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KINGSGATE HOUSE, KENT: A CASE OF AMATEUR INTERVENTION IN ARCHITECTURE

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Kingsgate is little known except to local golfers and holidaymakers; yet in the mid eighteenth century it became the sea-air retreat of Henry Fox (later Lord Holland). Fox, often – unfairly – lauded as ‘the public defaulter of unaccounted millions’, determined on this spot to help recover from ill-health. Here he created a ‘Village’: an eclectic assortment of follies centred about a dwelling which would evolve into his ‘Formian Villa’ (Fig. 1). In 1953, Hugh Honour wrote ‘An Epic of Ruin-Building’,¹ which has remained the main source on Kingsgate until recently. New research has shed considerable light on the creation of Fox’s buildings and has revealed the roles played by both professional architects (John Vardy and Robert Adam) and amateurs including the second Duke of Richmond, Thomas Wynn (Lord Newborough),² John

Luke Nicoll, Charles Hamilton, and Robert Digby. Those follies that remain still appeal and amuse. Their history has been fully charted;³ this article considers the development of Kingsgate House itself.

In 1761 Henry Fox, Paymaster General and former Secretary at War, visited Sir George Oxenden’s house at Deane (or Dene), just to the south of Wingham (Kent), with a view to improving his health by finding a suitable house near the sea. Sea-bathing, and the taking of sea water, became popular activities in the eighteenth century, especially for the treatment of various medical conditions, and were regularly promoted in medical treatises and swiftly exploited by coastal towns. Margate, for example, is recorded as having a private bathing facility in 1736, and the

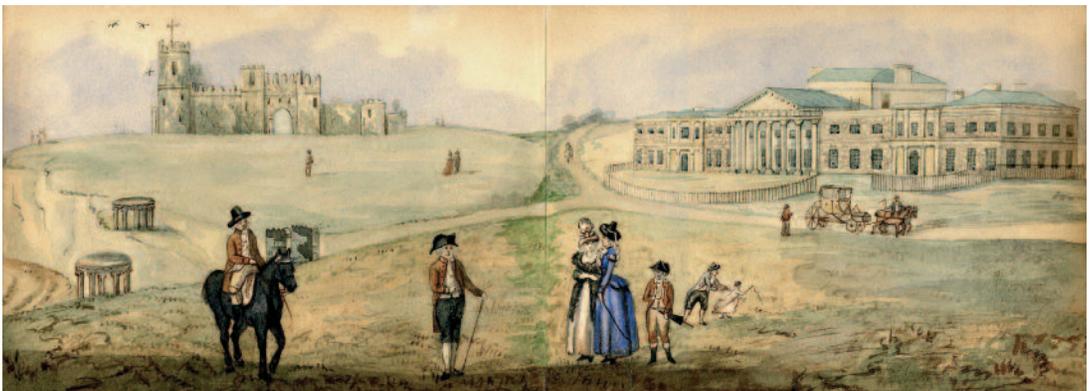


Fig. 1. King's Gate House, watercolour by the Rev. John Pridden FSA, 1784.
(Private Collection)

famous bathing machines soon followed. However Fox ‘found no Place to my liking ... But I think I can borrow of M^r Whitfield (a Windsor Apothecary) a very little place that will do’,⁴ and on 16 April he leased it for the months of May and June,⁵ though in the event he spent only a couple of weeks there. This marks the genesis of what became Kingsgate House.

Fox’s first intentions for his new house are not easy to determine. John Luke Nicoll, an official in the Pay Office, prepared a plan in September 1761 which was ‘much admir’d by the D. of Richmond & M^r Charles Hamilton, both Architects’, though they considered ‘the Wings too high’. Fox explained to Nicoll that ‘my present Design is to have but one Story no Stair case. I’ll scratch out my Intentions, & send the scratch to You next Week’,⁶ and on 26 September he sent him his ‘scratch’ [sketch] of a single-storeyed house, stipulating that it was to be built ‘with flint & Stone, or Stone only, or Stucco, The Roof not to be at all high. The chief rooms 12 feet high perhaps the Offices may be by way of shed from the Inner^{Wall} of the court to the outside.’ Nicoll was asked for an elevation, but was not promised the commission: ‘If You are sure You shall not take it ill, if after all I don’t execute Your design, pray amuse Yourself with making one. You’ll alter doors for Windows & *vice versâ* as You please.’⁷

Fox’s father-in-law the third Duke of Richmond now became involved, and provided Fox with another ‘Scratch’, which he forwarded to Nicoll.⁸ Possibly affronted by this ‘design for your Sea House’,⁹ Nicoll retorted that the Duke of Richmond ‘has used liberties which little Geniuses like myself must not presume to take – The great difficulty to make any thing pretty proceeds from the limitation of the Height to 12 feet – This His Grace has elegantly Surmounted [sic] by two Turrets. – I have also thought of Something for this purpose – but shall never think of putting it in competition with His Grace.’¹⁰

Early in 1762, Fox investigated the possibility of buying an estate near Beachy Head for his seaside

retreat,¹¹ but Kingsgate prevailed, and that spring his wife made her first visit to the Isle of Thanet,¹² staying in a property belonging to a Mr Ketcherell close to Whitfield’s house. This was leased by Fox for two years on 14 April, presumably with the intention of building a larger house on the site.¹³ Whitfield now started to act as Lord Holland’s agent or broker in making purchases of lands ‘In trust for said Lord Holland his Heirs’.¹⁴ It is in this capacity that later references to the house and estate as being ‘Whitfield’s’ have to be considered. In fact both Whitfield’s and Ketcherell’s houses were absorbed into the site occupied by the new mansion. Ketcherell’s house was a simple two-storey affair; Mrs Fox (later Lady Holland) described it as ‘this little habitation – a neat little parlour to dine in, a little comfortable drawing-room, paper’d all over, and four bedchambers with linen, furniture, a little stable, and beds for two or three livery men. We are so quiet and pleasant here it’s quite delightful. I really look on it as a lucky incident our meeting with this place just now; the expense is a trifle’.¹⁵ The trifle mentioned was £16, as it remained when Lord Holland took out a long-term lease on the property in 1764.¹⁶

In 1763 Fox was raised to the peerage as Lord Holland, and began acquiring lands at Kingsgate.¹⁷ This may explain references by the amateur architect Thomas John Wynn, to ‘the Foundation Stone for the Village’ and sending Holland his ‘Design for the Village’ in July 1764.¹⁸ It would be fair to say that these schemes included more of the outlying follies, adding to the just-finished Kingsgate Castle designed by Charles Hamilton, more famous as the creator of Painshill in Surrey.

Meanwhile William Kent’s pupil John Vardy was brought in to carry out improvements to the rear of the house. These involved altering the Drawing Room, with its ‘Window to the Garden’, a feature that Lady Holland wished to retain;¹⁹ which resulted in a ‘scheme for making y.^e back of y:^r house more irregular & odd’.²⁰ In a letter to Nicoll, the go-

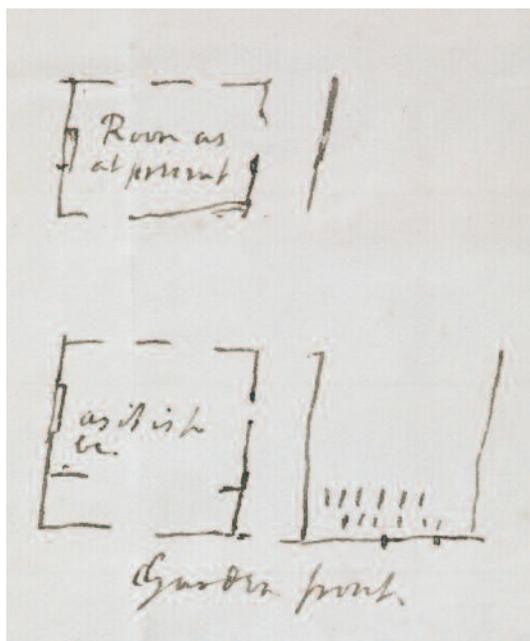


Fig. 2. Sketch of the original house layout at Kingsgate, c. July 1764.
(© The British Library Board, Add MS 51401, f. 83)

between in effecting the ‘propos’d Alteration’, Holland wrote: ‘We must support the Wall above, & make a Recess, to the outward Wall that is now to be built. M^r Vardy talk’d of pillars, I don’t like that, an Alcove with trusses, something clever like that you may design will please me best.’²¹ A small sketch (Fig. 2) in one of Lord Holland’s letters illustrates the project, and on 18 July Holland wrote: ‘The prettyest thing of the sort I know, is what M^r Kent made in the Bedchamber in the House in Albermale Street Lord Powis lives in, with an Ellyptick Arch; and in the Room under it there is an Alcove with trusses.’²²

