

JOHN MAN: A GREAT ENTETAKER

Version June 16, 2025

John Man was born in 1718 in Hurst, Berkshire, the eldest son of John Man and Ann (Tyle) Man, and he was baptized on 8th June 1718 at St. Nicholas, Hurst. He married Mary Balchen on 26th February 1746/47 at Holy Trinity Church, The Minories, London. They had seven children but only two - James and Henry - had descendants.

In around 1770 John left his family and took up residence in Cardiff, Wales and assumed the name Thomas Roberts. When and why he left his family and took on another name is not known. Some family researchers suspected that he ran up large financial liabilities as a speculative builder and was afraid of being imprisoned for debt. More misogynistic members say his wife Mary was a difficult woman, and he wanted to escape from her. Others have combined both reasons.

John died in Cardiff, Wales, under the assumed name of Thomas Roberts, and was buried on 10th April 1783 at St. John the Baptist, Cardiff.

In *The Dictionary of National Biography*, John is described as a ‘well-known builder’, and in the Preface to his son Henry’s *Miscellaneous Works*, John is described as an ‘eminent London builder’. In his diary the Welsh diarist William Thomas¹ described John as: ... *a great entetaker [undertaker] in building bridges, gentlemen's houses ...*

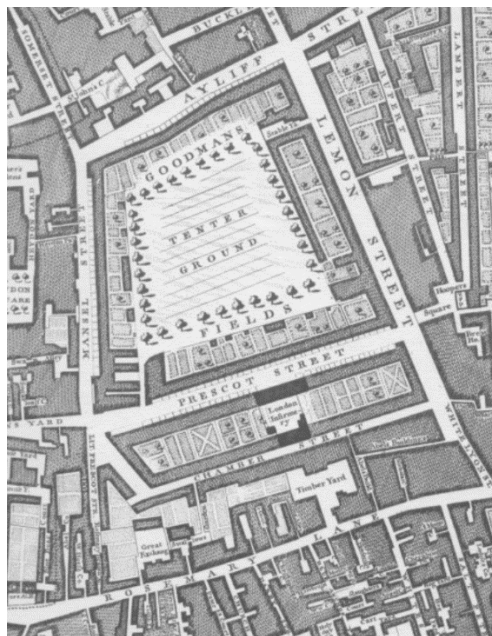
John Man in London

Among his works (based on contracts) in London were: Digging the foundation and building the first floor of the new London Hospital in 1752; building for Susannah (Banner) Cropp a substantial house on Fenchurch Street, and two houses on the north end of Tower Hill.

John’s involvement with the London Hospital’s new building began soon after the Hospital’s General Court had agreed and finalised plans for a new building in December 1751. At the time, John was living with his family on Mansell Street at Goodman’s Fields, just round the corner from where the old London Hospital was located on Prescott Street. The new Hospital was to be located at Whitechapel.

The houses around Goodman’s Fields at the time have been described as mostly large houses and mansions and the best houses in Whitechapel. These included around a dozen five-bay double-fronted mansions on the east side Mansell Street, on the west side of Lemon Street, and on Prescott Street to the south. The house John occupied was probably owned by his wife’s uncle Henry Balchen, a wealthy linen draper.

¹ The Diary of William Thomas, 1762-1795



Mansell Street runs vertically along the left (east) side of Goodman's Fields while Prescott Street runs horizontally along the bottom (south) side with the 'old' London Hospital called the Infirmary in the middle.

The minutes of the Building Committee for the new London Hospital note that on 14 February 1752, advertisements were placed in various London newspapers including: *The General Advertiser*, *The Daily Advertiser*, *The White Hall*, *The London Evening and General Evening Posts*, for all bricklayers and carpenters willing to contract for digging and laying the foundation, and erecting a shell for the building, according to the finalised plan.

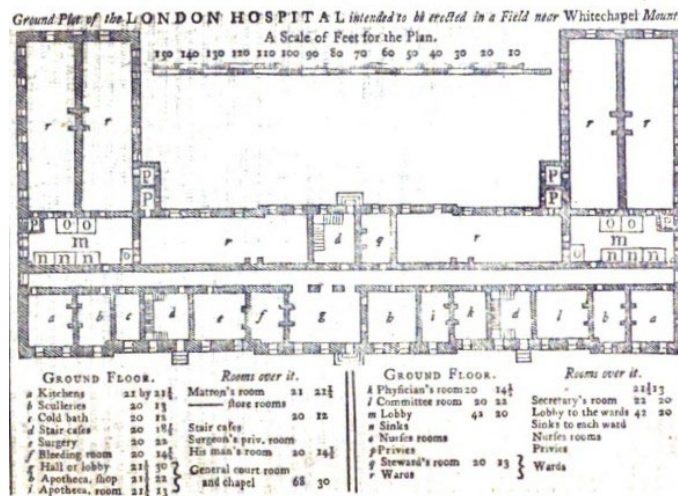
LONDON-HOSPITAL.
AT a General Quarterly Court held the 25th of September, 1751, the Report of the Building Committee approving of a Plan for an intended Building, being read,
It was unanimously Resolv'd,
 That no Money be made Use of for any intended Building, but what had been already, or may be hereafter given, expressly for that Purpose.
Then the Report was unanimously agreed to by this Court.
Resolv'd unanimously,
 That the Thanks of this Court be given to the late Committee, for the Trouble they have been at in this Affair; and that they, and the several Persons added thereto by this Court, do transact such further Business as shall be necessary for carrying the said Plan into Execution under the same Restrictions as the last Building Committee; Reporting their Transactions from Time to Time to a General Court.
Resolv'd unanimously,
 That the said Committee do meet directly to receive Proposals, and take the proper Methods for Beginning and Forwarding the said Building.
Resolv'd,
 That these Resolutions be printed and publish'd in the public Papers.
By Order of the General Court,
 P. WARREN, Vice-President.

3rd October 1752 *London Evening Post*. London Hospital

London Hospital, Feb. 12, 1752.
THE Committee for Erecting a Building for this Hospital, give Notice, that all Bricklayers and Carpenters, who are willing to contract for digging and laying the Foundation, and erecting a Shell for the Building, according to the Plan agreed to by the last General Court, and under the Direction of Boulton Mainwaring, Esq; their Surveyor, may give in their Proposals in Writing sealed, to the Committee.
 All Persons concerned, by applying to the Secretary at this Hospital, any time after Wednesday next, the 19th Instant, may be informed of the Particulars, and Proposals for Contracts will be received and considered on Wednesday the 26th Instant.
 By Order of the Building Committee,
 W. TROTTER, Sec.

14 February, 1752, *General Advertiser*. London Hospital

An example of the finalised plan appeared in the March edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine*.



The Gentleman's Magazine, March, 1752

On 8 April 1752, the Committee prepared further advertisements for publication - once in the evening and twice in the daily papers - regarding the Committee's plans.

To those bricklayers, carpenters, masons, etc. who had responded to the various advertisements, the Committee handed each of them proposals for consideration of digging the foundations and building up to the first floor and a request for them to bid on the project. Once each artisan had responded to these proposals with their bid to do the job, these were then reviewed by the Committee and a selection was made as to whom would be chosen for the project.

John must have seen one of these advertisements and submitted a proposal and a bid accordingly. The Building Committee notes in its minutes of 15 April that it had received proposals from carpenters: Robert Leg and Richard Hall, **John Man**, Thomas Jupp & Son, Joseph Gordon, Joel Johnson, and others as well as from bricklayers: Thomas Cleaver, Thomas Andrews, etc.

On reviewing the proposals, the committee agreed at its meeting on 15 April to contract with:

John Mann [sic], carpenter, and Thomas Andrews, bricklayer – lowest tenders. Proper contracts to be drawn up.

It must have been quite a triumph for John to have beaten out Joel Johnson who was an up-and-coming builder with a large yard to the west of Back Church Lane, and who came to style himself an architect and was responsible for designing chapels. Johnson was later chosen to work on the London Hospital after John had completed his contract.

On 3 June 1752, the Building Committee heard a report from the surveyor, Boulton Mainwaring, that there had been a delay in drawing up contracts with John Man the carpenter and Thomas Andrews the bricklayer. No reason was given for the delay. During this meeting Mr William Bellers made a present to charity of a picture of the prospective building (below), which he had drawn in perspective, and it was moved by the committee that thanks be returned.



William Beller's drawing of the proposed London Hospital

On 11 June 1752 the foundation stone to the Hospital was laid by Sir Peter Warren, Admiral of the Fleet.

**The first stone was laid for the foundation
of the new *London* hospital near *White-Chapel*
Mount in the presence of the *D. of Bedford*;
Sir Peter Warren, and divers other persons
of distinction, governors.**



Sir Peter Warren

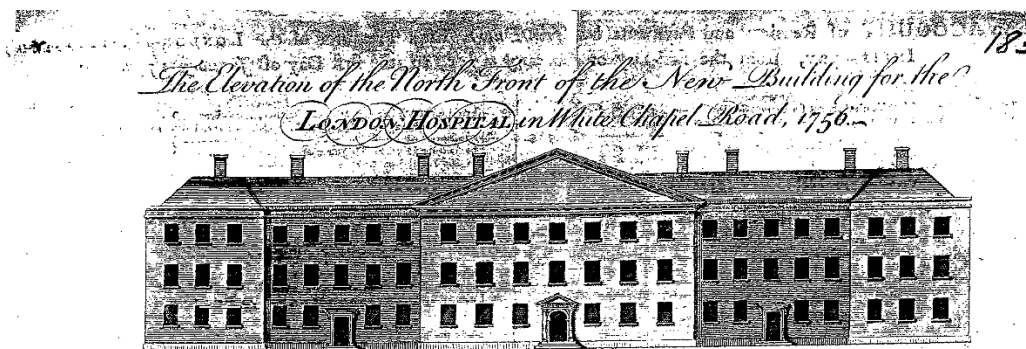
On the same day John Man was handed a contract to sign which consisted of three parties: first William Trotter, Secretary for the Hospital, second John Man and Henry Balchen (John's wife's uncle) of Mansell Street, Gentleman, and third Simon Youd plasterer in Prescott Street. The contract in part read that John would:

"... do all and every the Carpenter's work that shall be directed by Boulton Mainwaring Esq the present Surveyor or any other surveyor for erecting and completely finishing the foundation and such other Carpenter's work as shall be directed by the said surveyor in carrying on the building to the first floor of the hospital ... in the most substantial and best workmanlike manner and with good and sound material and to the entire satisfaction of the surveyor and to provide all the timber ... "

On 11 June, Mr Andrews, the bricklayer, advised the committee that he expected to finish his contract by Michaelmas day next, i.e. 29th September. The committee then advised Andrews that they depended on

the contract being finished punctually on that day. It was also agreed that Mr Man (carpenter) would be allowed the same amount of time as Mr Andrews.

On 28 November 1752 Boulton Mainwaring informed the Committee that John Man, carpenter, had finished the contract that he had entered into with the Committee for carrying on the new building (digging the foundations and erecting the first floor), work that amounted to the sum of five hundred and ninety-seven pounds and eleven pence.



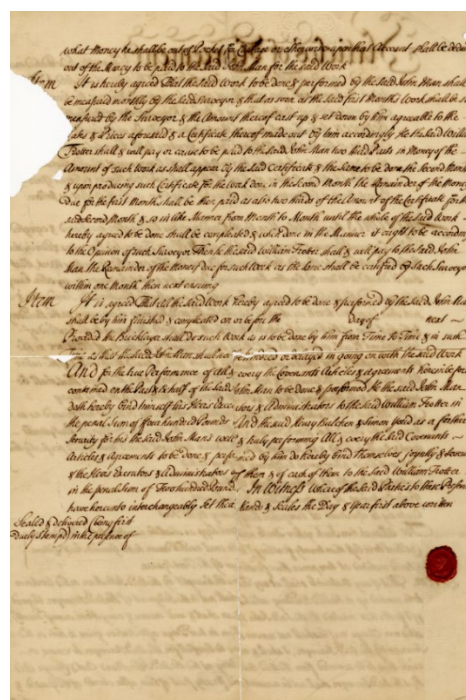
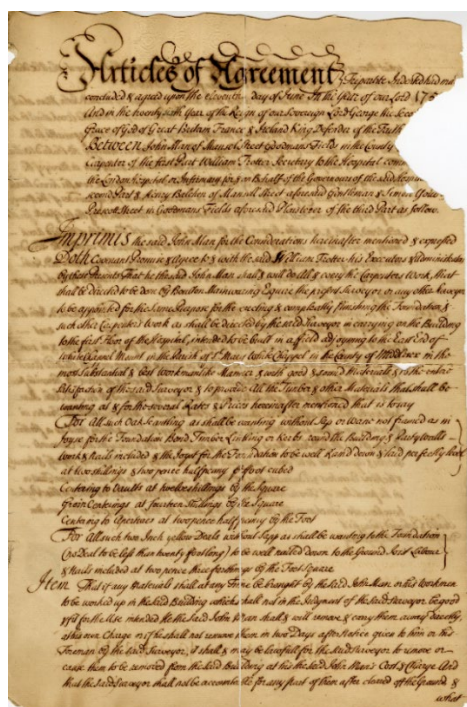
AN
ACCOUNT of the RISE, PROGRESS, and STATE
OF THE
LONDON HOSPITAL, or INFIRMARY;

Supported by CHARITABLE and VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS, for the Relief of all Sick and Diseased Persons, and in particular MANUFACTURERS, SEAMEN in MERCHANT-SERVICE, and their WIVES and CHILDREN; from the First INSTITUTION on the 3d of November 1740, to the 1st of January 1756.

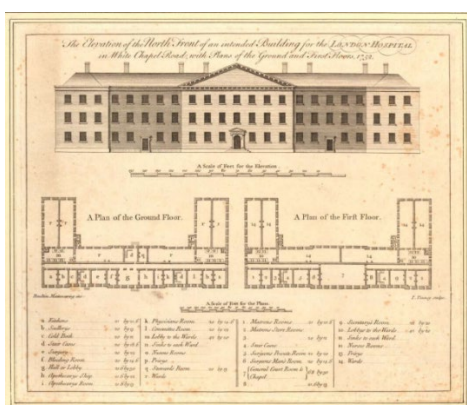
In December, after all the workmen had completed their contracts, Mainwaring was asked to prepare separate estimates for finishing the main parts of the hospital and its wings. Mainwaring estimated in his report that the cost of finishing the project would be £5,300, an amount that was far higher than any sum of cash on hand and requiring much more fund raising than had been anticipated.

The November 1752 Committee entry was the last that mentions John Man, so we assume that, once having fulfilled his contract, and having been paid, he moved on to his next project.

Below, John Man's contract to build parts of the new London Hospital dated 11th June 1752.



Title: Draft Contract between John Man of Mansell Street, carpenter, and William Trotter, Secretary to the Hospital, for carpenter's work in building the Hospital. Date: 11th June 1752 Held by: Barts Health NHS Trust Archives. Reference: LH/A/23/3



The Elevation of the North Front of an intended Building for the London Hospital in White Chapel Road, with Plans of the Ground and First Floors, 1752. [Copyright Trustees of the British Museum]



William Trotter's invitation to celebrate the opening of the hospital, inviting persons to a Sermon at St Laurence's Church followed by Dinner at Merchant Taylor's Hall on 28 April 1756. [Copyright Trustees of the British Museum]



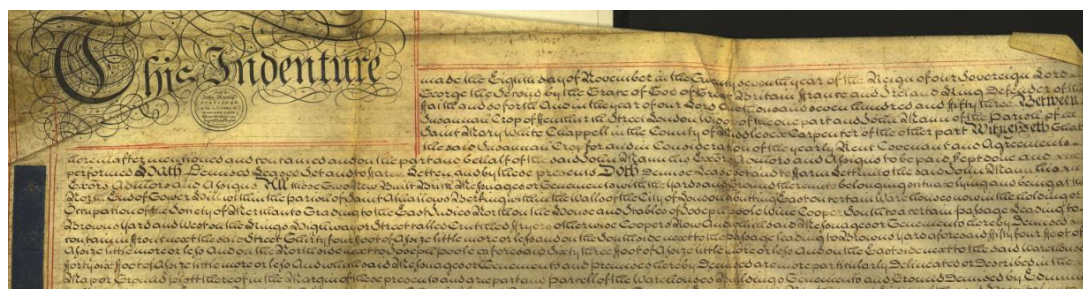
William Hogarth's drawing of the London Hospital, that was used to appeal for funds when it was still at Prescott Street. The ramshackle building may have been Hogarth's version of the Prescott Street location known as the London Infirmary. [Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.]



A medal struck to commemorate the opening of the London Hospital in 1756: 'Relief in Distress'. [Copyright Trustees of the British Museum.]

After completing his work on the hospital, John signed a contract with a near relative², Susannah Cropp, on 8th November 1753. In it, John agreed to lease for a thirty-year period from Susannah: 'two newly built brick houses at the north end of Tower Hill in the parish of St. Allhallows, Barking, abutting to the east of certain warehouses occupied by the East India Company and northeast of a house occupied by Joseph Poole wine cooper'. The piece of land had earlier been known as Baron's Yard.

Below, the first part of a very large document in which John agrees to lease two newly built houses that he himself had constructed on Tower Hill.



The agreement was witnessed by George Cumberland Senior who had married John's sister-in-law Elizabeth Balchen. What the purpose was behind John leasing the two houses is not known.

² Susannah Cropp was John's wife's second cousin once removed. Sussanah's husband Abraham Cropp had brought the Tower Hill property from Sir John Blunt for £2,100 in 1729. Blunt had married Susannah's mother as her third husband and was thus her stepfather. He was responsible for what is known as the South Sea Bubble.

Sealed and delivered by the within named
John Man (being first duly
stamped) in the presence of
Cumberland
Edwards } South Sea House

The above states: Sealed and delivered by the within named John Man (being first duly stamped) in the presence of Cumberland and Edwards South Sea House.
[George Cumberland had married John Man's wife's sister Elizabeth Balchen]

Susanna Cropp

Susannah Cropp's Seal and Signature

John Man

John Man's seal and signature

Right: John Man's sketch of the location of two newly built brick houses each 34 feet wide; on the north end of Tower Hill.



BUILDING THE RECTORY AT HAYES

Without more work in London, John moved his family to Croydon where his sixth child Frances was born on 24 August 1757 and who was baptized on 5 September at St John the Baptist Church, Croydon.

Not far from Croydon was the village of Hayes in Kent whose most prominent resident was William Pitt the Elder (later Earl of Chatham) who at the time was the Leader of the House of Commons and Secretary of State for the Southern Department. Pitt and his wife Hester resided at Hayes Place.

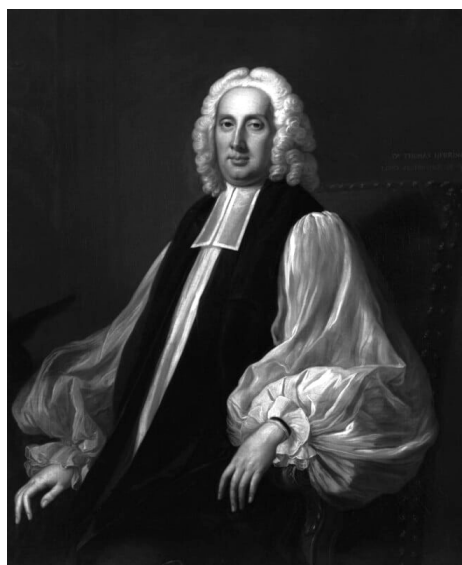


The vicar, William Farquhar, was new, having been appointed on 31st March 1755 and who had gained his Master of Divinity at Aberdeen and who was to cause considerable unrest in the village and to John Man in particular.

PREFERRED. The Rev. William Farquhar is presented to the Rectory of Hayes, and Vicarage of Down, in the Diocese of Rochester and County of Kent, vacant by the Death of the Rev. Dr. Walter Walker Ward.

Whitehall Evening Post, April 1, 1755

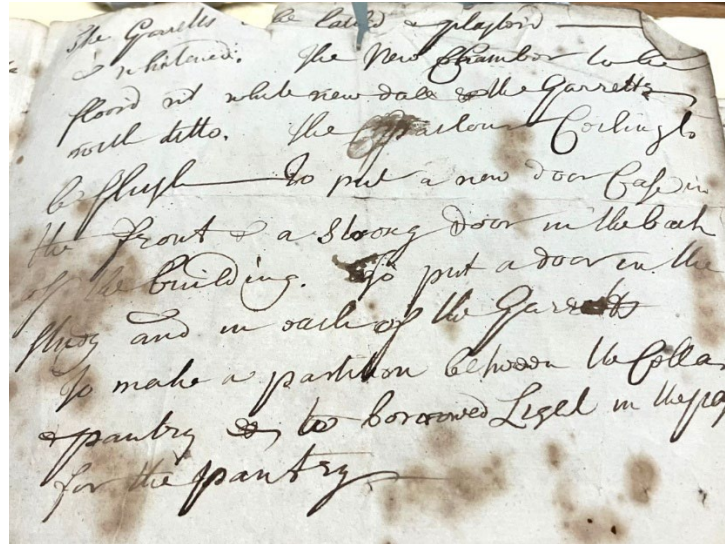
When he arrived, Farquhar found that the rectory was in great need of repair and Dr Herring, Archbishop of Canterbury, agreed that if the difference between repairing and rebuilding was not more than £25 to £30 then it could be rebuilt. Farquhar made his plans, although he knew it would 'straiten him' as the living he derived from Hayes was small amounting to £67 per year after taxes.



Thomas Herring Archbishop of Canterbury (1693-1757)
© National Portrait Gallery, London

In April 1757, a Mr. Singleton of Croydon came to Hayes with John Man in order to survey the dilapidated rectory. After two or three meetings at Croydon, John agreed to take on the project for £105, although he originally wanted £120 to build a better house.

Farquhar had already purchased 10,000 bricks and a full specification was drawn up, which included taking down the old buildings, laying new foundations, making floors, staircases, doors, windows, plaster partitions and building a new brewhouse.



The last page of the list of specifications for building the parsonage house (*not* the agreement).

[Bromley Historic Collections P/180/3/12]

A separate agreement was signed on 23rd May 1757 which included certain penalties such as requiring John to complete the exterior of the building by the end of September. Work started but problems soon arose as Farquhar supervised the building's progress far too closely for the workmen's liking.

Because the old rectory had been completely pulled down, Man reused some of the old bricks as part of the foundation for the new building as was usually done. As the bricklayer was going about his business, Farquhar appeared and ordered the bricklayer to stop and to lay only flint instead of brick at which point the bricklayer laid down his tools and took off to *The George*, the local pub, for a couple of hours.

On his return, he did as he had been told and began laying just flint. Two days later Man came to Hayes, and on observing the flint being laid, ordered the brick layer to lay bricks first and then to place the flint above them as this was what had been agreed upon between Man and Farquhar.

When the front wall was about a foot and a half high, Mr. Farquhar, upon observing the journeyman Carpenter laying a piece of timber on the wall, which he said was to nail the skirting board to, Farquhar objected.

This piece of timber he found fault with, saying it was full of mortises, gaps, and was much rotten. Since all the timber lying about belonged to Farquhar, he told the carpenter to take another piece and use that. This the carpenter refused unless Farquhar paid him to do so.

Incensed, the "turbulent and quarrelsome disposition" of Farquhar's got the better of him and he took to delivering a slap to both the carpenter and the bricklayer. Having had enough, the carpenter and the bricklayer decided that they would go to Croydon to tell John Man of their affliction. At this Farquhar

told them not to be so foolish and asked them if they would not continue with their work as he was expecting Man to dine with him that evening and all would be settled then. At this the two workers agreed to continue.

Some four hours later, Man came to Hayes, and on hearing what had happened he ordered the Bricklayer to stop work, saying he would “go to Westminster Hall”, by which he meant he would take the vicar to court. He then retired to the George ale house to enjoy a beer with his men, and it was there that Mr. Farquhar later found him.

He asked John why he behaved in this manner and begged him to look at the piece of timber that had been the cause of all the ruckus. Man refused and said he would have no more to do with the work unless Mr. Farquhar would oblige himself not to go within 70 yards of the house while it was being built, because he scrutinized everything too closely, but Farquhar disdainfully refused.

As a result of Farquhar’s obstinacy Man ordered the work to be stopped for fourteen days and he employed some of his own people to go ring the bells of the Hayes parish church for joy that he had given up the work. For this he paid George Wallis, the Inn Keeper at the George, about four shillings for beer as well as for the bell ringers who were now his men.

Some time passed and eager for the work to continue, Farquhar went off to Croydon in order to find Man and to work out a compromise which was eventually agreed on. This entailed the re-writing of the original agreement and the use of the Reverend John Lamb of Croydon to act as an arbitrator. The new agreement contained several points, one of which required Farquhar to pay John an extra twenty shillings to lower the ceilings (“furr down the joysts”) and for Man to return some of the timber from the old rectory which he had carried off. John was also obliged to furnish what timber should be needed to complete the stable at his own expense.

However, despite this new beginning, there were still problems with the chimneys and “tying in of the roof” so Farquhar called in a well-known lawyer – Mr. Bullock – who on inspecting the chimneys for himself asked Man why he had made them in such an unworkmanlike manner to which Man responded, ‘To plague Mr. Farquhar’.

This contrasts with a statement made by John later in a court case that he had brought against Farquhar in which he claims that:

... when constructing the kitchen chimney, Farquhar refused to follow the original design and insisted on changes that did not conform to standard architectural practices. Although the changes were against the agreed upon plan, he [Man] had no choice but to comply with Farquhar’s demands and that after he built the chimney according to Farquhar’s instructions, Farquhar admitted his mistake and asked for it to be rebuilt according to the original plan. John complied, incurring additional costs.

On about the 10th of August Mr. Harris, a carpenter of Coleman Street in London, was asked by Farquhar to survey the building before it was all tiled in. Afterwards, Harris wrote to Man and suggested that for his own credit and reputation that he should try to make good some defects that he had found. Man thanked him for his good advice but added that ‘he intended to have made Mr. Farquhar a good house if he had behaved like a gentleman’.

Towards the end of August 1757, this on again off again project was nearing completion, at least as far as the exterior of the building went. It was agreed therefore that two surveyors would make a visit, in the company of Mr. Farquhar and Mr. Man. The date of Tuesday 30th August was set and three of the party – the two surveyors and John Man - arrived at Hayes drenched as it so happened that on that day there was

a great downpouring of rain. This was enough, however, to detain Farquhar who did not appear. Instead, Farquhar set out the next day with his own two surveyors, Mr. Harris and Mr. Blackson, to inspect the building.

After the inspection that occurred on the agreed upon date of August 30th, the two surveyors submitted a letter which they left with the innkeeper at the George which concluded that the building had all been constructed 'in a workmanlike manner according to the price given' and that he [Man] should be paid 'according to measure and value given'. Man sent Farquhar a letter that same day saying that, as they had not met on the Thirtieth as planned, he would meet with him the following Friday or Saturday; presumably to collect what Farquhar owed him.³

It would seem from the above, taken from various sources, that the building, at least the exterior, had been completed to most parties' satisfaction, and that the difficulties John had had with Farquhar were resolved and satisfactorily concluded by the surveyors' letter, in which case John would have gone on to complete the interior.

However, from the following court case brought in November of the following year such a conclusion was not in fact the case.

In the Chancery Division is to be found the case of *John Man, of Croydon, Surrey, master-builder, versus William Farquhar. 23rd November 1758. [C 12/348/69]*.

He begins: *To the Right Honorable Sir Robert Hornby, Knight, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of Great Britain.*

What follows is a summary of John's case against William Farquhar:

John Man, a master builder from Croydon, Surrey, is bringing a complaint before the court. He states that on or around May 23, 1757, William Farquhar, a clergyman from Hayes, Kent, approached him about building a house. Farquhar, knowing Man to be an honest and skilled builder, asked him to take on the project.

