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# DR WILLIAM STUKELEY'S HOUSE AT GRANTHAM

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The Bodleian Library has a set of charming, naive watercolours, five interior views and two views of the garden of a house in Grantham, Lincolnshire.<sup>1</sup> They are dated between 1727 and March 1729. Interior domestic views of this date would normally serve as the background to a portrait or conversation-piece and might therefore show an artist's studio backdrop or an idealised interior designed to flatter the sitter with references to his virtues and attainments. The Bodleian drawings, however, are quite simply records of the arrangements of the rooms which they depict with little pretension to artistic merit. While they foreshadow S.H. Grimm's views of Hardwick and other houses of antiquarian interest,<sup>2</sup> they are closer in spirit to Osbert Lancaster than to any eighteenth century topographer. They present fascinating images of the decoration and arrangement of furniture in an early Georgian middle class interior.

The artist is the antiquarian William Stukeley, born the 7 November 1687 at Holbech in the county of Lincolnshire, the son of a lawyer.<sup>3</sup> Reluctant to follow his father into the law, he determined to pursue a career in medicine. On 20 November 1703 he was admitted as a pensioner at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. His fertile mind was not content with the collecting of herbs and the dissecting of animals; at the same time he conceived a passionate love of antiquities and, realising that he could not afford a grand tour of the Continent, he turned his attention to the antiquities of his own country.

In an entry in his diary he describes his interests thus: 'I began childhood with a love to drawing, and exercised it in practise continually. Antiquity-

studys soon got an ascendancy in my fancy . . .

I remov'd to London at 29 years of age, neither for pleasure nor profit, but that I might indulge my propensity to study. I immediately was instrumental in founding the Antiquarian Society. I travel'd all the summers alone, except 2 years out of 9, when I accompanied Mr Roger Gale, & fill'd my mind with British & Roman Antiquitys in our own country.' A three-month tour to the West country in the summer of 1721 in company with Roger Gale produced the famous drawings of Avebury and Stonehenge, correctly observed and measured, firmly establishing that they were of pre-Roman date.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst I lived in London for 9 years together, in the flourishing time of my life, I had the greatest intimacy with Thomas Lord Pembroke, Heneage Earl of Winchelsea, Sir Isaac Newton, Dr. Halley, Mead, Sir Hans Sloan, Lord Oxford, James West, John Bridges, D. of Argyle, Tom Rawlinson, Dr. Friend, Dr. Arbuthnot, Dr. Morton, Dr. Walter Harris, Sir Godfrey Kneller, & in short with the whole sett of learned men & Vertuoso's, who at that time abounded, & by having recourse to their librarys I arriv'd to a considerable degree of knowledge & equal reputation. At the end of 1725 an irresistible impulse seiz'd my mind to leave the town . . . This December I throly resolv'd to goe into the country to live, & bought a house at Grantham.<sup>5</sup>

This seemingly sudden determination to leave London and take up again his original profession of medicine was perhaps caused by his failure, despite his many powerful and aristocratic friends and patrons, to secure any preferment or salaried position in London. Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, a Scottish antiquary, paid him an early visit at Grantham, which he records in his diary 'He

