

A PORTRAIT OF THOMAS ANSON OF SHUGBOROUGH (1695-1773)

In the words of his friends and in his own words.

For a detailed account of Thomas Anson and the background to this material please see:

<https://andrewbakercomposer.com/thomas-anson-of-shugborough/>

Thomas Pennant, botanist and nephew of Thomas Anson's travelling companion James Mytton, writes:

My much-respected friend the late Thomas Anson, Esquire, preferred the still paths of private life, and was the best qualified for its enjoyment of any man I ever knew; for with the most humane and the most sedate disposition, he possessed a mind most uncommonly cultivated. He was the example of true taste in this country; and at the time that he made his own place a paradise, made every neighbor partaker of its elegancies. He was happy in his life, and happy in his end. I saw him about thirty hours before his death, listening calmly to the melody of the harp, preparing for the momentary transit from an earthly concert to a union with the angelic harmonies.¹

The harpist (at Thomas's London house, 15 St James's Square) may have been Edward Jones who performed with Thomas's friend Antonin Kammell and who visited Shugborough with Pennant in the early 1780s.

There is a note in the list of Thomas's bills to be paid after his death:

Hire of a Harp	£1-13s.-6d. ²
----------------	--------------------------

A lengthy poem, written by an anonymous visitor in 1767, gives a detailed account of Thomas Anson's cultural interests and the treasures of his estate:

Anson, to no man the celestial Muse
Her festive strain of merited applause
Bears gladlier, than to him whose generous aid
Protects & cherishes the sister arts
Of imitation.³

"The celestial Muse" is Urania, muse of Astronomy. She is sometimes equated, as she is here, with Aphrodite Urania, the goddess of Harmony – as a muse she embraces all the arts that her sister muses inspire.

As the anonymous poet writes:

From the Muse proceeds
All Harmony however to the sense
Directed, immaterial: in the grace
Of fair proportion, & harmonious form
Perceptible, as in the number'd notes
Of melting music, or of measured verse:

The Muse's gift in either:
Her's the lyre of ORPHEUS,
Her's the SYRACUSAN reed,
A RAPHAEL'S pencil
Her's & Her's the touch
Whose exquisite sensation shapes the block
To forms of GRECIAN beauty.

Pennant describes Thomas Anson's house and park, in its setting:

From the middle is a view, of very uncommon beauty, of a small vale, varied with almost every thing that nature or art could give to render it delicious; rich meadows, watered by the Trent and Sow. The first, animated with milk-white cattle, emulating those of Tinian; the last with numerous swans. The boundary on one side, is a cultivated slope; on the other, the lofty front of Cannock Wood, clothed with heath, or shaded with old oaks, scattered over its glowing bloom by the free hand of nature.

It is more difficult to enumerate the works of art dispersed over this Elysium; they epitomize those of so many places. The old church of Colwich; the mansion of the ancient English baron, at Wolsely Hall; the great-windowed mode of building in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in the house of Ingestre; the modern seat in Oak-edge; and the lively improved front of Shugborough; are embellishments proper to our own country.

Amidst these arise the genuine architecture of China, in all its extravagance; the dawning of the Grecian, in the mixed gothic gateway at Tixall; and the chaste buildings of Athens, exemplified by Mr. Stuart, in the counterparts of the Choragic monument of Lysicrates', and the octagon tower of Andronicus Cyrrhestes. From the same hand arose, by command of a grateful brother, the arch of Adrian of Athens, embellished with naval trophies, in honor of Lord Anson, a glory to the British fleet; and who still survives in the gallant train of officers who remember and emulate his actions.⁴

On the day Thomas Anson died, on 30th March 1773, Sir John Eardley Wilmot (1709-1792) wrote a personal obituary for him in his journal:

On the 30th of March 1773, Thomas Anson, Esquire, of Shuckborough, in the county of Stafford, departed this life: he was the elder brother of lord Anson, who died without issue, and inherited his great acquisitions. He was never married, and, in the former part of his life, had lived many years abroad; was a very ingenious, polite, well-bred man, and dignified all his natural and acquired accomplishments by his universal benevolence and philanthropy.⁵

Thomas "had lived many years abroad". We may not have a record of all his travels.

In the early 1720s Thomas Anson sold the South Sea Company stock he had inherited from his father, and travelled to Italy, via Belgium.

Mr. Mytten, Mr. Anson and Mr. Degge, three English gentlemen who have been here for some time and design to take Cambray on their way to Paris desire your lordship's protection. They are pretty modest gentlemen, and Mr. Anson, who is nephew to my Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Macclesfield, has been particularly recommended to me by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as Secretary of State and Mr. De la Faye. When he has been about a month in Paris, he designs to come back and make some stay at Cambrai.⁶

Thomas made a more adventurous journey in the 1730s. In 1732 Lord Middlesex and Sir Francis Dashwood were in Italy thinking about the formation of the Society of Dilettanti. They considered going to the east but went on to Spain.

Thomas (presumably also in Italy at the time) did travel east. He visited Athens – very few British travellers did in these dangerous times.

Rev. Sneyd Davies, in his poem titled *To Thomas Anson Esq. of Shuckborrow*, written on a visit in 1750, mentions many of the places Thomas visited, including Athens.

