

Comment on a planning application

Application Details

Application: 18/2977/FUL

Address: Marble Hill HouseMarble Hill ParkRichmond RoadTwickenhamTW1 2NL

Proposal: 1. Marble Hill House: External decoration and repair work (if a window is substantially rotten, partial or full replacement of joinery) and replacement rooflight. 2. Stable Block: External alterations, installation of mechanical plant, timber plant enclosure to the rear and front landscaping (creating an outdoor seating area) to facilitate the refurbishment of the existing café.3. Service Yard: new pedestrian access and associated refuse storage facilities.4. Landscaping: new soft and hard landscaping including restoration of gardens, upgrade of sports pitches and facilities, replacement of seating and new play areas.5. Sports Centre: External ramp for improved access.

Comments Made By

Name: Dr David Jacques

Address: SUGNALL HALL LITTLE SUGNALL LANE LITTLE SUGNALL STAFFORD ST21 6NF

Comments

Type of comment: Support the proposal

Comment: Although I still advise Historic Royal Palaces on their gardens and parks, my only professional involvement at Marble Hill was about 10 years ago when I gave advice to a consultant on historical matters. My research on Marble Hill in the 1990s was through a desire to resolve several historical uncertainties, mainly concerning land assembly, and I was not paid to carry it out. I am not currently employed the English Heritage at Marble Hill or elsewhere.

I will not deal with the problematic parts of LMH's document point by point, as my comments would become as repetitive as LMH's assertions. So I briefly discuss the main points of contention below.

At the same time I would like to affirm that English Heritage has used historical and archaeological research in a correct manner. It is open to new interpretations, but its unwillingness to accept most of LMH's is quite justified. I know that EH's decision has been the outcome of very lengthy consideration. I believe that it stems from a desire to reverse much of the neglect, overmaturity and decay that has been afflicting the whole of Marble Hill (not just the gardens) for very many years.

Yours sincerely,

Dr David Jacques

MAIN POINTS OF CONTENTION

Alexander Pope

The plan in the Norfolk Record Office (ref. MC 184/10/3) was attributed in the 1990s to Alexander Pope by myself and the late Mavis Batey, author of Arcadian Thames and a book on Pope. I could see that it took as given the initial land ownership in early 1724; by late 1724 there was more land down to the river. She was convinced by the strong similarities to sketches on the back of one of Pope's manuscripts. This attribution has not been questioned since, though LMH seeks to do so.

Charles Bridgeman

One letter by Bridgeman in late 1724 mentions that he was preparing a plan for the garden. This does not appear to have survived, and we don't know for certain whether his plan was implemented. The design on the 1750 plan, though, is quite consistent with Bridgeman's other known designs of the 1720s. I have written in *Gardens of Court and Country* that it appears to have been devised to accommodate some of Pope's ideas, like the bowling green, whilst being simpler and grander, which is the way his designs were tending at the time.

LMH points out that there is no mention of Marble Hill in 'Sarah Bridgeman's extensive archive'. There is no such archive, and her correspondence is known only through items in other archives. It can also be pointed out that (according to the old adage) the absence of evidence does not equate to the evidence of absence.

Groves down to the river

Lord Ilay had acquired additional land for the planting of the groves flanking the vista down to the river in late 1724. On the east side of the vista was a sliver of land taken from Park Close, belonging to Thomas Vernon of Twickenham Park. 122 trees were then planted on it, and the damage (i.e. loss of revenue from not being able to grow wheat) was assessed in March 1725. There is no dispute that the earthwork terracing on the slope in the vista was carried out in or about 1725, nor that Captain Gray was completing the riverside terrace in gravel at the same time. This is all argued in my paper on 'Land tenure at Marble Hill' from about 10 years ago. IZARD's meadow in between the chestnut groves, and between the earthwork terraces and the river, was not acquired until 1749, but that was acceptable – 'borrowed' landscape was well known by this date – the important design objective was the vista between villa and river.

LMH try very hard to deny that the groves were planted down to the riverside terrace in 1724/5 by confusions over Vernon's land, seeing figures on the Heckell engraving as travellers along the track (rather than people in the garden), and other interpretations.