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Finding Wroth's Loughton Hall

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The Open University

Lady Mary Sidney Wroth, daughter of Penshurst Place, Kent, made her marital home at Loughton Hall, Essex, and remained there as a widow until her own death in 1651.¹ The house was burnt down in 1836, and little is known of its appearance or history. This is a loss in two major respects. Firstly, as the home of a major literary figure whose work draws heavily on her life, we might expect that the home environment she created was both shaped by and informed her evocation of place and space in her work. This is not to suggest that literary work can be read back into the built environment, but Loughton Hall should take its place amongst the houses within the Sidney circle: Penshurst Place, Wilton House and Houghton Conquest House, for example. There is more to say about its landscape setting. Secondly, Wroth had a role in remodeling the old house, and there is a tantalizing but unproven association with Inigo Jones, known to Wroth from the Court. This provides the second theme for this discussion, the Court and the classical tradition in architecture. The early decades of the seventeenth century in England are distinguished by what might be called a 'classical turn' in building, in the form of heightened awareness of and interest in the theory and practice of architecture as inherited from Italy and a Roman past. Wroth was in a very good position to observe design at Court, and in her own circle, with special emphasis on her female friendships, such as that with Mary Herbert, Dowager Countess of Pembroke.

¹ This discussion owes its existence to Margaret Hannay's scholarship, especially *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) (hereafter *Mary Sidney*), which is gratefully acknowledged, and to the *Dramatizing Penshurst: Site, Scripts, Sidneys*, conference 2014;

Early nineteenth-century artists' views provide some evidence for Loughton Hall's appearance, but these are in an important respect, highly misleading. The methodological challenges of writing the history of a lost house, with a fragmentary archive, are considerable. In the absence of standard architectural sources such as building accounts, household inventories, plans, and interior views, an innovative use of sources more familiar to social historians, in the form of Hearth Tax records, provides new insights into the scale and relative status of Loughton Hall. Ultimately, however, it is Wroth's creative persona that brings the house back in to view: without this, Loughton would remain a regrettable but minor loss in the literature of the English country house and its attrition. Wroth was born eleven years after Inigo Jones, and as the daughter of a courtier family she was of the generation of the English elite who created the new classicism in English architecture. Jones has been hailed as the genius who brought Italian classicism to England in older accounts of English architectural history. However, designers need patrons, and it is the processes of patronage and commissions, supported by the transmission of architecture in print, that really tell the story of change in this period.

I. Loughton in the landscape

When Wroth left her Sidney home to marry Sir Robert Wroth, in 1604, she moved to the north side of London [Figure 1]. The house she is associated with was Loughton Hall, now in the Epping Forest district of Essex, a house that came to the Wroth family via Susan Stoner [Stonard], Sir Robert's mother, in 1579. It was leased from the Crown, as part of the private estate of the Duchy of Lancaster, and thus tenure was in the gift of the monarch. The Wroths owned a nearby manor house, Durrance or Durrants, in Enfield five miles to the west, which had been in the family since at least 1401 but it was Loughton that became significant for Wroth. Durrants descended through the male line until it was sold in 1672, whereas

Wroth retained Loughton for her lifetime (it subsequently descended to the Earls of Rochford and was sold in 1745).² This outline is well established, but the particular situation of Loughton and its neighbours bears further consideration for their distinctive landscape character, one that appears to have caught Wroth's literary imagination.

Loughton Hall was within a cluster of courtier houses lying on the Middlesex / Essex border. These houses occupied small estates within a royal forest formerly known as the Forest of Essex, maintained as open spaces and managed woodland, which survives in a reduced form today as Epping Forest and Enfield Chase, both at a convenient distance of approximately 12 miles from the City of London. The Crown retained hunting rights across private estates within the Forest, and three Tudor hunting lodges (stands) were built to provide good views of the hunt. The forest was divided north to south by the River Lea, with the more populous settlement of Enfield to the west side, and the hamlet of Loughton to the east. Enfield Chase became a favourite hunting ground of James I after he occupied Cecil's great house at Theobalds, to the north of Enfield.³ Neighbouring houses included Elsyng Hall, Enfield, used by the official Keepers of Epping Forest after 1602. Susan de Vere Herbert and her husband Philip, Earl of Montgomery (later Pembroke) lived here in the

² A.P. Baggs, Diane Bolton, Eileen Scarff and G. C. Tyack, "Enfield: Manors," in *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 5, Hendon, Kingsbury, Great Stanmore, Little Stanmore, Edmonton Enfield, Monken Hadley, South Mimms, Tottenham*. Eds T.F.T. Baker and R.B. Pugh (London: Victoria County History, 1976), 224-229; online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol5/pp224-229> (accessed January 28, 2016).