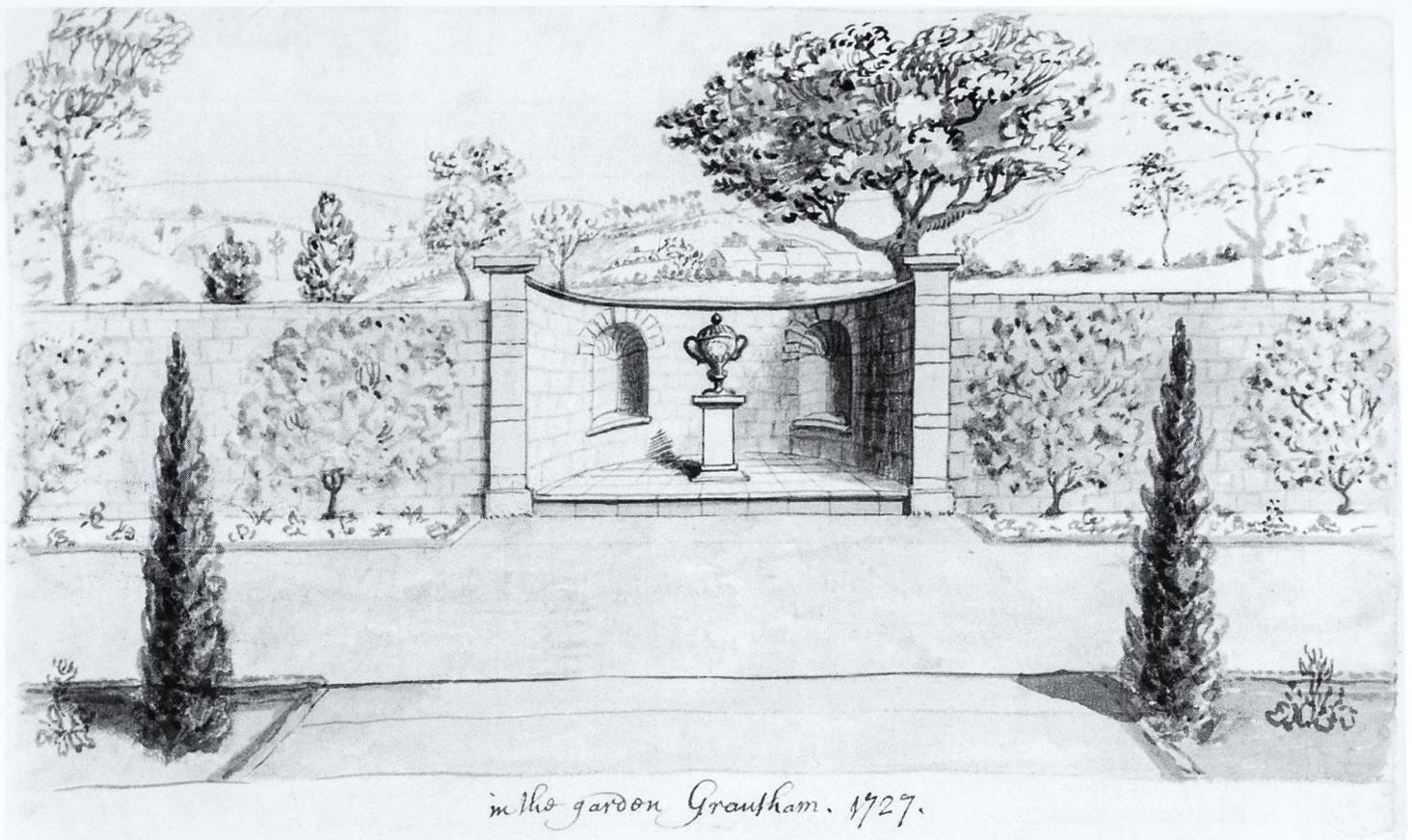


Figure 1. William Stukeley, 'in the garden, Grantham 1727'. Bodlaien Library, MS Gough Maps, 16 p.33B

[Stukeley] has written several things but not meeting with the encouragement he expected from the publick he has withdrawen himself from London to live privately at Grantham having a little estate of 150lb. Per ann and no Family and a little business in his profession.<sup>6</sup>

Stukeley's first letter from Grantham is to the book dealer John Murray, dated 10 August 1726. He addresses Murray, as Dear and Honest Landlord, 'This is the first day I have set pen to paper in an epistolary way since my retirement . . . I have hitherto been busy in building and fitting up my mansion against winter . . . You can't think too much, how I am delighted with my scituation, which is really extremely pretty. My house is a strong and good old fashioned one. Well shaded with trees, fit for a Druid's cell (Fig. 7), my garden is spacious and open having a fine prospect and wash't by the Wisham.'<sup>7</sup> This view is clearly discernable over the garden wall against which are well-grown fan-trained fruit trees. Within the apse of the wall are

two handsome shell headed niches and, at the corner of the bed, obelisk-cut yews (Fig. 1).

Certainly he entered enthusiastically into his new domesticity and in a letter from Grantham, dated 6 February 1727, to his friend Samuel Gale he recounts more fully the improvements he was making to his property. The proportions of the garden he gives as 130 feet wide and 230 feet long. 'Last summer I spent fitting up part of my house, & levelling my ground for gardening, in which I am at this time very intent. I am planting green, flowers, alcoves, herbs, fruit trees, & what not. I am laying out the stations of dyals, urns, & statues, inoculating mistletoe, & trying vegetable experiments (Fig. 1). Within doors I am fitting up my study, which has a most charming prospect over my garden and adjacent valley . . . In my hall I am fixing 4 bustos, after the antique, on termine between doric pillasters.'<sup>8</sup>

No illustration of either the study or hall exists but the profile heads in medallions over the doors in

