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AN ARCHITECT FOR LUTTRELL'S TOWER

Roger White

In the summer of 1989 members of the Georgian Group visited Luttrell's Tower, a Gothick 'folly' on the banks of the Solent near Calshot Castle commanding views across to the Isle of Wight. Though tolerably well known to folly buffs and aficionados of the Landmark Trust (which acquired it in 1968 and subsequently restored it to its usual high standard), it has until now lacked an architect. 'In the manner of James Wyatt' would have been a fair guess. However, there is a possible clue to the real identity of the architect in the fact that it is first recorded in the description of an engraving of Calshot Castle published in 1780.¹ This states that 'about a mile behind [Calshot] the Hon. Temple Luttrell has erected a very lofty tower, which commands an extensive prospect and affords a very fine object for the Isle of Wight'. The engraving was of a view by Paul Sandby

In May 1990, while on a short sabbatical at the Yale Center for British Art, I visited Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, New York State) to examine the drawings by Paul Sandby's brother Thomas which form part of the collection of 18th- and early-19th-century English architectural drawings and topographical watercolours acquired by the Revd. Elias Magoon in the 1850s from the estate of the antiquarian John Britton (perhaps the first such collection to cross the Atlantic), and which were then the subject of a small exhibition in the college art gallery. I was particularly struck by an unidentified elevational design for a Gothick tower (Fig. 1)²; the Hon. Mrs Jane Roberts, Curator of the Print Room at the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, had suggested that this might have been yet another of the many unexecuted Sandby projects for ornamental structures in Windsor Great Park, while James Palmer's catalogue entry also related it to the design of Robert Adam's Brizlee Tower at Alnwick. To me it called to mind Luttrell's Tower.

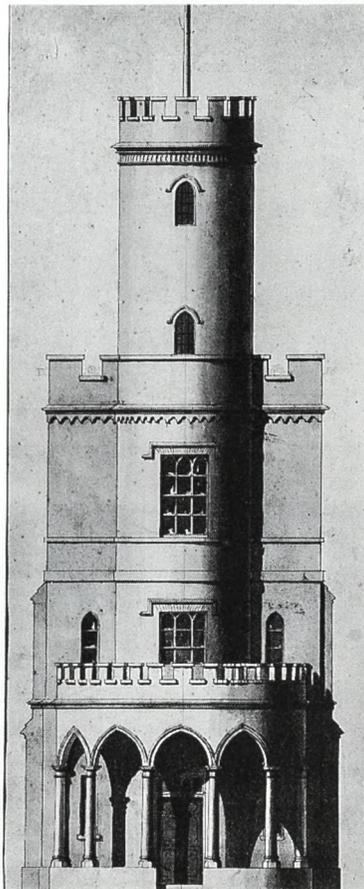


Fig. 1. Thomas Sandby, Design for a Tower (Vassar College Art Gallery).



Fig. 2. Luttrell's Tower from the north-west (Landmark Trust).

On my return to London I was able to compare a photocopy of the Vassar drawing with photographs of the west elevation of Luttrell's Tower (Fig. 2), which more or less confirmed my hunch. There were, however, discrepancies to be accounted for. The tower is built of creamy-buff brick with Portland stone dressings. It is a rectangular battlemented structure of three storeys, with, embedded in its west face, a circular stair turret that rises considerably higher and again terminates in battlements. Sandby shows the first and second floors of the turret lit by large square-headed sash windows under Tudor drip-moulds. At some stage these were evidently filled in and the first and second floors of the west and south sides of the tower rendered, leaving only the upper of the drip-moulds floating in limbo in an expanse of bare wall. The pointed windows to either side of the turret at first floor-level have been replaced by small portholes.

