status rooms that created the set-piece route through the house for guests began with the great hall, although this was rarely used for dining by the family. The great dining chamber was the preferred room, up a flight of stairs from the high-status (former dias) end of the great hall. From this chamber, withdrawing rooms would lead to the best or state bedchamber. Bedchambers were multi-purpose living rooms, and company was received by the occupant hence the many elaborate suites of chairs noted in the inventories. The beds themselves were the subject of high expenditure on hangings. The formal apartments were complemented by the provision of at least one long gallery. Although galleries are associated with exercise in inclement weather, they were most important as a site of display for collections, particularly for portraits, and as “neutral” spaces for informal discussions away from the state rooms (Coope, “Long gallery”).

This was the “ideal” form for a noble household c. 1600. Penshurst Place had evolved around the fourteenth-century hall, service and solar block. The survival of a medieval great hall at the centre of a seventeenth-century house is not unusual: Knole, Kent, has similar origins, as does Boughton House, Northants. However, the offset Buckingham building south of the solar block and the encircling defensive wall and towers (1392), are unusual and their survival had a decisive effect on the plan of the new work. Rather than acquiring new courtyards by linking wings to gatehouse towers, as at neighboring Knole, Sir Henry Sidney incorporated the existing asymmetric layout (including the defensive towers) into courtyards with a combination of new ranges and garden walls. In effect, Penshurst gained three high status courts, and three service courts, within the confines of the medieval defensive

layout. Courtyard houses were designed to look into the courts, rather than away into the landscape. Some of these aspects have been reversed after 1700 at Penshurst.

The processional entrance route at Penshurst Place began at the King's Tower and continued across the great court to the great hall (West, "Studies and Status" 281). The bay windows of the parlor and parlor bedchamber faced into this court. On passing through the great hall, visitors could ascend to the great dining chamber by the medieval stone stairs, or preferably take the longer but more formal route through the lobby tower into Sidney's Lodgings. Here they could be received by their hosts in the great parlor, before ascending the great stairs to reach the dining chamber by its north door. Once on the upper floor, after dining in state, the adjoining Buckingham Building provided a sequence of withdrawing rooms and state bedchamber in the form of Gloucester's Lodgings. Gloucester's Lodgings were modernized by having the beds removed by 1677. The processional route on this side of the house ended by passing into the upper long gallery. Back down in the great parlor, visitors could ascend to the best lodgings of all: the state bedchamber suite later called the King's lodging in the north range of the great court.

Seventeenth-century Penshurst Place was thus arranged to offer all the amenities of an earl's house, including a private chapel that survived until c.1818 (when the architect Biaggio Rebecca reordered some of the rooms). The great stairs were probably comparable with the highly decorated great stairs that survive at Knole. The Knole stairs were completed by 1608; their ascent within a square plan, the Renaissance use of classical columns, a balustrade with Jacobean strapwork and wall paintings, would be as suitable for the Earl of Leicester at Penshurst as it was for the Earl of Dorset (National Trust, *Knole* 14-15; Cooper, *Jacobean* 34-43).

Away from the state rooms, living quarters were assigned distinctive names, and represented groups of rooms centered on bedchambers. They are often described in inventories as “apartments” but at Penshurst in the seventeenth century they are called lodgings: the King’s lodgings (above), Leicester’s, Gloucester’s and Sidney’s. Leicester’s lodgings occupied the ground floor rooms of the Buckingham Building. Gloucester’s lodgings were up on the first floor and were part of the processional route around the house. Sidney’s lodgings encompass the three storey block behind the solar and wrap around to the lobby tower. The first floor room (now subdivided) in the lobby tower still has an overmantel with an earl’s coronet and RB for Robert and Barbara Sidney. These lodgings also had a study, one of five around the house.

One further high status apartment remained, at the low status end of the great hall, entered by stairs near the south porch. On the first floor, above the buttery and the passage to the kitchen, were two chambers and a study in 1623, assigned to Lord Sunderland by the time of the 1677 inventory. The Sunderland lodging was furnished with an extremely high-value suite by then, which concurs with the family legend that “Sacharissa,” Dorothy Sidney Spencer Smith, Countess of Sunderland, occupied it as a widow in the mid seventeenth-century ([see 1:10](#)).