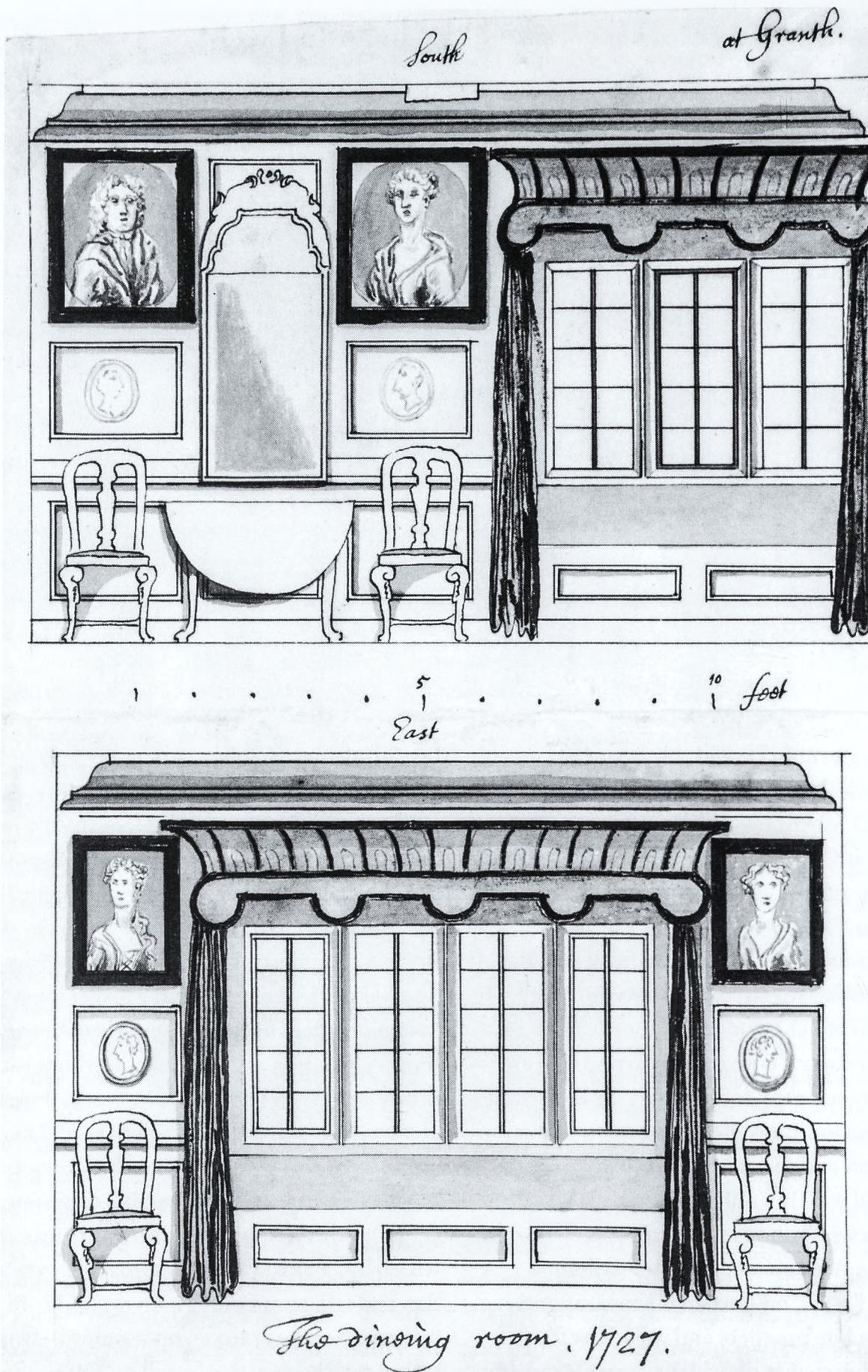


Figure 2. William Stukeley, South and East sides of the Dining room at Grantham, 1727.