A more striking discrepancy is the fact that Sandby shows a curved five-bay battlemented Gothick arcade wrapped around the ground floor of the turret, within which the tower is entered through a door under a Gothick fanlight. Although the door and fanlight — which mid-20th century survey drawings show removed — have been reinstated, the arcade has vanished altogether. However, although the arcade had disappeared by the time Nixon's view of Luttrell's Tower was engraved in 1807,³ it is still there in the sketch by Francis Grose (Fig. 3), made perhaps circa 1790;⁴ moreover J. Hassell's *Tour of the Isle of Wight*, published in that year, notes that 'the portico has a pleasant appearance and is very convenient'.⁵

Comparison of these three views — Sandby, Grose and Nixon — in fact suggests that several modifications were made to Sandby's design at the time of the tower's erection. Thus, although Sandby shows this Gothick porch topped by a simple battlemented parapet at the junction of ground and first floors, Grose shows the porch itself having a first floor lit by circular windows, so that the first floor of the tower's west elevation is entirely obscured and the

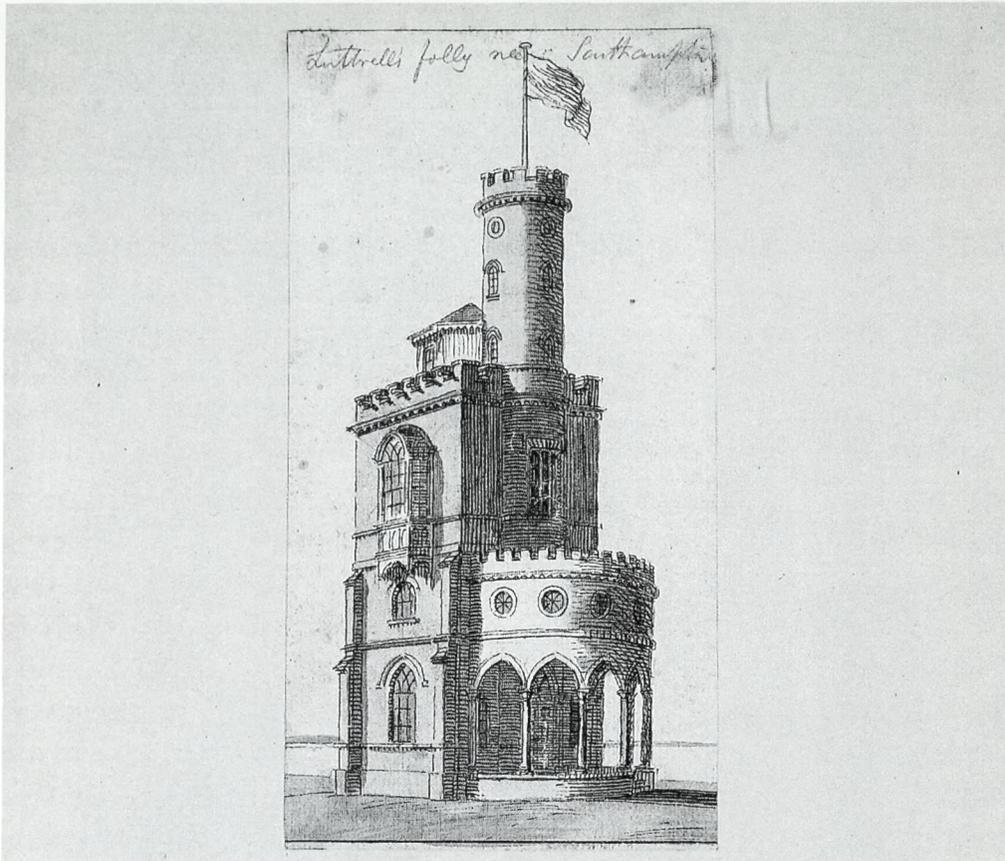


Fig. 3. Francis Grose, 'Lutterell's folly near Southampton' c.1790 (Southampton University Art Gallery).

battlements rise to the base of the second floor. In Nixon, though the door remains, the turret's first floor window has been replaced by what appears to be a tablet bearing an inscription. Finally, the turret itself has acquired an extra stage in both Grose and Nixon, lit by circular apertures. Since Sandby's Vassar drawing, like Nixon's, is a head-on view of the west elevation, it is impossible to say whether the pretty wooden oriels which enliven the north and south elevations at second-floor level are part of Sandby's original design. Nor can one be sure that the present appearance of the east elevation, which is ornamented with elegant Classical urns and paterae (almost certainly of Coade stone) set respectively into oval and circular recesses, corresponds exactly with Sandby's intentions.