The President’s Court, named after the President’s Tower, is less of a set-piece place of display. The loggia and the President’s Tower form an elegant coda to the north range, but they are distinct from the processional route described above. In the President’s court, the large room over the “stone gallery” (1623) or cloister (1677 inventory) (loggia) remained one big room until 1818. By 1677, Robert Sidney, second Earl of Leicester, slept in the first floor of the President’s tower while Dorothy Percy Sidney, Countess of Leicester, was probably on the upper floor of Sidneys lodgings. The President’s Tower and the loggia were a private retreat away from the

formal route through the house, placed to enjoy a court as far from the service side of the house as possible. The strongest candidate for the seventeenth-century library room (holding most of the 5000 volumes) is the great room over the loggia, convenient for the first and second earls' private rooms (West, "Studies and Status" 285-86).

The supposed library room at Penshurst was subdivided into a corridor and bedrooms during the nineteenth century. As one open space it was filled with light from the three great windows and was able to hold a rich interior scheme that comfortably absorbed the 5,000 volumes of the library collection. The walls were hung with six tapestries, a chair and four stools were upholstered with cloth of gold, and a table and court cupboard were dressed with a green carpet and a Turkish carpet, recorded in 1623. The tapestries were taken down and replaced by twenty two pictures and more furniture arrived by the time of the 1677 inventory: three more chairs, three further court cupboards and two cabinets, as well as one book press. The cabinet, as a small chest of drawers usually supported on a stand or frame, was a favorite receptacle for Renaissance collections of small objects: coins, medals, and other objects of virtu (Thornton, *Scholar in His Study* 74). The bookpress, the first dedicated piece of shelving recorded for this study, was presumably distinct from the fitted shelving (unrecorded by inventory takers) and may have been similar to Samuel Pepys's design for a freestanding tall bookcase with glazed doors (his survive in the Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge).

The library held items of silver: eight candlesticks, a candle box, a standish (desk accessory for pens, inkpot and sand). Less expected are the tumblers, chaffing dish (for heating or cooking food, a distant relative of the modern fondue pot), a tooth pick case and a gilt spoon. The room appears to have been a comfortable place for a

quiet supper. Objects for contemplation must also have included some of the diverse collections of bronzes, busts and bas reliefs known to have filled the house, and sold in 1703 (Maddicott, “A Collection of the Interregnum Period” 1-24).

Finally, other important rooms were essential to the great household although not intended to be inhabited. The armory which would be most conveniently sited near to the great hall, was perhaps in the medieval undercroft, at the high end of the great hall. The old wardrobe, a great storehouse of unused textiles and furniture, was adjacent to the President’s court according to occasional references (*De L’Isle and Dudley* 2:426). The usual kitchen offices filled a court on the east side of the hall. Penshurst Place was immense, but filled by a bustling presence whenever its household of sixty returned to full strength for the complex processes of supporting the lifestyle of an earl and his family. However rich the new textiles and painted and gilded furniture were within the best rooms, Penshurst was also visibly rooted in its medieval past. With the new London house created as the next stage of the Sidney’s building ambitions, the family would be able to express their interest in and understanding of the latest architectural directions.

### **Leicester House, London**

The next stage of the architectural story of the Sidneys concerns Robert and Dorothy Sidney, second Earl and Countess of Leicester. The Sidneys, like many aristocratic families who did not inherit a substantial medieval home in London, had been used to renting houses or borrowing rooms in Baynard’s Castle when they needed to live there as a household for any length of time. This pattern changed when Robert Sidney <sup>2</sup> selected a plot of land to build his own house on, right on the edge of the expanding urban area, completing the land purchase in 1631. His choice was a contrast to the

smoky, congested, and essentially medieval City; Robert Sidney settled on an airy and open landscape of open fields and ancient trackways, leading north from the thin ribbon of development on the river frontage of the western termination of the Strand and beyond the western limit of the expansion of urban streets.