Tho' by Minerva's Fane Illisus glide;⁷

“Minerva's Fane” is the Parthenon.

Thomas sailed to the island of Tenedos, close to Troy. James Harris writes:

WHEN the late Mr. Anson (Lord Anson's Brother) was upon his Travels in the East, he hired a Vessel, to visit the Isle of Tenedos. His Pilot, an old Greek, as they were sailing along, said with some satisfaction, “There 'twas our Fleet lay.” Mr. Anson demanded, “What Fleet?” “What Fleet?” replied the old Man (a little piqued at the Question) — “WHY OUR GRECIAN FLEET AT THE SIEGE OF TROY”. This story was told the Author by Mr. Anson himself.⁸

He travelled home from Smyrna via Italy. Merchant Babajan of Avetik writes (in Armenian):

In the year 1734, September 25 in Izmir⁹

....an Englishman arrived from England [Ingleterra] in this place [i.e. in Izmir] stating that he is a lord of a great household and is a very good man. In truth, few kind/good men among the English such as this man are to be found [here?] and he is a good friend of your servant [Babajan]. His name is Master Tomasso Anson. I was conversing with him one day and remembered your good reputation to him. Since he is returning [to Livorno] with this same English ship, he asked your servant [Babajan] for a [letter of] recommendation, so that if he has any needs in that place [Livorno], I beg you to provide services to him without any charge, for providing services to such nobility will not go to waste ...

I have recommended you to him so you may show him your friendship to your servant [Babajan] by going to pay your respects to him at the Lazzaretto [Nazaret? or at the quarantine?] ... The Mister [Tomasso Anson] will go to France from that place [Livorno] in order to return to his country from there ... I beg of you to [provide your services to Tomasso Anson] and write back to your servant [Babajan]. May your lordship [Bortolo] have a long life and always be filled with joy.

From your menial servant,
Babajan of Avetick¹⁰

On his return to England, Thomas became a founder member of the Society of Dilettanti which Middlesex and Dashwood had been contemplating in Italy in 1732.

Thomas was a member of both the Divan Club (for those who had travelled in the Sultan's Dominions – his journey predated those of the more well-known members, Lord Sandwich and Francis Dashwood, by a few years) and the Egyptian Society, of which he was secretary. Isis appears in the Drawing Room at Shugborough holding her sistrum, the badge of the society.

It is possible that most dramatic and disturbing event of Thomas's life precipitated another journey east.

Erasmus Darwin writes of that fateful date in January 1740, in his *Zoonomia*:

Mr. Anson, the brother to the late Lord Anson, related to me the following anecdote of the death of lord Sc—. His lordship sent to see Mr. Anson on the Monday preceding his death and said, "You are the only friend I value in the world, I [am] determined therefore to acquaint you, that I am tired of the insipidity of life, and intend to morrow to leave it."

Mr. Anson said after much conversation, that he was obliged to leave town till Friday, and added, "As you profess a friendship for me, do me this last favour, I entreat you, live till I return."

Lord Sc— believed this to be a pious artifice to gain time, but nevertheless agreed, if he should return by four o'clock, on that day. However,

Mr. Anson did not return till five, and perceived by the countenances of the domestics, that the deed was done. He went into his chamber and found the corpse of his friend leaning over the arm of a great chair, with the pistol on the ground by him, the ball of which had been discharged into the roof of his mouth, and passed into his brain.¹¹

"Lord Sc—" was Richard Lumley, 2nd Earl of Scarbrough, who committed suicide on 29th January 1739/40. He was, intriguingly, patron of Thomas Wright, who may or may not have worked at Shugborough, perhaps confidentially as a matter of honour.

Thomas sailed with his brother on the Centurion but parted from him at Finisterre and headed east.

His notebook has instructions about his business:

Mr. M to answer my Bills I draw upon him.

Mr. Lascelles Demd to be discharged at my Return if not disc'g by Mr. Mytton.

Mills(?) has orders to pay 75(£?) yearly of demd by a certain person purs. (?)¹²

It also includes instructions for preserving seeds copied from a 17th century book. This was, in part a botanical expedition.

Sneyd Davies tells us that Thomas was in Cairo:

What Europe, – and what Asia yields, is thine;
For Thee it's splendour & Decays combine,
Where fretted Gold Alcairo's roof adorns,

Francis Congreve, merchant in Cairo, writes to his brother on January 2nd 1740/1:

As the whole time of Mr. Anson's stay here has been nothing but hurry I am sure his goodness will excuse any deficit or omission on my part in not abandoning myself entirely to his services which his merit deserved had he made a longer stay or I been more leisure.¹³

Thomas saw Baalbek. It would have been from Aleppo that he made the three-week journey to Palmyra, following Richard Pococke's expedition the year before. This was the inspiration for the ruins at Shugborough.

Sneyd Davies writes:

Or Temp'l'd Balbeck her lost grandieur mourns.
To please thy view, Time check'd his cruel pow'r,
And sav'd the mouldring shrine, & falling Tow'r.
What tho' Palmyra boast her pillar'd pride...

Thomas arrived in London on June 27th 1741.

He was soon back at Shugborough. James Mytton wrote to him about their curious business dealings:

...the gum affair will turn out ill.