*Bodleian Library, ms Gough Maps, 16 p.37B*

*The west side of the parlor. Grantham. 1728. august.*

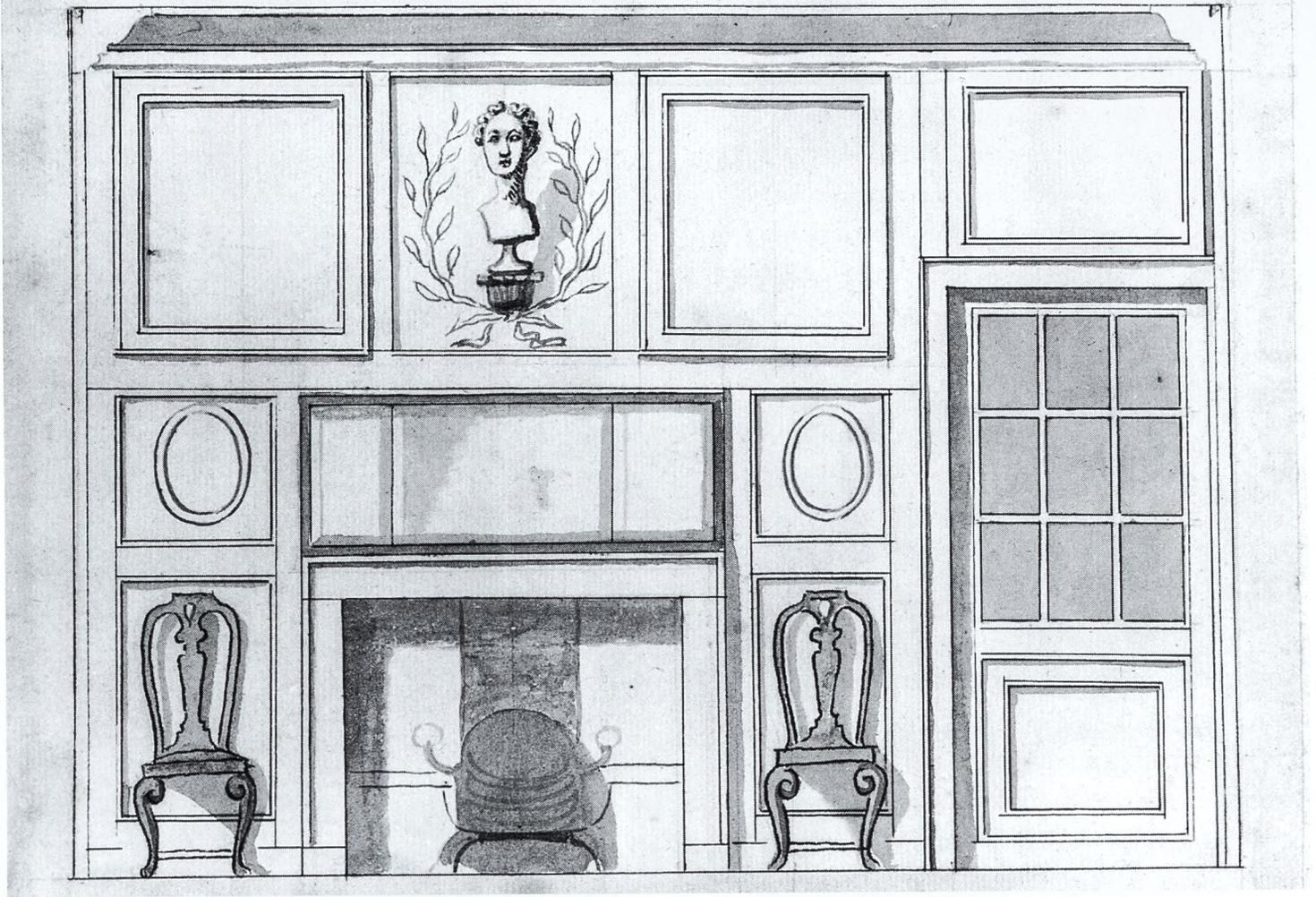


Figure 3. William Stukeley, 'The west side of the parlor. Grantham 1728. august.'

*Bodleian Library, ms Gough Maps, 16 p.38*

the best chamber (Fig. 6) and the bust on the bracket with plasterwork laurel wreath over the chimney piece in the parlour (Fig. 3) give an idea of Stukeley's style of interior decoration. A yellow colour wash indicates giltwood frames to the portraits in the dining room and gold fringe and braid to the curtains. The mahogany dining table and chairs are shown ranged against the walls (Fig. 2).

This most clubbable man could not long be content without like minded friends about him. On the 3 April he wrote again to Samuel Gale '... If you have a mind to purchase, here's a pretty house & garden next to mine to be sold for £200 ... stone mullioned windows, as is the method here, not very

irregular, but may be corrected, as I have done mine by stopping up dexterously some of the lower lights [Fig. 7]. This morning I set with my own hand two or three yards of ocymum, ajorana, meissa & some more herbs of that sort, sweeter than the names themselves, under the windows of my dining parlour, over which is my bedchamber study ... My whole garden near the house is planted with all the sweet things of nature [Fig. 4]. At this time my circus or amphitheatre of 100 feet diameter, full of fruit trees, is as white as a sheet with flowers & that colour lying as it were upon the deep green of the opposite declivity beyond the river makes an appearance to me in my hall, surprizingly

beautiful<sup>9</sup>. No wonder then that Sir John Clerk wrote, after his visit to Stukeley, 'He seems to be ravisht with the prospect he has of rural life.'<sup>10</sup>