Robert Sidney purchased four acres from Hugh Audley (notorious money lender and founder of what would become the Grosvenor estate in London) of the enclosed field of St Martin's parish (formerly a common resource and hence without formal boundary hedges). Since this was once parish land, he was ordered to leave half of it open and this became the urban square known as Leicester Fields (Sheppard "Leicester Square area").

While Robert Sidney gained country air, the choice of site is also an indication of his awareness of the latest speculative developments west of the City. During the 1630s, the redevelopment of London's streets as speculative housing development for wealthy tenants marked the introduction of the uniform, brick built terraces of tall, narrow houses that would dominate English urban housing into the nineteenth century. Covent Garden and Lincoln's Inn Fields were the chief ornaments of the city in the 1630s, both planned as terraces around central open squares (McKellar, *Modern London* 193-97). The setting of Leicester House gradually came to resemble these formal squares during the rest of the century. Recent activity on the Bedford estate, which terminated at the east side of St Martin's lane, may have suggested the potential to Leicester for future development of his new plot: Covent Garden Piazza was developed in 1631 (Summerson, *Georgian London* 30-31).

Knowledge of Leicester House is limited, as a result of its demolition in 1792, and a period prior to that when it was not in family ownership or occupation. The great house was constructed towards the south of the irregularly shaped plot which

Robert Sidney had enclosed, north of the open field. Behind the house were elaborate formal gardens, ornamented with statues. The western gardens included an orchard with statues, and a kitchen garden. Pleasurable strolls could be taken along the elevated terrace walk, ornamented with statues; shade was provided by a covered walkway (*De L'Isle and Dudley* 6:633-34). The immediate setting for the house was thus a series of structured garden areas, designed for leisure and to supply the household with produce, ornamented in the latest manner with statuary. A good comparison, now reconstructed, is the garden setting for Ham House, as recorded in a design of 1671-72, where an immense terrace, four times the length of the house, surveyed the parterre garden (National Trust, *Ham House* 54-55).

The house fitted within a forecourt later recorded as 133 feet wide. Robert Sidney reportedly spent £8000 on his house, comparable to the £7,500 estimated for the cost of building the Queen's House at Greenwich (by Inigo Jones (1632-38); Worsley, *Inigo Jones* 115). The setting of Southampton House, built at the northern end of Southampton (later Bloomsbury) Square from 1657, is a useful comparison: it too was a wide house dominating one side of the open square. Elizabeth McKellar has pointed out that early London squares in front of great houses may have been intended as an ornament to the house, creating an open court to enhance the view out from the house, rather than our impression from artists' views which are inevitably looking towards, rather than away from, the aristocratic mansion (*Modern London* 198-99).

This was a century of immense change in the pattern of English house building. Firstly, it was a period of transition from timber to brick. In London, the timber-framed city was rebuilt, particularly after the Great Fire in the City of London in 1666, as a brick and tile metropolis. Secondly, it witnessed the definitive shift to

Italian classical style, proportion and planning for the houses of the wealthy, led by the principal court architect, Inigo Jones.

Jones' work translated Italian Renaissance architecture into an adaptable English pattern. His houses are relatively plain and undecorated on their exteriors, in contrast to the richness within. Jones's designs tended to give equal height to each storey, as state rooms were spread across two floors in the seventeenth century. This allocation is seen in the inventories for Leicester House. This then, is an ideal appearance for Leicester House in the 1630s: brick, symmetrical and with a heavy hipped roof.

The exterior of Leicester House was not intended to impress by the use of classical ornament. It was **ten** bays wide with a three bay addition to the west, of two storeys over a high basement, with dormers in the roof, and monumental groups of chimney stacks either side of the centre (Figure 3). The original facade of the house was therefore slightly asymmetrical, since the door had to be one bay to the side of the central point. This design quirk suggests that despite an otherwise Jonesian style, the unknown architect was unable to co-ordinate all the design elements. The door was emphasized by a pedimented portico surround and a more elaborate frame to the upper floor window above it. Otherwise, the windows were framed by lugged architraves and the roof was emphasized by a modillion, or bracket, cornice. These features constitute the grammar of ornament for the house, a grammar derived from architectural books after Palladio and Serlio of the late Renaissance and from interpretations of contemporary Dutch classicism. Eighteenth-century comments dismiss the exterior of Leicester House as merely "long and low," and as an astylar brick house of the 1630s it would not compare well with the stone classicism of the eighteenth-century Palladian revival. However, if the exterior views of Southampton

and Leicester Houses are compared, taking in to account the later addition of a balustrade to the former, the long and low quality of Leicester House can be viewed in something close to its original setting.

