

Garrick's Villa and Temple to Shakespeare



David Garrick (1717-1779), actor, dramatist and theatre manager, was one of the greatest actors to appear on the English stage and the first to gain a position in society. He was born at the Angel Inn, Hereford and educated at Lichfield where he was, for a short time, the pupil of Samuel Johnson with whom he made the journey to London. After a brief excursion into the wine trade he turned to the stage having already had some success as an amateur actor. His professional career began when he appeared with the Goodman's Fields company at Ipswich in 1741, and he achieved his first public acclaim with a performance of Richard III at the same theatre in October.

By 1747 he had attained sufficient affluence to acquire the Drury Lane Theatre in partnership with James Lacy. Two years later he married Eva Marie Violetti having enjoyed a stormy relationship with Peg Woffington during the previous decade. The next ten years saw him stage twenty-four of Shakespeare's. He did much to restore Shakespeare's popularity, but also encouraged the custom of rewriting and rearranging the texts. In 1769 Garrick organized the Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Between 1741 and his retirement in 1776 Garrick wrote twenty original plays - the best known being **The Clandestine Marriage**, the result of a collaboration with George Colman. The Drury Lane Theatre was sold for £35,000 to Richard Brinsley Sheridan and his partners in 1776; three years later Garrick died at his town house, 5 Adelphi Terrace on 20th January 1779 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Horace Walpole noted in a letter to Sir Horace Mann on Friday 29th January -

'Garrick is dead; not a public loss, for he has quitted the stage. He is to be buried on Monday in great ceremony at Westminster Abbey.'

Although no pictorial record exists to show us what Garrick's Villa looked like before the famous actor came to live there in 1754, it is possible, from existing records, to trace the house and its ownership back to the middle of the 17th century. Like the majority of houses

in Hampton it was held, apart from the Commonwealth period, by copyhold by the Lord or Lady of the Manor of Hampton Court - in other words, the reigning monarch.

Part of what is now known as Garrick's Lawn was acquired in the 1640s by Richard Caswell – a wealthy London grocer - and was inherited by his son, Richard Caswell the younger. The site of the houses now forming Hogarth Way was additional land acquired by Richard Caswell from Edmund Blackwell. Richard Caswell the younger died in 1669 and the estate passed to his heir, Captain John Caswell, a fervent Royalist who died at Hampton in 1682 having outlived the Commonwealth. Hampton House (as Garrick's Villa was formerly called) then passed to Captain Caswell's sister Katherine, the wife of Nathaniel Lacey - grocer, spice importer and a benefactor of Hampton Grammar School. Nathaniel died in 1714 and, on the death of Katherine some two years later, the house passed to her nephew, Humphrey Primatt. At this time the total estate included the house and surrounding garden, the plot leased to Richard Caswell in 1662, the 4.50 rods of river frontage, four cottages, a walled-in orchard between the present Church Street and High Street and numerous pieces of land in different parts of Hampton. Humphrey Primatt's son, Nathaniel, who inherited the estate in 1729, acquired two more plots of land in 1743 and 1749 and was thus be able to extent his river frontage almost to it present-day proportions. Nathaniel died in 1751 and left the estate to his son, Lacey, who let the house to Lady Furnese (fourth wife of Sir Robert Furnese, Bart.). She left the house towards the end of 1753 and was succeeded as tenant by David Garrick, who came to Hampton in January 1754. The rent for the house, gardens, drying house and stable yard was £60 per annum.

Garrick was evidently very pleased with the house, for he persuaded Lacey Primatt to dispose of the copyhold to him in the following October and at once set about improving the house and extending the estate. By the summer of 1755 the house was full of workmen and Garrick wrote to his brother Peter – ‘We are here at present over head and Ears in dirt and Mortar’. It was during Garrick's time that Robert Adam's façade, portico and office extensions were added. An orangery was built and a tunnel constructed under the Kingston - Staines road to give access to the riverside lawn. This was no simple tunnel, but a Grotto Arch which had, at the west end, a bath-house with 3 rooms. This had been made from the conversion of a cottage on the riverside and was supplied with fresh water from a spring in Hall's Platt, the land on the south-west side of Uxbridge Road near its junction with Broad Lane.