On the 7 February 1727 Stukeley wrote again to John Murray 'I for my part look upon myself as throly fixt and become a mere country doctor, and find I begin to rowl in pretty business. I can be content to get less than 30 guineas a day.'<sup>11</sup> His estimation of his earning power was perhaps more accurately described in his letter to Samuel Gale of 25 October 1727, 'I am in a manner now got into full business, & can get 2 or £300 per annum, which in quantum sufficit.'<sup>12</sup>

In the same letter Stukeley lists more of his improvements 'I have now fitted up my libray (& 'tis just full), so that I may properly say I begin to live. There are two windows in it, one to the east, the other to the south . . . I have adorned my study with heads bas reliefs, bustos, urns, & drawings of Roman antiquitys, as my bedchamber adjoining with Aegyptian.'

When listing amongst the attractions of Grantham the ingenious knot of gentlemen, Stukeley had also noted a monthly assembly for dancing among the fair sex. Quite suddenly at the end of the 1727 we find Stukeley married to Frances Williamson of Allington, the daughter of a local gentlemen. Early in 1728 Roger Gale writes to congratulate his old friend on his marriage and comments particularly on his wife's intellectual attainments.<sup>13</sup> She had been a pupil of Michael Maittaire, the classical scholar, but her dowry amounted to no more than £300.

The drawings of the Parlour and the Best Bedchamber post-date his marriage. The latter (Fig.6) is the most elegant room with a pair of girandoles flanking the window, and an elaborate tester bed, the pine frame to which the fabric is glued is in the latest taste. The pelmet boards are carved and upholstered ensuite, though they did not get the new festoon curtains which were just coming into fashion. The elegant tea service prominently displayed on the side table in the parlour must have

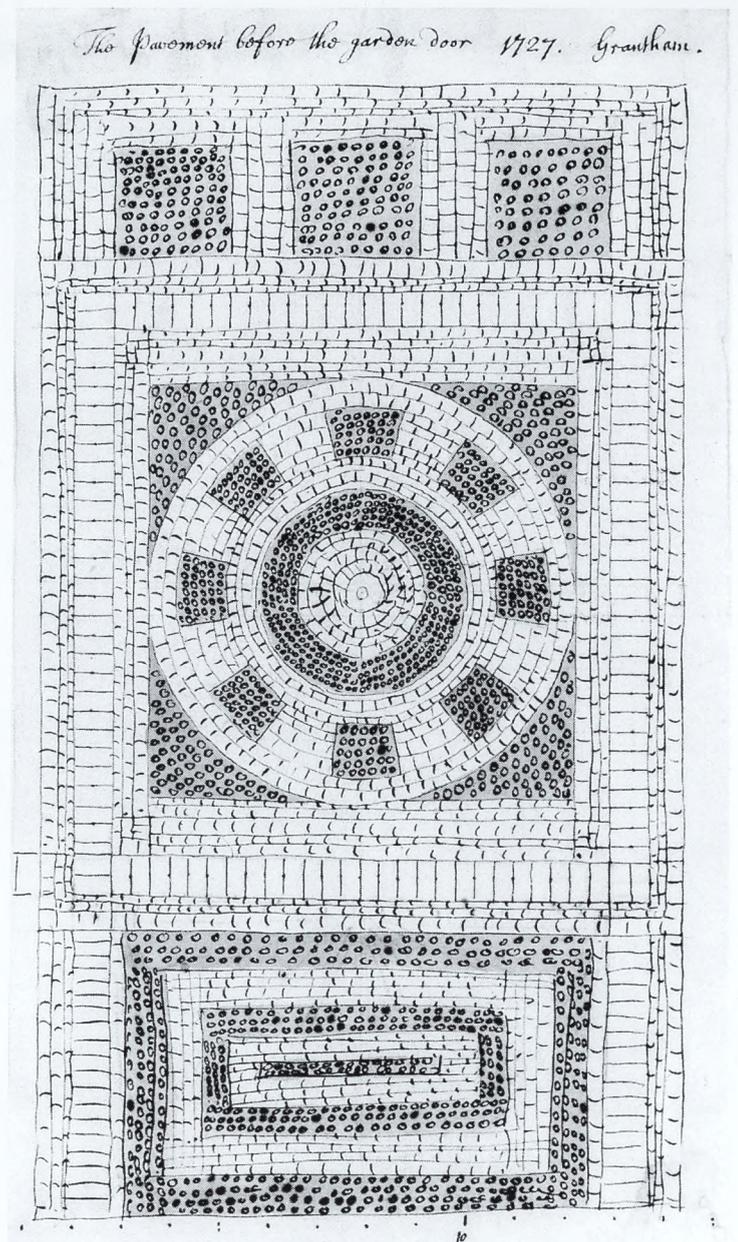


Figure 4. William Stukeley,  
'The Pavement before the garden door 1727. Grantham.'  
*Bodlain Library, MS Gough Maps, 16 p.38*