³ See animated reconstruction of Theobalds c. 1607 online: <https://www.broxbourne.gov.uk/leisure-parks-and-green-spaces/history-cedars-park> (accessed 24 February 2016).

former royal palace, 6 miles as the crow flies from Loughton.⁴ Loughton, then, was the quieter of the two Wroth properties, one mile east of the hamlet of Loughton.

Even after the arrival of the railway, it was a landscape of open fields and farms, protected by the bulk of the forest to the north-west and looking south-east towards the River Roding [Figure 2]. Loughton Hall was situated on a minor triangular prominence raised above small valleys for the River Roding and a tributary, so that the ground fell away steadily to the water courses to the north east and south east. Land to the west of the house continued to rise, meeting the forest. The house was on a small outcrop of sand and gravel, offering good drainage amongst the prevailing clay lands. Here then is the forest lodge of the *Urania*, noted by Margaret Hannay: ‘Situated on a hill a fair house’ with ‘a delicate walk’ from the river up through the garden, and to the ‘House ... with furniture fit for a Court’.⁵ Later reports of the interior of the house also suggest courtly splendor, a theme to be investigated.

⁴ For Elsyng see H.M. Colvin, *The History of the King's Works* IV (London: HMSO, 1982), 87-88; Joe Prentice, *Archaeological Recording at The Summerhouse, Forty Hall, Enfield* (Northampton: Northamptonshire Archaeology Report 10/129, 2010), 2; online: http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-703-1/dissemination/pdf/northamp3-101102_1.pdf (accessed 24 February 2016).

⁵ Margaret P. Hannay, “Barbara Gamage Sidney, Elizabeth Sidney Manners, and Mary Sidney Wroth,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Sidneys, 1500-1700, Volume 1: Lives*. Eds M. Hannay, M. Brennan and M. Lamb, (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015) (hereafter *ARC*) 112, citing Mary Wroth, *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Tempe, AZ: Arisonza Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) 344.

II. Loughton Hall to c.1616

Loughton Hall has been identified as a house that Sir Robert Wroth, and possibly Wroth herself, improved, but as the house was burnt down in 1836, its architectural history has not been written. Destroyed before the age of photography, the house at Loughton was recorded in three known artist's views of the early nineteenth century.⁶ However, two centuries on from Wroth's lifetime, these are questionable representations of the house she knew.

Elite houses during this period, c.1600, were the sites of considerable architectural experiment and change, particularly in the layout of rooms. Major medieval houses followed courtyard plans, usually centred on a great hall, with sides of the courtyard available for bedchambers (lodgings). This format was easily multiplied, so the biggest houses of the nobility might have two or more courtyards (Theobalds had three). However, by the end of the sixteenth century, English houses could be designed as a compact plan, where the principal rooms were brought into one block that was two rooms deep, and up to three stories high. These houses were also designed to look symmetrical on the exterior, even if the interior spaces were less strictly organized. Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, is a good example of a compact but monumental house. The new compact houses could still retain vestiges of

⁶ Essex Record Office: Old Loughton Hall, built c.1616 destroyed by fire, 11th December 1836 Aug. 1821 [(?) by George Buckler I/Mb 228/1/21; Black and white print: Loughton Hall, destroyed by fire December 11th, 1836 From a water-colour drawing, in the possession of Miss I.R. Maitland Extracted from Trans. Essex Arch soc N.S. viii, 345, I/Mb 228/1/1; Watercolour: Loughton Hall, front view L. E. [?Louisa Eliza) Lloyd (1805-1884). Eldest daughter of William Lloyd and Louisa daughter of Sir Elias Harvey of Rolls Park, Chigwell I/Mp 228/1/1. Images available online.

courtyard plans, in the form of short wings that were integral to the main house. These house plans are referred to as H-plan, where the front and rear facades have wings and the central block with the great hall is the cross-bar of the H. Ham House, Surrey, was originally in this form. Houses without wings to the rear were also common, and referred to now as half-H plan, or U-shaped. These terms will be used in the following discussion of Loughton, which probably started life as a courtyard house and was extended with a new main block in a half-H plan.