As first built in (presumably) the late 1770s, the tower rapidly gained local notoriety on account of both its architectural oddity and the yet odder way in which it was inhabited, as Hassell's account explains:

'Eaglehurst, or as it is generally named by the inhabitants of the coast, Lutterell's Folly, is built close to the shore and near the point on which stands Calshot Castle. The building is very whimsical, but neat and agreeable to the sight. On the top of it a round tower is erected which was originally intended to have a full view over the southern shores of the Isle of Wight: but unfortunately the director or architect forgot that the ground on which it stands is not of equal height with the intervening mountains on the island . . . The kitchens, except being damp in winter, are equally convenient with the other parts of the house. Several subterraneous passages lead from the area to a number of marquees, to which the family retires when the turbulence of the weather renders a residence in the house disagreeable. In these tents there are several beds, and also a kitchen. The house being small, these retreats are both cool and agreeable . . . From hence another passage underground leads to a bathing house on the beach. All these retreats are well bricked and floored: but so very wet at times that they are impassable'.

The Revd. William Gilpin, writing in 1807 in his *Observations on Forest Scenery*,⁶ confirmed the decidedly eccentric recourse to tents to augment the tower's accommodation. The 'whimsicality' and 'contrivance' of the conception did not appeal to Gilpin, and indeed it must

have been fairly soon after his visit that the practical drawbacks of so much canvas on an exposed coastal site led the then owner, the Earl of Cavan, to replace it with a more permanent single-storey house, set well back behind the tower. The young Princess Victoria found the arrangement 'very singular' when she visited the Cavans in 1833: 'there is a very high tower near the sea; but they live entirely on the ground floor like tents. There is not a staircase in the house. It is very comfortably furnished and quite like a cottage.'⁷

The explanation of the oddities of Luttrell's Tower, and indeed the probable reason for Sandby's involvement, may be sought in the raffishness of the builder and his Irish family. Temple Luttrell was a younger son of the 1st Earl Carhampton. His eldest brother refused to respond to a challenge to a duel issued by the earl on the grounds that his father was not a gentleman. His younger sister Elizabeth was jailed for cheating at cards and ended her days in Bavaria by poisoning herself after being convicted of picking pockets in Augsburg. According to local tradition Temple himself chose to site his tower on the Solent because of the opportunities it afforded for smuggling; some plausibility is perhaps lent to this theory by the underground passage connecting the tower with the foreshore, although Luttrell's brother John was a Commissioner for the Excise and acting magistrate for the district. In 1793 Temple was arrested in Boulogne by the French revolutionaries and imprisoned for two years before finally dying in Paris in 1803.

The connection with Sandby came through his elder sister Anne, who in 1771 married George III's son Prince Henry Frederick, Duke of Cumberland. Elizabeth, Lady Harcourt called her 'the widow of a private gentleman, without either beauty, fortune or respectable connections to support her and with a very equivocal character, [who] had persuaded the duke, who was a remarkably silly man, to marry her'.⁸ Lady Louisa Stewart described her as 'vulgar, noisy, indelicate and intrepid . . . one who set modesty at defiance . . . after being with her, one ought to go home and wash out one's ears'.⁹ It was this unfortunate union, rather than that of the Prince of Wales to Mrs Fitzherbert (1785), which prompted the passing of the Royal Marriages Act in 1772. At all events, it was probably due to the duke's favour that Sandby was appointed Deputy Ranger of Windsor Great Park in 1765, and certainly in this capacity that his many projects for the Park were drawn up.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Charles Hind for drawing my attention to the Vassar drawings; to James Palmer who organised the exhibition there and showed me the drawings; and to Mrs Charlotte Haslam of the Landmark Trust for very kindly making her notes on Luttrell's Tower and the Luttrell family available to me.

NOTES

1. The engraving hangs in the tower. It has not been possible to discover exactly when it was published.
2. *Vassar College Art Gallery*, 864.1.298.
3. *European Magazine*, 1807, vol 52.
4. Southampton University Art Gallery, Cope Collection C9 LUT, inscribed 'Luttrells folly near Southampton'.
5. J. Hassell, *Tour of the Isle of Wight*, 1790, vol 1, pp.63-66.
6. *Ibid*, vol II, pp.196-7 (1791).
7. September 13, 1833. *Ex. inf.* Royal Library, Windsor.
8. Quoted in Cokayne's *Complete Peerage* (ed. Vicary Gibbs), 1913, under the entry on the Duke of Cumberland.
9. *Ibid*.