The sketch is useful as it shows how small the original house was. A letter from Lady Holland to her sister confirmed that it ‘has two windows looking to the sea [and] This alcove will have a window down to the ground, to go immediately into the

garden.’²³ She proposed ‘to furnish it with green and white strip’d paper, which is the prettiest paper to my taste I have yet seen, at least ’tis my passion at present,’²⁴ though she confessed that ‘Lord Holland’s [other] works don’t amuse me; building old ruins and gateways I can’t care about; they amuse him tho’, which gives me great satisfaction—’tis not fancy in him’.²⁵ Other alterations included the lowering of doorways,²⁶ and the addition of a second building to face Whitfield’s ‘new house’, referred to in a letter from him of January 1765.²⁷ By May 1766 he could write:

‘Neptune hall is no more.
The Chalk Pit is fill’d up.
My New House is all stuccod, and finished.
The Cornish of the Library is up and stucco’d.
The Roof of the Library and servants hall is Paperd and Pitched and Tar’d.
The Circular Wall next your Lordships Offices is up.’²⁸

Whitfield may have confused the location of the aforementioned cornice, as shortly after he wrote ‘I have done but little to the inside of the Library’ and proposed ‘runing a Cornish, the same as in Lady Hollands Favorate. which was M^r Wynns design’;²⁹ this work was duly carried out. The Favourite was the easterly one of two blocks added to the rear of the house (Fig. 3) and would seem to equate with Whitfield’s ‘new house’, as he had apartments allotted to him in Kingsgate house during his life.³⁰ The other block was the library, being bigger because it had the servants’ hall appended to it, as depicted on Hodskinson’s survey map (Fig. 4).³¹ What ‘Neptune’s hall’ was we do not know, but the Roman god was not forgotten and his name was to resurface after a couple of years. As to the other activities:

‘We are hard at work leveling Ground, removing Rubbish. Building Cole House, Wood house. Necessary, House &c &c ___ behind your Lordships new Building. All my Garden walls are up. – The Dado of the Favorate is once colourd. And all the Stucco of the front, and back front of your Lordships House has been Painted twice.’³²

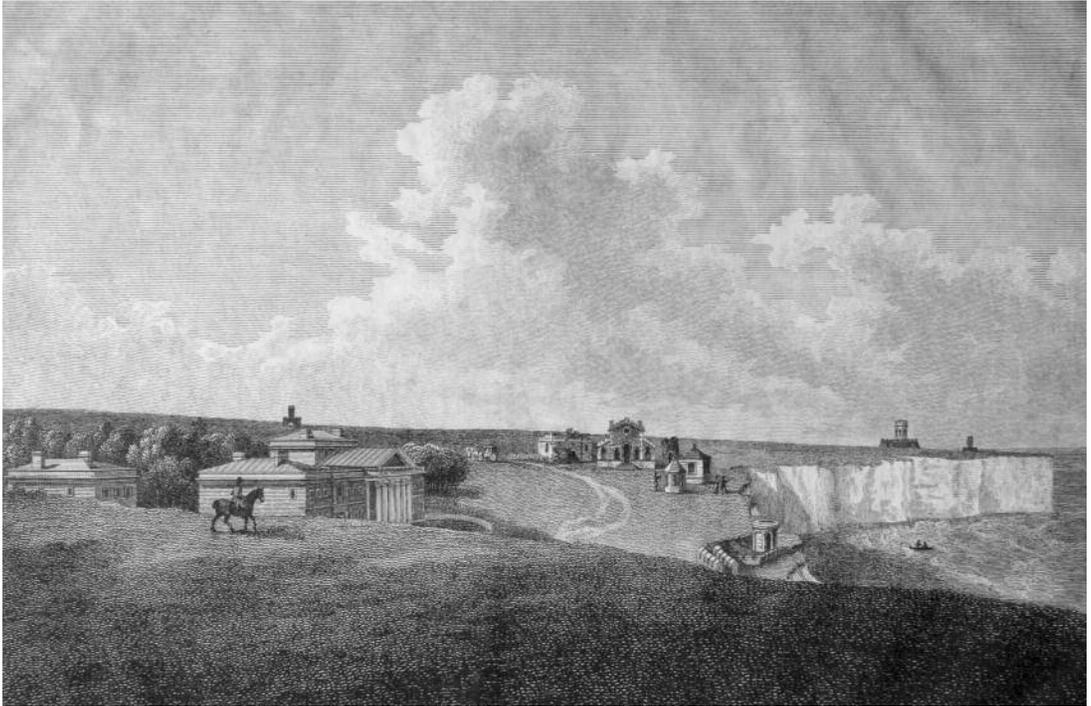


Fig. 3. 'S:E: View of Kingsgate', showing the Favourite, published by B.T. Pouncy 1 July 1793, London, and by W. Garner, Margate. (By permission of Kent County Council – Libraries, Registration & Archives. Broadstairs Library, The Parker Collection No 2055 YO62 BRO 144)

There is further mention of the 'little pretty garden room called the favourite by a Mr Winne' from Lady Holland, who adds that Wynn is 'an ingenuous young man who has given divers drawings and designs for this pretty place'.³³ From her description it is possible to start building up a picture of the house, and its symmetrical southerly elevation:

'This is a closet in the garden, which is fitted up, or rather to be, for it is not yet finished, very prettily à l'italienne, or rather I think à la française. It has a delightful sofa in it, and a large glass door which opens upon the grass looking into the flower garden; no view of the sea, which for variety here and the sake of my eyes, I like; on the other side of the garden is a room somewhat bigger, which is fitting up as a book room [library], and you can't imagine in a small place as this is the convenience we find in these two little rooms.'³⁴

THE ITALIAN VILLA

On 23 September 1766, Lord and Lady Holland embarked for the continent.³⁵ This visit, Holland's third to Italy, but this time made for the sake of his health, was to have a profound effect on the final shaping of Kingsgate House. It was on the various excursions – particularly to Baia – that the family were to become inspired by the ancient Roman villas and temples. Lady Holland wrote to her sister that:

'The ruins and remains of the Roman Empire really amaze me. Only think, tho', of there being now a marshy desert place between this and Rome, where once stood twenty-four great cities, now only some ruins here and there. Baia, a famous place where the Romans had villas, is near here; Formian about half way between this and Naples...'³⁶

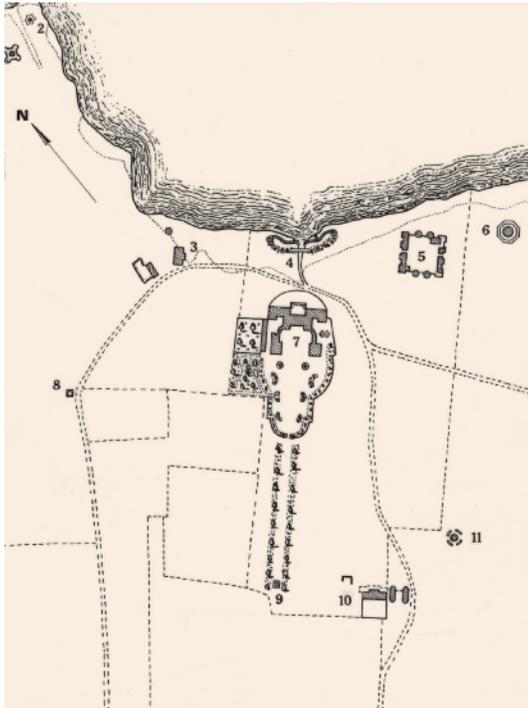


Fig. 4. Map of Kingsgate (after J. Hodkinson, 1774)
at Quex House, Birchington.
(Author)

Nicoll remained in England to supervise work, which included a ‘new apartment’ for her Ladyship and other ‘intended Architecture at Kingsgate’.³⁷ Subsequent correspondence shows that the plan had been ‘made under Lady Holland’s own direction at Kingsgate’,³⁸ before they departed that October. January 1767 saw the Hollands at Herculaneum, and the month after at Pompeii, noting that ‘some of the environs of Naples were famous places, where the Romans had villas formerly.’³⁹ In a letter to Nicoll from Lord Holland in Rome Robert Adam’s involvement at Kingsgate is first mentioned:

‘Upon considering it We find, that M.^r Adams and you are about Building Twice as much as was design’d at Kingsgate, a fine Dressing Room for my Lady Caroline, (who wants none), an Alcove, (which she for

the World would not live in) and some other alterations. So cut all short, I herewith send you a plan, which Lady Caroline begs may be exactly followed; The Door must be of glass, and if there is not room for the stair case, as that is Built in the Court, you may, I suppose, take more room. I send you likewise an upright of the Building to the Garden which is M.^r Wynn’s, and which We like mightily; and now surely, there can be no mistake; Least there should I send Duplicates to M.^r Wynn. Pray Dear Nicholl communicate with Him and with M.^r Whitfield, and set the latter about His work immediately [...] I send you M.^r Wynne’s, (the Ground Plan alter’d so what Ly Holland likes) you’ll find the Dimensions what We lik’d at Kingsgate, & like now. I’ll send him Duplicates. You’ll observe there are 3 Windows at the End. The Balistrade is call’d finistrait I suppose. you say the walls won’t be dry. The Walls were built before I came away.’⁴⁰

And then from Florence:

‘I hope my Letter from Rome, came time enough to put an end to M.^r Adam’s scheme, and so set M.^r Whitfield to work at Kingsgate Upon what was settl’d when you was there. I shall bring new Views for Kingsgate from the sight of Italy, and from the Climate health, I hope, to Live and finish them; But I won’t make that hope too absurd, By haveing any designs that will take up long time.’⁴¹

A follow-up letter a few days later drove home the point yet again: ‘...How could you be so simply complaisant as to let M.^r Adams alter your pretty Plan [...] I hope there can be no mistake now’.⁴² A drawing of a ‘Cieling for Lady Hollands Bed Chamber at Kingsgate. 1767’ by Adam in the Soane Museum must relate to his schemes (Fig. 5).⁴³ Though it is clear that he was ‘involved’ in the rebuilding of the house, Adam never gained favour with Lord Holland.

By this time Whitfield was also spending less time on site; he was seriously ill and died before the year was out.⁴⁴ Still there were building difficulties: just returned from Italy, Lord Holland informed Lady Holland: ‘I think the ceiling of the Kitchen can’t be lower’d. There’s Room I beleave in y^e thickness of the Wall for very gentle Steps, & I find

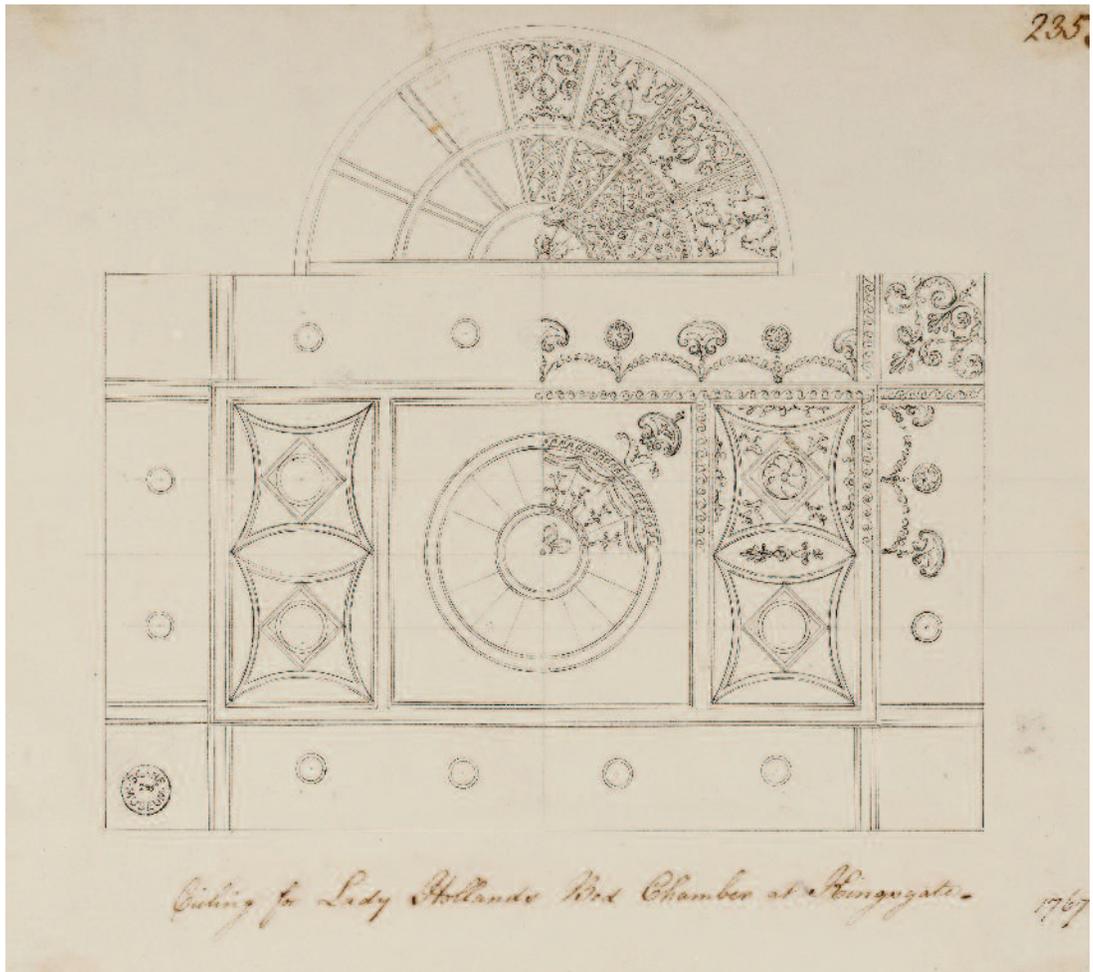


Fig. 5. 'Ceiling for Lady Hollands Bed Chamber at Kingsgate, 1767'.
 (By Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, *Adam Drawings*, vol.11/235)

that will do as well.⁴⁵ The house was severely compromised through being designed piecemeal, around the original building leased in 1762. In another letter to his wife, Holland wrote that he would 'not give up the Library & Favorite till Mr Adams has seen the place at least', but agreed that 'The Back part of the House looks now just like such a Villa as I meant.'⁴⁶ Holland was in a dilemma as to what to do: from later correspondence it is clear that

the 'Favorite' survived,⁴⁷ and before they left Kingsgate that year (1767) Lady Holland recorded that 'We are going to enlarge our house a little, not to build a new one as we once intended.'⁴⁸ The decision may have been caused by the arrival of the numerous antiquities that they purchased 'at considerable expense' in Italy.⁴⁹ A year later Emily was hearing of how 'Lord Holland, besides his other buildings at Kingsgate, is going to make a portico,

and improve the house there. It is to be an Italian villa, cela amuse, does good to the poor people by employing them, which consequently when one can afford it is a rational amusement.⁵⁰

By now Vardy was dead and Nicoll had died the previous summer,⁵¹ so Wynn (created Lord Newborough in the Irish peerage in 1766), a clear favourite of the Hollands, assumed the mantle. The work included having the 'Dining Room enlarged' and building 'a very large Room for the Curiosities [Lord Holland] has purchased abroad, such as his marble Columns, Urns, Statues, and other Remains of Antiquity which y^e corroding hand of time has not been able to destroy.'⁵² This was to be the 'Repository'. The works for that year (1768), included the employment of '2 Chalk-cutters from Bath',⁵³ possibly for the facing of the walls, and the move of the library (declared 'one of the finest libraries in England') to inside the main house. The former library was needed for the Saloon of Neptune.⁵⁴ A letter from Wynn to Holland outlines this work in some detail. It states that the sculptor Domenico Bartoli was approached to make the columns for the portico:

'I trouble M.^r Charles Fox [Holland's eldest son] to carry the Ground plan & Elevation of Kingsgate to your Lordship, and the plan of the Offices in the Basement Story shall be sent by the next post. M.^r C. Fox will acquaint your Lordship of our Conversation yesterday with M.^r Bartoli, whom I likewise saw this morning; He does not seem desirous of undertaking the Columns for the Portico; He says His Composition in that Work, of which large Dimensions will not do him Credit, and estimates Each Column in the Portico at Forty Five pounds: Yesterday He was very willing to undertake the Portico.— and is very anxious to finish the Columns in the Saloon: for which he is ready to contract, according to the Inclos'd Agreement... With the plans of Kingsgate there is a sketch for the Floor of the Saloon by M.^r Bartoli, the Ornaments are antique, would correspond well with porphery Columns, and it is estimated I think, at five Shillings the Square ~~Yard~~ Feet ... M.^r C. Fox, if I remember well, recommended the Corinthian: the Doric & Ionic Orders being introduc'd in the House.'⁵⁵

Wynn's aim was 'to give the place a resemblance of Cicero's Formian Villa',⁵⁶ which stood on the Bay of Baiæ near the city of Pozzuoli. How Holland visualised this villa from the scanty remains is impossible to fathom. Sarnelli's 'handbook' for visitors to Pozzuolo of 1675, informs us that only a small portion of the villa remained.⁵⁷ It lay about a mile from the shore, and John Eustace, writing in 1802, noted 'the remains of ancient walls scattered over the fields, and half covered with vines, olives and hedges [...] These shapeless heaps tradition points to as the ruins of Cicero's *Formian* villa'.⁵⁸ This was called the Villa Superior for lower down, near the sea, was the Villa Inferior. He continued: 'On the opposite of the road rises, stripped of its decorations and indeed of its very shape, a sort of obelisk in two stories, and this disfigured pile the same tradition reveres as his mausoleum, raised on the very spot where he was butchered and where his faithful attendants immediately interred his headless trunk'.⁵⁹ Sarnelli's handbook also mentions a 'Tempio di Nettuno'⁶⁰ which may have been the inspiration for that building at Kingsgate.

