

‘A Child of Strawberry’: Thomas Barrett and Lee Priory, Kent

by MATTHEW M. REEVE and PETER N. LINDFIELD



20. *View of the south façade of Lee Priory, Kent*, by John Dixon. 1785. Canvas, 63.5 by 98.4 cm. (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven).

WRITING IN JULY 1790, Horace Walpole famously recounted his impressions of Lee Priory in Kent (Fig.20), newly rebuilt for Thomas Barrett (1744–1803) by James Wyatt (1746–1813): ‘I found Mr Barrett’s house complete, and the most perfect thing ever formed! Such taste, every inch is so well furnished [. . .] I think if Strawberry [Hill] were not its parent, I would be jealous’.¹ He regularly praised Lee in his letters and in print, elsewhere calling it his ‘Gothic child’.² Walpole unapologetically positioned Lee as the offspring of Strawberry Hill (and thus of himself), a child of his famous Gothic villa in Twickenham.³ Flippant though Walpole’s perspective might seem, it reminds us that our understanding of the Gothic Revival via a positivist teleology of style, framed by Charles Locke Eastlake and others

in the nineteenth century, had little meaning for Georgian audiences. From Walpole’s perspective, and to a large extent from Barrett’s, Lee Priory was understood to represent a second generation of Gothic houses following an original ‘family’ of Gothic buildings built by Walpole’s friends and designers between c.1740 and c.1775, including parts of The Vyne in Hampshire, Dickie Bateman’s villa at Old Windsor and Donnington Grove in Berkshire.⁴ Structuring this ‘familial’ relationship with the ‘children’ of Strawberry Hill, Walpole hung images or ‘portraits’ of these Gothic houses in his home, including a ‘View of Lee, the seat of T. Barrett, esq; in Kent, by Pether; in an ebony frame’.⁵ Recent scholarship has shown that this ‘family’ of patrons and designers was bound by common aesthetic and

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¹ H. Walpole: *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis et al., London 1937–83, XXXV, p.635; *ibid.*, XI, pp.98 and 162.

² 27th August 1789: ‘I had promised to Mr Barrett to make a visit to my Gothic child his house’; *ibid.*, II, p.59.

³ The most sustained analysis is M. Snodin, ed.: *Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill*, London 2009.

⁴ See M. McCarthy: *The Origins of the Gothic Revival*, London 1987, pp.92–102 and 171–79; and M.M. Reeve: ‘Dickie Bateman and the Gothicization of Old Windsor: Gothic Architecture and Sexuality in the Circle of Horace Walpole’, *Architectural History* 56 (2013), pp.99–133.

⁵ H. Walpole: *Description of the Villa of Mr Horace Walpole*, London 1784, p.93. Pether’s picture hung in the Breakfast Room at Strawberry Hill. Of Donnington Grove, designed by John Chute for James Pettit Andrews, Walpole had four elevations hung in the Beauclerc Closet (*ibid.*, p.79), and a print thereof in his bedchamber, in

addition to a painting by J.H. Müntz of Chute’s house, The Vyne, which he partially Gothicised (*ibid.*, p.41). Pether’s painting, consequently, may be seen as a postscript to this familial tradition of connection and display.

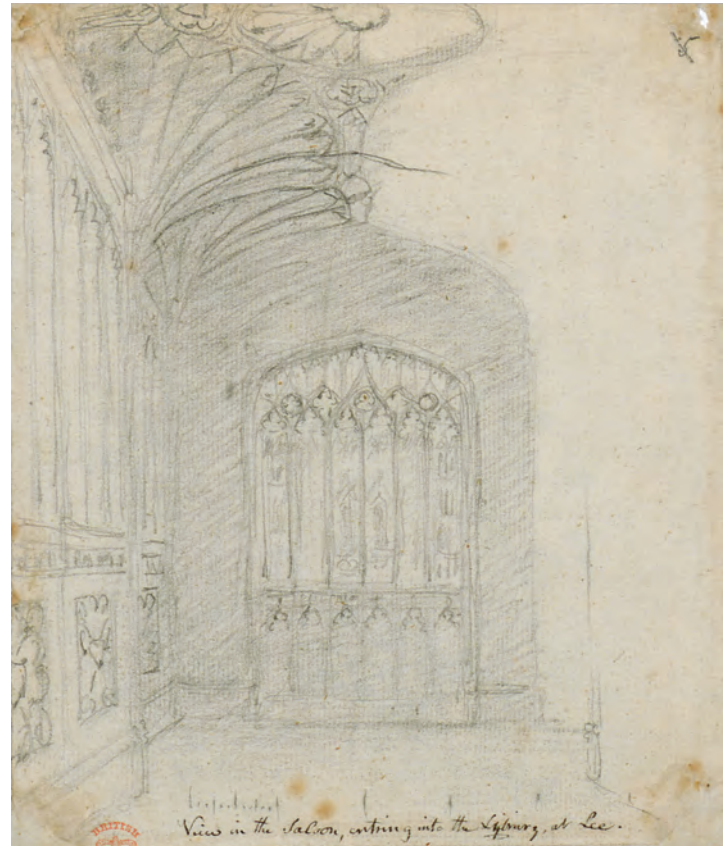
⁶ Reeve, *op. cit.* (note 4); *idem*: ‘Gothic Architecture, Sexuality and License at Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill’, *Art Bulletin* 95/3 (2013), pp.411–39. The literary context of Walpole’s circle has been explored by G. Haggerty: *Horace Walpole’s Letters: Masculinity and Friendship in the Eighteenth Century*, Lanham MA 2011. Queer Family Romance was initially explored in W. Davis: ‘Queer Family Romance in Collecting Visual Culture’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17/2 (2011), pp.309–29, which frames William Beckford’s patronage at Fonthill in terms of Queer Family Romance.