The manor house that Susan Stoner brought to the Wroths in 1579 was presumably a sixteenth-century building, old enough to require considerable repair by 1602, when a Duchy of Lancaster survey estimated that seventy trees and £100 would be required. The scale of the house was that of a manor house, entered through a gatehouse, and it is likely that it was planned as a courtyard house with an entrance court. The main house had three floors (probably included attic rooms) and a tiled roof over the parlour and chambers. Some repairs must have been rapidly put in hand, as James 1 was entertained there in 1605 and the Prince of Wales followed in 1606.⁷

After the death of Robert Wroth senior in 1606, Robert inherited the bulk of the Wroth properties as the eldest son, and the couple made Durrants their home, using Loughton for occasional entertaining.⁸ In 1608, they evidently decided that the Loughton estate would serve as their main home, convenient for entertaining royal hunting parties, and as a

⁷ W. R. Powell "Chigwell: Manors," in *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 4: Ongar Hundred* (London, Victoria County History, 1956) (hereafter *Essex*) 24-32. British History Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15539&strquery=Loughton> (accessed 15 August 2014); M. Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 114.

⁸ M. Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 138.

dowerhouse for Wroth's future. They acted to secure a more permanent stake in the estate from the Duchy of Lancaster. Wroth wrote to Queen Anne in support of her husband's application to the King.⁹ The details that Wroth revealed are significant, promising that Robert 'will build, and make the house fit for both your Majesties to rest in, and will also make his chief dwelling there... it will be much for my good, Mr. Wroth having promised to add it to my jointure, all the rest of his lands being entailed.'¹⁰ Robert's petition to the King promised to 'bestow in building upon the said Manor house within six years five hundred pounds.' The petition was successful, a new lease was granted to 1689, and Robert acted on his promise. However, it is clear that the improvements at Loughton were to be commissioned by Wroth herself, to a more generous budget. Her father reported in October 1608 that Robert 'gives her 1,200 pounds towards the building of Loughton.'¹¹ This report was written in the same month that the Loughton petition was presented to the King, which suggests that Robert was persuaded rather rapidly that £500 would do very little to make an old house into anything 'fit for both your Majesties'.

Most capital investment in building by owners of landed estates has historically been drawn from annual rental income, rather than windfalls such as dowries, or debt incurred through mortgages. However, it is notable that 1608 also saw the overdue completion of Mary's dowry from her father, a remainder of £500, exactly the sum that Robert promised to

⁹ M. Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 142.

¹⁰ M. Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 141-4, citing Cecil Papers 130/174 and P.778, dated 1608.

¹¹ M. Hannay, N. Kinnamon and M. G. Brennan, eds. *Domestic Politics and Family Absence: the Correspondence of Robert Sidney, 1st Earl of Leicester, and Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), R. Lisle to Viscountess Lisle, Letter 176, 16 October 1608.

spend on the house. There was an unexpected boost to their capital in 1610, when Robert received £5,600 from the King in compensation for Loughton land taken in to the expanding royal forest of Enfield Chase.¹² Any of this money could have been very welcome to speed the completion of works. After 1610, Loughton appears to have been ready to be their principal home as records of family visits refer only to Loughton, not Durrants.¹³

The house was surveyed by the Duchy of Lancaster in 1612 as part of a revaluation of the Manor, and described as follows:

The mannor or mansion house contains a Hall, a Buttry, Kitchen, Larder, Bakehouse, Pastry, Mylkhowse, Wash-howse, and eight other Lodgings, with faire Lodginge and great Roomes over the said Roomes new built and redified at the chardgs [sic] of Sir Robert Wroth... with two barnes... two duple stables...sundry other out offices and Lodgings; with an orchard and a garden now in plantinge, all consisting of Six acres.¹⁴

The survey noted that the property included repairs and recent new building, probably a new wing to provide modern standards of bedrooms (lodgings) on the ground floor and reception rooms on the upper floor. The great hall led to the standard group of service rooms (kitchen, buttery and larder etc.) in one direction, and via a great staircase, the best rooms overhead. In this period, double height great halls were increasingly rare. Mary had her own study and closet, probably next to her bedchamber, as part of the family rooms.¹⁵ The generous provision of reception rooms reflects the Wroths' expectations of hosting the royal

¹² M. Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 120, 151

¹³ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁴ W. Waller, "Old Loughton Hall" *Essex Naturalist*, vol. 7 (1893), 14-21, 18. Online: <http://www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/portal/p/Archive/s/008/o/0018> (accessed 25 February 2016).