Hugh Honour suggested that the house at Kingsgate may have been based on Cicero's other villa at Tusculum (near Alban Mount),⁶¹ but this does not correspond with the Hollands' itinerary. Of Tusculum, Eustace wrote that it 'was extensive, highly finished, and richly adorned with columns, marbles, and statues' and 'that all of his villas [...] it is highly probable that Tusculum surpassed them all in magnificence, as it was his favorite retreat, owing to its proximity to Rome...'⁶² Annexed to it were a lyceum, a portico, a gymnasium, a palaestra, a library, and 'an academy for literary discourses and philosophical declamations during the winter...'⁶³

Of the 'great alterations'⁶⁴ that were being made at Kingsgate, Lady Holland's new bedchamber – hung with 'Indian paper' – was useable for the first time in the summer of 1768.⁶⁵ Whether it ever included Adam's design for the ceiling is uncertain, as in the following year not only was a 'new drawing

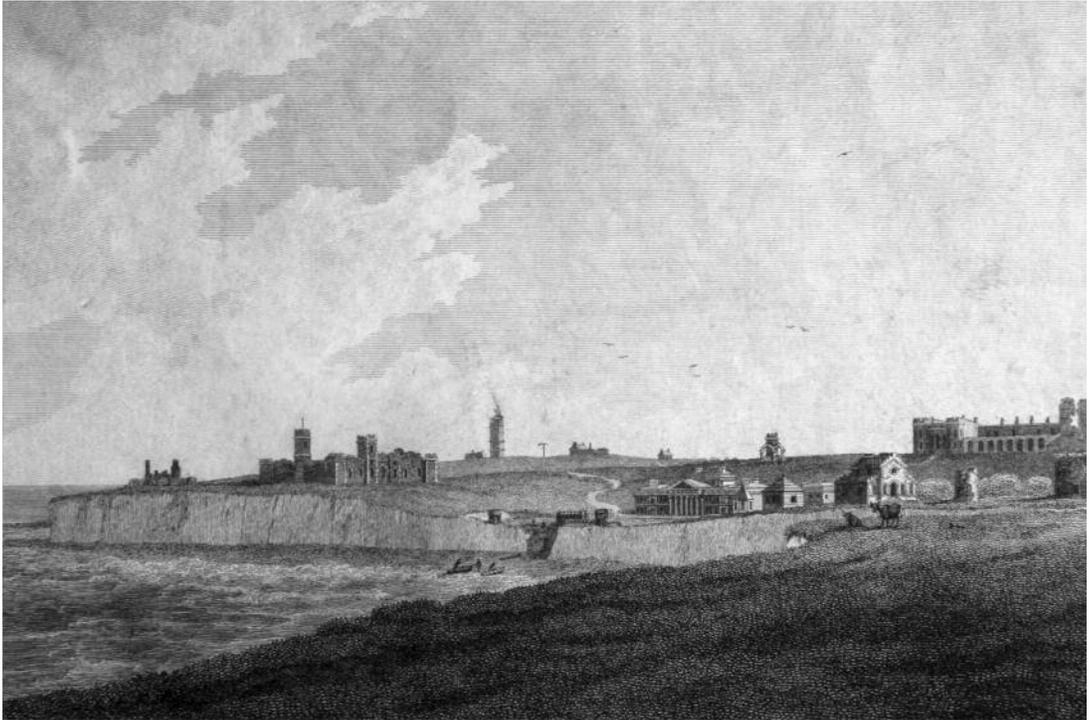


Fig. 6. 'N: View of Kingsgate', published by B.T. Pouncy 1 July 1793, London, and by W. Garner, Margate.
 (By permission of Kent County Council – Libraries, Registration & Archives. Broadstairs Library,
 The Parker Collection No 2050 YO62 BRO 161)

Room built', but 'Ld H^d intended [a] Bed Chamber made a dining room'.⁶⁶

By 1769 accusations of political fraud and swindling against Holland had appeared in the press,⁶⁷ but the following year proved a relatively quiet one, and Holland seemed to tire of life, and, to a degree, Kingsgate.⁶⁸ The most significant event was the conveyance of his estates in Kent to his profligate son, Charles James Fox, for five shillings, and Charles's almost immediate mortgage of it for £20,000.⁶⁹ Lord and Lady Holland, however, continued to live at Kingsgate in the summer and autumn months, and her Ladyship's journal entry for 3 October 1771 records: 'we fixed up the New french Drawing [Room] for the first time this Summer the

flower Garden behind Ly Marys [Fitzpatrick] house made and put in order the favorite newly painted, the Sallon quite finished with all the Virtue put in it'.⁷⁰ The decoration of the Saloon was praised in a contemporary guidebook: 'The Ornaments of the Ceiling in the great Saloon deserve Notice: they were painted by Mr. Hakewill, junior. The beautiful Columns of Scagliola, in Imitation of Porphry, were executed by Bartoli and Richter.'⁷¹ However, as noted earlier (note 55), the agreement for the columns in the saloon appears to have been with Bartoli alone. The Saloon was filled with antique marble busts, vases and 'beautiful fine paintings, the *chef d'œuvres* of the Flemish and Italian schools'.⁷² One of the busts, in white marble, was of Lord Newborough, and

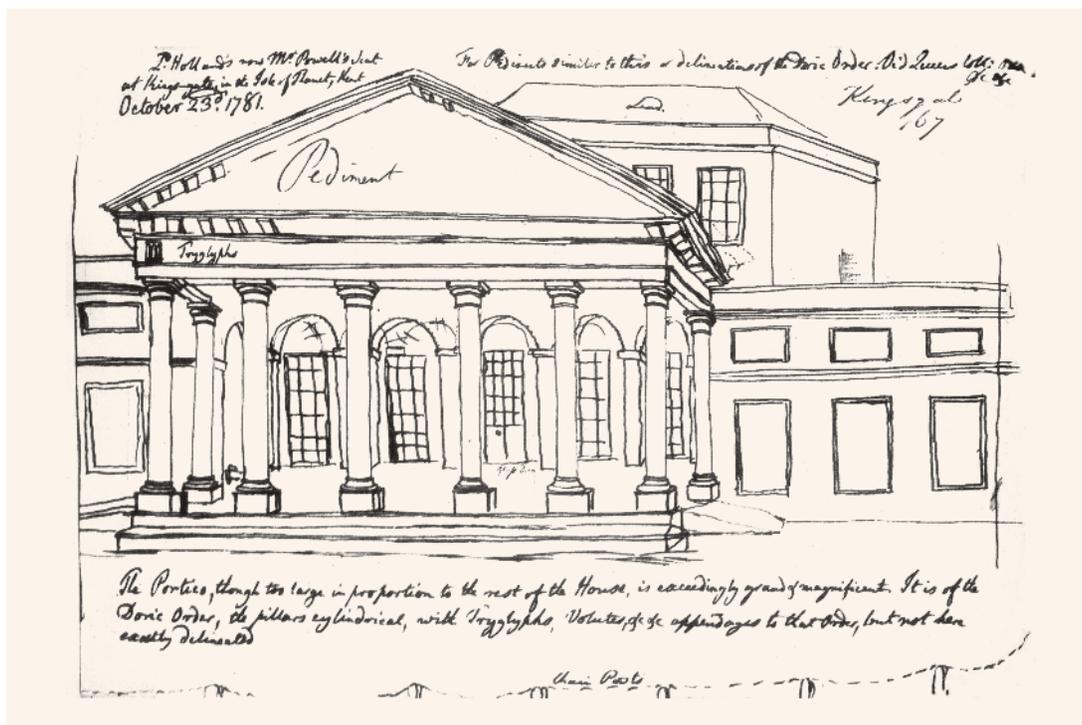


Fig. 7. 'N.º 2. N.W. of the Great House at Kings-gate', drawn 23 October 1781, from John Pridden's MS for his intended *Topographical Collections for History of the Isle of Thanet*. (By permission of Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone, EK/U203).

opposite, on a table was 'a most beautiful *Democritus*', presented by Sir Charles Bunbury, who had recently married Lady Holland's sister.⁷³

