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John Evelyn's Norwich Garden

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Source: *Garden History*, Winter, 2006, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter, 2006), pp. 249-253

Published by: The Gardens Trust

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25472344>

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## NOTE

### JOHN EVELYN'S NORWICH GARDEN

*John Evelyn's work at Albury Park, Surrey, for Henry Howard, the grandson of the 2nd Earl of Arundel, who eventually became the 6th Duke of Norfolk, is widely known. In contrast, the scheme he laid out for Howard in Norwich, Norfolk, has been, until now, unnoticed. It was a pleasure garden approached from the river, some distance along the Wensum from the Duke's palace. Through his wife's cousin, Samuel Tuke, Evelyn (in London) received a plan of the site on which he suggested an outline design for the gardens, which seems to have been executed – it is his only known 'public' city garden. The evidence lies in correspondence between Tuke and John and Mary Evelyn, now at the British Library. Although the garden was only recorded there and in a couple of contemporary descriptions, by the 1680s the gardens were a noted feature of the city and survived for at least another 50 years.*

#### THE EVELYNS AND THE HOWARDS

Although John Evelyn offered advice to many landowners on planting and ordering their parks and gardens, there is frustratingly little hard evidence of exactly what he suggested. Only his redesign of Albury Park, Henry Howard's garden near Guildford, Surrey, remains intact, a unique survival of the Italianate garden in England for which Evelyn even drew up (probably in the late 1670s, and thus long after the work had been completed) an idealized plan, now in the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas.<sup>1</sup> But Evelyn's links to the dukes of Norfolk, who were to regain their title at the Restoration, also provided him with another opportunity. Howard apparently asked him to design a city pleasure garden in Norwich, Norfolk – the evidence of which lies in correspondence between Evelyn and his close friend and relative by marriage, Mary Evelyn's Catholic cousin, Samuel Tuke.

In 1638 the 2nd Earl of Arundel, Thomas Howard (grandson of the 4th Duke of Norfolk), became a Surrey neighbour of the Evelyn family. Evelyn's father, Richard, who had been the high sheriff of Surrey and Sussex in 1633–34, acted as trustee for the earl when he purchased

Albury Park, just a few miles away from his own estate at Wotton. Soon after, on his travels in the Low Countries and then in Italy, the young John Evelyn became a protégé of the 'collector' earl. On their last meeting in Padua, in the spring of 1646, when Arundel gave Evelyn and his companions (including the poet Edmund Waller) a detailed itinerary for their journey home through northern Italy, their conversation lingered over Albury as he sent messages about his garden to his steward 'that he will have greater care that agayneste the Gallery & House, store of Roses, Chesimine wodbines & the like' (*sic*).<sup>2</sup> By the autumn Arundel was dead.

#### EVELYN AT ALBURY PARK

In 1652, soon after his final return to England, Evelyn himself considered buying Albury – so conveniently situated for Wotton (now in the hands of his elder brother, George). But Henry Howard, a grandson of the earl, changed his mind about a sale and in 1655 turned to Evelyn for advice on the remodelling of the landscape. In the summer of 1662, while considering whether his son should join the Howard household at Arundel House (he did), John Evelyn spent almost a fortnight at Albury, even swallowing his dislike of field sports and following a stag hunt in the park.<sup>3</sup> It was probably then that the recently widowed Howard began to implement Evelyn's advice, though the exact period in which the works at Albury were carried out is uncertain. (Evelyn seems to have been involved there for at least twenty years but dates in his diary are often inaccurate.) The canal and the vineyards have long gone, but the grass terraces, the yew walk, the brick *exedra* wrapped around the pool, and the crypt (Evelyn's own *Posilippo*, as he termed it), which tunnelled through the hill, all remain. Albury offers vital and impressive evidence of the influence of Italian- and French-designed landscapes upon Evelyn, as well as his feeling for the setting of classical antiquity.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE HOWARDS RETURN TO NORWICH

