



THE GEORGIAN GROUP

Jonathan Marsden, 'William Penn and Sir Francis Dashwood's Sawmill', *The Georgian Group Journal*, Vol. VIII, 1998, pp. 143-150

WILLIAM PENN AND SIR FRANCIS DASHWOOD'S SAWMILL

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For two hundred years, travellers on the Oxford road as it passes through West Wycombe have been confronted by several of the most extraordinary buildings of the eighteenth century. Crowning the hill above the village is the Mausoleum, a hexagon of triumphal arches, and behind it, on the tower of the medieval church of St Lawrence, a massive golden globe in which six people can be accommodated on benches. These are only the most prominent incidents in a landscape created over forty years by Sir Francis Dashwood, 2nd baronet, and Lord Le Despencer from 1763 (1708–1781), which has remained largely unaltered since his death (Fig.1). One important element survived, by contrast, for only a short time: a life-size lead statue

of William Penn (1644–1718), the first proprietor of Pennsylvania, on the roof of the sawmill at the centre of the park. Given the well-known image of 'Hellfire Francis' and the monks of Medmenham, it may seem surprising that a figure of one of the most revered of Quaker founding fathers should thus have presided over a landscape otherwise dedicated to Bacchus and Venus. Plans now being prepared by the National Trust for Penn's reinstatement form the occasion for this article.

Sir Francis Dashwood's landscape was formed in two phases; the rococo garden of the 1740s and 1750s, with its toy forts, miniature frigates and Temple of Venus – truly a Pleasure Ground – and the works of the 1770s, mostly in the wider park and