Mrs Delany declared in 1770:

‘The house is singular, and seems to owe its prettiness and elegance to her [Mrs Garrick] good taste. It has the air of belonging to a genius.’

In 1755 Garrick resolved to build a temple on the riverside lawn. Strangely this event is not recorded in his own letters and the name of the architect who designed the small octagonal brick building with its elegant portico is unknown. Both Robert Adam and 'Capability' Brown have been suggested as likely designers. For contemporary mentions one must turn to the prolific Horace Walpole who became a close friend of the Garricks and often visited them. On 4th August 1755 he wrote to Richard Bentley –

'I have contracted a sort of intimacy with Garrick, who is my neighbour. He affects to study my taste; I lay it all upon you - he admires you. He is building a graceful temple to Shakespeare: I offered him this motto: "*Quod spiro et placeo, si placeo tuum est.*"

Just over one year later he reported to George Montagu (14th October 1756)

'John [presumably John Cowie "my old gardener" to whom Walpole left an annuity of £20 and who died in 1795] and I are just going to Garrick's with a grove of cypresses in our hands, like Kentish men at the conquest. He has built a temple to his master Shakespear, and I am going to adorn the outside, since his modesty would not let me decorate it within, as I proposed, with these mottos.'

"Quod spiro et placeo, si placea, tuum est".

That I spirit have and nature,
That sense breaths in ev'ry feature
That I please, if please I do,
Shakespear, all I owe to you.'

One of the best views of the Temple can be seen in the painting by Johann Zoffany. Entitled **Mr and Mrs Garrick by the Shakespeare Temple at Hampton**, it and its companion **A View in Hampton Gardens with Mr and Mrs Garrick taking tea** were painted in 1762 by Zoffany and hung in the dining-parlour of the Garrick's Adelphi town house. The Temple was a small octagonal brick building with a dome and an Ionic pillared portico. In the same year, Zoffany painted **A View of Hampton House and Garden with Garrick writing** which was also in the same room.

Mrs J. Henrietta Pye in **A short view of the principal seats and gardens in and about Twickenham**, 1767 wrote:

'The garden [of Garrick's Villa] is laid out in the modern taste, with a passage... cut under the road, to a lawn, where, close by the water-side, stands the temple of Shakespear. This is a brick building, in the form of a dome, with a handsome porch, supported by four pillars. Opposite to the entrance, in a large niche, stands a statue of the poet as large as the life at his desk, in an attitude of thought.'

The statue of Shakespeare referred to is the one which Garrick, in 1756, commissioned Louis Francois Roubiliac (1704/5-1762) to sculpt. It stood in the niche opposite the door of the temple and cost 300 guineas or £315. Roubiliac, the most accomplished sculptor to work here, had been born in Lyons, the son of a Huguenot merchant and came to England in 1735. His first commission was for a statue of Handel for Vauxhall Gardens and this was later followed by the superb monument to John, 2nd Duke of Argyll, in Westminster Abbey. Garrick's statue of Shakespeare was based on the Chandos portrait while the actor himself is reputed to have modelled the pose. On Garrick's death the statue was bequeathed to his wife for her lifetime and then to the British Museum where it stands today in the King's Library.

On completing the Shakespeare statue, Roubiliac turned his skills to its owner and made the gilt bronze now in the Garrick Club. The Roubiliac statue in the niche was joined by other Shakespeare relics which Garrick collected over the years. One of these objects was

a chair made from wood from a mulberry tree which grew at New Place, Stratford and was reportedly painted by Shakespeare. The tree was cut down in 1756 and Garrick purchased some of the wood. The chair can just be seen in the portrait of the Garricks started by William Hogarth in 1752, but which remained unfinished when Hogarth died in 1764. But the temple was never turned into a 'museum' for its main use was as a place to dine, sup and entertain his friends - activities immortalised by Zoffany. The temple was reached via the grotto tunnel (still in existence but not leading to the public part of the lawn) which Garrick had constructed under the busy Kingston-Staines Turnpike road.