Work continued at Kingsgate till the very end of Holland's life. Although his health had declined, he hired a Bathing machine from Margate, now a fashionable watering place, in 1772 to continue his dips in the sea.⁷⁴ In September of that year 'Lord Holland's New-Bed-Room' was finished, for which there is an account entry of £70.⁷⁵ In the following year there was a payment in June for £13 2s 3d for 'New Tying part of the House over Ldy H's Bed-Chamber'; that September a final entry records 'New Kitchen & all other Alterations in the House [for which] The New-Kitchen comes to 216^s : 8^s : 7^d'

The house was now complete, but Holland only lived one more year to enjoy it: he died on 1 July 1774, and his wife followed him to the grave less than a month later. He had spent well over £10,000 in creating and furnishing his 'Paradise' (Fig. 6).⁷⁷

THE HOUSE DESCRIBED

Kingsgate House was faced in flint and Portland stone, so that 'the Flint-Work, being well polish'd & nicely join'd, has the Effect of Black Marble'; this may explain why the facing was often described as being of 'curious workmanship'.⁷⁸ The best description, however, can be built up from John

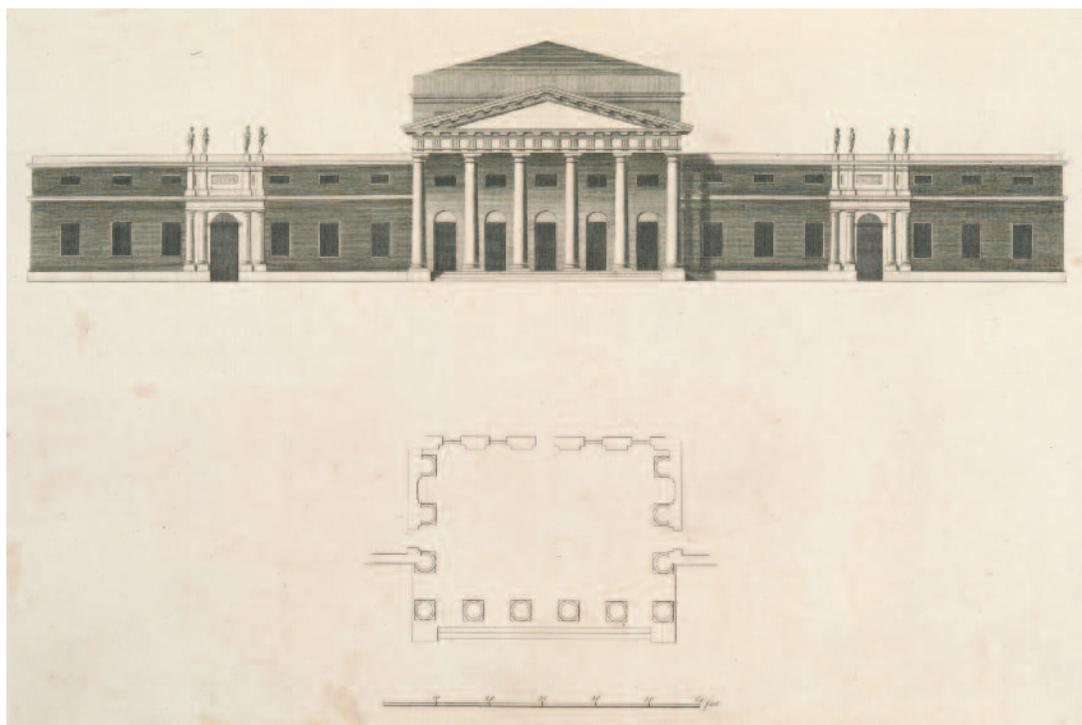


Fig. 8. 'L.^d Holland's now M.^r Powell's Seat at Kings-gate, in the Isle of Thanet, Kent' by James Basire, c.1772.
(© The British Library Board, K. Top.18.30.a.1)

Pridden's notes of 1780 to 1781 and his sketches of the building (Figs 7–9). Most of the following section has been compiled using his manuscript.⁷⁹

'The House' wrote Pridden, 'is built of flint neatly squared, the Coins Windows. Cornices &c &c of Stone, the flint at the N.E. part of the house [i.e. the main front] is remarkable for the neatness of the Workmanship'. At the centre was a massive portico, flanked by two wings with 'buildings partly detached, (which serve for Offices &c) & which answer to each other in the Garden.' On his sketches Pridden wrote: 'The Portico is grand but too large in proportion to the rest of the building. It is of the Doric Order, the pillars cylindrical, with Tryglyphs, Volutes, &c &c appendages to that Order, but not here exactly delineated.' His comment about the

oversized proportions of the portico, of the Roman Doric order, was to be echoed by future visitors, but he probably mistook volutes for mutules. (Fig. 7) The pediment, he noted, was similar to 'delineations of the Doric Order. Vid Queens Coll: Ox[ford] &c.'

The portico was approximately 33 ft. deep and was made up of twelve columns of Portland stone, six at the front supporting the pediment, and three on each side, two of which were set back *in antis*, as shown in Basire's engraving (Fig. 8). The recessed area thus created led into to the tall central block, which rose higher than the apex of the pediment. Set into the entrance wall were five arched openings filled with glass, the central one containing a double door. Over these were five rectangular windows, and on each side at ground level there was an arched

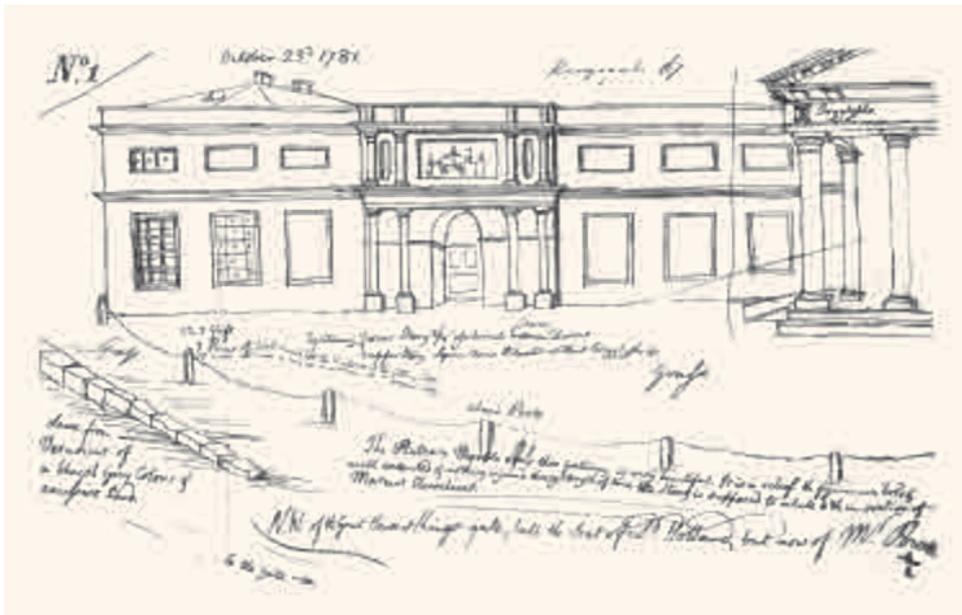


Fig. 9. 'N.º 1. NW. of L.^d Hollands ...', by John Pridden 1781.
(By permission of Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone, EK/U203)

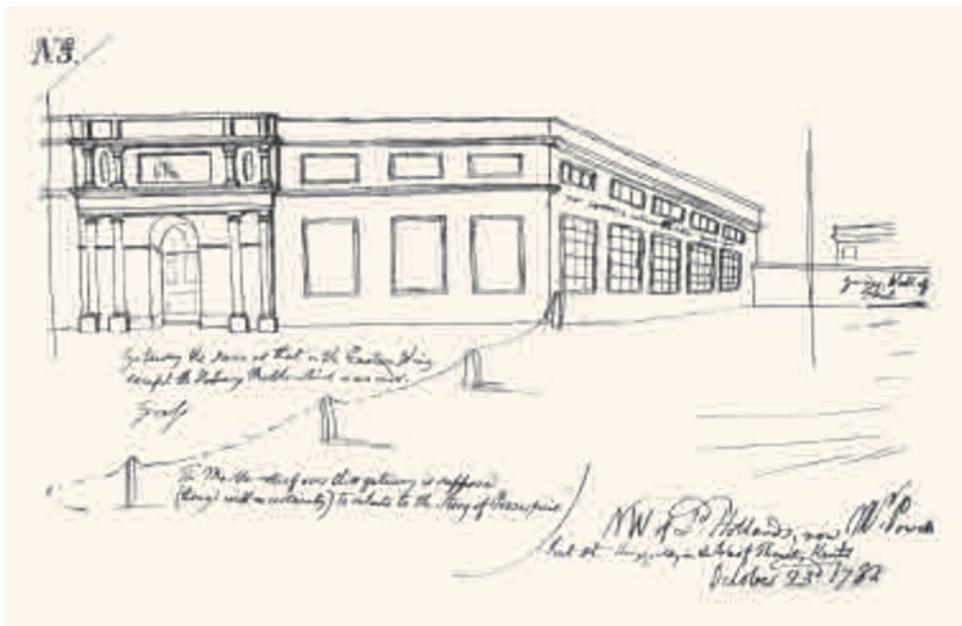


Fig. 10. 'N.º 3. N.W. L.^d Hollands...', by John Pridden 1781.
(By permission of Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone, EK/U203)