They agreed on a price of £105, and a written contract was drawn up and signed by both parties on the same day. After signing, Farquhar took possession of the original document, promising to have two copies made on stamped paper, sign one, and give a copy to Man.

John Man further states that, after signing the agreement, he began work on the house, assuming that William Farquhar would honor their contract. Man invested significant time, effort, and money to gather materials and hire workers to build the house according to the agreed-upon plan. However, since Farquhar had taken the only written copy of the plan and contract, Man had to rely on memory for the construction.

During the foundation work, Farquhar insisted that the bricklayers dig more than a foot deeper than was necessary, which unnecessarily disturbed the ground. Despite the contract allowing Man to reuse old materials from the site—something customary in such projects—Farquhar removed the old bricks after they were laid and forced Man's workers to use expensive new bricks that were meant for other parts of the house.

³ Excerpts from Hayes, A history of a Kentish Village, by Jean Wilson & Trevor Woodman, Vol 1

The unnecessary foundation work, the reworking of chimneys, and the forced use of expensive new bricks, etc. all added to his expenses.

Furthermore, Farquhar treated the workmen so poorly that many complained to Man, and some even quit, disrupting progress. As a result, Man had to pay higher wages to those who remained.

After Man had completed enough work to be entitled to a £20 payment per the contract, he repeatedly requested payment, and eventually Farquhar reluctantly paid him the £20.

Man continued working until the exterior of the house was finished and tiled. At this stage, he needed access to the plan and agreement to proceed with the interior work. When he asked Farquhar for these documents, Farquhar outright refused. Because of this, Man was unable to complete the interior of the house as specified in the agreement.

Per the agreement, Man was now owed an additional £30 for completing the exterior. He demanded payment, expecting that Farquhar would honor their contract. However, Farquhar not only refused to pay but also conspired with others—whose identities were unknown to Man at the time—to prevent him from completing the house.

John Man states that William Farquhar has completely dismissed him and his workers from finishing the house.

Man also explains that their agreement included a penalty clause of £30 if he failed to finish the house by Michaelmas (a deadline in late September). However, due to Farquhar's obstructions, Man was unable to meet the deadline. Instead of acting fairly, Farquhar has exploited the situation by threatening to sue Man in the Court of King's Bench to enforce the penalty.

By Farquhar continuing to pursue legal action against Man, which Man argues is unjust and oppressive, Man claims that these actions violate principles of fairness and conscience. He further explains that he cannot properly defend himself in a court of law because key witnesses who could support his claims are either deceased or have traveled abroad.

Therefore, Man is petitioning the court—where cases of this nature are properly handled—to require Farquhar and any co-conspirators to testify under oath and provide full and honest answers regarding the agreement and Farquhar's actions. Man wants the court to ensure that justice is served by compelling Farquhar to disclose the truth about their dealings. He wants Farquhar to confirm whether:

- 1. He and Man made a formal agreement which was put in writing and signed by both parties. The agreement included specific terms, including payment by installments. However, it was then taken away by Farquhar under certain promises and assurances. Why did he do so?*
- 2. Man repeatedly requested to see the agreement and obtain a copy, and if Farquhar refused, why he did so.*
- 3. Did not Farquhar unnecessarily order the foundation to be dug deeper than required, causing additional labor and expense and did not Farquhar force the use of expensive new bricks for laying the foundation instead of using old materials, despite the agreement allowing for the reuse of existing materials?*
- 4. Had Farquhar paid any portion of the agreed amount, and if so, how much and when?*

5. *What is the current state of the house and what is the reason Farquhar subsequently prevented further work on the house?*
6. *What is the cost of the work already completed and whether it was done in a proper and professional manner?*
7. *If Farquhar had not caused so many delays and obstructions would not the House have been completed by the deadline (Michaelmas) or another agreed-upon date so that Man would have been paid?*

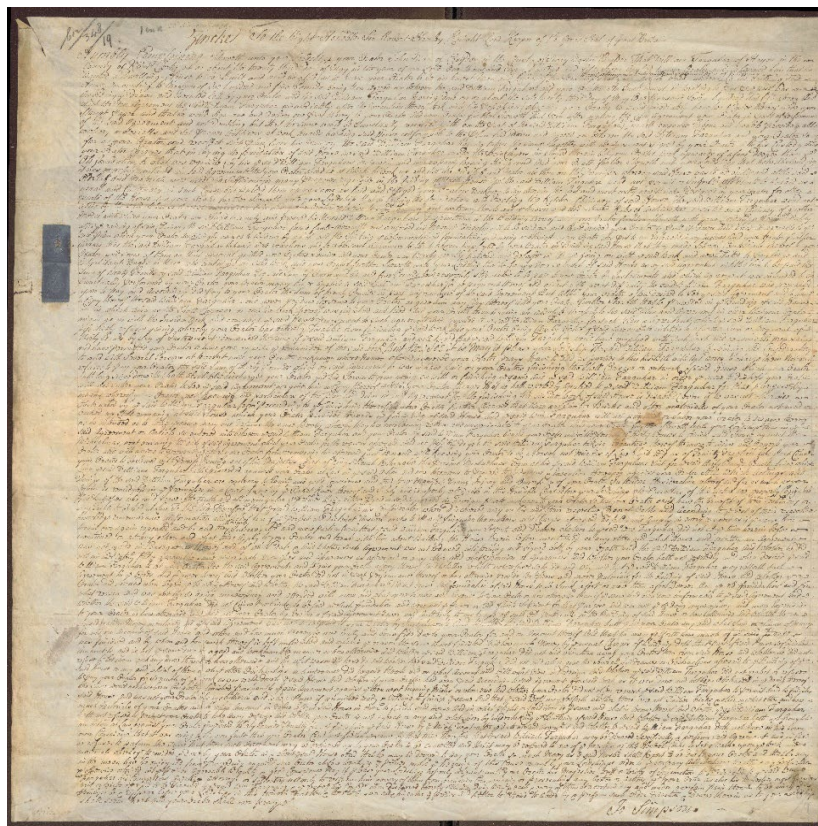
Man is requesting that the court compel Farquhar to provide full and truthful answers to these questions, ensuring that justice is served in their dispute.

John Man states that he repeatedly asked William Farquhar for permission to finish the house and has always been ready and willing to complete the work. He also requests that the court determine whether timber, bricks, and other materials that Man had purchased for the project are still at the construction site, and what their value is, and their current condition. Man claims that Farquhar has refused to let him retrieve these materials, resulting in the materials having deteriorated and become useless causing him financial loss.

Man is asking the court to require Farquhar to honor their original agreement. If Farquhar refuses, Man requests that the agreement be officially canceled. He also asks that the court appoint an official to assess the value of the work already completed and the materials he provided. Based on this evaluation, Man wants Farquhar to be ordered to pay him the amount determined to be fair compensation.

In the meantime, Man requests that the court prohibit Farquhar from continuing his lawsuit against him in the King's Bench until a final ruling is made. He also asks the court to issue an official order requiring Farquhar and any co-conspirators to appear and provide full answers to all claims. Finally, Man seeks any other legal relief that aligns with fairness and good conscience.

Below, John Man's appeal to the Chancery court.



Five months after John's appeal had been lodged in Chancery John and Mary's seventh child Maria[h] Man was born on 29 April 1760 at Croydon, Surrey.

We have been unable to find an official ruling on the case but we do learn some of the outcome from a letter that Farquhar wrote to Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury, in response to a letter Secker had sent Farquhar.



In 1758 Seker had decided to undertake a comprehensive survey of the Church of England's parishes under his jurisdiction, i.e. his dioceses. This effort involved sending a series of detailed questions to parish vicars, aiming to gather extensive information about each parish's condition and operations. Among the questions were:

- The extent and population of the parish.
- Details about the clergy, such as residence and duties.
- Information on church attendance and the presence of dissenters or nonconformists.
- The condition of church buildings and other related structures.
- Educational provisions, such as schools and catechizing practices.

Farquhar responded to Secker in an undated letter by first trying to explain away his late response by confessing that he did not reside at the Rectory where the letter was first sent, for reasons he explains at length, and that he is forced to lodge at a 'very disagreeable' farmhouse instead. And he goes on to explain in a non-sequitur that he only came upon Secker's letter by chance "being picked up out of curiosity".

One of Secker's questions was: *Do you reside constantly upon your cure? Do you live in your parish?* In other words, whether Farquhar lived permanently within his parish to fulfill his pastoral duties.

Farquhar's response to this question, which is his most lengthy, is informative as it, in part, tells us how the case brought by John in Chancery was resolved.

Farquhar responded:

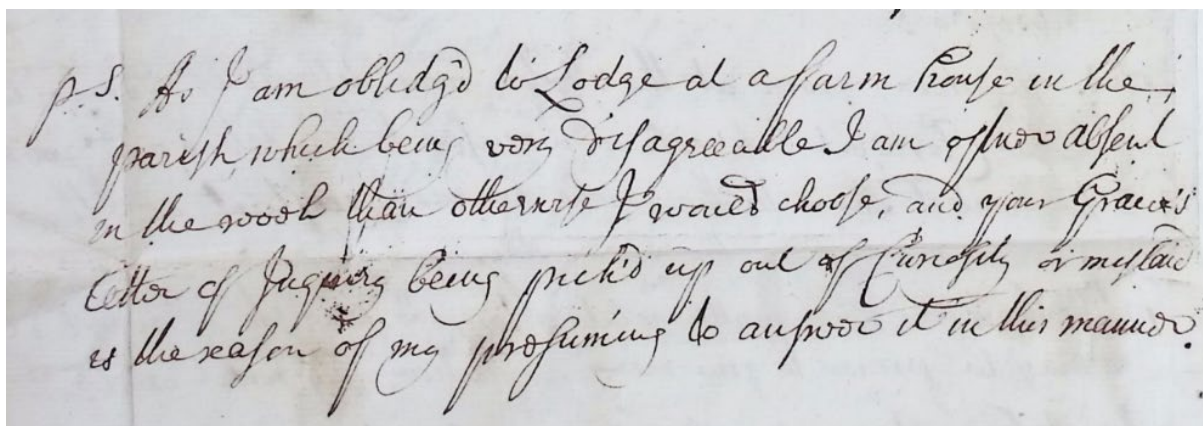
I reside on the cure but not in the house belonging to it. I lodge at a farm house in the parish for the Parsonage house being in so bad repair about 4 years ago when I got the living from the Late Dr Herring then Archbishop of Canterbury⁴ I was obliged to pull it down to the ground and as I had agreed with a Builder in Croydon to rebuild the House, brew house, and stable for a certain sum and to be done in a good and workmanlike manner yet he did not perform his part of the agreement as appeared by a survey taken by Mr Phillips the King's carpenter and other persons of ability and ?? Judgement ??, I was advised to stop the second payment to have justice done to myself and successor and being obliged to sue him at Common Law [The King's Bench], he filed a bill in Chancery and at last after great trouble and expense to me, he submitted and for some consideration (?) money we released one another and the shell is only built, a great part of it must be taken down and I must finish the whole which with the expenses at Law have straiten me as the whole Tythes of Hayes are let as lye ??? and the taxes paid out of that. I would not have presumed to have troubled your grace with this detail of the parsonage house had it not at first made such a noise in the Country and I blamed by the Vulgars.

It would seem from this that at least one of Man's Chancery requests was answered: *'that the agreement be officially canceled'*; here stated as 'we released one another'. And it is perhaps good to know that Man's actions in Law inflicted some pain on Farquhar after all.

Secker's response to Farquhar's answers came on June 14, 1759, and he commiserates with Farquhar's response above noting only that: *'I hope you will proceed with your parsonage House, as you are able and will not be too often absent from your parish on week days.'*

⁴ Thomas Herring (baptised 10 October 1693 – 23 March 1757) was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1747 to 1757.

Farquhar added this PS - still griping about his lack of accommodation:



p.s. As I am oblig'd to lodge at a farm house in the parish, which being very disagreeable I am often absent in the wood than otherwise I would choose, and your Grace's letter of inquiry being pick'd up out of curiosity or mistake is the reason of my presuming to answer it in this manner.

A second indication that Man did not complete the house and Farquhar probably never occupied it comes from a contemporary print engraving dated 1772. The British Museum's catalogue description of the print reads:

A tall lean man in profile on the right faces a shorter man also in profile. He wears plain dark clothes, a plain hat, wig, plain shirt and neckcloth. He looks perturbed and bites his right thumb. In his left hand he holds a long walking stick. From his pocket protrudes a book, *Mead on Poison* and a paper, *Wanted a Curate*. Behind him is a church inscribed Hayes, near it is a small, detached house, probably the rectory, placarded 'To Lett'.

Underneath is handwritten: 'David Wilson. Bookseller. Strand at Plato's Head'.

An added note in the British Museum catalogue states that Wilson's companion is Farquhar. Farquhar died sometime between the time he wrote his will in October 1773 and the time that it was probated which was in March 1774. No death notice for Farquhar appeared in any of the newspapers. The print was made in 1772 and no doubt Farquhar would have seen it.

On the print there is no direct reference to Farquhar, although the title of the work protruding from Farquhar's pocket, the rectory being for let, the church being that of Hayes, and the Scottish mull referencing his Scottish origins are all clues to his identity. Wilson too was of Scottish descent. There is no indication that William Farquhar ever wrote any works although at the time a certain George Farquhar did have his 'collected works' published.



A puzzle is the title: *The Macaroni Vicar of Bray*. In the 18th century a *Macaroni* referred to a man who was excessively stylish and extravagant in his dress and mannerisms. These men were often perceived as foppish, effeminate, and overly affected in their tastes. The *Vicar of Bray* refers to someone who changes their beliefs or principles opportunistically to remain in power or retain their position. It is probably the case then that this print was supposed to impugn Farquhar's character but to what purpose we cannot say. The fact that such a minor and obscure object as the empty rectory is featured at all, let alone that it be for let, indicates that the issues surrounding its occupancy were sufficiently known enough to make it worthy of inclusion.

The character on the right, 'Plato', is David Wilson, a bookseller who owned Plato's Head, which was a well-known bookshop in 18th-century London. Wilson was also a publisher specializing in philosophy, classical literature, and controversial works. Some of the books he sold were considered radical or subversive and he was known for working with prominent thinkers and writers, distributing works that were sometimes deemed controversial by religious and political authorities. Mead's book on poison first

published in 1702 and re-issued in 1756 appears in Wilson's pocket although it is unclear what if any association Wilson had with that publication. It was certainly not controversial.



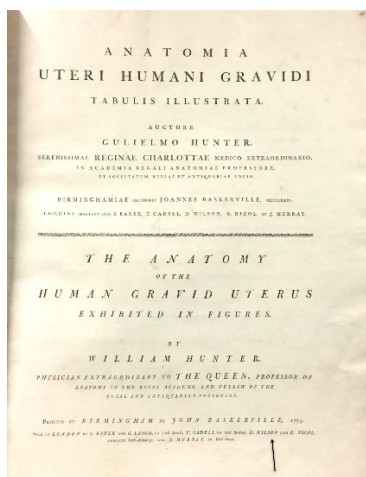
Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury



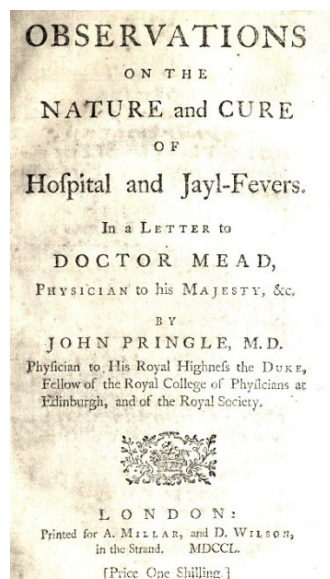
Richard Mead, George II's physician

Mead was King George II's physician and famous for dissecting vipers and scorpions. His book on poisons gives an exact account of the mechanism which provides for the erection of a viper's fangs when the snake opens its mouth to deliver its poison. To demonstrate this, Mead swallowed poison from a viper and thus confirmed the fact that a puncture is necessary to produce the effect (DNB). Does the Mead reference suggest something about Farquhar's character?

Below are the title pages of two books, one showing Wilson as a bookseller and the other as a printer. Wilson was the uncle of the famed bookseller and printer George Nicol (circa. 1740-1828) who had moved to London in around 1769 and began working in his uncle's shop.



The title of a book indicating Wilson and Nicol as booksellers



A letter to Richard Mead by John Pringle. Printed for D. Wilson



George Nicol

The quarrel with Man was not the Revd. Farquhar's only one. Two years later, in May 1759, he was in difficulties again when Peter Walraven of Pickhurst brought a case before the church court accusing him of fighting in church. The rector was summoned for:

... quarrelling, chiding, and brawling in the Parish Church of Hayes aforesaid and laying and imposing violent hands upon the Person of Peter Walraven of the said Parish of Hayes and for striking of the said Peter Walraven in the said Parish Church of Hayes at the Promotion of the said Peter Walraven ... '

And, on another occasion, it was alleged that he struck his church warden in the midst of divine service.

Farquhar's willingness to engage in punishment and retribution also emerged in an answer to another one of Secker's questions:

"Are there any persons in your parish ... who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day [Sunday]?"

To which Farquhar responded:

There are those of the meaner rank who commonly absent themselves ... and as the Laws are not put in Execution for the Religious Observation of the Lord's Day (as they are in North Britain) they resort to the ale houses in time of Divine Services.

[And his solution to this issue is for] *some of the ancient discipline [be] more revived, which in my humble opinion would be a means to revive the drooping state of religion and enforce the observation of the Lords Day, the neglect of which is in some measure the source of the corruption of the morals of the Vulgar ...*

In hoping for the revival 'of the ancient discipline', Farquhar may have been referring to, among other things, *The Act of Uniformity of 1558* which mandated that all individuals attend Anglican services weekly, imposing a fine of 12 pence for each missed service without a valid excuse. He also saw the root of much of the rot in parish as resulting from abuse of the Toleration Act of 1689⁵.

Secker's response to Farquhar's solution to absenteeism which for Farquhar included some form of punishment was as follows:

I am extremely grieved to find that so small a proportion of your parishioners receive the Holy Sacrament, and that the Lord's Day is so little regarded. It might have been hoped that the excellent example of Mr Pitt and his lady joined with your exhortations would have wrought a reformation [but] persons must not be compelled to come to the sacrament, but come to the church [as] they may, prevailing by persuasions and by encouragements is the best way and one would try a mixture of threatenings also, before one proceeded to punishment.

Farquhar was not only a man of hot and hasty temper, but he was also very lazy and careless as during his incumbency he wholly neglected the parish registers, and his successor had to do his best to learn from parishioners what they could remember as to baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

⁵ This is suggested on page 343 in *Churchgoing in the Cradle of English Christianity: Kentish Evidence from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* by Clive D. Field. Archaeologia Cantiana, 2008.

Even William Pitt's wife Hester found him unbearable. After her husband had given her the task of dining with Farquhar and providing him 'much good fare and wine' in order to try to persuade him to agree to an exchange of land, Hester wrote to her husband afterwards describing Farquhar as 'a hateful sort of creature'.



Farquhar made his will on the 8th of October 1773, and it was proved in London on 26th March 1774. In it he mentions David Wilson:

I also give leave and bequeath unto David Wilson Bookseller in the Strand the remainder of sixteen pounds he owes to me by promissory note after deducting what I owe him for money paid out to amount[??] to Wilson and Juliet.

Farquhar died unmarried, unnoticed, and probably unmourned. *The Kentish Gazette* noted that on Saturday 9th April 1774 Francis Fawkes had succeeded Farquhar as the vicar of Hayes and Down. Other than this, there is no death notice for Farquhar.

The Rev. Dr. Plumtre, as Rector of Orpington in this county and Rochester Diocese, has presented the Rev. Francis Fawkes, (Vicar of the same, and Translator of Theocritus, &c.) to the Rectory of Hayes with the chapel of Downe annexed, in the same county, void by the death of the Rev. Mr. Farquhar.

A note in the clergy database that he died [11 April 1774](#) is therefore wrong, especially since his will was proved in March.

Man's building, *if* we can call it that, remained for more than two hundred years the home of the rector and his family, although alterations continued to be made over the centuries.



The house, once it was completed, but when and by whom we do not know, was on three floors and consisted of two upper bedrooms, three bedrooms on the first floor and a study, parlour and kitchen on the ground floor, a wash house, ale and wine cellar, and a stable⁶. In 1936 it was agreed that the Rectory should be sold to the Borough of Bromley for £3000 to be used as a library to which purpose it has been used ever since.



The Rectory at Hayes Built. Two wings were added later



Above, Hayes church in 1775 by John Inigo Richards.
During the 19th Century it was severely reconstructed and lost much of its original form.

There is some evidence that John Man may have travelled to Yorkshire sometime in 1745. There are three pieces of evidence that support this notion. The first comes from an advertisement for a prospectus for a school at Startforth in Yorkshire near Barnard Castle whose headmaster was the Reverend Bowman Rector of Bowes.

John is listed as being one of those who can be consulted in London for information about the school. This begs the question of why John would be involved in a school so distant from London? Unfortunately, the notice identifies John as living in Mansfield Street not Mansell Street. Mansfield Street was not in existence in London until 1765.

Second, in 1748 we find a John Mann, Carpenter, jailed in the Ouse Bridge Jail in the City of York. The prison was built to house debtors and *Insolvent Debtors Relief Act* of 1747, which John took advantage of, aimed at alleviating the hardships faced by individuals imprisoned for debt. It permitted qualifying debtors to petition for release, provided they met specific criteria. To benefit from the act, prisoners were required to notify their intent to apply for relief and to surrender all their assets for equitable distribution among creditors. This legislation did not absolve debts but facilitated a legal framework for debtors to manage their liabilities while regaining their freedom. John would have been thirty years old at the time. John does not appear to have been particularly good with money as his flight to Wales shows. The Man-Mann confusion in the bankruptcy notice is common but may give some pause to using this as evidence.

At **STARTFORTH** in **YORKSHIRE**, near
Barnard-Castle,

YOUTH are taught English, Latin,
Greek, Writing and Arithmetick, in all its Branches; they
are also decently accommodated with Board, Cloaths, Books, Learning,
and all other Necessaries, at 10 l. a Year each.

By the Rev. Mr. **BOWMAN**, Rector of Bowes,
And proper Assistants.

For farther Particulars, enquire of the Rev. Mr. Granger, Rector
of Black Friars; Mr. Russell, at his Chambers in Gray's Inn; Mr.
Clark, Apothecary, in St. Alban's-street, near St. James's-square;
Mr. John Chambers, in Engine Pump Court, St. James's Palace;
Mr. James Scot, in Rupert-street, near the Haymarket; Messrs.
Webber and Pullein, Grocers, in St. Giles's; Mr. Thomas Newby,
near Wapping New Stairs; at Bright's Coffee-house in Fridge-street,
Westminster; Mr. John Man, in Mansfield-street, Goodman's
Fields; or of Mr. Moses Waite, in Blackman's Street, Southwark,
Agent for the said School.

26th May 1752 General Advertiser

The following Persons being Prisoners for Debt in
Owfebridge Goal in the City of York, hereby give
Notice, that they intend to take the Benefit of the
late Act of Parliament made in the Twenty-first
Year of the Reign of his present Majesty King
George the Second, intituled, An Act for Relief of
Insolvent Debtors, at the next General or Quarter
Sessions of the Peace to be held in and for
the said City of York, or at the Adjournment
thereof, which shall happen next after thirty Days
from the Publication hereof, viz. Stephen Lambert,
late of the City of York, Hosier. John Carr, late
of the same City, Gentleman. Thomas Bell, late of
the same City, Cordwainer. John Mann, late of the
same City, Carpenter. Thomas Stavelly otherwise
Stabler, late of the same City, Wind Miller. Abraham
Dickinson, late of the same City, Victualler.
Thomas Jelson, late of the same City, Brazier.
Francis Edson otherwise Easton, late of the same
City, Felmonger. William Ripley, late of the same
City, Labourer. William Bland, late of St. Mary-
gate nigh the Walls, Butcher. Richard Hardy, late
of the same City, Translator. Thomas Nightingale,
late of the same City, Translator.

28th May 1748 London Gazette

The third piece of evidence comes from the fact that when John left for Wales, he was almost immediately hired by Peter Birt who had made his money in Yorkshire from investing in the Aire and Calder Canal. This hiring would suggest a pre-existing relationship which may have taken place while both men were in Yorkshire. The section on John in Wales below details the Birt-Man relationship



The Old Ouse Bridge, York: ©York Museums Trust

JOHN TAYLOR LAMB

When John Man moved his family out of London and took up residence in Croydon in about 1756 his two eldest boys, Henry and John, were aged about 11 and 10 at the time and so were ready for school. In the introduction to Henry Man's posthumously published *'Miscellaneous Works'* it states that he (and no doubt his brother John) were placed 'under the tuition of the Rev. John Lamb' of Croydon.

Lamb had been appointed by Archbishop Hutton to be Master of Whitgift's School in Croydon on 31st October 1751, a position he held till 1774. He was also chaplain to Croydon Hospital during the same

period. The school is now a large and prestigious establishment, but in the 1760s it was in decline; its historian F H G Percy describes it as having been a small school for unambitious pupils.

It appears from the Introduction to the *'Miscellaneous Works'* that Henry Man and the Reverend John Lamb did not get along. Initially Henry's 'native genius' assisted by a 'retentive memory', soon raised him to the head of the upper class. His understanding was 'strong and vigorous' and his conception 'quick'. All of which gave him a 'decided superiority' over all his other school fellows.

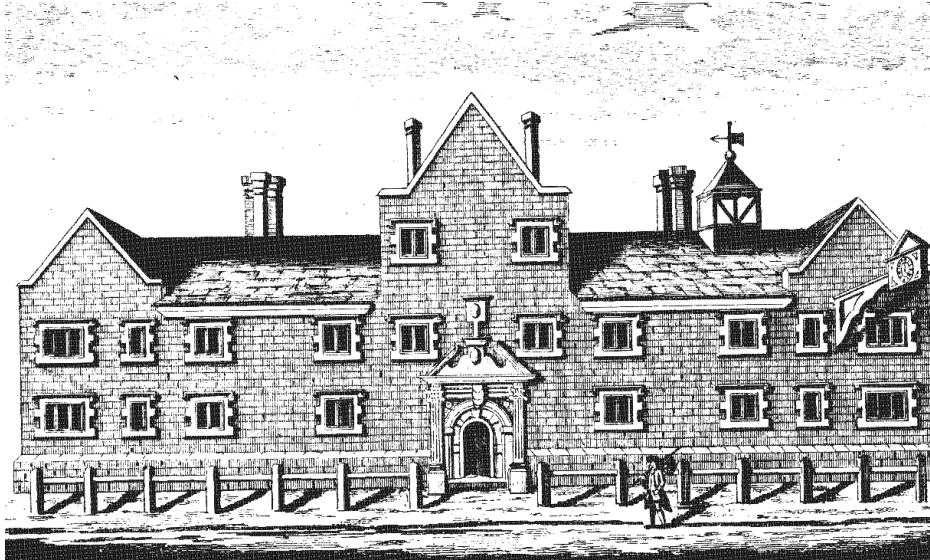
By the age of fourteen he had acquired a general knowledge of Latin and French. He would have continued with the same success with other branches of learning when it appears that the "severity" of John Lamb as a teacher came up against the "vivacity" of his pupil. In 1762, at the age of fourteen, Henry left the school earlier than he would otherwise have done. At the age of fifteen he was placed in a clerical position in the South Sea House where he eventually rose to the position of Deputy Secretary.

Henry was so impacted by his experience with John Lamb that he was prompted to publish a series of essays entitled *'Some Cursory Thoughts on Learning'* which appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* between June and September of 1774. In these he strongly advocated allowing the 'natural genius' of the child to flourish and express itself with minimal interference from the school master. He imagines having 'the spirit of thinking' cultivated in that kind of school where *'no rude master reigns.'*

He believed that that one "may be very wise, and very happy, with a very little school learning; that the powers of scientific knowledge rather increase than satisfy enquiries; and that the wisdom of the heart is all." Henry's brother John does not seem to have been quite so affected by his schooling as he later became a schoolmaster.

