

Northumberland House, 15 Petersham Road, Richmond

Northumberland House stood on the Riverside at Richmond, a few yards above Richmond Bridge, from 1766 until its demolition in 1969.

The earliest records relating to the site appear in the rate books. In 1726 the site appears to have been occupied by one house in the occupation of a Mrs Killner. She was succeeded by John Newman and Anthony Bambridge; then in 1740



by a Mr. Morse who seems to have replaced the single house with 2 smaller ones. He was followed in 1761 by William Price snr. who was rated for a house, timberyard and land. Price was the last occupant of the site before George Colman appears in an undated rate book which is probably c.1766.

George Colman the Elder [1732-1794] was born in Florence where his father, Francis, was the British Envoy. He was educated at Westminster School and Oxford University and by 1760 had turned his attention to a theatrical career as a playwright and later as a theatre manager. In 1765 he collaborated with his friend David Garrick in writing **The Clandestine Marriage**; it was Garrick who, a year later, reported to Colman (then in Paris) on the progress being made on his new house at Richmond:

'Hampton. June 30 1766...Saunderson [Master Carpenter of Drury Lane Theatre] tells me that they have laid the timbers for the first floor of your house at Richmond. It rises most magnificently to the Ferry passengers; you will be surprised to find yourself master of a chateau at your return. Don't lose the autumn for planting trees to screen you from the timber yard...

Most affectionately yours D. Garrick'

A more unkind comment appears in a letter from Sir William Chambers to Joshua Reynolds; he says the builders lost £500 on the construction having promised to do it for £1000. He added that he believed it to be the worst built house in Richmond!

Colman was attracted to Richmond for several reasons and had lived in The Vineyard for at least 3 years prior to moving to his new house. His son, George Colman the Younger, was to recall in **Random Records** (1830) that in 1771 when his mother died and his father brought him to his riverside house:

'In those days Richmond was to London more like what Tusculum was to Rome, for it boasted in itself and its vicinities the villas of various celebrated and and classical men, mingled with those of the grandees. ...at my father's table...I sat down with Johnson, Foote, Gibbon, Edmund Burke...Garrick, Topham Beauclerk, Sir Joshua Reynolds and many others – Richmond was not only my playful scene of action during infancy and childhood, but my headquarters afterwards.'

Another attraction was the river – he remembered his father's pleasure in it:

'There was a horse-ferry across the Thames, and the boat in motion, wafting over passengers, carriages and cattle was a particularly picturesque object when viewed from his grounds; this was at last superceded by a bridge; and if any friend condoled with him on the loss of the ferry-boat he was sure to say "Sir, you could not put a higgler's cart into it, that it did not become beautiful.'"

The third attraction was the theatre – the Theatre Royal had been opened on Richmond green in 1765 by Garrick's friend James Love. By July 1766 Garrick could report to Colman in Paris that **The Clandestine Marriage** had been played twice at Richmond to great houses. Five years later Love was to offer Colman 'The Freedom of Richmond Theatre, and honour me with your patronage and protection.' Colman was happy to accept the offer.

George Colman the elder's mother was the sister of Anne Pulteney, Countess of Bath. The Earl and Countess supported Colman financially and on the Countess's death in September 1758 he received a bequest of £6000. Six years later, in 1764, the Earl died and the **St. James's Chronicle** reported 'By the death of Lord Bath, an annuity of nine hundred guineas per annum devolved to George Colman.' This was undoubtedly the source of the funds that enabled Colman to build and furnish his 'chateau' and to entertain his eminent friends. In acknowledgement of this he called his new Richmond house 'Bath House'.

In 1777 a new Act of Parliament authorised the City of London – who managed the towpath up to Staines – to build a new towpath for horses between Water Lane and Kew which was to be extended to Richmond Bridge and then to Ham. This was not popular and in July 1780, Colman engaged 'a gang of coalheavers, watermen etc. armed with axes and saws' to attack the City's labourers. City marshals and soldiers had to intervene to quell the trouble and Colman brought a suit in the King's Bench for injury done to his premises, but lost the case. Horace Walpole – a friend of Colman's and living at Strawberry Hill – wrote to William Mason on 15th July 1780 giving the following account of the events:

'You must know an embankment is making at Richmond for drawing barges, for the benefit of the city's trade. It encroaches on the garden of Colman, manager of the little theatre in the Haymarket. He cut away the piles; the city went to law with him and the town of Richmond, and cast them [defeated them in the lawsuit], and renewed the invasion. On Monday evening Colman hired an *Association*, who stormed and the new works, and knocked down two persons who opposed them, and half-killed one. A committee of the city arrived on Thursday in their barge, and...seized twenty of rioters and now hold them imprisoned on board their floating King's Bench, under a guard of the military, who are applied to all sauces [sic].'