¹⁵ W. Waller, *Loughton in Essex, Collections Illustrative of the History of the Manor and Parish, Part 1, Transcripts and Abstracts of Wills Part 2*, (Privately printed, Epping: Alfred Davis, c.1889-1900) 24. Online via British Library as digital item: <http://access.bl.uk/item/pdf/lsidyv3c24a6d6> (accessed 25 February 2016).

family, and one such room was reported to be known as the King's chamber a hundred years later. The same source lists the dining room, upper drawing room and lower drawing room, and great parlour.¹⁶ These were undoubtedly the great rooms referred to in 1612. In 1826 the best rooms in the house were still known as the King's Rooms, with a saloon (one of the drawing rooms) and a gallery.¹⁷ Loughton Hall at this point had been owned by Miss Ann Whitaker (c.1746-1826), a wealthy woman who spent more time in her London house, and who apparently maintained Loughton in 'exactly the state it was in Captain Wroth's time.'¹⁸ Captain Wroth is presumably John Wroth IV (d. 1718), whose wife Elizabeth died in 1738 at which point the house was inherited by their cousin William, 3rd Earl of Rochford. The 4th Earl of Rochford sold the Loughton estate in 1745. This rather circuitous route around later owners of Loughton suggests that no significant alterations were made to the house during the eighteenth century, despite the break in ownership with the sale in 1745.

¹⁶ Waller, "Old Loughton Hall"¹⁹ citing [The National Archives] Chancery Proceedings, Hamilton , 645, Answer of J. Wroth, July 1,1709. Online: <http://www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/portal/p/Archive/s/008/o/0019> (accessed 25 February 2016).

¹⁷ "Loughton: Manors" *Essex*, 118-121. British History Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15597> (accessed 15 August 2014).

¹⁸ W. Waller, "An extinct county family: Wroth of Loughton Hall III", *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, New Series vol. 9 (1906) 1-14, 14 ; Ann Whitaker may also have been well educated and a book collector, like her companion Rebekah Bliss, Keri Davis "Rebekah Bliss: collector of William Blake and Oriental books," in *The Reception of Blake in the Orient*, S. Clark and M. Suzuki eds, (London and New York: Continuum, 2006) 41-43.

This 1612 phase of the house offered the standard rooms for an established gentry family, centred on the great hall, with up to date reception rooms and a best bedchamber apartment on the upper floor. Family visits seem to have used Durrants for additional accommodation. Sir Robert was then permitted to buy the manor outright, in 1613, subject to manorial payments.¹⁹ The tone of the 1612 survey suggests a completed project. However, it is possible that further work was done to the house, if a post-fire newspaper report of dates of 1616 on lead rainwater heads is correct.²⁰ As Robert died in 1614, any further work is Wroth's. 1616 is also the year of her infant son's death, but Wroth continued to have the use of the house and Loughton estate through her life.

So far, the evidence provides only a general sense of Loughton Hall, little more than can be inferred from the Wroth's courtier life. However, it is possible to assess Loughton in relation to other houses of the gentry and nobility, and to gain a better sense of its probable architectural form in the seventeenth century. Late seventeenth-century Hearth Tax evidence offers a means of comparing Loughton with other houses. Tax returns noted the number of individual hearths for each property, and can allow a rough ranking by size for the principal houses. This source is used by social and economic historians, interested in evaluating regional patterns of relative household wealth, but has been little used by architectural historians. The complexities of how the tax was assessed and collected, and the partial survival of records, mean that the returns offer snapshots of groups and localities, rather than

¹⁹ Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 142-3.

²⁰ 'Destruction of Loughton Hall, Essex, by fire' *The Essex Standard, and Colchester, Chelmsford, Maldon, Harwich, and General County Advertiser* (Colchester, England), Friday, December 23, 1836; Issue 312. *19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II*. Online: SOURCE (accessed 25 February 2016).

a comprehensive way to track individual prosperity. However, it is possible to relate the number of hearths in a house to broad status groups: thus a gentleman with a modest estate might be represented by a 10 hearth house, a baronet might appear in a 20 hearth house. Above 30 hearths, the established landed families, not all of whom were of the nobility, held the largest houses in each county. In 1662 Loughton was taxed for 35 hearths, in a regional collection that included a group of gentry houses. Within this group, Loughton was the second largest of seven.²¹ Taken in isolation, this is not a particularly useful insight, but analysed at county level, it becomes more powerful.