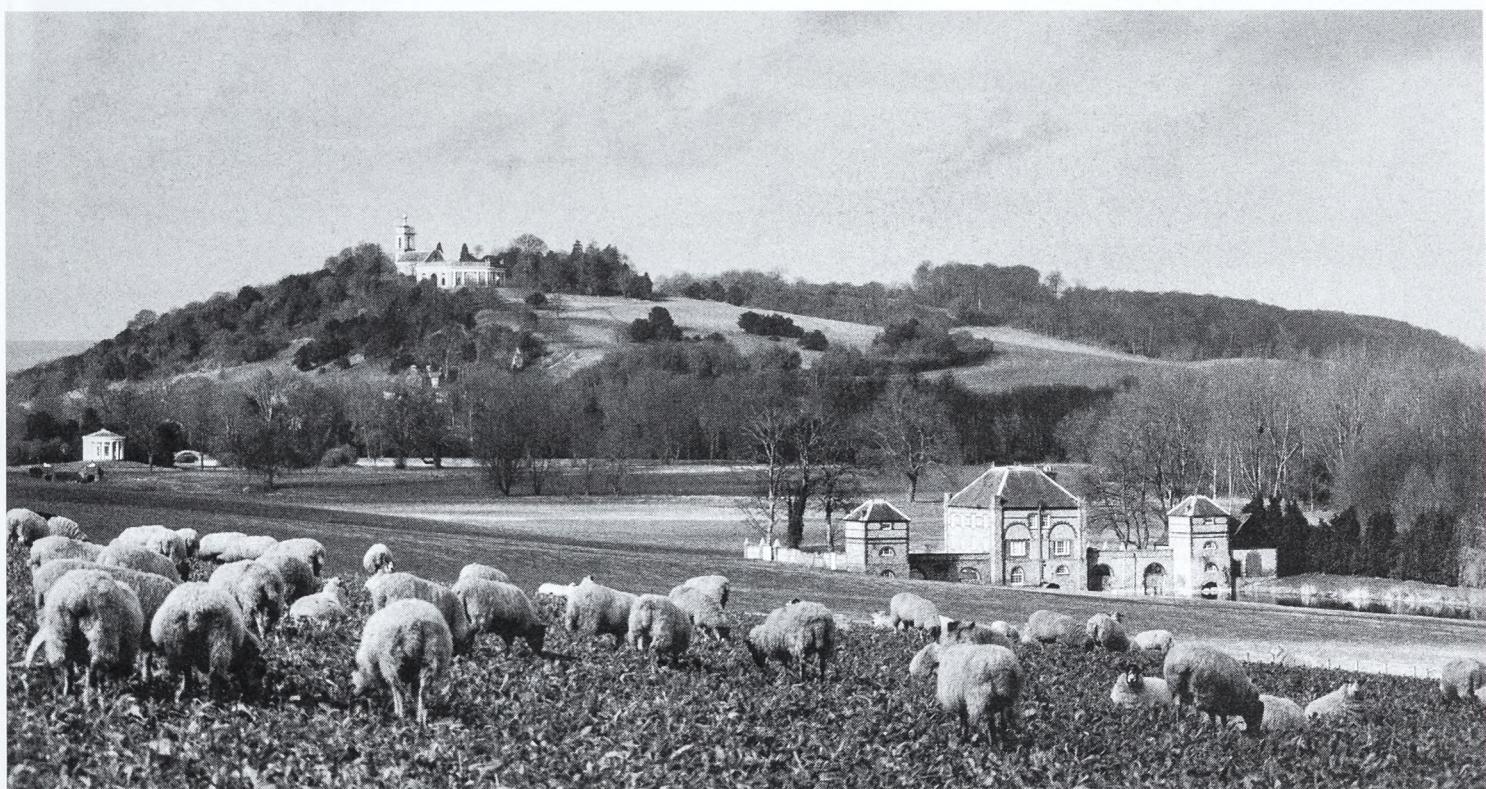


Figure 1. West Wycombe Park from the south-east, including the sawmill (right), the Music Temple (left), the Mausoleum and the Church. *Jonathan Marsden*.

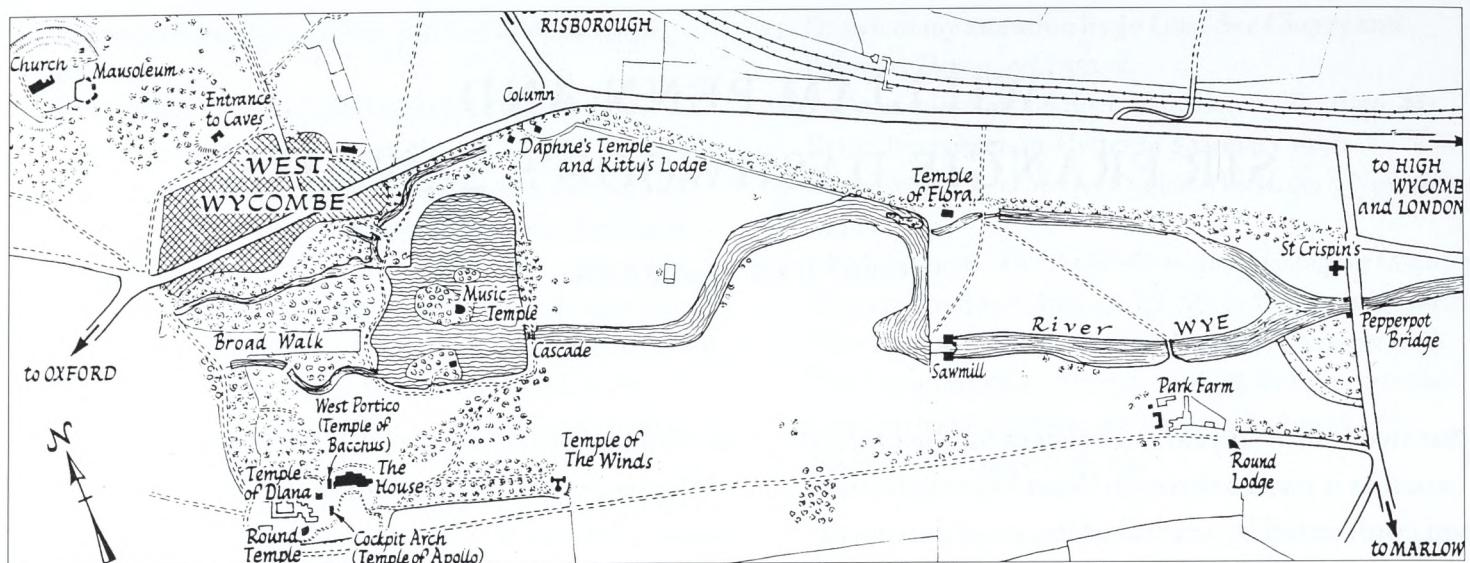


Figure 2. Plan of the garden and park. The house is at the lower left, and the sawmill just right of centre.