The person arrived from Bath. ... There was an appointment ... to meet him and our Tower St acquaintance to talk over the affair.

And what is this?

I have received two hampers of about 5 doz each from Portsmouth. ... Mr. Eddoes writes that the weather is too severe to venture the rest ... I have taken the best I can and wrapped it well in straw ...

I am to thank you for some excellent venison. I gave part of it to my sister Pennant and the rest to Richmond where it will be very acceptable.

A chearfull Christmas and many happy years to you all.

James signs himself:

I am ever & most affectionately yours, J. Mytton.¹⁴

Thomas's hopes to retire to his country house were delayed by the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. There was a danger the battle might take place on his doorstep.

On 25th November 1745, Thomas writes to his brother from Shugborough:

I was yesterday to wait upon the Duke of Richmond where I met with our old friends, Skelton Price & Ellison. I made 'em from my heart an offer of anything I was capable of accommodating of serving them in ... I doubt not but that they will give a good account of them [the rebels]; if not, the Lord have mercy upon this poor country! I shall send my sisters away to-morrow night or next morning by easy Stages, the Oxford Road by Henly & Stratford wch is ye safest Route & they may perhaps halt a day or two when they are out of the reach of the Disturbance. I look upon Oxford in all times & events to be ye Safest and most Sacred of all Places – an easy distance from London &c. I shall continue hovering about my own fields as long as I can without falling into ill hands wch I shall endeavour to guard against.

He adds a PS:

Send to ye Stage Coach on Saturday next for a Doe & send Mytton & Adair a piece.¹⁵

In 1748 Thomas went on a secret mission to Belgium and France with James Mytton, with letters from Lord Sandwich, who was negotiating against the wishes of prime minister Pelham.

Thomas shows sangfroid, in his letter to George from Rotterdam, in May 1748:

The morning after we parted from you at the Hague, we arriv'd at Harlem in an ill hour. We found the magistrates in a Fright, the Populace in a Fury, the Burghers all under arms, but most of 'em favouring the Disorder they were sworn to suppress, & obeying the Burgomasters no farther than their own Schemes or Inclinations led 'em. The gates of the town were shut, & nobody permitted to go in or out. ...

We were then forc'd to amuse our selves wth the Proceedings of the Mob, who were busy pulling down Houses & throwing all the Furniture & whatever cou'd be found into the Canal, for no part of the Plunder was to be appropriated upon pain of Death. Seven of the Pactors or Fermiers houses were demolish'd whilst we staid in the town, many abuses & some Murders. ...

A Conference was held for half an Hour, in wch they treated all their Superiors wth a Delicacy of Language peculiar to a drunken Dutchman, wch wou'd suffer in any Translation. The issue was that my Guard retir'd to their posts, expressing great Concern & Regard for me. However I found means at last, shock'd wth seeing anarchy wth all its Horrors, to make my escape thro' another Gate, & got off in a voiture to Amsterdam; ...

I am just setting out for Antwerp & hope to be at Paris by Thursday. I am Lady Anson's & yours entirely.

Pray write to Shugborough.¹⁶

A few days later:

Wch I shou'd be convinc'd of by finding the Road to Paris covr'd with Soldiers, Officers & baggage returning to France, which indeed we found in a prodigious degree, & to our great inconvenience ... The greater part of the French troop make a much worse appearance in every respect than those we saw at Breda ...¹⁷

In Paris, Thomas and James enjoyed the adulation the French gave to Admiral Anson, though their enemy, and met George's new friend St George, captain of the captured L'Invincible.

Elizabeth, Lady Anson, recently married, wrote her first letter to Thomas, still in Paris:

I have but a moment to tell you how many acknowledgments & Honour, I have rec'd upon yr acct & the light in wch you appear here, to that degree that Mytton is in as great Transports as when ye Triumphs were quite fresh. I should perhaps flatter you but that it happens I am present taken up wth myself just returnd from Mr. Puysieux wth the Pleasure of finding my self flatter'd by the Person in the World from whom it comes most reducing. Je sais que vous etes eclaire & que vous

etes vertueux, je n'ai rien a craindre, je n'ai rien a manager avec vous. [I know that you are enlightened and that you are virtuous, I have nothing to fear, I have nothing to manage with you.] But my Design is that you should thank Ld. Sandwich. St. George has behaved beyond all Imagination, but has never heard from you. I hope Lady Anson rec'd my fine letter.

She writes, as commanded by her husband, in return for "the long & entertaining dispatches he [Thomas] has received from you ..."18

She has received her "fine letter":

... the Titles of the Chapters, which your letter contains, excite our curiosity and impatience very highly, as they promise that your Memoirs will be extremely entertaining ...

... how trifling that must sound, to one who spent four days at the magnifique Palais de Versailles. ... An evening spent at Vauxhall, or Ranelagh, or at what is still worse, a Summer Assembly, must likewise appear very insipid to one who passes his time in the lively amusement of Paris. – Or what is sailing to Lambeth in his Grace's Barge, as the Poet expresses it, which by means of the Archbishop's politeness we have done twice, but without the least danger of drowning, in comparison with the honour, you might have had, of running the risk of breaking your neck in company with the French King? ... You are certainly on the side of the water with every thing important, as well as elegant. We hope much from the Rondeur of your French Ministerial Friends ...