In Wroth's home county of Kent, a total of 85 households with 20 or more hearths has been identified. A further 500 households in Kent had between 10 and 19 hearths, and the majority of the population managed with one or two hearths, to give some indication of how the elite compare to the majority.²² The biggest houses included Penshurst Place, which appears (in the name of the Earl of Leicester) in two parishes, at 21 hearths and a further 40 hearths in Hildenborough, an administrative split which illustrates the cumbersome and archaic system of land division that made collection of the tax so difficult. Surrenden, the Jacobean house of Sir Edward Dering, famous for his collection of playbooks, including a manuscript copy of Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*, was of two storeys with attic rooms

²¹ W. R. Powell, "Analysis of hearth tax assessments: Ongar Hundred, 1662, 1670 and 1674," in *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 4: Ongar Hundred* (1956), 303-310 (thereafter *Essex*) British History Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=15723&strquery=Loughton> (accessed 15 August 2014).

²² D. Harrington, S. Pearson, and S. Rose, *Kent Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1664*, volume II of the British Record Society Hearth Tax Series (Kent Archaeological Society vol. 29, 2000). xxxiv-xl.

like Loughton, taxed for 34 hearths.²³ The Elizabethan/Jacobean house Scotts Hall, also of two storeys and attic rooms had 36 hearths although it was demolished in 1808 it is recorded in a plan, which shows the half-H front to have been 120 feet wide.²⁴ Essex presents a similar picture, using the 1670 Hearth Tax returns, with 97 households taxed for 20 or more hearths²⁵. All of these houses were built externally of brick, even if timber frames were used

²³Of this group of substantial houses, all listed in *Kent Hearth Tax*, ed. D. Harrington, S. Pearson and S. Rose, a few survive and visual records of others can be traced: Knole, the great house of the Earls of Dorset (85 hearths), Cobham Hall (51 hearths); Eastwell Park, home of the Finch family, Earls of Winchelsea (47 hearths); Lullingstone Castle (40 hearths); Charlton House, Greenwich (40 hearths); Boughton Place, Boughton Malherbe (37 hearths) and the moated Leeds Castle (37 hearths). For Surrenden, see online http://www.lostheritage.org.uk/houses/lh_kent_surrendering_info_gallery.html (accessed 26 February 2016).

²⁴ Also listed in D. Harrington, S. Pearson, and S. Rose, *Kent Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1664*, volume II of the British Record Society Hearth Tax Series (Kent Archaeological Society vol. 29, 2000).

²⁵ C. Ferguson, C. Thornton, and A. Wareham, *Essex Hearth Tax Return Michaelmas 1670*, volume VIII of the British Record Society Hearth Tax Series, (London, British Record Society, 2012). Audley End at Saffron Waldon, the leading house in the county, is omitted from the 1670 record but included are Leez (Leighs) Priory; St Osyth's Priory (76 hearths); the old house at Wanstead (43 hearths), Ingatestone Hall (30 hearths) and Albyns, a courtyard house completed by 1620 at Stapleford Abbots (40 hearths), a closer parallel for Loughton Hall. See "Plate 93: Stapleford Abbots, Albyns," in *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Essex, Volume 2, Central and South west* (London, Royal Commission on

internally, and we should not be misled by the number of trees required for Loughton's refurbishment in the 1602 survey: elite houses adopted brick much earlier than prosperous farmers could, in counties such as Essex without good building stone.

Working with Hearth Tax evidence has produced valuable comparisons for the likely scale of Loughton Hall, in the decades after Wroth's death, and the probable form of a plan able to accommodate the number of rooms implied by the hearths. Unheated rooms could be plentiful, so a Hearth Tax return is not evidence for the absolute number of rooms (as is clear when a contemporary household inventory is available to read alongside the Hearth Tax). A visitor to Loughton after 1616 would be expecting to see a substantial brick house, probably with an entrance forecourt, and of either a half H-plan or a complete courtyard plan, with additional service blocks, stables and outhouses.

III. Loughton Hall after Wroth

The Hearth Tax returns for Loughton can be tracked at three points: 1662, 1670 and 1674, and unusually the number of hearths is smaller each time, going from 35, to 27 and then 23 hearths. This is more than an adjustment of a wrong return, it must represent a substantial reduction in the fabric of the building. A loss of twelve hearths is the equivalent of an acceptable gentleman's house in scale. This demolition occurs before the first visual records of the house, with consequences for their interpretation as records of Wroth's house. Before turning to the nineteenth-century views of the house, there is some further evidence for the reduced form of the house.