With the Restoration, the dukedom restored, Henry Howard was eager to re-establish his family presence in Norfolk. Although his elder brother, Thomas, 5th Duke of Norfolk, was '*non compos mentis*' and had been living under

restraint in Padua since 1645, the title was now safe again. Recognizing this, the city fathers of Norwich immediately turned to him for help in establishing their charter. But the family's palatial seat, the Duke's Palace, close to Charing Cross in the parish of St John Maddermarket, was in poor repair after years of neglect, its bad structural condition exacerbated by a site too close to the river, causing the cellars to flood regularly. Though Henry Howard did not inherit the dukedom for many years, he lived in fully ducal style. Built in 1561–67, the Duke's Palace was approached through a gatehouse giving onto an entrance courtyard with fountains, beyond which were a further two courts. Howard now planned to rebuild the house in the modern style (Robert Hooke has been suggested as a possible architect, but there is no hard evidence and Howard himself was an accomplished amateur) but was determined to retain the same constrained, and patently unsuitable, site.<sup>5</sup> In recompense for the lack of space in which to provide outdoor entertainment, he decided to plan a garden on ground he now owned, some distance away in a more open setting on the banks of the River Wensum. The friary of the Austin Friars had stood on this spot until the dissolution in 1538.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE GENESIS OF MY LORD'S GARDEN

The site, which became known as 'My Lord's Garden', lay off the old street of Conesford Inferior (which first became St Faith's, then Mountebank Lane) in the parish of St Peter Parmentergate.<sup>7</sup> Howard's scheme was for a pleasure garden approached by water. Such open space as there was around the Duke's Palace was entirely dominated by an almost 200-foot-long bowling alley, which stretched from the house to the waterside. He had been forced to look further afield for his garden – hence the acquisition of the friary site. And it was to John Evelyn that Howard turned, even though he was a stranger to the city. However, the reputation that Norwich now had as a centre for expert florists, largely Protestant émigrés from Northern Europe, made it a particularly attractive location in which to dream up a 'public' garden, one in which Howard's guests and the dignitaries of the city could stroll, having been rowed to the site.

The man who brokered the arrangement between Evelyn and Howard was Evelyn's steadfast friend and relative, Samuel Tuke, who having been passed over as the Duke of York's secretary, deemed unsuitable since he was a Catholic convert, was now a central figure in Howard's establishment – overseeing the education of the two Howard boys, Thomas and Henry, with whom he would soon move to Paris. Tuke had spent the Interregnum years, after his heroic role in the defence of Colchester, Essex, in the protracted Civil War siege, in a number of European cities – a busy emissary in the

exile community. Restive with his confinement in Norwich he wrote to Mary Evelyn, whose Parisian upbringing (her father Sir Richard Browne had been the king's Resident in France) made her more French than English, describing this 'flegmatique island'. He would like her to see 'how I behave myself amongst the Gentlemen of the Province, who are a nation as new to mee as the Americans'.<sup>8</sup>

Stranded in the decaying, old Duke's Palace, Tuke was too far away even to build upon his own moment of literary fame in London. His adaptation of a Spanish piece (thought to be by Calderon) was a runaway success of the winter 1662–63 play-going season.<sup>9</sup> Tuke dedicated the published edition of *The Adventures of Five Hours* (1664) to Howard and wrote that it was:

bred upon the Terrace Walks in your Garden at Aldbury; and, if I mistake not, it resembles the Place where it was Brought up: the Plot is Delightful, the Elevations Natural, the Ascents Easie, without any great Embellishments of Art.

He was, presumably, describing the gardens at Albury as Arundel had left them (and as etched earlier by Wenceslaus Hollar) rather than the subtle but considerable extensions of the Italianate theme for which Evelyn was responsible.