George Anson added a few scrawled lines to his wife's letter:

You will perceive I have employ'd a much better correspondent to answer your letter than myself, and you know me too well to imagine that any thing can make me enter into a dispute with Ladys who will certainly have the last word in all arguments and consequently will keep the field of Battle, which is always looked upon as a sort of victory; my Compliments to Mitton and St George.

Paris was the centre of fashion even when France was the enemy.

After this dangerous trip Thomas was busy preparing the newly expanded Shugborough for a visit by George and Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's brother Philip Yorke and sister-in-law Jemima Grey.

George was to send various decorations.

The Chinese Pictures you say I must answer you about are upon paper, Pheasants & Flowers, and will be found in the dark Closet in the Bedchamber. I beg leave to borrow the General Flag of the Acapulco. It may be deposited here safely to be return'd when call'd for, & I may in the mean time contrive to make an occasional Display of it ... I will expect Brett soon, for I fancy the rains will drive him from Buxton.¹⁹

Piercy Brett is believed to have designed the Chinese House.

Jemima Grey wrote, on 30th July 1748, to her half-sister, Lady Mary Gregory:

We met Lord and Lady Anson at Mr Anson's as we proposed. ... it [this place] is very small, very neat and pretty. Imagine a little green spot with the house and a shrubbery by it filling up the middle; the Trent winding along one side of it, and a canal round two others which begins where

the river turns off to a large bridge that makes a very good object, and where another stream joins it. In the canal is a Chinese house and a Chinese boat extremely pretty, and a green walk encompasses these with some scattered trees upon it, and your view across the water is bounded everywhere by hills and woods at different distances. The house has some fine rooms lately added to it, and one exceedingly odd and pretty that is the library.²⁰

Shugborough was “very small” – it was a philosophical gentleman’s villa not a grand house.

In 1750 Rev. Sneyd Davies visited Shugborough. His poem shows that he saw the gardens as a memorial of the ancient civilisations Thomas had visited on his extraordinary travels.

TO THOMAS ANSON ESQ. OF SHUCKBORROW

After thy Course of various Travel run,
& to his morning-glories trac’d the Sun,
Here, Anson, rest; the busie Toil is o’er,
And Waves & Tempests recommend the Shore.
See from this Haven length of Waters past;
Look from this Summit to the dreary Waste,
Enjoy by turns thy pleasures & thy pains,
The burning sands & aromatic Plains;
Here to reflection Desarts wild be brought,
Or in the Citron grove refresh thy thought.
What Europe, – and what Asia yields, is thine;
For Thee it’s splendour & Decays combine,
Where fretted Gold Alcairo’s roof adorns,
Or Templ’d Balbeck her lost grandieur mourns.
To please thy view, Time check’d his cruel pow’r,
And sav’d the mouldring shrine, & falling Tow’r.
What tho’ Palmyra boast her pillar’d pride,
Tho’ by Minerva’s Fane Illisus glide;
Can thy stretch’d Wish beyond Possession roam,
Or sigh for beauties, which thou wan’st at Home?
Does Lycus roll his stream thro’ fairer Meads?
Or Tempe’s self a fresher Verdure spreads?
May not that broken Pile’s disorder’d state
(Columns expressive of the stroke of Fate)
Hap’ly recall to thy attentive eye
Some lov’d Remain of fair Antiquity?
Here may’st Thou oft regale in Seric²¹ Bow’r,
Secure of Mandarin’s despotic Pow’r,
Behold thy Eastern structures rise, nor fear
The Sultan’s frown, or Turban’d Officer.
Safe from their servile yoke, their arts command,
And Grecian Domes erect in Freedom’s land.²²

In his revised version of the poem (published in the 19th century as a poem titled *To Lord Anson*, read in error as being in honour of George), Davies describes the Shepherd’s Monument, the symbolic key to the gardens, as a “vanitas” monument:

Upon that storied marble cast thine eye,
The scene commands a moralizing sigh;
Ev'n in *Arcadia's* bless'd *Elysian* plains,
Amidst the laughing Nymphs, and sportive swains,
See festal joy subside, with melting grace,
And pity visit the half-smiling face;
Where now the dance, the lute, the nuptial feast,
The passion throbbing in the lover's breast?
Life's emblem here, in youth and vernal bloom,
But Reason's finger pointing at the tomb!²³

Elizabeth Anson was a regular visitor to Shugborough and shared in the ideas behind the landscape. George may only once have visited.

Thomas acted as chaperone to Elizabeth on holidays to Bath and Buxton. She sent this letter to her husband from Buxton in 1753, with the heading "Purgatory", dated 22nd September:

Scarborough with all its evils was a Palace of delights to this place. Constant stinks all over the House, an absolute destruction of Breakfast from the badness of Butter, with the like, are among the trifling inconveniences. But the two capital grievances, & which I do not think I shall ever be able to endure, are the bathing, & the noise. ...