Historical Monuments (England), 1921), 93. Online: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rhme/essex/vol2/plate-93> and following (accessed 26 February 2016).

Loughton parish was surveyed in 1739, and the surviving copy of the survey map shows the house in outline plan, facing a trapezoidal forecourt, with its associated outbuildings and the farm behind it. I have redrawn the house outline and based on a measurement for the principal front derived from later map evidence, I conclude that Loughton Hall was 100 feet wide (30m) [Figure 3]. For comparison, Ham House, Surrey, completed by 1610 for Sir Thomas Vavasour, is c.115 feet wide (35m), an H-plan house. After the old house burnt down in 1836, the site remained undisturbed until the present house was built in 1876. The first ‘modern’ map, the work of the national Ordnance Survey, fortunately recorded the area in detail before the replacement house, and showed the footprint of the burnt house, including the irregular north façade, based on the old cellars, with the terrace and garden steps. This corroborates the 1739 survey, and is presented in Figure 4 in solid outline (omitting the cellar-less wings to the east and north-east), with the site of the old church of St Nicholas (also later rebuilt) in outline.²⁶ A wall that survives today follows an inverted L-shaped course from the church to the house. This wall is dated to c.1600 and also shown on the 1739 survey [Figure 4]. This is the archaeological evidence, the physical remains, of the old house and a wall contemporary with Wroth’s occupancy. This red brick wall is substantial, at nearly 3m high, in the characteristic style of early modern boundary walls with a coping to shed water, and a decorative band of bricks at an angle, making a

²⁶ Images of the old church held by Essex Record Office, Black and white print: S.E.

Loughton Church, 17 July 1821 Drawing by George Buckler I/Mb 228/1/14. Available as digitised images via online catalogue.

dogtooth pattern.²⁷ The same style survives at Penshurst Place and at Ham House. The survival of this wall and its relationship to the burnt house ties the evidence together for the scale, form and position of Wroth's Loughton Hall.

Loughton Hall was clearly bigger in the early sixteenth century than it was when it was sketched in the early nineteenth century. Drawing all this evidence together, it is possible to reconstruct this house back to its full 37 hearth extent before the 1660s. Although the entrance front of the house has a symmetrical plan, of two short wings, it is now clear that the north front was irregular, and there was a long service wing to the east, which contained the kitchen, servants' hall and bedrooms for servants in 1836. Newspaper accounts of the disastrous fire called the house 'an irregular Elizabethan pile', which is borne out by the block plan in Figure 3 (although the same reports were untroubled by the Jacobean date of 1616 on the rain hoppers). The news accounts alleged that the house had fifty rooms, which is probably not greatly exaggerated for the reduced 23 hearth house, when cellars, attics and unheated passages are included.²⁸ One possibility is that the gatehouse noted in the 1602 survey was demolished, as a means of modernizing the approach to the house, and the

²⁷ Historic England, national heritage list, Wall of St Nicholas's Churchyard list entry number 1111178. Online: <http://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1111178> (accessed 29 October 2015).

²⁸ "Destruction of Loughton-Hall, Essex, by Fire." *Times* [London, England] 12 December, 1836: 3. *The Times Digital Archive*. Online: <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ttda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=CS52062092&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> (accessed 4 February 2016).

irregular plan of the north façade represents the remains of the sixteenth-century courtyard house, with the 1616 additions to the south.

IV. Loughton Hall's appearance

Shortly before its fiery destruction in 1836, Loughton Hall was painted and drawn in three known images. This discussion has avoided them until this point, because they are not easy sources to use as a starting point for the house of 1616. The image probably made by the professional artist and architect John Chessell Buckler was drawn in 1821.²⁹ It is in the topographical tradition, capturing the atmosphere of the old house in its secluded, tree-shaded setting, glimpsed from the country lane in passing. It shows the entrance front and the service wing to the east, with only the top of the spire of St Nicholas's church emerging from the trees on the right [Figure 5].

The front of the house is two storeys high, with attic (dormer) windows. The roofline is otherwise unbroken, and shows four broad chimney stacks with a further stack to the rear. The house has two short wings, each covered with a pitched gabled roof. The façade is centred on a shaped gable emerging from a continuous parapet, which has two circular niches. Hidden from view, but visible in the two other sketches, is a central round-headed niche on the upper floor, over the classical door surround which has a broken pediment. The window openings are tall and narrow, and filled with later sashes. The wing set back to the right, topped by the bell turret, accords with the sixteenth-century origins of the house. The challenge is to deconstruct the layers of history captured by Buckler, and to return to the house Wroth knew.

