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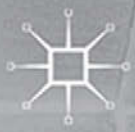
LOST MANSIONS

Essays on the Destruction of the Country House

Edited by

James Raven



Lost Mansions

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Edited by

James Raven

Professor of Modern History, University of Essex, UK

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the founding report on the Marks Hall Mansion Re-Creation Project. Two particular proto-archaeologists, William and Rupert Raven, proved volubly supportive from the beginning, and it was they who helped push the geophys machine that inaugurated the archaeological dig for the foundations of the lost house at Marks Hall.

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Notes on Contributors

Ian d'Alton is the author of *Protestant Society and Politics in Cork*, *1812–1844* (1980), and of numerous papers, chapters in books and essays on southern Irish Protestantism from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. A recipient of the Royal Historical Society's Alexander Prize in 1972, he was an editorial advisor and contributor to the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009). His other scholarly interests are literary (principally the works of the Anglo-Irish writers Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane and Iris Murdoch) and the study of French art medals, 1870–1935. In 2011–2012, he was an honorary Senior Research Fellow in the School of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool, and in 2014 a visiting fellow at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.

Michael Davis is an independent author and architectural writer. His published books include *Scots Baronial* (1997), a study of Scots Baronial mansions and of recent castle restorations in the West of Scotland, and *The Castles and Mansions of Ayrshire* (1991). His detailed investigation of *The Scottish Castle Restoration Debate* is forthcoming and his current research concerns a series of Scottish conservation *causes célèbres*. He has contributed numerous articles and essays to conferences and books, including *The Georgian Villa* (1996) and *Restoring Scotland's Castles* (2001). In a varied career, he has lectured, run a Building Preservation Trust and served as a Group Chair for the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland.

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Terence Dooley is Associate Professor of History and Director of the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Landed Estates at Maynooth University. He is the author of several books relating to Irish country houses and landed estates including *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland* (2001) and *'The Land for the People': The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (2007). With Christopher Ridgway, he edited *The Irish Country House: Its Past, Present and Future* (2011). His most recent book is *The Decline and Fall of the Dukes of Leinster, 1872–1948: Love, War, Debt and Madness* (2014).

James Raven is Professor of Modern History and Director of the Centre for Bibliographical History at the University of Essex and a Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. His books include *Bookscape: Geographies of Printing and Publishing in London before 1800* (2014); *Publishing Business in Eighteenth-Century England* (2014); *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450–1850* (2007); *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Book Collections since Antiquity* (2004), and *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (2002). He is a Trustee of the Marks Hall Estate, Essex and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

Jon Stobart is Professor of History at the University of Northampton. His research interests encompass various aspects of retailing, consumption and material culture in eighteenth-century England. Recent publications include *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade,* co-edited with Ilja Van Damme (2010), *Sugar and Spice: Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650–1830* (2013) and a collection of essays co-edited with Bruno Blondé on the textiles trade, *Selling Textiles in the Long Eighteenth Century: Comparative Perspectives from Western Europe* (2014). He is working on a major study of consumption and the English eighteenth-century country house, exploring the complex relationships between supply networks, material culture, everyday life and elite identity.

Barbara Wood is a regional curator for the National Trust in South West England. Originally an archaeologist, she has held a variety of posts in national, local and community museums, taught museum studies and archaeology, and led developmental projects in museums, heritage and

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arts. She has a strong interest in material culture, and much of her work has focused on collections and interpretation. She is particularly interested in issues of authenticity and in the discourse which takes place between specialists, curators and visitors within the context of museums and historic sites.

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1
Introduction

James Raven

Abstract: *The opening essay introduces the history of demolished and otherwise lost country houses in Britain and Ireland in the twentieth century, exploring controversies caused by the campaigns to save abandoned great houses. Most contemporary discussions of country house loss arise from an assumption that saving these places is an intrinsic good, but such presentations can be misleading and one-sided. Demolished houses are not neutral subjects: their decline has aroused passions for those who lament the loss of beauty (where beauty rather than incongruity has indeed been lost) and for those who mistakenly lament a halcyon lost age of social order and beneficence. This introduction suggests that we need not mourn the loss of all lost country houses. Rather, we should attempt to set the realities and representations of country house destruction within broad historical perspectives. The essays that follow encompass a range of public, cultural and political actions and attitudes that open a window upon wider debates and suppositions.*

Raven, James, ed. *Lost Mansions: Essays on the Destruction of the Country House*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. DOI: 10.1057/9781137520777.0005.

At least one in six of all the great country houses existing in Britain and Ireland in 1900 had been demolished by 2000. Over 1,200 English, 400 Scottish and 300 Irish country houses have been recorded as lost during the twentieth century. This tally is certainly an underestimate and it does not include the destruction of lesser country houses and manors (nor indeed the lost great town houses of the wealthy and the aristocracy). The lost houses considered in these roll-calls were major establishments set in substantial estates. In many cases, ailing houses and estates were paralyzed less by hostility than by indifference. The destruction of great houses accelerated after the First World War, but the 1950s and 1960s were also decades of particular loss. In Scotland, 200 of the mansions destroyed in the twentieth century were demolished after 1945. Included in the destruction were works by Robert Adam, including Balbardie House and the monumental Hamilton Palace. One firm, Charles Brand of Dundee, demolished at least 56 country houses in Scotland in the 20 years between 1945 and 1965.

Besides physical loss are other types of loss. Where great houses still stand, survival is often partial and circumscribed. Hundreds of grand houses have been so radically reconfigured that they are no longer houses at all. Many transformed houses, performing valuable as well as incongruous roles, retain little surrounding land of their own. Such loss could be even more hidden than the ostentatious pulling down. Giving up a house was often less public and might be more subversive than blowing it up. When Rosneath Castle was blown apart in 1961, images proved sensational (Figure 1.1). Designed by the London-based architect Joseph Bonomi in 1809, this neo-classical mansion had served as a military hospital during the First World War, home to Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise until her death in 1939, and as headquarters for the Rosneath Naval Base in the Second World War. By contrast, the baroque Wentworth Woodhouse near Rotherham, apparently the largest private house in Britain, remains virtually intact (unlike its surrounding estate) but became the focus of bitter and complex struggles over its use, in which failure, recrimination and private dealing were and are recurrent. A double set of death duties and the nationalization of the estate's own coal mines reduced the wealth of its owners, the Fitzwilliam family, who sold off most of the contents of the house.

This volume debates reactions to the destruction of great houses in modern Britain and Ireland, asking questions about the causes of their loss, their representation at the time of their disappearance and the

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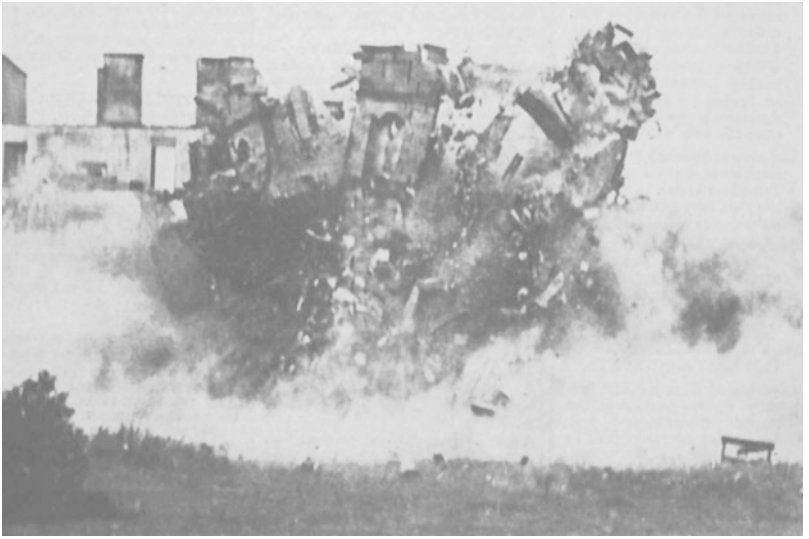

FIGURE 1 *Demolition of Rosneath Castle, Argyll and Bute, in 1961, by 220lbs of gelignite*

Source: Reproduced by kind permission of the Helensburgh Heritage Trust.

implications of current resurgent interest in great estates. What was and is the place of the great house in local society and politics, and how does this relate to popular romances that stretch from Brideshead to Downton? Ultimately, is there anything to mourn about the loss of so many of these enormous houses, when in many respects society is better off without them? At issue is the nature of 'heritage', the relevance of conservation, and our understanding of proprietorship and estate management in times of social, political and economic transformation.

Contours and causes of loss

Given that many great houses do survive, the most obvious question is what was it that doomed the rest? The question is also historic in that it is now far more difficult to destroy a great house than it was in the 1950s or even the 1970s. It was not until the Town and Country Planning Act of 1968 forced owners to seek permission to demolish listed buildings that the wave of demolitions finally came to an end.

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The fount of memorialisation is *Country Life* which has featured an article on the history of a country house in every issue since its launch in 1897. In its first issue of 1905 *Country Life* lamented the loss by fire, 12 years earlier, of Uffington House, a fine Restoration house in Lincolnshire and seat of the Earl of Lindsey. *Country Life* commented that it seemed as if each day brought news of the loss of one of those 'splendid houses of old England, which, though private possessions, are truly part of the national heritage'. Two years before the beginning of the First World War, in May 1912, the magazine carried a seemingly unremarkable advertisement: the roofing balustrade and urns from the roof of Trentham Hall, Staffordshire, could be purchased for £200.[1] Rebuilt on a grand scale in the 1830s for the second Duke of Sutherland, Britain's greatest landowner, Trentham Hall was abandoned by the fourth Duke in 1906. Trentham was offered to the county council, but no agreement was reached, and the mansion was demolished in 1911.

The last two unprotected and demolished houses illustrated in *Country Life* both went in 1972. In Yorkshire, Warter Hall (renamed Warter Priory) comprised a massive, 100-room, unappealing pile rebuilt (among others) by Charles Wilson, a Hull shipping magnate, who was created Lord Nunburnholme in 1906. Detmar Blow's charismatic Arts and Crafts' Little Ridge, Wiltshire, built in 1904 and incongruously extended in the 1920s, remained unlisted when it was pulled down in 1972. Many of the houses demolished in the 1960s and early 1970s had been empty and decaying for years, but as Giles Worsley noted, 'what is surprising today is how houses in good repair of the importance of Eaton Hall [Cheshire] or Herriard Park [Hampshire] could be demolished with little concern, even from the pundits at *Country Life*'.[2]

In the Britain and Ireland of the early twenty-first century, protection and designation orders are not only in place but cannot be ignored as they once were. Buildings are listed, ancient monuments are scheduled, wrecks are protected, and battlefields, gardens and parks are registered. The enactment of these, however, has a long and convoluted history. Although the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882 gave protection to a limited number of 'ancient monuments', property-owning MPs remained reluctant to restrict what owners of occupied (or even unoccupied) buildings might do with their property. The next Ancient Monuments Protection Act, of 1900, related only to unoccupied properties and imposed no constraints on owners' freedom to do what they liked with their buildings. It was not until the early 1930s (as noted in

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Chapter 7 later) that legislation began to protect uninhabited houses. Damage to buildings by bombing during the Second World War prompted the first listing of buildings deemed to be of architectural merit and was the origin of the current Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The early listings, however, often proved ineffective.

The current listing process developed from the wartime system and subsequent provisions of the two Town and Country Planning Acts of 1947, one covering England and Wales, and the other concerned with Scotland. Listing began notably later in Northern Ireland, with the first provision for listing contained in the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order of 1972, followed by the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order of 1991. In England and Wales, the current authority for listing is granted to the Secretary of State by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990. Listed buildings in danger of decay are listed on the Heritage at Risk Register of English Heritage. The statutory bodies maintaining the lists are English Heritage, Cadw (The Historic Environment Service of the Welsh Government), Historic Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. In the Republic of Ireland buildings are surveyed for the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage in accordance with the country's obligations under the Granada Convention (and where the preferred term in Ireland is 'protected structure').

In all parts of the British Isles and Ireland, listings do not absolutely prohibit change. Rather, listings identify buildings with exceptional architectural or historic special interest in advance of any planning stage which may decide a building's future. All buildings built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed, as are most of those built between 1700 and 1840. English heritage also now recognises 19,717 scheduled ancient monuments, 1,601 registered historic parks and gardens, 9,080 conservation areas, 43 registered historic battlefields, 46 designated wrecks and 17 World Heritage Sites. Some 33 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are also designated within England under the provisions of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (and one of which features in Chapter 5 later in connection to the reclaimed Parke House in Devon). Of many examples of great houses saved by this legislation at the end of the last century is Tyntesfield, the remarkable mansion in north Somerset, rebuilt by the guano merchant William Gibbs in the 1830s. For many years, the house seemed on the brink of being broken up and its contents sold. In

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2002, the National Trust bought the house with money raised from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and a popular fund-raising campaign. Even if the National Trust had not intervened, however, one thing was always certain. Tyntesfield would not have been demolished.

It is the lateness of this legislative-based listing and protection that explains much about the extent of great house destruction in the twentieth century, but it is not, of course, the originating cause. However dramatic the many demolitions of mansions and the alterations to estates in earlier centuries, the predicament for country houses in Britain and Ireland in the twentieth century was unparalleled in scale. Country houses offered visibility to the power of landownership which extended from local power and prestige to influence at Westminster. Political reform, however, ensured that county councils replaced many of the powers exercised by compliant magistrates (some themselves owners of great houses and estates) and the power of the country estates was effectively eclipsed by a more representative parliament. By the outbreak of the First World War, most landowners had accepted their reduced position and, with less immediate realisation perhaps, a radical change in the role of the country house. As Worsley puts it, 'no longer powerhouses, these were now just family homes. Where scale and opulence had once gone hand in hand with political influence, by 1918 large houses just seemed extravagant'.

Examples of overextension followed by desperate retrenchment are legion. Typically, when fire partly destroyed the Duke of Newcastle's Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire in 1879, it was rebuilt even more monumentally. By 1908, however, the Duke had retired to live in the suburban comfort of Forest Lawn near Windsor. His heir, the Earl of Lincoln, demolished Clumber in 1938, planning to build a more convenient house on a new site, but was frustrated by the outbreak of war and eventually sold the estate. Many wealthy families owned more than one great property, encouraging the ruthless abandonment of surplus and oversized houses. The 1883 edition of *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage* listed 167 peers and 99 baronets with 2 or more country houses. The Honywoods of Marks Hall in Essex, considered in the final essay in this volume, owned three massive mansions. No life on the road beckoned for the Duke of Sutherland when he demolished his overbearing Trentham Hall: he still owned Lilleshall, Shropshire and five other houses in Scotland. Many secondary estates had brought political influence in their counties, but such value diminished in the twentieth century, just

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as the encumbrance of the further property increased. The Dukes of Northumberland, for example, owned Alnwick and Keilder Castles in Northumberland, Stanwick Park in Yorkshire, Syon House in Middlesex and Albury House in Surrey. When money had to be raised for death duties after the death of the eighth Duke in 1918, the Stanwick estate, which had been occupied by the dowager duchess and then let after her death, was the logical sacrifice.

The modern troubles for many owners of great houses and estates originated from the agricultural depression of the late 1870s. Land carried less political benefit than in the past, but it also offered a diminishing investment in comparison to stocks and shares. A more urgent sense of crisis arrived after decades of prosperity in which landowners had grown used to comfortable incomes. Many landed families habitually accepted indebtedness, buttressed by the certainty that income continued to meet interest payments. With the collapse of grain prices that followed the farming of the American prairies, however, and then the fall in livestock prices after the invention of refrigeration and fast steamships, rent-rolls and agricultural returns (in peacetime at least) declined until the 1950s. Great landowners disposed of immense acreages during the brief land-price boom after the First World War, to the benefit of tenant farmers and the detriment of many huge and abandoned houses.

Increased taxation proved an impossible further burden for many of these ailing and reduced estates. Death duties and greater income tax ensured the reduction in size of many domains. The estate that was left often proved incapable of supporting a house with large staffs and running costs. The significance of the first death duties, introduced by Sir William Harcourt in his budget of 1894, resided more in signalling future policy intention than in the duties' effectiveness, given that only properties valued over £1 million were subject to the top rate of 8 per cent. Lloyd George's later (and overly complex) Parliament and Finance Acts similarly proved ineffective and were repealed in 1920. In 1940, however, war needs caused the government to raise the maximum rate of death duties from 50 to 65 per cent, raising them again in 1946 and 1949. Although the 1947 Agriculture Act offered greater death-duty relief on agricultural land, the consequence was an even greater temptation to demolish the great house, if indeed the estate could be retained at all. In 1952, *Burke's Landed Gentry* bemoaned a situation in which in 1937 'perhaps a third of the entries were of families which no longer owned land; in the present edition this proportion may have risen to half'. The

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Fitzwilliams at Wentworth Woodhouse were not alone in enduring coal mining beyond the ha-ha. Many landowners, as Giles Worsley ruefully observed, brought it upon themselves, enticed by investment in industrial ventures that brought pits and steelworks to the estates.[3] Not that everyone who sold up was forced to do so either by pressing financial need or the sight of coalmines at the end of the park. Some, like the eleventh Duke of Leeds, did not see why they should take on the responsibilities of being a landowner at a time of financial constraint when, by liquidating his holdings, he might live a very comfortable independent life. So, despite inheriting half a million pounds after tax from his father at the age of 26 in 1927, he put his Hornby Castle estate on the market in 1930. Hornby Castle, save for one gutted wing, was demolished the following year. Along with several other English and Scottish great house owners, the eleventh Duke idled his remaining decades (he died in 1961) on the Riviera. Father-in-law of the notorious gossip-columnist, Nigel Dempster, he served as a prominent but not exceptional advertisement for the rejection and loss of great mansions by their owners.

The 1950s proved the most significant decade of the century for the disappearance – sometimes sensational, sometimes mysterious – of great houses in Britain. In 1955 alone, at least 38 country houses were demolished in England. In the opinion of Worsley, 'these were years of despair after a Socialist Government had made it seem as if the age of the country house was over'.[4] Wartime requisitioning had often interrupted lines of family occupation and left houses damaged beyond affordable repair. Many owners – and many examples will recur in essays in this volume – abandoned ancient homes, particularly when those returning to their ancestral seats were old, had no suitable heirs and were faced by unsurmountable bills and taxes for property that was now not particularly attractive (if it ever had been).

As John Harris recalled of his early adventures scaling the boundary walls of abandoned great houses:

> What is very difficult to understand today is that in the fifties England was a land full of empty decaying houses. Of course, in 1955 aged twenty-four, I little understood the real reasons for demolition. I just lived up to my family motto, 'Up, Over and In', simply enjoying decrepitude and decay. In that dreadful decade of the nineteen fifties 400 houses are documented as demolished; in 1955 one house set on its estate a day was demolished. For me the experience of this destruction culminated in the *Destruction of the Country House* exhibition I organized with Marcus Binney at the V&A in 1974.[5]

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That pioneering exhibition, curated by the V&A's director, Roy Strong, together with Harris and Marcus Binney of *Country Life*, included a 'Hall of Destruction', decorated with falling columns and illustrations of some of the thousand country houses demolished since 1875 and said to be brought down by falling estate incomes, rising costs, death duties and damage caused by government requisitioning during the Second World War.[6] The graphic illustration of the scale of destruction of Britain's built heritage changed public opinion and encouraged moves to protect the country houses that remained, including the formation of the campaigning group, SAVE Britain's Heritage, in 1975, a year that was designated as European Architectural Heritage Year by the Council of Europe. Roy Strong recalled that 'the impact on the public was overwhelming. ... Many was the time I stood in that exhibition watching the tears stream down the visitors' faces as they battled to come to terms with all that had gone'.[7]

The mood change took time to be effective. Notably, within a year of the close of the V&A exhibition, the extraordinary collection of art and furniture at Joseph Paxton's 1852–4 Mentmore Towers was auctioned off. In 1977 the empty building itself was sold to pay taxes following the death, in 1974, of Harry Primrose, sixth Earl of Rosebery (and son of the Prime Minister whose Liberal government introduced the first death duties in 1894). Mentmore, however, still stands, and by the close of the twentieth century demolition was almost never an option for the owners of redundant country houses. As a result, attention turned to the problem of retaining the integrity of houses and their contents. Such concern seemed marginal in the post-war years when the National Trust took on many houses with no or minimal contents or left the contents in the ownership of the family. New quandaries about how to present properties to the public, of what to conserve and of what and how to display, merely reinforced debate about what the loss of other houses represented.

Heritage controversies

The comparative perspective is instructive. In Ireland, hatred is readily explicable. The fall of the houses symbolised the longed-for fall of British presence.[8] In 1944, the Fianna Fail Minister for Lands dismissed Irish 'big houses' as 'tombstones of a departed ascendancy'. These symbols of oppression were 'not structurally sound, have no artistic value and no

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historic interest'.[9] In England, Wales and Scotland, jubilation or simple relief at the removal of symbols of local oppression and of white, patriarchal and landed authority is less obvious but evident nonetheless within broader class, gender and racial politics. Indifference to the loss of aristocratic houses also remains marked among many sections of modern British and Irish society, and notably so among immigrant communities. By contrast, many writers, dramatists, tourist professionals and heritage conservators convey an often facile lament for the loss of the houses. Such reaction invites as much historical interest as the causes of the original destruction. In this respect, the landmark 1974 'Destruction of the Country House' exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum proved a *cause célèbre* not simply because of the fuss about saving houses but because of the opposition it generated to establishment and populist assumptions that all that was lost was invariably good. For the cultural historian Robert Hewison the 'Destruction of the Country House' exhibition appeared to be 'a covert piece of propaganda against the wealth tax and a lament for the disappearance of a genteel way of life'.[10]

Nevertheless, in Britain, the V&A 'Destruction' exhibition did begin to change things. The event captured public opinion, raised political awareness and persuaded the then Labour government to introduce exemption from Capital Transfer Tax on important works of art, outstanding buildings and land. By the end of the year, a further wealth tax was dropped and 'the government adopted an entirely different policy towards heritage property'.[11] According to Ruth Adams, the exhibition brought together powerful parties to direct the future of what was increasingly accepted as 'heritage'. With little resistance, the promoters of the V&A exhibition and their allies shaped political debate and the popular understanding of history, promulgating 'an effective if not always coherent discourse, fashioned from an emotive combination of nostalgia, English nationalism and a (to some extent manufactured) sense of urgency'.[12]

Ten years later, still louder heritage heckling accompanied the 1985–1986 Washington exhibition, 'The Treasure Houses of Britain' which covered 35,000 square feet of the National Gallery in Washington, DC. For David Cannadine, the show epitomised an attitude 'withdrawn, nostalgic and escapist, preferring conservation and development, the country to the town, and the past to the present'. The Washington display showcased the pick of aristocratic collections (albeit those still in Britain, excluding many magnificent items now permanently in US galleries and museums) and ignored the cloying clutter and philistine taste that more

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typified most British great house interiors. More than 100 mansions were then in the care of the National Trust. As Cannadine mused, 'just how many more do we actually need?'[13]

Such a question was rarely asked, let alone answered, when the loss of great houses contributed to a populist and politically loaded nostalgia. Writers and dramatists romanticized the decline and fall of the country house. Vintage depictions were dusted off and repackaged. Granada TV ensured that the lure of Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead persisted for generations and created fertile ground for lesser but even more popular dramas of life behind magnificent facades. Noël Coward's ditty 'The Stately Homes of England' found as much success abroad as at home, and country house fantasies proved valuable exports. Jeeves and Wooster and the Blandings Castle of P G Wodehouse reappear in dramatisations for television in the modern era and batty toffs and ruined and ruinous piles continued to inspire a large number of other light-hearted books and dramas in which comedy and pathos obscure sharper political arguments and agendas. 'Downton Abbey' is the most successful television costume drama since 'Brideshead Revisited', attracting British audiences in excess of 11 million viewers. The British Prime Minster presented its first script to the Premier of China in June 2014.[14] Simon Schama, in a review that echoes David Cannadine's dissection of 'The Treasure Houses of Britain,' dismissed Downton as 'a steaming, silvered tureen of snobbery'. 'Nothing', he wrote, 'beats British television drama for servicing the instincts of cultural necrophilia'.[15]

Today, that value-laden nostalgia seems as prevalent as ever, and partly relates to the changed definition and increased prominence of the term 'heritage'. In the same year as the Washington Brit-fest, Patrick Wright wrote about the political agendas behind the manipulation of the cultural past,[16] an argument amplified in 1987 by Hewison's pessimistic and populist assertion that the British Isles stood in danger of sanitized reduction into a giant historical theme park.[17] Although Wright, Hewison and others identified a conservative and reactionary ideology at work in the production of heritage and the mourning of loss, the Marxist historian Raphael Samuel warned that such an interpretation, focused on a conspiracy engineered by ruling elites, came dangerously close to sneering at popular taste.[18] It was at least clear that 'heritage' was not neutral, even if this is now remembered more by those living when the term underwent its transference from diverse ideas of the inherited to a more generally accepted label for a particular type of historical presentation, encompassing environment, landscape and material

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culture. The first Thatcher government had reinforced that usage in the 'National Heritage' Acts of 1980 and 1983, but as the acceptance became more general, the relativity, politicisation, presentism and ideological contingency of 'heritage' attracted numerous cultural critics.[19]

Broader political change played a further part. What Schama identified in himself as a 'Jacobinical rage against the moth-eaten haughtiness of the toffs' derived from his upbringing in the Britain of the 1950s and 1960s with its succession of prime ministers, Eden, Macmillan and Douglas-Home who had not just attended public school, but the same public school, Eton. This ended in 1964. From then until 1997, every prime minister, Labour or Tory, was state-school educated. Tony Blair, an alumnus of Scotland's most privileged private school, reversed the trend and the upending of meritocracy was confirmed by the recapture of 10 Downing Street by an Etonian in 2010. During a period, therefore, when membership of the National Trust increased from 226,000 (in 1970) to its current 4 million, far-reaching changes in politics and society sustained debate about inequalities of opportunity but also a refamiliarisation with privilege and the origins of wealth (exacerbated, among other things, by the banking and debt crisis which resurrected old contrasts between landed values and allegedly upstart, irresponsible new wealth). The perpetuation of rose-tinted histories and treatments of the great country house are too rarely linked to the continuation of a deferential and hierarchical British society in which, for example, the social apex, the monarchy, has largely maintained its popularity, sustained by injections of celebrity 'younger royals' and popular affection for a long-serving queen. Late-twentieth-century Britain self-indulgently bathed in televisual, filmic and novelistic nostalgia that reinvented a particular tradition of the country house. Even social history led re-enactments of the downstairs labours of the servant class served to reinforce a cosy view of life in service and of the estate. Julian Fellowes's 'Downton Abbey' added a final layer of syrupy melodrama that boosted Britain's exports, demeaned accurate historical representations and secured its author a seat in the Lords.

An idealisation of past family and community values has also buttressed the politicised nostalgia and re-emphasized 'loss'. In the original V&A exhibition, explanatory panels presented great houses set in self-sufficient neighbourly country estates. Films and television sagas further depicted these glories of England in miniature, in terms of lost solidarities and affective communities. In such dramas everyone

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lives and works for the family in the big house, depending on each other to the envy of those unfortunate enough to live beyond the protection of the estate. Some commentators draw wider lessons. According to Miriam Cady, 'the country house is related to the power and might of Britain and her empire [and so] these ruins are reminders of the loss of the country house and perhaps an idealized way of life; but more, the ruins are diagnostic of the loss of power. The sadness ... associated with the ruins of country houses and the feeling, as stated by Prince Charles, that "something went wrong" when Britain began to destroy its own heritage, can be interpreted as feelings of regret, the feeling that more could have been done in the second half of the twentieth-century for the country houses. The ability to wander through the ruins allows visitors to interact with the loss and regret of not being able to save the grand houses that are so indicative of Britain and Britishness'.[20]

In such ways, threat contributes to the definition of heritage. The cultural comfort food of a 'Downton Abbey' or a 'Monarch of the Glen' carries a political undertow in which current perceptions of the imperilled are implicitly contrasted with safe versions of the past. Perceived threats to national identity by immigration or European interference, for example, are transferred to parallel threats to constructed and imagined 'heritage' As Robert Hewison suggested nearly 20 years ago, 'powerful symbols' such as country houses 'appear most significant when they are most in danger' and where the struggle to save them seems against all odds.[21] Hewison was echoing an earlier warning of Patrick Wright, that 'given an entropic view of history, it is axiomatic that "heritage" should be in danger ... that threat defines the heritage as valuable in the first place'.[22]

For the historian investigating the causes and consequences of the destruction of country houses, debates about 'loss' can therefore be misleading and one-sided. Many – probably the great majority – of contemporary discussions of country house loss arise from an assumption that saving these places (however 'saving' might be defined) is an intrinsic good and that their demolition or change of use is bad. The following essays start with the premise that we need not mourn the loss of lost houses. Rather, the contributors to this volume attempt to set the realities and representations of country house destruction within the widest possible historical context. Such histories encompass a range of public, cultural and political actions and attitudes that open a window upon wider debates and assumptions. In the long saga of

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Wentworth Woodhouse, for example, a class battle ensued as opencast mining moved within yards of one side of the house encouraged by the post-Second World War Labour British government, and the exhortations of Manny Shinwell, minister for Fuel and Power, in particular.[23] The National Trust declined an offer from Earl Fitzwilliam to take over Wentworth Woodhouse after the Health Ministry attempted to requisition the house as 'housing for homeless industrial families'. Instead, most of the mansion was leased to the West Riding County Council to house the female teacher-training Lady Mabel College of Physical Education from 1949 to 1979, a college later merged with Sheffield City Polytechnic (now Sheffield Hallam University). The prohibitive cost of maintenance brought the sale of the house in 1989 to a locally born businessman before bankruptcy ensured its repossession by a Swiss bank and its resale in 1998. Wentworth Estates retain the surrounding parkland but the new owner of the mansion has pursued an ambitious restoration project.[24]

The story of crumbling stately homes is, after all, one with resounding political implications. For many commentators, and especially those of conservative inclination or aristocratic lineage, the villains are clear: high taxation and death duties instigated by socialist governments (but as the more discerning also note, continued by Conservative ministers). The pathos is provided by the loss of aristocratic heirs in two world wars. Far too many landed families were forced to sell their estates, leading to a wave of country-house demolitions that could, and should, have been prevented if only the Government had acted sooner. A rather different perspective is offered by those more concerned by the suffering and indignities of the staff 'downstairs' and the possibility and natural justice of upstairs come-uppance. Political campaigning has always been somewhat muted in this direction however, the championing of the servant class in the great house somewhat compromised by the suspicion that the army of retainers in the house and on the estate was implicated in the protection of the old order and had somehow sold out to the class enemy.