... I mean the almost Eternity of Noise. I lost one night's sleep in Ashbourne, & yet the Inn there was the Cave of Quiet compared with this, lastnight I could not get to sleep 'till One o'clock, & then rather because I was tired out than because there was any cessation of walking over my head, talking of each side, rumbling chairs & tables all round, all which waked my a half hour after five this morning and continues still & I have now the Headache, & am quite stunned & unable to understand anything I attempt to read, wch is yet the only amusement I can propose, as there can be no such thing as walking without the Temptation of a Prospect or the Shelter of Trees, in both of which respects Stilton & Newmarket have the advantage of this place, and as any partys from it are impossible from the distances & nature of the Country ...

I own obligation to Mr. Anson beyond all power of return, for exchanging his own Elysium for this worst of Purgatorys, yet I am concerned he ever came; for my own sake as much as his & could wish he would leave me, & forget he has ever seen me here. Miss Anson who was so good to intend coming was prevented by a cold.²⁴

On the 28th of September, Lady Anson wrote a paragraph to her husband in praise of her brother-in-law's virtues:

Indeed, I find, wch I thought impossible, my Love & Regard for your Brother rise higher every instant: it is not possible to owe more to a friend than I do for him, he bears with me when I am unreasonable, sometimes pitys me kindly, sometimes chides me gently, advises me with friendship & judgement, reproves me with Sense & Knowledge, forms me with his Politeness, & amuses me with all the art of the elegant badinage.

But she did not share his taste or enthusiasm for wild landscapes:

... every day's experience tending to convince me how much better it is to live among Knowls than Hills, in a beautiful inhabited cultivated country, rather than what is called romantic Country.²⁵

Their visit to Bath in 1757 led to a journey into Wales. By this time Thomas's travels to romantic landscapes had replaced his expeditions to ancient cities. He was now 62 years old.

Thomas added this to a letter from Elizabeth to George:

I shall take my final leave tomorrow morning. Capt Parker who desires the honour of being remembered to you, goes with me as far as Mr. Berkeley's, who I hear is at Stoke, so I shall acquit myself of a promise made him that if he would permit me to see his place in December I would certainly revisit it in a better season. God's country, as Lord Lyttelton calls Brecknockshire, I shall not reach. Going up and down mountains takes a deal of time and is too tedious when one is alone. Mr. Allen says that Monmouthshire, which I shall see thoroughly is a fine part of Wales. We dined yesterday at Prior Park.²⁶

Thomas developed the romantic and picturesque landscape of Cannock Chase as part of the essential effect of Shugborough, as noted in a passage from the anonymous 1767 poem:

Westward, with near approach, & bolder swell,
The wavy hills rise mountainous, befringed
With gloomy groves of never-changing leaf,
Cedar, or pine, or fir: plantations vast,
And venerable! not in curious lines
Restrained, & cramp'd, nor on the summits clump'd
Bleak, & unthrifty; but profusely spread
Along the mountain slope for many a mile
To shade a country. Such the groves that grace
The shaggy sides of APPENNINE, or huge PIRENE.²⁷

Thomas's close friend, botanist and musician Benjamin Stillingfleet, had a cottage on the Foxley estate in Herefordshire, where he contributed to the development of the picturesque theories of the Price family thirty years before Uvedale Price popularised such ideas. In 1759 Stillingfleet and Robert Price made an important tour of Wales in search of the picturesque.²⁸

Thomas Anson was a pioneer of agriculture, employing Nathaniel Kent, one of the four friends to whom he left annuities, to manage his estates in Norfolk. After Thomas's death Kent worked at Foxley, reorganising Robert Price's estate.

The enthusiasm for beauty in the landscape goes hand in hand with science. This interest in landscape and nature is inseparable from the new interest in the Greek Revival.

Thomas was already patron of James "Athenian" Stuart, though the first of Stuart's authentic Greek buildings was for Lord Lyttelton at Hagley – a temple from which one looked at nature.

In October 1758, Lyttelton writes to Mrs Montagu:

Mr. Anson and Mr. Stewart who were with me last week are true lovers of Hagley, but their Delight in it was disturbed by a blustering Wind, which gave them colds and a little child their Imagination itself. Yet Stewart seems almost as fond of my Vale, as of the Thessala Tempe, which I believe you heard him describe when I brought him to see you. Nor could the East Wind deter him from mounting the Hills. He is going to embellish one of the Hills with a true Attick building, a portico of six pillars, which will make a fine effect to my new house, and command a most beautiful view of the country.²⁹

After George Anson's death in 1762, Thomas inherited a fortune from his brother. This enabled him to build his new London house, 15 St James's Square. There is no evidence that George contributed financially to Shugborough before his death.

James Mytton died before he could enjoy Thomas's later developments. Thomas Pennant left this note about his uncle:

I must not forget a shade of my affectionate uncle *James Mytton*, fifth son of the same house and brother to the last, the kind friend of my youth, with whom I lived long, and strove, to the best of my power, to reap from him every advantage that his good sense, good heart, and polished manners, wished to instil into my susceptible mind.³⁰

James Mytton, whose part in this story is, perhaps, more important than the fragments of evidence suggest, asked in his will that his body

... may be buried in the most private manner and with the least expense possible in the Church Yard of whatever Parish I might happen to die ...³¹

Thomas would also ask for the simplest possible funeral, with no memorial, a tradition continued by Patrick, 5th Earl of Lichfield, who died in 2005.