⁷ G.P. Bevan: *Handbook of the County of Kent*, London 1876, p.137. Letters relevant to the demolition of the house are now at Kew, The National Archives, PRO HLG 103/39 and 103/100, and London, Victoria and Albert Museum, MA/1/L785. Lee has been given cursory treatment in monographs on the Gothic Revival, including McCarthy, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.2 and 146; T. Davis: *The Gothick Taste*, Newton Abbot 1974, p.99; and M. Aldrich: *Gothic Revival*, London 1994, pp.80–82 and 86.

sexual (homoerotic) subjectivities. Art within Walpole's circle, from the exchange of objects and images and their display, to the design and decoration of houses which often employed the same designers and was in their privileged Gothic (or 'court') style, formed what has been called a 'Queer Family Romance' within the patronage of Walpole's clique.⁶

That Walpole's positioning of Lee as a product of his own social and aesthetic endeavour has not resulted in a more prominent role for Lee in the history of architecture and the decorative arts is due to its demolition from 1st September 1953, and, before that, to its substantial remodelling and expansion by Sir George Gilbert Scott in the 1860s, after which the house was considered to be 'by Scott'.⁷ Despite Scott's interventions, which saw the white stucco exterior encased in red brick, many of the interiors remained, offering a rare and largely original example of a significant Gothic country house of the later eighteenth century. It has been assumed that the 'Strawberry Room', now on permanent display at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and three associated pieces of furniture are the only remaining evidence of Lee's eighteenth-century interiors. Another room, however, the Library's antechamber, referred to by John Carter as the Saloon (Fig. 21), was also saved in 1953.⁸ Offering a reassessment of Lee Priory, this article brings to light a cache of new evidence for the house, including previously unpublished views of its interiors, and it explores the roles of James Wyatt and the antiquarian and draughtsman John Carter in its design and decoration.

In what remains the fullest monographic treatment of Lee Priory, Thomas Barrett was called 'one of the less notable members of Walpole's circle', a view that now requires some nuancing if not outright revision.⁹ Barrett travelled to France and Italy on a Grand Tour (probably from June 1771 to before 2nd April 1773 when he was elected MP for Dover), where he appears to have met and travelled with George Chamberlayne, Lord Lincoln, the Revd Norton Nicholls and the Scottish architect Lord Findlater, who had been exiled for homosexual offences.¹⁰ Barrett had been in control of Lee Priory and his father's famous art collection since the death of Thomas Barrett Sr in 1757, when he was thirteen years of age, but appears not to have advanced any building works until the late 1770s. Although Walpole had competed against the elder Barrett at auction and later acquired some of his collection for Strawberry Hill, Walpole's acquaintance with Thomas Barrett Jr is less clear. In all likelihood, the correspondence noted by Anthony Dale requesting a letter of introduction to Horace Walpole in 1777 refers to the young Thomas Barrett.¹¹ He and Walpole were certainly well acquainted when Walpole made his first visit to Lee in 1780.¹² Almost thirty years junior to Walpole (1717–97), Barrett (b. 1744)



21. View in the Saloon, entering into the Library, at Lee, by John Carter. 1791. Pencil on laid paper. (British Library, London).

had 'a most sincere friendship' with him, which it seems focused to a great extent on a shared taste for the Gothic. Walpole functioned as a mentor to the younger Barrett, frequently reviewing his Gothic designs and commenting upon them, and very likely introducing him to the artists who worked on his home. These notably included James Wyatt and John Carter, both of whom were well-known exponents of Gothic architecture and antiquarian research, and had been involved at Strawberry Hill.¹³ Extracts from Carter's recently republished *Occurrences* (1817) articulate one of the overlapping coteries that gave birth to the Gothic Revival, by providing a pencil sketch portrait of Barrett as a gentleman scholar and patron (Fig. 29) in a group of portraits of Horace Walpole, Richard Gough (Director of the Society of Antiquaries of London), Richard Bull (who commissioned Carter to draw the Strawberry Hill interiors), Thomas Kirkgate (Horace Walpole's printer at the Strawberry Hill Press) and others within Walpole's circle.¹⁴ Barrett died unmarried in 1803.