opening giving access to the wings. At the centre of each wing was a triumphal arch flanked by ‘ $\frac{3}{4}$ Cylindrical Doric Columns’, above which were ‘Square Doric Pilasters without Tryglyphs &c’ framing antique bas-reliefs of white marble (Fig. 9): ‘The Statuary Marble over this [eastern] Gateway is very beautiful. It is in relief the figures are bold & well executed & nothing injured through length of time. The Story is supposed to relate to an ovation of Marcus Aurelius.’ The relief over the western gateway, supposedly relating to the story of Ceres and Proserpine, was equally well executed, and although Pridden claimed both to be in excellent preservation, he also noted the latter as being asunder. The apartments either side of the gateways each had three windows, but the return wings on either side had five, and, unlike the front, had no

cornice between the attic and ground storeys (Fig. 10). According to Pridden the roof was covered with lead (Basire states it to be copper).

The main approach, from the north, led past a semi-circular area of grass, the perimeter of which was marked by chain posts. Further out, at ‘the North east angle of the building [,] a line of stones are placed to prevent carriages approaching too near they are about a foot & a half square and consist of Lava bought from the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius. In other parts of the ground & gardens is abundance of Lava.’ Whether the lava was brought back specifically, or was just ballast, we do not know, but it was ‘of a bluish Grey Colour & excessive hard.’⁸⁰ To the west was a separate block surrounded by a ‘Garden Wall of Flint’, and the ‘King’s Gate’ at sea level allowed glimpses of the classical portico (Fig 11).



Fig. 11. View of the portico through the King’s Gate, drawing by George Engleheart, 1796–97.
(*NMR BB82/534, reproduced by permission of Historic England*)

In the recesses of the Portico were two ancient sarcophagi: ‘the one that stands in the west recess is very neat the ornaments graceful and simple; on it is inscribed.

AVREL ·
:M ·P ·
SABINAE.

it is of white marble & in good preservation the other sides of it are quite plain. The other which stands in the east recess is also very neat & has many figures on it’. In a recess of one of the garden buildings was the fragment of an inscription, and in one of the walks were ‘four stones piled on each other brought from the Giant’s Causeway, in the County of Antrim.’ Another walk contained a ‘beautiful sarcophagus of white marble in very high preservation,’ and in a circular recess in the garden was ‘a fragment of an altar about four-feet and a half high.’ Despite the presence of all of these antiquities, however, Pridden described the gardens as ‘very small & have nothing to recommend them’.

AFTER HOLLAND

At the end of 1777, the lands and messuages were finally released to John Powell,⁸¹ ending the Holland association with Kingsgate. When Powell eventually took possession of the property he removed most of the furniture; the house’s subsequent story is a sad one of decline. Lady Mary Coke, in 1780, considered the house ‘the worst contrived I ever saw there are three or four fine rooms totally unconnected with each other & the best of all is very dismal _ has no view of the sea, & even those which have are so contrived by the smallness of the windows to be very gloomy, there is a fine Portico which is very pleasant as the view there is unembarrassed, but by its great depth it makes all the rooms obscure__’.⁸² The itinerant traveller, Thomas Pennant, wrote of his visit of 1787 that:

‘The villa is certainly a beautiful piece of architecture.—In the front is a large Doric portico: the house is low, consisting of only the ground floor; the apartments numerous; but most of them, except the saloon, small. They are crowded with statues, busts, bas-relieves, vases, and various other antiquities brought from Italy. On an ancient altar, once devoted to Æsculapius, his Lordship thought fit to renew the like devotion to the God of Health, in this form:

Ob salutem in Italia
Anno 1767 recuperatum,
Hanc columnam,
Olim D. Æsculapio sacram,
Nunc iterum donat dedicatque
HOLLAND.

...Every thing about the house shews symptoms of neglect. After the death of Lord Holland, Powel ... was the ostensible owner: now the owner is scarcely known; but it is let, during the season of bathing, to any stranger who wishes to make it his residence.’⁸³

He also noted that ‘Not a tree is to be seen in all the extent of the adjacent downs, which, instead of groves, or verdant clumps, are dotted with buildings of flints, in numbers of fantastic forms’.⁸⁴ In 1781, when John Powell was still alive, Pridden noted that ‘He lets out this noble Seat every Summer at the exorbitant rate of three-hundred guineas for each Season. S.^r Horace Mann had it for some Seasons; a M.^r Dawes had it for a short time, but this Season his Grace the Duke of Beaufort honours this Mansion with his residence’.⁸⁵ Mann was there with his family in 1780, and it would seem that he was also the tenant the previous year.⁸⁶ Lady Amabel Yorke, one of the many distinguished visitors that the place still managed to attract several years after Holland’s death, noted in her diary for 29 July 1782: ‘Poor M^r Child had taken it for the Summer, & we just heard last Night that he is dead’.⁸⁷

Powell was succeeded in 1783 by his brother-in-law, William Roberts, who continued to lease out the property: Lord Cholmondeley was at Kingsgate ‘for some time’ in 1786, and in 1794 the house was

inhabited by Thomas Coutts, the banker, who was recorded as again being there in 1799.⁸⁸ Two years previously Lord Loughborough, then Lord Chancellor, had taken the house, and in 1803 it was the turn of a General Jones, and one of its last guests, before his death, was John Lord Brownlow.⁸⁹ Occupation was temporary at best. Zachariah Cozens must have visited around 1789, when the antiquities were being packed for removal. His description of the villa was quite disparaging, but probably accurate: ‘the chambers and stair-case being particularly mean for such a house’, and in reaching the Saloon ‘the disgusting passage to it from the house spoils the effect of it entirely: it may well be compared to the winding, low passages through which you are obliged to creep, to gain admittance to the inmost recesses of an Egyptian pyramid; for in this a full-sized man cannot walk upright.’⁹⁰

William Roberts’s death in 1805 appears to have been the final nail in Kingsgate’s coffin – his second son, John Powell Roberts, came into the Thanet estates and decided to make Quex Park at nearby Birchington his principal residence. A sale by auction of the household furniture brought in £334–9–9, but this was small change to Roberts, who needed a considerably larger sum ‘...having come to a determination to pay off the 5000£ Incumbrance’.⁹¹ The house sold for £3550 including fixtures, but was put up for sale in 1806, and auctioned again in 1807. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* printed a letter on the sale:

‘The house, with its extensive gardens, ... was, a few weeks ago, purchased by two professional gentlemen from London (a Mr. Clifford, an eminent Architect, and Mr. Spottiswoode, a Gentleman of the Law), for half the sum mentioned in the London prints; and since the purchase, they have been offered four thousand pounds for their bargain, as the vast quantity of lead and copper will clear all the purchase money.’⁹²

The wings of the main house were to be left standing, the right wing being formed into a hotel and coffee-room, from which a covered gallery was to erected (in

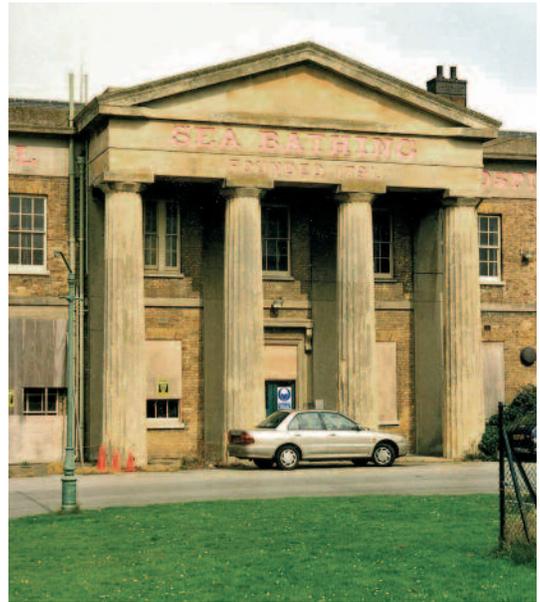


Fig. 12. The Royal Bathing Infirmiry, Margate.
(Photo: author)

place of the former low curved passage) leading to the grand saloon (Saloon of Neptune, formerly the library). The other wing – despite a confusing narrative in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* – was to be ‘converted into a Lodging house, and the great dining parlour in to a public Library and Reading-Room’. The ‘Favourite’ was to come down, as was the Doric portico, together with the centre house which was found to be decayed, ‘and a modern-built house, with a grand entrance, will be erected instead’. ‘Several other buildings’ were to be erected fronting the sea to form a beautiful crescent.