Thomas was able to expand the estate and his collection of classical statuary. The anonymous 1767 poem describes the Orangery:

In living sculptures, godlike shapes, & forms
Excelling human! Light-robed FLORA first,
Protectress of the place, with garlands crowned,
Scatters with liberal hand a waste of flowers.
Nor shall the learned eye deem here misplaced,
O smooth ADONIS, thy transcendent form.
How shall the Muse address Thee, lovely Youth,
How celebrate? a mortal or a God,
Doubtfull!

The young Joseph Banks was shown Adonis that same year:

... went with Mr. Sneyd to Mr. Ansons about 4 miles off at a place call'd Shuckborough to see his architecture and marble both which are reported to be beyond any thing else in their kind. Find a large company to dine there and are forc'd to content ourselves for this day, with taking our dinners and resolving to return and see things properly the next day: by an accident however found the estimation in which every thing there was held by its master. ... Stealing from the company after dinner I got a candle and was employd in examining his chief marble which was an Adonis in the interior. He passes by. I took the opportunity of complimenting him by saying "truly sir this is a most elegant piece of workmanship." ... "Indeed it is, sir" said he, and shewing me the different parts of it "there's a grace sir ...Believe me the Venus of Medicis is clumsy to it." ... Having said this he retired and left me to my contemplations.

The figure is certainly a very elegant one tho I can not prize it so highly, as its master does. He is represented not with the Chase, having just thrown a light robe over his shoulders to cool gradually. Probably the Game is suppos'd to lye at his feet as he rests himself upon one leg and

seems to contemplate something lying before him with a look of satisfaction.³²

Banks saw various exotic creatures roaming about at Shugborough. Twenty years earlier there had been Kouli Kan, the Persian cat. Banks describes having seen the crown bird:

From thence we went into the Kitchen garden where we saw the Pavonina or Crown Bird who had lived here for some time upon sea Biscuit and what he could pick up which the Gardener said was a good deal especially when dung was brought into the garden.³³

It had been there a few years. In 1764, James Stuart noted in a letter to Thomas, "Mr. Goodall has got the biscuits for the Crown bird."³⁴

Banks also saw the goats known as "muffoli", which had recently arrived from Corsica.

John Dick, who acted as Thomas's agent for supplying his purchases of classical sculpture from Italy, writes on 30th January 1767 from Leghorn (Livorno):

Mr Biddell has also taken charge of two tame live animals which I have taken the liberty to send to you, on a presumption that they may be somewhat curious in England, they were sent me by a very Respectable Person in Corsica and are called "Miufri." The one is a Male and the other a Female, I have never heard of them, but in that Island, and are extremely wild, these having been taken young, are tamed. I wish you may think them worth your acceptance.³⁵

The 1767 anonymous poem attests to Thomas's love of animals:

To every creature that the vital air
Sustains, is ANSON'S kind benevolence
Extended: beasts of chace, & fowl of game
Secure in his protection roam at large
Unpersecuted. Never here was heard
The hunter's barbarous shout, or clam'rous horn
To fright the peacefull shades; or murd'ring gun
To stain the hospitable fields with blood.

15 St James's Square would become the place for Grecian art, and music, led by his friend Kammell.

Lady Shelburne described a lavish event held at 15 St James' Square, in April 1769:³⁶

Thursday Morning, April 13th. – We breakfasted at Mr. Anson's, who gave a breakfast and concert to Mrs. Montagu, to which she very obligingly invited us. We called upon her and went together, and saw a very fine house, built and ornamented by Mr. Stuart. The company were Count Bruhl, Lord Egremont, Mr. and Mrs. Harris and their daughter, Mrs. Vesey, Mrs. Dunbar, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Scott, a M. de Vibre, M. de Maltête a President de Parlement, who came over expressly to see a Riot, but was deterred from going to Brentford by the French Ambassador, and condemned to pass this memorable morning in the calmer scene of Mr. Anson's house and entertainment.³⁷

On 18th April 1769, James Harris wrote to his son, James Harris Jnr:

Lord Spencer's and Mr. Anson's houses by Stuart, Lord Shelburne's by Adams are models of Grecian taste, not unworthy of the age of Pericles.³⁸

A month later Thomas was back at Shugborough, presumably with Kammell, who must have been writing his violin duets op. 5, dedicated to Thomas, at this time.

When John Parnell visited, he wrote:

There has been this day, Thursday, a most agreeable meeting of the neighbouring gentry, Snead, Clifford, Piggot etc. who all play or sing and dance together here afterwards and have music again on the evening ...³⁹

On 27th March 1772, Elizabeth Harris wrote to James Jnr:

Yesterday morning we were all at that most elegant house of Mr. Anson's to a breakfast and concert after, every thing suited the elegance of the house. When breakfast was ended the room were open for people to walk about and admire – after that the concert, for which he had collected the best hands in town – Madame Sirman, Grassi, Fischer, Crosdale, Ponto, Kamell etc. Got home in time enough to snap a short dinner before the opera.⁴⁰

It seems Stuart and Kammell were both well-known at Shugborough.

A poem by Sir William Bagot of Blithfield Hall, dated 25th April 1772, looked forward to Thomas's return to Shugborough at the end of the London season. It was to be his last summer.