Garrick was so pleased with Robert Adam's work at the Adelphi theatre that, in 1774, he asked him to design a classical façade for the house. The work was finished in August of that year and Garrick planned 'a splendid entertainment or Fete Champetre at his gardens at Hampton' in order to celebrate the Garricks' 25th wedding anniversary which had occurred in May. The **London Chronicle** reported the event thus –

'Last night Mr Garrick gave a splendid entertainment or Fete Champetre at his gardens at Hampton. Signior Torre conducted a most brilliant fire-work; an elegant concert of music was performed; and the company, which consisted of a great number of Nobility and Gentry, expressed the utmost satisfaction on the occasion. The temple of Shakespeare, and gardens, were illuminated with 6000 lamps, and the forge of Vulcan made a splendid appearance.'

Garrick always liked the idea of celebrating May Day – and at Hampton he sat in Shakespeare's Temple and, as each child came up, he would ask its name and then gave each a piece of plum cake and a shilling.

During the twenty-two years following his arrival in Hampton, Garrick bought up nearby properties as they became available. Apart from various small plots of land in the western part of the parish, his main acquisitions were the house in Church Street (now called Orme House); the inn known as the Six Bells, later renamed the White Hart; three aits other than the one now known as Garrick's Ait and, shortly before his death, the riverside house adjoining the eastern end of his Temple's Lawn. This house, formerly known as The Cedars and now known as Garrick's House, was purchased for his nephew, David Garrick.

Among the residents of Hampton who were friends of Garrick and his wife was Edward Lovibond, an insignificant poet though well-known in his own day. His only published work **Poems on Several Occasions** included **The Mulberry Tree**, a long rambling poem with painfully forced rhymes describing how Garrick and Dr. Johnson visited Stratford-upon-Avon and were greatly impressed by the famous mulberry tree and how Garrick eventually climbed to the top of the tree. After Lovibond's death his house was sold to Thomas King, the actor who frequently appeared under Garrick's management and who was to become the mainstay of Drury Lane after Garrick's death. King's associations with Hampton ended in 1787 when he lost all his savings as a result of one night's gambling and had to sell the house.

Another of Garrick's friends at Hampton was John Beard, the great tenor for whom Handel composed parts in his oratorios. Beard came to Hampton in about 1768 when deafness was ending his singing career and lived in the house later known as Rose Hill (now Hampton Library). He succeeded Rich, the father of his second wife, as patentee of Covent

Garden at the time when Garrick was actor-manager at Drury Lane. The Garricks were also on very friendly terms with their neighbour at The Cedars - Elizabeth Spencer, Countess of Pembroke. The Countess, who was said to be one of the outstanding beauties of her day, took part in the Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford in 1769 and appeared at the fancy dress ball as one of the witches from **Macbeth**.

According to Dr. Johnson, the death of Garrick in 1779 'eclipsed the gaiety of nations.' It also eclipsed the gaiety of Hampton House which, together with his house at the Adelphi and the sum of £6,000, was left to his widow, Eva Marie Garrick. She apparently suffered from a delusion that she had too little on which to live. As a result she became a near-recluse and the condition of Hampton House inevitably suffered. One of her servants, James Yates, described his experiences as follows:

'Hampton House may have been all free and liberal when anything special was going on, but it was 'sprats and cabbages' at other times. One might pick up a bit now and then, but only from those who, coming to stay, wanted to get away as sharp as possible after the first dinner. The place was as damp as a water-rat, and we often had to paper up the broken windows. I once slept in one of the attics that had a chunk of hay pushed through a hole in the roof to keep out part of what was going on outside. I complained of cold and the old lady gave me a pair of her own knitted drawers to wear. They were, however, too much one way and too little the other.'

Mrs Garrick died in 1822 aged 97. She had little to leave as the house at Hampton and the Adelphi were only hers for life. The recipients of her principal bequests were her husband's nephews, Christopher and Nathan Egerton Garrick. She also remembered her friend Hannah More and left £300 to the poor of Hampton for the purchase of coal. After Mrs Garrick's death the Hampton House estate was bought by her solicitor, Thomas Carr, whose wife had been a friend of hers for many years. Carr set about repairing the neglected house and it was in good order again by the time of his death in 1838. It was Carr who changed the name from 'Hampton House' to 'Garrick's Villa'.