John Lamb was thus much involved in the lives of the Man family, representing John Man (Snr.) in his confrontation with William Farquhar and educating his children, up to a point.

John Taylor Lamb was baptised on 21 February 1726 at Ditchling, Sussex, the son of Reverend William and Elizabeth Lamb. He was educated at Ditchling School, and he entered the College of St John the Evangelist, Cambridge, 1748-9; B.A. 1749-50. He was ordained Priest 3 March 1750/51 by the Bishop of Rochester and was licensed to the curacy of Chelsfield with Farnborough, with a salary of £40 and surplice fees. He was collated by the Archbishop, Vicar of Leysdown in the Isle of Sheppey 3 February 1757, ceding this on being collated 21 November 1761 to the Rectory of Keston, Kent, which he held until his death in 1774. On 26 October 1766 John's son Thomas Lamb was born and baptised on November 29 at St John's, Croydon.



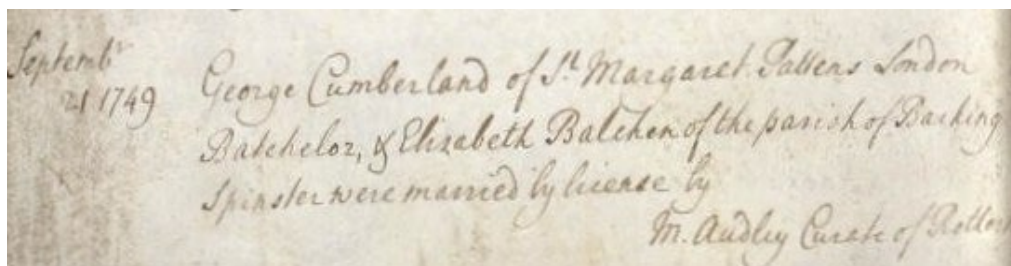
Whitgift's Hospital to which was adjacent to the School and the Headmaster's House where John Man's two eldest sons were educated

EXCILE IN WALES

In about 1770 John decided to leave his family and head for Cardiff in Wales and he did so without letting anyone know where he had gone. The consequences of John's disappearance on his family were profound. His sons were forced to take up trades, perhaps earlier than they would have liked, although these eventually flourished, with one becoming the largest publicly traded hedge fund company in the world as *Man Group* and the other as one of the world's leading commodity brokers - *E.D. and F. Man*. Another consequence involved a lot of back and forth regarding the release of money held in trust.

THE RELEASE OF STOCK

In 1749 John Man was appointed one of the trustees to stock held for Georg Cumberland, Snr. as part of a marriage settlement between Cumberland and John's sister in law Elizabeth Balchen. The marriage took place on 21 September 1749 at St. Olave's, Hart Lane, and there were two surviving children: Richard Dennison and George.



The settlement put £300 in Royal Exchange Assurance stock and £110 in South Sea Annuities into a trust managed by John Man and Elizabeth (Balchen) Cumberland's uncle Henry Balchen.

During Cumberland's lifetime he would receive all the investment income from the settlement and after his death, Elizabeth would receive the income for life, and after her death the money would go to their children. Elizabeth could also direct how the money should be distributed in her will. The settlement included a provision that the trustees could sell the original stocks and reinvest the money in land or other

government securities. It also allowed for the appointment of new trustees if one or other of the original trustees died.

George Cumberland Snr.'s died on Sunday November 10, 1771, and his death was first reported in the newspapers on Saturday November 16. On 21 November, it was reported in the newspapers that:

'Mr. George Cumberland, late of the South-Sea House, was a Gentleman greatly respected for his honesty and integrity; the cause of his *melancholy exit* is attributed to his having dabbled too freely in the Alley on speculation.' We can assume that the 'melancholy exit' refers to George's probable suicide which was motivated by losses on the stock market. His sons at the time were aged nineteen and seventeen.

On becoming a widow, Elizabeth began receiving the income from the trust some of which also went to her children's "maintenance and education" until they turned 21. Beginning in 1776 Elizabeth decided to have the trust dissolved so that she could have access to the principal, but to do so she needed the approval of the trustees and unfortunately for her one of those, John Man, had disappeared in about 1770 and had not been heard of since.

If she could persuade her uncle to appoint another trustee in John's place who together would dissolve the trust, then all would be well; but this he refused as he feared that John Man was still alive and might yet be found.

Finding her uncle immutable, Elizabeth turned to the "*Governors and Company of Merchants of Great Britain trading in the South Seas*" to likewise require them to release the joint stock of South Seas Annuities. However, they too refused citing the same reason: "... because no proof was produced of the death of the said John Man one of the trustees."

In February 1778 Elizabeth issued a 'Bill of Complaint' hoping to persuade a court of law to force either her uncle or the Governors to break the trust. She states that she and her two sons had, among other things, repeatedly asked the Governors and Company to allow Henry Balchen to transfer the annuities so that they may be held by him and another trustee in accordance with the original terms of the marriage settlement. She and her sons had also requested that Henry Balchen himself transfer the stocks and securities into his name and that of a newly appointed trustee, again in line with the settlement's terms. They had hoped this reasonable request would be granted. However, the Governors and Company have refused to allow the transfer, and Mr. Balchen is unwilling to make the transfer or reassign the trust assets to any new trustee without the court's approval. Because John Man's consent is still formally required—and he has long been missing with no word of his whereabouts—the petitioners argue that he should be presumed dead. They therefore request that the court permit Mr. Balchen, as the remaining trustee, to transfer and assign the trust property accordingly.

Elizabeth's Bill of Complaint went nowhere as the court upheld the argument that Balchen and the Governors could do nothing until John Man was declared dead or his whereabouts known.

In the Eighteenth century it was possible if, after seven years, a husband or wife had not been seen for either spouse to declare herself or himself to be widowed. Elizabeth's case, having failed, her only solution was to try to persuade her sister Mary to declare herself a widow. This would then allow her uncle Henry to be the sole trustee and as such he could then appoint another trustee and have the principal released.

However, in this case it would prove no easy task. Mary had the reputation of being a difficult woman as evidenced by a letter her nephew George Cumberland wrote in July 1774:

Our Aunt Man I know nothing of she never calling on us. I am sorry she does not know her friends, there is nothing but what I would do to serve her in my power but her unhappy pride, and tenaciousness will never let her make a friend but perhaps she is prevented by a certain person ...

George's efforts to have Mary make the declaration were rebuffed and in no uncertain terms which his brother Richard found to come from ill will.

" ... what you tell me of Mrs. Man's refusing to serve you in selling out the Stock ... as it can never be of any use to her Family and must proceed from malice and ill nature, tho' I much doubt the sincerity of your Uncle [Henry Balchen] in endeavouring to persuade her to it."

George continued his benevolent attempts to persuade his aunt Mary to allow for the release of the stock and on one occasion he recruited Mary's son John Man to assist him. Of this attempt he writes to his brother Richard:

"I went this morning to Mile End to persuade Mrs Man to oblige us by swearing &c (John having told me, he had now explained to her all we wanted and that she would comply). I met him just by the house and he went back with me to lend his assistance, but instead of agreeing, she broke out into complaints that I and my Mother had treated her with disrespect, in not calling on her, before letting her Uncle know &c, &c, and in the end bounced out of the Room, and John and I out of the House; of course, I am much beholden to John for the pains he takes to serve us in this affair, and sorry it has rendered his time in London so disagreeable."

Richard, in reply, opined that his aunt's behavior to be such that: *"I cannot account for it in a more charitable way, than by supposing her a little discorded in her head."*

Another John - John Balchen - had also offered to intercede on behalf of the Cumberland brothers, but this offer was turned down as this John was seen as: *"... going so busily between Us and Mrs Man,"* and *"I am confident he has some bye End to Serve."*

On the 26th June 1778 George briefly notes that *"Mrs Man has swore. Nancy [Balchen] is going to Prison for £4 again ..."*

By swore we take it Mary had made the declaration needed for the stock to be released, a lot of palaver all because one Man had gone missing. Nancy was another Balchen aunt. Her behavior was wild, reckless, and erratic, causing consternation and embarrassment among the family (she supplied the foundling hospital with at least two infant members).



John Man's sister-in-law Elizabeth (Balchen) Cumberland

WALES

When John arrived in Wales, he decided to adopt a more native sounding name and so became known as Thomas Roberts even so, having been born and raised in Berkshire he certainly did not sound like a Welshman and his non-native appearance, despite the name change, must have been obvious to all. It certainly was to William Thomas who recorded John's death in his diary:

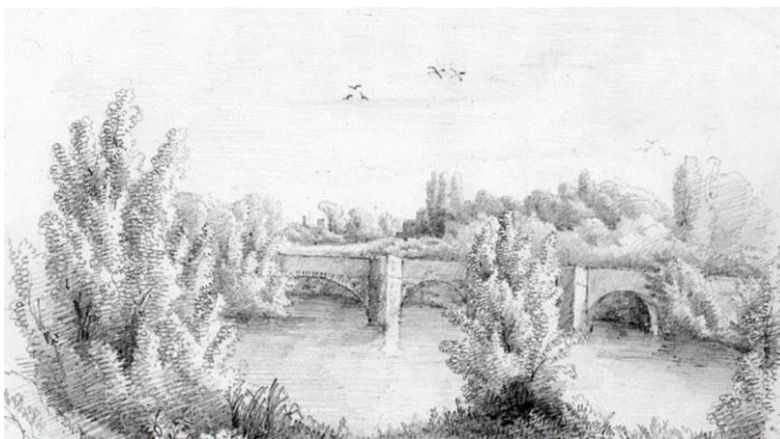
Was buried lately in Cardiff Mr. Roberts a great entetaker [undertaker] in building bridges, gentlemen's houses, etc. of about 70 years of age an Englishman but hereabout and residing in Cardiff these 15 years or more.

As Thomas Roberts, John quickly established himself as a reliable builder. Among his early works was the construction of Llandaff Bridge for which, in 1770, Cardiff town council paid him fifty pounds.

The bridge spans the River Taff at the far end of Bridge Road. At one time this was the most important bridge across the lower reaches of the River Taff and sometimes had to be used instead of Cardiff Bridge when that became flooded or was unsafe to cross.



John's three-arched stone structure with its narrow roadway and stone parapets was replaced at the end of the nineteenth century by a flat metal deck resting on the old stone piers and arches.



Llandaff Bridge



Thomas Heath's painting of John Man's bridge
[© Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales]

After the completion of Llandaff bridge, the city council began considering advancing payment to him of £200 pounds to rescue the decaying Cardiff bridge by:

.... raising the broken pier as high as it was formerly, and dam out the water so as to get a sufficient foundation, and afterwards to underpin the foundation of the said pier together with the foundation of the two arches supported by the said pier, with Lyon stones and good lime mortar, and all to be filled solid to complete the same in a good workmanlike manner ...

Although he must have done a solid job, John's restoration of the Cardiff bridge was eventually pulled down in 1796 and a new one was constructed.



The 1796 version of Cardiff Bridge that replaced John's earlier one

In 1776 John was engaged by the Cardiff City Council to rebuild the jail / gaol, re-using stone from the demolished west wall of the city. On 27th October 1776 John wrote to his friend Peter Birt:

... the astonishment I met with last night ... there was an adjournment of the Quarter Sessions held yesterday to view my work at the Goale [jail] and to setall [settle] my account ... there was a Number of Justices who all went to find out faults but found none and all extremely well satisfied [so] they settled my account as was due to me £165 and as a Gratuity they was please to say gave me 15 pounds and then signed an order upon the Treasurer to pay me £180.

John's relations with the City Council were not always smooth as at the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace held on 20th October 1780 before Sr Herbert Mackworth, Constable of the Castle of Cardiff, Thomas Edwards, and Francis Minnit, his Majesty's Justices, a fine was imposed on John for having left: "large Blocks of Free Stones laid in the Street in Womanby".



A distant view of Cardiff City Hall

In the *Parochial Records: Vestry Book of St John's, Cardiff, 1763-1820* there is an entry for 1777 in which it was ordered that: "... the Wall on the North Side of The Church be forthwith Rebuilt by Thomas Roberts, Builder."

A year later the extent of the wall being rebuilt was extended to all the Church yard walls. This required that all the tomb stones be taken down and levelled with the ground; and that the pitching to the North side of the Church wall be repaired.

When Thomas died in 1783, he was buried at St. John the Baptist, Cardiff, with a grave slab that identified him as: Thomas Roberts, Architect.



However, it was not until after John's death at Cardiff in 1783 that his family in England were able to establish for certain what had happened to him.

In 1787 his son, John Man of Reading, went to Cardiff to look for his father and found that he had arrived four years too late. John's letters to his brother James relate what he was able to discover about their father and how he had established himself as a much-respected builder. John writes:

Cardiff July 12. 1787

I told you last night I intended going to Cardiff this morning. It was cloudy when I got up, but on the strength of a N. W. wind I set out about 8 o'clock and had a very pleasant walk. Almost all the way in sight of King Road and the Shipping, at 12 I got safe here – my first object was to visit the church yard which I did without success. I then enquired of a little girl where the Sexton dwelt, but her direction was so obscure I could not find him, so I looked about for an Inn and with difficulty found [one] that I am now in, for notwithstanding Mr Carey's description of this place, I see little difference between this and the other towns in Wales. Having ordered a lamb chop for my dinner I began my enquiry with my landlady who could give me no other information than that she knew such a person, that he died about 4 years ago and was buried by a Mr. Priest who was a principal creditor and took to all his effects. As she could give me no other information except that Mr. Priest too was since dead, I beg'd a direction to the Sexton. She said the Clerk was the properest person to enquire of so I went to him. The man was very civil told me the Parson had taken the register out of his hands, but if I pleased he would go with me to him. I asked him if he knew the person? He said very well. I told him I was sorry not to see any stone over him in the church

yard. He said he was sure there was one and went with me to shew me where I found a black slatey stone laid upon which he informed me had been used before for the same purpose and the old writing partly erased on this was written —

Here lieth the body of Thomas Roberts of this town Architect who departed this life April 7th, 1783, aged 70 years.

On our return I asked him where he had lodged. He said he had a house to himself. Who was his housekeeper? A Mrs Page. Was she living? He could not tell, but if she was, it was at the farther end of the town. There I went and seeing an old woman at a little Public House door; I asked for Mrs Page. She was gone from those parts she knew not where but would ask her daughter who informed me I might hear of her at Robert Francis, Plumber, at Bristol. I told her my business. She said she knew Mr. R. very well, that he lived at the opposite house [a large handsome one, for the country] had always paid his men [the old woman said he had always walked with God] that she sat up with him a week before he died and was with him when he died, that he was not ill to keep his bed more than a week, was very composed and calm and died without a groan. That Mr. & Mrs. Page had lived with him long, he as his foreman she his housekeeper, that he never had any wife, that Mr Page died before him after which he kept his house about 3 years. That he never was distressed but had always been imposed upon by the villains who worked for him, that he left what he had, when all his debts were paid, to Mrs Page but that Mr Priest had taken all and the old woman was never the better. That she never heard him say anything about his family (but heard from Mrs Page he often talked of a son he had) ... as this is all information I am likely to get here I shall set off immediately on my return to Bristol and if I can see Mrs Page I will give you another letter from Reading. This melancholy business so distresses me I hardly know what I write as you will see by my blunders. This life has few comforts for me and I am walking fast after the poor old man. May my latter end be like his. We have been too remiss. May God forgive us ... I have been often in great distress and my present circumstances are not very flattering but the distress of this day is the greatest of all to lose such a father and in such a way is too much for one. May heaven shower down his blessings upon you and yours is the earnest prayer of your unhappy brother.

John Man

In his will dated 4th April 1783 John Man, writing as Thomas Roberts, directs that his executor, Nicholas Priest, dissolve his estate and with the money raised he is to discharge his debts and pay for his funeral.

After that, Priest is required to ensure that Johanna Page, John's servant, receives an annuity during her lifetime after which the annuity was to go to Priest and his descendants. However, from his son's letter we gather that Mrs. Page never got what was her due. The will was proved in London on 8th May, 1783. Nicholas Priest died in April, 1786 and was buried at Cardiff on the thirteenth of that month.

BUILDING WENVOE CASTLE

At the National Library of Wales there is a bound volume in which are mounted sixteen holograph letters, that begin on 24th May 1776 and end on 21st March 1777, from Thomas Roberts, builder of Cardiff, to Peter Birt, Esq., who had purchased Wenvoe castle and its estates in 1770 from Sir Edmund Thomas.

The letters mostly consist of progress reports on the pulling down of the earlier building and the construction of the new Wenvoe Castle and the Red House in Cardiff. There are interesting details on the acquisition of materials and the difficulties of labour supply, and a few small plans.

The language is plain and the grammar simple, veering from what would be considered standard today. However, such a comparison is hard to make given that, at the time, there was no fixed standard to be

compared to as there is today. The writer is educated but not highly and since he wishes to convey facts his style is plain and purposeful not figurative. There are only a few personal references.

His employment by the castle's new owner, Peter Birt, may be explained in part by the circumstances of their births, for not only had John been born near Reading in Berkshire, so too had Peter.

In one of his letters to Birt, John, writing under his assumed name of Thomas Roberts, points out that he has known Peter since 1729 when Peter was seven years old, and John was eleven. As such, they could be called friends from childhood, sharing a common background.

Other pieces of evidence that point to Birt's Berkshire roots include:

1. His baptismal record from St Laurence Church in Reading, Berkshire, dated 30th October 1722, where his father is listed as Peter Birt and his mother Barbara.
2. His Father's will which describes him (the son) as being 'of Reading'.
3. A number of court cases held in Reading, Berkshire, in which he appears with his father who is described as being 'of Reading' and a 'linen draper'.
4. His father's Death Notice in the papers such as the one from the *Leeds Intelligencer*, Tuesday, 15th October, 1771:

A few days ago died at Reading in Berkshire,
aged 84, Peter Birt, Esq; Father of Peter Birt,
of Armine, in this County, Esq.

5. One of the executors of the will of Peter Birt of Wenvoe was Robert Mecklem of Reading.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
In BATH, in SEPTEMBER or OCTOBER next,
In SEVERAL LOTS,
WENVOE CASTLE, together with the Manors
of Wenvoe, and Cadoxton East Barry, in the County
of Glamorgan, (and the Perpetual Advowson of the Rectory
of Wenvoe of near the Value of 15*l.* per Annum) with above
4000 Statute Acres of profitable Lands, of the yearly Value of
200*l.* and upwards, all within three measured Miles of the
Castle, seven of Cardiff, and nine of Cowbridge, two plen-
tiful Market Towns.
For further Particulars, enquire of Mr. Williams, Attor-
ney, at Cowbridge, in the said County; Mr. Cha. Attwood,
Attorney, at Uik, Monmouthshire; Mr. George Jones, No.
9, Lincoln's-Inn, next the Gardens; Mr. Tarlton, at Bath;
or Mr. Hargrave, in Quality-Court, Chancery-Lane.
The Estate will be shewn to any intended Purchaser,
on applying as above, or at Wenvoe-Castle; and the Day of
Sale will soon be advertised.

Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette 05 August 1773

Unlike the previous occupants of Wenvoe, who came from a long line of Welsh gentry, Peter Birt was unknown to the local inhabitants and was, like John Man, a stranger in their midst. How Birt had acquired such a vast sum as £40,000 to purchase such a magnificent property and what the fortuitous circumstances were that had brought Birt to acquire such an estate in far off Wales was a cause of much local gossip.

He was known as a Yorkshire man who came from Armin / Armyn / Hall in that county and a man of immense wealth, but perhaps, it was rumoured, not a gentleman. Gossip swirled that his father and perhaps even he were mere tailors, linen drapers, and who knows what else. In his letters to Birt John would sometimes relay such gossip but was always quick to state how he had defended his employer from such nonsense. Even so, John was not above insinuating that Birt's secret was only somewhat safe with him.



Airmyn Hall in Yorkshire

The source of Peter's wealth did indeed lie in the North of England in Yorkshire and in particular along the Aire and Calder Navigation Canal where he had acquired, by means of astute business dealings, a monopoly on the lock fees for the boats navigating the canal; thus generating a large income for himself and his family. This also allowed him to buy various coal mines in the West Riding, as well as several barges to transport the coal (no fee required).

However Birt was not popular ...

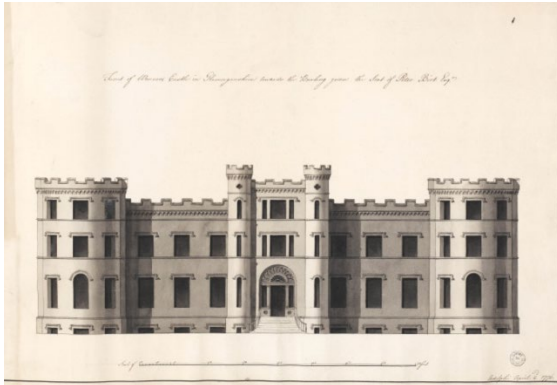
Even though his ambitions and his unpopularity led him to buy an estate in Wales, his business interests often needed his attention in Yorkshire, and such an absence required much letter writing on John's part to keep Birt updated on the building's progress.

It also required John to make his own decisions as to what next steps to take, which materials best to use, who to hire for what tasks, and how best to situate parts of the building, etc. Because the mail was slow, sometimes taking weeks for letters to be exchanged, John was often left relying on his own knowledge and experience on how best to proceed in the hopes that whatever resulted would receive Birt's approbation.

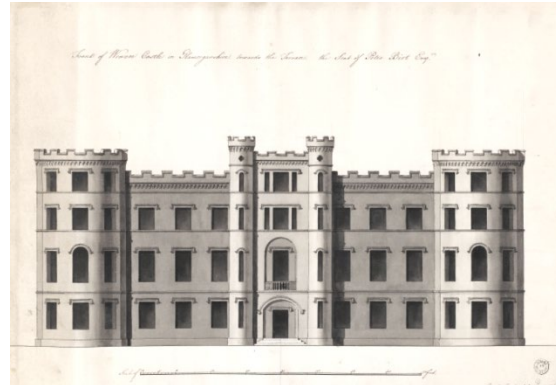
Given the quality of John Man's work and their previous knowledge of each other it is perhaps not surprising that when Peter Birt decided to tear down Wenvoe Castle and build his own magnificent replacement he would have chosen an old friend of the family for the task.

This raises some questions: Were Birt and Man in touch with each other for a time before John left England? Perhaps Birt with plans in hand, requested John Man to join him in Wales? Thus making John's 'disappearance' from England and reappearance in Wales more deliberate than it might have seemed. Or, was it John, already established in Wales, who had alerted Peter in Yorkshire to the possibility that he could purchase Wenvoe? Or, had their paths crossed fortuitously and unexpectedly in Wales?

On 2nd April 1776 the architect Robert Adam drew up plans for Birt's new castle and these appear to have been used as the basis of the castle as built, but they were not relied upon entirely as the house differed from them in many respects. Below are Adam's drawings of two opposing facades of the new Wenvoe.



© Sir John Soane's Museum



© Sir John Soane's Museum

Below, one of the facades of the actual Wenvoe Castle, as built by Thomas Roberts. When completed in the late 1770's, Wenvoe would have been among the finest houses standing anywhere in Wales. Viewed from across its broad parkland, a mock-castellated building of immense length would have been on view, running along the crest of an artificially formed ridge.



John Man's version of Robert Adam's building

What is perhaps the most obvious difference between Adam's plans and the actual house is the truncated somewhat squat central portal while the overall height is reduced by one story. What the building lost in height and elegance it made up for in width by means of two long low extensions running out on either side of the main building to the east and west and that were terminated by slightly reduced versions of the main central portal. These terminal buildings were referred to as 'pavilions' and were never part of Adam's plans. Thus, the building reached over three hundred and seventy feet in length.



What the building lacked in height John made up for in length; as indicated by the red shaded areas

Adam never set foot in Wales, so his plans had to be interpreted and executed entirely by John and so it is not surprising that the castle drifted away from Adam's plans, becoming stumpier and longer. It is probably safe to assume that much of how Wenvoe turned out was due in part to John's own interpretation of Adam's plans.

In one letter reporting on the building of the kitchen he tells Birt that '*... the front of the Kitchen is finished as **my** sketch was...*' James writes that: "We need look no further for the man [Thomas Roberts] who adapted Adam's plans, and who is in the most meaningful sense the architect of Wenvoe Castle." p. 13.

In carrying out his work, an added burden for John was Peter Birt's long absences from Wales. He was often to be found either in Yorkshire at Armin Hall or with his son in law Robert Dynley in Bloomsbury Square in London, or somewhere in between. As a result, John had to resort to much letter writing to keep Birt abreast of the work being done; seeking Birt's approval for work accomplished, as well as asking Birt what he would like done next. For example:

Please to give me your determination on it.

Please to let me know how the work men are to be supplied with Money for you know they cannot wait more than a week and hardly that.

... therefore please to send me your answer by Return of post which will Much Oblige ...

... but regularly as usual pray send me your answer ...

He often wishes Birt would either write to him or present himself in person:

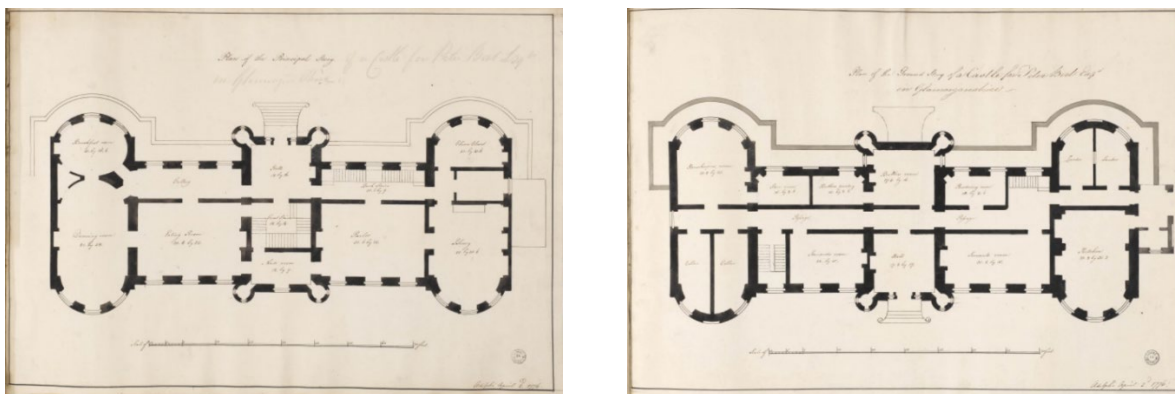
... but I wish you was here to see it yourself ...

I Rec^d no Letter yesterday from you I suppose owing to snow or bad weather in the North as we have had a good deal of frost and snow this week here but it soon melted and went off. Being disopinted [disappointed] of your a costimed [accustomed] Letter I am at a loss for matter to wright [write] about.

John expresses frustration at the amount of letter writing he is forced to undertake as it takes up much of his time and he suggests that he will write shorter letters in future to save not only his time but the amount of paper he has to use to write on.

I hope you Excuse a Shorter Epistle for the future, for it takes up much of my time ...

Below, Adam's plans for the interior.



Adam's plans for the interior of Wenvoe [© Sir John Soane's Museum]

On demolishing the old building to make way for Birt's new one, much of the original stone was re-used by John in addition to locally quarried "blue stone", as well as Bath stone which was brought to the site by ship via the port of Cardiff.

At one stage over 30 masons were engaged on the building and by 29th April, 1776, the foundations were almost complete, and the roof was on before the end of that year, but the interior was so vast and grand that it was not finished until ten years later.

A contemporary writer [John Byng] said the house and grounds: "... exhibit a charming effort of bad taste and bourgeoisy."⁷ⁱ However, another described the house as: "... one of the finest houses standing anywhere in Wales." while another said it was "... an extremely large but uninspired castellated mansion". An article in *Welsh Style* says that when completed Wenvoe would have been among the finest houses standing anywhere in Wales and as such stood as a "fine monument to good taste".