⁸ Victoria and Albert Museum, London, W.48–1953 (Strawberry Room) and W.49–W.51–1958 (furniture). The Library's antechamber was salvaged by Ian L. Phillips of Charlton Mackrell Court, Somerset, and at the time of writing is with Architectural Heritage Ltd, Taddington Manor, Gloucestershire. A note on this room is in preparation and will appear in a subsequent issue of this Magazine. For correspondence concerning the antechamber, see London, Victoria and Albert Museum, MA/1/L785, 31st July 1976. A door from this room was included in the exhibition *Gothick*, Brighton (Royal Pavilion Art Gallery) 1975, p.22, pl.14.

⁹ H. Honour: 'A House of the Gothic Revival', *Country Life* 163, no.4211 (30th May 1952), pp.1665–66.

¹⁰ A handful of letters between Chamberlayne and Barrett recount these experiences; see New Haven, Yale University, Lewis Walpole Library, MSS File 18. A letter 25th January 1772 is emblematic: 'James [James Bucknell Grunston (1747–1809)], you know favours himself one of the most lovely youths man or woman can set eyes on, and that posterity may not be deprived of the pleasure of looking on his charms, he has been sitting for his picture, in full dress with one hand leaning on his sword and the other playing

with Cobler [dog]. The painter, not so much satisfied with his beauty as he himself is, has taken a great deal of pains to flatter him, but in this I think he has not succeeded. Lord Findlater's John told him to hang it up in the bog house, for then, says he, whoever comes there if he is disappointed of his sh—g will be sure at least to spew'. The less racy correspondence was summarised in E.M. Symonds: 'An Eighteenth Century Convert', *The Month* (1901), February, p.139; March, p.247. On Findlater, see A.A. Tait: 'Lord Findlater, Architect', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 128 (1986), pp.737–41.

¹¹ A. Dale: *James Wyatt*, Oxford 1956, p.133.

¹² H. Walpole: 'Journals of Visits to Country Seats', *Walpole Society* 16 (1927–28), pp.76–77.

¹³ J.M. Robinson: *James Wyatt: Architect to George III*, London 2012, p.221; Dale, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp.132–33; and Snodin, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.53–54.

¹⁴ London, King's College, Leazes 7/4, II, fols.6r (Gough), 16r (Barrett), 17v (Bull), 22r (Walpole) and 22v (Kirkgate). See B. Nurse and J. Mordaunt Crook: 'John Carter, FSA (1748–1817): "The Ingenious, and Very Accurate Draughtsman"', *Antiquaries Journal* 91 (2011), pp.222–23.



22. North view of Lee, the seat of Thos. Barrett Esqr. near Canterbury. Taken 1785, attributed to John Carter. 1785. Pencil and watercolour on paper. (British Library, London).

Although Barrett's contributions to Lee are now largely lost, the house can be studied in a substantial dossier of photographs and antiquarian drawings and descriptions, much of which is presented here for the first time.¹⁵ The form of the house that Thomas acquired is unclear, but, like most of the buildings erected by members of Walpole's circle, Barrett's work was a comprehensive renovation of an existing structure (apparently seventeenth-century in date) rather than a new build. The first evidence of activity at Lee comes from August 1780, when, after a visit, Walpole commented on recent work to its grounds. It is described as 'a small house that is decent [. . .] He has some few good pictures, prints, and books, and indulges himself without extravagance'.¹⁶ Walpole's next significant commentary is from August 1785, in which he claims to have seen James Wyatt's plans (multiple times) and 'approve[d] them exceedingly'.¹⁷ This date has often been taken to indicate that works at Lee were just about to begin, although the evidence indicates that the building of the house was largely complete by this stage, thus pointing to the likelihood that Walpole's initial 1780 visit may well have been the catalyst.¹⁸ By September 1781 Barrett had engaged the services of James Wyatt, one of the leading London architects of the day, to renovate the house, as noted in a letter from George Chamberlayne; and in the same year he began corresponding with John Carter over paintings for his home.¹⁹ Unspecified works appear to have been in the planning, if not underway, by 1782, and a later source suggests that a foundation stone had been laid in July 1783.²⁰ A previously unpublished drawing now in the British Library (Fig. 22; not signed by Carter, but certainly by his hand) shows the tower and north façade complete.²¹ Its caption, 'Taken 1785', provides a probable *terminus ante quem* for the lion's share of Barrett's patronage at Lee. John Dixon's



23. Strawberry Room, formerly at Lee Priory, Kent, by James Wyatt. c.1785. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

View of the south façade of Lee Priory (Fig. 20), which also dates to 1785 and was exhibited at the Royal Academy that year (no. 412), confirms that the structure of Lee Priory was substantially complete at this time.