Less noticed, in terms of the historical determination of country house loss, is the physical and economic effect of war, the use and damage of great houses in wartime, the economic strains after the First World War and the overextension of estates to absurd levels. Clive Aslet, editor-at-large of *Country Life* recently pointed out that 'History is littered with examples of noble families that have drunk, gambled or otherwise roistered themselves into oblivion. Social mobility, which has allowed new

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people to join the aristocracy, is not an escalator that only goes up'.[25] Aslet is one of many to quote a young and newly de-commissioned Major Denis Healey, addressing the 1945 Labour Party Conference: 'upper classes in every country are selfish, depraved, dissolute and decadent'.

David Cannadine's acclaimed *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* chronicled a complex intersection of burdens and woes befalling the caste, not a few originating in a genetic indisposition to face rejuvenation and reality. The story of such an eclipse, however, also reveals the endurance of many aspects of British aristocratic society and the persistence of the cultural and even political significance of the great country house and estate.[26] Less searching but important and focused studies illuminate different aspects of the fall from grace. John Martin Robinson, for example, has recently examined the wartime requisition of great houses, with limited compass in terms of the numbers of houses considered, but hugely suggestive of the variety of uses and fates experienced by houses appropriated by wartime government. The Public Record Office itself moved to a great house – Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire, where the Duke of Rutland was said to sleep with the national records of which he was now honorary curator. In some cases 'the war did for the house altogether', in other cases, disfigurement from enforced occupation initiated long-term and ineluctable decline.[27] Rosneath, for example, once abandoned by the navy, suffered a mysterious but very damaging fire in 1947, 14 years before its vivid end.

Despite the serious historical studies, much literature on the lost houses of Britain suffers from palpable bias. The late Giles Worsley, author of *England's Lost Houses: From the Archives of Country Life*, was an astute chronicler adept at using an often unique photographic source, but he was also an implicated insider. Worsley's family moved into Hovingham Hall and its 3,000 acres when he was 12, after his father inherited the baronetcy and estate. Worsley always prefers the term 'socialist government' to 'Labour government', and he wears his politics heavily.[28] Other important reflections are given in the 45-house photo-memoir of *The Silent Houses of Britain* by Alexander Creswell, with an introduction by Marcus Binney, and in John Martin Robinson's *Felling the Ancient Oaks: How England Lost Its Great Country Estates*.[29] There are many issues here that will repay future investigation: the timing, extent and political motivation of mid-1930s surveys of great houses in anticipation of wartime use, the perception, national and local, of the estate abandoned by the military after the war, the ineffectiveness of campaigns to save the house in what is generally

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described as an 'exhausted' post-war Britain, and much more besides. The best images remain in the *Country Life* photographic file, the on-line images of English Heritage (*www.viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk*) and above all, the site maintained by Matthew Beckett, 'Lost Heritage: A Memorial to the Lost Country Houses of England'.[30] The site details some 2,000 houses lost during the last 200 years.

My own *entrée* into this romantic and political confusion is personal. My four grandparents, their extremely numerous siblings, and their forebears had been 'in service', indoors and outdoors, to local gentry in rural north Essex and south Suffolk from at least the eighteenth until the mid-twentieth centuries. The men, women and older children of several generations worked in houses and estates, and (pertinently for this volume), one of them, my great great grandfather Raven, started his working life as a gardener at the mid-Essex Marks Hall estate in the 1820s (before he made a run for it and joined the police force). My family had no illusions about the harshness of estate life and its hierarchical and patriarchal community, tempered only by the realization that service as agricultural labourers, housemaids, scullery maids and stable-boys offered local if sometimes volatile employment. The history of that life was also discussed throughout my childhood. There was no need of 'Ancestry' research when the stories of long dead generations were told and retold all the time (even if the sexual servitude accepted by one great uncle as valet and gentleman's gentleman remained undisclosed until recently). There is a test here: would my grandfather gardener have mourned the loss of the house he worked for? Possibly he would have done, if there had been no alternative. Certainly, it is a truism of many studies of female service that alternatives were absent. It is partly on that basis (but also sometimes ignoring that basis), that many claim that the estate provided security, education and a sense of responsibility. Some mourn the passing of the lost house, estate and local (genuine) Nob as part of the social and moral decline of our times. As Lord Fellowes of Downton Abbey writes: 'Britain would be better off if we admired our wealthy heirs as much as our self-made tycoons … the country is now in thrall to a reverse snobbery … when you have been born into a very privileged position, often such people are kinder than the generation that provided the means for that privilege'.[31]

Possibly my great, great grandfather would have mourned the loss of doffing his hat to his betters (including infants), and of not being allowed to woo his wife within the estate but only in certain designated lanes not

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owned by the Master. Possibly my great, great grandmother (married to her husband by permission of the great house) might not have minded that she spent her life (she died in 1894) unable to read or write. Perhaps the couple were happy to start their married life in separate quarters. But then again, perhaps not.

Whatever the social losses and gains, the architectural loss is evident and numerous outstanding and exquisite buildings were bulldozed, blown up or left to fall down. Even here, however, nostalgia obscures the loss of many unsightly piles that were the Victorian and Edwardian equivalent of the current Duke of York's Sunninghill 'Southyork'.[32] Berechurch Hall, Victorian successor to an estate owned by Thomas Lord Audley under Henry VIII, was one such bloated establishment. The estate was home to and resting place of another of my great great grandfathers, and his gravestone, paid for by his master, describes him as 'loyal servant'. Berechurch Hall, with some 80 rooms and stables for 30 horses at its distended peak, stood out as ugly, superfluous and unsustainable. After 1921, the house was unoccupied until war requisitioning in 1939 and then, to little dismay, it was demolished in 1952.[33] That is not to say that the demolition went unreported. In May 1952, on the other side of the world (and presumably in relation to some family ex-pat connections), *The Singapore Free Press* gave front-page coverage to the destruction of the remaining 35 rooms of the 'rambling, ornate Berechurch Hall' where German prisoners of war had lately been kept and which was now to make homeless its legendary ghost 'the woman in white'.[34]

It is also the case, however, that many great houses survived against the odds, often in private hands, and many now flourish as they probably have not done so for a century or more. Today, the gap between rich and poor seems, in some respects, to be greater than ever. The Cameron government exudes wealth and privilege to an extent that would have astonished Harold Wilson and even Margaret Thatcher. Numerous surveys suggest that income inequalities have been greatly increasing. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the poorest tenth of the British population suffered, on average, a fall in real incomes. By contrast, the richest tenth of the population experienced larger proportional rises in their incomes than any other group.[35] Inequality is also more than income inequality. The shocking imbalance in access to wealth and innovation extends to social capital and a moral and cultural inequality that is profound and neglected. An establishment targeted by both left and right has survived and thrived, albeit by the accommodation of the

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mega new rich, including Russian 'oligarchs' of barely credible wealth and taste, stepping in to save houses, estates, islands and grouse moors. Besides this saving of the old, privilege also boasts new loci in which the power of affluence extends in new directions, often leaving behind the abandoned husk of former manifestations: the great houses, estates and households of retainers. New displays of wealth and power operate from different bases, even if they include the creation of a new servant class and in some cases rescue and redefine an ancient seat.

However many demolitions occurred, many country houses still survive, many still in private ownership. *Country Life* photographed about 2,450 English country houses between 1897 and the late 1980s. Of these, 117 have either been demolished or lost important interiors. Seventy-six houses were demolished and their sites abandoned. Eleven have been rebuilt or restored; nine have been severely reduced in size; eight survive as shells; and five have been replaced by new houses. Of the 47 houses published by *Country Life* in its first year (1897), 17 (under a third) continue in private hands more than a century later, 13 owned by the same families. Eleven of the class, or rather snapshot, of 1897 are owned by business institutions and nine by the National Trust. Only five of these forty-seven houses have been demolished, of which two have been replaced by a new house. Regional variation is marked, however. Essex lost nearly a third of its country houses, whereas Norfolk lost one in eight of its houses and Westmorland one in twenty-five. In all, 366 houses were lost out of a total of 2,260, making an average of about one in six. F. M. L. Thompson wrote that 'In 1989 the thousand-year-old land pattern was still in existence, somewhat dented and battered to be sure, but little more battered than it had been fifteen years earlier. It would certainly be unwise to equate the destruction of a pre-1914 country house with the disappearance of the family which had lived in it or the landed estate which supported it'. In 1984, John Martin Robinson recorded over 200 new country houses built by landowners since the Second World War in *The Latest Country Houses* and planning controls prevent the figure from being even higher.

Nevertheless, images of twentieth-century destruction have come to dominate our perception of the loss of the country house, not least, of course, because photography and then film has been with us to record it. By the end of the century, *Country Life* had photographed some 110 English country houses that were subsequently destroyed. It was John Harris, then of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) who

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recited, on a continuous tape recording, the toll of lost houses at the seminal V&A *Destruction of the Country House* exhibition and his voice still resonates. His *No Voice from the Hall* published in 1998 and the companion volume *Echoing Voices*, published in 2002, are both evocative memoirs of decayed, empty and demolished country houses. As Harris noted at a 2013 meeting with the authors of the following essays:

> Some here today may be old enough to have heard my recorded voice tolling out the names of the lost houses, or remember the huge pile of two feet square cubic blocks, each face of which featured a lost country house, towering to the ceiling of the gallery. In the catalogue we showed illustrations of 319 houses demolished within the century 1875 to 1975, when it was reckoned that maybe 800 houses of documented architectural significance were lost.

Such is understood, but the demolished houses are not nor should be neutral or neutered subjects: their decline has aroused passions for those who mourn the loss of beauty (where beauty rather than incongruity has indeed been lost) and for those who mistakenly lament a halcyon lost age of social order and beneficence. Those preserving great houses, intact or ruined, and those writing about or even presenting reconstructions of lost mansions face new and fascinating challenges of interpretation. The essays which follow aim to stir the argument more than the heart.

Notes

1 *Country Life* 4 May 1912.
2 Giles Worsley, *England's Lost Houses: From the Archives of Country Life* (London, 2002), p. 141.
3 I am indebted to the late Giles Worsley for suggesting these examples and commenting on these sections first written for a conference he was to have organised.
4 Worsley, *England's Lost Houses*, p. 21.
5 John Harris, a memoir for the 'Lost Mansions and Country Estate' conference at the University of Essex, 13 July 2013.
6 Roy Strong, Marcus Binney and John Harris, *The Destruction of the Country House, 1875–1975* (London, 1974).
7 Roy Strong, *The Roy Strong Diaries: 1967–1987* (London, 1998), p. 141.
8 See, for example, the comment of a local observer to the ruined Tyrone House, County Galway: 'Ha!' she snorted, 'Sad! Good riddance, more like', in http://roisincure.com/wp/online-exhibitions/tyrone-house-and-the-fall-of-the-st-georges/.

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9 Quoted more fully later, p. 55.
10 Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940* (London, 1997), p. 193.
11 Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (London and New Haven, 1997), p. 407.
12 Ruth Adams, 'The V & A, the destruction of the country house and the creation of 'English Heritage', *Museum & Society*, 11: 1 (March 2013): 1–18.
13 David Cannadine, 'Brideshead re-revisited,' *New York Review of Books* XXXII: 20 (19 December 1985): 17–23, review of 'The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting' National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 3 November 1985 to 16 March 1986.
14 http://www.itv.com/news/update/2014-06-17/downton-script-among-gifts-from-pm-to-chinese-premier/.
15 'No downers in "Downton"', *Newsweek,* 16 January 2012. I am grateful to this volume's anonymous press reader for this reference.
16 Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1985).
17 Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987), p. 31.
18 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), pp. 264–265.
19 Notably David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998); Sara McDowell 'Heritage, Memory and Identity', in Brian Graham and Peter Howard (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Farnham, 2008): 37–53; Nityanand Deckha 'Beyond the Country House: Historic Conservation as Aesthetic Politics' *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7: 4 (2004): 403–423; and Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London, 2006).
20 Miriam Cady, 'The Conservation of Country House Ruins', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Leicester, 2013, f. 236.
21 Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, p. 193.
22 Wright, *Living in an Old Country*, p. 73.
23 Catherine Bailey, *Black Diamonds: The Rise and Fall of an English Dynasty* (London, 2007).
24 M. J. Charlesworth, 'The Wentworths: family and political rivalry in the English landscape garden', *Garden History* 14: 2 (Autumn, 1986): 120–137; *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 11 February 2007, 19–23.
25 *Daily Telegraph*, 24 November 2014, p. 24.
26 David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London and New Haven, 1990); Mandler, *Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*.
27 John Martin Robinson, *Requisitioned: The British Country House in the Second World War* (London, 2014).

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28 Worsley, *England's Lost Houses.*
29 Alexander Creswell, *The Silent Houses of Britain* (London, 1991); J. M. Robinson, *Felling the Ancient Oaks: How England Lost Its Great Country Estates* (London 2012); David Littlejohn, *The Fate of the English Country House* (Oxford, 1997); and cf. Ian Gow, *Scotland's Lost Houses* (London, 2006).
30 http://lh.matthewbeckett.com/lh_complete_list.html.
31 Julian Fellowes, *The Times* 24 November 2011.
32 A pun on the 'Southfork' of the fictional *Dallas*, the house was sold for $15m to a Kazakhstan tycoon in 2007 and abandoned by him.
33 From: 'Outlying parts of the Liberty: West Donyland', *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 9: The Borough of Colchester* (London, 1994), pp. 408–418; http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22022 (accessed 19 November 2011).
34 *The Singapore Free Press* 22 May 1952, p. 1.
35 Inequality measurements are, of course, highly controversial and difficult to predict: see Mike Brewer, Alissa Goodman, Jonathan Shaw and Luke Sibieta, *Poverty and Inequality in Britain: The 2006 Report for the Institute for Fiscal Studies*, esp. p. 60; cf. 'The Poverty Site [UK]' at http://www.poverty.org.uk/09/index.shtml (accessed 2 February 2015).

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Part I
Implications of Loss

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2

Lost Aspects of the Country Estate

Jon Stobart

Abstract: *Complete destruction is just one aspect of loss in the country house. By focusing on the house as a process rather than an end product, this chapter highlights a range of other questions about loss and absence: of material objects, of processes of acquisition and of people. It explores a variety of sources that help us to recover something of these 'lost histories'. More importantly, the essay outlines an approach that gives due weight to the shifting and transient nature of the country house and recognises the role played by 'minor' players, too often hidden behind heroic figures. The result is a richer and more dynamic picture of a great mansion.*

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The complete destruction of country houses is one of the most dramatic and thoroughly recorded means by which important aspects of our history and heritage have been lost. Catastrophic fires catch the newspaper headlines, while exhibitions and publications have uncovered the scale and extent of loss all across the country.[1] Loss, however, is more deceptive and wide ranging than this focus would suggest. Leaving aside the destruction and decay of many gardens and landscape parks, which in many ways are even more vulnerable than the houses around which they are arranged, most houses have lost some part of their fabric over the years. Sometimes this is the product of changes taking place a long time ago. Prodigy houses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were vast, with large amounts of space being set aside to provide accommodation for visiting royalty who brought with them huge retinues of servants.[2] Most were significantly reduced in scale through the long eighteenth century, as this was the only way in which they could be made habitable and practical for their owners, who no longer needed such rambling houses. At Audley End, for example, the outer courtyard was demolished in the 1710s, effectively reducing the house by one half and creating the compact form seen today.[3] More recently, partial loss has occurred because of fires, such as that which struck Castle Howard in November 1940 destroying the famous dome and nearly 20 rooms. Nearly 75 years later, several rooms remain as shells.

Elsewhere, the building survives more or less intact, but only as a shell. Kirby Hall in Northamptonshire forms a notable example, the once-grand interior, marked by widespread use of heraldic imagery, is largely open to the sky. Kirby's decline was gradual, in part resulting from neglect as the eighteenth and early nineteenth century owners focused attention on their principal house, Eastwell Park, emptying the property through a series of public sales.[4] Elsewhere, decline was more abrupt: Sutton Scarsdale Hall being sold by William Arkwright in 1919 and stripped by its new owners, a group of local businessmen, who sold the roof and most of the interiors, leaving just the shell. Less dramatic in some ways are the empty rooms of places like Croome Court where the ceilings and walls are intact, but the contents are dispersed and the decorative schemes often severely compromised. This is still more the case, although in some ways less visibly so, when a house survives but with a radically different function. Institutional owners of all descriptions are notorious for removing or destroying interiors, with schools often the worst culprits. Even with a relatively sympathetic owner, losses

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to decay or modernisation are often severe, as is apparent at Delapre Abbey, used for several decades as the Northamptonshire Record Office. Here only a handful of rooms survive with anything like their original decorative schemes. Conversion into hotels inevitably involves profound changes to the interiors, even though efforts are made to preserve the feel of a country house. It is a process nicely illustrated in Stanford Hall in Leicestershire, which promotes its heritage as the ancestral home of the Cave family, and in the growing Warner's chain, which includes Littlecote House and Thoresby Hall.[5]

More misleading in some respects are interiors that have been recreated in character. These might comprise a modern re-imaging of period schemes, as seen in Kelmarsh Hall in Northamptonshire. Here Nancy Lancaster's reworking of many rooms, including the Great Hall, impacted on the house itself and on early twentieth-century attitudes to the country house style.[6] We might argue that the process of dressing a house for the visiting public also involves loss. As explored in the essays in the second part of this volume, organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage are choosing to present a house in a particular way, thereby making decisions which privilege certain periods, people and narratives at the cost of others. Some stories are told and others are not; some interiors are preserved, assembled and presented; others are fragmented and obscured. But in many ways, this forms part of an ongoing process which has long characterised the country house, with successive owners bringing in new goods and decorative schemes which were overlain onto and at least partially erased the existing material culture. As a palimpsest, even a country house full of 'original' pieces does not retain everything from its past: many things have been lost along the way. These processes of change and loss require further study.

When exploring the country house, we all too easily lose sight of history as a process. The country house is often viewed as a stable end product rather than an ongoing process of change. If we pause for just a short while, then the manifest falseness of this viewpoint is apparent: country houses were alive with people coming and going, bringing in goods, information and ideas. The house itself is the product of generations of accumulation, sorting and disposal. It is a palimpsest created by the lives of successive owners, each with their own tastes, priorities and constraints. If we focus on these processes and think about the country house as a nexus of flows of goods, people and ideas – that is as process than product – then we open up a range of different

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questions about loss and absence. Taking this approach, the following discussion explores three related ideas, illustrating each with reference to a selection of country houses, mostly in the English Midlands. The first relates to material objects and our tendency to focus on the things that survive: how do we recover items that have gone and what might this tell us about the country house? The second centres attention on the lost processes of acquiring goods: what do these tell us about the economic and cultural contexts in which the country house was situated? The third focuses on the people who lay at the heart of these processes, and in particular on those individuals too often lost from our narratives of change: what can the actions of more 'minor' figures tell us about the country house?

Lost histories: material culture

The first key issue which we confront relates to the material culture of the country house and our tendency – in some ways entirely understandable – to focus on the things that survive rather than those that have gone. Acquiring new things almost inevitably meant removing existing items to other parts of the house or other houses, passing them on to the servants or disposing of them entirely. Equally, many household goods would simply be lost to the ravages of time. This is true not only of mundane items such as kitchenware or servants' furniture, but also things like drapery, wallpaper and china tableware which would wear out or break and thus need to be replaced with new things. These 'lost' items have generally escaped the attention of historians of the country house, whose interest is often focused on surviving and high quality pieces: the collections and fine furniture and art which define the material culture of the country house.[7] The wider interest in household goods, seen in studies of changing domestic material culture, has been slow to percolate into studies of the country house.[8] It has sometimes entered via the back door through studies of servants' lives and their everyday experiences in kitchens, laundries and dairies.[9] Yet there have been relatively few attempts to reconstruct the assemblages of everyday goods that filled bed chambers, dressing rooms and even the principal rooms of the country house. In focusing on changing style and form, or on the rare and valuable, it is all too easy to lose sight of the overall contents and material form of different rooms.

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Inventories are perhaps the most widespread and familiar source through which domestic interiors can be recreated – they survive in tens of thousands for a wide range of social groups. Their relative underuse by historians of the country house is all the more surprising, then, especially given the long runs of inventories that survive for many properties and the way in which they provide more or less complete lists of the goods assembled in each room. Of course, they can only ever tell us what was in a room, not what it looked like. However, analysed systematically, they allow us to recreate whole series of 'lost' interiors and thus chart the relative pace of change in the material culture of different rooms. Two examples from Canons Ashby in Northamptonshire serve to illustrate these processes. One of the most striking changes to occur in the house came in the 1750s, when the then owner, Sir John Dryden, created his 'New White Room'. Out went an 'old wrought bed', an 'old couch', four turkey work chairs, and another 'old chair; in came a 'white damask bed and window curtains to match', eight walnut chairs 'bottoms same as bed', a walnut bureau, two further walnut chairs, a washstand, and a 'looking glass with drawers to the frame'. Perhaps most striking was the wealth of ornamental china, much of it displayed on the chimney.[10] The overall effect was to produce a comfortable and fashionable bed chamber; one that remained largely unchanged over the next 60 years or more, but which has now largely gone, although the room is still displayed as a bed chamber. In contrast with this relative stability, the ground floor room, described in 1717 as the Left Hand Parlour was subjected to constant changes of use and furniture. It started the eighteenth century as a comfortable parlour, with cane-bottomed chairs, tea tables and a variety of pictures. By 1756, it was known as the Common Parlour and was similarly furnished, with the addition of some mahogany tables, a tea chest and a chess board. Fourteen years later, it was the Dining Parlour, a change marked by the addition of two 'mahogany square dining tables' and matching chairs and removal of all walnut furniture. A generation later, in 1819, it was the Billiards Room. Practically all the earlier furniture had gone, replaced by a billiards table, japanned chairs, mahogany writing and cards tables and a series of modern lamps.[11] Finally, in the 1840s, the room became the library, lined with book shelves and furnished with a desk and arm chairs.

These examples show how assemblages of goods long since dispersed can be recreated and reveal the constant ebb and flow that characterised the material culture of the country house. Visiting houses such as Canons

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Ashby and being able to view real historic interiors should not obscure the existence of these previous incarnations. They have, on the whole, been swept away rather than overlain by subsequent changes. Recovering them thus becomes an archival exercise and one that is essential to understanding the development of the country house as a lived space.

Goods removed from one room were often placed elsewhere in the house,[12] but more dramatic and complete clearances sometimes occurred. The process of selling off the contents of country houses has attracted considerable media and academic interest in recent decades, either because particular artistic treasures are being lost (that is they are going to overseas collectors) or because the clearance is wholesale. For example, the 2005 sale of art and furniture held on the premises at Easton Neston in Northamptonshire included old masters, chairs by Thomas Chippendale, seventeenth-century plaster busts of Sir William and Lady Fermor (ancestors of the current owners), and a 1690 scale model of the house itself. The quality of the items being sold generated national interest in the press and around 7000 people attended over the three days of the sale – some to bid, but many simply to witness the proceedings and be part of the occasion.[13] Of course, such sales are nothing new: the Fonthill sales of 1801 and 1822 attracted a similar level of popular and press interest.[14] However, in focusing on the event, we can too easily forget the tangible yet transient nature of the interiors being dismantled and sold.

Sales almost always took place on the premises and at least the pre-auction viewing involved potential buyers moving from room to room. The catalogues recreate this process and offer detailed vignettes of the contents and character of each room within the country house. Moreover, the rhetoric of selling adds richness to the often sparse accounts contained in inventories. By combining descriptions of the physical appearance of goods with an appraisal of their aesthetic, visceral or visual qualities, sales catalogues thus provide a fuller understanding of the assemblages of goods being dispersed and 'lost'; they also give us an insight into contemporary attitudes to those goods.[15] In the catalogue for the 1792 sale of goods from Stanford Hall, Leicestershire, the following descriptions appear for goods in the 'drawing room':[16]

1 An elegant polished steel stove, with beaded, pierced, and engraved front, pillar feet, and fret border, serpentine cut steel fender, shovel, tongs, and poker, with vase tops, to correspond

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2 A clear plate of glass, 60 inches long and 36 wide, in a neat gilt and ornamented frame
3 Two pair of elegant treble-light girandoles, neatly carved and ornamented, and highly finished in burnished gilt
4 A pair of elegant satin wood circular card tables, tastefully ornamented with a beautiful inlaid and coloured border, with flowers, &c. lined with green cloth, and embossed leather covers
5 Eight genteel well made cabriole elbow chairs, with japaned frames, canvas hair cushions, and beautiful striped and flowered chints pattern cases, fringed
6 Six ditto finished in a similar manner, with cushions and cases, to correspond
7 A handsome cabriole sopha, japaned frame, stuffed in fine canvas, and brass jocket casters, a hair squab, and 3 cushions, in canvass, and neat striped and flowered chints pattern cotton cases, fringed, in suit
8 Three pair of beautiful striped and flowered chints pattern cotton hang down window curtains, 13 feet 6 long, lined with fine calico, tastefully ornamented with drapery vallens, and burnished gold cornices with gilt rods, pullies, &c. complete, finished in the immediate taste
9 Three green painted venetian sub shades, complete
10 A pair of exceeding neat shield-shape pole fire screens, japaned stands, and ornamented
11 An excellent carpet of Moore's manufactory, 24 feet long and 17 feet 9 wide, contains about 70 yards, a beautiful stripe and flowered pattern, fine colours, and in perfect condition.

This catalogue allows the recreation of the collection of furniture in the drawing room (a typical grouping of chairs, sofa, card tables and fire screens) and something of its physical appearance (striped and flowered chintz being used for the upholstery and drapery, the pattern being picked out in the carpet). Repeating this across the house gives us a hugely detailed picture of its contents and aesthetics just as they were being dispersed. It also tells us how these goods fitted into contemporary notions of taste. The stove (i.e. fire grate) and card tables are 'elegant'; the sofa is 'handsome'; the chairs are 'genteel' and the fire screens, carving and chintz are 'neat'. All these words suggest that both the owner and potential buyers were concerned with restrained rather than ostentatious good taste. That some of these goods could also be described as being

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the 'immediate taste' underlines the importance of fashion in furnishing the country house.[17] Perhaps most telling is that many of these items were conceived en suite: a reminder that surviving decorative schemes often reflect a series of pieces and styles accumulated over the years or assembled to dress a room for paying visitors.

Of course, both inventories and sale catalogues focus on moveable goods, fixtures only occasionally being listed. Yet the decoration of walls, ceilings and floors was hugely important to the character of a room. Ceilings and floors often endured surviving a number of refurbishments, but walls were frequently recovered or repainted, in part to freshen rooms and in part reflecting changing tastes in colour, pattern and finish. Successive decorative schemes – lost under many coats of paint and paper – can be recovered through analysis of paint scrapings, drill cores or by quite literally peeling back layers of wallpaper. However, these procedures tend to focus on the technicalities of the paint and paper, rather than the human processes of choosing (discussed later) or the ways in which these decisions formed part of the broader decoration of the room. In this context, tradesmen's bills can be extremely helpful.

Bills from tradesmen provide us with important information about these lost elements of the country house. Amanda Vickery has done much work on the order books and correspondence of Trollope, showing the care with which owners selected particular wallpapers according to the character of the room.[18] At Stoneleigh Abbey, bills from painters and wallpaper merchants give us a feel for how each room was decorated. In 1763–1764, Bromwich and Leigh supplied and hung wallpaper in about 30 rooms, mostly in the west range of the house.[19] Four colours were commonly used: yellow, Saxon blue, crimson and green; the majority were striped or embossed, but more occasionally there were others described as stucco or sprig. Reading this bill alongside another presented by Thomas and Gilbert Burnett, a London upholstery firm, we can see that each room was decorated en suite, with wallpapers and drapery in matching colours.[20] Thus, for example, Room 4 was hung with 110 yards of crimson ground stucco paper and the bed furnished with 52 yards of crimson morine. The process was repeated in Lord Leigh's Bedchamber, which was hung with '147 yards of painted paper to match a chints', but this room also contained gilt leather wall hangings, apparently retained from an earlier decorative scheme. The bill from Bromwich and Leigh thus reveals how each room was treated differently, and also the way in which new furnishings were added to those already present in the

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room, but in a way that complemented the existing décor. It goes further, Lord Leigh being charged for '6 days work taking down gilt leather and putting up 90 yards of silver wetting stamp'd' in Room 11 and a further eight days work putting this gilt leather back up in Room 19.[21]

This bill discloses, therefore, a series of decorative schemes long since lost from Stoneleigh Abbey, but we also achieve real insights into the processes by which much older forms of decoration might be repaired, extended or even relocated to other parts of the house. This raises interesting questions about what is original and authentic. It also allows us to add questions of what was (including things that have been lost) to those concerning what is (surviving material culture). However, this leaves unaddressed questions of what might have been. In this way, we remain tied to things rather than processes.