The house was sufficient enough to inspire Turner to make an obscure sketch of it in 1798 as shown below:

⁷ Contributions Towards a History of Wenvoe Castle by Brian James in The Cardiff Naturalists' Society Reports and Transactions, Vol. XCVIII, 1974-76



During the latter half of the eighteenth century the architectural style which was considered the apotheosis of taste and refinement was the classically inspired Greco-Roman style of which Robert Adam was an ardent exponent. Thus, Wenvoe's bulky hulking neo-gothic monumentalism ran counter to what was then the fashion and could not have been further from Adam's own taste.



THE RED HOUSE

While Thomas Roberts was building Wenvoe, Peter Birt was busy in Cardiff acquiring more properties, and particularly The Red House. The Cardiff City Council records note:

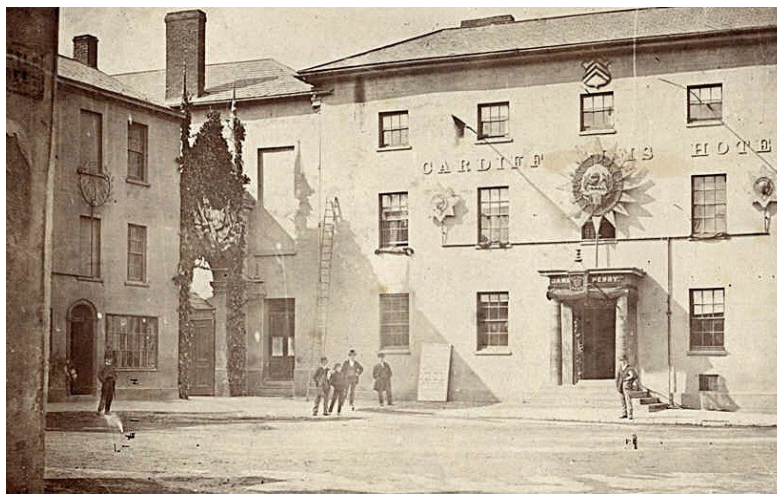
Whereas Peter Birt Esqr hath Apply'd to the Bailiffs Aldermen and Capital Burgesses of the said Town for a Lease of the Lands and Buildings situate and adjoining to a House lately purchased by him of Sr Edmund Thomas BarBar[one]t Call'd the Red House and lately held by Lease by the said Sr Edmund Thomas for 99 Years at the Rent of 3s. 4d. now we the said Bailiffs Aldermen and Burgesses in Consideration of the said Peter Birts having erected Certain Buildings on the said Premises do consent and agree to Grant a Lease to the said Peter Birt on the same for the Term of 21 years to Commence at Candl'as last at the Rent of Three Pound three Shillings payable Mich'as Day yearly, & do hereby Impower and direct the Bailiffs of the said Town to put our Common seal to a Lease for that purpose.

Originally intended as a private dwelling, Birt decided to repurpose the building as an Inn and for this he needed to demolish parts of the earlier building once owned by Sir Edmund Thomas.

He instructed Thomas Roberts to rebuild the Red House at a cost of no more than three hundred pounds to which Roberts agrees: *'... but as you say you make no doubt but 300 will make a very complete inn.'*

This price prompted skepticism among the locals some of whom had: *"declared in public that I could not cover the house in for 300."* However, Roberts managed to accomplish this feat as he writes:

"Yesterday afternoon had a visit from Sir Hebert Mackworth to see the alterations of the Red House and [he] acknowledged a surprise and astonishment so much that he told me I should Build 2 houses for him &c &c &c I told him what money was expended only he seemed thunder struck."



John Man's building for Peter Birt, then known as The Red House

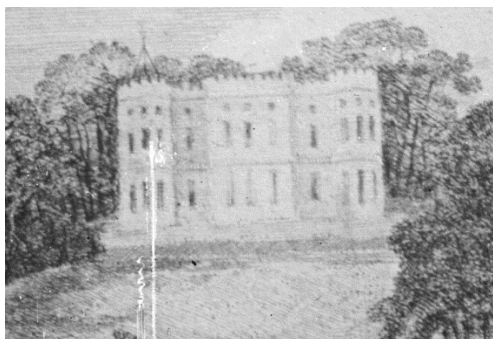
After completing the new and much larger Red House, John is pleased to relate that: *"... the Rich [are] grudgingly wishing they had such a house to live in for there is none such in the town."*

The Red House was later renamed The Cardiff Arms, which was demolished in 1878 during street improvements.



John Man's 'Red House'

Perhaps Mackworth's admiration for Thomas Roberts' accomplishment with the Red House extended as far as an invitation for John to build a house for him as well. Not far from Wenvoe was Mackworth's home, Gnoll House, which he had begun to add to at about the time that the new Wenvoe was being built. By the time Mackworth had finished with Gnoll, a house emerged that very much resembled neighboring Wenvoe.



Sir Herbert Mackworth's Gnoll House

Sir Herbert employed an architect by the name of Johnson to make his additions to Gnoll, but like Wenvoe, an executive architect, such as Thomas Roberts, was needed who was capable of translating plans into actual buildings. Gnoll met the same fate as Wenvoe and over the years slowly crumbled away to nothing.

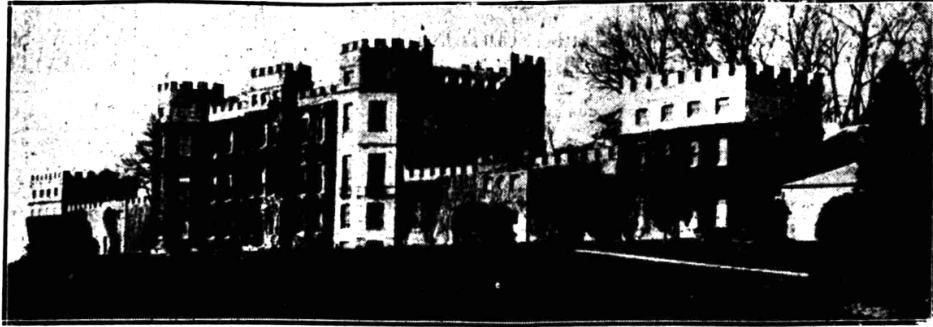
THE END WENVOE

John's legacy did not endure. During the early 20th century, the castle's occupants, The Jenner family, gradually found the cost of maintaining the castle too much and the property was put on the market. This move was precipitated by a fire on 21st February 1910 when the East wing of the Castle, which included the library, burned down at a cost at the time of £10,000. The building never revived, and it was left to gradually deteriorate. An effort was made to sell the Castle between 1927 and 1929 but there were no buyers.

Wenvoe Castle for Sale Western Mail - Saturday 12 March 1927

WESTERN MAIL, SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 1927.

WENVOE CASTLE FOR SALE.



Wenvoe Castle, the residence of the late Mrs. Jenner, which is to be sold by private treaty. It is a charming old mansion, and commands an extensive view of the Bristol Channel and the Vale of Glamorgan. [Western Mail photo.]

Country Life - Saturday 12 January 1929. Advertisement for Wenvoe Castle.

GLAMORGANSHIRE
Five miles from Cardiff, two miles from Barry.
THE FREEHOLD RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY
WENVOE CASTLE.

AN IMPOSING STONE-BUILT AND SLATED STRUCTURE IN THE FEUDAL STYLE, erected about 140 years ago and standing on rising ground, facing almost due South and enjoying extensive views over well-timbered parklands.

The accommodation comprises central hall, five reception rooms and conservatory, 21 bed and dressing rooms, and usual offices.
Company's water, electric light from private plant, cesspit drainage.
 Stabling and garage premises affording stabling for about ten horses.

THE PLEASURE GROUNDS
 contain many fine trees, lawns, rock and rose garden.

LARGE WALLED GARDEN.
 The Property extends in all to about
20 ACRES.

FOR SALE PRIVATELY OR BY AUCTION IF NOT SO SOLD.
 Solicitors, Messrs. GODDEN, HOLME & WARD, 34, Old Jewry, E.C. 2.
 Land Agent, C. D. THOMSON, Esq., Estate Office, Wenvoe Castle, Cardiff.
 Auctioneers, Messrs. KNIGHT, FRANK & RUTLEY, 20, Hanover Square, W. 1.

In 1930 it was decided to demolish the castle, except for the 'East Pavilion' together with the stable block, which left enough of the original to turn it into a Golf Club, which is what it is today. The 'East Pavilion' being one of the blocks that terminated the long eastern wing.

Below, the sad remnants of the once magnificent Wenvoe Castle: *Western Mail* - Tuesday 21 January 1930



A VIEW OF WENVOE CASTLE, which is being demolished on account of the expense involved in maintaining it.
Wenvoe Castle being demolished Western Mail, 21 January 1930

Western Mail - Saturday 01 March 1930:

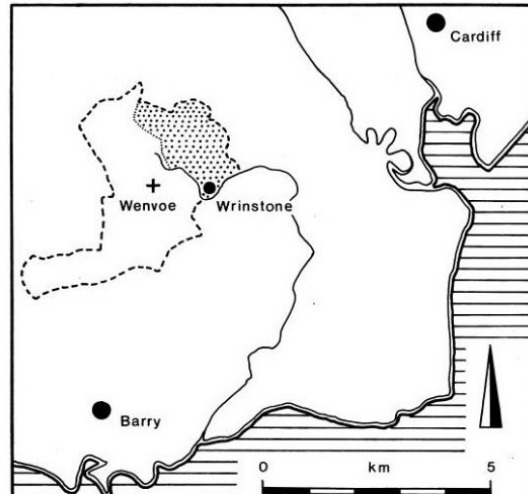
Wenvoe Church Memorial. Tenant farmers and parishioners of Wenvoe have decided to erect a lych-gate over the main entrance to the parish churchyard in memory of the late Mrs. Jenner, of Wenvoe Castle. *The lych-gate, is to be made of materials from the demolished castle.* The church tower already contains a clock to the memory of the late Capt. Jenner.



THE ENTRANCE GATE to Wenvoe Church, erected in memory of the late Mrs. Jenner, Wenvoe Castle, to be dedicated on Wednesday next. The gate was built from stones taken from Wenvoe Castle during its recent demolition.



The gate leading to Wenvoe Parish Church made up of stones taken from Wenvoe Castle.



Below, Mrs. Jenner's Portrait Western Mail - Wednesday 02 April 1930



The remnant of John's building, The East Pavilion, is still an impressive structure conveying something of John's master hand – a structure that was never a part of Adam's original plans.



The Wenvoe Golf Club showing the East Pavilion

THE LETTERS ON WENVOE

One of Thomas Roberts first tasks was to demolish the cellars of the old building using 40-pounds of dynamite which then left the building:

... a Deplorable place to look at now: It's like an Old Building that had stood a long siege: as it has indeed as Hawkins has used he tells me near 40 worth of powder : as soon as the cellars are dug he will set the Labourers to take down the other Building which I hope will be within a week.

Once pulled down (or blown up) John reused much of the remaining material and incorporated it into the new building.

An important but mundane feature is the digging of a reservoir to supply the house with water and he gives Birt some numbers as to the width, length, and depth that the reservoir should be and the numbers of gallons it would hold. Having built an entire canal 34 miles long and 52 feet wide it is not surprising that Birt's response is to suggest an even bigger reservoir along with the gallon amount it would hold. To this John acquiesces but he worries that it would cost Birt at least £50 to construct, depending on the nature of the soil to move.

... the size of our Reservoir described in my last letter is 18 foot long 5 foot wide and 3 ft 6in deep : which will hold 52 barrels or about 26 Hogsheads, 70 gallons ... : now the Reservoir you purpose will hold above 500 Hogsheads at 63 Gallons to y/r Hogshead : the Utility and Practability I approve of : But such a place as you describe : if its only loose Earth to Move : will stand you in 50 [pounds] at Least : but if it should be Rock to move : God only knows what it may cost

Birt must have expressed frequent concerns about whether things were moving in the right direction, and he needed to be reassured that all was going to plan and that he can be relied upon to finish the job. As a result, John scatters his letters with assurances that Birt will be pleased with the outcome.

Had I but Jupiter's Phaeton I would fetch you to the top of the Garden that you should satisfy your curiosity and assuage your anxiety for I should see with as much pleasure as I ever did at Wenvoe Castle. Nay it would give me pleasure could I see you every week to consult upon frivolous matters as thank god nothing material has happened since we began. As to the time I am not out of hopes in the Least of performing my intended intention ... nothing but Death should prevent me executing my plan but as

things now are, you have the extent of my Power. As to my address its plain, simple, and sincere without any affectation so hope you will trust to my weak abilities, and I will extend them to you utmost in your service and if any defect should unfortunately break out I will Immediately give what relief I can to it so you shall certainly be informed of it immediately.

Other instances of John's attempts to reassure Birt include:

... make no doubt but we shall fill the County / Country [?] with admiration ...

I beg you 'll make yourself happy for all that mortal beings can do shall be done ...

As I have said often if I did not think it for your interest, I would not propose it ...

When I advise it is with truth and sincerity and I will not put my name to falsity ...

He tells Birt about times when he occasionally runs into trouble such as when he receives a load of timber:

I am much afraid I shall be troubled for girders for Mr Jones' timber is so very crooked I can hardly find a good growed stick in the whole lot. It is in short the most unfit timber for building I ever used or saw. The timber is sound, but so very crooked ... it grieves me to see ...

The timber that Robert's complaints about came from Robert Jones' estate at Fonmon's castle some five miles from Wenvoe. The Joneses were an old and well-established Welsh family unlike Peter Birt's.



Robert Jones of Fonmon (1738–1793), wearing a Hussar's uniform by Sir Joshua Reynolds

His relationship with the men he works with appears mostly cordial and he is especially dependent on the good graces of Mr Hawkins the Mason.

Hawkins is doing all in his power to procure men for several have left him but they are often changing; one goes and another comes, but I spear [spur?] him till he winces nay after he is angry and then I just smooth him down again for upon the whole the man does all in his power I verily believe and has the work at heart the same as myself.

However, at one time he detects a certain languidness and sense of discouragement among the Masons which he finds disturbing, and which require him to step in and instill a sense of hope among them:

... as I observed in my last there seems a spirit of stillness, an inactive spirit, amongst both men and master for I believe Hawkins is afraid he shall not save himself which makes him languorous for I encourage him and told him I was sure [this] would pass [?] my life for it you would not let him be a looser by it. Well, said he, and smiled, that is some encouragement however and during the time since he is more active than before, therefore if you think proper to write a line to him with some fresh assurances, I hope it will awaken the present lethargy.

Since the country around was dependent on an agricultural economy it is not surprising that masonry work was secondary to bringing in the harvest and so John's labor force ebbed and flowed around him according to the seasons.

Yesterday evening Mr Hawkins arrived from Bristol with 5 hands and more is promised to come by the Boats which is expected tomorrow or Sunday : so that Peace and Tranquility continues at present as usual : I don't say restored because it was never broke by me : nor none else but Mr. Hawkins' men going from him which at this time of the year they will all do for they will not leave their old customs no more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots, for some of your best friends has taken some of the work people away: to serve themselves, but thank god the weather is fine at present and the harvest will soon be over and all the labourers will return again to their work as they have promised to do.

When the harvest is over the workers do indeed return: *I believe the masons will stick to their work now as they say there are men to be had in other places for [then] they are much less the Dog in the manger.*

And the numbers tell the story as well: on 23rd August Hawkins had sixteen masons at work; by 11th October there were thirty.

And, even when the masons are in plentiful supply and willing to work, the stone for them to work with is sometimes not there and when there is no work, they end up grumbling and are "obliged to go play" or they threaten to "go to threshing."

In order to find stone for the masons to work with John has to resort to finding more buildings to demolish and in one letter he suggests to Birt that it would do well to pull down an old gate house for further supplies:

Thank God the weather is fine & all that can be done shall. It's the hewing the stone that stops the whole work for if stone was ready there is masons enough to rise the whole storey in a week or ten days time and another thing the old Stones [are] nearly all used up ... and as the old Gate house is of no use but take of the View of the N:E think it might be taken down : please to give me your determination on it. As to weather: I know none will hurt our building ... neither frost nor snow but may Retard its progress ...

On another occasion, when stone is in short supply, John runs through some possibilities of getting hold of more such as: digging or using powder to blast for them or re-using stone from old buildings.

I was told a 1000 Load of Stones were buried which I believe we will find true but expensive getting at them ... there lies the ruins of several old Buildings which we are in hopes of coming at much cheaper than any digging for them ... any Building Size will not rise without powder ...

John's patience is sometimes tested by the locals who come to visit and comment on Wenvoe and he writes that he has been long enough in Wales to become 'scandal-proof' and he is prepared to put up with a lot of sniping from the neighbors, such as Sir Herbert Mackworth, who on a visit to Wenvoe questions whether John has situated the castle in the proper place to which John retorts in a letter to Birt that:

I am confident the house is situated in the best place on the Estate. If a Man had a mind to study Astronomy [then] on top of the Bowling green might be more agreeable perhaps, but I am sure it would not [be] for any other use ... It Gives me all the Satisfaction I wish for. And as to the esteem of the Gentlemen of this Country, if ever I should meet with any, it will be as unexpected as Snow in Harvest.

And some locals were even betting as to whether work at the Castle would be completed:

... for there was 20 to 5 offered that the work was all stopped at Wenvo by Griffey Price ...

And there are shadows cast by characters whom Roberts does not trust:

I look upon the whole a very shuffling affaire [shuffling affair] amongst Glamorganshire later meganicks [mechanics] : Glamorginesses [??] Theves [thieves]...

With Birt largely absent, he must often rely on his own sense of taste when it comes to choosing what material to use:

As I have told you before, as to the whiteness of the free stone it has an exceeding good effect to my eye but that may be grown as I am old fashioned amongst the young modern but as your eyes are not many years younger than mine I hope it will give them the same satisfaction it does mine and then my ambition will be satisfied , and make no doubt when the critics are as old they will thinks as I do.

Birt asks him to supply him with a description of the building and John writes:

As to the appearance of the building, a man that sounds his one [own] Horn is a fool but at your Request I give you my simple judgment which is it far exceeds what I ever expected owing to the hewing of the stones & the goodness of the work ... and as to the Defects or any kind of omissions I know not of any in the whole building

The chimneys are all plastered within side and a proper size and with the blessing of God I make no doubt but they will answer their proper purposes but no man [is] infallible.

In November 1776 a 'Huricen' struck South Wales causing widespread destruction among the cottages on the estate. As Roberts puts it the hurricane:

... has tore the covering off all your houses : I believe belonging to your estate. Some more than the other.

The people on the estate approach Roberts for help to restore their roofs:

Many of them would put up with a little thatch as they say [but] it's very hard. They have not a day bed to lie on.

He tells Birt he can do nothing for them and:

... so to get rid of them I send them to John for straw and John wont part from a handful so the poor creatures are left to shift; but if a little thatch was put upon some of the houses it would save the timbers &c. more than the value of the straw. Please to give me some answer to this as I may have some peace either here or at house but now I have none at either place.

The storm affected much of the country and was reported in the newspapers.

From various Parts of the Country, we have received Accounts of the Damage done by the tempestuous Weather during the Night of Tuesday last, and on the two following Days: At many Villages we hear of Houses being unroofed, Chimnies blown down, and Trees torn up by the Roots, and carried to a considerable Distance.—A Correspondent at Liverpool writes Word, that several Ships at that Port were driven on Shore by the Violence of the Wind, and greatly injured, and it was feared the Pacquet Boat which sailed from thence but a short Time before the Storm began, with 100 Passengers on board, was lost. At Chester, Houses, Garden Walls, and whole Stacks of Chimnies were blown down; and the Sloop, called the Holywell Pacquet, bound from that Place to Rudland, was totally lost in a hard Gale of Wind.

A Letter from Manchester, dated Nov. 23, says, "On Tuesday Night began a very violent Storm of Wind, Hail, and Rain, which continued without Intermission till Thursday, by which a great deal of Damage has been done in this Town and the Country adjacent, particularly several new Houses were blown down, and a poor Man was so much hurt by the fall of one of them that he is since dead."

The Derby Mercury, November 22, 1776

From various Parts of the Country, we have received Accounts of the Damage done by the tempestuous Weather during the Night of Tuesday last, and on the two following Days: At many Villages we hear of Houses being unroofed, Chimnies blown down, and Trees torn up by the Roots, and carried to a considerable Distance. A Correspondent at Liverpool writes "Word, that several Ships at that Port were driven on Shore by the Violence of the Wind, and greatly injured, and it was feared the Pacquet Boat which sailed from thence but a short Time before the Storm began, with 100 Passengers on board, was lost. At Chester, Houses, Garden Walls, and whole Stacks of Chimnies were blown down; and the Sloop, called the Holywell Pacquet, bound from that Place to Rudland, was totally lost in a hard Gale of Wind. A Letter from Manchester, dated Nov. 23, says, "On Tuesday Night began a very violent Storm of Wind, Hail, and Rain, which continued without Intermission till Thursday, by which a great deal of Damage has been done in this Town and the Country adjacent, particularly several new Houses were blown down, and a poor Man was so much hurt by the fall of one of them that he is since dead."

Because the letters are almost entirely taken up with progress reports on the building, they are somewhat mechanical and are filled with the number of tiles to be counted, square footage calculated, lengths of timber, stones to be transported, but there is one passage that stands out for not having to do with the building and instead it has to do with an encounter John has with a local farmer. The passage reads:

In the evening going into my room as usual for a tankard of Ale, there was an old grave gentleman like farmer in before me which my Landlord asked pardon for so it made no difference to me as the man was quiet. So in the discourse he began to ask several questions about Wenvoe and told me it was the opinion of all the country Sir Edmund Thomas [the previous owner] was to have the Estate again nay even your own work people believe and spoke the same. At last he said he wondered how you should get so much money to buy such an estate as he was told by some gentlemen that you was only bred a tailor in Yorkshire and that you had a great deal of money by your trade and then you undertook to dig a canal and there you had a scheme and got a vast deal of money and that you was not bred a Gentleman. I told him I had known you before you was 7 years old and I knew you was bred as much of a Gentleman as any Man in Wales. He asked me what country was that I told him [he told me] I must be mistaken for you was bred in I told him he was mistaken and his author too.

This kind of gossip must have stung Birt on several points. First, the question of his being a gentleman or not and second the question of his money running out and the estate reverting to its original owner. Both suggestions veered toward the truth as Birt's father was indeed a draper and Birt himself had at times run into money difficulties but never enough to sink his project. It is interesting that in the last two lines two points of geographic location have been carefully torn out of the letter; otherwise, the letter might have read:

He asked me: "What country was that?" I told him Berkshire. He told me that I must be mistaken for you was bred in Yorkshire. I told him he was mistaken and his author too.

When Roberts remarks occasionally on the local gossip that Birt might not be a gentleman, it may be that John too was reminding Birt that his origins were not too far above John's own.

John probably did not survive long enough past building Wenvoe to turn his attention to landscaping the grounds although in one letter he mentions:

Some time past I sent you word that the well in Bairs [Bears] wood was half dry and was afraid the water had found another course; as I have known instances of but about 3 weeks past curiosity led me to see it again which to my agreeable surprise found the spring had resumed its usual velocity.

This feature was later turned into a grotto from which a 'serpentine canal' emerged which is still discernible today.



In another letter he refers to a Haw Haw which would indicate that the earlier and by now demolished Wenvoe had included some landscaping.

There are occasional references to other Birt family members such as Mrs Birt whose solicitations he acknowledges:

Please my Duty to Mrs Birt and family and Return her thanks for her advise, but I thank god I am much better and begin to [eat?] as I usual did like a farmer and drink like Bachus.

Sir I Recd Mrs Birt's very affectionate Letter yesterday pray give my duty to her and many thanks.

The letters left behind by John Man as Thomas Roberts, and fortunately preserved by the Birt family, show a decent man careful to protect his employer's interests and reputation and who intends to carry out

to the best of his abilities what is required of him and to do so in a timely and cost-conscious way. The result was one of the most monumental buildings in Wales and what it lacked in grace and refinement it made up for in breadth and depth which stood for almost 200 years.

THE LETTERS OF JOHN MAN / THOMAS ROBERTS
TO PETER BIRT

FIRST LETTER / FIRST PAGE

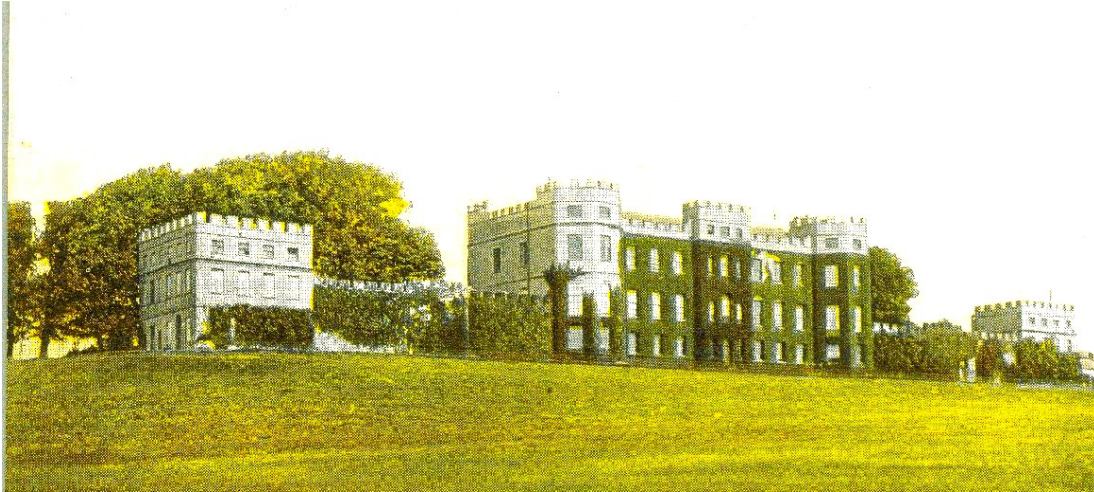
Sir

[29 April 1776]

I hope you have seen Mr Truss before now ... you given me your Reason; the first letter you sent me as you did in that of the 18 instant you might a saved Mr Truss the journey: but as I had explained the best place for a/y Engon and Cheapest by many pounds I thought was sufficient however as near as I can Remember : for the Gardener &c I levelled and Mr Truss put down the Contents : the [distance] from Gofland well to the top of the Green is I think 88 foot the Distance 600 yards: the Quantity of water of all the Springs together about 40 superficall inches: at the whole in the wall I think about 27 or 28 inches the fall from the Well to the River is about 2.5 or 3 foot as near as I can Remember but as he came on purpose and his one Business I left it to him.