²⁹ Essex Record Office I/Mb 228/1/21. Several members of the Buckler family produced topographical drawings, but the current attribution to George Buckler is problematic as he would have been only 11 years old at the time. J.C Buckler (1793-1894) is more probable.

The most distinctive style feature is the use of pairs of columns to signal the corners of the wings and the centre of the house. Although classical orders were used in this fashion on c.1600 houses, signalling an awareness of the emerging Italian style (to be found on Inigo Jones's Banqueting House, Whitehall, London after 1618), their presence at Loughton is seriously at odds with the otherwise solidly Jacobean language of the parapet. Exterior columns were noted in 1790, "several stone pillars of the Grecian [Doric] order attached to the front," which refutes a post-fire account that the columns were added c. 1830 as part of a major refurbishment.³⁰ The preferred solution to this puzzle is to consider them as part of a phase of alterations, hinted at in later accounts as occurring in the time of Queen Anne (1702-14). These superimposed orders can be interpreted as an expression of the English Baroque, taken together with the addition of the stone niche and the Baroque nature of the doorcase with the swan-necked pediment (visible in the other two sketches). Giving Loughton Hall a Baroque phase also sits well with the elaborate iron gates, visible in Buckler's view, that were dated by the presence of John and Elizabeth Wroth's initials to their tenure (1708-18). If this c.1710 phase is stripped away, the general appearance of this half-H front of the house still sets some puzzles.

³⁰ Waller, "Extinct county family" 11; "Destruction of Loughton Hall, Essex, by fire" *The Essex Standard, and Colchester, Chelmsford, Maldon, Harwich, and General County Advertiser* (Colchester, England), Friday, December 23, 1836; Issue 312. *19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II*. Online:

<http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/dvnw/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=DVNW&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&docId=R3210318658&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> (accessed 25 February 2016).

There are no surviving windows of c.1600 in any of the sketches, but many houses had their windows significantly remodelled during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Vertical sashes began to replace mullion and transomed casement windows in England from the 1670s. The roof and chimneys are more challenging for a c.1600 date, as they are better compared to the new classical houses being built from the 1630s, and the wider adoption of these broad stacks and hipped roofs after the 1660s. A major reconstruction of the roofline needs to be considered, perhaps as part of the c.1710 phase suggested for the addition of the columns.

What remains of the façade from Wroth's time are the parapet and central gable, firmly Jacobean, a hybrid of northern European late Gothic and new Italian style features. The wings probably had similar gables of brick, which were demolished when the new hipped roof was constructed. Wroth's Loughton had a much more conventional Jacobean appearance if the gables are multiplied, retaining the attic windows, to give a conventional division of the recessed front into three gables [Figure 6]. Wroth's aunt and mentor, Mary Sidney Herbert, Dowager Countess of Pembroke, was also engaged in building her new house at Houghton Conquest, Bedfordshire, from 1615.³¹ This house, surviving as ruins, does have a secure attribution to Inigo Jones, who contributed the Serlian centrepieces on each façade: superimposed columns, niches, and a tripartite rhythm as found on the facades of classical churches in sixteenth-century Rome. Loughton lacks this classical detail, but it does

³¹ M. Hannay, " 'Your Vertuous and Learned Aunt': the Countess of Pembroke as a mentor to Lady Wroth," in N. Miller and G. Waller eds *Reading Mary Wroth: Representing Alternatives in Early Modern England*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991) 15-34.

share a characteristic gable design with Houghton Conquest, that is probably derived from the second architect, John Thorpe, who worked on the Countess's house.³²

The final hint to be gleaned from the nineteenth-century newspaper accounts concerns the interiors. By the time of the fire, Mr Maitland had spent a considerable amount on the house, enriching the interiors with "Ionic and Corinthian orders, richly gilded at the capitals". He seems to have been inspired by earlier interiors in the house, which were attributed to Inigo Jones and included the ceiling of the inner (or marble) hall and the stone staircase.³³ Inigo Jones's reputation was re-established during the eighteenth century, as the pioneer who showed English designers how to use the Italian style, and who was thus central to the

³² Houghton Conquest is depicted before its partial demolition in a print showing Loughton-style gables immediately next to the elaborate centrepiece "Prospect of Houghton Park House in Bedfordshire" in Henry Boswell, *Picturesque Views of the Antiquities of England & Wales* (London: Alex. Hogg, 1786). Online: http://virtual-library.culturalservices.net/webingres/bedfordshire/vlib/0.digitised_resources/amphill_houghton_house.htm (accessed 8 April 2016). Description of Houghton House, English Heritage Online: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/houghton-house/history/description/> (accessed 8 April 2016).