Lost histories: processes

Much can be gained by focusing attention onto the processes surrounding the acquisition, use and disposal of goods – that is, how people and goods interacted through processes of consumption. There is a wealth of literature on consumer motivations; the meanings that owners attributed to their belongings, and how they deployed them as symbols of power, wealth and status.[22] These are important questions, but are not the principal concern here; rather, the following considers more basic processes of consumption to recover neglected aspects of country house history.

Aristocratic landowners are often seen as spendthrifts, laying out vast amounts of money on collections of art, fine furniture, rich upholstery and so on. There are certainly examples of fantastic, even ruinous, expenditure. The first and second Dukes of Chandos managed to accumulate huge debts through reckless spending and unwise investments during the eighteenth century, and the third Duke hardly fared any better. They showed a penchant for 'a splendid style of life, whatever it cost', and displayed 'insouciant attitudes toward debt and an almost heroic financial laxity'.[23] In this, they were far from unique: William Beckford's huge collection of artistic treasures was matched only by his fantastic (and enormously costly) neo-gothic Fonthill Abbey, while later in the nineteenth century the Rothschilds spent huge sums on furniture, antiques and art, housing them in the purpose-built Mentmore Towers and Waddesdon Manor.[24] These men demand attention, but they skew

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our picture of aristocratic spending. The majority of country house owners spent rather more modestly, in part because their incomes were less spectacular, but also because they chose to balance income and expenditure more closely.[25] Moreover, the processes of collecting were rather different from the more practical issues of furnishing and maintaining the house, and feeding its occupants – processes which are less spectacular, but more fundamental to the country house.

Some landowners moved slowly, taking many years to create and furnish their houses in the desired manner. In Warwickshire, Sir Roger Newdigate took more than five decades to remodel Arbury Hall in a neo-Gothic style, paying for the work out of current income. He began by engaging David Hiorn in 1750 to remodel Lady Newdigate's dressing room to a Gothic design supplied by Sanderson Miller, and then moved progressively around the house, Gothicising in turn the library, drawing room, dining room, saloon and hallway. The exterior was given a similar treatment, first the south and later the north front.[26] In this way, the house evolved slowly, much as the medieval houses and churches on which the work was based, and was thus the product of many hands rather than a single designer. Newdigate fell out with Miller in the 1750s and thereafter operated to some extent as his own architect, drawing advice and designs from Henry Keene, Surveyor to Westminster Abbey, and later Henry Couchman. He employed numerous craftsmen, mostly from the local area, including William Hitchcox (Miller's mason), the wood carver Benjamin King of Warwick, the Coventry mason John Alcott and a glazier from nearby Atherstone called William Cobbett.[27] Similar time and care was taken at Audley End, where Sir John Griffin Griffin undertook extensive renovation and refurnishing in the second half of the eighteenth century. He engaged Robert Adam to design a new suite of rooms in the 1760s and laid out a new state apartment in the 1780s, partly to reflect his elevation to the peerage and partly in anticipation of a visit from George III, which never materialised because of the king's ill health. Sir John's method of buying furniture for his ever-grander house was in general measured and careful: he bought from a great number of different suppliers rather than relying on one or two, generally patronised those one down from the highest quality, and frequently placed a small order (sometimes for his London house) before buying a larger range of goods from a particular supplier.[28] There were also regular payments for repairs and re-upholstery work.

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In contrast, Edward, fifth Lord Leigh, appears to have been in rather more of a hurry to furnish the ancestral home, Stoneleigh Abbey. He inherited the property in 1763 after a period of minority during which the house had lain largely empty. Over the next five years, he spent about £5,000 per annum, much of it on decorative schemes, furniture, drapery, books, silverware, and the like. In 1765 alone, bills amounted to c. £14,500 – a peak which may have caused a temporary cash-flow problem, but which was scarcely immodest compared with estate income of around £11,000.[29] These figures are comparable with those laid out at Audley End at a similar time, but Lord Leigh, in contrast with Sir John, placed several large orders with single suppliers. There were bills of £3,484 from the upholsterers Thomas and Gilbert Burnett, £818 from the cabinet makers William Gomm & Co., £755 from the silversmith Thomas Gilpin, and £356 from the wallpaper merchants, Bromwich and Leigh.[30] In addition, books to the value of £1524 were purchased from five booksellers. In part, this spending was linked to the need to furnish rooms left largely empty and even unfinished at the time of his father's death. Nonetheless, the pace of and approach to spending was very different from that seen at Audley End and Arbury Hall, the steady accumulation and renewal of goods being eschewed in favour of a dramatic episode of consumption which was only curtailed by Lord Leigh's deteriorating mental health and commitment as a lunatic in 1774.

Even a brief exploration of these processes reveals something of the relationship with suppliers and something of the decision-making processes that lay behind them. These aspects of the country house are only now attracting sustained attention from historians and we are only slowly starting to recover something of the 'lost' processes of supply. Costly and luxury items generally came from London or were acquired on the Grand Tour. The latter was particularly important in terms of art and books, many of the most famous collections being accumulated while on the Tour or purchased wholesale from European aristocrats or dealers – a practice that accelerated rapidly in wake of the revolutionary wars.[31] That said, paintings, sculptures and books could also be acquired in Britain, from the sales of bankrupt aristocrats or via London dealers. Lord Leigh, for example, bought several extremely rare and valuable books in London that might usually be seen as souvenirs of the Grand Tour, most notably *Recueil des Peintures Antiques* costing £52 10s and *Herculaneum & Caserta*, in four volumes at £50.[32]

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London tradesmen were most prominent in supplying furnishings, tableware and the like. It was a pattern repeated at Stoneleigh Abbey, Arbury Hall, Audley End and most other country houses. Although local craftsmen were often engaged in building and decorating the house, London was clearly preferred when it came to finished goods. Despite his proximity to Birmingham with its extensive metal trades, Sir Roger Newdigate looked to London when commissioning a Gothic stove. Something of the process involved is revealed in a series of letters from Oldham and Oldham, patent stove makers of Holborn. They wrote firstly to warn of a delay due to problems in sourcing the right tools and case, their usual suppliers in Sheffield being unable to meet the requirements of this bespoke item. Later, Oldham and Oldham reported how the finished product was admired by several gentlemen who had visited their warehouse, and then of its dispatch via Pickford's wagon and the Coventry Canal.[33] The notion that London craftsmen and dealers could supply better quality goods underpinned many such decisions. In contrast, everyday goods were purchased from a much wider range of places. Whittle and Griffiths show the importance of local suppliers and gifts, especially of food.[34] These helped to lock the country house not only into local production and supply networks, but also into webs of mutual obligation. At Stoneleigh Abbey, as with most houses, the housekeeper was responsible for organising the supply of many provisions. An account presented in 1738 listed peas, red and black cherries, turnips, cheese, raspberries, cider, greens, strawberries, beans, carrots, eggs, ducks and asparagus, all of which were probably locally produced. It also included lemons, oranges, newspapers, crabs, oil and whiting which clearly came from further afield yet were being purchased locally, from itinerants or from the market or shops in nearby towns.[35] At the same time, a range of durable goods also came from local towns (including chinaware, stationery, chandlery, furniture, drapery, haberdashery and livery) while many basic supplies were sent from London. Groceries in particular came from both metropolitan and provincial suppliers, reflecting differences in quality (fine teas for example coming from London dealers) but also the fact that most landowners spent at least part of the year in the capital, making London retailers effectively local.[36]

This discussion shows how the country house lay at the centre of flows of goods and people critically important to its furnishing and maintenance, and in feeding its many occupants: family, visitors and servants. If we focus too much on the built structure (and on the architectural

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grandeur or significance) of the house itself, then these links and associations are lost and the house floats free of the economic, social and political bonds that tied it to the locality and the nation. This links in particular to ideas of patronage. Maintaining social and political loyalty depended on treating franchise holders around the time of elections – a practice adopted even by landowners, such as the Leighs of Stoneleigh Abbey, who were not particularly engaged in politics.[37] More fundamentally, such loyalty was based on the day-to-day patronage of local producers and suppliers. Writing in 1716, Sir Thomas Cave noted that 'certainly Warwick must resent Lord Brooke's absence, he having often promised them to reside there when married, and the contrary must lose him good interest'.[38] Set right up against the centre of the town, Warwick Castle would undoubtedly have been of prime importance to many tradesmen; but substantial benefits would only accrue if Lord Brooke was in residence.

Lost histories: people

As suggested in the introduction and other essays in this volume, the history of the rise, fall and destruction of country houses reflects the history of the gentry and aristocracy who built, owned and occupied such houses. It is all too easy to lose important parts of that history. In focusing on processes of consumption, we can easily be dazzled by great heroic figures: those who commissioned houses, amassed great collections or influenced taste. Thus, we know a great deal about the activities of men like Thomas Coke, first Earl of Leicester, who built Holkham Hall to network with political allies and house his collection from the Grand Tour, and Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington, who did so much to spread the taste for Palladian styles in the early decades of the eighteenth century.[39] Much less attention is focused on more minor figures: those who did not hold high office, shape the taste of their peers or plunge the family into debt through extensive programmes of house building.[40] Even within a particular family we tend to skip over some owners to focus on the next important player in the history of the family house.

Women are perhaps most susceptible to being ignored in this way. Vickery, Greig, Lewis and others have done much to highlight the importance of women in general, and certain women in particular, in

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processes of decorating and furnishing the country house.[41] Indeed, Vickery argues that female taste was seen by contemporaries as being especially important in shaping domestic material culture. As she notes, Jane Austen's novels are littered with scenes in which women are importuned for their opinions on how the house and especially sitting or drawing rooms should be decorated and furnished.[42] And yet, in general, history and historians have not treated women kindly in terms of their impact on the country house. One reason for this relative neglect is the frequent absence of a tangible material footprint: the woman's hand in decorating the country house is often lost in the ongoing processes of renewal which we have already examined. They were most prominent in choosing furniture and decorative schemes or adding personal goods which helped to make houses into homes, all of which were easily removed or replaced. This material vulnerability is reinforced by the fact that most dynastic spending was undertaken or at least sanctioned by men; and they, of course, were generally the ones who settled the bills, obscuring the gendered negotiations which led up to the purchase. It can thus be difficult to uncover the real impact of women: if not lost, they are certainly hidden in the history of the country house. Scratch the surface of the documentary record, however, and the deep impact of women can become very clear.

Mary Leigh inherited Stoneleigh Abbey as a life tenant when her brother Edward, fifth Lord Leigh, died in 1786. Over the 20 years of her ownership, she purchased a modest amount of furniture, most of it in the first few years after she had inherited. She paid Michael Thackthwaite of Marylebone for a range of mahogany goods including basin stands, Pembroke tables, chairs and dressing tables, and for upholstery work, much of it repairing and altering existing hangings. It is likely that this was for her London house, Grove House in Kensington Gore, rather than Stoneleigh Abbey. The latter did, however, receive regular maintenance, including a fresh coat of paint to the wood work in many rooms, especially the bed chambers initially decorated by her brother, Edward, in 1765. And it was probably for the Abbey that Daniel Frost supplied a variety of mahogany furniture (including four 'state chairs' en suite with two stools, two chests of drawers, and a large wardrobe) and undertook a total of 139 days' work.[43]

These additions would have made relatively little difference to the house, but Mary's impact was, in reality, far more profound. In moving large amounts of furniture between rooms, she created different settings,

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more suited to her taste and her domestic arrangements. There was a substantial flow of furniture between the bed chambers, as dressers, chests of drawers and soft furnishings were shifted about. The co-ordinated colour schemes, created for Edward in the 1760s, were kept intact, but often moved from one room to another, perhaps in an attempt to create a more pleasing effect or more comfortable sleeping arrangements for Mary's guests.[44] Of the principal public rooms, she did little to change the overall appearance of her grandfather's Great Apartment. Like her brother, who also made few changes to these rooms, she apparently saw them as an important symbol of continuity with earlier generations. It is significant, therefore, that she reassembled the state bedroom – a room which Edward had used as a study and had furnished with bookcases, a writing table and a range of scientific equipment. Mary brought in four chairs and two stools (possibly those bought from Frost) and a four-post bed, all furnished in crimson velvet, together with a richly carved pier table, basin stand, pot cupboard and chest of drawers. This, then, was the 'alarming apartment, with its high, dark crimson velvet bed, just fit for an heroine' described by Cassandra Austen when the family visited in the early nineteenth century.[45] In the Breakfast Room and Dining Parlour, on the opposite end of the west range, Mary changed things more completely, removing amongst other things 24 chairs and a mahogany organ, and bringing in different chairs, a variety of work-, card- and backgammon tables, book stands and a range of paintings. The result probably resembled Humphrey Repton's 'Modern Living Room', which he juxtaposed with the stuffy and old-fashioned formality of the 'Old Cedar Parlour'.[46]

It is possible that these were the 'new rooms' about which Mary wrote to her friend and solicitor Joseph Hill, describing them as 'pretty'.[47] But there is also a set of three small rooms, probably on the first floor, which are described as 'New Rooms' in the 1774 and 1806 inventories.[48] These are relatively plain, if comfortable, with a few pieces of decorative china in one of them and new stoves in each. Significantly, these again were completely refurnished by Mary, though to what end is less clear. More certain is the function of another innovation introduced to Stoneleigh Abbey by Mary: the Printroom. This is described by Cassandra Austen as being 'fitted up with modern prints on a buff paper' – a description which matches the 1806 inventory in which the room is seen to contain 214 prints and a range of comfortable and feminine furniture, including a sofa and several satinwood tables.[49]

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Together, these changes had a profound impact on the appearance of rooms and the 'feel' of the house; yet little can be seen of these changes today and little is said about Mary in histories of the house. She is effectively squeezed between the tragic figure of her brother, who shone briefly and brilliantly as a consumer before being declared insane and dying aged 44, and her distant cousin James Henry Leigh, who engaged in an orgy of spending shortly after he inherited in 1813. These men left a material footprint on the house and seemingly have more interesting stories to tell, but neglecting women such as Mary means that we lose much from our understanding of the country house, especially as it passed through relatively quiet periods in its material development.

It is not just women who are lost in this way. Men who have left little material or documentary evidence can also be condemned to obscurity. One such individual is Sir John Turner Dryden, who, along with his wife Elizabeth who survived him by about 20 years, owned Canons Ashby in the 1790s. They made few changes to the house itself and feature little in its conventional history, other than as the spendthrift grandparents to the Victorian owner, Sir Henry Dryden.[50] And yet Sir John and Elizabeth effectively transformed the interior of the house. They added large amounts of mahogany to bedrooms, parlours, dining rooms and dressing rooms, an influx which must have had a profound impact on the appearance of many rooms, with walnut dominating only in a bed chamber called the White Room. In addition they demonstrated their fashionable good taste through the acquisition of a small number of pieces in satinwood. These were principally placed in the first-floor Drawing Room and comprised a writing table, a small inlaid work table, three inlaid chiffonier pier tables and a pair of fire screens. Here, they complemented a number of pieces of inlaid mahogany furniture, and a set of 12 japanned elbow chairs with cane seats.[51] As at Stoneleigh Abbey, these additions had the effect of creating a fashionable room, which encouraged informal sociability around card tables and virtuous feminine pursuits at the work or writing tables.[52] There were even the requisite landscapes, still lives and allegorical paintings to add interest and perhaps spark conversation.

This room formed part of a broader process seen at Canons Ashby during Sir John and Elizabeth's ownership: that of growing specialisation and modernisation of room use. The Drawing Room had been created out of a sparsely furnished 'Dining Room', although there was little in the room to suggest its sustained use for this purpose, even given the loose

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definitions of such rooms in the early eighteenth century. A more readily apparent dining room, equipped with appropriate tables and chairs, had probably existed downstairs for several decades. However, Sir John and Elizabeth restyled the 'Best Parlour' as a Dining Parlour, installing a mahogany sideboard, dumb waiters and canteens, along with bookcases and a grand piano. The room thereafter became fixed in this function and furnishing, apparently being the exclusive location of formal dining. They made a billiard room from the former dining room, furnishing it with a table, maces and cues; japanned chairs and six lamps (the only ones recorded in the house). A measure of the extent of their impact can be found in the structure of the 1819 inventory, which distinguishes those goods 'belonging to Lady Dryden'.[53] In some rooms, she laid claim to very little. In the Gallery, for instance, two white painted presses were hers, whereas eighteen walnut chairs, two armchairs, an old sofa, an old couch, a linen press and a piano all belonged with the house. Elsewhere, it seems that the majority of the furniture was Lady Dryden's: everything except a circular yew table and a small japanned table in her amply furnished first-floor Breakfast Closet and Sitting Room, and all but a cabinet, two stands, two pictures and a pair of pier glasses in the Drawing Room. The latter is perhaps especially telling as it underlines the fact that new ways of presenting key rooms were built around furniture acquired by Sir John and Lady Elizabeth.

As with Mary Leigh, however, this role in transforming the house is largely overlooked, not least because so few of the goods they acquired remain at Canons Ashby. Indeed, apart from the room names and a picture of Sir John, there is little to see of their impact. But that is not the entire story: a collection of Sir John's showy jackets and waistcoats were preserved by his antiquarian grandson, Sir Henry Dryden, and are still kept at the house.[54] That they are not on display is understandable, given their delicate nature, but this has the effect of further relegating Sir John and with him Lady Elizabeth as a footnote in the history of the house.

Conclusions

Whether we view the loss of country houses as tragic is a matter of perspective: one person's national treasure is another's symbol of vested interest and oppression. For good or ill, however, each loss forms a part of our history as well as our heritage that can never be recovered. Yet

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loss goes far beyond the final destruction of the built structure. There is the loss of goods, through decay or disposal. Sometimes this has occurred relatively recently, as for example with the 2005 sale of art and furniture from Easton Neston in Northamptonshire. In many houses, however, such sales have been a recurrent feature. Most famous, perhaps are the Fonthill sales, which effectively spelled the end of the house; but this story of dispersal and demise was repeated elsewhere, for instance at Kirby Hall where sales in 1772, 1823 and 1831 marked the demise of this once great house.[55] In addition to these tangible losses of material goods is a stealthier loss of history, highlighted here as a neglect of process in favour of things. The latter are clearly important, but fetishizing the material object can result in ossification of the house: it is seen as being fixed and permanent rather than a constant flow of goods, people and ideas. We need to recover something of these flows and processes to reinvigorate the country house as a lived space: the product of individual and collective taste, but also of domestic negotiation and deliberation. We lose sight of these at our peril because, without them, the country house is reduced to a museum; each room is a cabinet displaying treasures, but devoid of life or human context. Yet, in remembering people, we need to be mindful of those that are difficult to trace through the surviving material culture. Heroic figures are vitally important because, without them, the country house would be a shadow of itself: little of the drama and few of the treasures that mark out the English country house as a unique social and cultural entity. At the same time, we need to remember that even those with little apparent material footprint could play a large part in the preservation or renewal of the fabric and contents of the house.

Notes

1 Including Strong, Binney and Harris, Destruction of the Country House; Gow, *Scotland's Lost Houses*; Worsley, *England's Lost Houses;* Robinson*, Felling the Ancient Oaks*.

2 Holdenby House in Northamptonshire was reputed to be over 78,000 square feet; its construction effectively ruined Sir Christopher Hatton: John Heward and Robert Taylor, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire* (Swindon, 1996), pp. 235–238.

3 Paul Druly, *Audley End* (London, 2010), pp. 32–33.

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4 Rosie MacArthur and Jon Stobart, 'Going for a song? Country house sales in Georgian England', in Jon Stobart and Ilja Van Damme (eds), *Modernity and the Second-Hand Trade. European Consumption Cultures and Practices, 1700–1900* (Basingstoke, 2010): 188–192.
5 See the images available at: http://stanfordhall.co.uk/gallery.php?gallery=4218.
6 Martin Wood, *Nancy Lancaster: English Country House Style* (London, 2005).
7 A tradition best represented in: Geoffrey Beard, *Georgian Craftsmen and Their Work* (London, 1966); Gervaise Jackson-Stops (ed.) *The Treasure Houses of Britain. Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting* (Washington, 1985); John Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors* (New Haven, 2004).
8 See Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660–1760* (London, 1988); Mark Overton et al., *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750* (London, 2004); Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution. Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008).
9 Pamela Sambrook, *Keeping Their Places: Domestic Service in the Country House* (Stroud, 2009); Jeremy Musson, *Up and Down Stairs: The History of the Country House Servant* (London, 2010). Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven, 1997) is a rare example of elite material culture being explored in terms of economy, repair and reuse of goods.
10 Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO), D(CA) 901, 1717 inventory; D(CA) 902, 1756 inventory. Jon Stobart, 'Inventories and the changing furniture of Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, 1717–1829', *Regional Furniture*, xxvii (2013), 1–43.
11 NRO, D(CA) 901, 1717 inventory; D(CA) 902, 1756 inventory; D(CA) 201, 1770 inventory; D(CA) 903, 1791 inventory; D(CA) 904, 1819 inventory.
12 See Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, 'Fashion, heritance and family: new and old in the Georgian country house', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:3 (2014), 385–406.
13 *Country Life*, 25 February 2005; *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 May 2005; more recently, both house and contents have been sold at Cowdray Park; see *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 2010. For a more general discussion, see David Littlejohn, *The Fate of the English Country House* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 132–136.
14 Robert J. Gemmett, ' "The tinsel of fashion and the gewgaws of luxury": the Fonthill sale of 1801', *The Burlington Magazine*, CL (2008), 381–388; Anne Richter, 'Spectacle, exoticism, and display in the gentleman's house: the Fonthill auction of 1822,' *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 41 (2008), pp. 643–664.
15 See Jon Stobart, 'The language of luxury goods: consumption and the English country house, c.1760–1830', *Virtus*, 18 (2011): 89–104.
16 Northamptonshire Central Library, M00005645NL/11, Sale Catalogue for Stanford Hall, 1792.

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17 For more on the use of language in this context, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 161; Stobart, 'Language of luxury goods'.
18 Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven, 2009), pp. 166-83.
19 Shakespeare Central Library and Archives (SCLA), DR18/5/4402.
20 SCLA, DR18/3/47/52/15.
21 SCLA, DR18/5/4402.
22 Useful entrées to the literature on consumption can be found in Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption. New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington, 1988); John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600–1800* (London, 2002) and, more recently, Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford, 2012).
23 P. G. M. Dickson and John Beckett, 'The finances of the Dukes of Chandos: Aristocratic inheritance, marriage and debt in eighteenth-century England', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 64 (2001): 309–355.
24 Gemmett, 'The tinsel of fashion'; Nicola Pickering, 'Mayer Amschel de Rothschild and Mentmore Towers: Displaying *le goût Rothschild'*, in Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (eds), *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (London, 2015). For other examples, see Gordon Mingay, *English Landed Society*, pp. 61–66, 126–129; Ray Kelch, *Newcastle, A Duke Without Money: Thomas Pelham-Holmes, 1693–1768* (London, 1974).
25 Mark Rothery and Jon Stobart, 'Inheritance events and spending patterns in the English Country House: The Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey, 1738–1806', *Continuity and Change*, 27:3 (2012), 379–407. It was not just men who showed this kind of caution: the construction of Mrs Montagu's new house in Portman Square was slowed considerably by her determination to spend interest not capital – see Kerry Bristol, '22 Portman Square. Mrs. Montagu and her Palais de la vieillesse', *The British Art Journal,* 2: 3 (2001): 72–85.
26 Geoffrey Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses* (Chichester, 1994), 11–12; Warwickshire Record Office (WRO), CR136/V/136. See also Michael McCarthy, *The Origins of the Gothic Revival* (New Haven, 1987).
27 WRO, CR136/V/136.
28 Hannah Waugh, 'Country house consumption and material culture at Audley End, *c.*1762–1835', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Northampton, Chapter 1.
29 Rothery and Stobart, 'Spending patterns', p. 391.
30 SCLA, DR18/3/47/52/15, DR18/5/4408, DR18/5/4251, DR18/5/4402.
31 Francis Haskell, 'The British as collectors', in G. Jackson-Stops (ed.), *The Treasure Houses of Britain. Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting* (Washington, 1985), pp. 50–59.

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32 SCLA, DR18/5/4202; Mark Purcell, '"A lunatick of unsound mind": Edward, Lord Leigh (1742–86)', *Bodleian Library Record*, 17 (2001): 253–254.
33 WRO, CR136/B/3048/B, letters dated 15 July 1801, 9 November 1801, 17 December 1801.
34 Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household. The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 72–84.
35 SCLA, DR18/5/2150.
36 See Jon Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers: Supplying the country house in eighteenth-century England', *Economic History Review,* 64: 3 (2011): 885–904.
37 See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/6126.
38 Quoted in Peter Borsay, 'The landed elite and provincial towns in Britain', *Georgian Group Journal*, xiii (2003): 281–294.
39 Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *The Building of the English Country House, 1660–1880. Creating Paradise* (London, 2000), pp. 66–79.
40 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, has lamented the neglect of the lesser gentry, but the lesser aristocracy is covered little better in the literature.
41 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 83–105; H. Greig, *The Beau Monde. Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford, 2013), 32–62; J. Lewis, 'When a house is not a home: Elite English women and the eighteenth-century country house', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009): 336–363; M. Ponsonby, *Stories from Home. English Domestic Interiors, 1750–1850* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 131–153.
42 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 83–88.
43 SCLA, DR18/5/5703, DR18/5/5864, DR18/5/5905.
44 SCLA, DR18/4/43.
45 Letter from Cassandra Austen, 13 August 1806, quoted in Deirdre Le Faye. *Jane Austen: A Family Record* (2nd edn, Cambridge, 2004), pp. 156–157.
46 Humphrey Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London, 1816).
47 SCLA, DR671, 22 August 1790.
48 SCLA, DR18/4/43.
49 Letter from Cassandra Austen, 13 August 1806; SCLA, DR18/4/43.
50 National Trust, *Canons Ashby* (2001).
51 NRO, D(CA) 903, 1791 inventory, D(CA) 904, 1819 inventory.
52 Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 231–256.
53 NRO, D(CA) 904, 1819 inventory.
54 Mark Rothery and Jon Stobart, 'Merger and crisis: Sir John Turner Dryden and Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, in the late eighteenth century', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 65 (2012): 19–30.
55 MacArthur and Stobart, 'Going for a song', pp. 188–192.

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3

The Destruction of the Country House in Ireland, 1879–1973

Terence Dooley

Abstract: *In the late nineteenth century, country houses in Ireland, as throughout the United Kingdom, were symbols of social, economic and political elitism. The later irreversible decline of country houses in changing socio-political and economic conditions was hastened by the growth of Irish nationalism and their demonisation as representatives of colonial oppression and decadence. During the revolutionary years, 1916–1923, rhetoric gave way to physical attacks and the burning of at least 300 country houses. After independence, successive Irish governments gave little support to preserving these houses, but even if they had done so, Irish country houses were simply unsustainable in the post-independence economic climate. Effectively, their day had come and gone. From the 1920s, impoverished owners abandoned hundreds of houses to dereliction or demolition. Other houses were sold off to become schools, state institutions, research centres and hotels. There are still a significant number of Irish houses owned by their original families. With few exceptions, however, the existence of these properties is threatened by inadequate income and State support.*

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Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, country houses in Ireland were the physical symbols of the economic, social and political power of the landed class at national and local levels. The same was obviously true of Britain, except that in Ireland from the era of the Land War (1879–1881) country houses were also represented by aspiring Nationalist politicians and agrarian agitators (often one and the same) as symbols of colonial oppression, and their landlord owners as cormorant vipers sucking the lifeblood from the country. Over the following half century or so, the whole fabric of Irish landed society was transformed by economic, social, cultural and political developments, most of which were outside the sphere of influence of Irish landlords. The fall of the landlords, when it came, was symbolised in the large-scale destruction of their country houses. This essay explores the reasons for this destruction, a phenomenon which, of course, was by no means unique to Ireland, but rather part of a much wider phenomenon which affected country houses throughout Britain and wider continental Europe especially in the decades after 1914.[1]

By the end of the nineteenth century, some aristocratic landlord families such as the FitzGeralds, Dukes of Leinster, had been in Ireland for over 700 years, having arrived with the first wave of Anglo-Norman settlers in the twelfth century. The Anglo-Normans predominantly confined themselves within a geographical area which became known as the English Pale,[2] and over time replaced the existing Gaelic tenurial arrangements with a feudal system centred upon a manor that eventually evolved into an estate system centred on a country house. Thus, the FitzGeralds who had begun by building a great medieval castle at Maynooth in County Kildare, a symbol of their feudal supremacy, had by the early eighteenth century created a grand Palladian mansion, with all the trappings of aristocratic grandeur, including a magnificent eighteenth-century demesne and Lafranchini-designed stucco interiors. The medieval castle ruins were maintained as a reminder of their ancient lineage.[3]

Other families such as the Bowens, the subject of Ian d'Alton's essay in this volume, were of later planter stock, arriving in the seventeenth-century with Oliver Cromwell's army. For his role in the wars of the 1640s, Robert Bowen was paid in Irish land by the English exchequer. In the 1770s, a later generation of the family built Bowen's Court near Kildorrery in the north-east corner of County Cork. It was an example of the tall, square, eighteenth-century Irish house of three storeys over a

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basement, a much more modest affair than the ducal Carton House, but appropriate to the social status of the Bowens within the middling landed gentry class. By the late 1930s, the house was owned by the renowned Anglo-Irish author, Elizabeth Bowen. As d'Alton has shown, Bowen articulated gentry class awareness that its homes were regarded with a great deal of ambiguity by those living outside demesne walls. Bowen's Court, Elizabeth wrote, may have been built of native stone but it had been 'imposed on seized land [and] built in the ruler's ruling tradition'. 'Each of these houses', she continued, 'with its intense, centripetal life, is isolated by something very much more lasting than the physical fact of space: the isolation is innate; it is an affair of origin'.[4] Indeed, the very term Bowen preferred, 'big house', is a uniquely Irish term which not only encapsulates the physical size of these gentry and aristocratic homes but also hints at the alienation felt by the majority of the population towards them.[5]

Negative populist perceptions of the country house in Ireland were embedded in the social memory of the confiscation and redistribution of land resulting from the plantation schemes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Tudor governments had attempted to simultaneously conquer Ireland and impose Protestantism as the state religion through the migration of Protestants to settle on confiscated estates. The most successful plantation was in Ulster at the beginning of the seventeenth century and this eventually determined the different path both politics and society would take in that province, eventually leading to the partition of Ireland in 1920 with the creation of the new state of Northern Ireland. The Cromwellian settlement of the early 1650s, which brought the Bowens to Ireland, resulted in the redistribution of around 1.6 million acres to 7,500 Cromwellian army officers and 1,000 Adventurers, the latter rewarded for their investment of £360,000 in the military campaign. The Penal Laws which followed in the eighteenth century resulted in the almost complete transfer of landownership from Catholics to Protestants so that by the beginning of the next century the Catholic share of landownership had fallen to 5 per cent. Thus, landownership had become the preserve of a Protestant elite who, by extension, were the social and political elite. Landownership, religion and politics became inextricably entwined.