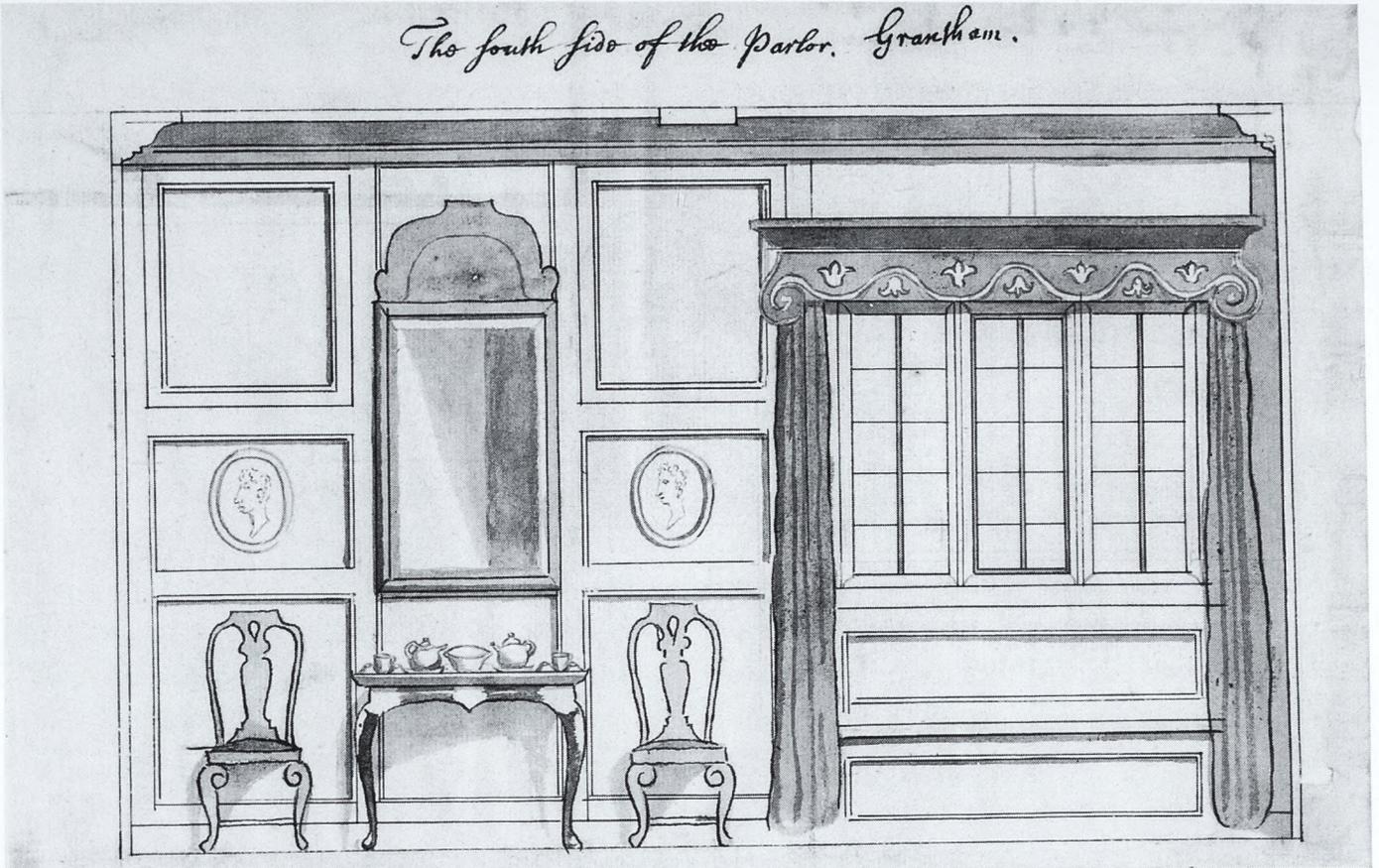


Figure 5. William Stukeley, 'The south side of the Parlor. Grantham.' *Bodleian Library*, MS *Gough Maps*, 16 p.38