That autumn of 1663 Tuke reported to Evelyn, 'Mr Howard has given 700L for a plot of ground to make a spring garden at Norwich'.<sup>10</sup> He was not looking forward to a long winter in the city, his feeling of isolation perhaps exacerbated after a visit to Henry Jermyn, Earl of St Albans, at Rushbrooke, near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, where he met Evelyn's old friend, the poet-politician (and critic of his own writings) Waller. 'I know of no business to call mee to London; therefore I pray refresh mee sometimes with your Letters'.<sup>11</sup> Evelyn did so, and the men were constant, faithful correspondents.

The first reference to Evelyn's involvement in Howard's planned garden was when Tuke sent a plan of the former Austin Friars site to London on the Norwich coach, for, he told Evelyn, Howard:

desires your advice how he shall dispose it for a Garden to entertaine the good company in the Towne. He intends to have in it a Bowling ground & the rest to be cast into walks with fruit trees against the walls, with such pert words as you shall judge proper, the figure is irregular but that is not to be helped. Therefore I pray combine it the best you can.<sup>12</sup>

Presumably the 'words' would be classical mottoes, such as those which visitors remarked upon, scattered liberally over doorways and gates

in Evelyn's Deptford garden, Sayes Court, Kent.

In October, Tuke told Mary Evelyn that his patron (Howard) was coming to London soon and wanted to 'speake with Mr Evelyn about the contrivance of his garden; but for my part I shall be frozen up all this winter in Norwich'.<sup>13</sup> But Howard was mercurial and in late October Tuke counsels Evelyn, presumably by then eager to press on with preparatory works before winter set in, to be patient for 'the plott of the garden it will keepe colde'.<sup>14</sup> There are no further references to Evelyn's part in the garden after this, but it is known that it was partially laid out by that January, presumably what was on the ground was the outcome of Howard's requests and Evelyn's experience in execution (albeit at a distance).

Dr Edward Browne, the eldest son of the eminent Norwich-based philosopher, Dr Thomas Browne, was a physician who would, two years later, be one of Christopher Wren's travelling companions in France. He was astonished by the celebrations over Christmas 1663 at the Duke's Palace:

so magnificently as the like hath scarce been seen; they had dauncing every night and gave entertainments to all that would come & hee build up a roome on purpose to dance in very large, and hunge with the bravest hangings I ever saw, his candlesticks, snuffers, tongues, fireshovels, andirons were silver a banquet was given every night after dancing.

He admired the great collection:

prints and draughts done by most of the great masters own hands. Stones and jewels ... the more and better than any prince in Europe rings and seals ... all manner of stones and limnings beyond compare these things were most of them collected by the old Earl of Arundel who employed his agents in most places to buy him up rarities, but especially in Greece and Italy.

In addition, he continues, Howard 'hath lately bought a piece of ground of Mr Mingay in Norwich by the waterside in Cunsford'. The Mingays were mayors of Norwich and Howard must have bought the land in Conesford ward, towards the outer limits of the city, following Robert Mingay's death in 1660. It is from Browne that one learns that the outline of the garden was already sketched out on the ground, presumably following Evelyn's plan. Howard, wrote Browne, intended:

a place for walking and recreations, having made already walkes round and crosse it, forty foot in breadth. If the

quadrangle left bee spacious enough hee intends the first of them for a fishpond, the second for a bowling green, the third for a wilderness, and the forth for a Garden. These & the like noble things hee performeth and yet hath payed 100000 of his Ancesters debts.<sup>15</sup>

On 16 January Browne went to look at the site for himself. If one trusts his evidence, and he seems to have been a very accurate witness, 'My Lord's Garden' was taking shape over the winter of 1663–64.