The evidence for Barrett's work after 1785 relates entirely to the decoration of his house and his art collection, suggesting that his attention was turned to the interiors after the completion of the structure.²² In all likelihood, the plans Walpole saw in 1785 were those for Barrett's 'Strawberry Room' (Fig. 23), a room made self-consciously in homage to Walpole's then-famous country villa. Walpole continued to advise Barrett on the decoration of Lee's interiors. Five years later, he saw and approved the plans for what would be Lee's centrepiece: the interior of Barrett's Gothic library. He writes on 25th July 1790 that 'I have seen over and again Mr Barrett's plans and approve them exceedingly [. . . the Library] is the most perfect thing I ever saw [. . .] I wish William of Wickam were alive to employ and reward Mr Wyatt – you would think the latter had designed the library for the former'.²³

Aside from Walpole's interpretation of Lee as 'A Child of Strawberry Hill', we have no evidence of the 'brief' that Barrett gave Wyatt for his initial designs of Lee Priory. Wyatt apparently prepared both Gothic and Neo-classical designs, but Barrett chose the former, even if some of the interiors had classical detailing.²⁴ The evidence, however, leaves no doubt that Barrett aimed to create a series of calculated allusions to

¹⁵ Aside from the other sources cited below, for the purposes of the present study the most significant sources have been the 1952 photographic survey (National Monuments Record 2451/14–31); the survey of the house's proportions (English Heritage MD94/06067–6101); and the 1918 and 1859 sale catalogues (National Monuments Record SC 00556 and 00582, respectively).

¹⁶ Walpole, *op. cit.* (note 1), XI, p. 265.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XII, p. 136, and XXXV, p. 635.

¹⁸ Robinson, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 335, suggests 1785. The obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 93/1 (1803), pp. 90–91, states 'about 1783 he began to alter and new-model his house at Lee in the Gothic style'.

¹⁹ In a letter to Thomas Barrett from George Chamberlayne of 11th September 1781, he notes: 'It will be very entertaining to hear how the exquisite taste of a Wyatt arranged your house'; Symonds, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 145. Wyatt apparently prepared

both Neo-classical and Gothic designs for Lee; see S.E. Bridges: *List of Pictures at the Seat of Thomas Brydges Barrett, Esq. at Lee Priory*, Lee Priory 1817, pp. 6–7. For Wyatt's fashionable status in late Georgian Britain and his work in the Gothic mode, see Robinson, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 218–25.

²⁰ Symonds, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 146, citing a letter of 23rd March 1782 from a document cited in note 10 above. Bridges, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 7.

²¹ London, British Library, Add MS 32366, fol. 40 (lower drawing).

²² Barrett's mother lived at Lee until her death in 1785. It is possible that building works progressed after her passing; Bridges, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 6.

²³ Walpole, *op. cit.* (note 1), XXXI, p. 342.

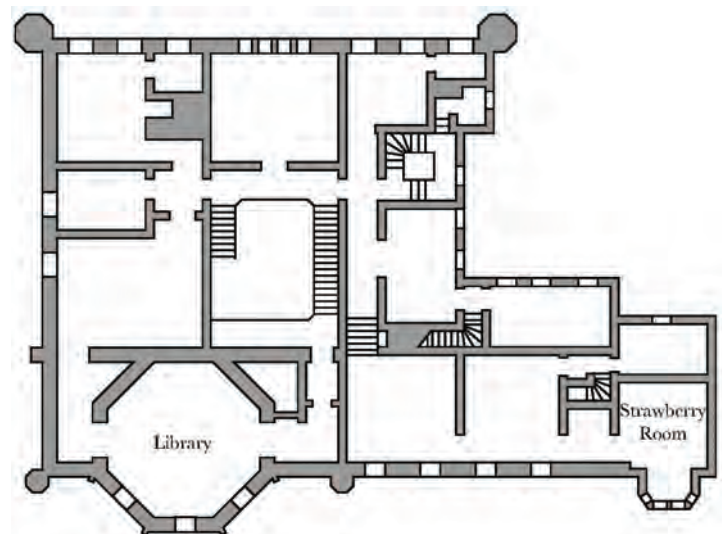
²⁴ Bridges, *op. cit.* (note 19), pp. 6–7. Some of Wyatt's presentation drawings are probably those in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 92.D.59. Another presentation drawing may be Wyatt's classicising ceiling for 'Mr Barrett's Dining Room';

Strawberry Hill at Lee. By the 1780s, Strawberry Hill had already established itself as an archetype of the home of a man with literary and antiquarian pretensions, and its influence can be charted in a number of buildings. Barrett's designs for Lee leave no doubt that he positioned it within this genealogy, since Barrett was a collector, antiquarian, author and, like Walpole at Strawberry Hill, ran a significant private printing press at his home.²⁵ Sir George Gilbert Scott's preparatory ground plan of the house, made c.1858, allows us to reconstruct and assess the house's *piano nobile* before its Victorian restoration (Fig.24). Lee's central staircase, accessing two levels of the house, is most probably derived from Strawberry Hill's own staircase, and related buildings such as Donnington Grove, Berkshire, as well as the central Gothic staircase at Sheffield Place (now Park), East Sussex, by Wyatt (c.1776–77).²⁶ Other aspects of the house may too find their origins within Walpole's circle. As is well known, Wyatt's designs for the spire that topped the Library at Lee (Fig.20) were based upon drawings of the monastery at Batalha, Portugal, a model that Wyatt later transformed for the crossing tower of his greatest Gothic building, William Beckford's Fonthill Abbey, Wiltshire (completed 1790).²⁷ What is perhaps less known is that these drawings of Batalha also originated (or at least circulated) within Walpole's milieu. Batalha was an important source for eighteenth-century English Gothic designs via the account by Thomas Pitt (1760) that was circulated within antiquarian circles and eventually copied.²⁸ Upon his return, Pitt became an adjunct to Walpole's 'Strawberry Committee', and in September 1763 Walpole praised him highly as 'one of the few that I reckon quite worthy of being at home at Strawberry'.²⁹ It is tempting to suggest that the forms of Batalha were debated within Walpole's circle and that they may have given a copy of the drawings to Wyatt. Wyatt certainly knew of Batalha by 1783 when he was working on the house of A.B. Conyngham, who had visited the monastery in Portugal.³⁰