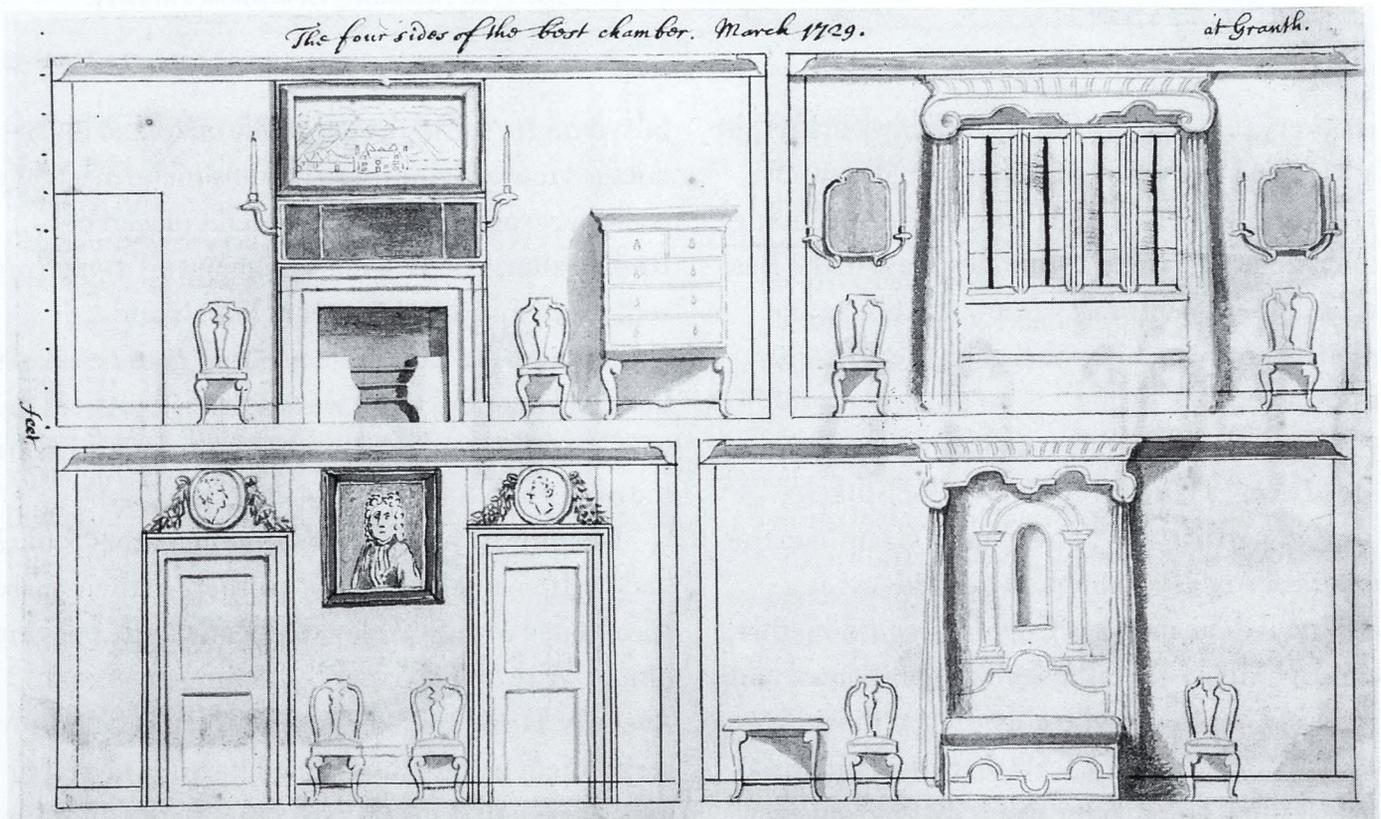


Figure 6. William Stukeley, 'The four sides of the best chamber. March 1729 Grantham.'

*Bodleian Library*, MS *Gough Maps*, 16 p.38



Figure 7. William Stukeley, 'The front of my house at Grantham 1726'. *Spalding Gentlemen's Society*.

been a very recent acquisition, possibly a bridal gift (Fig 5). The large walnut-framed pier glass above has single plate of bevelled glass, still a great luxury in the 1720's.<sup>14</sup> Above the chimney glass in the Best Bed Chamber is a bird's eye view of a house and garden, the only picture other than the portraits in the house.