The political and economic decline of Irish landlords, and as a consequence their country houses, coincided from the 1880s with the rise of the Home Rule and Land League movements. By then, landlords

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were predominantly Unionist in political outlook (with rare but notable exceptions such as Charles Stewart Parnell), determined to retain the political connection with Great Britain as enshrined in the Act of Union of 1801. This put them in opposition to the vast majority of their tenants (at least outside the six north-eastern counties of Ulster) who were predominantly Catholic and Nationalist and who, with increased politicisation and democratisation, aspired to establish a Home Rule parliament in Dublin.

The post-Famine decades of the 1850s and 1860s had been relatively prosperous for Irish farmers and generally lucrative for landlords, but a global agricultural recession which began in 1877 threatened to reverse the gains made.[6] A mass movement, the Land League, emerged in response to the economic downturn and the inability of tenants to pay their rents. The Land League drew its leadership from large farmers, Roman Catholic clergy and townsmen. From 1879, a Land War ensued, characterised by rent strikes, increased agrarian agitation and violence, the invention of boycotting against those who transgressed Land League law and a dramatic increase in evictions carried out by landlords against recalcitrant tenants.[7] For aspiring Nationalist politicians, landlords provided obvious scapegoats who could be blamed for the social, economic and political woes of Ireland. For agrarian agitators, who wanted to carve up the great estates which had given country houses their *raison d'etre*, Land League platforms allowed the activists to propound their social agenda. As R.V. Comerford has put it, this was a time when the nation was re-imagined so as to exclude 'the lords of the soil [who] were supposed to be of different stock from the rest of the population'.[8] The Land War irreversibly altered the relationship between landlords and tenants. Even on the most paternalistic estates, such as those of the Duke of Leinster, where a strong deferential dialectic had traditionally existed, the loyalty of the strong farming class was severely tested and began to give way under the weight of democratisation and the growth of nationalism.[9]

The Land War resulted in other significant developments. Firstly, the British government, in an attempt to defuse the agrarian agitation, introduced a far-reaching Land Act in 1881. Although largely ineffectual in terms of the transfer of landownership from landlords to tenants – just over 700 tenants purchased – the Act's provision for the establishment of the Irish Land Commission, with statutory power to adjudicate on fair rents, infringed on previously sacrosanct landlord property rights. In a

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politically charged climate, the nationalist-dominated Land Commission courts decreased rent levels, on average by around 21 per cent throughout the country.[10] At the time, most Irish landlords were heavily in debt and could not extricate themselves by mortgaging their lands, as might have been the case in the past. Financial institutions, wary of the plummeting value of agricultural land and the prospect of further government interference in the settlement of fair rents, closed all avenues of borrowing. In fact, panicky lenders (banks and assurance companies) began to call in their mortgages.[11] Landlords, therefore, spent less on the running and maintenance of their houses and demesnes as proportionately more and more of their declining gross income went to the payment of estate and family charges. For most Irish landlords, the over-dependence on agricultural rents decided their fate. They did not have the luxury, as many did in Britain, of owning estates which incorporated expanding industrial cities producing significant urban rents, or of being able to profit from mining, industrial investment and colonial expansion. Invariably, country houses began to show signs of decay. Lady Daisy Fingall recalled her home in the 1880s:

> My memory of the drawing room at Danesfield is that it was a shabby, rather faded room, and very little used. ... There were whatnots about the room, with bits of old china on them and shells and such things and an Ottoman, on which one might sit as uncomfortably as in a railway station waiting for a train.[12]

Cutbacks ensured the temporary closure of many big houses in a period of retrenchment. With very few exceptions, the staged remodelling or modification of houses since the end of the Great Famine in 1851 all but came to an end. From 1882, following the passing of the Settled Land Act (Ireland), Irish landlords increasingly sold off house contents, art collections and family heirlooms to meet debts and family charges.[13] Nationalists did not regard the stripping of country houses as a loss to the nation. As Vincent Comerford has contended, there was no public outcry in the 1880s or for decades more: 'Any attempt to acquire these [contents]', he wrote, 'whether pictures or other furnishings, for the public, was not conceivable in the prevailing political climate. ... So, the particular form that the overthrow of landlord power assumed in Ireland impoverished a class ... without achieving a concomitant enrichment of the nation'.[14]

Throughout the late nineteenth century and long after Irish independence in 1922, sold-off contents made their way across the Atlantic to adorn

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the homes of rich and aspirant American families. In the mid-1920s, for example, 'the great accumulator', William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951), bought the contents of Carton House. For one of Hearst's homes in Santa Monica, California, Charles Robertson salvaged the dining room, reception room and drawing room – each more than 60 feet long – from the eighteenth-century Burton Hall in County Clare.[15] Hearst also bought the magnificent seventeenth-century staircase from Eyrecourt in Galway from White Allom in 1927, which he later donated to the Michigan Institute of Arts in Michigan.[16] In her study of the Big House in Northern Ireland, Olwen Purdue has shown that this phenomenon also existed there after partition in the 1920s; she cites the example of the Kilmoreys who were frequently forced to sell works of art to meet their encumbrances including in the 1920s and 1930s such important works as Ruben's *The Adoration of the Magi* and a Gainsborough portrait of Lord Kilmorey.[17]

The sale of fixed assets was both symptomatic and symbolic of the changing economic position of Irish landlords in the late nineteenth century. But at that stage they did not sell their homes, the symbols of continuity in a world of change. They also continued to cling on to the landed tradition of preserving land for future generations. While this obduracy may have been because land was still a prerequisite to social position, it was also because the financial incentives to sell had not yet been provided in legislation. Granted, there were some aristocratic landlords, such as the Duke of Leinster, who sold portions of their outlying estates under the Land Acts of the 1880s to meet immediate debts and to remain solvent, but core estates, demesnes and country houses remained predominantly in their original ownership.

The incentives to sell (and for tenants to purchase) were provided under the terms of the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 (which took its name from the then chief secretary, George Wyndham), which might be described as the first great financial bail-out in twentieth-century Irish history. The Act, subsidised by the British taxpayer to the tune of about £80 million, provided a generous 12 per cent cash bonus to landlords who agreed to sell their estates. At the time, prominent Irish landlords, such as Lord Dunraven, believed that 'as a class there can be no question that the financial circumstances of the landed gentry will be improved by sale'.[18] For most, and for a few years during the *belle epoque*, this was probably true as great landlords converted their money into extensive colonial share portfolios (regrettably investing very little in Ireland.)[19]

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Most retained their houses and enough demesne and, in some cases, untenanted land, to allow them to continue farming. This strategy also maintained privacy and provided respectability for the big house and its setting.

Arguably, ridding themselves of their acres proved emotionally painless for Irish landlords once the generous financial incentives had been put in place. Big house social life continued on a comfortable scale until the outbreak of the Great War (perhaps best suggested by the number of servants returned for country houses and demesnes in the 1911 census household schedule returns). However, there were ominous clouds on the horizon. Landlords in Britain as a whole were coming under financial stress. A few years after Wyndham's Irish Act it became plain that emerging political heavyweights were determined to break landed monopolies. Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' of 1909 represented a major watershed in the history of the decline of the wider British aristocracy and portended what lay ahead.

In 1903, the dangers inherent in worldwide investments had not been obvious to potential investors who had tended to avoid the City. The interest rates on securities which the Irish Land Conference (a landlord organisation) recommended to landed investors yielded 3 to 3.25 per cent interest. The conference maintained that capital sums secured under the Wyndham Act and invested at these rates would provide landlords with a net income equivalent to their former rental incomes.[20] There were more exciting possibilities. For example, on receipt of its principal repayments from landlord mortgagors after 1903, the Representative Church Body of the Church of Ireland invested £99,250 in Russian bonds at 4.5 per cent. From 1917, in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution, the Church received no dividends and by 1924 its investment had been written down to £39,300.[21] It can be presumed that many Irish landlords may have been enticed into the same investment outlets prior to the Great War and more certain that the economic depression of the 1920s decimated the general share portfolios of most. In the end, nothing seemed as necessary for the upkeep of country houses in Ireland as the regular rental incomes that had sustained them for generations.

Moreover, in the intervening years, there were other damaging developments. Landed families were emotionally impoverished by the personal tragedies experienced during the Great War. As early as 1915, Douglas Hyde, cultural Nationalist and future president of Ireland

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(1938–1945), encapsulated the sense of loss that permeated the isolated, self-contained former landlord class:

> Nearly everyone I know in the army has been killed. Poor Lord de Freyne and his brother were shot the same day and buried in one grave. ... MacDermott of Coolavin, my nearest neighbour, has lost his eldest son shot dead in the Dardanelles. All the gentry have suffered. *Nobless oblige.* They have behaved magnificently.[22]

Although four times more members of the landed class came home than were killed, 'when the armistice came at last', as Lady Daisy Fingall put it, 'we seemed drained of all feeling. And one felt nothing. We took up our lives again, or tried to take them up. The world we had known had vanished.'[23] Big house social life had been thrown into disarray and after 1918 there was no chance of its rejuvenation as a war of independence followed by a civil war meant that the old landed class was subjected to a degree of terrorism beyond the comprehension of those forced to live through it. As the Land War generation gave way to the revolutionary generation it bequeathed the ancestral resentments that intensified the alienation of southern Irish landlords.

The most obvious manifestation of resentment was the burning of at least 300 Big Houses from 1920 to 1923 in the territory of the present Republic of Ireland.[24] There were various reasons for these arson attacks: on occasions it was because the IRA believed the owners to be supporters of the British administration or their houses were deemed strategic military targets (for example, in order to prevent them being occupied as military billets). As the war of independence drew to a close, reprisal and counter-reprisal tactics on both sides meant that big houses were burned in retaliation for raids on the homes of IRA supporters. Other houses were burned for more localised agrarian reasons, for the potential benefits which might accrue to the small economic holders or landless in their vicinity if landlords were to be physically displaced. The looting of contents undoubtedly accompanied at least some burnings, but this is a subject yet to be fully explored by historians. Big Houses in north-east Ulster were less affected during these turbulent years,[25] but fears in the rest of Ireland were probably not dissimilar to those felt by the wider European aristocracy in contested areas such as Silesia.[26] Suffering was clearly not as severe, however, as that of the Russian aristocracy after 1917.[27]

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When the arson campaign reached various peaks in Ireland, there were occasional outcries from to-be-expected sources such as the editor of the Unionist-sympathetic *Irish Times*, representatives of various Protestant church bodies (and occasionally the Catholic Church), fellow country house owners, and some old constitutional nationalists of the moribund Home Rule party. By the time the civil war had ended in the summer of 1923, many country house owners had emigrated to Britain and not just those whose homes had been attacked, but also many more who felt uncomfortable and uneasy in a post-colonial state where an unsympathetic political regime defined nation as Gaelic, Catholic and Nationalist so as to clearly exclude the former Protestant landed ascendancy. Thus, in a draft of a statement to be delivered to the Dáil by President W. T. Cosgrave in March 1923, he strongly hinted that the new government was not interested in providing compensation which might entice ascendancy émigrés back to Ireland: 'Practically every claim for financial accommodation to economic interest is accompanied by a statement [from Loyalists] that the government can find millions to compensate a class which never benefited the nation and drew its revenue from rents and lands etc. etc.'[28] After independence, the old landed class in southern Ireland became psychologically more insular than ever before (although, as we shall see later, the situation was different in Northern Ireland). By 1952, an article in the *Irish Times* summed up their situation:

> The Anglo-Irish are still there [Ireland], still using words as intoxicants in their lively, irresponsible fashion – emerging at times, especially in horse show week, as a kind of social entity under the glittering chandeliers of cocktail bars in Dublin's fashionable hotels. But, as a political entity, they are either caught up in the life of the new state or, like the French aristocracy, financially impoverished and exiled in a dream world of their own invention.[29]

Politically, the Northern Irish landed class had a different experience post-partition. As Olwen Purdue has shown, history was less punishing for their owners. As a result of the seventeenth-century plantations, the Protestant demography of the six north-eastern counties was much different from further south. The pyramidal structure ranged from aristocratic Anglican landlords to small Presbyterian farmers, from industrial magnates to shop assistants. By the nineteenth century, there was a higher proportion of 'great' landowners in Ulster than in the other three provinces; economic conditions on estates were more favourable; and some landed magnates benefited from the industrial expansion

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of the north-east. Ulster Protestant tenants may have shared the same agrarian grievances as their Catholic counterparts, but a shared religious, political and cultural outlook left landlord–tenant relations less fraught in the north-east and so when the land and national questions merged in the late nineteenth century, Protestant tenants were more inclined to throw in their lot with landlord Unionists. Thus, Purdue tells us that during the Land War of the 1880s which was 'initially fought with great intensity in parts of the north-east', it 'took a different direction than it did elsewhere and was largely superseded by the constitutional question and the growth of resistance to Home Rule.'[30] Very few country houses were destroyed in this area during the course of 1920–1923 and after partition, northern landlords managed to retain some political influence through their strong political links to both the Unionist movement and the Orange Order. They operated in a state where political and private attitudes to the landed class were less resentful and less damaging than further south. However, big houses did suffer from economic decline.

The 1925 Northern Ireland Land Act meant that by the end of the decade nearly all tenanted land had been transferred to farmers, and so former landlords faced similar economic challenges to their southern counterparts. Without rental income many houses were lost to the original families, although proportionately less than further south. Purdue summarised their position as follows:

> Although a large number of big houses [in Northern Ireland] were lost and families disappeared, a significant number of families remained, who either by careful management, strict economies or simple good fortune were able to adapt their finances and their properties in order to meet the challenges of the late nineteenth and, in particular, the twentieth centuries. More importantly, however, while no longer an economic or even a political elite, they were allowed, and even encouraged, by northern society and the Northern Irish state to operate as a social elite, thus providing those who remained with a crucial sense of identity and purpose that would play a vital part in extending the life of the big house in the north-east of Ireland.[31]

In 1923, coming towards the end of the Civil War and during a debate in the Irish Free State Senate, Lord Glenavy pointed out that 'nobody was anxious to have a building reinstated in its old form. It had grown out of their needs and they wanted a different style of architecture.'[32] It was an admission from a former landlord that country houses had simply outgrown their time. Along with global depression in the 1920s came dramatic increases in taxation and death duties. By 1932, the *Irish Times*

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was unambiguous about where the fault for the decline of the country house in the Irish Free State lay: 'The dead hand of the State lies heavily on the great houses. Depleted incomes make their maintenance difficult enough, but high taxation and death duties render the passage of a great house from father to son almost impossible.'[33] Finances were so tight that Senator Bryan Cooper of Markree House in Sligo told his fellow politicians back in 1924: 'persons who own such houses need every concession and would be glad to get it, even if it were only a five pound note.'[34] It was now more expedient to demolish houses (or at least strip them of their roofs) than pay unaffordably high taxes and local government rates. The situation was no different in Northern Ireland. Having survived the 1925 Land Act, Purdue argues that the dramatic rise in death duties by the late 1930s and taxation to unprecedented heights by the 1950s meant that:

> For someone inheriting a big house, taxation at these levels were, at best, a problem – at worst, ruinous. There was hardly an estate in Northern Ireland that was not seriously affected by the payment of taxation and, in particular, death duties at some stage. On those estates where the actual margin of income was small, such payments simply could not be met.'[35]

Almost every aspect of life formerly associated with big houses was now too expensive and out-dated. Lavish dinners, balls and hunting parties were things of the past; as Elizabeth Bowen put it in 1940: 'we all eat and drink a good deal less, and would not find it any shame in a host not to offer what he has not got'.[36] Servants and estate employees, including craftsmen, became less and less affordable with the result that the physical infrastructure of houses deteriorated at a rate much faster than ever before. It generally became the case that a country house minus adequate income equalled abandonment and demolition. In *Bowen's Court*, Elizabeth Bowen captured the predicament of a declining class:

> For seven years I tried to do what was impossible. I was loath to realise how impossible it was. Costs rose. I had not enough money and I had to face the fact that there never would be enough ... by 1959 it had become inevitable that I should sell Bowen's Court.[37]

The house was demolished a year later by its new owner, eager to expand his tillage farm and who wanted the land but not the financial burden of the house.

Besides decimated share portfolios and increased taxation, other factors impacted upon big house owners in independent Ireland. For those whose hopes of sustainability lay only in demesne farming

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unaffected by land legislation passed by Westminster, the first Irish Free State government dealt another severe blow in 1923. In that year, the government introduced a land act which gave the state, through the Irish Land Commission, the power to acquire compulsorily untenanted lands and to redistribute them among a hierarchy of allottees in order to deal with the social problem of congestion.[38] Although the Land Commission held no official brief to demolish Irish country houses, by stripping them of their remaining lands and their demesnes – a house without a parkland setting was a complete non-entity – the Land Commission furthered the eradication of the physical reminders of the landed class's cultural landscape. Thus, the commission sanctioned the destruction of a number of significant mansions including the John Nash-designed Shanbally Castle in Tipperary and Cuba Court, Glass House and Thomastown in the midlands.

In 1944, a speech to the Irish parliament by Sean Moylan, then Fianna Fail Minister for Lands, exemplified the lack of political sympathy for ongoing abandonment, dereliction and destruction:

> ... in general, the majority of these Big Houses that I know, and I am very familiar with them, are not structurally sound, have no artistic value and no historic interest. From my unregenerate point of view, I choose to regard them as tombstones of a departed ascendancy and the sooner they go down the better. They are no use.[39]

The country house held no place in the Irish national patrimony or, indeed, within the definition of Irish heritage as set out in the National Monuments Act of 1930,[40] which defined the preservation of a national monument as 'a matter of national importance by reason of the historical, architectural, traditional, artistic or archaeological interest attaching thereto'.[41] But it was not with the big house in mind that this definition was framed and Georgian architecture was essentially ignored. This disregard was encapsulated in a Department of Finance report drawn up the previous year in 1929 after the Irish government had been offered Russborough House in County Wicklow as a gift:

> So far as the Minister has been able to gather neither Russborough House nor the family connected with it has ever been associated with any outstanding events or personalities in Irish history. Accordingly, the interest which the place possesses is only its interest to the connoisseurs of architecture, plus whatever interest it has as illustrating a certain phase of social life in Ireland. Opinions differ as to the aesthetic merits of the Georgian as a style

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> of architecture, but, the period being relatively modern, good specimens of it are sufficiently numerous both in this country and in England to render state action to preserve this one superfluous.

The report clearly suggested that preservationists operated in an unsympathetic political climate that remained highly charged. Emotive memories of Land War and British administrative control still largely dictated the mind-sets and ideologies of those in government. However, in fairness to government, the prevailing economic climate ensured the allocation of finances to more pressing social reforms. The government prioritised social reforms above the preservation of heritage and the country house. In the end, Russborough was saved by private benefaction and today is one of the country's most popular heritage tourist attractions. Russborough continues to house a substantial part of the Sir Alfred Beit Art Collection.

In the decades after World War II, characterised by soaring inflation, energy shortages and lack of confidence in modern economic development, public finances continued to be limited. The government continued to pay very little attention to the preservationist lobby, including the Irish Georgian Society founded in 1957. At the time, the National Trust in England was under pressure to secure sufficient funds to protect its properties; one might imagine how much more difficult it was for the protectionist groups in Ireland.[42] This was summed up in a memo by the chairman of the Office of Public Works [hereafter OPW] in 1946:

> It is quite clear that the majority of the big houses must under modern conditions be demolished for the simple reason that the cost of future maintenance would in most cases be entirely prohibitive. The exceptions I think are where: 1. the house can be used by the State 2. the house can be used by a local authority 3. the house can be used by a religious community 4. where the historical or architectural merits of the building are such as to justify the maintenance of the house as a national monument.[43]

In the end, only a handful of houses were taken over by the State for practical purposes including, for example, Ballyhaise in County Cavan and Johnstown Castle in Wexford, both used as educational facilities and Shelton Abbey in Wicklow used as a prison. In time, local authorities in Dublin acquired a few more houses, including Newbridge House, Malahide Castle and Ardgillan Castle. Considerably more houses were acquired by religious communities and run as schools, convents

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and monasteries including Ballyfin in County Laois taken over by the Patrician Brothers and Emo Court in the same county bought by the Jesuits.[44] Eventually some houses, such as Castletown in Kildare, Muckross in Kerry and Rathfarnham in Dublin were taken over by the OPW and restored as tourist attractions. Other houses were transformed into luxurious hotels such as Adare in Limerick, Ashford in Mayo, Dromoland in Clare and most recently Carton in Kildare. Inevitably, as houses were modified to fulfil new functions, their historical and architectural integrity was greatly compromised but they have survived, and that is an important consideration in today's debate about the sustainability of country houses in Ireland.[45]

But more often in the decades after independence Country Houses were abandoned, dismantled and demolished. There are no definitive estimates of how many, but it certainly ran into hundreds.[46] *Vanishing country houses of Ireland* (1988) listed 60 for County Dublin alone, including the large Italianate St Anne's in Clontarf, built for the brewing magnate, Arthur Guinness, first Lord Ardilaun, sold to Dublin Corporation in 1939, badly damaged by fire in 1943 and demolished in 1968; Kenure Park in Rush, sold in 1964 and allowed to fall into dereliction before it was demolished in 1978, leaving only a rather dramatic portico now surrounded by a modern housing estate. Almost 50 houses were listed for County Galway including Dunsandle, Eyrecourt and Coole Park. The destruction of the latter in 1941, less than a decade after it had been sold to the State by its owner, Lady Augusta Gregory, a cultural Nationalist, founding member of the Irish National Theatre and a prominent member of the Irish Literary Revival, emphasised government indifference of the time, regardless of cultural significance. The *Irish Times* later lamented: '... the ancestral residence of a person so outstanding in the cultural history of the country as Lady Gregory should not have been allowed to be pulled down'.[47] Whereas the *Irish Times* might have been sympathetic to the Old Order, the *Farmers' Journal* might be said to have been more reflective of the New Order and so a reporter covering the sale of an unnamed country house and its contents reflected in 1959:

> Although I lived within a townland of this big house, I had never been inside it and I had never talked to the ladies who were the last owners. They were gentry ... the old gentry and generally [they] were a strange, lonely sort of people, living out their lives in isolation surrounded by high walls and with very little communication with the ordinary people.[48]

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This was a rather stereotypical representation of a people much turned in upon themselves and now often regarded as eccentrics in local communities because they spoke differently from the locals or because they dressed differently and exhibited different cultural tastes and values. Their feelings of cultural or political ostracism from independent Ireland were encapsulated in Lady Daisy Fingall's symbolic description of her home, Killeen Castle in County Meath:

> The front of the house seems to have had a blank look, the windows staring across the country like blind eyes. It is a look that the windows of Irish country houses often have, as though indeed that was the spirit inside them, the spirit of the colonist and conqueror, looking out across the country which they possessed but never owned.[49]

Conclusion

The plight of the country house in modern Britain was little different from what it was in Ireland as the landed class faced economic crises spawned by increased indebtedness, dramatic increases in taxation and death duties and the depreciation of rental and other forms of income. The country house suffered the consequences of the Great War and experienced lack of political sympathy under early Labour governments. The main difference for the British great house was it escaped the physical assault by militant separatists and agrarian agitators which accompanied social and political revolution in Ireland in the period 1920–1923.

David Cannadine has pointed out that in the decade between 1945 and 1955 alone, at least 400 country houses were destroyed in Britain because they were 'too big, too uneconomical and often damaged beyond repair, the setting for a life and for a class now generally believed to be extinct.'[50] As discussed in the introduction to this volume, the hugely influential 1974 V&A exhibition *The Destruction of the Country House* and its spin-off, the lavishly illustrated volume of the same name, raised public and political awareness of the destruction of country houses in Britain, and 'put before the public every aspect of a problem central to our cultural heritage',[51] while bringing about major tax concessions to the well-connected heritage lobby.[52]

In retrospect, it is difficult to imagine that a similar exhibition would have had such an immediate impact in the Republic of Ireland at that time (notably, the London exhibition did not include houses from

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Northern Ireland.) There, the country house continued to inhabit a contested space. But a sense that the country was changing included hope for the future. Ireland was becoming increasingly urbanised and less obsessed with the land question (the last major Land Act was passed in 1965.) Society was becoming less denominationalised and the 'moderation of politico-historical attitudes to the so-called "ascendancy" was also coming into play'.[53] After 1973, when Ireland joined the European Economic Community, the architectural significance of the Irish country house was to be seen in a much wider European context. It could now be said that Ireland 'belonged' to Europe as opposed to Britain. The new link had no historical contamination. Moreover, accession to the EEC required Ireland's adherence to international charters and conventions intended to inform and influence government policy and legislation for protecting the architectural heritage. Although Ireland was admittedly slow in signing up to some of these charters – almost 20 years in the case of UNESCO's *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and national heritage* – the government eventually accepted in 1991 that 'each state party to the convention recognises that the duty of ensuring identification, protection, conservation, preservation and transmission to future generations of this heritage belongs primarily to that state'. By then, much resulted from the strenuous efforts of organisations such as the Irish Georgian Society and An Taisce to promote the preservation of country houses and to safeguard them as part of a shared national heritage.[54] The era of destruction had ended, heralding the protection of the heritage value of country houses through legislation, but the challenges of maintaining and sustaining houses, most notably for the original owners, remained.[55]

Notes

1 For a more detailed study of the Irish situation, see Terence Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001); Olwen Purdue, *The Big House in the North of Ireland: Land, Power and Social Elites, 1878–1960* (Dublin, 2009). There is a growing historiography of destruction at county level in Britain; the seminal work is Strong, Binney and Harris, *Destruction of the Country House*; for wider surveys see Cannadine, *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*; Mandler, *Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*; Littlejohn, *Fate of the English Country House*.

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2 An area of Ireland taking in all or parts of the eastern counties of Louth, Meath, Dublin and Kildare.
3 For the rise and fall of the FitzGeralds, see Terence Dooley, *The Decline and Fall of the Dukes of Leinster: Love, War, Debt and Madness* (Dublin, 2014); also Terence Dooley, Patrick Cosgrove and Karol Mullaney-Dignam (eds), *Aspects of Irish Aristocratic Life and Living: The FitzGeralds of Carton and Kildare* (Dublin, 2014).
4 Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court* (Cork, 1998 edn [1st edn, London, 1942]), pp. 25–27; see also Elizabeth Bowen, 'The big house', in Hermione Lee (ed.), *The Mulberry Tree*: *Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (London, 1986), pp. 25–29.
5 See Bowen, *Bowen's Court*; the terms big house and country house will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter.
6 See Cannadine, *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, esp. pp. 35–139.
7 There is a vast historiography of the Land War in Ireland; see, for example, Paul Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858–82* (Dublin, 1978); Philip Bull, *Land, Politics & Nationalism: A Study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin, 1996); Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, NJ, 1979); R. V. Comerford, 'The Land War and the politics of distress, 1877–82' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A New History of Ireland vi: Ireland under the Union, II, 1870–1921* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 26–52; James S. Donnelly Jr, *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork: The Rural Economy and the Land Question* (London and Boston, 1975); Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Plan of Campaign in Ireland, 1886–1888* (Cork, 1978); Barbara Solow, *The Land Question and the Irish Economy, 1870–1903* (Cambridge MA, 1971)*;* E. D. Steele, *Irish Land and British Politics: Tenant-Right and Nationality 1865–1870* (Cambridge, 1974); W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994).
8 R. V. Comerford, *Ireland,* Inventing the Nation Series (London and New York, 2003), p. 9.
9 Dooley, *Decline and Fall of the Dukes of Leinster*, chapter one; on deferential dialectic, see Howard Newby, *Property, Paternalism and Power: Class and Control in Rural England* (London, 1979); David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (New Jersey, 1979).
10 Dooley, *Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp. 94–99.
11 See Dooley, *Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp. 79–111.
12 Elizabeth (Daisy) Fingall, *Seventy Years Young: Memories of Elizabeth, Countess Fingall* (London, 1937), p. 22.
13 Dooley, *Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp. 107–110.
14 Comerford, *Ireland,* p. 248; see also, Allen Warren, 'The twilight of the ascendancy and the big house: A view from the twenty-first century', in Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgway (eds), *The Irish Country House: Its Past, Present and Future* (Dublin, 2011), pp. 244–256.