Jonathan Marsden.



Figure 3. The sawmill from the east. The central block was converted into a house earlier this century.

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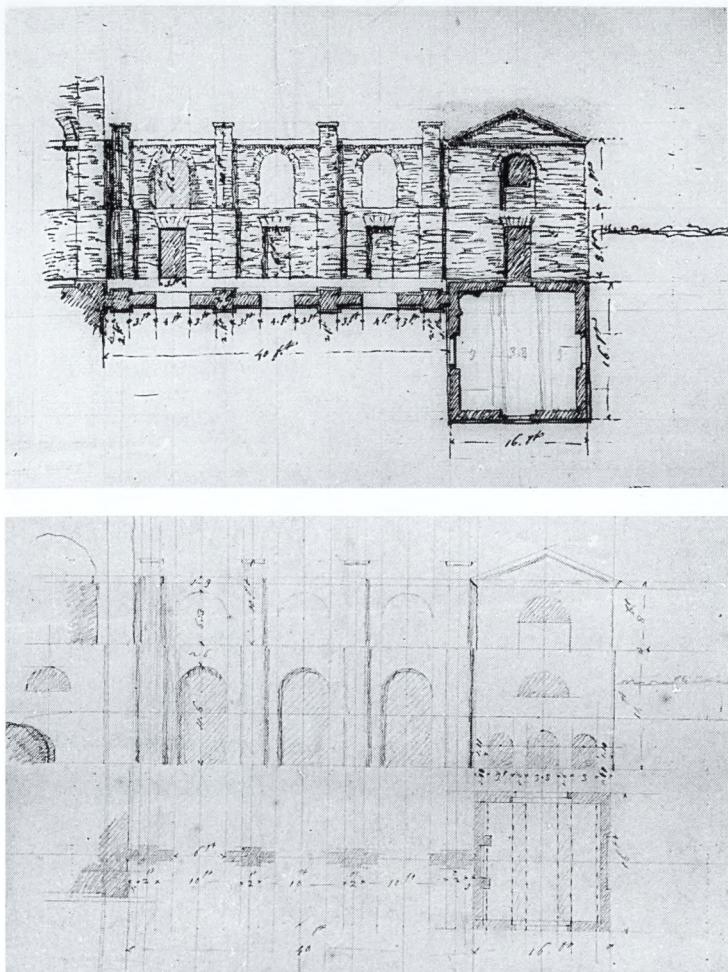


Figure 4 & 5. Sketch drawings attributed to Nicholas Revett and apparently related to the sawmill.
Sir Francis Dashwood, Bt.

including serious neoclassical architecture from the hand of Nicholas Revett, inspired by the archaeological publications supported by the Society of Dilettanti (Fig. 2).¹ These phases reflect the chronology of Dashwood's career: in 'opposition' in the House of Commons from 1741 to 1761, then successively Chancellor of the Exchequer, Keeper of the Great Wardrobe and, from 1766 to 1781, Joint Postmaster-General. If, as Chancellor, he was rightly said to have 'stumbled over farthings and trodden lightly over pounds', his achievements in office signify less than his lifelong political principles as an Independent.²

Outside politics, for instance in his membership of learned societies, Sir Francis' interests embraced both the useful and the beautiful. Visiting Peterhof