But the most straightforward allusion to Strawberry Hill was Barrett's 'Strawberry Room', or 'Walpole Closet', a small space of 221 by 572 cm. at the eastern extremity of Lee's south façade (Fig.24). Concluding the southern façade's *enfilade*, this modest room presumably functioned as a private apartment or study. It was one of at least two 'Strawberry Rooms' built by members of Walpole's circle, including that at The Vyne for John Chute, which was a small, wood-panelled room on the ground floor in which Chute hung images of architecture as the cultural productions of Walpole's circle.³¹ Unlike this use of imagery as a product of shared endeavour at The Vyne, Barrett's apartment approaches the problem through stylistic appropriation. Barrett and Wyatt did not attempt to recreate one of Walpole's rooms at Lee; rather, Barrett pays homage to Walpole and his later, mature

mode of Strawberry Hill Gothic, exemplified by his villa's Gallery, or State Apartment. Underscoring this connection, there was only one painting in the Strawberry Room: the reproduction of John Giles Eccardt's 1754 portrait of Horace Walpole that Barrett commissioned in 1787 (it appears over the fireplace in Fig.25).³² The imagery of the room unmistakably locates Walpole's presence within the space, juxtaposing Walpole with the style that he popularised and embodied. These Walpolean forms and allusions affirm the relationship between pupil and mentor, or 'father' and 'son', and their respective architectural projections. They articulate not only Walpole's involvement at Lee, but also the alignment of Barrett's own home within a broader homosocial and/or homoerotic genealogy originating in Walpole's first-generation Gothic Revival architecture.

But while almost all the sources relevant to Strawberry Hill survive, Lee's 'Strawberry Room' is a largely undocumented space. Previously unpublished drawings of Lee's interior by John Carter, however, shed new light on its forms and functions. Included in Carter's 1791 portfolio, his drawing of the 'Walpole Closet' shows, among other details, the form of the original oriel window (replaced in Scott's renovations), which comprised four Decorated lancet windows possibly derived from the bar tracery in Westminster Abbey's radiating chapels (Fig.25).³³ This drawing also establishes the type and arrangement of furniture in the 'Strawberry Room' during Barrett's lifetime. Before the discovery of Carter's drawings, the house's 1834 sale catalogue was the most comprehensive record of Lee's interior fittings.³⁴ Carter's drawing confirms the presence and location of stools made with turned legs and stretchers that are of the type Walpole



24. Plan of the *piano nobile*, Lee Priory, Kent, based on drawing by Sir George Scott, c.1785. (RIBA Library, SKB287/1; © Peter N. Lindfield).

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 58.511, fol.65r.

²⁵ S. Clarke: *The Strawberry Hill Press & its Printing House: an Account and an Iconography*, London 2011.

²⁶ McCarthy, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp.92–96. For Sheffield Place, see Robinson, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.219–20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.220–21.

²⁸ J. Frew and C. Wallace: 'Thomas Pitt, Portugal and the Gothic Cult of Batalha', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 128 (1986), pp.582–85.

²⁹ Walpole, *op. cit.* (note 1), X, p.101.

³⁰ C. Wainwright: 'William Beckford and his Collection and the Influence of His Excursion to Alcobaa and Batalha in 1794', in A. Delaforce, ed.: *Portugal e o Reino Unido: A Aliança Revisitada*, Lisbon 1994, pp.98–101, esp. p.99.

³¹ M. Howard and E. Wilson: *The Vyne, Hampshire*, London 2002. The 'Strawberry

Parlour' is noted in the 1776 Inventory of The Vyne; Hampshire Record Office, 31M57/646, fol.12.

³² 'In the *Strawberry Closet*, which is a small room very elegantly fitted up in the Gothic taste, with a ceiling of rich tracery, is a portrait of LORD ORFORD, copied from Echard [sic] by Stuart, in 1787'; E.W. Brayley and J. Britton: *The Beauties of England and Wales, Or, Original Delineations, Topographical, Historical and Descriptive*, London 1808, VIII, p.1095. For the original portrait, see Snodin, *op. cit.* (note 3), cat. no.40 and fig.19.

³³ London, British Library, Add MS 29930, fol.6. Wyatt's designs for the oriel window are preserved in his folio of presentation drawings in London. Document 92.D.59 cited at note 24 above, fols.22–23. Scott's restorations also involved the inclusion of a second doorway on axis with the original door.

³⁴ W. Sharp: *Lee Priory, Kent: Catalogue of all the Superb Antique and Modern Furniture*, London 1834.



