
Cassiobury.

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It is hardly necessary to mention that the House, which we have the privilege of visiting by courteous permission, is a modern structure, having been erected about the first year of the present century, for the fifth Earl of Essex, by the well-known Architect, James Wyatt, who also rebuilt in the *modern Gothic* style the Mansion at Ashridge.

The few minutes which can be allowed for notes I propose to occupy chiefly with reading a passage from Evelyn's Diary, which gives some interesting and authentic information about the rebuilding of the predecessor of this seat in 1680. It will be necessary, however, to give some words of introduction in reference to the origin of the first Mansion here.

The Estate of Cassiobury variously denominated in Mediæval times as Cægesho, Caissou, Caishoo, Kayso, and latterly Cassio or Cashio, is supposed to preserve the name of the British tribe of the Cassi, whose seat of Government was at Verulamium, called by the Saxons Verlamceaster and also Watlingaceaster. It was one of the important estates conferred by Offa on his Monastery; and the Manor of Cassio, reduced some time after the Domesday survey to probably its present dimensions—the Manor of Watford being taken out of it—remained with the Abbots till the dissolution of the Monastery. In 1546, August 29th, it was granted by Henry VIII., not as a free gift, but for purchase-money

and in exchange for certain properties in Yorkshire, to Sir Richard Morison. From the inscription on the monument of his son, Sir Charles Morison (erected by his grandson), we learn that he was a person highly distinguished for polite literature and diplomatic ability, and he acquired great honour as Ambassador to the Emperor, Charles V., and other princes. He was eminent as a lawyer and a controversialist, and employed his pen in defence of the cause of the Reformation of the Church according to his views under Henry VIII. and Edward VI. He was a wealthy man, and acquired other monastic estates besides this of Cassiobury. His grant here names the Lordship of "Cayshobury with Wippingdon Grove and Cayshobury Grove (apparently the estate which is now called 'The Grove,' Lord Clarendon's), in the parish of Watford and Cayshobury"—this seems to be a double name for the parish—also (the document says), all woods, messuages, mills, etc., Courts Leet, and Courts Baron, as completely as the Abbots held them—to hold of the Crown by the service of a tenth of a Knight's fee, and a yearly rent." The patronage of the Church of Watford was at this time granted separately from the Manor lordship and given to John Lord Russell (afterwards Earl of Bedford), who was bailiff of the Manor at the time of the survey. This afterwards came (in 1653) by family arrangement or purchase to Sir Charles Morison, Junior. Chauncy says that soon after Sir Richard obtained possession, he "commenced to erect a fair and large house on a dry hill, not far from a pleasant river (the Gade) in a fair park." For fuller information I am indebted to the "History of Cassiobury," compiled by the Antiquary John Britton in 1838, and dedicated to Geo. Capel Coningsby, 5th Earl of Essex, the builder of the present Mansion. The house was built on the site of the Abbots' Manor House. An old drawing shews that part of a Mediæval timber and plaster structure was incorporated in the Morison House; this structure must have been the Monastic Manor House. It appears that Sir Richard built only a portion of the Mansion he had designed, but probably sufficient for temporary habitation. On the accession of Queen Mary he fled from the threatened persecution, and at Strasburg

joined the exiled Reformers, with whom he had been associated—Peter Martyr, Grindall, Jewell, and others. Here he died, May 1556.

After the accession of Elizabeth, the design was completed by his son, Sir Charles Morison, who founded the Mortuary Chapel, at Watford Church in conjunction with his mother. He lived till 1599. This Tudor residence has been described in general terms as “a stately structure in the midst of a park with beautiful gardens.” Britton reproduces in his work an old plan, existing at Cassiobury, which shows it to be a very spacious residence. It appears in the form of the letter T. I exhibit a copy. The longest member (according to the scale on the plan) extended about 225 feet, the other member 190 feet. These dimensions exceed those of the present house as given in Britton’s plan of it. In an old picture made at another stage of its existence, after the alterations and additions made in about 1680, the North wing of the house appears as a Tudor structure of brick, long and rather narrow, having five window bays extending the whole height (two stories), a sharp gable at the end, and very ornate Elizabethan chimneys. This was the portion of the Morison house which was preserved at that period. Britton informs us that some of this Elizabethan work still exists in the North wing of the modern mansion—I must return to the narrative—After the death of Sir Charles Morison, (son of the first Sir Charles) who erected the monument to his father in the Chapel, the Lordship of Cassiobury and the other estates were brought to the Capel family by the marriage of the heiress, Elizabeth Morison, with Arthur, the Great Lord Capel, of Hadham. He resided chiefly at Hadham. The interesting picture by Cornelius Jansen, which we are to have the advantage of seeing in “the Inner Library,” represents him with his beautiful and devoted wife, and his five children, grouped in the gardens at Hadham. This was painted before the outbreak of the Civil war. Early in the struggle the Parliament party had their hand upon Watford and Cassiobury. The loyal Capel had little opportunity of attending to his house here. After the battle of Marston Moor, the Parliament chose to confiscate his estates, and made a grant of them, in 1645, to Robert Devereux the last Earl