as a young man in 1733, he was as fascinated by the technology of the great cascade as by the brilliance of its sculptural fountains,³ and among the drawings for West Wycombe by Giovanni Niccolo Servandoni and Morris Lewis Jolivet is a section of his own cascade showing its complex hydraulics.⁴ Two of the projects from the later phase with which Revett is associated, a home farm known as Don Quixote's Castle, and the rebuilding of one of the watermills in the stretch of the river Wye within the park, also combined the practical and the ornamental. The mill (Fig. 3) was the larger, consisting of three blocks, linked by arcades of two arches each. All three blocks have pyramidal roofs, although the pyramids are flattened at the top. The central block is divided into two bays by a blind arcade. It has clasping buttresses at the corners, extended above the eaves by short lengths of parapet. The building is of flint, with brick dressings, and a large number of brick string courses. Two drawings attributed to Nicholas Revett (Figs. 4 & 5) appear to be preliminary proposals for the mill, and suggest that it was first conceived as an antique viaduct or aqueduct. There is no specific evidence for dating, but it was complete by 1774, when Benjamin Franklin wrote about it to Sir Francis Dashwood (see below). It was painted by William Daniell in 1781 (Fig. 6). Evidently it was no mere eyecatcher. Visiting West Wycombe in 1776, the Duchess of Northumberland noticed that internally the mill was '... of a very curious but simple construction which at once saws a Tree of any Size and likewise is by the same motion a Corn Mill & beneath cutts Fire wood.'⁵ As an active member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Manufactures Sir Francis may have played a part in arranging the export of a model of a sawmill to America,⁶ and in 1775 he was in negotiation with Chatham dockyard over the supply of ships' timbers. Beyond the functions observed by the Duchess, the mill may also have been capable of producing paper.⁷

If Sir Francis' technological interests brought about the rebuilding of the mill, what