25. *View in the Walpole Closet at Lee*, by John Carter. 1791. Pencil on laid paper. (British Library, London).



26. Library bookcase from Lee Priory, by James Wyatt. c.1785–90. Painted oak, 254 by 217 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

collected in vast numbers for Strawberry Hill, and which correspond with the description of the room made by Edward Wedlake Brayley and John Britton in 1808: 'the chairs are ancient, of black ebony, curiously carved'.³⁵ The revealing difference between Carter's drawing and the 1808 description is that the chairs are actually stools, which are a particularly unusual variation upon the vocabulary of furniture in antiquarian interiors.³⁶ The stools are, nevertheless, part of an established category of antiquarian furniture referred to by Walpole as 'the true black blood' that he and his friends thought entirely appropriate for medievalising interiors, arising, in part, from their assumed connection with Cardinal Wolsey at Esher Place, Surrey, the Gothic Revival house created by William Kent for Henry Pelham.³⁷

But Walpole reserved his highest praise for what was manifestly the set piece of the house as a whole, Barrett's Gothic library. Writing to Mary Berry in October 1794, Walpole counters her criticism of the Library by noting that:

to me it is the most perfect thing I ever saw, and has the air it was intended to have, that of an abbot's library, supposing it could have been so exquisitely finished three hundred years ago: but I am sorry he will not coerce Mr Wyatt[t] to place the Mabeuse [Jan Gossaert, called Mabuse] over the chimney, which is the sole defect, as not distinguished enough for the principal feature of the room. My closet [the Strawberry Room] is as perfect in its way as the library, and it would be difficult to suspect that it had not been a remnant of the ancient convent only newly painted and gilt.³⁸

The room represents Wyatt's transformation of the original structure, a 'small house [. . .] without extravagance', into the place of a wealthy abbot who 'avoided ostentation, but did not chose austere gloomth'.³⁹

The library was an important architectural feature of the eighteenth-century Gothic Revival. It elided the forms of Gothic architecture with current antiquarian endeavour and traditions of scholarship originating in the monastery.⁴⁰ But unlike the oblong libraries with bookcases located along its lateral walls, as at Roger Newdigate's Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, and Walpole's Strawberry Hill, Barrett's library was a centrally planned octagonal structure with a dome and glazed louvre that distantly descended from a range of possible medieval prototypes, from monastic kitchens to chapterhouses (Fig.27). In Walpole's circle, the closest models must be Strawberry

³⁵ Brayley and Britton, *op. cit.* (note 32), p.1093.

³⁶ See C. Wainwright: 'Only the True Black Blood', *Furniture History* 21 (1985), pp.250–57, and *idem*: *The Romantic Interior: The British Collector at Home 1750–1850*, London 1989, pp.27 and 58–59.

³⁷ Walpole, *op. cit.* (note 1), X, p.77.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, pp.136–37.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, XI, p.265, and XII, p.137.

⁴⁰ M. McCarthy: 'The Gothic Revival Library', in *idem*: *Classical and Gothic: Studies in the History of Art*, Portland 2005, pp.37–48, and subsequently M. Aldridge: 'Creating an authentic style: John Soane's Gothic Library at Stowe', in *idem* and J. Hackforth-Jones, eds.: *Art and Authenticity*, Farnham 2012, pp.122–37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, XXI, p.306, and Reeve, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.105.

⁴² Brayley, *op. cit.* (note 32), p.1093. On colour and the kinaesthetics of Walpole's Gothic architecture, see M.M. Reeve: "'A Gothic Vatican of Greece and Rome': Horace Walpole, Strawberry Hill, and the Narratives of Gothic", in *idem*, ed.: *Tributes to Pierre du Prey: Architecture and the Classical Tradition, From Pliny to Posterity*, New York 2014, pp.185–209.

⁴³ British Museum, London, 1886, inv. no.1012.534.

⁴⁴ The Lee library bookcases, as at Strawberry Hill, must have been assembled in the room as they are larger than the doorways into the octagonal library. They were extracted by opening up the door heads in August 1953. Details are recorded in

Hill's Tribune that had 'all the air of a Catholic chapel – bar consecration' and Dickie Bateman's dining room at Old Windsor.⁴¹ Brayley's 1808 account of the interior records that the dome emitted light that was 'mellowed by passing through a medium of stained and semi-transparent glass', thus indicating that, like other experiments in Walpole's circle, the properties of coloured glass were exploited to endow the interior with a 'sacred gloom'.⁴²