The garden of the house in Grantham was the scene of many a fanciful ceremony, for Stukeley records in his diary, 'When I lived at Grantham the Duchess of Ancaster sent me a horned owl as a curiosity; it died and I buried it in my garden: this gave great offence to its kindred the gentlemen and Squires of Grantham, who encouraged the mob to abuse me upon it.'<sup>15</sup> One feels that a second burial also described by Stukeley would have given even greater offence. In the summer of 1728 Frances miscarried: 'The embryo, being as big as a filberd, I

buryd under the high altar in the chapel of my hermitage vineyard; for there I built a niche in a ragged wall overgrown with ivy, in which I placed my Roman altar, a brick from Verulam, and a waterpipe sent me by Lord Colrain from Marshland. Underneath is a camomile bed for greater ease of the bended knee, and there we entered it, present my wife's mother, and aunt, with ceremonys proper to the occasion'

Despite Sir John Clerk's statement that Stukeley had written much, the Gale brothers in their correspondence with Stukeley were constantly begging him to write up his papers on Stonehenge and Avebury. He defended himself to an unnamed correspondent in 1728 'but when I have set myself to look over such things, a rap comes to the door for me to go perhaps a mile off, and my fortune will not support me handsomely without some little busi-

ness, and that makes me at present very remiss in these affairs.<sup>16</sup> It was not until 1740 that Stonehenge was finally published,<sup>17</sup> followed three years later by Avebury<sup>18</sup>. His business was always somewhat irksome to him and his high hopes of a large and flourishing medical practice bringing him an income of £250–£300 per year were wildly optimistic. In September 1729 he hinted in a letter to Sir Hans Sloane that his profession brought him but £50 per year. Elsewhere he states 'I am scarce wanted once in a month.' But by that time he had decided on a change of career that astounded his friends. In June 1729 he was ordained a priest by his old friend and fellow antiquarian Archbishop William Wake. Maurice Johnson, a fellow antiquarian with whom Stukeley had founded the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding in 1710, described the event in a letter to Roger Gale dated September 1729, '... A letter from our friend Brown Willis, giving as punctuall

an account of the day when, the place where, and the person by who he was ordained, as if he had been a mitred prelate, and had received some sacred investiture... I suppose, at least hope, some desirable sinecure, if not the call, may prove the reward.'<sup>19</sup>

These pious hopes were not unfounded. On the 16 October 1729 Stukeley wrote to his wife 'I think now, my dearest love, I can wish you joy of being rectress of All Hallows, Stamford.' They left for Stamford early in 1730, thus ending Dr William Stukeley's happy sojourn at Grantham.

The house stood on the corner of Castlegate and Avenue Road. Later known as Cheney House, it was the home of the Haggerstone family and was demolished in 1867 to make way for the Congregational Church, now the United Reform Church.<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Oxford, Bodleian Library (hereafter Bodleian), Gough Maps, 16.
- 2 London, British Museum, Add. MS 15,537.
- 3 [William Stukeley], *The Commentaries, Diary & Commonplace Book*, London, 1980, 5.
- 4 Bodleian, Gough Maps, 229 & 231; Avebury, Alexander Keiler Library, Avebury drawings.
- 5 [Stukeley], *op. cit.*, 68–9.
- 6 Stuart Piggott, *William Stukeley An eighteenth century Antiquary*, Oxford, 1950, 82.
- 7 Bodleian, MS. Rawlinson, W.S to John Murray, fol. 343.
- 8 [Stukeley], *op. cit.*, 136, W.S. to Samuel Gale.
- 9 'The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley MD.' Vol 1, *Surtees Society*, LXXIII, 1880, 194.
- 10 Piggott, *op. cit.*, 83.
- 11 Bodleian, MS Rawlinson, *cit.*, fol. 344.
- 12 [Stukeley], *op. cit.*, 138–40.
- 13 'Family Memoirs... ', *cit.*, 202.
- 14 John Gumley's bill for supplying a similar pier glass and table to Erddig, June 6th., 1726, 'To a fine walnut tree glass table cove frame 4.10.0.' [M. Jourdain, 'Furniture at Erthig, Denbighshire,' *Country Life*, LXVII, March 22nd., 1930, 441].
- 15 [Stukeley], *op. cit.*, 107.
- 16 Piggott, *op. cit.*, 84.
- 17 William Stukeley, *Stonehenge, a Temple restored to the British Druids*, London, 1740.
- 18 William Stukeley, *Abury, a Temple of the British Druids*, London, 1743.
- 19 'Family Memoirs... ', *cit.*, 265.
- 20 Malcolm Knapp, *In Bygone Grantham*, Grantham, 1987, VI, 14, 15.