³³ "Destruction of Loughton Hall, Essex, by fire" *The Essex Standard, and Colchester, Chelmsford, Maldon, Harwich, and General County Advertiser* (Colchester, England), Friday, December 23, 1836; Issue 312. *19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part II*. Online: <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/dvnw/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=DVNW&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&docId=R3210318658&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> (accessed 25 February 2016).

Palladian revival of the 1720s. Attributions to his work in English country houses were frequent but rarely substantiated, and this is the case for Loughton. It is not impossible that a Baroque interior was mistaken for an earlier classical style. Court styles were recorded by the young John Smythson on his first visit to London, via Theobalds, in 1618. The drawings he produced show a rich mixture of hybrid late Gothic and classical motifs, with the occasional use of the Italian style from the sixteenth-century architectural treatises by Sebastiano Serlio.³⁴ If Jones did contribute to the design of the interiors, by 1616 his work was still strongly in the northern Renaissance tradition.

V. Reputations

Loughton and Wroth have had separate trajectories since Wroth's death in 1651, Loughton achieving some reputation as a place allegedly touched by the star architect of English architectural history (and thus to be mourned for its destruction), Wroth becoming disengaged from the place where she spent nearly five decades shaping an independent life. There is a hint in the post-fire notices that the Loughton library collection represented the Wroth family as well as the later owners, but if Wroth's own papers were included, they were unremarked.³⁵ Until Margaret Hannay's pursuit of Wroth's life in the round, Loughton and Wroth were not strongly associated. In the light of the present suggestion for reconstructing Loughton Hall, its conventional Jacobean appearance might be somewhat underwhelming. However, as the "fair house... with furniture fit for a Court" established its place in the new triad with Penshurst Place and Baynards Castle, for extended family visits and royal visitors,

³⁴ M. Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), discussing Robert's son John, 247-51.

³⁵ Waller, "Extinct county family" 14.

it seems clear that it was brought up to the standard of hospitality required by Wroth's courtier education. Hannay has pointed to Wroth's taste for gorgeous clothes, in contrast to her husband's family Puritan modes; Wroth's self-presentation can also be a guide to her expectations about the nature of display in domestic interiors.³⁶

Penshurst Place, the Sidney family seat since 1552, has acquired its own reputation as a seat of hospitality, via Ben Jonson's approbation of its apparently modest appearance and orderly household. The great fortified house was modest only in its lack of architectural claims to dazzling height and daring quantities of window glass: the most recent decades of elite housebuilding had produced "Hardwick Hall, more glass than wall" for Bess of Hardwick and the fairy-tale skyline of Burghley House, Lincolnshire, the creation of William Cecil. Penshurst was not left in its medieval state, but was steadily adapted to early modern courtier requirements: Wroth's childhood was punctuated by her parents' building campaigns. Her childhood experience offered a model for the desire to build, and her mother's involvement in managing the works during Robert's lengthy absences (including entrepreneurial sales of stone for Sir Robert Cecil's building projects) showed what was required.³⁷

'Lost' Loughton is also a product of lost conversations, which can only be imagined between Wroth and her circle. Surely the royal interest in refashioning Theobalds must have been a topic of lively interest, and the modest works at Loughton would have served as an amusing contrast. The improvements to Penshurst continued after she left for Loughton, and Mary Sidney Herbert began her new house in Bedfordshire, but nothing of these family discussions survives in the archive of letters. Architecture is as much a discourse as a design

³⁶ M. Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 120.

³⁷ S. West, "Penshurst Place and Leicester House" in *ARC Volume 1: Lives*, 281-96.

practice, and Wroth's abilities must have extended to the shared language of design that created the visual and material world of the Court. This emerging classical discourse is strongly represented through the masques, with temporary architecture, music, costume and text. The extended Sidney family, with their roles at Court, offered the young adult Wroth a saturated experience of a rich visual culture, and she embraced the possibilities.