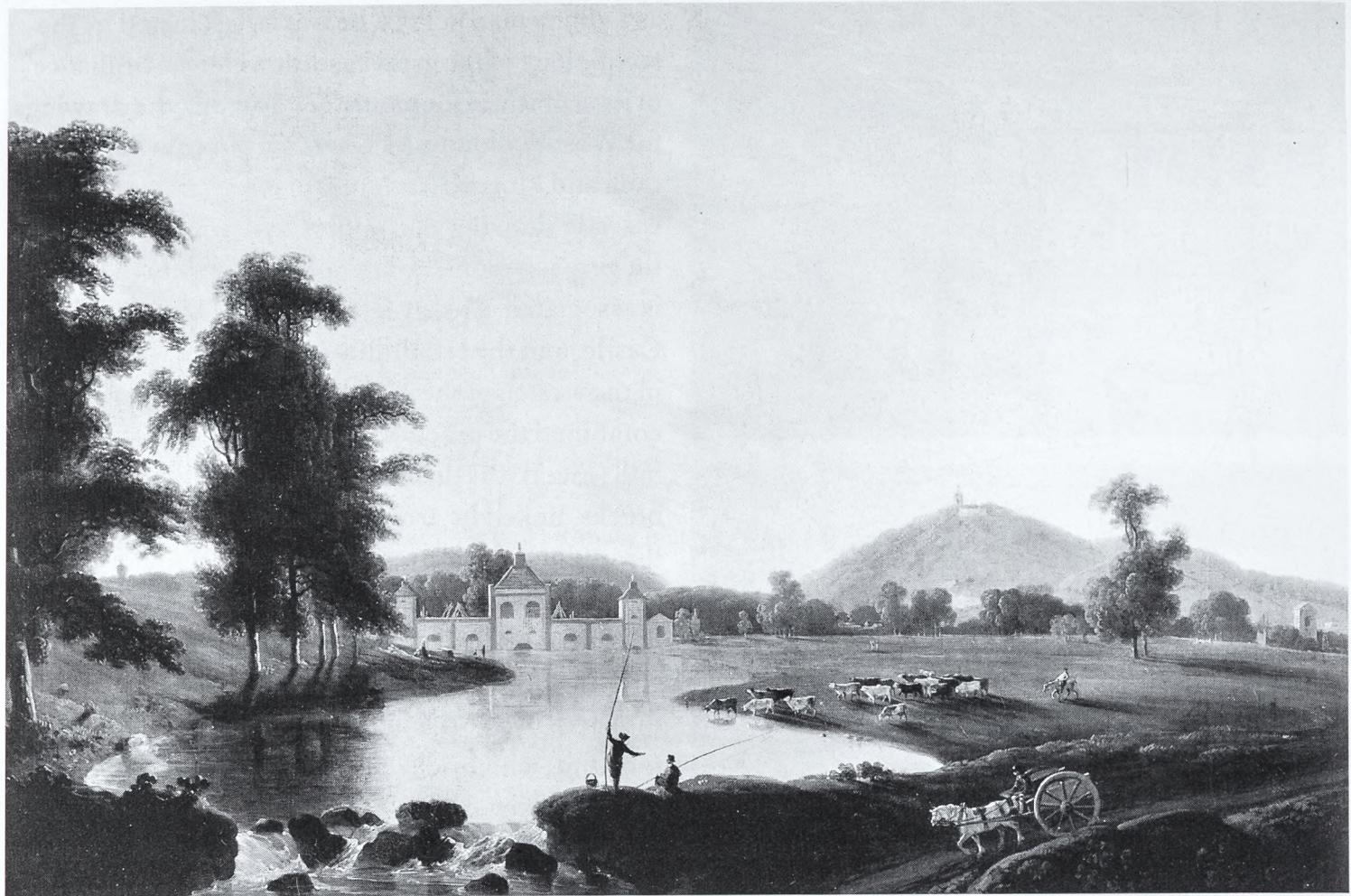


Figure 6. William Daniell, *A View of West Wycombe Park*. c. 1781.
Sir Francis Dashwood, Bt.



Figure 7. W. Woollett, after William Hannan,
*A View of the Walton Bridge, Venus's Temple, etc., in the
Garden of Sir Francis Dashwood, Bt. at West Wycombe
Park in the County of Bucks*, engraving, (detail).
Buckinghamshire County Reference Library.

of its unconventional sculptural decoration? Sculpture had played an important part in all of his projects at West Wycombe from the 1740s onwards.

In 1746 he purchased at Lady Wentworth's sale what must have been the entire sculptural contents of her garden at nearby Bradenham – 43 lead statues and their stone pedestals, together with urns, flower pots and rollers.⁸ These must have included the numerous figures disposed around 'Venus' Parlour', laid out in 1748–9 (Fig.7), and may also have provided the garniture for the parapet of the house. None of this secondhand sculpture survives at West Wycombe, but it is probable that, like the important group of lead figures which Sir Francis acquired much later from John Cheere (which do survive), it consisted of stock models after antique or renaissance types. The '... stooping figure of Wm Penn coloured & in his Quakers Dress'⁹ which the Duchess of Northumberland noticed on the sawmill roof seems to have been the only bespoke statue that Sir Francis ever commissioned. What

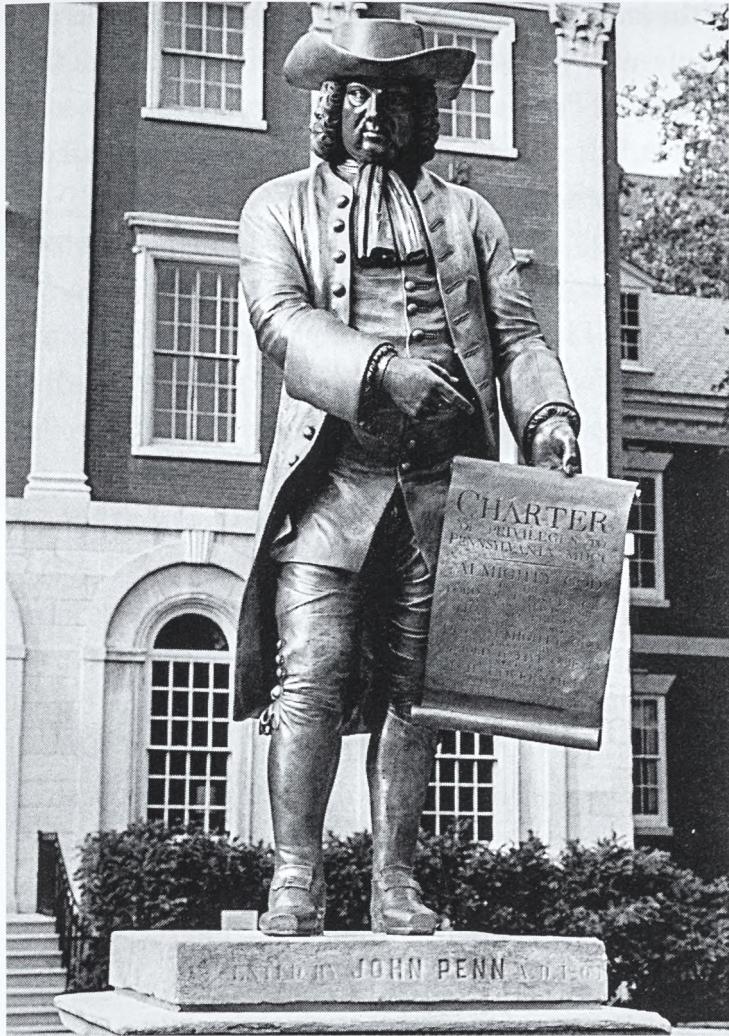


Figure 8. John Bacon R.A., *William Penn*, c. 1774–6.
Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia.