I have spoke with Hawkins about the Arches with stone and have convinced him he may do it at the same price and now he is willing to do it as there is fine stones for the use ...; and as such (which I never expected): I think the Arches will be better than the Brick for my part: But the Stuffs for the Centers you never gave me any directions about whether there are to be made out of Mr Jones' Timber or out of the Large Elm from Rumney; I want to know [so] that the Carpenter may prepare it; Mr Jones consent to this day and says he shall begin to hall [haul?] in a few days he has promised me to call heare [here] tomorrow or Wednesday morning & when I have seen him will send you more particulars in my next --- This Morning the first stone was layed under the back of the kitchen Chimney just opiset [opposite] the south in the wall across the old arched cellar and he has plenty of hands; and desires to know if you have such another house to build for he thinks he shall want Employment Long before Christmas: the foundations are most all ready but the Cellars: It's a Deplorable place to look at now : It's like an Old Building that had stood a long seage [siege]: as it has indeed as Hawkins has used he tells me near 40 worth of powder : as soon as the cellars are Dugg he will set the Labourers to take down the other Building which I hope will be within a week : as to Thomas' James' Brew house it's not worth repairing as it is a detached building I think if it was Built at the end of one of the other Buildings it would be much better & suppose it will not

I suppose you have seen Mr. Truys before now as
 you given me your Reason: the first letter you sent as you
 did in that of the 18 instant you might a saved Mr. Truys the
 Journey: but as I had Explained the Best place for y^e Engon and
 Cheapest by Many pounds I thought was sufficient however as near
 as I can Remember: for the Gardner & Lovell and Mr. Truys put
 down the Contents: the from Gosland well to the top of the green
 is I think 88 foot the Distance 600 yards: the Quantity of water
 of all the Springs together a bout 40 Superficiall inches: at the well
 in the wall I think a bout 27 or 28 inches the fall from the Well to
 the River a bout 2½ foot or 3 foot as neare as I can Remember but
 as he came on purpose and his one Business I left it to him —
 I have spoke with Hawkins about the looke with Stone and have
 Convinced him he may do it at the same price and now he is
 willing to do it & there is fine Stones for the Use: and as such
 (which I never Expected): I think the Arches will be better then the
 Brick for my part: But the Staff for the Centers you never gave
 me any Directions a bout whether they are to be made out of Mr
 Jones' Timber or out of the large Elm from Rumney: I want to
 know that the Carpenter may prepare it: Mr. Jones sent to this
 day & says he shall begin to work in a few days he has promised
 me to call here tomorrow or Wednesday Morning & when I have seen
 him will send you More particulars in My next — This Morning
 the first Stone was layed under the Back of the Kitchen Chimney just
 opisit the South Window in the wall a Cross the Arched Cellar: and
 he has plenty of hands: and desires to know if you have such a
 nother house to build for he thinks he shall want employment long
 before Christmas: the foundations are ^{all} Ready but the Cellars: Its a
 Explorable place to look at now: Its like an old Building that had
 stood a long seage: as it has indeed for Hawkins has Used he tells me
 neare 40 worth of powder: as soon as the Cellars are dugg he will
 set the labourers to take down the other Building which I hope will
 be within a week: as to Tho^s James' Brewhouse its not worth Repairing
 as its a Detached Building I think if it was Built at the End of one
 of the other Building: it would be Much better & I hope it will not



FIRST LETTER / SECOND PAGE

cost you above ten or twelve pounds as you have so many as it is fit for nothing else : Hawkins is at present supplied with water from the pump but I am afraid this will not last long but be that as it will I will take care he shall stop for nothing : and make no doubt but we shall fill the County / Country [?] with admiration : Hawkins turned of 4 masons as was not fitting for him and if a Sharper would but come heare he might pick up some money heare for there was 20 to 5 offered that the work was all stopped at Wenvo by Griffey Price and they had seen the 4 masons as told them so : who [?we] want the Barth [Bath] stone to Keep the Mason on I have sent to Mr Taylor to send it but when I left Cardiff the Boaters was not come in which is all at Present from Sir Your Obed^t and Hum Ser^t Tho^s Roberts

Wenvo 29 April 1776

[There is then added a note by George Playforth]

I received yours that is Joseph Letter and in Answer to what he sent the plantations Both of them Looks very well considering the dry season; Mr Hodges have his health very well Olde granny is well and desires her duty to all the family. I hear nothing amiss about the and his wife she is not Brought to bed some days she is not with child my wife and me joyn in Duty to you and Mistress and all the family and pray our service to Josphe and Settle[.] all is well with my Little George a fine boy but got no tooth from Sir Your most hum Servt Thomas Playforth

[This is followed by a PS from Thomas Roberts]

PS I know not the Reason but 3 of the letters you sent to me are marked at the Post office in London for Double Letters which given the trouble to go to the post house and am forced to tare of [tear off] the Directions to give it back which takes away your wrighting & spoyles the letter so that I cannot refer back to them

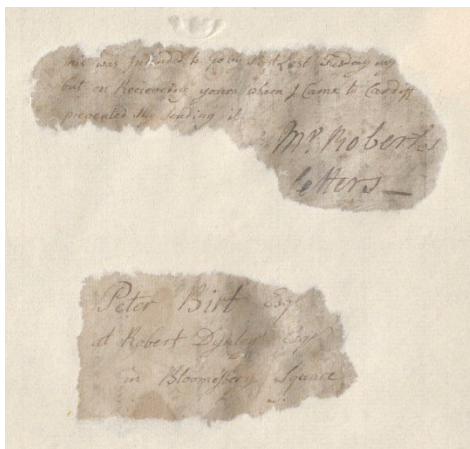
Got you some ten or twelve pounds as you have so much
 as is fit for nothing else: Hawkins is at present supplied with the
 goods but I am afraid that will not last long: but be that as it will I
 will take care he shall stop for nothing: and make no doubt but we
 shall fill the Country with Demerit: Hawkins turned off 4 Mafons as
 was not fitting for him: and if a sharper would but come hither he might
 pick up some Money here for there was 20 to 5 offered that the work
 was all stopped at Wendo by Griffey Price and then had seen the 4
 Mafons as told them so: who want the Barth Stone to keep the Mafon
 on I have sent to Mr. Taylor to send it but when I left Cardiff the
 Boat was not come in which is all at present from L^r you
 Wendo 29 April 1776 Most Obed^t Hum^l Serv^t Tho^s Roberts

I Received Yours that is Joseph's Letter and
 in Answer to what he writes the plantations both
 of them look very well (considering the dry season
 we have) Mr. Hodges has his health very well
 One Grancy is well and discharges her Duty to all
 the Family, I hear nothing at present about the Collier
 and his wife she is not brought to bed some days
 she is not with Child my wife and one boy in Duty
 to you and his ket and all the family pray our
 Devotion to Joseph and settle all is well with
 my Little George is a fine Boy but got no teeth
 from M^r your most hum^l Serv^t Tho^s Playforth

P.S. I know not the Reason but 3 of the Letters you sent to me are marked
 at the Postoffice in London for Double Letters which gives Me trouble to go to
 the post house and am forced to take of the Directions to give it Back which
 takes a way your Writings & spoils the Letter so that I cannot Refer Back
 to them

A Scrap

this was intended to go by Post Last Tuesday night but on Receiving yours when I came to Cardiff
 prevented My sending it.



SECOND LETTER / ONE PAGE

Edward Thomas is in a Greate hurrey to have the Red house Begun : but as I had no particular orders about it thought proper to send this to know if you please I should begin next Monday senite as I shall have workmen between this and then that will agree for the works : and if you please that the work shall go on immediately : please to let me know how the work men are to be suplyed with Money for you know they Canott waite more than a week and hardly that : Thos [Thomas] is afraid the Redhouse will be as long in Repairing as the Angle [Angel] have : but I tell him if its agreeable to you the Redhouse shall be finished before the Angel is now: therefore please to send me your answer by Return of post which will Much Oblige Sir

Your Most Obedient Humble Sev^t

Thos Roberts

24 May 1776

Cardiff

I hope you & Mrs Birt Got Safe to London and Mr Peter to Oxford where you found all friends well.

[Monday senite is a little obscure but perhaps means 'one week from this Monday']

(2)

Edward Thomas is in a Greate hurry to have the Red house Begun: but as I had no perticular orders about it thought proper to send this to know if you please I should begin next Monday Sonite as I shall have workmen choen this and then that will agree for the the Works: and if you please that the work shall go on Inedatly: please to let me know how the work men are to be supplied with Money for you know they Canott waite more then a Week and hardly that: Tho^s is a fraid the Redhouse will be as long in Repairing as the Angle have: but I tell him if its a greable to you the Redhouse shall be finished before the Angle is now: therefore please to send me your Answer by Return of post which will Much Oblige I^r
 your Most Obedant Hum^d Serv^t

24 May 1776

Cardiff

Tho^s Roberts

I Hope you & Mr^s Birt Got Safe to London & Mr^r Peter to Oxford where you found all friends well

THIRD LETTER / FIRST PAGE

Peter Birt Esq
 at Robert Dynleys Esq
 in Bloomsbury Square
 London

Sir

Wenbo 19 July 1776

the freestone first string is now setting, and will levill the work something above the floor : and that white stone, with the Blew [blue], makes a good figure together : Mr Jones goes on very well with the Timber : I Believe we have near 100 Tun [ton] in : but I have not had time to Square the dimensions : being So Busy between this place and Cardiff the other old buildings are nearly taken down : and hope the Buildings will be levill with the floor by the end of this Month as I said before : 3 o'clock Going to Cardiff -- I have just now Re^{cd} yours and shall Right to morrow by yours of 14 Instant I am very glad to heare you and my friends Got Safe to Armins : I have delivered Mr Thomas's Letter & shall Carey [carry] the Gardeners on Monday : and in Regard to [] Red House : I have just fell in with your Sentiments : for I have presivered [persevered] in my one plan : and have [ask??] ed : nothing of them : nor they of me : but as you say you Make no Doubt but 300 will make a very Complete Inn : its well if it do : and its much Better for somebodey : that your old Servant Calvert is not imploy for he and Mr Mackworth both declared in publock that I could not cover the house in for 300 that is the Roofe [.....] man could make a good from [.....] shall do time must

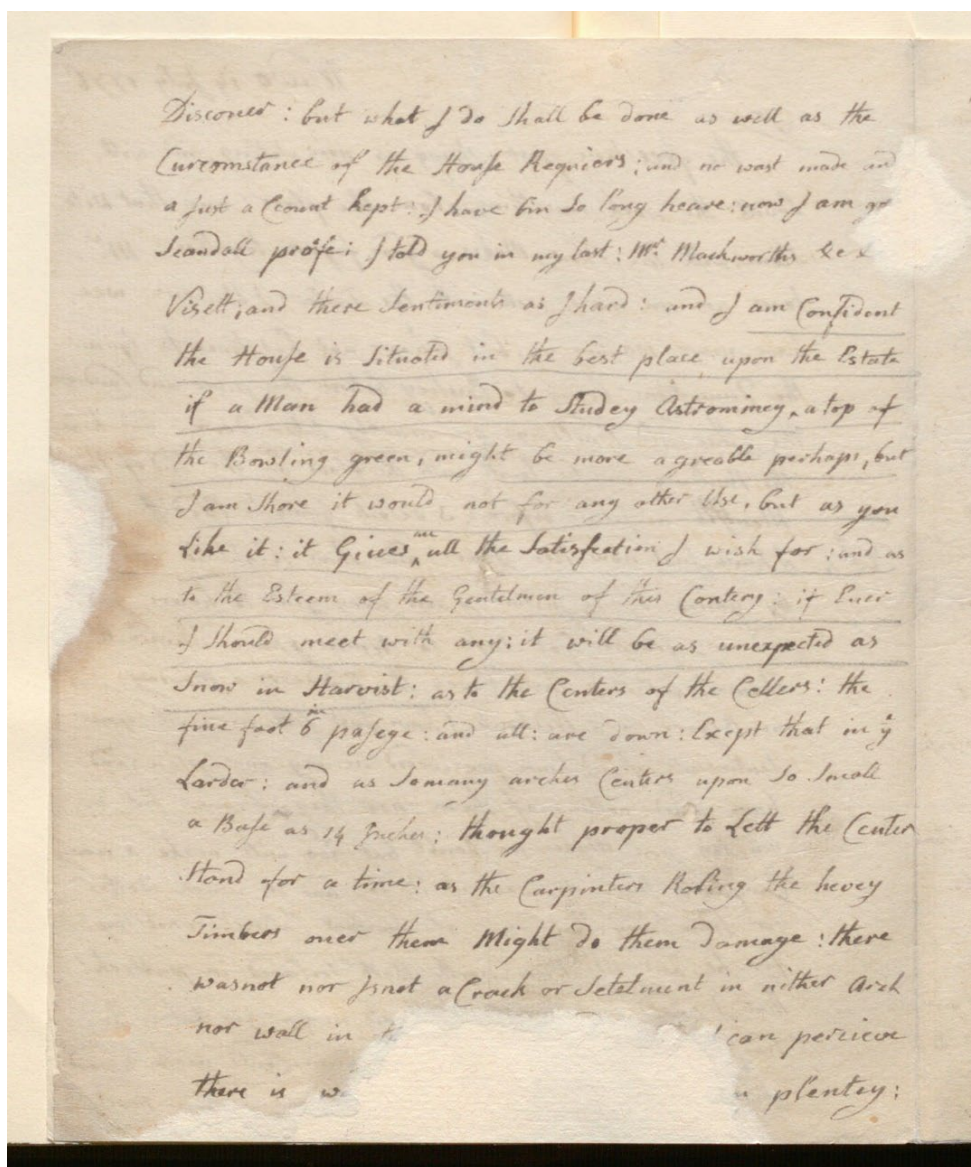
(3)
Wenwo 19 July 1776

^{1st} the freestone first string is now setting, and will
level the work something above the floor: and that white
stone, with the blue makes a good figure together: Mr.
Jones goes on very well with the Timber: I believe we
have near 100 Tun in: but I have not had time to square
the dimensions: being so busy between this place and Cardiff
the other old Buildings are nearly taken down: and hope
the Building will be level with the floor by the end of this
Month as I said before: 3 o'clock going to Cardiff —

^{2^d} I have just now Rec^d yours: and shall Right to morrow
by yours of 14 Instant I am very glad to hear you
and my friends got safe to Armin: I have deliverd Mr
Thomas's letter & shall Carey the Gardners a Monday: and
in regard to y^e Redhouse: I have just fell in with your
sentiments: for I have perservered in my one plan: and
have add: nothing of them: nor they of me: but as
you say you make no Doubt but 300 will make a very
compleat Inn: its well if it do: and its much Better
for some body: that your old servant Calvert is not employ
for he and Mr. Muckworth Both declared in publick
that I could not cover the house in for 300 that is the
Roof
Inn
I shall do time must

THIRD LETTER / SECOND PAGE

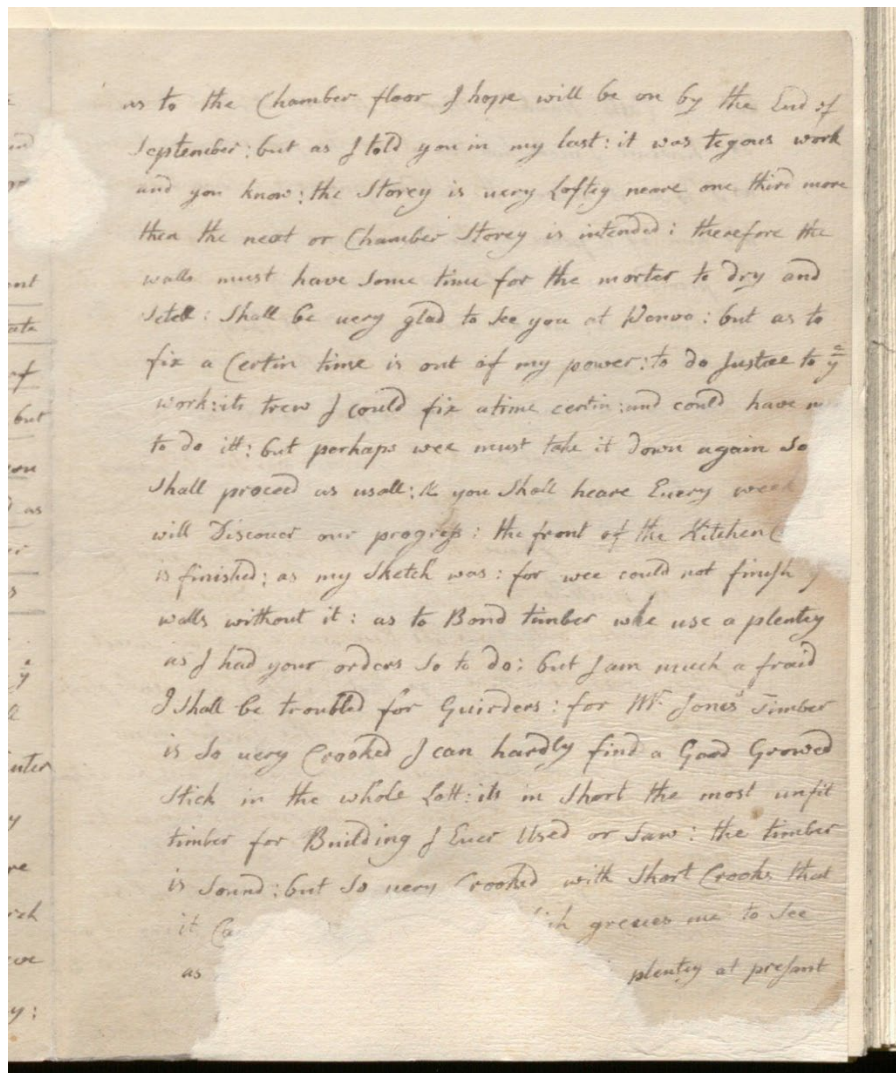
Discover : but what I do shall be done as well as the Circumstances of the House Requires : and no waste made and a just account kept : I have bin so long heare : now I am got [good?] Scandall profe [?] : I told you in my last : Mr Mackworths and [?] visit; and there sentiments as I had [or heard] : and I am Confident the House is situated in the best place on the Estate if a Man had a mind to studey Astrominey a top of the Bowling green, might be more agreable perhaps, but I am shore [sure] it would not for any other use, but as you like it : it Gives me all the Satisfaction I wish for : and as to the Esteem of the Gentlemen of this Contery if ever I should meet with any : it will be as unexpected as Snow in Harvist : as to the Centers of the Cellers : the five foot 6 in passage : and all are down : Except that in ye [?] Larder : and as so many arches Centers upon so Small a Base as 14 inches : thought proper to Lett the Center stand for a time : as the Carpenters Rolling [?] the heavy Timbers over them Might do them damage : there was not nor is not a Crack or Setelment in neither arch nor wall in the [.....] can perceive there is [.....] plenty;



Discover : but what I do shall be done as well as the
Circumstance of the House Requires; and no waste made and
a just account kept: I have bin so long heare: now I am got
Scandall profe: I told you in my last: Mr. Mackworths &c &
Vibell, and there Sentiments as I had: and I am Confident
the House is situated in the best place upon the Estate
if a Man had a mind to Studey Astrominey, a top of
the Bowling green, might be more agreable perhaps, but
I am shore it would not for any other Use, but as you
like it: it Gives^{me} all the Satisfaction I wish for, and as
to the Esteem of the Gentlemen of this Contery: if Ever
I should meet with any: it will be as unexpected as
Snow in Harvist: as to the Centers of the Cellers: the
five foot 6 passage: and all: are down: Except that in y^e
Larder: and as so many arches Centers upon so Small
a Base as 14 Inches: thought proper to Lett the Center
stand for a time: as the Carpenters Rolling the heavy
Timbers over them Might do them Damage: there
was not nor is not a Crack or Setelment in neither Arch
nor wall in the can perceive
there is plenty;

THIRD LETTER / THIRD PAGE

[....] to the Chamber floor I hope will be on by the End of September : but as I told you in my last : it was tegous [? tedious] work and you know : the Storey is very Loftey neare one third more than the next or Chamber storey is intended : therefore the walls must have some time for the mortar to dry and setell : shall be very glad to see you at Wenbo : but as to fix a Certin time is out of my power : to do justace to ye work : its trew I could fix a time certin : and could have me to do itt : but perhaps wee must take it down again so [...] shall proceed as usall : [..] you shall heare Every week will Discover our progress : the front of the Kitchen is finished : as my Sktech was : for wee could not finish [...] walls without it : as to Bond timber we use a plenty as I had your orders so to do : but I am much a fraid I shall be troubled for Guirders [girders]: for Mr Jones' Timber is so very Crooked I can hardly find a Good Growed Stick in the whole lott : its in short the most unfit timber for Building I Ever Used or Saw : the timber is sound : but so very crooked with short Crooks that it [.....] greves me to see as [.....] plenty at present



THIRD LETTER / FOURTH & LAST PAGE

but it costs Hawkins more to Schreen it; then the Lime do: however I make him use it : for the purpose first intended as I do see it answers the intended purpose : somebody has told him of a place by the Downs : ware he can get sand and he promised me to Go tomorrow to see it : if he finds it as its told him it : and my Carts can fetch it Cheaper than the Rubish : I believe he will drop the Rubish Trades which I shall heare a monday : please to take notice this is my last Frank : as I had but [..] : the enclosed was sent to Wenvo but from who I cannot tell : and sent to me by David Williams wife this day : I have sent to Mr Taylor this post for Bills [??] of parsells [&] for the Last stones came without any account only I was told there was 8 tun by Sweet. I mentioned some time ago that I wished you would please [?] to writeto priest about fetching the Timber from Rumney I have spoke severall times to him and his answer is wee dont want it : this day the man who ones [owns] the Ground where the Timber lyes told me he Expectes a Guinea for Damage and that the Timber should not be Moved without [.....]

19 July

T. Roberts

[Along the vertical edge:] Please my duty to all the Good family and hope all well as God be thanked I am

but it Costs Hawkins More to Schreen it; than the Lime
 do: however I make him Use it: for the purpose first intended
 as I do so it answers the intended purpose: Some body has
 told him of a place by the Downs: where he can get Sand on
 he promised me to go tomorrow to see it: if he finds it as its
 told him it is; and my Cart can fetch it Cheaper than the
 Rubish: I believe he will Drop the Rubish Trade: which I
 shall leave a monday: please to take notice this is my
 Last Friend: as I had but 3: the enclosed was sent to Benno
 but from who I cant tell: and sent to me by David Williams
 wife this day: I have sent to Mr Taylor this post for
 Bills of pearlshell &c for the Last Stones came without
 any account only I was told there was 8 Tuns by Sweet
 I mentioned some time ago that I wished you would plea
 to Wright to priest a boat fetching the Timber from
 Rumney I have spoke severall times to him and his answ
 is we dont want it: this day the man who ones the
 Ground where the Timber lyes told me he expected a
 Guinea for Damage and that the Timber should not be
 Moved without a warrant
 wrought a boat
 winter Apr
 let it go a way if you
 of Lewis as the
 sent from

J. Roberts

Please my duty to all the good family
 I hope all well as God is pleased

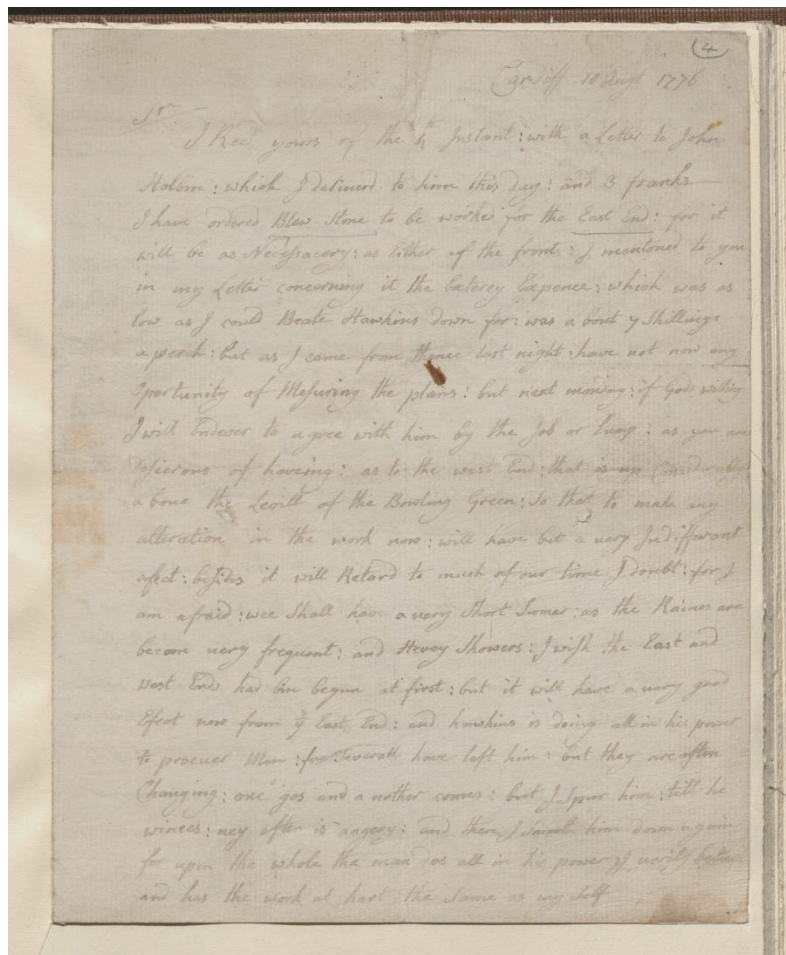
19 July 1755

FOURTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

Cardiff 10 Augt 1776

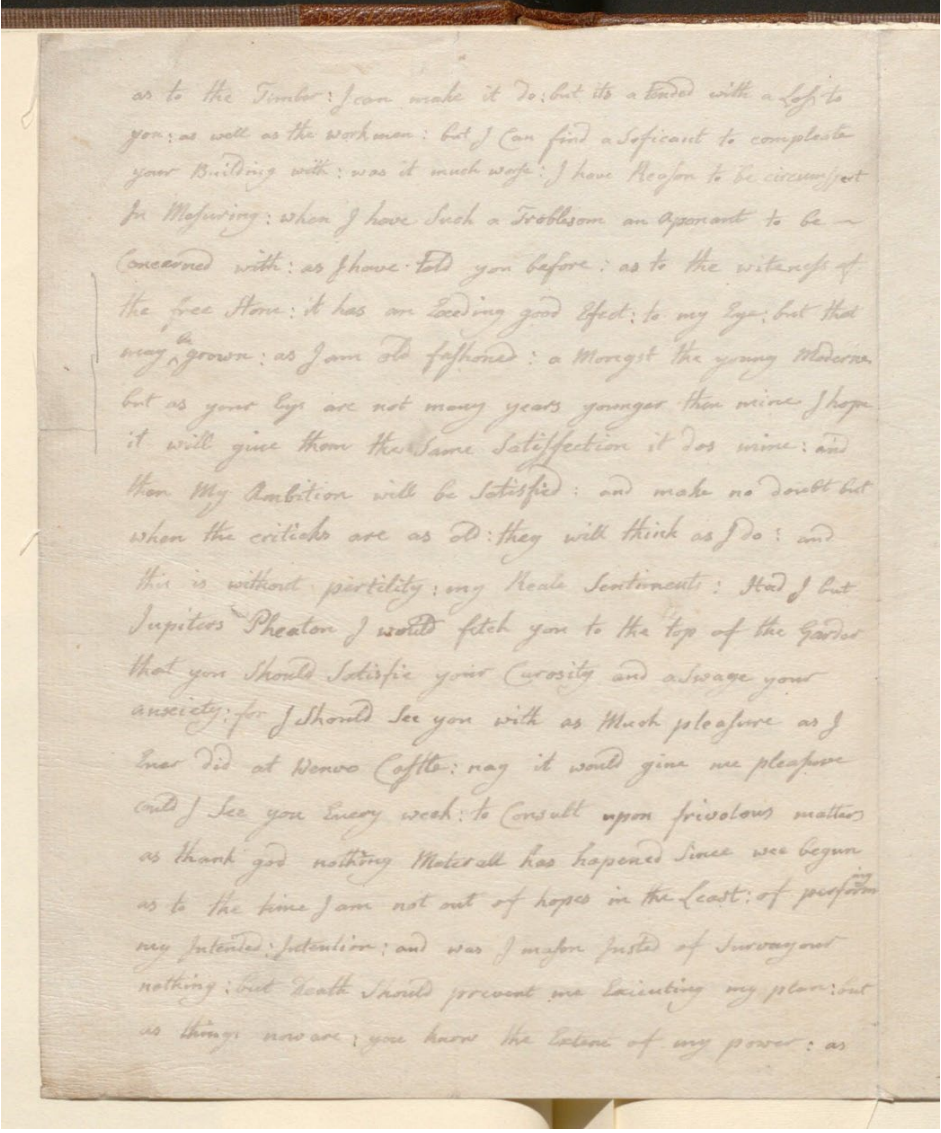
Sir

I Recd yours of the 4th Instant : with a Letter to John Holbin : which I delivered to him : and 3 franks - I have ordered Blew stone to be worked for the East End : for it will be as Necessary : as Either of the fronts : I mentioned to you in my Letter concerning it the Extrey [Extra] Expence which was as low as I could Beate Hawkins down for : was about 7 shillings a perch ; but as I came from thence last night I have not now any Opertunity of Mesuring the plans : but next morning : if Gods willing I will endeavor to agree with him by the job or lump [?] : as you are desirous [??] of having : as to the west End : that is up Considerbly above the Levill of the Bowling Green : so that to make any alteration in the work now : will have but a very Indifferent affect : besides it will Retard too much of our time Doubt [?] : for I am afard [afraid?] : wee shall have a very short Summer : as the Raines are become very frequent : and Hevey Showers : I wish the East and West Ends had bin begun at first : but it will have a very good efect now from 2/y East End : and Hawkins is doing all in his power to procure Men : for Severall have left him : but they are often Changing : one goes and a nother comes : but I spier him [?] till he winces : ney after is angry : and then I just smooth him down again for upon the whole the man does all in his power I verily believe and has the wok at hart the same as my sels [myself]