The intended enterprise never really got off the ground, though some of the planned work was carried out: ‘this once noble building has been lately much reduced in its size; the beautiful flint work has been stripped from the outside of it, and three separate houses rise from the remains, which are however sheltered by the noble portico in front of them’.⁹³ By 1820 we hear only of the ‘The Remains of the Doric front’,⁹⁴ and subsequent alterations and

other building work soon removed even this, with a new house erected in the recess, built flush with the adjacent dwellings. It was this central house alone that then acquired the name Holland House. Storeys have subsequently been added to the flanking wings, each made into separate dwellings (Little Holland House and Holland End), but their respective round-headed door-cases, each with four engaged columns and entablature, are those of the original Kingsgate House.

The suggestion that the portico was moved from the house to The Royal Sea Bathing Hospital at Margate (Fig. 12) is apocryphal and not substantiated by the evidence. The portico at Kingsgate was supported by six unfluted Roman (or Tuscan) Doric columns,⁹⁵ whereas the Hospital has four, not six, baseless and fluted columns of the Greek Doric order. The Hospital portico also measures only 33ft 8in, in contrast to the 50ft shown in Basire's scaled engraving of Kingsgate House (Fig. 8).⁹⁶

CONCLUSION

The final shape of Lord Holland's house at Kingsgate was always hampered by its piecemeal development – originating from two humble dwellings, and growing during a four-year period, with contributions from both amateur and professional architects: John Luke Nicoll, Thomas Wynn, the Duke of Richmond and John Vardy. Despite the later involvement of Robert Adam (an unsuccessful relationship as it turned out) the house still lacked a clear architectural form. The eventual 'Italian villa' resulted from Holland's visit to Italy in 1766–67, characterised by its extended wings with antique reliefs, its part-engaged portico, and its new and rearranged rooms. It remained a vision and hybrid creation of amateurs, Lord Holland and Thomas Wynn. Despite its aesthetic and practical shortcomings, as an early seaside villa it deserves more recognition than it has received.

ENDNOTES

1. Honour, Hugh, "An Epic of Ruin-Building", *Country Life*, 114 (10 December 1953), pp. 1968–69.
2. For an account of Wynn's other works, see Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840*, 4th edn (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 1203.
3. Michael Cousins, 'As for Paradise which is but another Name for Kingsgate', *The Follies Journal*, no. 8 (summer 2009), pp. 47–88.
4. British Library (hereafter referred to as BL), Add MS 51416, fol. 77, Henry Fox to Caroline Fox, Pay Office, 11 April 1761. Fox was MP for Windsor from 1741 to 1761.
5. *Ibid.*, fol. 85, Henry Fox to Caroline Fox, 16 April 1761.
6. BL, Add MS 51400, fol. 3v, Henry Fox to John Luke Nicoll, Goodwood, 18 September 1761. For Nicoll, see Colvin, *Dictionary*, pp. 749–50.
7. BL, Add MS 51400 fols 5–5v, Henry Fox to John Luke Nicoll, Goodwood, 26 September 1761.
8. *Ibid.*, fol. 16, Henry Fox to John Luke Nicoll, 17 October 1761.
9. *Ibid.*, fol. 21v, John Luke Nicoll to Henry Fox, Waverley Abbey, 23 October 1761.
10. *Idem.*
11. BL, Add MS 51400, fol. 37, Henry Fox to John Luke Nicoll, 25 February 1762.
12. BL, Add MS 51444, fol. 2, Lady Holland's 'journal' from Kingsgate, entry for 17 May 1762.
13. Kent History and Library Centre (hereafter referred to as KHL), R-U1063/T60, Deed no. 37, 13 December 1759, 'Memorandum'.
14. KHL, R-U1063/T45A, Supplementary Abstract, Indentures of Lease and Release made between Thomas Sackett of the one part and The Right Honble Henry Lord Holland of the other part, 29 & 30 April 1763.
15. *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 1731–1814*, ed. by Brian Fitzgerald, 3 vols (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1949–57), vol. 1, pp. 326–27, Kingsgate, 23 May 1762. This, and all subsequent letters quoted from this correspondence, are from Lady Holland to her sister, Emily, Marchioness (later Duchess) of Kildare.
16. KHL, R-U1063/T60, Deed no. 38, 7 June 1764.
17. KHL, R-U1063/T45A, fol. 9. This 'summary' and accompanying abstract record four purchases made that year by Lord Holland.

18. BL, Add MS 51409, fols 131–131v, Thomas Wynn to Lord Holland, Conway, 17 July 1764.
19. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 342, Kingsgate, 14 Sept 1762; BL, Add MS 51401, fol. 84, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Kingsgate, 8 July 1764.
20. BL, Add MS 51432, fols 67v–68r, Robert Digby to Lord Holland, Redlynch, 9 July 1764. Digby was Lord Holland's nephew.
21. BL, Add MS 51401, fols 84–84v, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Kingsgate, 8 July 1764.
22. BL, Add MS 51401, fol. 90, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Kingsgate, 18 July 1764.
23. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 407, Kingsgate, 28 July 1764.
24. *Idem.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 408, Holland House, 4 September 1764.
26. BL, Add MS 51416, fol. 147, Lord Holland to Lady Holland, Kingsgate, 12 June 1764.
27. BL, Add MS 51409, fols 153–54, Henry Basset to Lord Holland, Margate, 20 September 1765.
28. BL, Add MS 51409, fol. 181, Robert Whitfield to Lord Holland, Kingsgate, 18 May 1766. Whitfield, clearly erroneously, captioned it 'the state of Dant delion Farm.'
29. BL, Add MS 51409, fol. 183, Robert Whitfield to Lord Holland, Kingsgate, 26 May 1766.
30. [Fisher], *The Kentish Traveller's Companion...*, 3rd edn (Canterbury: Simmons & Kirkby, 1790), p. 248.
31. Quex House, plan surveyed in 1774 by J. Hodskinson.
32. *Idem.*
33. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 459, Kingsgate, 16 July 1766. Wynn's drawings do not seem to have survived.
34. *Idem.*
35. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 479, Florence, 9 Nov 1766. They were scheduled to sail, eventually, on 1 November, and landed at Naples on 11 November.
36. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 483–84, Naples, 19 December 1766.
37. BL, Add MS 51401, fols 151v & 155, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Naples, 30 December 1766 and 27 January 1767 respectively.
38. BL, Add MS 51401, fol. 160v, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Florence, 7 April 1767.
39. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 498, Naples, 20 February 1767.
40. BL, Add MS 51401, fols 157–57v, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Rome, 25 March 1767.
41. BL, Add MS 51401, fol. 159, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Florence, 3 April 1767.
42. BL, Add MS 51401, fol. 160v, Lord Holland to John Luke Nicoll, Florence, 7 April 1767.
43. Sir John Soane's Museum, Adam vol.11 / 235.
44. BL, Add MS 51444, fol. 8v, Lady Holland's 'journal' from Kingsgate. She recorded that 'M^r Whitfield dyed while we were abroad this year', 1767 (the journey, through France, Switzerland and Germany, lasted until the May of the following year). KHLIC, R-U1063/E12, an 'Indenture of Assignment of Mortgage' (Deed no. 490) indicates that Whitfield was still alive on 10 October of 1767.
45. BL, Add MS 51416, fol. 176, Lord Holland to Lady Holland, Kingsgate, 29 May 1767.
46. *Ibid.*, fol. 179, Lord Holland to Lady Holland, Kingsgate, 1 June 1767.
47. BL, Add MS 51444, fol. 13v, Lady Holland's 'journal' from Kingsgate, general entry under 1771.
48. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 517, Kingsgate, 27 August 1767.
49. *Henry Fox, First Lord Holland: His Family and Relations*, ed. by Earl of Ilchester, Giles Stephen Holland Fox-Strangways, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1920) vol. II, p. 282. The biography states that 'Most of the real antiquities—the statues and objects of vertu' were 'collected in Italy with the help of Sir Horace Mann, and put ashore at Holland's own landing-stage'. The original document(s) relating to Mann's involvement, or the presence of a landing stage at Kingsgate, have not been located, although Mann was well-versed in the role of acquisition and transportation.
50. *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 544–46, Holland House, 6 October 1768.
51. Vardy died on 17 May 1765; Nicoll died around late-May / early-July according to Lady Holland (*Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 519, letter of 3 September 1767).
52. BL, Add MS 51440, Diary of Henry Fox, entry for 16 August 1768; BL, Add MS 27578, fol. 24, The Reverend John Lyon to the Reverend Weeden Butler, Margate, 11 October 1768.
53. BL, Add MS 51440, *op. cit.*
54. Zachariah J. Cozens, *A Tour Through the Isle of Thanet, and some other parts of East Kent* (London, 1793), p. 43. His description makes it quite clear that the Saloon of Neptune was one of the 'detached' buildings at the rear, reached via one of the curving passages.