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15 John Harris, *Moving Rooms: The Trade in Architectural Salvages* (New Haven, 2007), p. 221.
16 Ibid., p. 191.
17 Purdue, *Big House in the North of Ireland*, p. 136.
18 Lord Dunraven [Windham Thomas Wyndham-Quin], *Crisis in Ireland* (1905), p. 21.
19 Dooley, *Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp. 119–120.
20 *Freeman's Journal,* 10 September 1903.
21 *RCB Annual Report, 1924*, p. 10.
22 Quoted in Lennox Robinson, *Bryan Cooper* (London, 1931), p. 80.
23 Fingall, *Seventy Years Young*, p. 386.
24 Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp 172–207; James S. Donnelly Jr., 'Big house burnings in County Cork during the Irish revolution, 1920–21', *Eire-Ireland*, 47: 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2012), pp 141–197; Ciaran Reilly, 'The burning of country houses in Co. Offaly during the revolutionary period, 1920–3' in Dooley and Ridgway (eds), *Irish Country House*, pp. 110–133.
25 See below.
26 See Timothy Wilson, *Frontiers of Violence: Conflict and Identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia, 1918–1922* (Oxford, 2010).
27 For the Russian case, an interesting study is Douglas Smith, *Former People: The Last Days of the Russian Aristocracy* (New York, 2012).
28 Draft of statement to be delivered by President W. T. Cosgrave to Dáil Eireann, 26 March 1923 (National Archives of Ireland, Department of Taoiseach files, S 2188).
29 *Irish Times*, 10 December 1952.
30 Purdue, *Big House in the North of Ireland*, p. 3.
31 Purdue, *Big House in the North of Ireland*, pp 239–240; see also ibid., p. 100.
32 Quoted in *Irish Times*, 14 April 1923.
33 *Irish Times*, 7 November 1932.
34 *Dáil Eireann*, viii, 1583 (17 July 1924).
35 Purdue, *Big House in the North of Ireland*, p. 111.
36 Bowen, 'The Big House', p. 29.
37 Bowen, *Bowen's Court*, p. 458.
38 For a comprehensive study of the land question in Ireland after independence, see Terence Dooley, '*The Land for the People': The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2007).
39 *Dail Eireann debates*, vol. 93, 2 May 1944, 1852.
40 For a wider discussion on this, see Terence Dooley, 'National patrimony and political perceptions of the Irish country house in post-independence Ireland' in Terence Dooley (ed.), *Ireland's Polemical Past: Views of Irish History in Honour of R.V. Comerford* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 192–212.

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41 *An Act to make provision for the protection and preservation of national monuments and for the preservation of archaeological objects in Saorstat Eireann and to make provision for other matters aforesaid*, no. 2 of 1930 (26 February 1930).
42 See Mandler, *Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*, p. 256.
43 Chairman of the OPW's notes, 1 January 1946 (National Archives of Ireland, OPW files, F94/574/1); I am grateful to Dr Emer Crooke for this reference.
44 This is an area deserving of considerably more attention from scholars.
45 See Christopher Ridgway, 'Making and meaning in the country house: new perspectives in England, Ireland and Scotland' in Dooley and Ridgway (eds), *The Irish Country House*, pp. 203–243.
46 For a catalogue of some of these, see The Knight of Glin (Desmond FitzGerald), D. J. Griffin, N. K. Robinson, *Vanishing Country Houses of Ireland* (Dublin, 1988).
47 *Irish Times*, 11 January 1957.
48 *Irish Farmers' Journal*, 21 March 1959.
49 Fingall, *Seventy Years Young*, p. 29.
50 Cannadine, *Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*, p. 643.
51 Strong, Binney, Harris (eds), *Destruction of the Country House*, p. 6.
52 See earlier [Introduction – on tax concessions].
53 Comerford, *Ireland*, p. 249.
54 See for example, Edward McParland and Nicholas Robinson (eds), *Heritage at Risk: A Digest of An Taisce's Report on the Future of Historic Houses, Gardens and Collections in the Republic of Ireland* (1977); Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (Dublin, 2004).
55 See Terence Dooley, *A Future for Irish Historic Houses? A Study of Fifty Houses* (Dublin, 2003).

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4

Bowen's Court as 'an Aesthetic of Living'[1]: A Lost Mansion's Significance in the Imagining of the Irish Gentry

Ian d'Alton

Abstract: *Bowen's Court, Co. Cork, was the Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen's Irish home, demolished in 1959. Together, the house and Elizabeth's book* Bowen's Court *represent the gentry's life by story and subversion. The story is of individual Bowens generations, the family, the ancestral home, becoming almost of one substance in time and place. The subversion is in Bowen's portrayal of the Anglo-Irish life as predetermined grand tragedy – intense, emotional, inevitable, ghostlike – the introverted integrity of a cause lost a long time ago. Can that way of life, like the house, also be characterised as no more than a memory and an illusion? Perhaps. But if there is little but ruin and an empty shell, Bowen's literary craft has placed a preservation order upon both. The essay offers an innovative literary perspective, conjuring images of lost mansions and their meaning as literary texts.*

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Bartholomew's Irish ordnance survey-based map of 1966 is full of ghosts.[2] One such is Bowen's Court, an otherwise unexceptional Irish Big House located in a remote area of north County Cork in the south of the island of Ireland. It is still on that map; yet it had been demolished some six years previously, a mere three years before a new planning regime might, just, have saved it. Today, the curious will find in the grass, Ozymandias-like, a few remnants of cut stone and a forlorn outhouse.[3] 'This is a country of ruins', once declaimed its owner, the Anglo-Irish novelist and writer, Elizabeth Bowen.[4] Bowen's Court isn't even a ruin: it now exists only in literature and in the hearts and memories of those hardy Bowenistas that assemble, every last September, for a commemorative Anglican evensong in the little unlighted, unheated church at Farahy, close by where the house once stood.

Hermione Lee's 1981 literary biography of Elizabeth Bowen has two entries in its index for Bowen's Court, one in plain typeface, one in italics.[5] This encapsulates how this building has come to be seen. The house had its own existence as a sturdy reality in the landscape, a plain typeface entry. But it also possesses an italic, imaginative, historical and literary significance as the eponymous biography of the house and its inhabitants, originally published in 1942.[6] This chapter contrasts the ordinariness of this lost mansion with its, and its author's, place in the literature and the imaginative history of Anglo-Ireland.

Bowen's Court the house is frequently cited as an exemplar in the history of the Big House in Ireland. This identification is not because of any innate architectural merit or the political and economic importance of its inhabitants, but rather because this writer and historians like Terence Dooley (in the preceding chapter of this volume and in his *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland*[7]) probably find that they are seduced by the descriptive power, style and sheer literary quality wielded by Elizabeth in the book *Bowen's Court*. Photographs of the house, which are relatively few anyway, are almost redundant. With an artist's eye, Bowen places the house in its geographic setting – a limestone area of south-west Ireland, a land of middling fertility, lots of rivers and streams, no lakes, framed by, to the north, the imposing Galtee Mountains and Ballyhoura Hills. In *Bowen's Court*, Elizabeth contrasted '... the intense centripetal life' of these Anglo-Irish houses with the '... plastic emptiness' of the country ...' around it.[8] A corollary of this emptiness, though, was isolation. '"*You* are a long way from everywhere!"' was what her visitors often said.[9] And yet she also wrote that 'The country is not as empty as

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it seems', and went on to describe how she saw the indigenous (that is, Roman Catholic) population suddenly appearing in the countryside, especially on Sundays and festivals.[10] This is not as contradictory as it sounds. One important characteristic of the Anglo-Irish was an ability to filter out those not of their class or religion. As Lionel Fleming wrote, 'nothing counted for about three miles on any side of us, because there were no Protestants until then',[11] Bowen echoed this: 'sometimes for days together a family may not happen to leave its own demesne',[12] as did Joseph Hone: 'high on the hill behind two white gates, we were a world and a law unto ourselves'.[13] These writers sought – and found – their own. The gates of Bowen's Court were set as far up the road as possible to the then-fashionable spa town of Mallow.[14]

It has to be said that the house itself had little stylistic or architectural merit.[15] No drawings or details survive. Building commenced in or around 1765 by Henry Cole Bowen, and was completed some ten years later, at the confident high water mark of the eighteenth century's Protestant ascendancy in Ireland.[16] Here is Elizabeth's atmospheric description:

> Bowen's Court ... is a high bare Italianate building. It was intended to form a complete square, but the north-east corner is missing. Indoors, the plan is simple; the rooms are large, lofty and few. The house stands three stories high, with, below, a basement sunk in an area. Outside the front door a terrace, supported on an unseen arch, bridges the area: from this terrace the steps descend to the gravel sweep. The house is built of limestone from a nearby quarry; the south front and long west side are faced with cut stone – the mouldings and corners are marble-sharp ...
>
> The great bare block – not a creeper touches it – is broken regularly by windows; in the south facade there are twenty ... in the west side eighteen, in the shorter east side six, in the north back six ... When the sun is low, in the early mornings or evenings, the house seems, from the outside, to be riddled with light.
>
> Indoors, the rooms with these big windows not only reflect the changes of weather but seem to contain the weather itself ... on winter mornings ... the plaster and marble indoors, even the white woodwork, looks also frosty and hard. When rain moves in vague grey curtains across the country ... grey quivers steadily on the indoor air, giving the rooms ... the resigned look of being exposed to rain ...
>
> Bowen's Court is severely classical and, outside and inside, is very bare ... There has been no attempt to break any space up ... This is Bowen's Court as the past has left it – an isolated, partly unfinished house, grandly conceived and plainly and strongly built.[17]

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FIGURE 2 *View of Bowen's Court with Elizabeth Bowen. Reproduced by kind permission by Getty Images/Alim Aarons*

Inheriting the house on the death of her father in 1930, the England-based Bowen and her husband, Alan Cameron, stayed there sporadically until he retired in 1952, when they returned, as they thought, to live there for a long time (Figure 2). But Cameron died that year. Elizabeth remained on, stacking up financial problems as a generous hostess, trying to keep the money coming in by frantic writing. Something had to give, and the house had to go.

Attempts to keep the house in the family failed and it was eventually sold to a local farmer at the end of 1959.[18] Bowen thought it would be lived in again, with children. But that did not happen. It is not quite clear why the house had to be torn down. It may have been a decision based on hard-headed financial considerations. Yet there are those who would see in that action a final reckoning in the wars over land that had bedevilled Ireland for centuries – ironic, perhaps, as Bowen's Court had survived the Troubles of the early 1920s, unlike its neighbours Ballywalter, Convamore and Rockmills, all destroyed in a single night in 1921.[19] By and large, the Bowens seem to have been regarded as decent landlords and neighbours. Elizabeth put a brave face on this disaster. She professed to be glad that her house had 'had a clean end. It never was

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a ruin.'[20] According to her lover Charles Ritchie, she was not afraid to revisit the site in later years.[21]

So much for the house. It is safe to say that without its Elizabethan serenade, Bowen's Court would have merited little more than a line in any catalogue of Irish lost mansions. As it has turned out, *Bowen's Court* the book has attracted a great deal of attention, principally from cultural and literary scholars and, contradicting the house's physical modesty, has come to stand for those who see the Anglo-Irish world of the twentieth century as one of grand tragedy, predetermined, relentless, inevitable, with a soupçon of just dessert thrown in. Colin Reid has a striking phrase about the Protestant nationalist Stephen Gwynn, that he was 'dominated by ... pursuit of an imagined Ireland.'[22] One way in which that 'imagined Ireland' could be created and a cultural identity declared was through the literary: novels, plays, poetry, memoirs, even journalism. Unsurprisingly, this literature is extensive. After Irish independence in 1922, words often remained the only weapons at the disposal of the Anglo-Irish, and they had the education to use them effectively. Bowen once described one of her novels as 'fiction with the texture of history'. In many respects, *Bowen's Court* is history with a fictional, imaginative feel.[23] Furthermore, Bowen's non-fictive pieces on the Big House deepen its imaginative power in telling the southern Anglo-Irish story. *Bowen's Court* is central, but so also is Bowen's distilled essay 'The Big House', published in the Irish magazine *The Bell* in 1940.[24] 'The Big House' is a description of isolation, of too much roominess and exclusivity, but also one of refuge and utility.

A still wider perspective is offered by Bowen's 'Irish' novel, *The Last September*, published in 1929 (her second), and *A World of Love*, published in 1955.[25] *The Last September* is a story of the final days of a county Cork Big House, Danielstown, and its inhabitants, in 1920. As the surrounding country rises in defiance, these characters, with their conflicting desires and divided loyalties, are heading for unavoidable disaster; and they all know it. At the end, the Big House burns as its owners watch. 'Of all my books', wrote Bowen, *Last September* 'is nearest my heart'.[26] In it, her ear is perfect, her sense of place confident, her tone elegiac. There is little of the anguish of southern Irish Protestants expressed by a character in Lennox Robinson's contemporaneous play *The Big House*, set in 1921–1923: 'we were ashamed of everything, ashamed of our birth, ashamed of our good education, ashamed of our religion, ashamed that we dined in the evenings, and that we dressed for dinner'.[27] There may have been relative poverty at Bowen's Court. In 1934, in an eerie echo

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of Robinson, Virginia Woolf described the Camerons as 'keeping up a ramshackle kind of state, dressing for dinner and so on ...'[28] – but there was never shame.

A World of Love (1955) was, in Bowen's phrase, a 'darkened mirror' and reflected her preoccupations, after Cameron's death, with money, a shabby Irish house and a shabbier heroine. She was at a low ebb when writing it, and it shows. Here is Montefort, a smallish Big House, that stands as a metaphor for the 'Descendancy'[29] that many Anglo-Irish felt they had become after the World War II. The house's decrepitude mirrors its inhabitants' condition; and it has become almost a ghost in the landscape which it once dominated. 'Montefort? Pity that place has gone' remarks a neighbour who should have known better; and a casual visitor remarks, 'No idea there was anyone living here'.[30] To all intents and purposes, this miniature mansion is *already* lost. So are its inhabitants.

The central metaphors with which the Big Houses are most often associated are internalised. In Gearóid Cronin's perceptive phrase the House became 'a place of isolation, exclusion and enclosure' and 'a symbol of unity, a stage setting for an image of cohesion.'[31] In its relation to the outside world, the House, in Vera Kreilcamp's words, is 'a receptacle of illusion, as a richly evocative symbol of its occupants' encapsulation in the past.'[32] In its destruction, whether by murder or euthanasia, the House appears to symbolise the death-throes of a class in Ireland.

Something more might be added, however. The historian Oliver MacDonagh maintained that for the Anglo-Irish, 'the physical precincts were ... central to identity'.[33] In this reading, the Big House is a set, a backdrop, a screen against or upon which the everyday tiny dramas of Anglo-Irish life could be portrayed and projected. As Elizabeth wrote of Bowen's Court, the house offered 'representative if miniature theatre'.[34] Here, in the introverted Lilliputian worlds of Somerville's & Ross's *The Irish RM* and *The Real Charlotte,* the landed class weaves Mark Bence-Jones's intricate social filigree. Among themselves, the landed indulge in a variant of Freud's 'narcissism of small differences'.[35] It is the *ennui* of a perpetual Protestant afternoon tea.[36] In fiction, for roundness, the setting had to carry an aura not just of space, but also of time. This is captured in Lennox Robinson's stage directions for *The Big House*: 'the effect of all being a comfortable room containing the vestigia of generations'. The directions gel with Bowen's 'pellucid silence' of Danielstown, 'distilled from a hundred and fifty years of conversation'.[37]

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Bowen's fiction captures an Anglo-Irish class tied inescapably to the landscape, from *The Last September* and *A World of Love* through a plethora of short stories, such as 'Summer Night' and 'The Happy Autumn Fields'. But her portrayal is so often a relationship of murderous love. Eibhear Walshe, in a 2005 essay on Bowen's interaction with this terrain of north Cork,[38] highlights contradictions between Bowen's representation of landscape in *Bowen's Court* and in her fiction. In *Bowen's Court*, the landscape is not threatening. By contrast, in the fiction it *is* hostile, a proxy, perhaps, for those people the Protestant Anglo-Irish could not, or would not, see.

Bowen's use of *chiaroscuro*, of shadow and light, in *The Last September* reflects that sense of partially glimpsed menace that was a constant companion to the Anglo-Irish in the years between 1920 and 1923. *Chiaroscuro* creates a dimensional feel which is critical to the book. Bowen is not trammelled by geography, but even if she were, her 'Big House' also has to have a 'Big Garden.' As in *Bowen's Court*, she lavishes attention upon it.[39] Danielstown's demesne land is an integral part of *The Last September*, from its very first pages.[40] In all this, space is central to Bowen, whether it be sufficient, insufficient or over-abundant, or just ordinary. The roominess, indeed, emptiness, of Danielstown is evoked: 'in the dining-room, the little party sat down under the crowd of portraits ... spaced out accurately round the enormous table ... each so enisled and distant that a remark at random, falling short of a neighbour, seemed a cry of appeal'. That portrayal is countered by the cooking smells that invade the house, giving it a sense of smallness, even of the commonplace.[41] In Bowen's fiction, villas are often 'painted by numbers', so that the reader can achieve an appropriate visualisation.[42] And it must be remembered that Bowen spent most of her life in city houses and suburban villas. In that domestic sense, Bowen's Court was not central to her life. At the end, Bowen retreated to the Kent coast, where she and her mother had also gone when her father's mental illness had become too great to bear.

Bowen suggested in her essay 'The Big House', that 'the paradox of these big houses is that often they are not big at all' when compared to Irish 'great houses'.[43] In the world of her fiction, what is striking is the notion of the Big House as *Big*, no matter what its physical size. From the large Danielstown in *The Last September* to the small Montefort in *A World of Love* the house is unable to accommodate emotionally all who seek shelter in it. Elizabeth's exposition is that 'life works to dispossess

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the dead, to dislodge and oust them. Their places fill themselves up; later people come in; all the room is wanted.'[44]

And at the last, when these houses die, they are represented as much as the victims of war and its collateral damage as their inhabitants. Like people, the houses have glorious ends, or cower in the countryside, thankfully unnoticed, lucky to survive, living on, dying in their beds. In a mirror to the real 1921 burnings of three houses close to Bowen's Court, Elizabeth has three fictional houses in *The Last September* – Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel – also going up in flames.[45] These are the unlucky ones, but brave in their own way: 'Behind the trees, pressing in from the open and empty country like an invasion, the orange bright sky crept and smouldered', as the house awaited its 'executioners.' This is Bowen's description of Danielstown, mirrored later by Yeats, in his drama *Purgatory*:[46]

> But he killed the house; to kill a house
> Where great men grew up, married, died,
> I here declare a capital offence.

Here is a clue to what the Big House really means to Bowen. If the House as stage-set or background is a necessary condition for understanding how the Anglo-Irish lived and saw their lives, it is hardly sufficient. Cronin believed that in *The Last September* 'the house is the real central character of the story.'[47] The primacy of the house's personality is established as early as the second page, where 'the mansion piled itself up in silence' over the visitors' voices.[48] This anthropomorphic sense runs through Bowen's other writings. In *The House in Paris,* she wrote of 'sending vibrations up the spine of the house'. In *The Heat of the Day*, Holme Dene, the house of the spy, Robert Kelway is '... a house made for surveillance, a man-eating house'.[49] And if the house is a character then, in Bowen, characters can be houses. The description of the English soldier Gerald Lesworth's character in *The Last September* as 'rare and square – four-square – occurring like houses in a landscape, unrelated and positive ...', is reflected in her last novel, *Eva Trout* (1969), where the house, Larkins, has human character; it, too, is soldierly, four-square – 'its gaze was forthright'.[50]

The anthropomorphic house may have held much more for Elizabeth. Bowen's marriage with Alan Cameron was childless. Cameron was not only a decorated World War I hero and an intelligent administrator with a deliberate line in boring stories, but also a diabetic and an alcoholic.[51] Yet,

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the *house* Bowen's Court can be seen either as the mother she lost when only 13; or, more empathetically, as the child she never had. The house proved wayward, expensive, exasperating, but also loved and loving, a refuge, a point of hope.[52] The *book Bowen's Court* was *its* offspring, so to speak, a grandchild to Bowen's imagination. The house, as she wrote 'was made happy by the presence of our relations'.[53] In some respects, Bowen's relationship with the house is that of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard in his book *Poetics of Space*.[54] His notion of the house as 'home', as a place in which we are protected, from cosmos to cradle, envisages the house as a maternal figure, in which we store our treasures collected from lifetimes. In other respects, it is more in tune with Phyllis Lassner's suggestion that Bowen's 'portraits of empty but claustrophobic houses challenge our stereotypical associations of family homes with a nurturing and beneficent female essence'.[55] This family chronicle with a literary sense, described as 'an act of pietas' by Roy Foster, is, of course, a superb story. It is also a dangerously subversive history: 'an act', in Neil Corcoran's words 'of imaginative family elegy and empathy'.[56] The story is of individual Bowens, the family and the ancestral home, becoming almost of one substance in time and place. The subversion lies in the misleading perception that history and emotional capital pile up. In Elizabeth's words, 'with the end of each generation, the lives that submerged here were absorbed again. With each death, the air of the place had thickened: it had been added to.'[57] The gentry might be no more than holograms in a solid landscape, but this version of Protestant history has (or appears to have) an attractive and believable reality for those who wish to believe. *Bowen's Court* the book has a central place in that believability.

In one sense, although the fiction doesn't mirror what the historians and anthropological sociologists have established, it carries its own validity. The detachment and introversion of the worlds of Danielstown and Montefort reflect the generality, but not the particularity, of historical reality.[58] Danielstown burns, and the novel encourage us to characterize its destruction and, by extension, the historical burnings, as a sort of *suttee* in which the Anglo-Irish flinging themselves on the funeral pyre. With that immolation may come resurrection. Renewal through fire is an age-old imagery in many cultures, but in the case of the Irish Big House, it rarely happened. Instead, owners suffer merciful release from the house as tyrannous invalid aunt forever banging on the bedroom floor for attention, the spoilt, demanding child gobbling up resources, the complacent, sleepy sentry in a hostile territory.

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In reality, the Anglo-Irish, by and large an unimaginative race, bore their dispossession stolidly; and, in any case, in R. B. McDowell's cool words, 'hardships sustained by the southern loyalists were on the whole not excessively severe nor long-lasting'.[59] According to the historian J. C. Beckett, 'acquiescence seemed the only course open to them, and they adjusted themselves to the new conditions more quickly and with less difficulty than might have been expected'.[60] It may be thought that this is about 1922; but Beckett was referring to those Protestants who were opposed to the Act of Union after 1801. This offers another clue to coping. The gentry of 1922 had been here before. They could be there again, or so it seemed. Echoing Yeats, history was cyclical: 'the soul of man lived many lives'.[61] Cultural stasis is the balance between remembering the future and imagining the past. This transcendental level is perhaps reflected in the fiction. The Big House renews its life by drawing in the spirits of the dead, as from the nearly ghost republican who brushes past the heroine Lois in the garden of Danielstown.

In contrast to the sense of the Anglo-Irish as alien and unwanted, Bowen's Court, the template for Danielstown,[62] escaped the turbulent years 1919–1923 almost unscathed. Bowen's description of her father's funeral in 1930 is particularly poignant. The Anglican service was held in the open air at Farahy church so that Roman Catholics could attend, which they did in their hundreds.[63] Nevertheless, although outwardly the Anglo-Irish's *raison d'etre* might have appeared in reasonable order at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was increasingly disengaged – an engine running, but in neutral. If that disengagement, social, cultural, economic and as much voluntary as involuntary, had begun long before Irish independence in 1922, it was because, in Bowen's words about the gentry's life as early as the 1830s, 'it could exist in detail – comings-and-goings, entertainments, marriages – but the main healthy abstract was gone.'[64]

Where Bowen's fiction and non-fiction dovetail is in an avoidance of the Big House's workaday economic and social role by giving it a life and a characterisation almost independent of those who inhabited it. Bowen, whose writing is indirect and oblique, creates not just one, but several, distinct *personae* for Danielstown in *The Last September*. This grows organically from her childhood, and is somewhat in antithesis to it. Elizabeth coped with her father's mental illnesses by a 'campaign of not noticing'.[65] But Danielstown, a.k.a. Bowen's Court, *is* noticing: 'the vast facade of the house stared coldly over its mounting lawns'.[66] Thus, right at the start of the

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book, one of its characters, the house, is defined as that of both observer and protector. Its principal characters drive out, but the house watches; 'looking longest after them, like an eye, a window glittered.'[67] The south-west facing Bowen's Court had lots of glittering windows.

In Bowen's fiction, the Big House is often as mysterious as a stranger. A romantic gothic thing, it is a behemoth. In Virginia Woolf's phrase about Bowen's Court, this 'great stone box'[68] represents the magical *deus ex machina* which, as in the later novels of Iris Murdoch, enables the plot to be justified and resolved.[69] Bowen engenders a faint sense of menace and furtiveness in the House's attitude towards its human inhabitants. Nevertheless, it is also a co-conspirator; it's on the same side as its inhabitants (we think). They are all outsiders in this land, frightened rather than frightening:

> The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face ... It seemed to gather its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide, light, lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon it was set.[70]

If the essence of its personalisation by Bowen lies in the need to see the Big House as elemental life force, it is obvious that many were already dying, their economic justification largely gone by the early 1900s.[71] Matt Eatough's 2012 essay, 'Bowen's Court and the Anglo-Irish World-System',[72] argues that Bowen, influenced by notions of the usefulness and economic autonomy prevalent in the Ireland of the 1930s, represents the gentry as a professional class, thus seeing the gentry's decline as, in essence, the consequence of a changing economic world rather than as the victims of '... an overemotional economy that binds Bowen's class to the land of Ireland'.[73] Ultimately, there is a certain lack of sentimentality for and an absence of loyalty to the Big House, as exemplified by the Naylors' abandonment of Danielstown in *The Last September*.[74] Bowen was faced, in real life, with the same dilemma; and answered it in much the same way. This reading goes some way towards validating her utilitarian vision in the 1940 essay 'The Big House':[75]

> From the point of view of the outside Irish world, does the big house justify its existence? I believe it could do so as never before.'

In *Bowen's Court* Elizabeth stoutly maintained of the gentry that 'they are tougher than they appear'.[76] That this toughness was allied to the sturdiness of their houses was evident. It did not necessarily conflict with her sighing conclusion that, 'in the life of ... the new Ireland ... the lives of

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my own people become a little thing'.[77] In a parallel Protestant-gentry world, largely self-contained and inward-looking, littleness might not matter. But where utopianism breaks in is her justification for the Big House's continued relevance. Is the House to be a source of capital? Or a focus for agricultural efficiency and innovation? Or a tourist trap? No; in her phrase, it is to be 'sociable'. This seems to be code for no more than a place where the two primal kinds of Irish – Roman Catholic and Protestant – can meet, talk and resolve. In this, it *is* emotional, and falls far short of a vision for a sustainable future.

Yet it might be held that the sustainable future was as likely to be socio-cultural as anything else. Robert Tobin has asserted that 'as the Big House died as a social actuality, it was reborn in Irish literature.'[78] In this interpretation, the book *Bowen's Court* is just one more reinforcement of an Irish literary redoubt that runs from Charles Lever to William Trevor. Here, it has become a cliché, a distorting lens, the stuff of coffee-table books, a deliberate representation of the introverted integrity of a cause lost a long time ago.[79] Just as the book *Bowen's Court* has outlived the house, the fiction of Anglo-Irish nostalgia has possessed a life outliving its subject matter. As Tobin maintains, this led to 'the readiness with which many Protestant writers have embraced, or at least acquiesced in, the imagery and language of extinction'.[80] That extinction is one of black hole; saddled with their genealogy, hostages to their futures, the gentry struggled with the often contradictory centrifugal and centripetal force of their houses. 'A Bowen, in the first place, made Bowen's Court', wrote Elizabeth, 'since then, with an alarming sureness, Bowen's Court has made all the succeeding Bowens.'[81] Anything but Bachelard's home of rest and refreshment, Michael Davitt's poem *Third Draft of a Dream* brilliantly evokes that image of the Big House as gaoler as well as gaol:[82]

> The door, that shadowy door
> Closes. And the mind is closed.
> A disembodied eye
> Roves through the big house …
> They had built their own open prisons.