FOURTH LETTER / SECOND PAGE

as to the Timber : I can make it do : but its a tended with a loss to you : as well as the workmen : but I can find a Suficant to completion your Building with : was it much worse : I have Reason to be circumspect for Mesuring : when I have such a Troblesom an aponant [opponent?] to be Concerend with : as I have told you before : as to the witeness of the free stone : it has an exceeding good efect : to my Eye : but that may be grown : as I am old fashioned : a mongst the young moderne but as your eyes are not many years younger than mine I hope it will give them the same satisfaction it does mine : and then my Ambition will be satisfied : and make no doubt when the criticks are as old : they will thinks as I do : and this is without pertility [? Partiality?] : my Reale Sentiments : Had I but Jupiters Pheaton I would fetch you to the top of the Garden that you should Satisfie your Curoosity and aswge [assuage] your anxiety : for I should see with as much pleasure as I ever did at Wenvo Castle : nay it would give me pleasure could I see you every week : to Consult upon frivolous matters as thank god nothing materall has happened since we began as to the time I am not out of hopes in the Least : of performing my intended intention and was I mason [?] justed [?] of Surveyor nothing but Death should prevent me Executing my plan : but as things now are : you have the extent of my Power : as

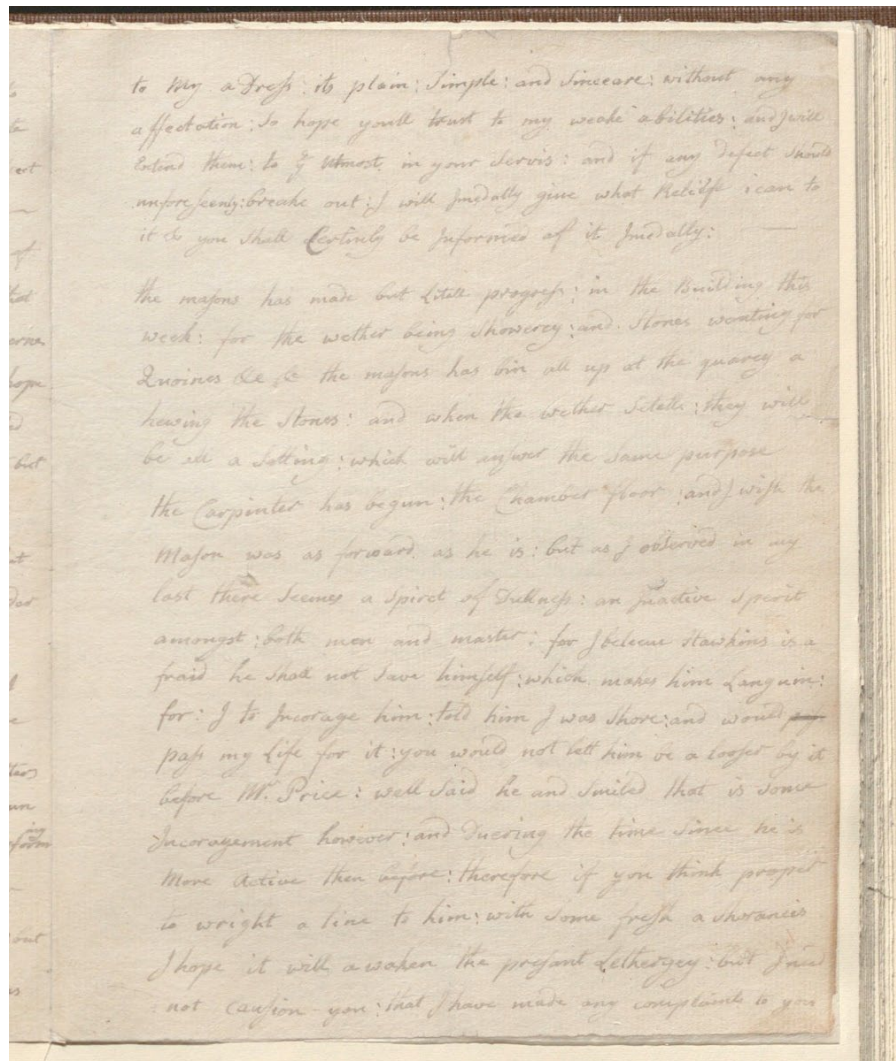


as to the Timber: I can make it do: but its a tended with a loss to you: as well as the workmen: but I can find a Suficant to completer your Building with: was it much worse: I have Reason to be circumspect for Mesuring: when I have such a Troblesom an aponant to be concerned with: as I have told you before: as to the witeness of the free stone: it has an exceeding good efect: to my Eye: but that may be grown: as I am old fashioned: a Mongst the young Moderne but as your eyes are not many years younger than mine I hope it will give them the same Satisfaction it does mine: and then My Ambition will be Satisfied: and make no doubt but when the criticks are as old: they will think as I do: and this is without pertility: my Reale Sentiments: Had I but Jupiters Pheaton I would fetch you to the top of the Garden that you should Satisfie your Curoosity and aswage your anxiety: for I should see you with as Much pleasure as I ever did at Wenvo Castle: nay it would give me pleasure could I see you every week: to Consult upon frivolous matters as thank god nothing Materall has hapened since we began as to the time I am not out of hopes in the Least: of performing my intended intention: and was I mason justed of Surveyor nothing but Death should prevent me Executing my plan: but as things now are: you have the extent of my power: as

FOURTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

to my address its plain simple and sincere without any affectation so hope you will trust to my weak abilities : and I will extend them to you utmost in your Service : and if any defect should unforeseenly break out I will immediately give what Reliefe I can to it so you shall Certainly be informed of it immediately :

the masons has made but littall progress : in the Building this week : for the weather being showery : and stones wanting for Inoines [?] etc etc the masons has bin all up at the quarey a hewing the stones : and when the wether Sitalls [settles] : they will be all a setting : which will answer the same purpose the Carpenter has begun : the Chamber floor: and I wish the mason was as forward as he is : but as I observed in my last there seems a Spirit of stillness [?] an inactive spirit amongst : both men and master : for I believe Hawkins is afraid he shall not save himself : which makes him Languous [?] for I to incorage him : told him I was shore : and would pass [?] my life for it : you would not lett him be a looser by it before Mr Price : well said he and smiled that is some Incoragement however : and during the time since he is more active than before : therefore if you think proper to wright a line to him : with some fresh ashorances [assurances] I hope it will awaken the presant Lethergey : but I need not caution you : that I have made any complaint to you

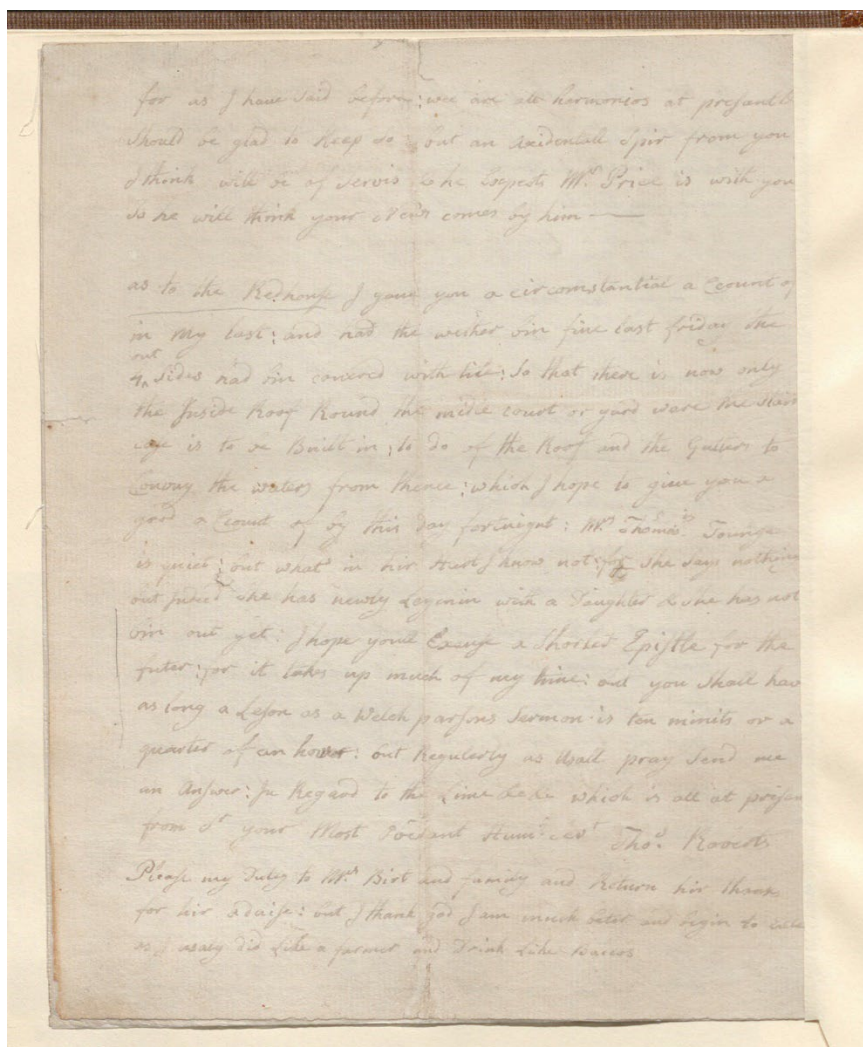


FOURTH LETTER / FOURTH & LAST PAGE

for as I have said before : we are all harmonios at present and should be glad to keep so but an axidental spir from you I think will be of servis & he expects Mr Price is with you so he will think your News comes from him ----

as to the Redhouse I gave you a circumstantial account of in my last : and has the weather been fine last friday the 4 out sides had been covered with tiles so that there is now only the inside Roof Round the middle court or yard where the stair case is to be Built in : to do [?] of the Roof and the Gutters to Convey the waters from thence : which I hope to give you a good account of by this date fortnight : Mrs Thomas' tongue[?] is quiet but what in her heart I know not for she says nothing but indeed she has newly Leyin in [laying in i.e. given birth?] with a Daughter and she has not been out yet : I hope you Excuse a Shorter Epistle for the future : for it takes up much of my time : and you shall have as long a Leson as a Welch parsons sermon is ten minits or a quarter of an hour : but regularly as usual pray send me your answer : in Regard to the Lime etc etc which is all at present from sir your Most obedient Humble servant Thos. Roberts

Please my Duty to Mrs Birt and family and Return hir thanks for hir advise : but I thank god I am much better and begin to [eat?] as I usual did like a farmer and drink like Bachus [?]



FIFTH LETTER

Thomas Roberts Wenvo

23 Aug 1776

Sir

yesterday Evening Mr Hawkins arrived from Bristol with 5 hands and More is promised to come by the Boats which is expected tomorrow or Sunday : so that Peace and Tranquility continues at present as Usual : I don't say Restored because it was never Brooke by me : nor none Else but Mr. Hawkins' men going from him which at this time of the yeare they will all do : for they will not leave there old Costoms no more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the Lepped his spots : for some of your best friends has taken some of the work people a way: to serve them selves : but thank god the wether is fine at present and the Harvist will soon be over and all the Labourers will Return again to there work as they have promised to do: Mr Hawkins has now 16 mason at work and I make no doubt in the least : but I shall Cover the Building before Xmas : but this weeks stop : will put us back in getting the Chamber floor so soon as I Expected : However I beg youll Make your self Happey for all that Mortall Beings can do shall be done and I Believe the masons will stick to their work now as they say [?] there [are] men to be had in other places : for they are much less [?] the Dogg in the manger ; Shall wright tomorrow as usual with other Particulars and am Sir your most Obedient Humb Sert Thos Roberts

Wenvo 23 Aug 1776

Sir yesterday Evening Mr. Hawkins a Pline from Bristol with 5 hands and 5 More is promised to come by the Boats which is expected tomorrow or Sunday : So that Peace and Tranquility Continues at present as Usual : I dont say Restored because it was never Brooke by me : nor none Else but Mr. Hawkins' men going from him which at this time of the yeare they will all do : for they will not leave there old Costoms no more then the Ethiopian can change his skin or the Lepped his spots : for some of your Best friends has taken some of the work people a way: to serve them selves : but thank god the wether is fine at present and the Harvist will soon be over and all the Labourers will Return again to there work as they have promised to do : Mr. Hawkins has now 16 mason at work and I Make no Doubt in the Least: but I shall Cover in the Building before Xmas: but this weeks Stop: will put us back in getting on the Chamber floor so soon as I Expected: However I beg youll Make your self Happey for all that Mortall Beings can do shall be done and I Believe the masons will stick to there work now as they do there men to be had in other places: for they are much less the Dogg in the manger: Shall wright tomorrow as usual with other Particulars and am Sir your Most Obedient Humb Sert Thos Roberts



SIXTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

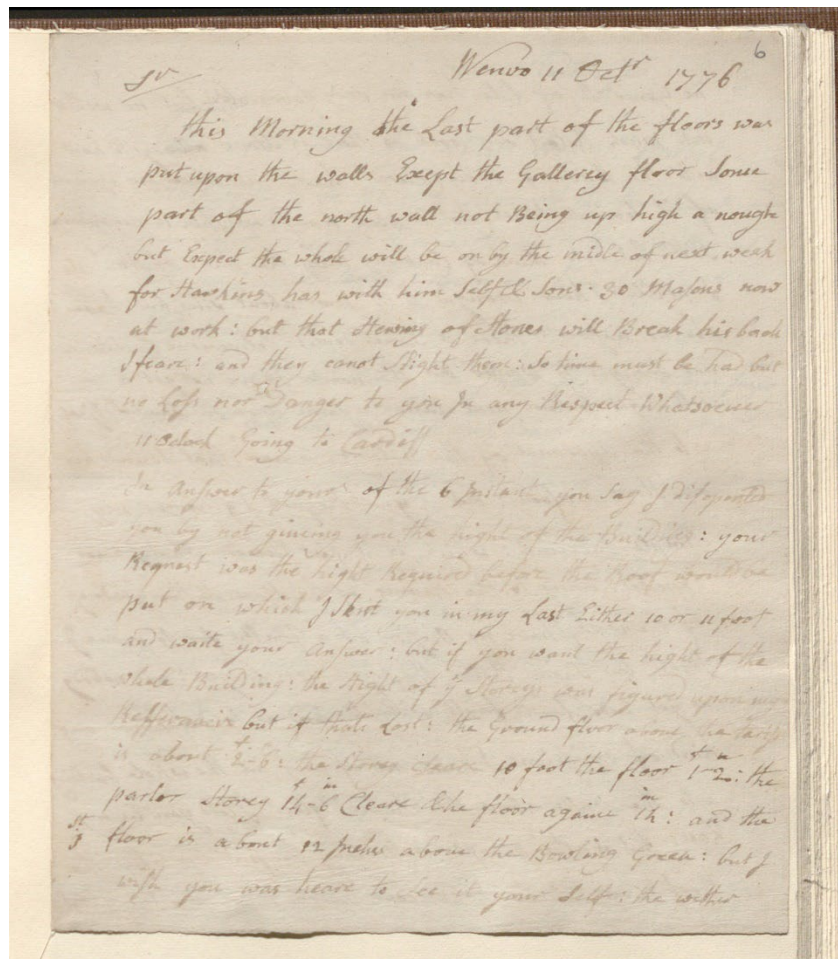
Sir

Wenbo 11 Oct 1776

this Morning the Last part of the floors was put upon the wall Except the Gallerey floor some part of the north wall not Being up high a nough but expect the whole will be on by the middle of next week for Hawkins has with him self & sons 30 Masons now at work : but that Hewing of stones will Break his back I feare : and they canot slight them : so time must be had but no Loss nor Danger to you for any Respect Whatsoever

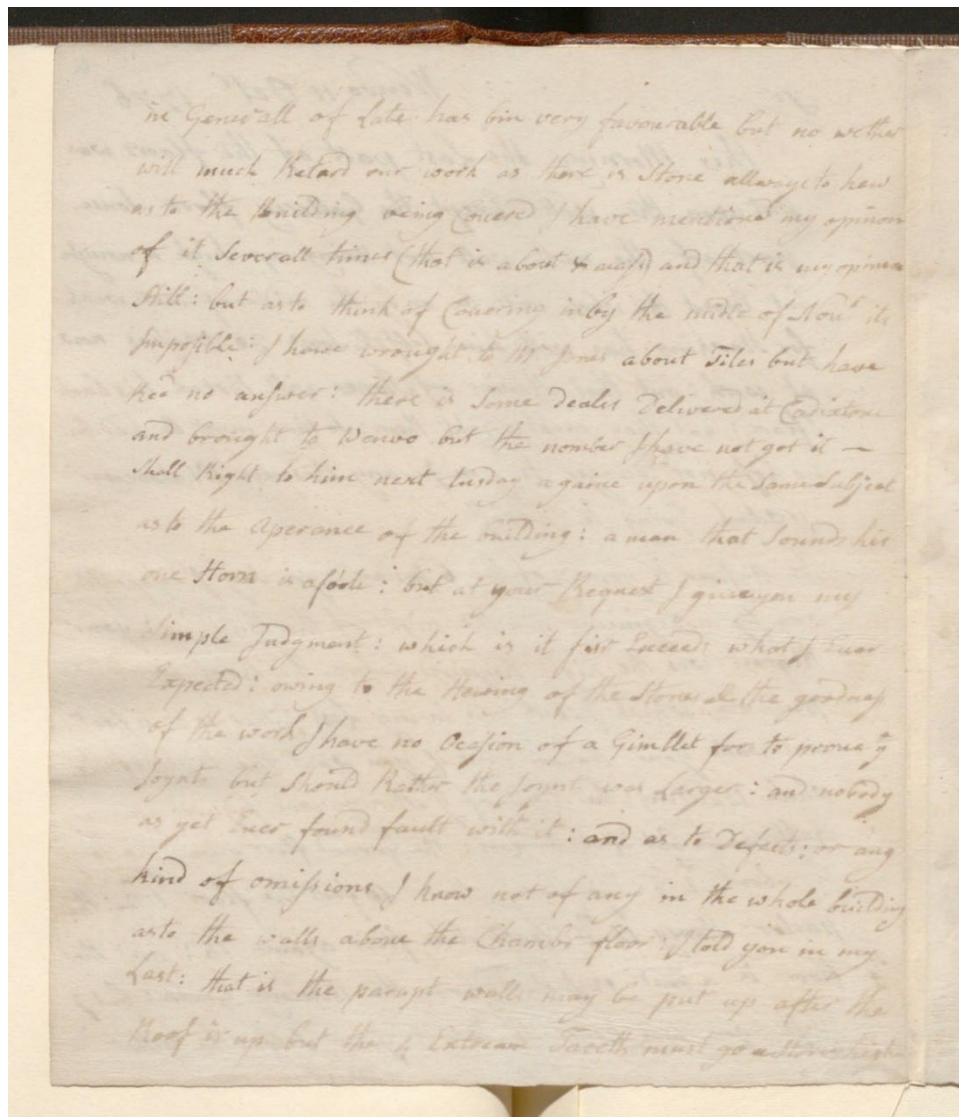
11 O'clock Going to Cardiff

In answer to yours of the 6 instant you say I disappointed you by not giving you the hight of the Building : your request was the hight Required before the Roof would be put on which I sent you in my Last Either 10 or 11 foot and waite your answer : but if you want the hight of the whole Building : the Hight of [4?] Storeys was figured upon my Refferancies [?] but if thats last / lost : the Ground floor above the t ... [?] [taris = terrace?] is about 2 [foot] - 6 : the storey cleare 10 foot the floor + 1 [foot] - 2 in : the parlor store 14 [foot] - 6 [in] & the floor again in 1 h [?] : and the [...] ? floor is about 12 inches above the Bowling Green : but I wish you was heare to see it your self : the wether



SIXTH LETTER / SECOND PAGE

in Generall of Late has been very favorable but no wether will much Retard our work as there is stone allwaye to [have or hand] as to the Building being covered I have mentioned my opinion of it severall times (that is about ---- ?) and that is my opinion still : but as to think of Covering in by the middle of Nov its impossible : I have wrought [written] to Mr Jones about Tiles but have Recd no answer : there is some dealer delivered it at Cadixtone and brought to Wenvo but the number I have not got it -- shall Right to him next tuesday again upon the same subject as to the aperance of the building : a man that sounds his one [own] Horn is a fool : but at your Request I give you my simple judgment : which is it far exceeds what I ever Expected : owing to the Hewing of the Stones & the goodness of the work I have no occasion of a Gimblet for to prove .. Joynts but should Rather the joynt was Larger : and nobody as yet ever found fault with it : and as to the Defects : or any kind of omissions I know not of any in the whole building as to the walls above the Chamber floor : I told you in my Last : that is the parapt [parapet] wall may be put up after the Roof is up but the 4 Extreme Tarets [turrets] must go a storey higher.



SIXTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

Redhouse

I yesterday after noon had a visit from Sir Herbert Mackworth to see the Alterations of the Red house and acknowledged a surprise and astonishment : so much that he told me I should Build 2 houses for him &c &c I told him what money was Expended only he seemed Thunder Struck : said he I now see I have bin imposed upon &c but the 300 will not Compleate the House and stables [?] I have spoke to Thomas to wright to you and I wont in close it to you which he said he would for he is in great Necessity for Stables at this time: and I give you the reason for your Intrist to go on with the stables : (that is some of them) as soon as possible in my 2 last and in your next I hope to Receive your Approbation and Consent for as I have said often if I did not think it for your interest I would not propose it : I saw Mr Richards yesterday he Desired I would mention to you small notes would be

Redhouse

yesterday
 I ~~had~~ after noon had a Visit from S^r Herbert
 Mackworth to see the Alterations of the Red house and
 acknowledged a surprise & astonishment: so much that he
 told me I should Build 2 houses for him &c &c &c
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 and Stables &c I have spoke to Thomas to wright to
 you and I wont in close it to you which he said he
 would for he is in great Necessity for Stables at this
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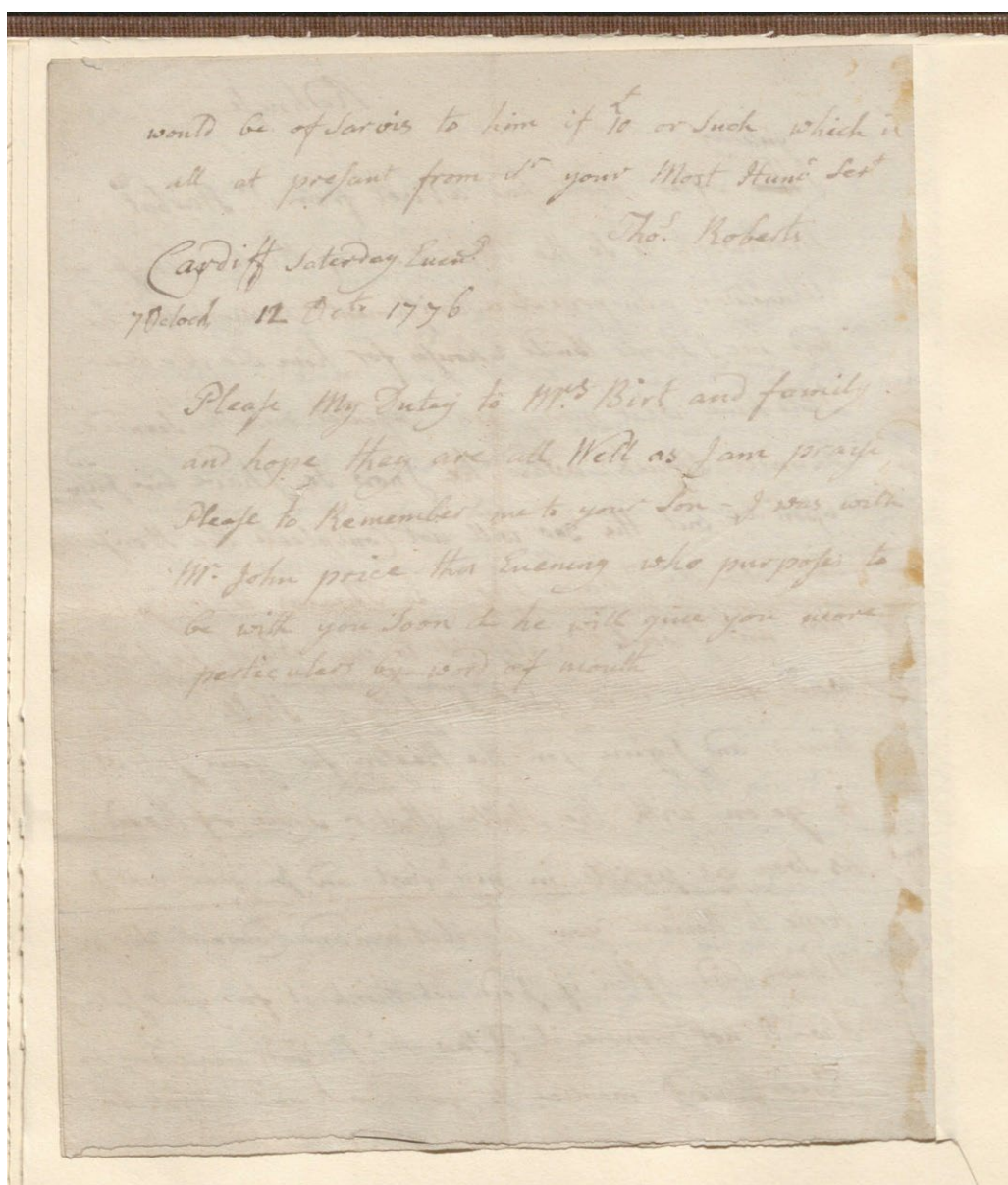
of Sarvis [service] to him if £10 or such which is all at present from Sir your Most Humb Serv

Thos. Roberts

Cardiff Saturday Even ..

7 O'clock 12 Oct 1776

Please my Duty to Mrs Birt and family and hope they are all well as I am praise Pleas to Remember me to you Son. I was with Mr John Price this evening who purposes to be with you soon & he will give you more particulars by word of mouth.