Bring Attic Stuart, Indian Orme,
Kammell unruffled by a storm
Shall tune his softest strain;
And my Louisa will rejoice
To notes like his to tune her voice
With health restored again.⁴¹

On Friday, 21st December 1772, Josiah Wedgwood wrote to Bentley, his partner in London, about his concerns for Thomas Anson's health:

Mr. Anson is in a very dangerous way as to his health and I fear cannot live long. He gets little sleep, has constant pain at the pit of his stomach, ie. his Liver. His legs swell and I believe his body likewise. Perhaps it may be of some consequence to our friend Mr. Stuart to know Mr. Anson's situation.

... I have taken a few molds from Mr. A-s medals to try how they will look. Mr. Sneyd thinks a good suit of Historical medals will do as well as anything fore us to form a Cabinet for young gentlemen. If so Mr. Anson's is an admirable cabinet for us.⁴²

Five days later, Wedgwood reported from Etruria that Mr Anson was returning to London:

Mr. Anson is going in a day or two to *Die in London*. He says he would rather die there than at Shugborough. His Vases have come here, so he will never see them, and perhaps when he has left Shugborough his sisters will think proper to take them in. However we will send them to day ...⁴³

Thomas travelled back to London. Despite his ailing condition, he continued to entertain at 15 St James's Square.

On 5th March 1773, James Harris's daughter wrote to her brother (originally in French):

We were at a breakfast and a concert this morning at Mr. Anson's. Everything bespeaks good taste; the house is charming and exquisitely appointed, the music is by the best hands in England: in fact it was a total delight.⁴⁴

On 23rd March 1773, James Harris's wife, Elizabeth, wrote:

Friday at a breakfast and concert at Mr. Anson's at which all the fine world were assembled and all elegant to a degree.⁴⁵

Thomas Anson died in London on 30th March 1773.

On 3rd April, Mr Goodall, Thomas's manager, wrote:

When I told Sir Charles Saunders [Admiral] that Mr. Anson was no more it shook him so much that I am afraid it will go hard with him.⁴⁶

Elizabeth Harris wrote to her son on 6th April 1773:

Mr. Anson's death is a loss to many, to the poor he was charitable to a degree, the artists of all sorts had his protection and partook of his generosity, and all his friends were sharers of his most elegant entertainments. His great fortune comes to Mr. Adams his nephew. Both he and Mrs. Adams are amiable people and deserve it.⁴⁷

Thomas's body was brought back to Staffordshire and buried simply, with no memorial, as was his wish. There is no religious language in his will.

On 23rd June, Antonín Kammell wrote to Count Waldstein:

My dear good old friend Mr. Anson, the brother of the Admiral who defeated so much the Spaniards, died two months ago. I do not like to lose good friends, his death contributed a lot towards my illness, in his testament he left me 50 gineas yearly for the time of my life, my friend George Pitt, when he saw me so distressed after Anson's death, he also gave me by the law 50 gineas yearly, now I have 100 gineas yearly to spend as I wish.⁴⁸

Thomas had left annuities to Antonin Kammell, Benjamin Stillingfleet (who had predeceased him), James "Athenian" Stuart, and agriculturalist Nathaniel Kent.

Robert Orme, historian of the East India Company, was so moved by the generous legacy of £500 in his old friend's will that he commissioned a bust of Thomas from the leading sculptural artist Nollekens – and one of himself.

To perpetuate the memory of his friend, Mr. Orme had a handsome white marble bust of Mr. A. executed by their mutual friend Nollekens in his best manner, which was conspicuously placed in his library. It was a most admirable likeness; and after Mr. Orme's death was, by his executor, sent to the representative of Mr. Anson, as the most proper person to preserve such a memento of his ancestor.⁴⁹

The bust remained at Shugborough unrecognised until I happened to notice it a few years ago. For many years Thomas Anson has been an enigma but now his own voice has begun to re-emerge, his character – and his portrait.



ANDREW BAKER

13th June 2021

-
- ¹ Thomas Pennant, *The Journey from Chester to London*. Printed for Luke White, Dublin, 1783, available on Google Books.
 - ² Staffordshire Record Office, *Records of the Anson Family of Shugborough, Earls of Lichfield*. D615/P(S)/1/6/49A
This collection of personal papers and bound letters held at the National Archives, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service: D615/(D), (E), (M), (P), (S), DW03, DW1474, DW1840 and D5800, also includes deeds and estate papers, maps and plans.
 - ³ Staffordshire Record Office. D615/P(S)/2/5
 - ⁴ Thomas Pennant, *The Journey from Chester to London*. Printed for Luke White, Dublin, 1783, available on Google Books.
 - ⁵ John Eardley Wilmot, *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir John Eardley Wilmot, Knt. Late Lord Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and one of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council*. Printed by J. Nichols & Son, London, 1811, available on Google Books.
 - ⁶ Alexander Hume-Campbell Marchmont, Earl of; Walter Hugh Hepburne-Scott Polwarth, Baron; Henry Paton, *Report on the manuscripts of Lord Polwarth, preserved at Mertoun House*. Great Britain Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC). HM Stationery Office, 1931, available on Google Books.
 - ⁷ Staffordshire Record Office. Op. cit. D615/P(S)/2/5
 - ⁸ James Harris, *Philological Enquiries, in Three Parts*. C. Nourse, London, 1781.
<https://archive.org/details/philologicalinquit1and2harriala/page/n6>
 - ⁹ Izmir was known to European travellers as Smyrna, an ancient city on Turkey's Aegean coast.
 - ¹⁰ Staffordshire Record Office, *Correspondence from Sir John Dick (British consul at Leghorn) and others regarding purchases of antiquities in Italy, 1765-1771*. D615/P(A)/2
 - ¹¹ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, the laws of organic life*. Vol. 2. Printed for J. Johnson, London, 1796.