Three days later Walpole wrote to the Countess of Upper Ossory giving an up-dated version of the events:

‘The only novelty I know, is, that we have had a riot of our own at Richmond, where an embankment for barge horses being carried before Mr Colman, the manger’s, garden by the City, he, feeling himself, like Agamemnon, a king of kings, behaved with equal hauteur, and levied a mob to destroy the works, which they did with hatchets last week in open daylight. The City, three days after, sent a naval force, consisting of one barge with a committee on board, who seized thirteen of the rioters, and sent them to London, where they were bailed – but the barge remains *encamped* near the bridge, according to the precedent in London’ [soldiers remained encamped in Hyde Park and St James’s after the Gordon Riots].

George Colman the Elder died in Paddington on 14th August 1794. Bath house then came into the possession of Drummond Smith who greatly enlarged it. Drummond Smith was the 3rd son of John Smith, a London merchant and his wife Mary. Drummond’s eldest brother was Joshua Smith, M.P., of Stoke Park, Wiltshire and his second brother was John Smith who assumed the name of Burgess in 1790, 3 years before being created a baronet. Drummond Smith himself was created a baronet on 11th June 1804. His first wife, Mary, was the eldest daughter of Sir Ellis Cunliffe. He remarried in 1805, his second wife being the widow of Sir Francis Sykes. Drummond Smith died on 22nd January 1816 and his widow survived until 1835. Bath House seems to have changed hands between the two dates as by 1820 it was owned by Samuel Paynter who was succeeded by William Paynter, who gave the house a new name – ‘Camborne House’. It was during his ownership that the house was let to Helene Louisa Elizabeth, Duchess of Orleans who died there in May 1858 aged 44. [She was the daughter-in-law of Louis Philippe, King of the French and widow of his eldest son, Ferdinand, Duc d’Orleans, who died in 1842]. By 1868 the house had become the residence of Edward Kilburn, then from 1873 to 1879 it was the home of Eleanor, Dowager Duchess of Northumberland. Eleanor was the daughter of Richard Grosvenor, 2nd Marquess of Westminster and his wife Elizabeth Leveson-Gower, daughter of the 1st Duke of Sutherland. Eleanor married Algernon Percy, 6th Duke of Northumberland at St. George’s Church, Hanover Square on 25th August 1842 – 5 years before he succeeded to the dukedom. A year after her marriage Robert Peel described her as ‘homely looking enough and very short.’ She died, aged 90, in 1911 having outlived her husband by 46 years.

Having stood empty for a number of years, Northumberland House – as it became known – was acquired by the Richmond Club in 1885. The club, founded by Sir Richard Burdett, had opened at Gothic House in Petersham Road on 1st December 1880 following a meeting at the Greyhound Hotel in George Street. At first the name of the club was changed to The Northumberland House Club, but it soon reverted to its former title. The club remained at Northumberland House until shortly before its demolition in 1967 when it closed down. The Richmond Club was a ‘Gentleman’s Club’ and in its early years enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Teck who was its president and Sir John Whittaker Ellis who was, for a time, its Vice-President. It advertised itself as ‘social and strictly non-political.’

Between 1967 and 1981 the site was the subject of a number of planning application which at one time included an eight-storey block of flats, offices and space for club. Finally, in

1981, building work started on a new development on the site – 12 luxury riverside houses and 8000 square feet for offices to be called Northumberland Place and finished in 1983.

Further reading

- Cashmore, T.H.R. **The Orleans family in Twickenham 1800-1932.** Borough of Twickenham Local History Society Paper no. 49 (1982)
- Cloake, John **Richmond past: a visual history of Richmond, Kew, Petersham and Ham** (1991)
- Local History Notes: Horace Walpole (1717-1797) and Strawberry Hill**
- Local History Notes: Richmond's Theatres**
- Local History Notes: Garrick's villa and Temple to Shakespeare**
- Local History Notes: Residences of the French Royal Family of Orleans**
- Peake, Richard Brinsley **Memoirs of the Colman family** (1841)
- Walpole, Horace **Works** – there are a number of editions of his works and letters in the Local Studies Library. The most detailed and complete edition of his *Letters* is the Yale Edition of **Horace Walpole's Correspondence** edited by W.S. Lewis. This began publication in 1937 and was finally in 1983 and runs to 48 volumes