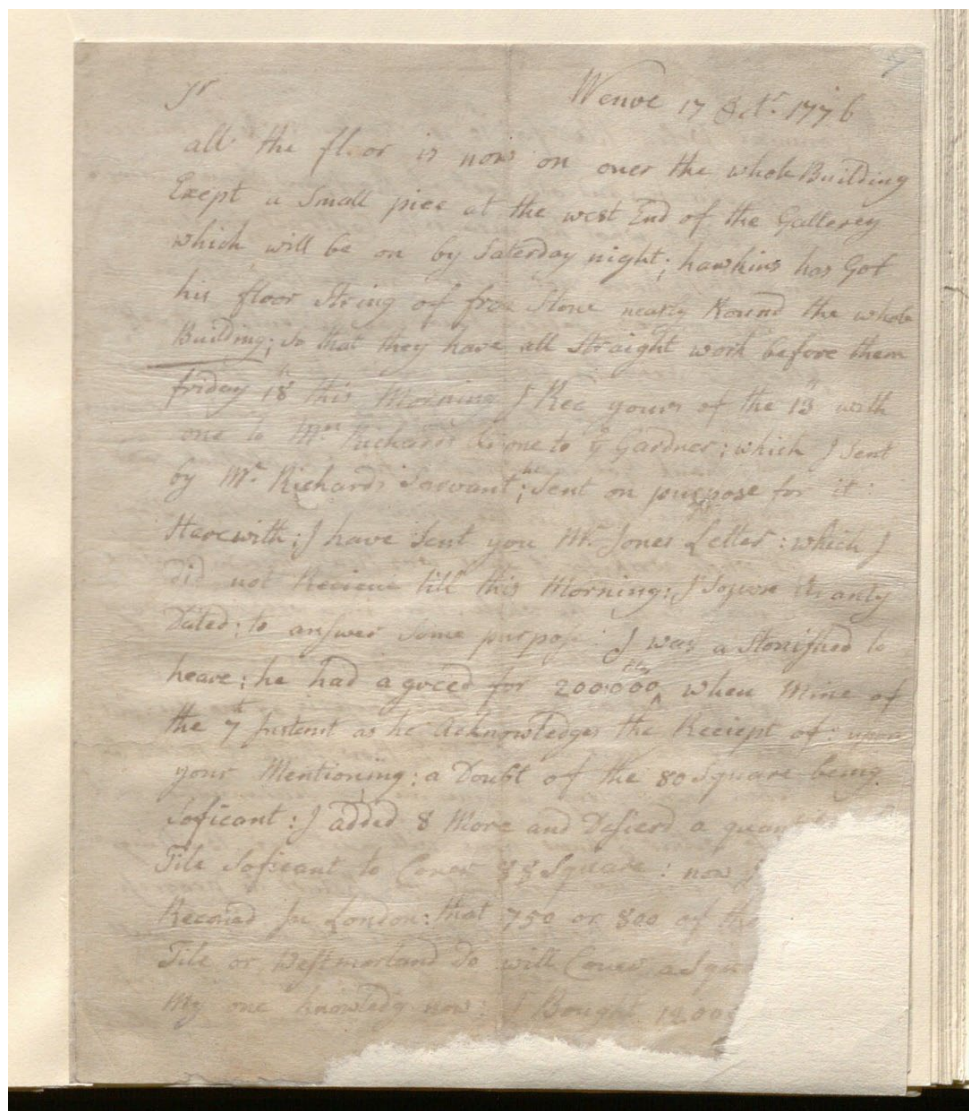
SEVENTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

Sir

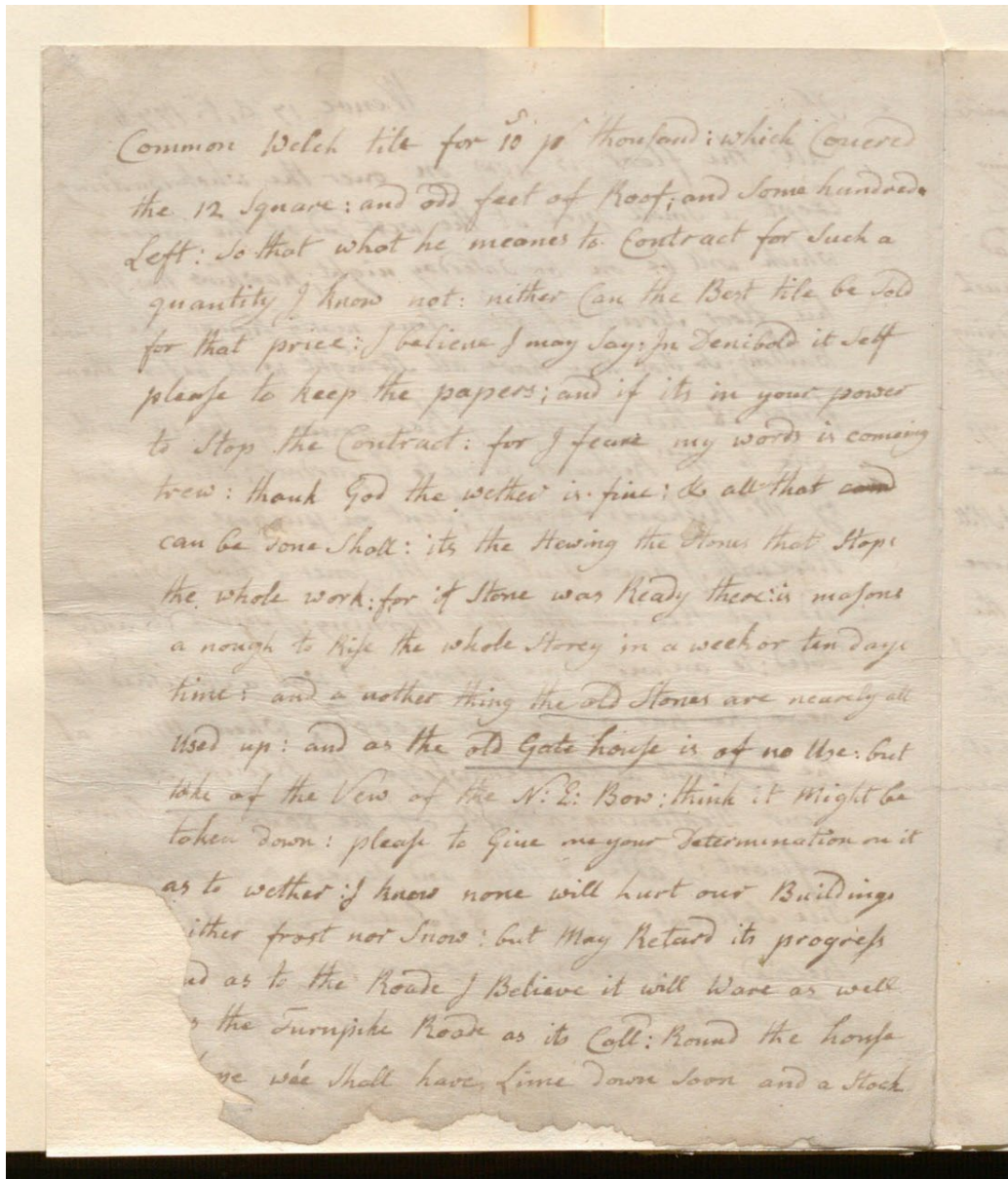
Wenvoe 17 Oct, 1776

all the floor is now on over the whole Building Except a small piece at the west End of the Gallery which will be on by Saturday night; Hawkins has got his floor string off from stone nearly round the whole Building; so that they have all straight work before them.

Friday 18 this Morning I Rec^d your letter of the 13 with one to Mr Richard Lione [??] your Gardner : which I sent by Mr Richards servant ; he sent on purpose for it : Herewith, I have sent you Mr Jones Letter : which I did not Receive till this morning: I suppose its only dated [?] : to answer some purpose : I was astonished to heare ; he had agreed for 200;000 ... when mine of the 7th instant as he acknowledges the Receipt of : upon your mentioning : a Doubt of the 80 Square being soficant [sufficient] : I added 8 more and desierd [desired] a quantity Tile sufficient to cover 88 square : now IReceived for London : that 750 or 800 of the tile or Westmorland do with Cover adjust my one knowledge : I Bought 1800 ...

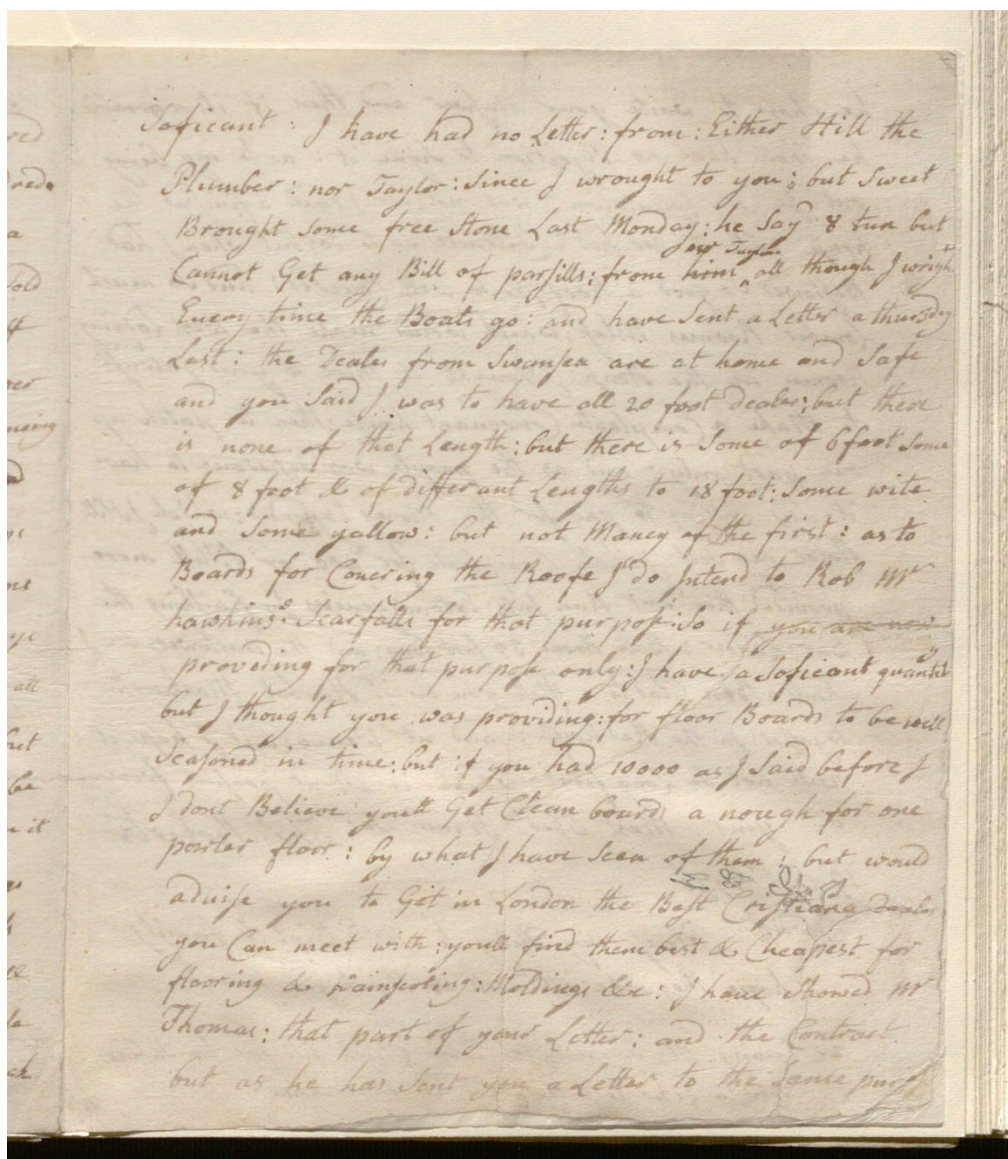


Common Welch tile for £10 per thousand : which covered the 12 square : and odd feet of Roof; and some hundred left : so that what he means to contract for such a quantity I know not : neither Can the Best tile be sold for that price : I believe I may say : in denibold [?] undeniably?] it self please to keep the papers : and if it is in your power to stop the contract : for I feare my words is coming trew [true] : thank God the weather is fine : & all that can be done shall : its the Hewing the stone that stops the whole work : for if stone was Ready there is masons a nough [enough] to Rise the whole storey in a week or ten days time : and another thing the old Stones [is] nearely all used up: and as the old Gate house is of no Use: but take of the View of the N:E: Bow [?] : think it might be taken down : please to Give me your determination on it. As to weather: I know none will hurt our building ... neither frost nor snow : but may Retard it progress and as to the Roade I Believe it will Ware as well the Turnpike Roade as its call : round the house we shall have Lime down soon and a stock



SEVENTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

soficant : I have had no letter from Either Hill the plumber nor Taylore Since I wrought [wrote] to you; but Sweet Brought some free stone Last Monday : he say'd 8 tun but Cannot get any Bill of parsills from him nor Taylor although I write every time the boats go : and have sent a letter a Thursday last : the Deales [?] from Swansea are at home and safe and you said I was to have all 20 foot deale : but there is none of that Length : but there is some of 6 foot some of 8 foot & of different Lengths to 18 foot : some white and some yellow : but not many of the first : as to the Boards for Covering the Roofe I do intend to tob Mr Hawkins's scarfalls [scaffolds?] for that purpose : so if you are now providing for that purpose only : I have soficant quantity but I thought you was providing : for the floor Boards to be well seasoned in time : but if you had 10000 as I said before I don't believe you'll get clean boards enough for one parlor floor : by what I have seen of them : but would advise you to get in London the best & cheapest for flooring & wainscoting : Moldings &c : I have showed Mr Thomas : the part of your letter : and the Contract but as he has sent you a Letter to the same purpose



soficant : I have had no letter from Either Hill the Plumber : nor Taylor : since I wrought to you : but Sweet Brought some free stone Last Monday : he say'd 8 tun but Cannot Get any Bill of parsills from him ^{nor Taylor} although I write Every time the Boats go : and have sent a letter a Thursday Last : the Deales from Swansea are at home and safe and you said I was to have all 20 foot deale : but there is none of that length : but there is some of 6 foot some of 8 foot & of different Lengths to 18 foot : some white and some yellow : but not many of the first : as to Boards for Covering the Roofe I do intend to Rob Mr Hawkins's Scarfalls for that purpose : so if you are now providing for that purpose only : I have a soficant quantity but I thought you was providing for floor Boards to be well Seasoned in time : but if you had 10000 as I said before I don't Believe you'll get Clean boards enough for one parlor floor : by what I have seen of them : but would advise you to get in London the Best & Cheapest for flooring & wainscoting : Moldings &c : I have showed Mr Thomas : that part of your Letter : and the Contract but as he has sent you a Letter to the same purpose

he chose to wait your answer and then if it is agreeable he shall have no objection to sign it ; as to my being out of my Calculation I was not : for I could a finished the house with the £300 had I contracted so to do : but when I had Bestowed so good a Roof : & so well covered : and so much Lomber Roomes Useless [?] : which would make the best lodging Roomes in the House : I thought it More to your interest to Make a Compleate Covenant house : than to patch up one part only : and as the people was desirous to have it : and willing to pay for the Money Expended : which I still flatter myself I shall compleate for £400 : or Littell more provided they run into : extravagancies in finishing the Bar : Larder : Ball Room 39 feet long : and the parlour &c should abin [been?] Glad to a mett [??] you & Sir Harbot [Herbert] Mackworth together in the Red House : and at Wenvo : but I hope it will not be Long first : which is all at present from sir your most Obed Humb Serv Thos. Roberts

27 Oct

the astonishment I met with last night imboldened me to Trespass upon my Good God to acquaint you with my good luck as you know me with me well there was an ajournment of the Quarter Sessions held yesterday to view my work at the Goale [jail] and to setall [settle] my account and as the melitia [militia] are now imbodied there was a Number of Justices who all went to find out faults but found none and all extremly well staisfied [satisfied] they settled my account and was due to me £165 and as a Graturity as they was please to say gave me 15 pounds : and then signed an order upon the Tresurer to pay me £180:

justices that finished the whole sir Harbart Mackworth Bart

Robert Jones Esq.

William Hurst Esq.

The Reverend Mr Windone [?] of New house

19 Oct 1776

Cardiff Please my duty to Mrs Birt & family hope they are all well as thank god I am.

20 Evening Mr Thomas the Town Clerk told me he should send a letter Inclose but he from home

[£100 in 1776 is equivalent in purchasing power to about £20,538.21 today]

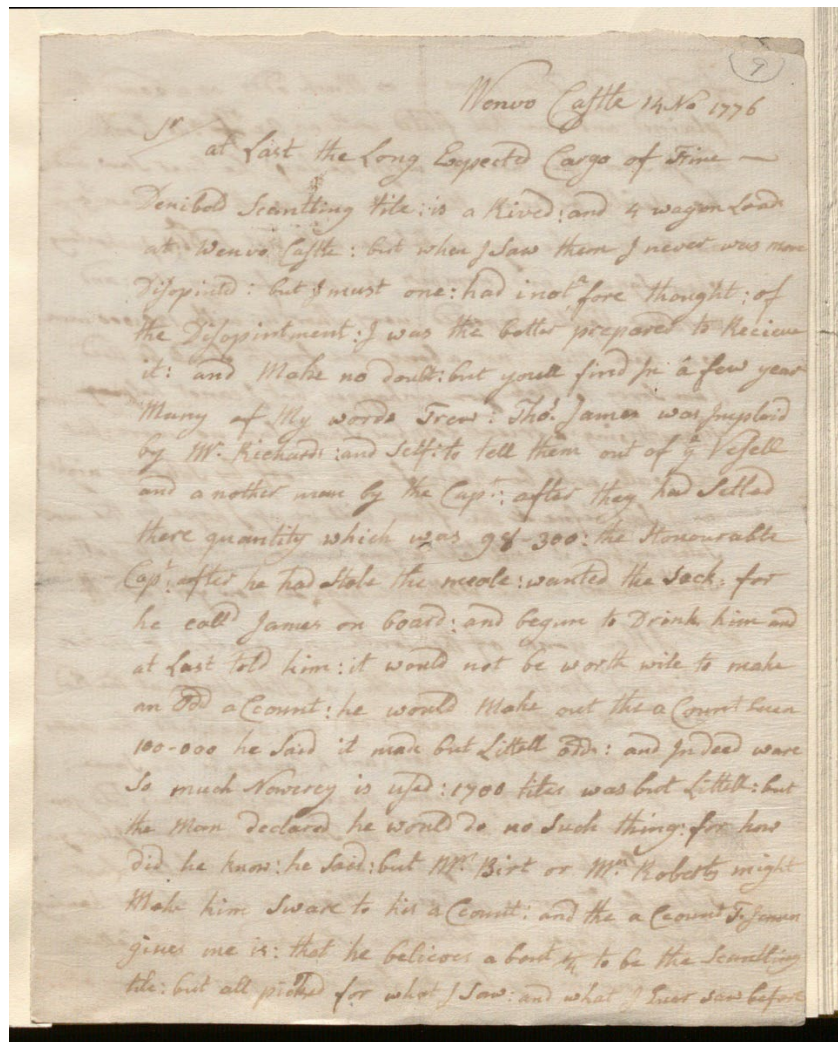
he chose to waite your Answer and then if its agreeable
 he shall have no Objection to signe it: as to my being
 out in My Calculation I was not: for I could a finished the
 house with the 300 had i Contracted so to do; but when I had
 Bestowed so good a Roof; & so well Covered: and so much
 Lumber Roomes Walep; which would make the Best Lodging
 Roomes in the House: I thought it More to your Intruist
 to Make a Compleate Convoenant house: then to patch up
 one part only: and as the people was desirous to have
 it: and willing to pay for the Money Expended: which I still
 flater my self I shall Compleate for 400: or Littell more
 provided they dont Run into Extravagencies in finishing the
 Bar: Larder: Ball Room 39 foot long: and the parlour &c.
 Should a Ben. Glad to a Meet you & S^r Harbot Mackworth
 together: in the Red house: and at Wauvo: but I hope it
 will not be long first: which is all at present from
 S^r your Most Obed^t Hum^l Ser^t Tho^s Roberts
 19 Oct^r 1776

Cardiff Please My Duty to M^{rs} Birt & family
 hope they are all well as thank yad from

20 Evening M^r Thomas the Town Clerk told me he should
 send a Letter to Inchee but he's from home

Wenvo Castle 14 Nov 1776

Sir at last the long expected cargo of Frine Demibold Scanthing [?] tile; is arrived : and 4 wagon Loads at Wenvo Castle : but when I saw them I never was more Disopinted : but I must one : had I not a fore thought of the Disappointment : I was the better prepared to Receive it: and Make no doubt : but you'll find in a few year Many of my words Trew : Thos James was imploid [employed] by Mr Richards : and self to tell them out of the Vesell and another man by the Capt : after they had settled there quantity which was 98 - 300 : the Honourable Capt after he had stole the meale : wanted the sack for he called James on board : and begun to Drink him and at Last told him : it would not be worth while to make an odd account : he would make out the account sum 100 -000 he said it made but little odds : and indeed were so much Nowerey [knavery ?] is used : 1700 tiles was but little : but the man declared he would do no such thing for how did he know : he said : but Mr Birt or Mr Roberts might make sware [swear] to his account : and the account to James gives me is : that he believes about 1/4 to be the Scanthing [?] tile : but all picked for what I saw : and what I ever saw before



Wenwo Castle 14 Nov 1776

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of Demibold Tile : there is as much odds as a board that's plained : and one that's flatted with an ax or a Bill hook : and in short : they are the worst he says he ever saw : and he verily believes they are not worth more than $\frac{3}{5}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ more he say : he believe will not hold ... inches long when squared : and numbers too short for any use : and another Vesell Expected : very shortly : 120:000 more was them mine : not above one fourth should be used : I am sorry to make you unhappy : but I cannot help sympathising : a friends loss : but shall say no more : but the walls will be Ready for the Roof by Saturday night as I said before and the floor will be up I hope by the next Saturday : but it will take a long time and trouble to gett up such timbers : as the walls are high : & now for Cardiff.

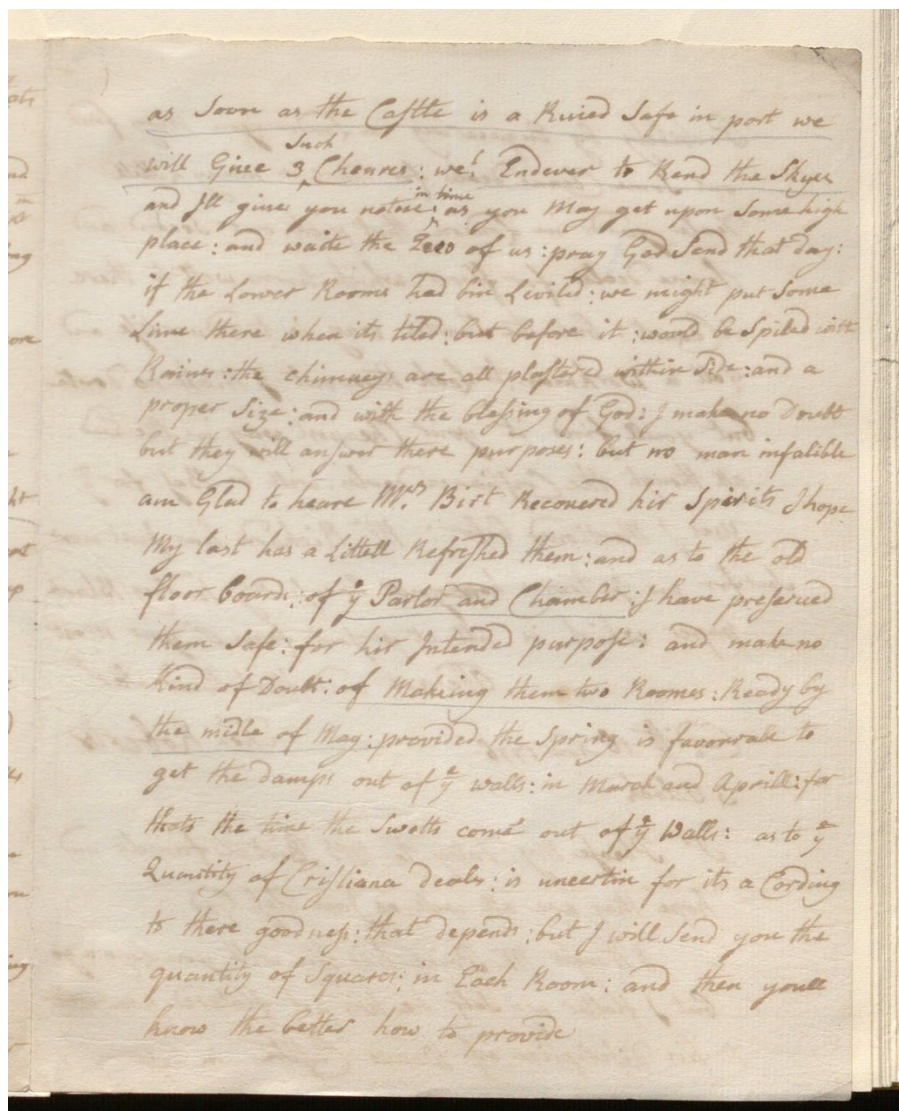
Sir I Rec^d yours of the tenth : with 3 inclosed to messers Richards, Holbin & Playforth : a 6 stall stable at the Red house will be tiled in next week : a 4:3 & 2 ditto the walls above half ready for your [?] Roof : and a Coachouse the Same : I am glad the size of your Rooms please you : I all wais [always] told you I gave good measure : as I liked the Tanket [?] should be : I sent you Mr Hills Excuse : Last post & I have sent him a tickelar [?] Last Tuesday by the [?] post as no Excuse Might be made of not having orders : & a Copy was taken by a nother hand : as to ye [?] Cellars I mentioned in my Last : as Lime is bringing in Every other day

of Venisbol Tile: there is as much odd as a board that
 plaines: and one that flated with an Ax ^{or} Bill hook:
 and in short: they are the worst he says he ever saw: and
 he verily belives they are not worth more than 3rd
 and 1/2 More he says: he belives will not hold ^{for} much longer
 when squared: and numbers to short for any use: and
 a Nother Vessel Expected: very shortly: with 120:000 more
 was there Mine: not a bone one fourth should be used:
 I am sorry to Make you unhappy: but I cannot help
 Sympathising: a friend left: but I shall say no more: but
 the walls will be ready for the Roof by Saturday night
 as I said before the floor will be up I hope by the next
 Saturday: but it will take a long time and trouble to get up
 such timbers: as the walls are high: de now for Cardiff

I Rec yours of the tenth: with 3 Enclaves to Messrs
 Richard, Holbin & Playforth: a 6 Stall Stable at the Rad
 house will be tiled in next week: a 4:3 Charnel the walls
 about half ready for y^e Roof: and 4 Coachouse the same:
 I am glad the size of y^e Rooms please you: I all waies told you
 I gave good Measure: as I liked the Tarkhet should be: Went you
 Mr. Hills Excuse: last post: he I have sent him a tickel at last
 Tuesday by y^e post as no excuse might be made of not having
 orders: & a Copy was taken by a nother hand: as to y^e Callon
 I Mentioned in My last: as time is bringing in Every other
 day

EIGHTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

as soon as the Castle is arrived safe in port we will give 3 such Cheares [cheers ?] : we'd endeavor [endeavour] to Rend the Skyes and I'll give you notice in time as you may get upon some high place : and waite the [hero?] of us : pray God send that day : if the lower Rooms had bin [been] Leviled [levelled] : we might put some lime there when it is tiled : but before it : would be spilled with Raines : the chimneys are all plastered within side : and a proper size : and with the blessing of God : I make no doubt but they will answer there [their] proper purposes : but no man [is] infalible am Glad to heare Mrs Birt Recovered her spirits I hope my last has a Littell [little] Refreshed them : and as to the old floor boards : of the Parlor and Chamber : I have preserved [?] them safe : for hir [her] intended purpose : and make no kind of doubt : of making them two Roomes : Ready by the middle of May : provided the Spring is favorable to get the dampes out of the walls : in March and April : for thats the time the swotts [?] come out of the walls : as to the quantity of Crislina deales [?] : is uncertin for its a cording [according] to there [their] goodness : that depends : but i will send you the quantity of Squares : in Each Room : and then youll know the better how to provide



EIGHTH LETTER / FOURTH & LAST PAGE

Probibely by Enquiering in London : you may find out some Cleane deales for there is many Little deale yards in London : that picks out second and cleane deales for floors : which turns well to there account : but the Shortis [shortest] way is to advertise : and get a workman to look at them out : I make no but youll find it your cheapest way in the End : all though the Crislianea [?] deale : will be Best for your uses as I mentioned before : Mr Richards has just now sent for me in town : hope you'll excuse my sending blank paper which is all at present from Sir your most Obediant and Most Humb Servt

Thomas Robers

Cardiff 16 Nov 1776

3 O clock

Sr Please my Dutey to Mrs Birt & family and hope they are all well as I am bless God

I thought Mr Price had bin [been] with you long ago but I flatter myself he has not flattered you with his description of Wenvo Castle in half [?]