The height of Leicester House would have been emphasized by the presence of a balustrade and central cupola on the roof: Dorothy Sidney referred to the progress in making the balustrade around the top of the house, in 1636 (*De L'Isle and Dudley* 51). These houses were all designed with casement windows, not sashes, and so the frames were of fixed mullions and transoms, with one or two hinged casements.

Many of the design features listed above for Jones-type houses also determine the internal plan of the house: chimney stacks grouped tidily within the roof rather than running up exterior walls; symmetrical disposition of rooms around axial lines; facades that look the same on front and rear. The house was planned on four levels: a high basement for cellars and service rooms, raised first floor for family and state rooms, upper floor for family and state rooms, and attic rooms for family bedchambers and storage of surplus furniture and textiles in the wardrobe room. Secondary service functions, including chambers for the lower servants, were disposed in a series of courts to the east of the main house. The house was a double pile, and thus organized as two ranges of back-to-back rooms.

The appearance and form of the house, and the absence of a named designer, suggest that both Robert and Dorothy shaped their own house. Leicester's experience of court styles, contemporary building campaigns in London and of European currents through Paris indicates that he would aim to build a house that reflected the latest designs. Dorothy came from a family with a track record of female architectural design, with her mother's experience of updating Syon House, Middlesex, and her grandmother, Lettice Dudley, maintaining the splendid Essex House, off the Strand,

London (Brennan, Kinnamon and Hannay, 2010 5-6). Both were exposed to the latest developments in London architecture, and Dorothy also kept abreast of design trends as she supervised the interior finishes for Leicester House, below.

Dorothy's responsibility for supervising the construction of Leicester House in many ways parallels her mother Barbara's responsibilities in earlier decades for works at Penshurst Place. Dorothy promised her husband that she would 'take the best care I can that it may go as far as possible', referring to their tight budget. She organized the sale of timber from the Penshurst estate, and probably suggested that the proceeds should fund the new house, as Robert agreed to this use in 1637 (Brennan, Kinnamon and Hannay, 2010, 62, 81-82, 103). She also had to fend off 'clamorous creditors' in London, including the blacksmith who had made the iron balconies for Leicester House (95-6).

A visitor would enter the central door into a very wide great hall, with great stairs to one side, and cross to a sequence of reception rooms: ante room, little dining chamber and old drawing room looking into the parterre gardens at the rear. The rest of the front range was a private apartment for Dorothy Sidney. The extreme east of the house was filled by rooms for household officials and the back stairs, leading to the adjoining service wings and courts. The west end of the house was extended by 1670, with a wing that wrapped around the front, to provide two additional state rooms of a new bedchamber and new drawing room.

The formal route continued up the great stairs to the state apartment sequence of an ante room, great chamber and withdrawing chamber, and it is most likely to have overlooked the parterre garden. The front of the upper floor was filled by the earl's private apartment. These front rooms appear to have a private stair, allowing the earl and countess free movement between their apartments without having to walk to

the far side of the house. The storey over this, in the spacious roof, was divided into comfortable apartments for the earl's adult children and for the old nurseries.