Soon after, Howard left Norwich and Tuke headed for Paris, where he was in charge of Howard's sons. But a few years later the prospect of a visit from Charles II brought Howard's attention back to East Anglia and his property in Norwich. In autumn 1671, the court extended the annual visit to Newmarket with a detour to Lord Arlington's Euston Hall, Suffolk (where Evelyn was also giving advice on planting), as well as Yarmouth and Norwich. The king spent just one night in Norwich, but the queen extended her stay in the Duke's Palace to three nights, before returning to Euston. Was she, perhaps, rowed along the Wensum to the riverside pleasure garden? Evelyn, himself, thanks to Arlington's patronage, was also caught up in the royal progress and, at Howard's invitation, was able finally to visit Norwich.<sup>16</sup>

On their journey Evelyn learned from Howard that he was hoping his son might marry one of the king's daughters (an ambition he did not achieve). He also confessed to his dalliance with Jane Bickerton, an actress, of whom even the king disapproved. When they reached the Duke's Palace, it was still hardly visible beneath the recent hasty conversion of the house and outbuildings to accommodate no less than three royal courts, those of the king, the queen and the Duke of York: the tennis court became the kitchen; the bowling alley the dining rooms. Now Howard 'advised with me concerning a plot to rebuild his house, having already as he said erected a front next the streete, and a left wing, and now resolving to set up another wing and pavilion next the garden'. Nevertheless, Evelyn thought the Duke's Palace a 'wretched building, & that part of it, newly built of brick, is very ill understood ... it had ben much better to have demolish'd all'.<sup>17</sup>

Evelyn, who (a true Vitruvian) always emphasized the crucial importance of a carefully chosen site, suggested an entirely different location, nearer the castle. Howard took no notice, although he rebuilt it at the cost of some £30,000 (oddly the same figure given for Berkeley House, London), nor is there any reference to My Lord's Garden. It is not known whether Evelyn saw the garden he had laid out on paper: the lack of comment may have been more a reflection of

Evelyn's growing distaste for Howard. By the 1690s, in his additions to William Camden's *Britannia*, Evelyn no longer even claimed the remodelling of the gardens at Albury for himself. But in 1671, Evelyn's stay in Norwich was made memorable by the pleasure of finally meeting the newly knighted Sir Thomas Browne, one of those few people to whom, many years before, he sent the outline of his ambitious manuscript, the *Elysium Britannicum* – still unpublished in 1671.<sup>18</sup>

#### MY LORD'S GARDEN IN 1681

As the years passed, Henry Howard came to epitomize for Evelyn the decadence and untrustworthiness of those in court circles. Tuke, knighted in 1664, had died in 1674, and despite her pleas for help, Howard gave Lady Tuke and her three young children no financial help whatsoever. When in the mid-1680s Evelyn visited the 6th Duke's house at Weybridge, Surrey (originally belonging to his mistress, Jane Bickerton, now the Duchess of Norfolk), he commented that 'never in my daies had I seene such expense to so small purpose'.<sup>19</sup> By then the Howard estates were in flux. There was a crumbling (though almost new) palace in Norwich; Albury had been sold in 1680; and Arundel House, the rambling townhouse on the Strand, London, demolished. For all the expenditure the duke had lavished on rebuilding his Norwich mansion, in 1681 Thomas Baskerville described it, though 'sumptuous', to be sited in a 'dunghole place'. The topographer found the Duke's Palace with 'little room for gardens and is pent upon all sides both on this and the other side of the river with tradesmen and dyers's houses who foul the water by their constant washing and cleaning of their cloth'.<sup>20</sup>

He was, perhaps, all the more shocked by the flawed grandeur of the Norfolk family house after his pleasant impression of the 'fair garden' to which the boatman had first rowed them. It had 'handsome stairs leading to the water by which we ascended into the garden and saw a good bowling-green, and many fine walks'. On arrival, they were plied with 'good liquors and fruits' by the gardener, who was evidently always ready to welcome admiring guests.<sup>21</sup> Despite his many distractions, Howard apparently still retained and maintained the mature and congenial pleasure garden on the Wensum in fine style. In Baskerville's opinion, it was there that the Duke's Palace should have been rebuilt since 'From this garden for the rest of the city down stream, and about a furlong up stream, there are no houses built on the other side the river to hinder that prospect into the country'.<sup>22</sup>