-
- ¹² Staffordshire Record Office, *Records of the Anson Family of Shugborough, Earls of Lichfield*. D615/P(S)/2/4
- ¹³ Staffordshire Record Office, *Congreve Letters*. D1057/M/G/4/11
- ¹⁴ Staffordshire Record Office, *Miscellaneous Letters, 1764-1773*. 'From J. Mytton, R. Jackson, Benjamin Whittaker, J. Goodall to Thomas Anson re business.' D615/P(S)/1/6
- ¹⁵ British Library, *Letters from Thomas Anson to Admiral George Anson, 1743-1749*. MSS Add. 15955
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Staffordshire Record Office, *Records of the Anson Family of Shugborough, Earls of Lichfield*. D615/P(S)/1/3 and following.
- ¹⁹ British Library. Op. cit.
- ²⁰ Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service, *Transcripts/Extracts of Correspondence of Jemima Yorke, (Marchioness Grey) sent to Lady Mary Gregory 1748-1757, Vol. 2*. L30/9a/2
- ²¹ "Seric" means silken.
- ²² Staffordshire Record Office. Op. cit. D615/P(S)/2/5
- ²³ The poem *To Lord Anson* can be found on pp.160-1 in George Hardinge's *Biographical Memoirs of the Rev. Sneyd Davies D.D. Canon Residentiary of Lichfield in a Letter to Mr. Nichols*. Fifty copies printed for Nichols, Son & Bentley; not for sale, but for Mr. Hardinge's friends, and those of Dr. Davies. London, 1817.
<https://archive.org/details/biographicalmem00davigoog/page/n154>
- ²⁴ Staffordshire Record Office. D615/P(S)/1/1/379 and following.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.* D615/P(S)/1/117B 1
- ²⁷ *Ibid.* D615/P(S)/2/5
- ²⁸ Charles Watkins and Ben Cowell, *Uvedale Price (1747-1829), Decoding the Picturesque*, Boydell Press, 2015
- ²⁹ Susan Weber Soros (Ed.), *James "Athenian" Stuart, 1713-1788: The Rediscovery of Antiquity*. Yale University Press, 2006, p.324.
- ³⁰ Thomas Pennant, *The History of the Parishes of Whiteford and Holywell, 1796*.
- ³¹ The National Archives; Kew, Surrey, England; *Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Series PROB 11; Class: PROB 11; Piece: 902*
- ³² *Joseph Banks' Travel Journal, 1767* (extracts), pp. 112-113. National Library of Wales <https://www.library.wales/>
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ Staffordshire Record Office. Op. cit. D615/P(S)/1/6/13
- ³⁵ Staffordshire Record Office. Op. cit. D615/P(A)/2
- ³⁶ The year 1768 is incorrectly given on the English Heritage website and elsewhere. The *Family Papers of James Harris* and other contemporary references confirm the year to be 1769.
- ³⁷ Edmond Fitzmaurice, Lord, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne, Afterwards First Marquess of Lansdowne, with Extracts from his Papers and Correspondence, Vol. II 1766-1776*. Macmillan & Co., London, 1876, pp.187-8, available on Google Books.
- ³⁸ *The Family Papers of James Harris 1732-1780*, as cited by Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill in *Music and Theatre in Handel's World*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
- ³⁹ *John Parnell's Journal, 1769* (extracts, anonymous transcription). William Salt Library, Staffordshire County Council, CB/Shugborough/8. Original at London School of Economics, LSE Library Misc. 38.
- ⁴⁰ *The Family Papers of James Harris*. Op. cit.
- ⁴¹ Staffordshire Record Office. Op. cit. D615/P(S)/2/5
- ⁴² Ann Finer and George Savage (Eds.), *The Selected Letters of Josiah Wedgwood*. Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1965, p.140.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.* p.141.
- ⁴⁴ Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World. The Family Papers of James Harris 1732-1780*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Staffordshire Record Office. Op. cit. D615/P(S)/1/6/49A
- ⁴⁷ Hampshire Record Office, *Family Papers of James Harris*. 9M73/G1260/11
I am grateful to archivist Rosemary Burrows for suggesting I obtain the complete text.
- ⁴⁸ Michaela Freemanova and Eva Mikanova, 'My honourable Lord and Father...': 18th-century English musical life through Bohemian eyes', *Early Music*, Vol. XXXI, Issue 2, May 2003,
- ⁴⁹ Robert Orme, *Historical fragments of the Mogul Empire, of the Morattoes and of the English Concern in Indostan*. Printed for F. Wingrave, London, 1805, available on Google Books.