Wyatt's library exploited the spatial possibilities of an octagonal structure by locating Gothic bookcases within niches on the diagonal walls, creating a continuous, uninterrupted spatial volume. Its specially designed Gothic bookcases – of which three now survive in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Fig. 26) – are subsumed within alternating niches around the room, suggesting a place of display as much as a place of contemplation. This is evident in another previously unpublished drawing by Carter of the library (Fig. 27). The chairs are also of the turned ebony 'true black blood' form, pushed back against the walls as was typical in Georgian interiors. They are of the same type collected by Walpole that he used to furnish the Holbein Chamber and Great North Bedchamber at Strawberry Hill, and upon which Carter is depicted sitting in a Gothic library in his self-portrait (c.1817; Fig. 28).⁴³ Like Walpole at Strawberry Hill and Bateman at Old Windsor, Barrett faced the hurdle of acquiring genuinely medieval furniture to complete Lee's interior. So the approach Walpole adopted at Strawberry Hill – to mix the supposedly ancient pieces (including 'the true black blood') with that made in imitation of the ancient – can be seen at Lee as well. The library bookcases are certainly Georgian, but of a less ambitious design compared with those Chute developed for Strawberry Hill based upon the doorway in the screen at Old St Paul's Cathedral, London.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, they adopt the extremely wrought and decorated aesthetic seen in Lee's exterior and interior architectural detailing; in particular the blind tracery and sharply moulded pendant crestings are akin to the Strawberry Room's Gothic decoration.

The design and furnishings of Barrett's library freely blended the scholarly and religious connotations of the Gothic. The north-west library niche held a quasi-sacral installation containing an altar ensemble. Extant letters record that between 1789 and 1791 Carter created a series of painted panels for the altar space, while he was also acquiring art for Barrett as it became available in London.⁴⁵ In 1789 he delivered four panels of St George, a

London, Victoria and Albert Museum, MA/1/L785, M/MB/HARO/1987/LW.

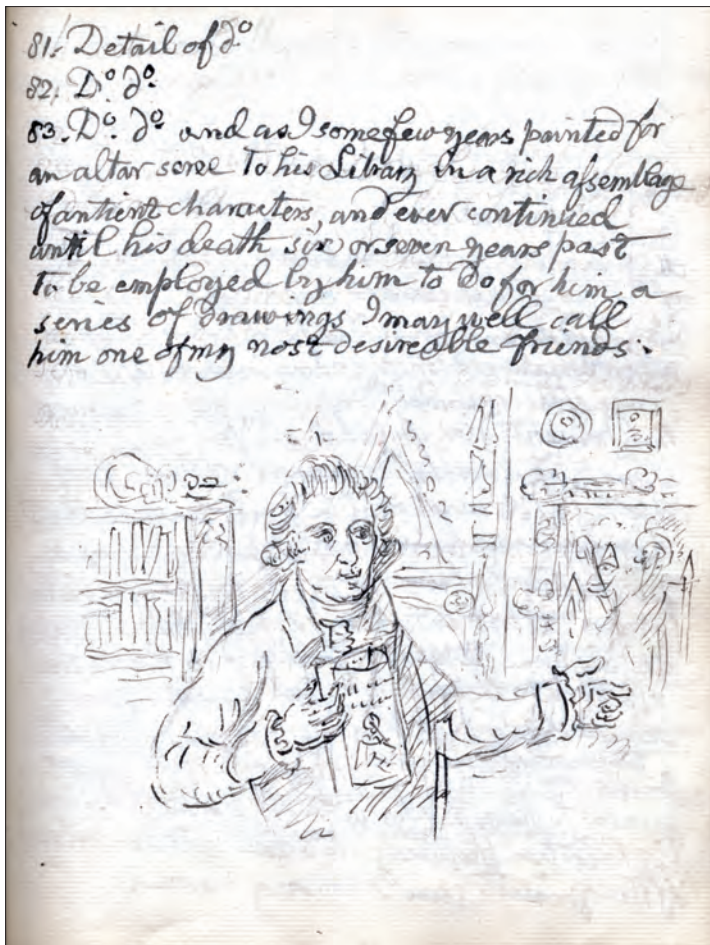
⁴⁵ The documentation for the paintings is now at Leeds, Bretherton Collection, Misc. Letters 2, Carter 2–8. For Carter's acquisition of images for Barrett, see New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MA 3078. On 10th December 1791 Carter wrote to Barrett informing him that he had found a late medieval French painting 'which is much in the style of those antient paintings which you have placed about your Library'. This letter includes a sketch of the original painting, apparently from the collection of Lord Scarbrough. Carter then turned to Walpole for advice on the painting: writing to Barrett three days later, he said: 'I received the favour of your answer to my letter about the painting of the Virgin and Child, but before I made a final agreement with the owner of the picture I thought it proper to wait on Mr Walpole for his opinion of it, which if favourable, would give you Sir, the greater satisfaction in the purchase of it, as you could not have the opportunity to see it yourself. Mr Walpole was pleased to like the picture itself, but when he came to hear of the price, 25 guineas, he was surprised beyond every thing and said he thought 5 guineas would be a great price for it, indeed. From this, sir, I carried back the picture to the owner, not on any account willing to go on my opinion over Mr Walpole's. I am very sorry, Sir, that I have given you all this trouble, but I trust your kindness will excuse it. You may Sir when you come to town have an opportunity to see it if agreeable if it should remain unsold'; Leeds, Bretherton Collection, Misc. Letters 2, Carter 2–8 (13th December 1791).



27. View in the Library at Lee [taken from the entrance from the Saloon], by John Carter. 1791. Pencil on laid paper. (British Library, London).



28. Portrait of John Carter, FSA, by John Carter and Sylvester Harding. c.1817. Pencil and watercolour on paper, 26.7 by 18.3 cm. (British Museum, London).