Little is known of the interiors of Leicester House, beyond the hints of the inventories. However, in the light of the couple's experience of Court life and of Robert Sidney's diplomatic life in Paris, the interiors represented the current state of French-influenced design in the 1630s. This is still visible in at Ham House, a Jacobean house remodeled for William Murray (later Earl of Dysart) in 1637-39 (National Trust, *Ham House* 60-63). Dorothy Sidney was proud of the results for the great chamber, ante room and great stairs, which were "verie hansomlie treated after a new waie," painted and with gilt details on the woodwork (*De L'Isle and Dudley* 6:51; Brennan, Kinnamon and Hannay 2010, 61). Some of the rooms had "fretwork" ceilings, i.e. with geometric divisions in the manner of Inigo Jones. The stairs and ante room were hung with gilt leather (embossed and painted panels of leather). The green cabinet at Leicester House on the first (ground) floor, hung with pictures and mirrors, is recognizably the green closet surviving at Ham House, with green textile hangings and ebony framed small pictures and portrait miniatures (Rowell, "Green Closet at Ham House" 14-31). Robert Sidney furnished their house with French tables and bedsteads, and new landscape tapestries. A landscape tapestry of this date would have been a detailed central image of a wooded scene, perhaps with exotic birds, framed by an architectural border with the latest style of swags, columns and other details also found on paneling and chimneypieces of the same date.

The house was extended sometime between 1644 and 1670, the dates of the two known inventories. The need for additional rooms of display reflects the substantial collections assembled by Robert and Dorothy Sidney, including Dorothy's patronage of Anthony Van Dyck. Dorothy's taste is hinted at in the 1659 codicil to

her will, listing French silver, Mortlate tapestries, pictures, ebonized cabinets, mirrors and porcelain, owned by her at Leicester House and Penshurst Place (Brennan, Kinnamon and Hannay 2010, 188). The picture gallery was the principal addition to the upper floor. The gallery overlooked the western gardens, and formed a splendid link between Robert Sidney's apartment and the upper state rooms. By the time of the Restoration, the house was suitable for the royal household of Charles II's aunt, Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, in 1662 and for the French ambassador, Charles Colbert, Marquis de Croissy, in 1668. With the additional rooms, the house reached its high point of luxury and convenience. It was designed and planned in the most convenient modern manner, and fitted out and furnished in the latest court style. It would not continue to enjoy its verdant setting for long.

After 1670, development around Leicester House intensified. To the east, James Cecil, third Earl of Salisbury, developed his three acres south of Newport Street from 1670, infilling the eastern half of Leicester Fields. Newport House survived but its long garden plot was developed. Behind the gardens of Leicester House, the first part of the area known as Soho Fields was laid out, creating King Street in 1679 (Sheppard, "Gerard Street Area").

Leicester House continued to be tenanted by some of the most powerful men in the kingdom: from 1673, Thomas Osborne, the Lord High Treasurer, and from 1674-6 by Ralph Montagu (who began his own great London house in 1675, later the site of the British Museum). However, the post-Restoration building boom became irresistible. After the death of the second earl in 1677, Philip Sidney, third Earl of Leicester, was blocked from his inheritance by his two brothers acting as their father's executors, until 1682. As soon as Philip Sidney took possession, he decided that such a large house was not necessary (he had a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields and had built

a larger suburban house at Sheen, Richmond) and followed the prevailing pattern of infilling and redevelopment. The western gardens were sold off and developed, in the form of the T-shaped Leicester Street and Lisle Street. The front wall of the great court was developed as single-storey shops, and a tavern was erected in the eastern corner (Sheppard, “Leicester Square, North Side and Lisle Street Area”). Behind Leicester House, development moved closer after King Street had been laid out in 1679, as the third earl also sold off some of the rear gardens of Leicester House and a new boundary was established, Gerrard Street, by 1682, as soon as he took possession. East of the house, Newport House had recently been redeveloped as a planned market, with further infilling of housing. The 1680s developments completed the transition from airy fields into urban density that had begun in 1630.

Leicester House survived, but the open views from the picture gallery at the west were abruptly curtailed. This was the house that **Philip Sidney, third Earl of Leicester**, knew, and he lived in it until his death in 1698. The sash windows shown in later views began to be adopted in England from the 1670s, and were perhaps added when Robert Sidney, fourth Earl of Leicester, spent over £2000 on the fabric of the house; further alterations were made 1718-19 for the household of George, Prince of Wales, and it is only after these two campaigns that artists’ views are known. The house of the second earl remains elusive, but Leicester Square remains as a testament to the great scale of his former home.