* * *

Today, anyone who undertakes a pilgrimage to Farahy churchyard will only sense ghosts. Elizabeth Bowen's grave crouches for shelter against a westering wall. Close by, the wind shakes the barley where once

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stood the 'great stone box' of Bowen's Court. Nothing is left. Can her Anglo-Irish way of life also be characterised, at the last, as no more than a memory and an illusion? Perhaps. But if the rot had long set from within, if there is little but an empty shell, we are indebted to the likes of Bowen whose literary craft has placed a preservation order upon it. A new, and a higher reality has been created. And thus, in *Bowen's Court*, she captures a nearby garden party at another Irish Great House now lost, Mitchelstown Castle. Here, on 5 August 1914, 'wind raced round the Castle terraces, naked under the Galtees; grit blew into the ices; the band clung with some trouble to its exposed place'. Here, on the day after World War I broke out, the flower of loyalist north Anglo-Irish society met, incongruously doing what it did best: Elizabeth Bowen's 'comings-and-goings, entertainments'. Here, though, as we know with a superior hindsight, this Anglo-Irish life was to be at the cusp of its finest hour. And here, appropriately in Bowen's words, we take our leave of that reality, that illusion:[83]

> The unseen descent of the sun behind the clouds sharpens the bleak light; the band, having throbbed out God Save the King, packs up its wind-torn music and goes home.

Notes

1 The phrase is Elizabeth Bowen's, in her short story, 'Sunday afternoon' – Angus Wilson (intr.), *The Collected Stories of Elizabeth Bowen* (Hopewell, NJ, 1981), p. 616. I express my thanks to Felix Larkin and Eibhear Walshe for assistance in the preparation of this chapter.

2 John Bartholomew & Son, *Quarter-Inch Map of Ireland, 4, Cork-Killarney* (Edinburgh: revised 1966).

3 See a pictorial representation of the site at http://igscork.blogspot.ie/2010/08/mid-summer-visit-to-north-cork-saturday.html - Irish Georgian Society visit to the site (accessed 27 May 2013).

4 Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court & Seven Winters* (London, 1984) [hereafter, *BC*], p. 15; written between 1939 and 1941, the book was originally published in 1942 by Longmans Green and Co Ltd, London (see Chapter 3). For a short analytical biography of Bowen, see Ian d'Alton, 'Elizabeth Bowen', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009), vol. 1, 693–695. The best of a large body of Irish scholarship on Bowen includes Victoria Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen: Portrait of a Writer* (London, 1993), p. 160; Roy Foster, 'The Irishness of Elizabeth Bowen', in *Paddy and*

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Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History (London, 1993) and his 'Prints on the Scene: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of Childhood', in *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (London, 2001); Declan Kiberd, 'Elizabeth Bowen – the dandy in revolt,' in *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1995).

5 Hermione Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen* (London, 1999), p. 260.

6 Bowen, *Bowen's Court;* the quotes following are from *BC*.

7 Terence Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 24–27, and 146–149.

8 *BC*, pp. 14, 20.

9 Elizabeth Bowen, 'The Big House' [1940], in *Collected impressions* (London, 1950), p. 195.

10 *BC*, pp. 4–5.

11 Lionel Fleming, *Head or Harp* (London, 1965), pp. 17, 36.

12 *BC*, p. 19.

13 Joseph Hone, *Duck Soup in the Black Sea* (London, 1988), p. 238.

14 *BC*, p. 9: '... all the Anglo-Irish houses, in a fifteen-mile radius, built their gates as far as possible up the road to Mallow'. For the parish in 1837, see Tim Cadogan (ed.), *Lewis' Cork: A Topographical Dictionary of the Parishes, Towns and Villages of Cork City and County* (Cork, 1998), pp. 235–236. In contrast to descriptions of other houses elsewhere in his *Dictionary*, Lewis has nothing to say about Henry Cole Bowen's mansion. The house was valued at £75 at the time of Griffith's Valuation; http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2644 (accessed 27 May 2013).

15 Dooley, *Decline of the Big House*, p. 24.

16 *BC*, pp. 167–168.

17 *BC*, pp. 21–28.

18 Victoria Glendinning, with Judith Robertson (ed.), *Love's Civil War: Elizabeth Bowen and Charles Ritchie: Letters and Diaries, 1941–1973* (London, 2009), p. 351.

19 These burnings, and the reasons behind them, are dealt with by James S. Donnelly Jr, 'Big House Burnings in County Cork during the Irish Revolution, 1920–21', in *Eire-Ireland* 47:3–4 (Fall/Winter 2012), pp. 164–167; Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 47.

20 *BC*, p. 459.

21 Glendinning with Robertson, *Love's Civil War*, p. 465.

22 Colin Reid, *The Lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn. Irish Constitutional Nationalism and Cultural Politics, 1864–1950* (Manchester, 2011), p. 245.

23 The phrase relates to her novel *The Last September* – Elizabeth Bowen, 'Preface to *The Last September* [1928]' in Hermione Lee (ed.), *The Mulberry Tree. Writings of Elizabeth Bowen* (San Diego, New York, London, 1986), p. 125. Bowen was careful not to claim historical verisimilitude for *Bowen's Court* – 'I

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am, evidently, not a historian' (*BC*, p. 452); nevertheless, she often gives an impression of evidence-based historical research when, in fact, none existed. 'She was no historian at all', Glendinning, *Bowen*, p. 64.

24 *The Bell*, 1: 1 (October 1940); the essay was reprinted in Bowen, 'The Big House', in *Collected Impressions* [but dated 1942].

25 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September* (London, 1998); *idem., A World of Love* (New York, 1978); Andries Wessels, 'Elizabeth Bowen's "A World of Love": A "Cultural Analysis" of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy in the twentieth century', in *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 21: 1 (July 1995): 88–95.

26 Bowen, 'Preface to *The Last September*', p. 123.

27 Christopher Murray (ed.) *Selected Plays of Lennox Robinson* (Gerrard's Cross, 1982), p. 195. Robinson's play was written in 1925 and published in 1926.

28 Woolf to Vanessa Bell, in Nigel Nicholson (ed.), *The Sickle Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1932–1935* (London, 1979), pp. 299–300, quoted in Lee, *Bowen*, pp. 37, 232–233.

29 Hubert Butler's term; Hubert Butler, 'The Bell: An Anglo-Irish View', in *Irish University Review*, 6: 1 (1976): 66–72.

30 Bowen, *A World of Love*, pp. 37, 80.

31 Gearóid Cronin, 'The Big House and the Irish landscape in the work of Elizabeth Bowen', in Jacqueline Genet (ed.) *The Big House in Ireland; Reality and Representation* (Brandon, 1991), p. 146; also David Kennedy, 'The Big House in Irish literature' in *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, xxxii (1989): 27.

32 Vera Kreilcamp, *The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House* (Syracuse, 1998), p. 168.

33 Oliver MacDonagh, *States of Mind: A Study of the Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1780–1980* (London, 1983), p. 28.

34 *BC*, p. 455.

35 *BC*, pp. 259, 436; Mark Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the Ascendancy* (London, 1987); Donald Akenson, *Small Differences: Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants, 1825–1922* (Montreal, Quebec, 1988), p. 149, using the term from Sigmund Freud, 'The taboo of virginity' (1917).

36 Bowen, 'The Big House', p. 198.

37 Murray, *Lennox Robinson*, p. 139.

38 Eibhear Walshe, 'Several landscapes: Bowen and the terrain of north Cork', in *Estudios Irlandeses*, 2005: 141–147.

39 *BC*, pp. 18–20, 28–30.

40 Bowen, *The Last September,* p. 7; Bowen, 'The Big House', p. 195.

41 Bowen, *The Last September*, pp. 9, 24.

42 For instance Shafquat Towheed, 'Territory, space, modernity: Elizabeth Bowen's *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* and wartime London' in Susan Osborn (ed.), *Elizabeth Bowen: New Critical Perspectives* (Cork, 2009), p. 121 writes of 'Bowen's geometrically obsessed writing'.

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43 Bowen, 'The Big House', p. 196.
44 The quotation is from Bowen, *A World of Love,* p. 56; see also Claire Wills, '"Half different": the vanishing Irish in A World of Love', in Eibhear Walshe (ed.), *Elizabeth Bowen* (Dublin, 2009), p. 135.
45 *The Last September*, p. 206. Bowen was haunted all her life by images of Bowen's Court burning – see Lee (ed.), *The Mulberry Tree*, p. 126; Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 47; Glendinning, *Bowen*, pp. 40, 68; it seems to have been a guilt similar to that experienced by soldiers who survive a brutal war.
46 *The Last September*, pp. 22, 206; William Butler Yeats, *Purgatory* (1938); see Natalie Crohn Schmitt, 'The landscape play: W.B. Yeats's "Purgatory"', *Irish University Review*, 27: 2 (Autumn–Winter, 1997): 262–275.
47 Cronin, 'The Big House', p. 146.
48 *The Last September*, p. 8.
49 Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London, 1950), p. 248.
50 *The Last September*, p. 40; Elizabeth Bowen, *Eva Trout* (London, 1999), p. 16.
51 For an imagined evocation of Cameron's life with Elizabeth, see Ian d'Alton, '"My name is Alan Charles Cameron ..." – The Farahy Address, 9 September 2007' in *The Irish Review*, 40–41 (Winter 2009): 171–176.
52 See Ian d'Alton, review article 'Courting Elizabeth Bowen' [a review of *Elizabeth Bowen: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Osborn (Cork, 2009); also Robertson, *Love's Civil War,* in *The Irish Review*, 42 (Spring/Summer 2010): 128–136.
53 *BC*, p. 449.
54 Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris, 2008), pp. 23–26, 56, 59, 61, 68; an English translation is in Gaston Bachelard, Maria Jolas and John Stilgoe, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston, 1994), where Bachelard explores the psychology of houses; see also Otto Rauchbauer, *Ancestral Voices: The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin, 1992), p. ix.
55 Phyllis Lassner, *Elizabeth Bowen* (Savage, MD, 1989), p. 160.
56 Foster, *The Irish Story*, p. 150; Corcoran, *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*, p. 23.
57 *BC*, p. 451.
58 The historian Theo Hoppen makes the point that what was remarkable about the landed gentry of southern Ireland was not that it lost power, but that, by maximising its advantages, it stayed relevant for so long as it did: Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 170.
59 Robert Brendan McDowell, *Crisis and Decline: The Fate of Southern Unionists* (Dublin, 1998), p. 159.
60 James Camlin Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (London, 1976), p. 85.
61 Francis Stewart Leland Lyons, 'Yeats and the Anglo-Irish twilight' in Oliver MacDonagh, William Mandle and Pauric Travers (eds), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750–1950* (Canberra, 1983), p. 232.

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62 Lee (ed.), *The Mulberry Tree*, p. 126.
63 *BC*, p. 447.
64 *BC*, p. 259; *contra* Hoppen, Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen*, p. 20 maintains that – 'In the novel [*The Last September*], the class and the tradition ... have become ineffectual and redundant within Ireland. We're shown their absurdity, their isolation, their lack of an active position, their helplessly conflicting loyalties. Grandeur has become snobbery, fanaticism has dwindled to eccentricity'.
65 *BC*, p. 416.
66 *The Last September*, p. 7.
67 Cronin, 'The Big House', p. 147; *The Last September*, p. 65.
68 Lee, *Bowen*, p. 37.
69 See Ian d'Alton, 'Iris Murdoch', in McGuire and Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, vol. 6: 783–785.
70 *The Last September*, p. 66.
71 Even though the erstwhile landlords still had control of nearly 2 million untenanted acres in 1922, this was a relatively small proportion of total farmland; Terence Dooley, *'The Land for the People': The Land Question in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 29; see also Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House,* pp. 127–131, and 171–205.
72 Matt Eatough, '*Bowen's Court* and the Anglo-Irish world-system', in *Modern Language Quarterly* 73: 1 (2012): 73.
73 Ibid., pp. 72–73.
74 Bowen, spare in her prose, captures the Naylors' reaction to the destruction of Danielstown in a single sentence (p. 206) – 'Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, not saying anything, did not look at each other, for in the light from the sky they saw too distinctly.'
75 Bowen, 'The Big House', p. 199.
76 *BC*, p. 456.
77 Ibid., p. 437.
78 Quoted in Kreilcamp, *The Anglo-Irish Novel*, p. 2.
79 Elizabeth Grubgeld, *Anglo-Irish Autobiography. Class, Gender and the Forms of Narrative* (Syracuse, 2004), p. 154; see Joseph O'Neill, *Blood-Dark Track: A Family History* (London, 2000), p. 327; as O'Neill notes, 'families and nations have self-serving editions of their past'.
80 Robert Tobin, 'Tracing again the tiny snail track: southern Protestant memoir since 1950', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 35: 1 (Jan. 2005): 172.
81 *BC*, p. 32.
82 Michael Davitt, 'Third draft of a dream' (trans. Paul Muldoon) in Tim Pat Coogan (ed.) *A special issue of Literary Review Ireland and The Arts,* (London, 1982), pp. 161-3.
83 *BC*, pp. 435, 437.

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Part II
Debates and Perceptions

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5

The Loss of Country Houses and Estates through the Destruction and Obscuring of Identity

Barbara Wood

Abstract: *This essay considers the presentation of country houses which survive and are in use but where their original functions and purpose have been lost or altered. Although new uses can secure the survival of a house and the meaning of place, it can also lead to a loss of understanding which can be as destructive as physical loss. We need to ask what purpose these places have. How do houses which haven't lost bricks and mortar but which have certainly lost meaning find a place for the future? These questions are discussed using the case studies of Montacute House and Barrington Court in Somerset and the Cornish Estate of Godolphin.*

Raven, James, ed. *Lost Mansions: Essays on the Destruction of the Country House.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. DOI: 10.1057/9781137520777.0011.

As essays in the first part of this volume amply demonstrate, the destruction of country houses and their loss, in terms of stone and mortar, have been frequently described and discussed in the context of the early and mid-twentieth century and in the continuing demolition and development up to the present day.[1] Destruction, however, is not only the result of the disappearance of landscapes, buildings and estates. As the introduction to these essays also suggests, it may be the case that buildings, gardens and parkland endure and remain in active use, perhaps still with furnishings and retaining estate archives, but no longer connected to their original identity. Where houses are divorced from their origins and original characteristics, what has been lost is actually the sense of place rather than the place itself.

The lost sense of place can be considered by examining the situation of three National Trust properties: Montacute in Somerset, a great prodigy house built at the very end of the reign of Elizabeth I; Godolphin in Cornwall, founded on mining wealth, the home of a powerful family and perhaps a mirror of the decline and resurgence of Cornwall and Barrington Court, an estate founded deep in rural Somerset within the shell of an original sixteenth-century building. These places have experienced a loss of identity that undermines their purpose, leading to a loss of direction for those who care and manage such sites, and confusion and lack of comprehension for visitors. Over recent years, they have been tenanted or lived in, opened to the public, remade, refurnished, operated as a museum or considered as a private house. Each house, however, has also recently engaged in a process of reconsideration and consequently in the definition of an identity which will go some way to provide the rationale which will secure physical care, enable wider intellectual understanding and find a contemporary purpose with relevance for the future.[2]

In what follows, a site with lost identity will be defined as a place which has experienced the loss of original purpose. There may now be only a general idea of present and future purpose or perhaps a current character that is clear but very different from the original. Before turning to the major case studies, several brief examples illustrate the point. The Jacobean mansion of Charlton House in London, for example, built 1607–1612 for Sir Adam Newton, Dean of Durham and tutor to Henry, Prince of Wales, is an imposing building and very much a local landmark. The house is now a community centre. Charlton House's previous pleasure grounds are parks and the walled gardens were redesigned and

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replanted in 2003–2004. A perennial meadow has been planted in the main walled kitchen garden, there is an international peace garden and the orangery has become the public toilets. For those who work with such houses and estates, it is vital that change is recognised and debated. It is important to be able to understand whether re-use is an acceptable remaking or development of place and identity which ensures a continuity of activity and a contemporary relevance or whether it is actually a loss of identity and thus a destruction of purpose.

There are numerous examples of English hotels, offices, golf clubs or museums similarly located in historic houses or associated buildings. The National Trust incorporates many activities within the historic spaces of its properties. Killerton House in Devon includes a large suite of regional offices on the upper floors with local property based offices and a restaurant on the ground floor. This is in addition to a relatively traditional exhibition of historic room settings and rooms devoted to the storage and display of an important, although not associated, costume collection. The house itself stands within a formal garden and an estate increasingly presented as a public park, with ticketing and entrance through the estate yard and stable complex which now includes a shop, additional cafe, volunteer run bookshop and plant centre. The site hosts events such as the fair and music event 'Crikey, it's Vintage' held in 2013, a weekly 'Park Run', theatre productions, a Christmas trail and regular schools events. Killerton House offers formal learning provision in addition to providing a venue for schools events such as orienteering.

The estate of Parke in Bovey Tracey, Devon, also now in National Trust care, was already established by the twelfth century. The estate retains essentially the same form as that already documented in 1640. The original house was rebuilt in 1826–1828 by William Hole as a relatively small, country residence with ornamental landscape in harmony with the older parkland setting. Parke House is now let as offices to the Dartmoor Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust is based in the parkland, the Lodge is available as a holiday cottage and the park is used as a modern recreational park. There is a high level of community involvement in maintenance particularly in the walled garden, and an aspiration to increase such engagement, with the estate presented as a local resource and as a gateway to the extended National Trust lands on higher Dartmoor.

It can be argued strongly that places such as these are not 'lost'. Their walls and roofs remain intact, they are maintained, they have purpose

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and they are in regular use. But, like many country houses open to the public, however positive their current circumstances, it is evident how easily original identities can slip away and a sense of life, domesticity and industry lost. How spaces begin to change use and lose coherence with the introduction of toilets, cafes, visitor routes, signage; the loss of the reality which the senses recognise – sound, smell, movement; the loss of purpose with empty outbuildings and stables reused as cafes. Physical relationships and purposeful working are obscured as farm buildings are left vacant or evolve into craft workshops, Education Centres or stores, or as historic pathways and doorways are blocked or opened up to facilitate ease of movement and the practical needs of twenty-first century activity. Is there any way to retain an original purpose and identity for such places or must it be always and irretrievably lost? Is it of any real importance that those who currently engage with historic spaces should be able to understand original landscapes and comprehend the impact of the country estate on the shape of the physical world and on the lives of previous generations? Or perhaps it is essentially contemporary identity rather than original purpose which is of importance? If so, what might a valid purpose be for our own time; does there need to be consistency with the past or is it simply easier and more realistic to remake identity as time moves and circumstances change?

In extreme cases, by saving fabric, making visitor attractions, using great houses as office suites or hotels, has re-use and new purpose been as destructive as in places where everything has been lost through demolition? Is it actually easier to study, explain or communicate at sites which are completely lost, disappeared with no physical remains and where identity will now always remain contemporary, uncompromised and therefore more easily recognisable? Are buildings or estates which have survived the destruction seen in the early years of the twentieth century really safe or might identity now be so obscured that they are vulnerable to loss and destruction through lack of public knowledge and understanding?

The following examines the discussion at three properties designed to ensure that sites do not become lost, subsumed within a generic historical day out or made anonymous through the requirements and operation of the heritage industry. In these cases, it is hoped that more insightful understanding for both visitors and staff helps to provide the rationale for conservation and care and enhances the experience of contemporary users of the sites.

Critical to all three estates and the work to recognise and closely define identity is a recognition of significance and a deep and shared

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understanding of 'Spirit or Sense of Place' be it rooted in the past or the future. This term refers to the living, social and spiritual nature of any place including built properties and open spaces. It has been closely defined in the ICOMOS[3] Quebec Declaration on the preservation of the spirit of place 2008:

> the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colours, odours, etc.), that is to say the physical and spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to a place.

Staff responsible for all three sites discussed in this essay have understood the importance of a solid foundation of knowledge of place in addition to character or spirit. Those managing each property intend ultimately to consolidate and condense such information into a set of documents which will be the tools to guide future operation and ensure that future development is well managed.

- A Vision Statement (purpose of place and the long-term ambitions)
- A Statement of Significance
- Spirit of Place (clarity and shared understanding of sense, spirit, character)
- Conservation Management Plan
- Visitor Insight (research, understanding, evaluation and measurement related to audiences and site users including staff and visitors; volunteer feedback)
- Operating Principles ('ways of working' which are characteristic of a particular place)

Barrington Court, Somerset

Barrington Court was built in the mid-sixteenth century for William Clifton, with an adjacent stable block added in 1675. As with many houses, it was a new estate created over a previous manor and probably over a past Roman site. The house passed through a number of families before being reduced to use as a farm house, cattle shed and cider store when the estate became purely farm land (Figure 3). It was the first mansion property acquired by the National Trust in 1907 and the Trust found itself almost overwhelmed with the financial requirements

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FIGURE 3 *Photograph of Barrington Court in the 1890s; behind the lady with two children by the entrance stands a maid with a bucket and mop in the doorway.*
Source: Reproduced by kind permission of ©National Trust Images/John Hammond

of conservation. The house was then in a completely ruinous state, open to the sky, with few of the interiors remaining. The National Trust was eventually able to let Barrington on a 100-year lease to Colonel Arthur Lyle. With a keen interest in historic buildings, Lyle had been looking for an appropriate site as a home for his great collection of historic woodwork and a house to restore and develop. His approach was to be similar to that of other wealthy families interested in architectural history and craft work at the time, including, for example, Lt Colonel Leopold & Mrs Leonora Jenner at Avebury Manor, Wiltshire, and Sir Walter Jenner at Lytes Cary, Somerset. Lyle and his architect (J. E. Forbes of Forbes & Tate Partnership) completely remade Barrington, linking the house and adjacent stable block to make a home, demolishing the buildings that had grown up around the main core, acquiring surrounding land and creating a model farming estate with a 'new' house at the centre. It was a project of astonishing ambition and vision, which, against the prevailing economic and social climate of the early twentieth century, resulted in the actual foundation of a mansion and country estate at a time of decline for so many others. This arrangement lasted until 1986 when the

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lease was returned and the property was re-tenanted to a reproduction company who used it as their show room, the National Trust opening the gardens only to the public. In 2008, this lease was also returned and the National Trust was left again with an empty property.

Barrington is an example of an identity which has been made, lost and remade over time with a number of different owners, different boundaries and different purposes. It has been an estate, a farm, an antique showroom or left empty. A garden visit offered a house with no contents and no continuity of occupation. The property's identity might be considered sixteenth-century, was sometimes perceived as twentieth-century, sometimes as a garden only and sometimes something else entirely depending on individual experience. Recent National Trust interpretation has not been particularly helpful and has reflected the internal confusion typical of many properties where it is unclear which of many stories or histories might be shared with a primary audience and where there is only a general or limited understanding of future purpose.

A process was initiated to define the critical key elements of the history of Barrington, how this history could be made relevant and shared effectively with visitors and how its management team might be supported to ensure that any model for the future would be financially sustainable. As the property came without collections but with relatively robust fabric, it was possible to explore some options more easily than if it had been furnished. Contemporary art exhibitions, the opening of the house as an empty property, and various tours and events have all been tested. Previous work was also brought together which had looked at options for offices, hotels or event hire and to think about the wider site: the let estate, farm buildings, broader interpretation and significance, Spirit of Place, volunteer opportunities and plans for the interiors.

As a result, a combination of workshops, research, consultation and detailed debate has established an identity for Barrington. It has been agreed that it will remain an unfurnished house, it will not be a recreation and it will not focus on a family history, architecture or even on the gardens. The character of Barrington has been recognised as something less tangible but more active, using the way of life of the Lyle family as the basis for an identity which is not about the past but about the future:

> Our foundation is the aspiration of Colonel Lyle to create a contemporary version of a medieval manor estate and the inspirational architecture of Forbes & Tate.

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> Our ambition is a functioning estate, a community. From the furnishing of the house to the management of the farm, we will maintain the quality of design and craftsmanship. We will play squash on the racquet court, dance in the hall and harvest produce from the garden. The gardens, working buildings and surrounding landscape will be alive with the sounds of those who make their living from traditional skills whether for the National Trust or for themselves, as employed staff or as volunteers.
>
> We recognise that there is a history and a future which the village and estate can share. We aim to continue to contribute to the rich traditional life of our village neighbours, recalling ancient relationships remade to be relevant to the future.[4]

Such a vision statement is pointedly aspirational. Barrington is not yet able to deliver such an experience, but the process of defining this provides an ambitious goal for the property team. The statement already informs everyday operational decisions. Proposals from craft workers to make use of farm buildings have been embraced. Discussion has begun with countywide sports' providers to explore a shared approach to refurbishing the racquet courts. The local village cricket team already plays on the estate ground and a historic dance society meets in the hall. However, offers to gift recently exhibited artwork to the property have been declined. More recently created flower beds at the south front of the house are to be returned to grass with climbing roses in an approach more resonant (although not exactly imitative) of the Lyle family. This will not mean that other elements of the character and history of Barrington are ignored, but it does mean that those who manage and interpret the house are able to understand where and how different aspects of the story can be told and crucially, how much time and budget it is appropriate to allocate to them.

Godolphin Estate, Hayle, Cornwall

Godolphin is an ancient estate and one of the great houses of Cornwall, founded on mining wealth and situated at the heart of an industrial and later farming landscape that has been in continuous use since the Bronze Age. Home of the Godolphin family since the Middle Ages, the fortunes of the estate in many ways reflect that of the county. When transport was primarily by great seaways, Godolphin was at the centre of trading and political networks. As roadways replaced coastal shipping and power

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consolidated in London, so the family moved on and the estate passed to the Dukes of Leeds who visited only once during their ownership. The house was tenanted and downgraded to a farm house increasingly surrounded by barns and outbuildings. The property was bought in the late 1930s by Sidney and Mary Schofield.

The National Trust took on the wider estate in 2000 and the main house and buildings in 2007. The house was already opened to the public in a limited way for local and arts events. The family was particularly concerned with conservation and had done as much as was possible within their personal resources to maintain and manage the place. However, on acquisition, the buildings were in many ways in a state of gentle decline, not for lack of care or good intention, but simply because this is the reality for such houses which are not owned by individuals of extensive means. The National Trust took an early decision to undertake an extensive programme of conservation of the main house and to refurnish it, with sympathy to earlier periods of use, and to open it as a holiday let. This has been successfully completed and although the estate and garden are fully open to general visitors, the main house opens only during the first week of each month (excluding August) and is let to holiday guests for the remainder of the time.

In the early years, the National Trust team believed that Godolphin would be a small scale, quiet, simple and 'lost in time' kind of place. There were references to the 'special' nature of the estate and some suggestion of a sense of 'fairy tale'. It is indeed an atmospheric place with a rich and complex history in terms of building and estate and in the stories of the powerful previous owners. But was the sense of place genuinely 'lost in time'? Curatorially, how would one manage such premises? Perhaps as a private house it may have been possible to follow the 'lost in time' edict, but once owned and marketed by the National Trust, huge public interest and high visitor numbers followed. Encountering the place through written reports and from a distance further suggested different ways of reading it: as a site of wealth, power, prestige, industry, noise, technological development and subsequent decline. The different perceptions among the team working on the site offered immediate reminders of how many different encounters can be made with a single place and how varied experiences might be. And if those involved in working with such places perceive such different identities, how can visitors arriving with no knowledge, no historical context and only an hour to spare, be expected to find a reality of relevance or of authenticity?

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In 2012, when the house at Godolphin opened to visitors, it was a place of enormous activity but it offered a rather uncoordinated, unprioritised and fragmented series of experiences. This was partly a result of the need to focus conservation work on the house, the earlier split ownership of the site, divided between the National Trust (estate) and the Schofield family (house), and the positive decision to open the house during building works and so engage visitors with activity underway. However, no clear long-term direction had been set for the site. Within development team meetings, ideas for potteries, craft workshops and volunteer accommodation were discussed. Generous donors approached the National Trust wanting to provide collections to start a museum. Apprenticeships and work experience opportunities were debated. With no spirit of place defined, ideas of all kinds were of equal weight and potential, requiring debate and consideration. Enthusiasm and the desire to make an offer to as many people as possible often carried the team on to support more events than were perhaps realistic or necessary. The programme included village fairs, food fairs, barefoot walks, Shakespeare on the lawn, 'hard hat' tours, guided tours, contemporary art exhibitions, artists in residence, garden walks, hidden history tours, a recreated house to visit, farm carts in the stables and high tea tours but among all these activities, what identity or sense of place were visitors finding? Written feedback often recorded that they had experienced a wonderful day out but such a response is not enough. It is ephemeral and fleeting, an experience perhaps soon replaced by the next 'great day out' and a poor measure of the complex dialogue between the visitor and those who interpret and present a site. What is more meaningful to communicate is a genuine understanding or concept of place, of why such a site or building is important and why the National Trust continues to care for it.

In 2011, before fully opening the property, the team at Godolphin invested time to identify new themes as the basis for visitor experience and interpretation. Despite wide consultation and discussion, this was not a successful process. There was no confidence in the output of the work because the identity and purpose of the estate were not understood. There were so many stories which could be shared, and so much to tell visitors. Was Godolphin about the Godolphin family or later farmers, power or decline, mining or farming, great architecture or vernacular buildings? Was it about individual stories or characters, about place or individuals, about the site or about the county? Was it an identity rooted

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in the past or the future? The team discovered that without themselves having a confident understanding of identity they were unable effectively to share real information and authentic experiences with visitors. It was also illuminating to realise that without a clear understanding of place and a vision for the future, their own custodianship of the site was compromised. Although there has always been genuine passion and care for Godolphin, the team recognised that this was rooted in a short-term view and in a laudable desire to make an offer to as wide a group of people as possible. It was also increasingly evident that limited understanding would soon lead to uniformed decision making, difficulty in succession planning among staff and a less effective and successful visitor experience.