The house was sold in 1839 to Silvanus Phillips, a London merchant, for £3,600. He died in 1861 leaving it to his three sons, two of whom surrendered their interest in 1863 to the third, Silvanus Phillips the younger who added the western wing in 1865. In 1867 Phillips let the house to Edward Grove who bought it three years later. After Groves's death in 1875, his widow continued to live there until 1902. In 1885 his children gave the east window of St. Mary's Church, Hampton, in his memory. Mrs Grove allowed the use of her grounds for school treats, flower shows, athletic competitions and for the Golden and Diamond Jubilees of 1887 and 1897. She also revived Garrick's custom of distributing money and cake to the poor children of Hampton from a chair in the Shakespeare Temple.

Mrs Grove was eventually driven away from Hampton by the arrival of the trams. As it was necessary to widen the road in front of Garrick's Villa to make way for the tracks, the house was bought by the London United Tramway Company in 1902 for demolition. Fortunately for future generations, the general manager of the company, Mr (later Sir) J. Clifton Robinson, decided to live there himself. The wall on the Hampton Court side had to be set back to where it is today, but the only other alteration made by the company was the provision of a siding for Mr Clifton Robinson's private tram so that he could be driven directly to and from work. The Clifton Robinsons' tenure of Garrick's Villa was marked by

great social activity. Flower shows and fetes were held there as well as enormous garden parties for company employees - two thousand being brought in relays by seventeen special tramcars stopping outside the door.

The Clifton Robinsons left Hampton in May 1910 and the house was put up for auction. Sir Charles Wyndham made a valiant attempt to persuade the Government to buy the house and convert it into a Garrick Museum. The Hampton Urban district Council tried to raise the money to buy it, but failed. In the event, the bidding failed to reach the reserve price of £9,600.

Garrick's Villa was commandeered by the Army from 1914 until 1917 when Mrs Hutchinson (who had bought the house in 1913) let it on a repairing lease to James Wooller who, in fact, neglected to repair the property. In March 1922, the Hampton Council approved Mrs Hutchinson's proposals to convert the house into 8 flats. In 1923, she sold Garrick's Shakespeare Temple and lawn to Mr Paul Glaize who built a house adjoining the Temple. The incongruity of this house was such that it was purchased in 1932 by Hampton Council so that it could demolish it and restore the lawn to public use.

In the 1960s, the owner of Garrick's Villa, Dr Laura McConnell, submitted plans for the development of the land which had been granted to Richard Caswell in 1662. After many objections had been met, approval was given and a group of houses was erected forming a new road called Hogarth Way. At the same time Messrs. Pennard purchased Garrick's Villa and re-converted it into flats. They also restored the Orangery (previously converted into a house) and added wings in keeping with the rest of the building - now also flats.

By 1977 the building was badly affected by dry and wet rot and the brickwork had suffered from settlement caused by the amount of traffic passing by. Thieves had also stripped the lead from the roof. Richmond upon Thames Council commissioned the architectural firm of Donald Insall to restore the Temple at a cost of £37, 000. This was undertaken by the architect James Lindus Forge and the building firm of Gostling.

The Temple was reported by the local paper – the **Richmond and Twickenham Times** – to be in a state of 'dangerous' disrepair in 1994. There was graffiti on the walls and one of the wooden columns supporting the walls had been hacked away. The following year a campaign was started to renovate the temple and use it for chamber music concerts and other small productions.

In 1998-9 £70,000 of heritage lottery money was obtained to restore the temple and the surrounding landscape with extra funding from local groups. The site is now managed by Garrick's Temple Partnership – a consortium consisting of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames; The Temple Trust; the Thames Landscape Strategy and Hampton Riverside Trust. A replica of the statue of Shakespeare has been supplied by the British Museum. It is possible to visit the site on Sunday afternoons from April to September.

Further Reading

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For more information on Richmond's Theatres see **Local History Notes: Richmond's Theatres** and **Local History Notes: Performances at Richmond's Theatre Royale.**

More information on David Garrick and his Villa and other historic figures associated with the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames is available from the Local Studies Collection.