must have made this all the more obvious was that Penn's companions, on the lower roofs to either side, were described as a Haymaker and his Mistress, clearly further 'stock' lead figures.¹⁰

Penn's statue remained at West Wycombe for only 25 years. When Sir John Dashwood-King consulted Humphry Repton in 1794 about the landscape he had inherited from his uncle it was singled out for special criticism as 'an instance of false scale . . .' Brought to earth soon afterwards, it came into the possession of Penn's descendant at Stoke Park, where it was placed indoors, only to attract further obloquy from Repton.¹¹ In 1804, John Penn made a gift of the statue of his grandfather to the Pennsylvania Hospital at Philadelphia, where it remains (Fig.8).¹²



Figure 9. John Hall, after Benjamin West, *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, engraving, 1775, detail.
The National Trust.

The earliest mention of a sculptor in connection with the figure is in John Fanning Watson's *Annals of Philadelphia* of 1830: 'The statue . . . was executed in whole or in part by Bacon, the best statuary of his day'.¹³ John Bacon R.A., the Elder (1740–1799), made a bust of Sir Francis Dashwood for the Mausoleum in around 1780, and although there is no mention of the Penn statue in early lists of his work, the attribution seems tenable.¹⁴ Moreover, nobody else made a statue of Penn, until Alexander Milne Calder's colossal figure, partly indebted to the present one, was set up on top of Philadelphia City Hall in 1894.¹⁵

The reason for this is simple. As a Quaker, Penn would have avoided having any likeness made, and Quaker portraiture in general is a fairly barren field

of art. It seems likely that Bacon derived his figure from what was to become one of the best-known images of the late eighteenth century, Benjamin West's *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1772.¹⁶ John Hall's engraving (Fig.9), marketed by Boydell from 1775 with another after West's *Death of Wolfe*, was reproduced in every possible medium, such that before the end of the century Thomas Penn could retire to sleep in the governor's house in Philadelphia with the image printed on his bed-curtains.¹⁷

The first (and only other) full-length likeness of Penn seems to have been that which Francesco Sleter painted on the wall of the Palladian Bridge at Stowe, which was completed in 1738. Together with a figure of Sir Walter Raleigh, it flanked the relief by Scheemakers of *The Four Quarters of the World Bringing their Tributes to Britannia*.¹⁸ There is confusion in the early sources as to whether there was also a statue of Penn at Stowe, compounded by the repeated mis-naming of the painted figure as Sir William Penn (Penn's father, the admiral, who had been knighted by Charles II). In a letter to Lord Kames of 1760, Benjamin Franklin relates that Lord Cobham, who had known William Penn, approached Thomas Penn for a likeness of his father, '... in order to get a bust form'd from it', but his need was met instead by Sylvanus Bevan, a Quaker apothecary from London, who carved a profile in ivory from memory and sent it to Stowe. Franklin goes on to say that '... from this little bust, the large one in the Gardens was formed'.¹⁹ The genesis of Lord Cobham's Temple of British Worthies – for which such a bust might have been intended – is obscured by gaps in the Stowe papers, but Penn seems never to have had a place there.²⁰

It was from Benjamin Franklin that the inspiration for the West Wycombe statue must have come. He was a frequent guest at the house, and his involvement in the project is revealed in a letter he wrote to Sir Francis Dashwood in April 1774 about the inscription. In West's picture, Penn is empty-handed, whereas in Bacon's statue (and in some

of the later reproductions after West), he holds a partly-unrolled scroll, inscribed with lines from the Charter of Privileges of Pennsylvania, proclaimed in 1701.²¹ It seems that the sculptor originally tried to include far more of the text, but as Franklin observed, '... there will hardly be room for so much in characters large enough to be read from below'.²² This seems to strengthen the attribution to Bacon, who encountered similar difficulty with the inscription to the Chatham monument in Westminster Abbey.²³