Recognising this position, the team created a process of research and debate to clarify a purpose and define the identity of Godolphin for the future. Existing knowledge was collated and a small group began to meet each month. Sufficient time was felt to be important and over a year was spent in creating a set of policies and guidance similar to those identified at Barrington Court (noted earlier). Time allowed the team to be thoughtful, to pursue avenues quietly and then decide not to continue, to consult and seek opinions and as the site began a second year of operation, to gather an increasing amount of data to support the understanding of visitor groups.

There is now confidence at Godolphin in a long-term plan to secure the buildings, bring spaces back into relevant use, make sense to visitors and be of value to the local community. Notably, priority will be given to conservation and hence to the care of the buildings, gardens and estate. Second is an aspiration to make a useful offer to the local community reflecting the changing culture of Cornwall. Although Barrington has resonance with the past, the plan now in place is fundamentally about the future. Godolphin, however, retains a stronger sense of a much deeper past. Here there is no need to find a new purpose but simply a need to recognise the unfolding of another phase in an existing identity. The fundamental purpose is very simple, it is the securing and the conservation of buildings and the estate for the long term. The structures will remain stable while the spaces within are flexible and able to change over time in response to local needs and opportunities. For Cornwall and thus for Godolphin, the current focus is on both tourists and on the provision of resources for local communities. It is important to note that although original visitor numbers were estimated at 12,000 annually,

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numbers are already over 45,000. Godolphin is an integral part of the current character of Cornwall and the use of the house for holiday rental appears entirely appropriate.

Montacute House

Close to Barrington Court and managed as part of the same group of properties lies Montacute, the great prodigy house, built for Sir Edward Phelips in the last years of the sixteenth century. An architectural masterpiece and a place of great beauty, it is a manifestation of the potential and ambition of the Elizabethan age, grand and magnificent but also a product of local materials, skills and a design of local architect, William Arnold. The house was retained by the Phelips family until the early twentieth century. After 1911, Montacute was let to a series of tenants, including Lord Curzon, and the contents sold. In 1929, it was offered for sale with a scrap value of £5,882, and finally purchased by Ernest Cook in 1931 and presented to the 'Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings' (SPAB). SPAB subsequently passed it on to the National Trust who opened it in 1932 despite it being empty of contents and the Trust being short of funds to deal with it. James Lees Milne, (Secretary to the National Trust Country House Committee) called it an 'empty and rather embarrassing white elephant'. A national appeal for furniture was made through the letters page of *The Times*, resulting in an extremely generous response from lenders and benefactors.

Montacute continues to display a high number of loaned items and the current presentation of the house remains something of a mixture. There are magnificent pieces loaned by individuals or by institutions such as the Victoria & Albert Museum, discreet and important collections such as the collection of samplers formed by Dr Douglas Goodhart, and significant gifts including the pictures, tapestries and furniture bequeathed by Sir Malcolm Stewart. There are rooms which are broadly suggestive of living spaces of a particular period but none is a recreation of any particular period of Phelips residency. The Long Gallery hosts a remarkable exhibition of Elizabethan and Jacobean portraits from the National Portrait Gallery, a partnership which has been active since 1974. Such collections are interesting and perhaps appealing, but what do visitors find in such a presentation? In 2013, Wikipedia dismissively described the inside of Montacute as 'a series of seemingly meaningless

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drawing rooms' which have 'lost original purpose'. Despite continuing high levels of 'customer satisfaction' and evidence of a 'great day out' experience, research and feedback indicated that few visitors were able to connect with an identity or sense of place. The original identity had been obscured by a well-intentioned desire to provide enough for visitors to see and perhaps by a self-imposed need to address the obvious loss of collections and purpose. There was a sense that although visitors valued the place and engaged with staff and volunteers, critical and interesting knowledge was not being effectively shared. Visitor curiosity seemed limited at a site which from its foundation was intended to excite and inspire as well as impress. There was no confidence that an ordinary visitor would be able to explain why the Phelips family built the house or why so many benefactors had felt it important to loan or gift furnishings for the empty rooms.

The Montacute team realised that the ongoing operation of the site, the use of its spaces, and the presentation of the estate and the creation of visitor facilities might be compromising the sense of place rather than supporting and enlightening the experience of visitors. When visitors park in kitchen gardens which once supplied the great house and enter through a new corridor-shaped building dedicated to visitor services, how can any visit begin with a strong sense of place? Over time, many sites fragment. Shops, cafés, gardens, estates and house operate almost independently of each other, compounding dilution, loss and confusion of identity. When a shop looks like any other National Trust shop, how is it helping to communicate the history of a particular place? When a café looks like any other café, then it will be treated in that way, an anonymous place, unengaged with its surroundings. This is not what is needed at a historic house where the ambition must surely be to connect with each and every visitor. The Montacute property team decided to take time out for internal reflection, reconsidering the history of place and refreshing their individual understanding and excitement about the house. This became a process in which members of the team were able to remind each other of the importance of every small element of the site, from car parks to cafés and from buildings to interpretation. The team reassessed the park, garden, house and collection in terms of historic development and of contemporary presentation.

Re-appraising the identity of an estate such as Montacute is not an easy process. The initial discussion has so far been largely 'in house', with support provided by regional curators, conservators and building

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surveyors, and by national specialists within the National Trust. The spectre of James Lees Milne's white elephant remains. Nonetheless, over time, much has been achieved. Unlike Godolphin and Barrington Court, where small-scale change is beginning, work has not yet begun at Montacute. The critical elements required to help manage the property with reference to a newly articulated identity for the future are now in place. With time invested in internal discussion and shared understandings, there is an enthusiasm to develop ideas for the future and a confidence that such debate will be founded in the 'spirit of the place'.

It is clear that the identity of Montacute is firmly rooted in its historic character. The house remains essentially the building which Edward Phelips commissioned and this sense of continuity and direct link with the past remains the heart of the place. Montacute will not, however, be presented as the home of the Phelips family. It is difficult to decide on which of the number of homes that might be presented, even if previous contents could be traced or recreated. It is, however, possible to offer visitors a concept of a great house and a unity of design in the architectural approach to the buildings, gardens and park. Partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, London, and the generosity of individual and institutional lenders bring wonderful collections which although not original, still illustrate the wealth and ambition of original furnishings. Focussing on the original purpose of the house will ensure that visitors will experience something of the sense of wonder which Montacute inspired in those who first saw it.

In the cases presented in this essay, much debate and thought has been invested to understand the purpose and identity of each place. Elsewhere, when country houses and estates simply develop and evolve without genuine reflection on their past purpose, might they actually face a destruction of identity through inappropriate, thoughtless or ignorant development? Or does it matter that the identities of country houses change over time? To a lesser or greater extent, this has always happened as houses benefit (or not) from new owners and different interests. If country houses and estates are to survive, it may be right that they become golf clubs and hotels. It could be argued that such houses and estates, although radically remodelled, will sustain a more genuine life and a continuity of relevant identity than places where development has been halted and change is no longer possible or where identity has become no more than a passing sense of history during a generic 'day out'. Nevertheless, for any place to be valued and used appropriately, it

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surely needs to be understood and its past recognised and incorporated in any future identity. Even more importantly, this valuation and use needs to be shared. It is not enough simply to ensure that a house or estate is 'open'. Planned or not, new identities will be made, particularly as there is always a need to generate revenue and retain interest with activities and events. Staff, volunteers, previous owners, visitors and those with specialist knowledge will all be part of the construction of future identity. The experience of museums and other heritage sites has demonstrated that once a place or collection is understood, whether by individuals or by communities, it is valued. Once people value a place, they become the knowledgeable supporters, advocates and champions who will ensure that it is not lost. Country Houses will not have the champions that local museums, libraries and other cultural institutions have had in recent years unless they have an identity which is clearly communicable, understood and maintained. It may be simply that like Montacute, a building is a stunning piece of architecture and a window open to the past, or like Godolphin, that an ancient site continues to reflect the concerns of the society which supports and surrounds it. Alternatively, the site might be as complex as Barrington, where facilities once in private ownership are now managed by a charity on behalf of the nation, with resources available to support the life and activities of the local community.

Historic places require individual purpose. Contemporary communities need to be able to recognise a future for such great houses and estates. Montacute lies within a few miles of the major town of Yeovil but it has very few local visitors. Although regarded by many as of little relevance, such great houses and estates have been part of defining the physical landscape which we inhabit. Housing estates reflect ancient boundaries, parkland becomes country park and buildings still retain formal and civic functions. Councillors, local residents, neighbours and other non-specialists frequently contribute to decisions regarding country houses. They may agitate to save a building or open space, but without the recognition of past history and the purpose or spirit of a place, identity is destroyed. Change is not unwelcome and identity is always evolving. It can be positive to see Parke being used as offices or Charlton House in use as a community centre, but historic identity need not be lost in the search for new usage. The work at Barrington Court, Montacute House and Godolphin demonstrates that the past need not be lost or forgotten but reconsidered and embraced as part of the future.

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Notes

1 Notably Strong, Binney and Harris, *Destruction of the Country House*; Worsley, *England's Lost Houses*.
2 With thanks to colleagues working with Barrington Court, Godolphin Estate and Montacute House including those from the National Portrait Gallery, London, and to Tim Turner and Ian Marsh (General Managers) for their support in producing this contribution.
3 The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) or *Conseil international des monuments et des sites* is a professional association that works for the conservation and protection of cultural heritage around the world. ICOMOS was founded in 1965 in Warsaw as a result of the Venice Charter of 1964, and offers advice to UNESCO on World Heritage Sites.
4 Vision Statement, National Trust South Somerset Team, 2012.

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6

Better Off as Ruins? The Scottish Castle Restoration Debate

Michael Davis

Abstract: *Ruined castles have long been a feature of the Scottish landscape. In recent years, debate has continued over appropriate restoration approaches and in some cases over the principle of restoration to allow re-use. This essay puts the case for restoration, emphasising the small size, late date and symbolic martial appearance of many Scottish castles. Restoration is considered in pragmatic terms as an alternative to decay and loss, but also as potentially positive in a wider sense because the creative aspects of restoration, if handled well, add future interest.*

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To an English or Welsh audience, the word 'castle' may well evoke images of large medieval structures. These buildings might be impossibly ruined, or else consolidated by English Heritage or Cadw and open to the public to wander around. Such ruins are widely seen as archaeological sites or monuments in the landscape rather than appropriate for restoration to form homes for modern families. A well-established viewpoint, dating back to John Ruskin, William Morris and the manifesto of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), sees such restoration as inappropriate.[1]

In Scotland the situation is very different. The word 'castle' in the Scottish context usually suggests smaller towers and pocket-sized chateaux. In recent years, the late Charles McKean seized upon the term 'chateau' to explain Scottish developments from the 1560s, which took the sculptural yet largely plain, fortified tower-house to flamboyant heights as a symbolic statement rather than an actual assertion of martial or chivalric power.[2] Professor McKean applied the term 'chateau' to a building to imply not so much stylistic influence from France but more the predominantly 'mock-military' residence of similar status. Debate continues over the extent to which sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish houses were actually defensive, but McKean's contribution has clearly shifted the argument away from the traditional approach of seeing the domestic architecture of Renaissance Scotland as representative of a backward society. Instead, McKean has offered the more tenable position of Scottish 'castles' of that time being more in tune with European trends than was contemporary English domestic architecture.

Significantly, Scottish houses continued to display actual or symbolic martial features well into the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In major construction, such as the remodelling of Glamis, or the virtual rebuilding of Drumlanrig on a palatial scale, the display of turrets blended with a Baroque aesthetic. In smaller houses, landowners were reluctant to abandon cultural baggage which still offered much delight. Some of these houses, such as Leslie Castle, asserted a more retrogressive statement of castle-like display.

Scottish 'castles' are often surprisingly small or of late construction, but many from the 1400s onward are also surprisingly convenient in their arrangements when viewed from a contemporary perspective. Although customarily the castles were intended to hold many more people than the average modern family home and to support wider estate functions such as local courts, the smaller towers and chateaux

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are recognisably residences to modern eyes. Their arrangements range from recurrent ground-floor kitchens, to bedroom chambers with en-suite garderobes, or the occasionally found small attic study where the owner retired from the hustle and bustle of a busy house to try to master his paperwork.

If a great many of Scotland's ruined castles *could* be restored to function as atmospheric family homes, the question still remains as to whether they *should* be restored. Are they, in fact, better off as ruins? In 1907, Dr Thomas Ross, the authority on Scottish Castles of his day, questioned from within the SPAB the stricture against restoration. At what point, he reasoned, should a castle be considered as inappropriate for restoration? Should it be restored when it has been a ruin for 100 years, or 10 years, or when it is in the process of being burned out? He mused as to how proper it was 'to tell a man whose historic towers are blazing that he must let them go to blazes'.[3] It is a question with a modern resonance. We might recall the dismal appearance of Windsor Castle and Uppark after their respective fires.

Ross's rendering of the dilemma has wider relevance today, when a more communal understanding of 'heritage' extends 'ownership' widely. If, for example, a widely loved historic building such as Craigievar in Aberdeenshire were to go up in smoke, should it be left as a ruin, or should it be restored as close as can be to its original form to be instructive, if not entirely venerable, for the future? From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, the ever-evolving Scottish castle bore a recognisable and coherent identity. It could and perhaps ought to be argued that the primary cultural significance of these buildings most often rests in their architectural design and not in ruination, whether recent or long standing, picturesque or otherwise.

The problem of Scottish castle restoration is made more pressing by the fact that there are so many ruined castles. Due to a major shift in architectural taste and domestic expectations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many castles were simply abandoned and, today, hundreds remain in varying states of completeness. Do we restore some or none? Which, and how many? Do we 'guide' restorers towards those ruins still almost complete to the wall-head, or to those partial ruins in greater need of support? Simply leaving these structures as they are, and consolidating as many as the state can afford, is of course an option, but one undercut by the high cost, the need for maintenance and on-going structural disintegration and collapse. The disintegration of Auchans – a

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magical, still-roofed castle with decaying panelled rooms in the early twentieth century – into a sad, potential archaeological site in the later twentieth century demonstrates how quickly so much can be lost beyond recall. Its interiors were never photographed or recorded.

The threat to ruined Scottish castles is not merely one of gradual shaking-down or even of more dramatic collapse. Natural decay is often accompanied by intentional vandalism and neglect, sometimes even in largely intact castles. In the 1980s, the sustained attack by large numbers of youths on the substantial ruins of Cathcart Castle led eventually to the complete removal of what was left of the structure on safety grounds. This is an extreme, although not unique incident. In 1991, Ardmillan Castle suffered a tragic and official demolition, without recording, as a solution to perceived Health and Safety issues. Other attractive, still-roofed private buildings continued to be spectacularly neglected. These buildings include Eastend in Lanarkshire and Westhall in Aberdeenshire, and both feature in the Scottish Buildings at Risk Register.

As a potential solution to such problems, castle restoration (in the sense of conversion of ruins to residences) boasts a long history in Scotland and the far north of England. Robert Lorimer's 1911 Arts & Crafts restoration of Dunderave Castle in Argyll, and Edwin Lutyen's more invasive and equally lyrical remodelling of Lindisfarne Castle in Northumberland, hugely increased the cultural interest and importance of the properties. Since the 1970s, the number of restorations has dramatically increased, sometimes part-funded by Historic Scotland. Historic Scotland supported some restorations as a means of preserving the original design, and avoided supporting others where the original form, externally at least, could not be accurately understood. Even so, by the 1990s some conservation professionals began to question the rationale of the restoration craze. After all, not all restorations were flawless either in terms of preservation or in terms of the aesthetics of creativity.

Strange outcomes often result from the increasing subtleties of conservation thinking when married with the apparent prominence of SPAB ideology within Historic Scotland at the beginning of the twenty-first century. By attempting to restrict the recent restoration of Caldwell Tower in Renfrewshire to minimum intervention and presumably to distinguish modern interference, Historic Scotland contributed to one of the most constipated and dismal restorations this commentator has encountered. This is because, in order to keep the additions to an absolute minimum,

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it was necessary to obscure the most important façade with a cramped design which was also considered by many to be highly inappropriate. Oddly, however, Historic Scotland was ultimately satisfied with the proposals, accepting 'the general principal of the extension' and noting that the proposals 'should allow the building to retain its character of a solitary tower'. In September 2011, after some revisions which Historic Scotland noted 'generally address our previous comments', the agency then confirmed that the local Council 'should proceed to determine the application without further reference to us'.[4]

On the other hand, although at odds with some conservation thinking at the time, many restorations began to advance an interesting aesthetic which is best considered as revivalism rather than historical recreation. This was, and is, most often evident in the plastering, decoration and furnishing of interiors, where there was need for sympathetic creativity, simply because usually so little was known of the original plasterwork and finishes. Nevertheless, the result could make a major and stunning contribution to the way in which these interior spaces were seen. Examples range from the glorious, theatrical assemblage of period furnishings in the hall at Towie Barclay, to the more intimate but equally exquisite arrangements within Tilquillie (Kincardinshire), Aiket (Ayrshire) and Leven (Renfrewshire). The internal *gesamptkunstwerk* of the latter two has, however, been disrupted owing to changes in ownership.

Such revived interiors – and there are many more of interest – underpin an instinctive understanding that we cannot actually rebuild the past. We can only provide a semblance of the past. This, however, is yet to be fully understood by some in the conservation establishment. In some respects, obsessive concern with the governance of restoration that suppresses creativity and permits 'accurate' reconstruction alone misses the point. Every restoration or remodelling there has ever been is now part of the past, of architectural history and of our heritage. While we need to regulate change, do we really want to suppress it, supposing that such a course of action were even possible?

This is not to say that it is wrong to attempt accurate reconstruction or even to consolidate a ruin in order to keep it as a ruin. Rather, the point is that there may be other restoration routes which have integrity. Even the most restrained intervention – for example to consolidate a decaying ruin – still involves work which is new. Acknowledging this – that we cannot somehow stand outside history while we mend the

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past – encourages acceptance that buildings have a future to which we can contribute as well as a past which we can attempt to recreate. That which we see, for better or worse, in the interiors of restored castles – and which can create the greatest visual impression – is often not a reproduction of ancient rooms, but a new chapter in their history.

Only a handful of modern restorations have applied creative revivalism to the overall process of restoration, and these instances have been extreme ruins which necessitated major rebuilding work. Prominent among them are Aboyne, restored by Ian Begg for the then Earl of Aboyne, and Aiket, restored by Robert Clow to his own designs (Figure 4). Is the restorers' revivalist approach – adding a new verse to an old song and catching the spirit of the past – really no more than deceit, a falsification of history which is to be prevented where possible, or does it represent honesty, building new work in new forms? In 2001, Historic Scotland added a new publication to their Heritage Policy series, Richard Fawcett's *The Conservation of Architectural Ancient Monuments in Scotland: Guidance on Principles*. The clear preference expressed, 'where restoration was considered an option' was for restoration to an exactly known, prior state: 'In most cases, proposals will only be viewed favourably when the monument can be restored authentically … Conjectural restoration should always be avoided in such cases'. Allowance was made for 'a more architecturally creative approach to restoration', but it was stressed that this was 'only likely to be seen as an acceptable way forward for a tiny minority of monuments[5]. Only recently, several restoration proposals have involved striking interventions in contemporary-modern style, and this too suggests an interesting development. When future generations look back to our present, will it be the more creative exercises, whether revivalist or modernist, which will be most valued among the restorations? Will earnest attempts at recreation, such as Historic Scotland's extensive remodelling at Stirling Castle, be seen simply as inadvertent revivalism, even if of a rather repressed nature?

Proposals to restore Castle Tioram, Inverness-shire, in 2001 provided an open clash between restorers and non-restorers, and, through the publicity attendant on a major Public Inquiry, encouraged the interested section of the public to take sides. Restoration was ultimately refused, even though it was conceded that significant structural collapse might follow in the next few decades. As one commentator put it, Tioram had been in danger: 'in danger of being saved'.[6] It was an outcome and a

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FIGURE 4 *'A new verse to an auld song', Aiket Castle, Ayrshire; the interior, like the re-imagined upper-works, is sympathetic to the past and to the ongoing history of the building. It does not attempt facsimile reconstruction of a precise period.*
Source: Photograph taken by Mike Scott.

debate which mystified many. The scenic element was perhaps the most emotive, because the ruin was spectacularly scenic. But then, so too was Eilean Donan, which as a result of a particularly cavalier restoration beginning in 1912, is quite possibly the most scenic building in Britain. Where scenic concerns were not decisive, philosophic or doctrinal objections to restoration were hard to follow and, in any case, followed in the wake of Historic Scotland's own restoration at Stirling. While Tioram was to be kept as representative of a particular 'frozen' moment (in this case, the historically important time when the castle went up in smoke) what then of historic Scotland's recreation of a 'defrosted' mid-sixteenth-century moment at Stirling Castle? Rather fancifully, the recreation of the Royal Apartments at Stirling Castle is apparently intended to represent not just a sympathetic evocation of the past, but an exact recreation of a very precise time: 'As it is unclear if James V lived to see the palace he commissioned, these rooms [the King's Chambers] are being left almost unfurnished, as if there was no point in unpacking the king's possessions if he were not to be there.'[7] One group of experts argued that Tioram could not be accurately recreated with integrity and £3 million of private

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money, but other experts argued that it could. The proposals, drawn up by ARP Lorimer and Associates, were far from unsympathetic, but Tioram remains a ruin.

The Tioram debate underlines the huge discrepancy in Scotland which generally exists between conservation theory and the practical treatment of historic buildings. Despite official protection of one kind or another, ruined castles are often not protected from decay. It is generally only when someone makes official proposals for a structure that protection appears to 'kick-in'.

As far as the more specialised debate goes, the objective for many has been maintenance of authenticity. Such an ideal is worthy, but also, alas, something of a moveable feast. This essay has already highlighted that it may not be a foregone conclusion that accurate reconstruction of a known historic design is any more honest than a more creative modern reconstruction of missing elements. The one is intended as authentic in its design. The other, by not attempting to replicate the past, might equally be claimed to be authentic in that it represents new work honestly. Whereas authenticity can be used as a stick with which to beat restorers' schemes, it has been notably pointed out (in the aftermath of the Tioram Inquiry) that ruination is not a particularly authentic state.[8] In fact, ruination might well be the least authentic state a building can reach. Much depends on whether a building is considered primarily from the viewpoint of archaeology or of architecture. The primacy of either viewpoint ought to depend on judgement more than dogma emanating from a narrow conservation viewpoint.

Recently, a Historic Scotland sponsored leaflet described the restoration of Portencross, Ayrshire, as 'recreating an authentic interior'. It was restored with minimum intervention, great respect for the integrity of the existing stonework, and £1 million of public money. But, is its main interior space, with exposed original stonework, such as window seating worn away almost beyond recognition and certainly beyond use, really authentic? It depends upon one's perspective. To some, the lack of plaster to the walls, the inserted, ugly, obviously modern, functional ceiling and the desperately eroded stonework, by their very lack of alteration, or renewal, preserve an authenticity which rests primarily in the very provenance of the individual stones. For others, the presentation of this pitiful, largely derelict interior, utterly ignores the intention of the original designers and occupants and presents a primitivised

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and erroneous impression of them, their architecture, their society and their culture.[9]

Of course, the answer must surely be that we need to remember that when we restore or consolidate a ruin, we are not only rebuilding the past or preserving the present of that structure, but also inevitably building its future. What really counts is what Charles McKean described as 'making judgements that will support a building's future', rather than doctrinaire thinking based on a narrow faith within the broader conservation church. We must recognise that, very often, there are a number of quite different ways[10] in which a ruin can be treated sympathetically and still preserve its integrity. This does not mean that decisions should be lacking in rigour or that quality of the end effect should be undermined. It simply calls for quite a different assessment than one based on dogmas such as minimum intervention and reversibility or on over-emphasis of the potential importance of 'the archaeology' within the overall equation.

Notes

1 The manifesto can be accessed via the SPAB website.
2 These ideas are advanced in: Charles McKean, *The Scottish Chateau: The Country House of Renaissance Scotland* (Stroud, 2001).
3 I am indebted to Professor Charles McKean for bringing to my attention Dr Thomas Ross's papers held in the National Library of Scotland; the paper referred to is entitled 'Restoration' and dates from 1907.
4 Historic Scotland, 18 March 2009, within the planning file 2009/0076/LB Ref. HHG/A/SK/83.
5 Richard Fawcett, '*The Conservation of Architectural Ancient Monuments in Scotland: Guidance on Principles*' (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 52–53.
6 Alastair Robertson, 'Row that proves our heritage industry is in ruins', *Daily Express*, 16 June 2001.
7 Caroline Donald, *Historic Scotland: The Magazine for Historic Scotland Members* (Summer 2011), p. 23; despite large expenditure on scholarship, much of what we see is in reality conjectural.
8 Jim Crumley, *Dundee Advertiser*, 8. October 2002; Crumley's article commented on a presentation by Dr Richard Fawcett of Historic Scotland: 'I am troubled by the passionate espousal of ruins as "authentic" and that restoring a ruin creates something less than authentic, was the thrust of much of Dr Fawcett's argument. It seems to me that the least authentic state a building can ever achieve is ruin'.

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9 For example, Professor Charles McKean, in his *Precognition for the Rowallan Castle Public Inquiry* (privately printed, n.d.), p. 7 (made available by the courtesy of its author), argued that Historic Scotland, by presenting 'roofed hulks' to the public, 'bearing no relation to the cultural quality of the people and the society that built them', appeared to be 'trying to present a primitivised version of Scottish social history'.

10 For a detailed, earlier argument supporting diversity of restoration approaches, within limits, see this author's chapter in: Robert Clow (ed.), *Restoring Scotland's Castles* (Glasgow, 2000).

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7

The Demolished Mansions of Essex and the Marks Hall Estate: Reconstruction and the Heritage of Loss

James Raven

Abstract: *The final essay focuses on the demolition of great houses in the county of Essex in the twentieth century, suggesting that demolition was often a solution to problems that were not new. The battle over the interpretation of loss has also been as great as original battles over demolition. Not that every demolition was contested – far from it. This essay shows why, for good reason, certain houses were lost and soon forgotten. The case study at the heart of this chapter is the lost mansion of Marks Hall, pulled down in 1950. The history of Marks Hall and the project to recreate the mansion are examined in relation to the distinction between history and heritage and how changing and controversial interpretations of 'heritage' – itself a modern formulation – might encompass ideas of the heritage of loss as much as lost heritage.*

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In 1955, *The Essex Review* published an article 'What can we do with our Mansions?' The article encouraged several Essex men to provide an answer. Ideas included opening redundant great houses to the public, leasing parts of houses to Essex County Council, converting them to schools, hotels or country clubs or reusing some of their fabric in other buildings. The article adopted a realistic tone. Several of the contributors suggested that the great houses of Essex had had their day and the expense of upkeep made demolition the obvious solution.[1]

The obvious solution was hardly new – and not always as horrifying or pointless as some have come to regard it. For good reasons, Essex mansions were demolished in the twentieth century, just as they had been in the nineteenth century and before. The great Palladian mansion at Wanstead was taken down and all its fabric sold in 1825 as a result of the family's abject financial failure. At the other end of the county, Mistley Hall was demolished to no general concern in 1835. In about 1841, Great Myles at Kelvedon Hatch (allegedly boasting a window for every day of the year) was demolished, as was Dews Hall, Lambourne. The uncertainty of the date (and some claim Great Myles went in 1837) speaks much about contemporary uninterest in these losses. For whatever reason, it appears that no other great Essex house was destroyed until the destruction of Woodford Hall, not far from Wanstead in 1900 (after it had served as an asylum for many years). The early- and mid-nineteenth-century demolitions were usually the result of family misfortunes, rather than later, early-twentieth-century overextension of buildings and households and the lure of land values close to London; perhaps the second half of the nineteenth century offered some ultimately unsupportable Indian summer for the aristocratic mansion in Essex.

Certainly, the history of great late-Victorian Essex houses contrasts to the roll call of the 21 or more lost between 1901 and 1940. The rapid growth of the capital absorbed much of the surrounding countryside, increasing pressure on any remaining areas of open land available for development. The large houses and grounds, once far from the urban sprawl, became prime building plots. Essex developers demolished Cranbrook near Ilford in 1901, the Great House, Leyton, in 1905, Blake Hall at Wanstead in 1909 and Skreens at Roxwell in about 1920. Hallingbury Place was eagerly taken down in 1924, the same year as Gosfield Place and New

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Place, Upminster. A year later, Parsloes at Dagenham (whose owners had other properties) was surrendered, and in 1926 builders knocked down Bower Hall at Steeple Bumpstead, followed four years later by Gidea Hall near Romford, already shed of its parklands. In 1911, the grounds of Gidea Hall had opened as the picturesque Romford Garden Suburb, with new houses built by a clutch of celebrated architects. A tennis club now uses the space once occupied by the Hall.

Several great houses maintained precarious existences. A notable example was Pyrgo House at Havering-atte-Bower, offered for sale in 1867, only 16 years after it had been rebuilt on an ancient site as a residence suitable for 'a gentleman of rank and wealth, or for a merchant prince'. The revamped Pyrgo House boasted its own gasworks and a private chapel. When finally sold in 1873, the new owner enlarged the estate to about 600 acres, before succumbing to the agricultural depression of the 1880s. The next owner of Pyrgo, Lady Alice O'Hagan, extended it still further, but on her death in 1921, her heir started selling off the estate. Developers acquired the remaining 125 acres and then the house itself in 1935. Within two years, however, Essex County Council intervened and bought the property from the developers as part of the Metropolitan Green Belt scheme, designed to defend greater London from over-development. The house was demolished sometime between 1938 and 1940.