Both in external design and interior fitting out, Leicester House can be considered to be of the first rank in terms of 1630s London buildings. It shows that the second earl and countess created an appropriate setting for the richly detailed furniture and textiles sent back from the Continent, and that the couple aspired to create a contemporary house with a conveniently compact plan to showcase their

collections and to support their rank. Leicester House was everything that Robert's father and grandfather had started at Penshurst Place, but without the constraints of the extended medieval plan. Its fate was similar to many of the great houses of early modern London, sacrificed to rising development land prices as the open fields were transformed into the modern West End of one of the largest and fastest growing capitals in the Western world.

### **The Material Environment of the Sidneys**

Directions in research using Penshurst Place are traceable as two broad strands, distinguished by a primary interest in the physical or the textual. Both strands have the potential to converge on the theme of the fashioning of the self in the early modern period, but there is arguably more ground work to be done on the material aspects of the Sidneys. Taking the historic environment first, the principal arena is of course the great house itself. The discipline of architectural history has tended to prioritize individual buildings rather than their wider contexts. Penshurst Place as a great house has been the subject of steady attention from architectural historians, but primarily for its significance as a medieval fortified residence. Most recently, John Goodall has placed Penshurst in a group of castles of the south-east of England, built or enlarged during the turbulent fourteenth century, as "first and foremost creations of domestic politics and dynastic good fortune" (*English Castle* 308, 318-9). Penshurst's medieval style takes its cue from the Court style of Richard II; the present author has argued that the Sidney's contribution was to take it into the English Renaissance yet with historicist allusions to its medieval past (West, "Studies and Status"). This is to differ from Don Wayne's earlier position that the work represented an illusion, or sleight of hand, about the Sidney's social origins (*Penshurst*).

More work remains to be done on Sir Henry Sidney's architectural activities: Goodall notes his extensive modifications at Ludlow Castle, during Sir Henry's lengthy service as President of the Council of the Marches. Further, Goodall speculates that Sir Henry's role in restoring Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, damaged in 1562 when the nave collapsed, during his term of office as deputy lieutenant of Ireland, was an act of conscious antiquarianism (*English Castle* 453-54). The role of the past in Elizabethan cultural politics is a theme that could be taken further with a deeper survey of the Sidney family's use of the material past, extending literary discussion of the construction of Sidney identities. The relationship of medieval to Renaissance art has seen a revival of interest in recent years (see Nagel and Alexander below).

The refashioning of Penshurst Place and the creation of Leicester House has not been marked by the discovery of named master craftsmen or architects. The known archive indicates that new discoveries of this nature are unlikely, and indeed the readings that are possible from the archive suggest strongly that the owners were as engaged with the design as with the execution of their building projects. This suggestion needs further work: the aesthetic interest that the archive portrays is muted, and although this is characteristic of the period, more subtle interrogation is needed in order to draw out the motivations and aspirations behind the end results, which were richly varied art collections and suitable architectural settings for their display. The material and visual environment of the Sidneys, looking outwards to their experience of the Scottish and European court cultures, could provide a valuable synthesis. Another direction is offered by consideration of the Sidney networks of friends and kin, particularly the connection with Wilton House. Roy Strong gathered a list of Sir Philip Sidney's portraits which also works as a prompt towards one such

socio-cultural network: the great houses of Wilton, Woburn, Windsor, Knebworth and Blickling can all be connected by personal relationships with Philip Sidney; otherwise, these houses are rarely associated with each other in the architectural literature (“Sidney’s appearance”). Elizabeth Goldring’s approach to art history works with this wider approach, as discussed by her in the following chapter.