Eventually – and inevitably – the extravagantly rebuilt Duke's Palace was demolished in 1711–14, its materials reclaimed and sold for a fraction of the original cost. Only Duke Street, a nineteenth-century route to a new bridge, commemorated

Howard's costly folly. 'My Lord's Garden', which seems on the available scant evidence to have been largely Evelyn's achievement, long outlasted the palace. The strength of Evelyn's disapproval of the 6th Duke of Norfolk led him to disown his connections with the family and his role there probably remained unknown beyond Howard's immediate circle. Francis Blomefield recorded the garden in the 1730s as 'some time sold', but its high stone walls (probably remnants of the friary) with 2 acres of orchards and gardens were still intact.<sup>23</sup>

The slender evidence for the garden and the fact that Evelyn does not mention it more do not detract from the importance of this lost city garden. It is known that he considered it with care and was even growing impatient for work to begin on his scheme, surely the garden that was being laid out within weeks of Howard's request? Evelyn's diary (written up long after the event) can be misleading, and many of the people and places which figure in Evelyn's correspondence and papers pass without mention in its pages. Equally as men revealed themselves, Evelyn tended to change his view of them and their works (e.g. his judgement on Clarendon House, London, in the light of the earl's fall from power) and to distance himself from men whose reputations had become unsavoury – from Charles II to the 6th Duke of Norfolk. It is odd, but not uncharacteristic, that he did not record visiting 'My Lord's Garden' when he visited Norwich in 1671 – it may have slipped his mind or been a deliberate omission. The correspondence with Tuke, Edward Browne's note of the new garden, and finally Baskerville's description are conclusive that Evelyn's garden, designed on the basis of a plan of the site, was the very one that was delighting visitors to Norwich many years later.

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- <sup>2</sup> David Howarth, *Lord Arundel and his Circle* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 216.
- <sup>3</sup> John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, edited by E. S. de Beer, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), III, pp. 326, 355; later John was removed 'for feare of their perverting him, in the popish religion'.
- <sup>4</sup> Carola Small and Alistair Small, 'John

Evelyn and the garden of Epicurus', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 60 (1997), pp. 194–214. See also Gillian Darley, *John Evelyn: Living for Ingenuity* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Kent, 'The houses of the Dukes of Norfolk in Norwich', *Journal of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society*, 24 (1931), pp. 73–87.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert A. Doubleday (ed.), *The Victoria History of the County of Norfolk*, Vol. II (London, 1901).

<sup>7</sup> Hochstetter's map of 1789 shows it surviving in rudimentary form; redrawn in James Campbell, 'Norwich', in *Historic Towns*, Vol. II, edited by J. Campbell (London: Scholar with the Historic Towns Trust, 1975). By 1830 it was gone.

<sup>8</sup> British Library, Add. MS 78435, 28 October [1663].

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Vol. IV: 1663, edited by Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: Bell, 1970–83), p. 8, n.2, p. 16; Evelyn/de Beer, *Diary of John Evelyn*, III, p. 350.

<sup>10</sup> British Library, Add. MS 78306, f.109, 28 September 1663.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., f.111, 7 October [1663].

<sup>13</sup> British Library, Add. MS 78435, 28 October [1663].

<sup>14</sup> British Library, Add. MS 78306, f.115, 23 October [1663].

<sup>15</sup> British Library, MS Sloane 1906, various entries for December 1663 and January 1664.

<sup>16</sup> Evelyn/de Beer, *Diary of John Evelyn*, III, pp. 592–5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., III, pp. 593, 595.

<sup>18</sup> Letter of 28 January 1659/60 (not 1657), quoted in John D. Hunt and Peter Willis (eds), *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), pp. 57–8. Also Darley, *John Evelyn*.

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn/de Beer, *Diary of John Evelyn*, IV, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Portland*, Vol. II (London: HMSO, 1893), pp. 263–314.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk, etc.*, 5 vols (Lynn: W. Wittingham, 1739–75), IV, p. 86.