Franklin's involvement cannot have been confined to the detail of the inscription, for he was at the heart of the political turmoil that in the 1760s had engendered near-unanimous opposition in Philadelphia to the continuing government of the Penn family. Thomas Penn, the aging son of the founder, was an English squire with a substantial estate at Stoke Poges, no longer himself a Quaker, and the character of his family's administration of the colony had departed almost beyond recognition from William Penn's original settlement. Infringements of the rights both of the native Americans and the colonists were continual and progressive, and Thomas Penn's commission to West in 1772 to commemorate – a hundred years after the event – the peaceful conclusion of his father's treaty with the native chiefs was intended to celebrate a temporary respite in the political storm.²⁴ It must also have shown up the contrast with his own regime, and Franklin certainly appreciated this. His friendship with West at this time promotes the suggestion that the sawmill statue was his idea.

Dashwood and Franklin collaborated in 1773 on an abridgement of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The text was largely Dashwood's work, ostensibly intended to answer widespread complaints that the morning and evening services of the Church '... are so long and filled with so many repetitions, that the continued attention suitable to serious duty, becomes impracticable'.²⁵ In fact it was Dashwood's response to the defeat in Parliament

of a bill supporting individual freedom in the use of the liturgy, and to what he saw as the gradual encroachment by the Church on the principles of the Reformation.

Thus it may seem more understandable for Dashwood, the lifelong Independent committed to the regulation of the power of the executive whether of church or state, to have given the place of honour in his landscape park to William Penn, the indefatigable religious dissident of the reign of James II and the founder of a model form of 'just government' in Pennsylvania.

Given the way in which both the English landscape movement and the world of Anglo-American relations developed shortly afterwards, it is not surprising that Penn's statue was spirited away.

During the last twenty years the present Sir Francis Dashwood and the National Trust have collaborated in the restoration of the West Wycombe landscape to reclaim its essential pre-Reptonian character. With the help of the authorities in Philadelphia, the Trust has recently obtained a cast of Penn's statue, which will shortly be reinstated as the final statement of the second baronet's political credo.

I wish to thank Richard Hewlings for many suggestions for improving the text, Sylvia Carlisle at Friends House in London for information on Penn's portraits, and above all Sir Francis Dashwood, Bt., whose quest for Bacon's statue of Penn began in 1967, who put his own archive on the subject at my disposal, and thanks to whose generous support the National Trust has been able to obtain a cast from Philadelphia.

NOTES

1 Gervase Jackson-Stops, 'The West Wycombe Landscape, I & II', *Country Life*, CLIV, June 20 and 27 1974, 1618–21, 1682–85.

2 For Dashwood's political career see Betty Kemp, *Sir Francis Dashwood: an Eighteenth Century Independent*, London, 1967.

3 Betty Kemp, 'Sir Francis Dashwood's Diary of his Visit to St. Petersburg in 1733', *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, XXXVIII, 1959, 213.

4 Gervase Jackson-Stops, *An English Arcadia* (exh. cat.) 1992, no. 65.

5 Alnwick, Alnwick Castle MSS, ms Diary of Elizabeth, Duchess of Northumberland, August 1776.

6 G. K. Menzies et al., *The Story of the Royal Society of Arts*, London, 1935, 29.

7 Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire County Record Office, Dashwood Papers (hereafter Dashwood), D/D/6/171, lease dated 26th November 1799, of '... all that Water Grist Mill and Paper Mills ...'

8 Dashwood, D/D/14/35/15.

9 Alnwick Castle MSS, loc. cit..

10 These may have been by John Cheere. Describing a visit to his yard at Hyde Park Corner, J.T. Smith noticed among the life-size lead figures, '... moweres whetting their scythes, haymakers resting on their rakes ...' [Streets of London, I, London, 1846, 16]. It is not known

whether these particular figures survive. The models are comparatively rare, and none have yet been found in good enough condition for moulds to be taken for the purpose of replication. The Duchess of Northumberland's reference to Penn's statue as 'coloured' deserves further comment. After many years standing in Philadelphia the statue is covered with numerous layers of black paint, but during the recent operation to take a mould, examination showed traces of colour in the earliest layer (information from Sir Francis Dashwood; see also Repton's description, note 11 below).