The value of household inventories to the architectural historian is often calculated by their usefulness in listing room names and possible spatial relationships; the present chapter has benefited from the results. However, a cultural approach to architectural history uses the information about interiors that such inventories offer, as coded descriptions of the lived-in spaces. Since houses are for living in, however brief the period of residence, it is the fixtures and furnishings that actuate many of the possibilities for human conduct within the spaces. For London residences, it remains an open question as to how families disposed of their luxury and essential goods between their London and country houses, and in the case of the third earl, a suburban house at Sheen (Maddicott, “A Collection of the Interregnum Period”). Possession of a permanent residence in this period did not mean that it had to be permanently furnished: the expectation that goods would be transported between residences seems to have ceased during the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries (Orlin, “Temporary Lives” 230). This needs to be taken into account when working with household inventories; for Leicester House, it appears that it was maintained fully furnished (for family and tenants), with the occasional inventory taker’s note that goods had been moved to Penshurst. For the previous generation, Jonson’s celebratory poem asserted that no room was unfurnished, suggesting that by 1610 this particular family had adopted permanency despite their transient relationships with other lodgings (Celovsky, “Ben Jonson” 191). This relationship between country and city residence

is just one of the wider contexts that would benefit from closer attention, creating a more accurate, and fuller, picture of the pattern of living in the Sidney household.

City life for the wealthy is associated with discourses around consumption; as a historically specific construct, it is not part of our own understanding of post-industrial consumerism. The renewal of the furnishing textiles around Penshurst Place and the creation of Leicester House exemplify luxury consumption during the seventeenth century. The considerable increase in quantities of luxury goods to be found in the homes of the nobility and gentry during the early modern period apply to the Sidney family, and the theme of consumption deserves more detailed consideration. Early modern luxury was put to use for several cultural ends: the cultivation of the mind, the maintenance of peer group relations, affirmation of political status, as well as the expression of ambition. The library and its lost room at Penshurst can be read together as a prime example of cultivation and consumption.

The present author has produced a material account of the absent library room of the seventeenth-century Penshurst Place (West, “Studies and Status”). The generous space occupied by the early seventeenth-century library room over the loggia is a surprising but important example of the value implied by such a creation. The physical environment was not just a place of display, but also a place of meaning: a library room was “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 (*Scholar in His Study* 176). The material environment 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 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. In reconstructing the library room, something of the owners' aspirations to a moral life are available to grasp.

William W. West explored more of the challenge of the “ideal of contemplation and the more limited and contingent actual engagements within a space” for early modern readers, noting the problem of relating metaphorical architecture to actual space (“Reading Rooms” 115n.7). He suggests that Nicholas Bacon created a new long gallery, ornamented with *sententiae* at his house of Gorhambury in 1577 specifically to “represent his mental space to another,” the queen; after her visit, Bacon had the doorway she used to enter the gallery walled up. Elizabeth was the intended viewer and Bacon showed himself to be her subject, through their shared performance of the gallery space (123). This compelling example, evidenced carefully, draws together text, space and action to suggest meaning. Bacon's gallery, then, is an appropriate place to move the discussion on from the first research strand, working from the architectural environment outwards to wider contexts, and to turn towards the second: literary conceptions of Penshurst.

The representation of architecture in literary texts has been the principal arena where the historical Penshurst Place and its estate have been investigated for its role within Renaissance discourses. The trope of hospitality is best known from Ben Jonson's *To Penshurst*, where the poet holds up the household organization found at Penshurst as a model of social obligation; duty is dispatched in an appropriate architectural environment of seemly display. Contemporaries were aware of a tension between country and city life; a rapidly expanding London and its attractions were believed to be undermining social leadership within the counties. Readings of *To*

*Penshurst* after Don Wayne's earlier use of poetic discourse in its historic environment are still being challenged and extended (Celovsky, "Ben Jonson"); as with the poem, the house should not be made to accommodate a single reading. The preceding discussion of the architectural history has sought to emphasize that the home of the Sidneys is not directly accessible, particularly lacking much of their interior schemes: the surviving "signs" to be decoded, whether visual or from the archive, may not reveal as complete or coherent a system as Wayne required. Nonetheless, the challenge of relating a discourse about hospitality to the material environment in which hospitality was enacted remains current and the country house poems retain their fascination for some architectural approaches (Skelton "Redefining Hospitality" 499). Victoria Moul's exploration of the classical precedents in Jonson's output provides a reminder of the layers of understanding that, if present to a contemporary audience for literary texts, should also be considered to be present to viewers of the material world (*Jonson, Horace and the Classical Tradition*).