of Essex of that name, son of Queen Elizabeth's favourite, and General of the Parliamentary forces. He died in the following year. Nothing seems to be known about his occupation of Cassiobury. There is a curious relic here to be seen in one of the corridors—a copper warming-pan impressed with the Devereux badge. This is said to have been brought from Rayne Hall, a former seat of the Capels. After Lord Capel's execution, or rather, immolation (March 9th, 1649), till the end of Cromwell's domination, nothing can be said about Cassiobury House, except that it is supposed to have been granted to Sir William Brereton. After the restoration of the Monarchy, Lord Capel's son, of the same name, recovered his inheritance here, and in 1661, April 20th, was created by the King, Viscount Malden and Earl of Essex. He was the 21st in order of the Earls of Essex, but the first of the family of Capel, whose honorable reputation he well sustained, till he was cut off by a violent death. The work which he effected here in regard to the family mansion, I will now relate in the words of his valued and gifted friend, Evelyn, and so bring to an end these short notes.

Under the date 18th April, 1680, in the Diary, we read:—

“ On the earnest invitation of the Earle of Essex, I went with him to his house at Cashioberie in Hartfordshire. It was on Sunday, but going early from his house in the Square of S. James', we arrived by ten o'clock; this he thought too late to go to church, and we had prayers in his chapel. The house is new, a plain fabric, built by my friend Mr. Hugh May. There are divers faire and good rooms, and excellent carving by Gibbons, especially the chimney piece of the library. There is in the porch or entrance a painting of Apollo and the liberal arts. One room parquetted with yew, which I liked well. Some of the chimney-mantels are of Irish marble, brought by my Lord from Ireland when he was Lord Lieutenant, and not much inferior to Italian. The tympan or gabal at the front is a bass-relievo of Diana hunting, cut in Portland stone handsomely enough. I did not approve of the middle dores being round, but when the hall is finished, as designed, it being an oval with a cupola, together with the other

wing, it will be a very noble palace. The Library is large and very nobly furnished, and all the books are richly bound and gilded; but there are no MSS. except the Parliament Rolls and Journals, the transcribing and binding which cost him, as he assured me, £500. No man has been more industrious than this noble lord in planting about his seat, adorned with walks, ponds, and other rural elegancies; but the soile is stonie, churlish and uneven, nor is the water nere enough to the house, though a very swift and clear stream runs within a flight shot from it in the valley, which may be fitly called Cold brook, it being indeed excessive cold, yet producing fair troutes. 'Tis pity the house was not situated to more advantage, but it seems it was built just where the old one was, which I believe he only meant to repaire; this leads men into irremediable errors and saves but a little. The land about it is exceedingly addicted to wood, but the coldnesse of the place hinders the growth. Black cherry trees prosper even to considerable timber, some being 80 feet long; they make also very handsome avenues. [Note one mentioned by Cook as 85 feet long]. There is a pretty oval at the end of a faire walke, set about with treble rows of Spanish chestnut trees. The gardens are very rare, and cannot be otherwise having so skilful an artist to govern them as Mr. Cooke, who is, as to the mechanic part, not ignorant in mathematics and pretends to astrologie. There is an excellent collection of the choicest fruit. As for my Lord, he is a sober, wise, judicious, and pondering person, not illiterate beyond the rate of most noblemen in this age, very well versed in English historie and affairs, industrious, frugal, methodical, and every way accomplished. His lady (being sister of the late Earle of Northumberland) is a wise, but somewhat melancholy woman, setting her heart too much on the little lady her daughter, of whom she is over-fond. They have an hopeful son at the Academie. My Lord was not long since come from his Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland, where he showed his abilities in administration and government, as well as prudence in very considerably augmenting his estate without reproach. He had been Ambassador extraordinary in Denmark, and, in a word, such a person as became the son of that worthy hero his

father to be, the late Lord Capel, who lost his life for King Charles I. We spent our time in the morning in walking and riding, and contriving (improvements), and the afternoones in the Library, so as I passed my time for three or four daies with satisfaction. He was pleased in conversation to impart to me divers particulars of State, relating to the present times. He being no great friend to the D (uke of York), was now laid aside, his integritie and abilities being not so suitable in this conjuncture. 21 May.—I returned to London.”