55. BL, Add MS 51409, fols 207–08v, Thomas Wynn to Lord Holland, 11 October 1768.
56. KHLc, R-U1063/E3, manuscript account of Kingsgate written between 1770 and 1774. Tully was the old English name for Marcus Tullius Cicero.
57. Ferrante Loffredo, Marquis di Treviso & Pompeo Sarnelli, *Le antichità di Pozzuolo et luoghi convicini, etc... Con le descrizioni de Bagni d'Agnano, Pozzuolo...*, 4 vols (Naples, 1675), vol. I, p. 12.
58. John Chetwode Eustace, *A Classical Tour through Italy... An. MDCCCLII...*, 4th edn, 4 vols (London, 1817), vol. II, p. 369.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 370. The tower that Holland erected to Thomas Harley was supposedly 'intended to resemble one of the most celebrated remains of antiquity II sepulchro di Cicero near the Formian Villa' (KHLc, R-U1069/E3).
60. Sarnelli, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
61. Honour, *op. cit.*, p. 1968.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
64. BL, Add MS 51444, fol. 9, Lady Holland's 'journal' from Kingsgate, general entry under 1768.
65. *Idem.*; *Correspondence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 549, 3 November 1768.
66. BL, Add MS 51444, fol. 11v, Lady Holland's 'journal' from Kingsgate, general entry under 1769. This could, of course, have been another bed chamber entirely, or the work may not even have been carried out.
67. For example, *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, July 20–July 22, 1769; Issue 1310.
68. There was, however, a dispute made public in the *St James's Chronicle* of 12 October 1771 about two pictures of Kingsgate House, 'each about five feet long, to fit certain pannels in his House' being commissioned from an Arthur Nelson, a claim that Holland denied. See BL, Add MS 51434, fols 71–72v, Nelson to Holland, St John's Antigua, 6 June 1770; fols 95–98v, (writer unknown) response to the letter in the *St James's Chronicle*; fols 99–99v, in Lord Holland's hand.
69. KHLc, R-U1063/T1 Part 1, Deed no. 572, dated 29 June 1770: 'Lord Holland to Charles James Fox Esq^r Conveyance of Estates in Kent'; Deed no. 574, dated 1 August 1770: 'Hon. Charles James Fox Esq^r to John Powell Esq^r Mortgage'. John Powell was then an accountant in the office of the Paymaster General, Holland having been instrumental in bringing him in, and securing subsequent promotions. Powell was also an executor of Holland's will.
70. BL, Add MS 51444, fol. 13v, Lady Holland's 'journal' from Kingsgate, entry for 3 October 1771. We do not know where Lady Mary's house was – she may have acquired Whitfield's apartments. A building is shown between the Captain Digby and King's Gate House in views of c.1820, but there are no unaccounted-for buildings on Hodskinson's survey of 1774. However, both the survey and Pridden's sketch 'General Plan' of March 1780 depict planting, particularly the latter, in areas behind the favourite and the Saloon of Neptune.
71. [Anon.], *The Margate Guide...* (London, 1775), p. 26. John Hakewill (1742–1791) was a painter and house decorator, specialising in the 'grotesque' style; Domenico Bartoli (fl. 1761–1805) and his partner John Augustus Richter (c.1730–after 1809) were the leading scagliola makers in London in the 1770s, and during their ten-year partnership worked extensively for Robert Adam.
72. *Gentleman's Magazine* (December 1807), vol. LXXVII, p. 1117.
73. [T. Fisher], *The Kentish Traveller's Companion...* (Canterbury, 1776), p. 130. The bust still survives at Quex House, and is known affectionately as *The Laughing Philosopher*.
74. Quex House, Housekeeping Book from Lady Day 1772, entry for September 1772.
75. *Idem.* The craftsmen involved were: Whatley (carpenter), Colcott (bricklayer), Clark (plasterer), Mitchell (stone-mason), Rogers (smith) and Gunton (glazier).
76. *Ibid.*, and entries for June and September 1773. In addition to the rooms already mentioned, there was apparently a Circular Room with statues of Venus, Flora, Hygeia, and Diana venatrix (all on pedestals composed of ancient urns); a Roman eagle, of black Namur marble; a Corinthian capital from (ruins of) old Rome (white marble); a marine pillar of white marble; and a sacrifice. There was also a Passage Room, but for a full description of its contents, and those of the other rooms, see the accounts given in Fisher, *op. cit.* (1776), pp. 129–32, and Cozens, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–45 [this description of Kingsgate would seem to have been written around 1789].
77. BL, Add MS 51413, fols 97v, 99v, 113v, 122, 135v, 165v, 204v, abstracts of expenses from 1 January 1765 to 29 September 1772.

78. BL, Maps Room, Kings Topographical Collection K.18.30.a.1; [Anon.], *The Margate Guide...* (London, 1770), p. 25.
79. KHLIC, EK/U203. The Reverend John Pridden's MS for his intended *Topographical Collections for History of the Isle of Thanet* (hereafter referred to as Pridden MS).
80. [Fisher], *op. cit.* (1776), p. 132. Fisher states: 'about fifty tons of the pietra di Vesuvio, or lava from Naples'.
81. KHLIC, R-U1063/T1 Part 2, Release dated 25 December 1777.
82. Formerly East Kent Archive Centre, TR 2188/2. Extracts from the unpublished journal-letters of Lady Mary Coke: A visit to Margate by Lady Mary Coke in 1780, entry for 16 August. The current location of this document is unknown.
83. Thomas Pennant, *A Journey from London to The Isle of Wight*, 2 vols (London, 1801) vol. 1, p. 110. This tour was started on 7 May 1787.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
85. Pridden MS. This was Horatio Mann the younger. His wife, Lady Lucy Noel, sister of the Earl of Gainsborough, had died on 11 February 1778 in Nice, and Kingsgate provided a suitable retreat for him. The Duke of Beaufort, would have been Henry Seymour, who became the 5th Duke in 1756.
86. According to an undated and unconnected note in Pridden's MS, 'The Great house has been let to S.^r Horace Mann for the 2 last seasons.'
87. West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, Vyner MS ACC.2299 Diaries of Lady Amabel Yorke, vol. 7. Robert Child, banker and M.P., was owner of Osterley Park. He died 28 July, presumably at Kingsgate.
88. Coke, *op. cit.*, p. 8; *The General Advertiser*, 29 September 1786; Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis, ed., *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 48 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937-83), vol. XII (1944), pp. 124-25, Mary Berry to Horace Walpole, Prospect House, 1 October 1794.
89. *The Observer*, 27 August 1797; *The Times*, 18 July 1803; KHLIC, R-U1063/T45A, Abstract, p. 59.
90. Cozens, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
91. Quex House, 21 June 1805, John Powell Roberts to Charles Deare. This encumbrance went back to a codicil in his uncle's will of a payment of £5000 to be made to his sister, Harriet Roberts, and for this, John decided to 'sell off Part of the Estate' (KHLIC, R-U1063/T45A, Abstract, p. 44, Codicil of John Powell's will (5 August 1775)).
92. *Gentleman's Magazine*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1116-17. The deeds (KHLIC, R-U1063/T45A, Abstract, p. 56 and Quex House, 'Account of Monies Received...'), show that Mr Clifford was, in fact, the architect Edward Gyfford.
93. Robert Edward Hunter, *A Short Account of the Isle of Thanet...* (Ramsgate, 1809), pp. 64-65.
94. Derbyshire Record Office, D3311/4/1 or 5. Diary of the architect William Porden, entry for 20 July 1820.
95. These drawings include: NMR BB82/534, drawing by George Engleheart, 1796-97 (view of portico through the King's Gate); NBR BB68/5073 front elevation of King's Gate House by Emma Bennett (later Lady Swinburne), 28 September 1784; BL, Maps Room, Kings Topographical Collection K.18.30.a.1, engraving by James Basire, c.1770; K.18.30.c, north view of Kingsgate, published by B. T. Pouncy, London, 1 July 1793.
96. Measurement of what is today called Holland House provides a figure of just under 45ft, the gap between the two flanking wings of the original house being narrower than the pediment itself.