The depth of intellectual history that is invoked in setting Sir Philip Sidney's work into context is also a challenge to the architectural historian, to reflect on how architecture may be implicated, as William West demonstrates (above), as action in the world (after Stillman, *Philip Sidney*). Philip Sidney's use of architectural forms and settings in *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590) has received some attention both for the role of the literary lodges and their inspiration. John Summerson cited the description of Kalendar's house to illustrate the late Elizabethan patron's desire to limit the ornamentation otherwise urged on by the master craftsmen (*Architecture in Britain* 53, citing the 1623 edition of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* 7). The paired star-shaped lodges evoked in the New Arcadia, taking the form of a comet, have been linked to the Hvězda Pavilion, Prague, built for the

Emperor Ferdinand in 1555: Philip Sidney visited Prague in 1575 and 1577 (Skretkowicz, “Symbolic architecture” 1982). In turn, the literary lodges have been suggested to have influenced the form of at least two star-shaped buildings, Star Castle, Scilly Isles, and Spur Royal Castle, Northern Ireland (Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture* 252). Mark Girouard notes that by 1624 Philip Sidney’s fantastical forms were disparagingly received as exemplars for architecture by Sir Henry Wotton, as unsuited for the accommodation of a court retinue (*Elizabethan Architecture* 254, citing *Elements of Architecture* 19-20). Wotton was a later generation that was looking more closely at Italian classicism and developing an aesthetic that valued commodity (decorum) over rarity, the generation that supported Inigo Jones and produced Leicester House. Wotton appears to take the fictive lodges as patterns for building, and this attitude may reflect the growing interest in direct precedent for the science of architecture.

The spatial paradigm in literature, the degrees to which architectural analogies are invoked in texts, and conversely the transference of built forms into the literary imagination, seem to have received little sustained attention beyond their “face value” uses. There is a recent intervention in the theory of Renaissance art which deserves further thought, as it highlights what might here be called the pre-Jonesian uses of the past in architecture. Philip Sidney’s re-imagined architecture (revived from the Prague lodge, for example) places sixteenth-century symbolic architecture into the narrative of a “timeless” pastoral narrative, the *Arcadia*. It would seem to follow the model of “double historicity” proposed by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood for the representation of contemporary objects as (to us) anachronistic choices in Renaissance art. Nagel and Wood point out that the uses of contemporary objects in historical scenes, such as Carpaccio’s depiction of the fourth-century St Augustine in a

thoroughly Renaissance study (c.1503), are not simply stand-ins or un-self conscious elisions of periods, but substitutions for older objects by virtue of the long chain of precedents for such types. The contemporary objects gain authority from being represented in historical contexts, rather than betraying the contemporary production of the work (“Renaissance Anachronism” 403-7). Philip Sidney’s lodges, then, to a shared circle with knowledge of the Emperor Ferdinand’s Prague building, might be received not as pen portraits from life but as acceptable substitutes within the long chain of spaces that supported royal identities over time.

“Poesie, historie, architecture and sculpture,” four characters in Jonson’s last court masque in 1631, are a reminder of how closely the plastic arts and texts were positioned; discourses around decorum, proportion and imitation shaped and responded to the issues of construction for text and object, as Elizabeth Jordan has shown (“Inigo Jones” 299). The concept of substitution, after Nagel and Wood (above), may now need to be accommodated with imitation. Few studies attempt a cross-disciplinary approach, although the “material turn” in the social and historical disciplines has brought renewed attention to material practices and environments in recent years, with a greater breadth of methodologies as a result. The material culture of texts (manuscript, print and “the book”) is a major contribution to this expansion of academic practice; architectural history appears more insular in comparison. The Sidneys as a literary family, of authors, patrons, readers and collectors, undoubtedly offer more potential for research that works across “poesie, historie, architecture and sculpture,” with the aim of revealing the pattern of now eroded connections between material and text.

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