In post-Victorian Essex (as in other parts of Britain), unfeasibly large mansions threatened the viability of many family economies and brought false hope to servants whose jobs proved short-lived. Other excessive Essex houses demolished just before World War II included Debden Hall at Debden (demolished in 1936); Belle Vue House, Walthamstow (1937); Havering Park, Havering and Lofts Hall, Wendon (both in 1938); and Warley Place at Great Warley (1939). The too large and unprepossessing Berechurch Hall, described in the introduction to this volume, remained unoccupied after 1921. Requisitioning by the War Department during World War II stayed the Hall's execution until 1952. The unmourned and very quickly forgotten Berechurch, much like Dagnams and dozens of other behemoth mansions in Essex, offered a lesson in Victorian and Edwardian over-reaching and of superfluity and unsustainability in the changing economic and social environment after World War I. When most of the Georgian house, with parapeted front of 11 bays, central pediment and porch, was replaced in 1882, by a new house of some 80 rooms,

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Berechurch also gained a new stable block for 30 horses and several new gatehouses and staff houses.[2]

Great houses continued to be demolished during World War II, and many more houses, often damaged by recent military use, were demolished after it. The wide-ranging Abercrombie report of 1948 recommended creating new housing estates on green field sites around the edge of London to house those who had lost their homes in the bombing. Of the 20 Essex country mansions lost between 1943 and 1960, 13 were demolished in the 6 post-war years of 1949–1955. In several cases owners and local authorities exaggerated wartime damage in order to promote swift demolition. Many houses, such as Weald Hall (demolished in 1950), Easton Hall (c.1951), Rolls Park (1953), Rounton Grange (c.1953), Belhus (1957) and Heath Old Hall (1961), were never reoccupied after being returned in poor repair from wartime requisitioning. The estate at Belhus had been sold in 1922, whereas its house, much early Tudor, suffered extensive wartime damage. The family were unable to meet the costs of repair, never moved back into the house, and no other use for it could be found. Demolition understandably beckoned, and in early 1957 the mansion was taken down. Today, only a faint outline of the foundations remains in the middle of a golf course. Also requisitioned was Dagnams near Romford, whose owner had sold 2,200 of its acres in 1919, leaving 500 acres surrounding the house. In January 1945, a German V2 rocket severely damaged the house and two years later London County Council compulsorily purchased what was left of it for £60,000, together with 850 acres of the local farms which had been sold off in the first Dagnams land sale of 1919. A caretaker hastened the demise of the house by illegally stealing the lead from the roof. A combination of military occupation, bombing, rooflessness and rain damage and the simple lack of any alternative resulted in the demolition of Dagnams in late 1950. The demolition team took payment in the form of the rubble to be sold as building material. The grounds became the public park that bears the name Dagnams today.

Although the losses in Essex appear to have been significant during wartime and again in the early and mid-1950s, surprisingly few houses were demolished in the immediate aftermath of World War II. This was possibly because of the difficulty of obtaining building licences. Nationally, five houses are recorded as lost in 1945, six in 1946 and 1947 and seven in 1948. Then the floodgates opened. Sixteen houses are

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recorded as lost in 1949 and 1950, twenty-three in 1951 and thirty-five in 1952. In 1955, thirty-eight houses are known to have gone. The total number of losses was certainly higher, as the precise date of demolition of many houses is uncertain. Twenty-one houses are dated simply to the 1950s, fourteen given as 'c.1950' and eleven as 'c.1955'. Along with Marks Hall, just under 300 houses are recorded as having been demolished during the 1950s. Far more houses, whose estates were sold, were converted into institutions, a process helped, ironically, by the fact that building licences meant that the chance of purpose-built accommodation was slim.

Some 20 years before Marks Hall was demolished, the 1931 Ancient Monuments Act and 1932 Town and Country Planning Act introduced two important principles: that historic buildings did not have to be uninhabited to be protected and that preservation was part of planning. The Acts enabled local authorities to protect monuments and settings from unsuitable developments. Local authorities were allowed to serve preservation orders on buildings of architectural or historic interest. As there were no lists of such buildings, however, such provisions were of limited practical value.[3] The Gowers Committee on Houses of Outstanding Historic or Architectural Interest was set up in 1948. As *The Times* explained in December of that year: 'Sir Stafford Cripps states that on more than one occasion in the last year or so it has been necessary to make special provision from public funds in order to secure for the nation certain houses of national importance which might otherwise have been in danger. The Government think that it is unsatisfactory to have to deal with such cases in a piecemeal way, and that it is necessary to work out a general policy.'

The 1948 report, set up under a Labour Government, is striking in its assumption that there was no need to justify the importance of country houses or the relevance of private ownership. Its findings were to prove the foundation stone of government policy on historic houses. As the Gowers Committee also noted, 'many great houses now need not less than £5,000 a year, some as much as £10,000, to maintain them, not on any luxury standard, but on the minimum necessary to preserve them and their contents from deterioration.' As a result, some owners turned with relief to the National Trust Country Houses Scheme, whereby families could hand over their houses, with an endowment, to the National Trust but remain living there. By 1945, the National Trust owned

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23 country houses. The Trust acquired another 19 between 1946 and 1950, 12 between 1951 and 1955 and 21 between 1956 and 1960. The acquisition of such houses, as discussed by Barbara Wood earlier, did not necessarily entail much thought about their future presentation and the retention or loss of their history as understood by visitors.

Marks Hall

Demolished in 1950, Marks Hall shares the profile of many post-war pulled-down Essex and British houses: family division, wartime use and damage, upkeep costs and public apathy. As noted in the introduction to this volume, particular features contributed to the demise of Marks Hall's Jacobean mansion. The absence of the house is also the more obvious at Marks Hall given that the estate has been partly restored after mid-twentieth-century deprivations and, together with new landscaping, redesigned gardens and an arboretum, is open to the public. The plain mound in the gardens upon which the mansion once stood is stark testimony to its removal.

The Marks Hall estate, between Halstead, Earls Colne and Coggeshall, has a recorded Saxon history and an ancient name, Mercheshala. The heavily wooded estate was held by the de Montforts and then the Markshall family from the Norman Conquest until 1562 when one John Cole, gentleman, rebuilt the ancient manor house. In 1605 the estate was bought by Robert Honywood from Maidstone. At 60 years old, Honywood was a migrant to Essex and a builder in a hurry. In 1609, he completed a great Jacobean mansion built on top of and beside the existing and recently remodelled medieval timber-framed manor house. The new mansion boasted a handsome brick battlemented frontage with an elaborate central porch and gothic windows (Figure 5a). Robert's Honywood heirs, many martial and some eccentric, developed the park and gardens but without disturbing the many ancient oaks. The family maintained Markshall as its main seat (while accruing further estates in Cumbria and Kent) throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In 1897, the Honywood possession of the Marks Hall estate and mansion ended in *Bleak House*-like inheritance tussles. What was by then a run-down estate was bought by Thomas Phillips Price, MP, heir to a

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Welsh mining fortune and then renting the vast Skreens Park at Roxwell Essex, itself to be demolished in about 1920. From 1907, Phillips Price was in correspondence with Kew Gardens, intending that Marks Hall mansion became a home for Kew's Director and that the botanic gardens themselves, then the subject of concern about London smog, might also move to the Marks Hall estate.

In his original will, Phillips Price left the Marks Hall house and estate to the nation with the express wish that its ancient oaks and deer park would be respected. In 1927, however, at the age of 83, he married for the third time – to Mary Elizabeth Swann then aged 51. Phillips Price made a new will bequeathing the estate to his bride for her life, together with a modest annuity, and only after his wife's death and in the event of no children did he leave the estate to the nation to be held for the advancement of agriculture, arboriculture and forestry. Thomas Phillips Price died in 1932 aged 88, childless and specifying that the estate's ancient oaks should not be cut down.

What happened in the next 30 or more years has many shadowy aspects. Some claim that Mrs Price, furious about her limited legacy and the constraints upon her interest in the estate, sought revenge. Her dealings with her lawyers and the advice they gave her are equally murky. In the first year of her widowhood, Mrs Price oversaw the first uprooting of many ancient trees and the demolition of Marks Hall church, standing a few yards from the mansion and dating from about 1330 but comprehensively remodelled in the 1750s and again in 1875. With the coming of war, Marks Hall served as a base for fighter and bomber forces, hosting the Eighth US Air Force Division in 1943 (when Mrs Price moved to the estate's dower house). In 1944, Marks Hall became the US Ninth Army Air Force headquarters. The airfield personnel, totalling some 3,000, lived in Nissen and Maycrete huts, simple single or double prefabricated units with corrugated iron roofs. The military built hangars, maintenance shops, a chapel and a hospital and the whole site was connected with a network of single-track concrete roads, many of which remain. The mansion house accommodated 600 headquarters' staff who slept in hutments at a distance. Under American tenure, the huts began to encroach upon the mansion house until more than a dozen stood in close proximity.

The RAF, who succeeded the US air force, departed Marks Hall in 1946, leaving the house empty and damaged. Braintree Rural District Council

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requisitioned the Nissen huts and other buildings to house displaced persons, but the council did not take on the site as a whole and rejected at least one plan to convert the mansion to flats. The sanitary inspector regarded the site as too isolated. Squatters arrived and jurisdiction over the abandoned airfield was left in chaos. For Worsley, 'the story [of Marks Hall mansion] appears [not to relate to urbanization but] rather to be one of the original owners running out of cash and their successors lacking the resolution to maintain what was not a very large house – though wartime damage also played its part'.[4]

Recent research, reopening the history of the demolition of the mansion, suggests that it was the combination of events that proved catastrophic for Marks Hall: the remoteness of the airfield site, the presence of abandoned hutments and the lack of effective control over theft and vandalism, the reluctance of the elderly Mrs Price (who had, anyway, sold her furniture) to move back into the mansion once the military withdrew, the threat of greater taxation, and the pressure on the local council to find emergency accommodation not only for local families inhabiting condemned cottages but also for refugees from the London bombing and large numbers of Polish families.

The sale of the Marks Hall fitments took place in December 1949. Sale and demolition of the fabric of the whole house, from top to bottom, began four months later (Figure 5b). As the *Essex County Standard*'s correspondent reported 'scrap iron merchants, country gentlemen and ordinary men wanting to buy wood for chicken runs and sheds gathered in the former dining room at Marks Hall Coggeshall … to bid for lots of floorboards, marble fireplaces, oak doors, solid oak panelling and 15 feet high window frames and mirrors'.[5] The whole house was dismantled and taken down to its very foundations. The back buildings including the mid-sixteenth-century dovecot were all demolished; only the coach house and some of the stables remained. In 1955, some of the estate was leased to the Forestry Commission. All but one of the great oaks were felled around this date. After the death of his widow in 1966, the Thomas Phillips Price Trust was set up in 1971 to manage the estate. Today Marks Hall is a registered charity governed by a DEFRA-appointed board of trustees. More than 40,000 visitors view its apparently mansionless but glorious gardens and arboretum each year and the mansion's coach house hosts numerous weddings and social events.

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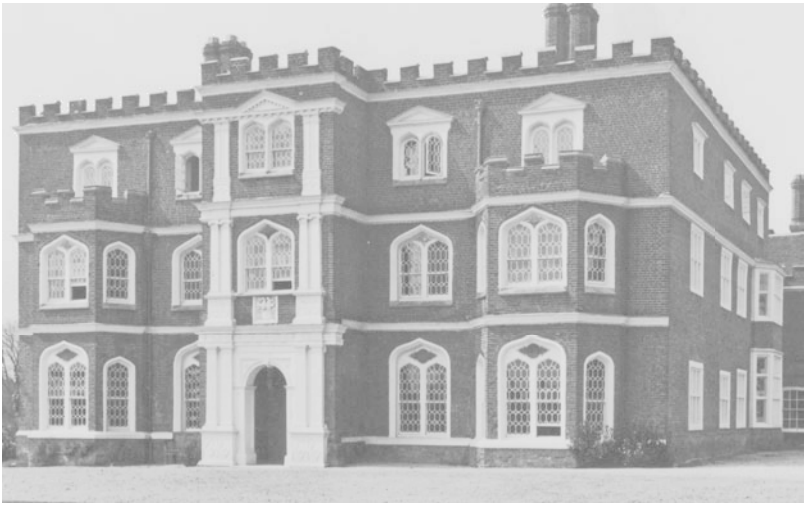

FIGURE 5A *The Jacobean Mansion at Marks Hall c. 1930.*

FIGURE 5B *Demolition of Marks Hall Mansion, January 1950. Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of Marks Hall Estate.*

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Reinterpretation: the heritage of loss not lost heritage?

Heritage is both more and less than history: more because 'heritage' properly considered is wide-ranging and encompasses objects, places and practices (including attitudes, memories, myths and partialities); less because heritage is not always historical in that it exaggerates, omits and distorts and is prone to political pleading. For many people, the word 'heritage' is interchangeable with 'history', but the past as recreated in museums, historic houses and heritage sites is often much more obviously in the image of the present, addressing contemporary concerns and values. Heritage presentations of William Wallace, 'liberator of the Scots', and Mary Seacole, 'the black Florence Nightingale' are prominent examples (among very many) pursuing particular and politicised agendas. Sites and buildings are even more subject to heritage valuations than individuals. David Lowenthal and others have insisted that heritage is not history, not an inquiry into the past at all, but a celebration of a past that fits present-day purposes.[6] It is, however, a type of enquiry into the past. In a description of a degree course on heritage, the Open University states that 'practices of heritage are customs and habits which, although intangible, inform who we are as collectives, and help to create our collective social memory. We use objects of heritage (artefacts, buildings, sites, landscapes) alongside practices of heritage (languages, music, community commemorations, conservation and preservation of objects or memories from the past) to shape our ideas about our past, present and future. Objects of heritage are embedded in an experience created by various kinds of users and the people who attempt to manage this experience'.

Lost heritage is apparently oxymoronic in that 'heritage' encompasses the lost as well as the materially evident, but lost heritage is also capable of distinctive treatment. The tangible is one part of heritage understanding, but so also is the lost and evanescent. Loss – whole, partial or threatened – is, for example, fundamental to the envisaging of a spirit of place that is a current preoccupation of the National Trust (and features prominently in an essay in this volume).[7] An obvious aspect of heritage is the idea, in the words of Rodney Harrison, 'that things tend to be classified as "heritage" only in the light of some risk of losing them. The element of potential or real threat to heritage – of destruction, loss or decay – links heritage historically and politically with the conservation

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movement. Even where a building or object is under no immediate threat of destruction, its listing on a heritage register is an action which assumes a potential threat at some time in the future, from which it is being protected by legislation or listing'.[8]

These considerations therefore lead to a further possibility, that the process and appreciation of loss can be defined as heritage, that our heritage includes destruction and the reasons for it. In this, the reconstruction of a wholly lost mansion offers an opportunity for consideration of how the history of the lost is written and presented. Miriam Cady has argued that country house ruins are special and underused resources for the interpretation of country houses and that their interpretation and presentation disrupts the usual expectations of visitors to such properties.[9]

At Marks Hall, like Belhus in Essex and hundreds of other demolished country houses nationwide, the understandably low priority given to restoration and reuse in post-war days makes historical recovery of how these houses were lost problematic and uncertain. That very uncertainty, however, adds to the appreciation of the nature and contingency of heritage. It moves the understanding of loss far from what Ruth Adams called 'the hegemonic nature of heritage' produced by the V&A Destruction exhibition and escapes the most obvious of frameworks imposed by funders and politicised lobbyists.

Offering visitors a sense of what a lost mansion was like and how that loss came about also involves a careful examination of what exactly was lost and what 'loss' actually means. Memories often remain, as do photographs and a wide range of material evidence, much conflicting and fascinatingly problematic. Materially also, loss is often less complete than might be expected: much was often sold off or salvaged, remaining extant, if sometimes neglected and in a very different place (or even continent) to where it once stood or hung. The Valance House Museum in Dagenham, for example, took some of the Belhus sixteenth-century panelling, and the Thurrock Museum in Grays accepted other fittings, including an oak fireplace, more panelling and a painting of the house from around 1700. Much evidence might also lie buried beneath ground.

Today, the site of the lost mansion at Marks Hall offers a remarkable challenge. This is a lost house whose re-envisaging within the estate might present not only the history of the vanished mansion but the circumstances of its destruction and an understanding of what the loss of a great house means in relation to the history of its times and to later

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(often romanticised) representations. The question is how best to do it? Nothing at all is left of the Marks Hall mansion save for the coach house and some of the stables, now remodelled. In 1923, a visit by *Country Life* (following a first appointment in 1902) resulted in a series of detailed and now iconic interior and exterior photographs. Many hundreds of other photographs have been given or loaned to the estate by local people, offering a very different perspective from that of official and commercial photographers. Some gravestones and memorials also survive. Many of these great tablets were sent off to the Hollytrees Museum in the centre of Colchester where they are set in a side wall; other stones were rescued from the stoke-hole of the demolished Marks Hall church.

Professional historians usually begin their research into landed estates with estate and family papers. The Marks Hall estate archive is very disappointing with only a handful of maps and papers surviving (most, in the keeping of Essex County Record Office). Other extant papers include a few materials on the plan, structure, appearance and interiors of the house; the will of the last owner relating to Mrs Phillips Price's legal position, her attitude and her advisors in 1950; the military at Marks Hall; official papers relating to the post-war national context and early efforts to salvage 'heritage'; the problem of upkeep and obtaining building supplies when the estate's income was diminished; local and national newspaper stories; minutes recorded by Braintree district and Coggeshall parish councils after 1950; and local police and court records regarding the Nissen Hut community.

This other loss and incompleteness – of the archives – offers visitors an understanding of earlier attitudes. The surviving particulars of sale for the mansion include a doleful reference to a cart load of estate records sent off to be dumped. Several living witnesses insist that many of the books from the house were buried in a pit, and we have no idea what they were. By contrast, sale details themselves provide a relatively full inventory of the house at the times of modern sale, in 1897 and 1949–1950, together with a typed inventory made for death duties in 1932. Surviving sales catalogues of 1897 record much original Honywood furniture and some are annotated, although with little sense of where the furnishings went. Several items are traceable, including a magnificent equestrian portrait of General Philip Honywood by Gainsborough. General Honywood succeeded to the estate in 1758, added a third storey, refaced and extended the mansion and rebuilt the church in the 1760s. He fought at Dettingen in 1743, carried two musket balls inside him for the rest of his life and

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in battle two years later was saved from death by gunfire only by the thickness of his pigtail. The portrait is now in the Ringling Museum in Florida, although its immediate post-sale provenance is unknown.

The much more brutal Marks Hall auction sale catalogue of November 1949 is extensive and some surviving copies are marked up with buyers' names and the price achieved. This final sale raised a total of about £5,300 from the sale of fittings and fabric. From a marked-up copy of the catalogue we know that 750 square feet of panelling, together with a carved oak chimney piece from the library, raised £390. Panelling from the Prayer Room with another carved oak fireplace was sold for £600, a set of Gothic type pointed arch windows with surrounds and shutters for £4, a roof bell complete with turret for £29 and a smaller roof bell for £3. Most of the doors went for about £2 apiece. The lead and copper roofing was sold for £550 and the solid oak and deal timbers in the roof for £110.

More significantly for a photographic, descriptive and even digital recreation of the mansion, the catalogues allow us to trace the present ownership and location of many former fittings and pieces of furniture. Two great marble fireplaces, for example, stand today in the library of the Colchester Royal Grammar School. Some of the oak panelling was bought by an Ipswich baker, an Ongar farmer and the owners of Lambourne Hall, Essex, where it is still installed. Less happily, several internal doors were bought by a local farmer for use as pig pens. Roof timbers were bought by Macmasters, a firm at Bures who manufactured chicken runs. Sections of the great staircase have recently been generously returned to the estate by the owners of a former art studio in Suffolk whose late owner bought them in 1950. The rough finish to the fretwork in those panels is suggestive of the history of local eighteenth-century craftsmanship in its rather unsuccessful attempts to emulate London fashions. It is a house history akin to those in Chapter 2 earlier and offers further revision to 'treasure-house' accounts of lost perfection.

Another evidential possibility became obvious in 2010 when the current Marks Hall mansion recovery project began. Although the house had been completely demolished in 1950 and the site levelled again in the 1970s when the new Trust began its work to restore the gardens, much can still be learned from underground investigation. Archaeological digs and geo-phys imaging, together with innovative technology (notably, robotic cameras moving through the Tudor and Georgian drains) have proved revelatory. Over three seasons of exploratory trenches, teams of

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amateur diggers under professional guidance have uncovered the original lines of the walls of the mansion (in very different positions from what had been thought), together with the location of three cellars and the position of the pre-Jacobean houses. An earlier hall with eleventh-century hearth has been fully revealed alongside the extensive Tudor drains (themselves of great beauty and something that would not have been seen save for the loss of the entire house above ground). The drains suggest a very extensive range of Tudor buildings, pointing again to how loss is not always fully recorded. With the site offering a gateway to various histories, the Trust remains optimistic about future explorations and revelations concerning the medieval manor and its site as a locale of ancient habitation. One of the finest Neolithic flints ever found in East Anglia was unearthed beneath the floor of the medieval hall.

Because demolition is still within living memory, a further presentation of lost Marks Hall is available and one also intriguingly susceptible to subjective and faltering perspective. Dr Jane Pearson has recorded some 30 interviews with men and women who knew Marks Hall before the mansion was pulled down. This oral testimony includes someone who as a child had lived in a Nissen hut at the mansion house, a local farmer who attended the demolition sale and bought numerous items, a man who was a plumber on the airfield, who worked in the house and whose grandfather worked for Phillips Price, a man whose brother lived in a Nissen hut and who entered the derelict house, someone whose father installed the protective covers for the panelling when the house was a military HQ, and the son of a wartime policeman stationed at the estate. Much about the 1950s Nissen hut community is also revealed in other interviews with people who lived on the estate after the aircrews left and the mansion was demolished. Oral records remind us of the extreme demographic volatility: how small the hosting parish was, how few lived there once employment on the estate was over, how the community was then hugely swollen (and indeed overwhelmed) by the immense war effort, swiftly depopulated and then made attractive to squatters as well as to the homeless assigned to live there. Many of the recorded voices also attest to feelings of disquiet, alarm, threat and subjugation: the representation of the country or 'big' house as a symbol of local oppression is not confined to the Irish lands discussed in earlier chapters.

An obvious result of this combination of vivid and often conflicting evidence is that the question of why the house was demolished not only becomes more central and intriguing for visitors but one that can be

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viewed from fresh and unexpected perspectives. Was destruction, or at least destruction in this way inevitable and when did it first become so and why? Mrs Price, aged 74 in 1950, faced limited choices and limited means to follow them. Again, and echoing a question that can be asked of many other requisitioned mansions in Essex and elsewhere, how damaged was the house by its war service? In *The Times,* two years after the demolition of the Marks Hall house, Lord Euston (later tenth Duke of Grafton) was quoted explaining that Marks Hall 'had been carefully looked after while occupied by the United States Air Force and the RAF during the war, but was afterwards so badly damaged by local hooligans while standing empty that it too has been demolished'.[10] Many surviving photographs taken by local people and donated to the Trust suggest considerable damage but offer no direct evidence to identify the perpetrators.

Before and after demolition, it was hard not to seek someone to blame for the loss. One argument goes as follows: if the government had been less vindictive in its taxation and more supportive in its tax relief and grants, then fewer country houses would have been broken up, their contents dispersed and their structures demolished. Underlying this argument is the implicit assumption that the continued existence of a specific landed family in a particular country house was the natural state of affairs, and that this pattern was broken by high rates of taxation and crippling death duties. This, in our still class-bound or perhaps retro-class bound society, is where the romantic overlay intrudes: usually unhelpfully for the historian but sometimes attractively for the dramatist and the commercial marketing consultant.

More practically, the will left by Thomas Phillips Price included a fatal flaw. He must have considered that the estate was self-financing from the profits of agriculture because he willed another part of his property, his coal-bearing lands in South Wales, to the Royal Gwent Hospital. His executors further decided to invest in government stock which produced a guaranteed income in a period when the capital value of government stock was diminishing.[11] This ensured that the Marks Hall estate did not lose its capital value on the death of Phillips Price's widow (which would have happened had the trustees bought an annuity from an insurance company). The beneficiary of a simple life interest only, Mrs Price must have seen little point in investing any of her income in the estate.

From the collected interviews of those living at the time, Mrs Phillips Price made four apparently crucial decisions: first, early in World War II,

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she offered the house to a school of evacuees in a vain attempt to avoid military requisitioning; second, in July 1942, within days of the RAF beginning operations on the newly constructed airfield, she auctioned the furniture in the mansion; third, in 1949, she decided against the heavy expense of renovating the house and fourth, in 1955, she allowed the Forestry Commission to lease the woods and fell the famous oaks.

Modern interpreters of the demolition of Marks Hall mansion are therefore invited to judge and discriminate between numerous representations and accounts of loss. A reconstruction project offers an evaluation of heritage that is as varied as it is fragmentary and open-ended. The integration of virtual recreation, archaeology and recorded oral history offers a rich story of the reasons for the demolition of the mansion, its wartime history and post-war Nissen Hut families, the dispersal of the staff and material artefacts (including whole interiors), and the change to the local rural economy and society. Such a presentation also invigorates debate about heritage interpretation and popular history. Oral testimony, for example, archived, cross-referenced and made accessible, offers conflicting histories of the life and demolition of the house, ably demonstrating that history turns upon the vantage point, fallibility and resourcefulness of evidence, whether written, material or recorded witness. It also contributes to broader understanding and involvement in the writing and creation of local and national history at exactly the time of great general public interest in the world of the country house.

However bewitching the small, grainy images of long-demolished houses, the image of a lost age and the thought that we will never know what rich interiors lay behind those enigmatic walls, the history of loss also invites new understanding of the past. 'The historic houses of this country belong to everybody, or at least everybody who cares about this country and its traditions' wrote Roy Strong in his introduction to the seminal V&A exhibition in 1975.[12] The words now seem oddly exclusive, and not just in terms of the appreciators but also of what is to be appreciated. As Worsley wrote also, it is hardly surprising that the history of the country house in the past century has generally been presented in terms of relentless and inevitable decline. At Marks Hall, where a stream was also dammed in the seventeenth century to create three lakes, the Trust could present an elegiac tour of the interior and exterior based on photographs of the past and of relocated materials. Such a partial experience, however, excludes greater understanding.

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A Marks Hall material diaspora, for example, is scattered nationally and internationally. Survivals of the estate's wartime history include parts of a Martin B-26 Marauder aeroplane and moving film of the house as airforce headquarters and the airfields of the estate in action with planes taking off and landing. Bob Hope came to give a concert at Marks Hall; jeeps ferried young airmen from hut to airfield as the planes readied to fight overhead. This very different celluloid presentation is as evocative as any other pictorial reminiscence of a lost mansion.

By the time of the *Destruction of the Country House* exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1974, the battle over country house demolitions had in fact largely been won. The 1968 Town and Country Planning Act required owners of listed buildings wishing to demolish or alter them to seek permission, rather than simply serving notice of their intentions. The Act also introduced spot listing, which meant that houses at risk could be listed overnight. The number of demolitions fell rapidly. Six are recorded in 1969, seven in 1970, four in 1971 and 1972 and two in 1973 and 1974. The battle over the interpretation of country house demolitions is far from won, however. We need more grounded interpretative projects as many continue to wallow, for reasons that are worth questioning, in Waugh-torn landscapes where country house history has been hi-jacked for very particular – if insinuated – political and cultural agendas. In the interpretation of demolished structures, houses can be palimpsests that are more about process than product. This volume has explored neglected facets of country house history and explored possibilities in the recreation of the processes and understanding of loss. Demolition was often a solution to problems – and the problems and solutions were not new, as the 1955 *Essex Review* article 'What can we do with our Mansions?' made clear.

Notes

1 'What can we do with our Mansions?' *The Essex Review,* 64 (Jan. 1955): 37–43; I am most grateful to Dr Jane Pearson for this reference and for other contributions to this essay.

2 R. A. I. Johnson, *Berechurch Hall*: *A History of a Grand House and Its Owners* (Wivenhoe, Essex, 2010); see also 'Outlying parts of the Liberty: West Donyland', A History of the County of Essex: Volume 9: The Borough of Colchester (1994), pp. 408–418. URL: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22022 Date accessed: 19 November 2011.

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3 The first lists derived from wartime operations and the two Town and Country Planning Acts of 1947 – see Chapter 1.
4 Worsley, *England's Lost Houses*, p. 111.
5 *Essex County Standard*, 16 December 1949.
6 Lowenthal, *Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, esp. pp. 1–21.
7 See Chapter 5.
8 Rodney Harrison (ed.), *Understanding the Politics of Heritage* (Manchester, 2009), p. 13
9 Cady, 'Conservation of Country House Ruin,' introduction.
10 *The Times,* 20 April 1953, quoting an article in the *East Anglian Magazine.*
11 Information from William Graham, the estate's last agent before the inauguration of the Phillips Price Trust (now the Marks Hall Estate) in 1971.
12 Roy Strong, 'Introduction: The Country House Dilemma' in Strong, Binney and Harris, *Destruction of the Country House*, p. 7.

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