11 Humphry Repton, *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, London, 1803, 5: 'On the summit of another building, viz. a saw-mill in the park, was a figure of a man in a brown coat and a broad brimmed hat, representing the great Penn of Pensilvania, which being much larger than the natural proportion of a man, yet having the appearance of a man upon the roof of the building, diminished the size of every other object by which it was surrounded. It has since been removed, and is now in the possession of Mr Penn at Stoke Poges, where, placed in a room, it seems a colossal figure.'

12 For the history of the Penn statue after it left West Wycombe see Henri Marceau, 'William Penn's Other Statue' in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and*

- Biography*, xcv, no.4, October 1971, 521–526.
- 13 John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania* (ms completed 1830; published Philadelphia 1927), I, 112 and III, 331.
- 14 Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors*, 2nd edition, London, 1969, 26. Bacon's other known metal sculpture is confined to the bronze groups of George III (Somerset House) and *Hercules and Atlas* (Radcliffe Observatory, Oxford). He had the use of a foundry adjacent to his studio in Newman Street, and corresponded on techniques of casting with the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Manufactures [Anna Cox-Johnson, *John Bacon, Sculptor, 1740–1799*, St Marylebone Society Publication no.4, 1961; *ibid.*, 'Patrons to a Sculptor: the Society and John Bacon R.A.', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, August 1962, 705–711].
- 15 Marceau, *op. cit.*. This 37-foot statue can be seen to best advantage in the title sequence of the 1993 Tom Hanks film *Philadelphia*.
- 16 Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West*, New Haven and London, 1986, nos.85–87. There are differences in Penn's physique and gesture between West's and Bacon's figures, but the face and dress are convincingly close.
- 17 Ellen Starr Brinton, 'Benjamin West's Painting of Penn's Treaty with the Indians', *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, xxx, 1941, 128.
- 18 Benton Seeley, *A Description of the Gardens of the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow*, Northampton, 1744, 24: 'The Palladian Bridge; where is a collection of antique Bustoes of Marble: The Roof, on the Side facing the Water, is supported by Ionic Columns; the Backside of it by an Alto-Relievo of the four Quarters of the World bringing their Products to Britannia. Here are likewise painted by Mr Slater, Sir Walter Raleigh with a Map of Virginia in his hand; and Sir William Penn holding a Book, stiled *The Laws of Pennsylvania*.'
- 19 Leonard W. Labaree (ed.), *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, IX, New Haven and London, 1966, 7 (January 3rd 1760). For Bevan's ivory profile and the many portraits which derive from it, see John Nickalls, 'Some Quaker Portraits, Certain and Uncertain', in *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, Supplement no.29, 1958, 10–12.
- 20 George Clarke, 'Signor Fido and the Stowe Patriots', *Apollo*, cxxii, October 1985, 248–251. None of the eighteenth-century guides mentions a bust or statue of Penn at Stowe.
- 21 For the text of the Charter of Privileges see Merrill Jensen (ed.), *English Historical Documents* IX, London 1955, 192–5. The inscription on the scroll in the statue is an abridgement of part of the first article of the Charter, *viz.:*
- CHARTER/of privileges to/Pennsylvania MDCC./
ALMIGHTY GOD/being the only/LORD OF
CONSCIENCE/I do grant and declare/that no person/
who shall acknowledge/ONE ALMIGHTY GOD/and
profess himself/obliged to live quietly/under the/CIVIL
GOVERNMENT/shall be in any case/molested or'
[here the scroll turns up].
- 22 West Wycombe Park, Dashwood Papers, Benjamin Franklin to Sir Francis Dashwood, April 14th 1774.
- 23 Gunnis, *op.cit.*, 25.
- 24 Notwithstanding the fact that in most respects, West's painting is fictitious. See von Erffa and Staley, *op.cit.*, no.85.
- 25 Francis Dashwood and Benjamin Franklin, *Abridgement of the Book of Common Prayer, and the Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the Use of the Church of England: together with the Psalter, or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches*, London, 1773.