29. Portrait of Thomas Barrett in his library at Lee, by John Carter. c.1817. Ink on laid paper. (King's College, London).

king, a queen and St Catherine, the disposition of which was based upon the great window at St Margaret's, Westminster. Carter's correspondence with Barrett reflects a careful, scholarly study of the sources of the imagery.⁴⁶ It is not surprising that for Barrett, Carter and related antiquarians, Strawberry Hill was becoming to be understood as an influential repository of medieval forms. For instance, Carter based many details in his St George on the same figure in the picture of Henry V on the staircase of Strawberry Hill.⁴⁷ The ensemble of images was completed in 1790 with additional panels of a monk and a nun – also based on earlier works of art – beneath St George and St

Catherine, respectively.⁴⁸ Barrett's altar was undoubtedly one of the signature Gothic installations at Lee; Carter specifically mentions this in his commentary on Barrett:

and as I some few years painted for an altar scree[n] To his Library in a rich assemblage of antient characters, and ever continued until his death six or seven years past to be employed by him to do for him a series of drawings I may well call him one of my most desirable friends.⁴⁹

In all likelihood, it is to a part of Carter's altar that Barrett points in the portrait sketch located directly beneath this text (Fig. 29).⁵⁰ Although these images are now lost, they were still *in situ* in 1953 when the house was demolished.⁵¹

Barrett's Lee Priory is an important, if until now, relatively neglected house of the Gothic Revival, and a significant building in the Gothic portfolio of James Wyatt. Newly discovered manuscript sources provide a wealth of information that clarifies its complex history. These sources go some way towards substantiating Walpole's characterisation of Lee Priory as 'a child of Strawberry [Hill], prettier than the parent', and clarifying the formerly hazy relationship between Walpole and Barrett. Understood here as the product of a series of social relationships within Walpole's homoerotic circle, the significance of Lee as a 'child of Strawberry' emerges with clarity. Assigning it its place in history, Walpole considered Lee Priory as a yardstick of sorts against which he judged his own architectural achievement and influence. However, the architecture of Lee Priory also points towards the increasingly archaeological replication of medieval architecture characteristic of the years around 1800, seen notably in Strawberry Hill's Beauclerc Tower of 1776 by James Essex, as well as Wyatt's Fonthill Abbey and Eaton Hall, Cheshire, designed by Wyatt's chief Gothicism William Porden (c.1755–1822).⁵² Further emphasising the continuity between the two homes, Walpole would indulge in some self-effacing denigrations of Strawberry Hill and its archaeological inexactitude in a 1788 letter to Barrett, thus flattering his friend and apprentice for his superior handling of the style: 'My house therefore is but a sketch by beginners; yours is finished by a great master'.⁵³ Lee Priory's apparent archaeological accuracy thus relegates Strawberry Hill to the seminal position of the 'dawnings of an art'.⁵⁴ Passages of this sort were both literal and rhetorical: they served to underscore that the child has outdone his father, thereby flattering the extraordinary example set by the former for the latter.

⁴⁶ Leeds, Bretherton Collection, Misc. Letters 2, Carter: 21st August 1789: 'The dress of the King is taken from the Painting of Richard II now in the Jerusalem chamber of West. abbey. The arms in the shields supported by angels, are his own arms on one side, and on the other of St Edward the Confessor. The statues, architecture, etc are taken from different monuments'.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 20th April 1790: 'The armour, flag, surcoat, flag or pinion on the tilting lance, part of which lies broken at his feet, from the figure of St George in the Picture of Henry V on the staircase of Strawberry Hill'.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 7th August 1790: 'The Painting of the Monk / The figure, attitude, Dress, with the chalice and wafer, from a Brass on the pavement at the West end of Hereford Cathedral [. . .] The Painting of the Nun / The figure, attitude, dress, from a Brass on the Pavement in Elstow church, near Bedford, of the Benedictine order . . . '.

⁴⁹ London, Kings College, Leathers 7/4, II, fol. 16r (Barrett).

⁵⁰ Nurse and Mordaunt Crook, *op. cit.* (note 14), p.233.

⁵¹ Swindon, English Heritage SC 00582, 1958 survey (unpaginated): 'In the recess at the NW end is a kind of altar table, over which are paintings of Eight small whole length figures of St George, Richard the Second, Anne his Queen, a monk, a nun, etc. Then, in niches above are several beautiful figures of Angels, playing upon musical instruments'. It is hoped that these panels might eventually come to light.

⁵² P.N. Lindfield: 'Porden's Eaton: William Porden's Role in the Development of Eaton Hall, Cheshire, 1802–1825', *The Georgian Group Journal* 21 (2013), pp.137–51. Wyatt's pivotal role in the construction of Lee was celebrated by 'a very good plaster bust, colored in imitation of bronze, of Mr. James Wyatt, the Architect of Lee' placed on the central staircase's landing; Brayley and Britton, *op. cit.* (note 32), p.1095.

⁵³ Walpole, *op. cit.* (note 1), XLII, pp.220–21.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.221.