Probibely by Enquiering in London you May find
out some Cleane deales for there is many Little
deale yards in London that picks out second and
Cleane deales for floors : which turns well to there
Account : but the Shortis way is to Advertise and
Get a Workman to look them out. I Make no Doubt
but youll find it your Cheapest way in the End :
all though the Crislianea deale : will be Best for y.
Uses I Mentioned before : Mr. Richards has just now
sent for me in town : hope youll Excuse My sending Blank
paper which is all at present from Sir your Most
Obedant and Most Humb Servt

Cardiff 16 Nov 1776 Thos. Roberts

3 O clock

Sr Please My Dutey to Mrs Birt & family and
hope they are all well as I am Bless God

I thought Mr. Price had bin with you long ago
but I flatter my self he has not flattered you with
his Description of Wenvo Castle in half

Wenvo Castle Mon 25 Nov 1776

Sir the floor of the Cistorn [cistern] was put up last Friday as I said in my last : and this day the Garrett floor is going on and a fine day now what would a bin [have been] done Last Monday : had it not bin wet wether : and that part of the Roof is framed : all to 2/y [to your?] Center Break [?] the Masons Begin to Rise the East End of your / the Building tomorrow : the size of our Reservoier diseribed [described] in my last letter is 18 foot Long 5 foot wide and 3 ft 6in deep : which will hold 52 Barills or about 26 Hogsheads, 70 gallons ... : now the Reservoier you purpose will hold above 500 Hogsheads at 63 Gallons to y/r Hogshead : the Utility and Practability I aprove of : But such a plase as you Disaribe [describe] : if its only loose Earth to Move : will stand you in 50 [pounds] at Least : but if it should be Rock to move : God only knows what it may cost and now I am upon water : some time past I sent you word that the well in Bairs wood was half dry and was afraid the water had found another course : as I have none Instancis [instances] of but about 3 weeks past Curocity [curiosity] Led me to see it a gaine : which to my agreable surprise found the spring had resumed its usall Vilosity : which I forgot to mention before : but there is one thing need full to be done in my Opinion : that is to Levill the Lower floors with the old Rubish Lime that is left : it being much more proper for that purpose : than any cold damp earth now as the time of yeare is come : to[o] often have small dribling raine : to[o] bad for the Masons to lay stones; Hawkins's Labourers are obliged to go to play : (but the masons can hew stones) which many of them Grumbels about : and tells Hawkins : that they will go to threshing : and there they shall loose no time : which he canot spare them : for when the Masons work : they are wanted : so that I have made a proposall to Mr Hawkins : to fill it up : to fill it up to its proper Levill : Either for a sum certain : or by the square yard which must be asertained before its begun : and before I finish this Letter he is to consider of it and to let me know and it shall be done the first opertunity ; for John has no men to spare now nor Never [??] I find

10
New Castle Mon 25 Nov 1776

The floor of the Cistern was put up last Friday as I said
in My last: and this day the Garrett floor is going on as a fine day
now doing what would a bin done last Monday had it not bin wet
weather and that part of the Roof is framed all to y^e Center brack
the Masons Begin to Rise the East End Building tomorrow: the size
of our Reservoir. Described in My last is 18 foot long 5 foot wide
3.6 Deep which will hold 52 Barrels or about 26 Hogsheads 70
Gallons y^e: now the Reservoir you purpose will hold above 500
Hogsheads at 63 Gallons to y^e Hogshead: the Utility and Practability
I approve of: But such a place as you describe: if its only
Loose Earth to Move will stand you in 50 at least But if
it should be Rock to Move: God only knows what it May cost
and how Jam upon water: Some time past I sent you word that
the well in Bairs wood was half dry and was afraid the water
had found a nother Course: as I have none just now of: but about
3 weeks past Curiosity led me to see it a gain: which to My agreeable
surprise found the spring had resumed its usual Velocity: which
I for got to Mention before: but there is one thing needfull
to be Done in My Opinion: that is to Levell the lower floors
with the old Rubbish lime that is left it being Much more
proper for that purpose: then any other sort of cold Damp Earth
now as the time of yeare is come: to often have small dribbling
Raine: to bad for the Masons to lay stones: hawkins Laboursers are
oblige to go to play: (but the Masons can hew stones) which money
of their Grumbels about: and tells Hawkins: that they will go to
Thrashing: and there they shall loose no time: which he cannot
spare them: for when the Masons work they are wanted so that
I have Made a proposall to M^r Hawkins to fill it up: to its proper
Levell: Either for a Sum Certain: or by the Square yard which
Must be ascertained before its begun: and before I finish this
Letter he is to Consider of it: and to let me know: now or if
these proposalls Meets your Approbation: please to let me know
and it shall be Done the first Opportunity: for John has no men to
spare nor has I find

NINTH LETTER / SECOND PAGE

just now going to Light my Candle & pipe

Thursday after Diner : the wether dry but very cold :thank god the Carpenters has got most of the Garet floor on to the Center Booke [??] safe and well : the floor over the Center Building I hope will be on by Saturday night : Hawkins going on now with the East End a proper high for 5 Guineas : and is ton [done ?] less than I Expected it to a bin done for : but as its to keep his men imployed he did it cheape : more particuler a ccount of the Cleane deales such deales they are of all lengths from 3 foot to 30 f or 40 f : now I have both Bought and sold Cleane deales for 6 d per foot supporting [?] in the rough but if more than 14 f or 16 f long then 7d or 8d per foot : Likewise broad bords from 12 in to 14 in wide for steps of stairs is worth 8d or 9d pr foot but youll hardly find bords cut exactly to the length of stairs therefore the workman that looks them out Must Endevur to take such as will Make the least waste Either one : 2 : or 3 Lengths : which you can tell best what Bredth you should Like your stairs but I would not wish them more then 5 foot as to the thickness its common from an inch to 1 inch 1/3 or full inch and as to second best deales they are worth about 2d. p'foot cheaper than the above prices : but that's according to the goodness [of] the workman that picks them out : it much depends upon his judgment and Integrity : the next is the size of each room : and will take about 125 superficall feet for a square : the study and saloone 6 Sqr Each : Dining Roome 6 1/2 Square : Large Breakfast parlor 4 1/2 : small ditto 4 sqr : the Gallerie 18 sq and I think good second best deales will do very well : the staircase & China closett : 3 sqr Each : 30 steps and risers of your one length which is the best account I can give : I purpose going to Bristol next Monday where I hope to meet a line from you as to Glass : I beg you'll buy it in London : Bolses best glass but would advise plate glass for the Best Rooms and if you should have an Instination [?] the size is in 24 1/2 by 16 in so you may know the price : the last Huricen [Hurricane] : yesterday week : has tore the covering off all your houses : I believe belonging to your estate : some more than the other : however I have one or the other with me daily : now Many of them would put up with a little thatch as they say : its very hard they have not a day bed to lye [lie] on

Just now going to light my Candle & pipe

Thursday after Dinner the weather dry but very Cold: thank god y
Carpenter has got most of the Garret floor on to the Center Block
Safe and well: the floor over the Center Building I hope will
be on by Saturday night: harkins going on now with the East End
I have this morning a greed with him to fill up the Rooms to
a proper high for 5 Guineas: and is ten less than I expected it
to a bin done for: but as its to keep his men employed he did it
cheaps: a More particulars a Count of y^e Cleare Deales as such Deales
they are of all lengths from 3 foot to 30 or 40: now I have both
Bought and Sold Cleare Deales for 6 p^r foot ^{superficial} in the Rough but if
More then 14 or 16 long then 7 or 8 p^r foot: Likewise Broad Boards
from 12 to 14 wide for Steps of Stairs is worth 2 or 3 p^r foot but
youll hardly find Corn cut exactly to y^e length of Stairs therefore
the Workman that looks them out, Must Endeavor to take such as
will Make the least waste either one: 2: or 3: lengths: which
you can tell best what Breadth you shoud like your Stairs but
I woud not wish them More then 3 foot as to the thickness its
comon from an inch to 1 inch 1/2 or full inches and as to Second
best Deales they are worth about 2 p^r foot cheaper then the
above prices but thats according to their Goodness the workman
that picks them out: it Much depends upon his Judgment
and Integrity: the next is the size of Each Room and will
take a Count 125 Superficial feet for a Square the: Study and
Saloon 6 Sq: Each: Dining Room 6 1/2 Square Large Break
fast parlor 4 1/2: Small Dicks 4 Sq: the Galleries 13 Sq: and I
think Good Second best Deales will do very well: the Staircase
de China Caselt: ~~also~~ 3 Sq: Each: 30 Steps and Risers of your
one length which is the best a Count I can give: I purpose going
to Bristol next Monday where I hope to meet online from you
as to Glaze I beg you to by it in London: but Bolles best Glaze
but woud advise plate Glaze for the Best Room: and if you
shoud have an Justination the size is 24 1/2: by 16 so you may
have the prices: the Last Staircase yesterday week has tore
the Covering of all your Houfes: I believe belonging to y^e Estate
Some More then others: however I have one of the other with
Me dayly: now Many of them: woud put up with a little thatch
as they say: its very hard they have not a dry bed to lye on:

NINTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

and that's the complaint to Mr Richards : so he sends them me & I can say nothing to it : so to get Rid of them : I send them John for straw : and John wont part from a handfull : so the poor creators [creatures] are left to shift : but if a litell [little] thatch was put upon some of the houses : it would save the Timbers &c. more than the value of the straw : please to give me some answer to this as I may have some peace : either heare [here] or at house : but now I have none at either place -- Priest tells me Mr Garnett wants to know wether [whether] you intend having the rest of the Deales as youes [yours] lyes [lie] on the Key [quay] and must be Moved which will cause an Expence I suppose you'll have some Bristol Plasterers interseeding for your work : but please beware who you ingage [engage] Especially him that works for the Malingriffey Companey for he is as great a black as ever crossed a Conterey [Country] : I have a very good one at the Red house will do any thing wanting heare for this 9 monthes to come : and now for a candle and a pipe --- Friday Morning wett : but not likely to continue : going to Cardiff to meet your Packet: ten Oclock

[here the writing becomes very faded and the rest is hard to read]

30 Instant I rec^d yours yesterday with one Inclosed for Mr Richards : which he will have to day as to the Number of tiles Brought at each loading is uncertain for neither the Driver nor the helper can tell a thousand so there can be no account of the quantity being kept I believe they are near half come but as there was stone sent from Bristol last dates [?] we are obliged to cleare the key [quay] or our friend Bird will [....] either them or me : for an interruption upon the famos [?] key Shall tell Mr. Richards to take no more than 100 000 [?] tiles : I have in my last and now told you in what situation this work is in : as to the Parapet wall its no matter about that: all I want is to lay the top stone of the cornish [cornise] that covers the whole wall projects significantly / sufficiently [??] on each side : then the walls are safe Indeed Mrs Birt thinks right : we are [wide ... ?] from infallibilty [?] and none but ease [??] : at times and as to the certin time of ...ing [?]

and that the complaint to Mr Richard: so he sends them.
 Me: so I can say nothing to it: so to get rid of them: I send them.
 John for Straw: and John want part from a hand full: so the poor
 Creators are left to shift: but if a little thatch was put upon
 some of the houses: it would save the Timber: be more than the
 Value of the Straws: please to Give me some Answer to this as
 I may have some peace: either here or at home: but now I
 have none at either place: — Priest tells me Mr. Gannett wants
 to know whether you intend: having the Rest of the Decks: as y^e
 lies on the Key: and must be Moved: which will cause an Expense
 I suppose you'd have some Bristol Plastered Interceding for your
 work: but please to Beware who you engage: Especially him that
 works for the Malingriffey Company: for he is as great a black
 as Ever crossed a Contrary: I have a very good one at the Red
 house will do any thing wanting here for this growing Month
 to come: and now for a Candle & a pipe — Friday Morning
 well: but not likely to Continue: going to Cardiff to Meet your
 Packett: ten O'clock — 30 Instant I Recd your yesterday
 with one enclosed for Mr. Richard: which he will have to day
 as to the Number of Tils Brought at each Load: is uncertain
 for neither the Driver: nor Helper: can tell a thousand so
 there can be no Account of that quantity: being kept I
 believe they are scarce half come: but as there was Struck
 from Bristol fast Boats: we are obliged to Close the Key:
 or our friend Bird: with the other them or me: for an
 Interruption upon the same Key: Shall tell Mr. Richard to
 take no more than ^{like} 100000: I have for my Last and now tell
 you for what Situation the work is in: as to the Parapet
 wall its no Matter about that: all I want is to lay the
 top Stone of the Cornish that covers the whole wall &
 projects Sufficiently on each Side: then the walls are safe
 Indeed Mr. Bird thinks right we are wide from infirmity
 and none but this at times: and as to the entire time of coming

NINTH LETTER / FOURTH & LAST PAGE

one can tell as that you the wether which at present is and make no doute [?doubt] if please god to have the [.....] west end tiles all before Christmas and the floor of the other... on : as to the [.....] last : and hope it will meet you approbation : the opinion [?] of Mr Price concerning the timber work is very just : The Girders have hold of the walls none less than 12 inches and most 18 in & some through the wall [.....] Sir I think I must Return your compliment in regard to a Proverb for I think you was in high spirits and am always happy when I can make Mrs Birt and you both so It shall be neglect of mine to make you so: the Recess in the Best parlor is 10 wide and 2ft 6 in deep to the best of my memory but if any material alteration will send it in my next[?] & the littel parlor as to the Red House : I have sent a sketch of the stables &c and they are going to everything after [??] house to let at lodging ... as the walls plastering Cielings and floors [?] are almost all new this must be very damp : but I believe we shall finish of the whole by Xmas ____ Sir I hartily wish you & your family much joy with the increase of your family and may long life and contentment with a plentyful offspring Crown there Happeyness to a good old age is the sincere wish of sir your Most Obedient Humb Ser Thos. Roberts

Pray my duty to Master Peter & family pray is he come home.



John Man's 'Red House' which became the Cardiff Arms

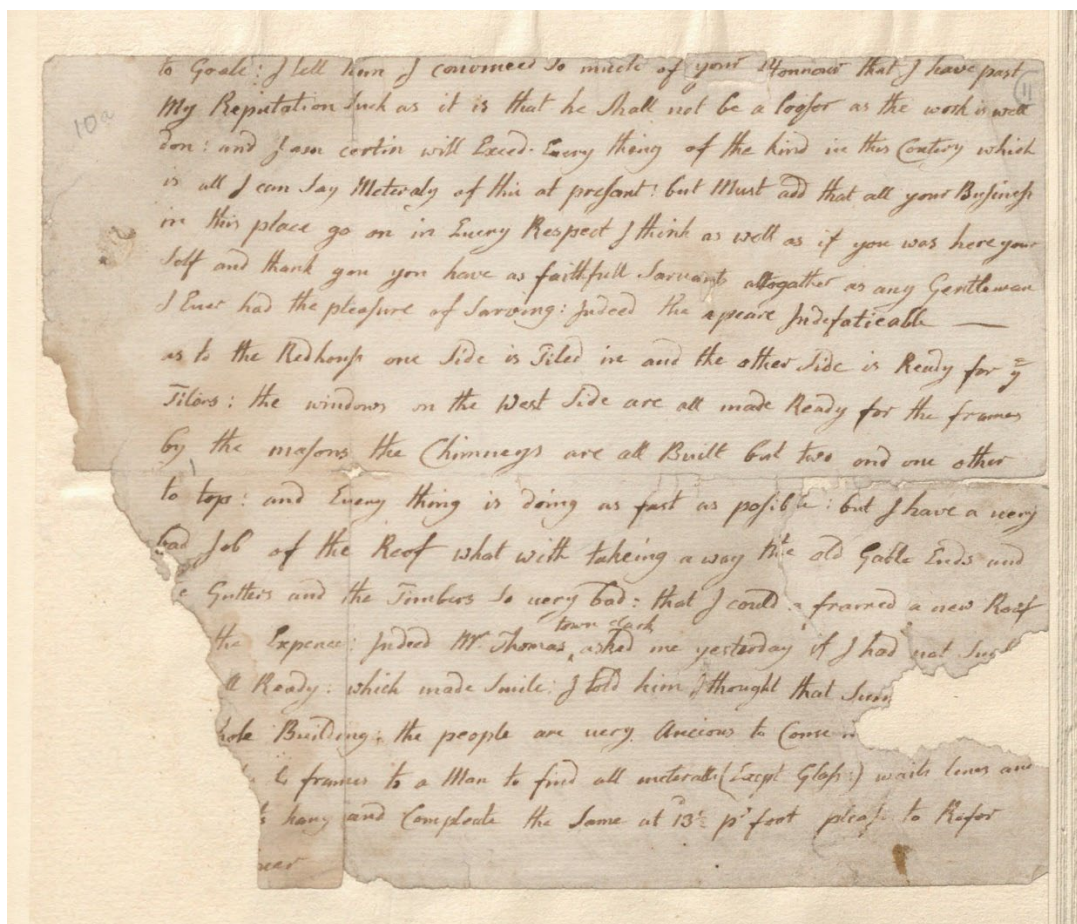
TENTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

[no date]

[this one is very torn about and so sections are missing which gives it a raggedy feel]

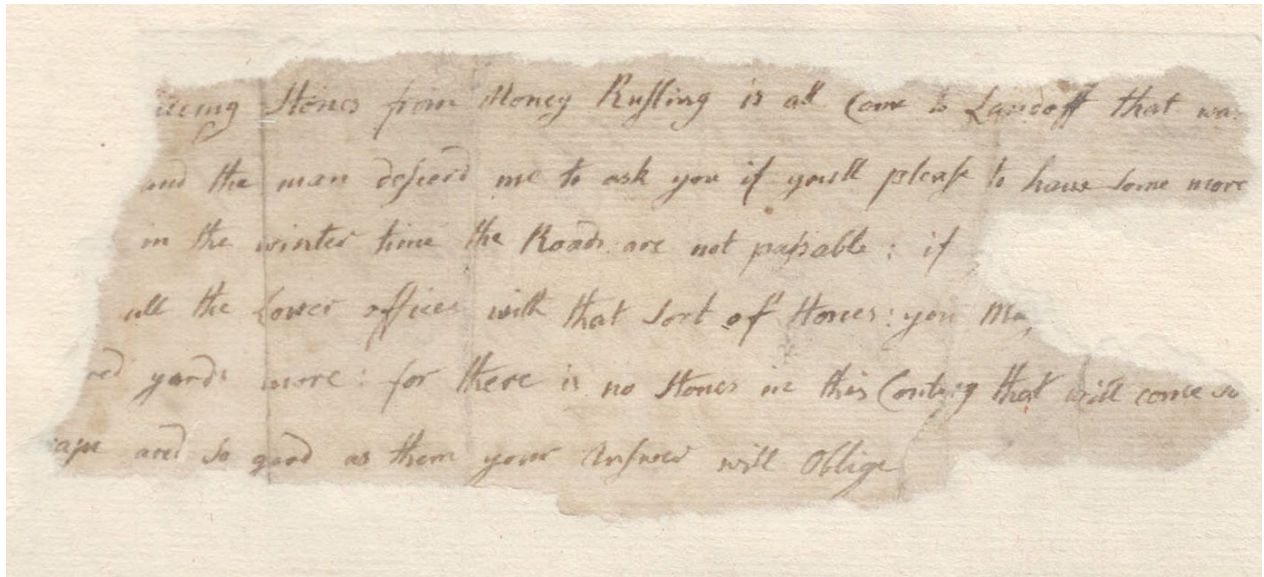
to Goale : I tell him I convinced so much of your Honour that I have past [?] My reputation such as it is that he shall not be a loser [?] as the work is well done : and I am certin will exceed everything of the kind in this country which is all I can say Meteraly [Materially] of this at present : but must add that all your Businesses in this place go on in Every Respect I think as well as if you was here your self and thank you you have as faithfull servants altogether as any Gentleman I ever had the pleasure of serving : indeed the apeare Indefaticable ----

As to the Redhouse one side is tiled in and the other side is Ready for the tiles : the windows on the west side are all made Ready for the frames by the masons the chimneys are all Built but two and one other to top : and everything is doing as fast as possible : but I have a very bad job of the Roof what with taking a way the old Gable Ends and the Gutters and the timbers so very bad : that I could a framed a new Roof [...] the Expencc : Indeed Mr Thomas town clark asked me yesterday if I had not such all[?]..... Ready : which made me smile : I told him I thought that such whole Building : the people are very anxious to come in to frames to a man to find all materials (Except Glass) waits lines and hang and compleate the same 13 1/2 d pr foot please to refer



TENTH LETTER / SECOND PAGE [A FRAGMENT]

ing stones from money Russing [?] is all come to Landaff that was ... and the man desired me to ask you if you'll please to have some more in the winter time the Roads are not passable : if all the lowere offices with what sort of stones you may yards more : for there is no stones in this Country that will come and so good as them your answer will oblige.



TENTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

only to confirm what I sayd I verily [?] believe the floor and the arch over the Larder will be up at the Later end as what I will give you further account next Saturday as I shall expect the --- and oftner if need Requires : I have delivered your orders next week ... sent you a letter last post : I have not bin honnoured with advice to do [Every / Survey] Price of park yet : but Report all Round the Country to John as he has..... is going to be Inlarged : but be that as it will I shall a Viset from Mr Power to give him such satisfaction as he will Required is your family it very strange that not one of your Nighbouring .. Endeaver all in my ... neare Wenvo since whe bgun to pull down ; not Ever ... I cannot but think surmise may be fabolous / felonious [?] : so many that : I delivered a friends to Hodges last Monday Morning I Recd from the Whitely to give his compliments to you and family and Return favours : as to the works at the Redhouse : whe proceed Recd your of the 18th as I could not do any thing to te Til... this Morning I have sent to Priest in Bristol to bring and then shall proceed in Earnest : whe have bin to building : and ashis [?] top of Chimneys & Repairing the answer to yours of the 18 : you May all ways..... I advise : its with truth and sincerity and for you will put my name to falcity[?] & de..... of a thing I shall leave it to your bet..... hope you will find him as you Expect much trouble : as to my part I will give next post week hope to give you a More at present Sr your Most Obed

was set out for yorkshire I hope and well please

only to confirm what I say. I hardly believe the floor of
 the Arch over the Larder will be up at the Lateral end, what I
 will give you further account next Saturday or I shall Enquire the Ac-
 count of need requires: I have delivered your order next week
 sent you a letter last post: I have not been honoured with answer to do Every
 Price of park yet: but Report all Round the Country to John so he has
 is going to be enlarged: but be that as it will I shall a Visit from Mr.
 power to give him such Satisfaction as he will require is your family
 it very strange that not one of your Neighbouring Friends all in my
 near know since who Enquire to put down: not Even I cannot but think
 Surmise, be fabulous: so that I delivered a friend has Ever been
 Hodges last Monday Morning I Recd from the whiteley
 to give his compliments to you and family and Return
 favours: as to the work at the Redhouse: we proceed
 Recd your of the 18 as I could not do any thing to the Site
 this Morning I have sent to priest in Bristol to begin
 and then shall proceed in Earnest: we have been to
 building: and this tops of Chimneys do representing the
 to your of the 18: you may all ways
 I advise: its with truth and Sincerity and for you
 will put my name to falsity (to ~~be~~ de-
 of a thing I shall leave it to your bet-
 you'll find him as you Expect
 much trouble: as to my part I will give
 at post hope to give you a more (in
 at present from Mr your Most Obedt
 was set out for north Shire I hope
 secure a kindle and well please

TENTH LETTER / FOURTH PAGE / ENVELOPE

Peter Birt Esqr
 at Robert Dynely
 Bloomsbury Sq
 London

Peter Birt Esq
 at Robert Dingley
 Bloomsbury Squ
 London

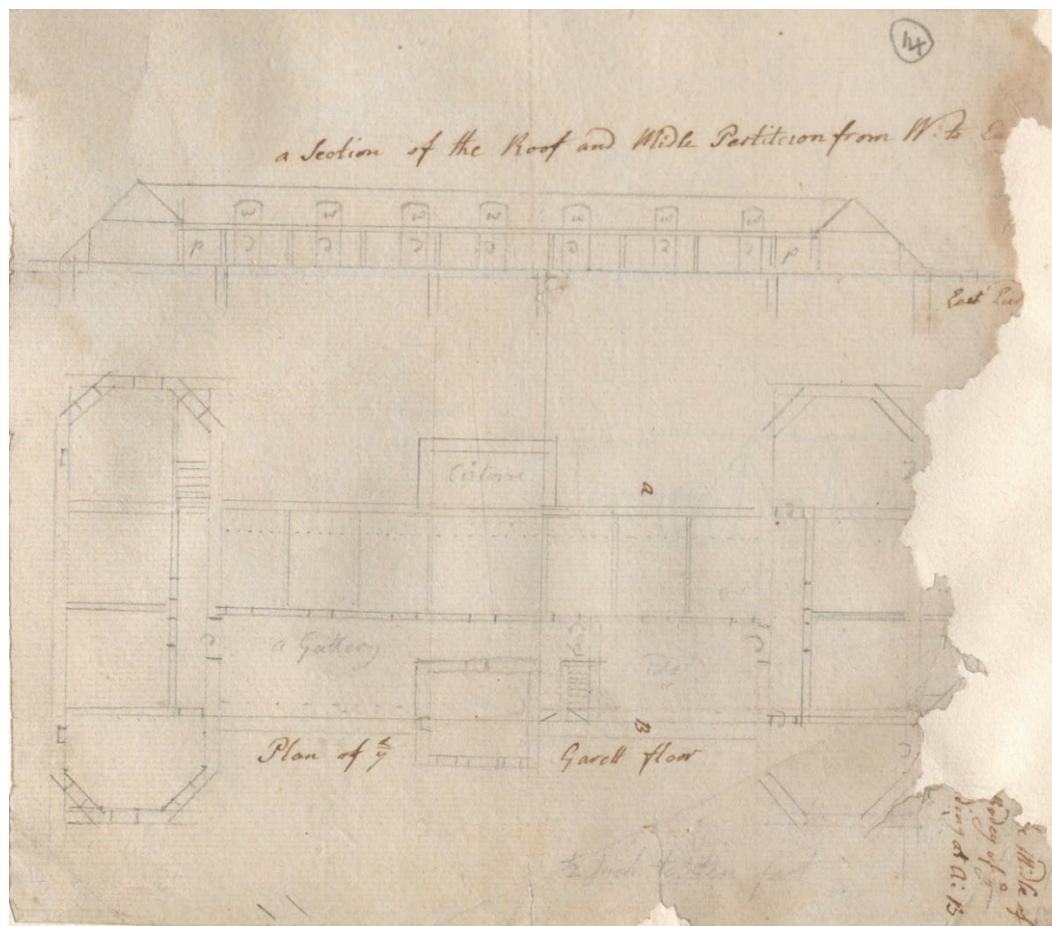
TENTH LETTER / FIFTH PAGE

Sir

This is what is intended for the Garret floor but the Partitions are not up a cross the Room and as your friend draws so well and I want both his eyes and hands : I have Left him work a Nough if you please to have them coppied as

13
 Sir this is what is intended for the Garret floor
 but the Partitions are not up a cross the Room
 and as your friend draws so well: and I want both his
 Eyes and hands: I have Left him work a Nough if
 you please to have them Coppied of

TENTH LETTER / SIXTH PAGE / SKETCH

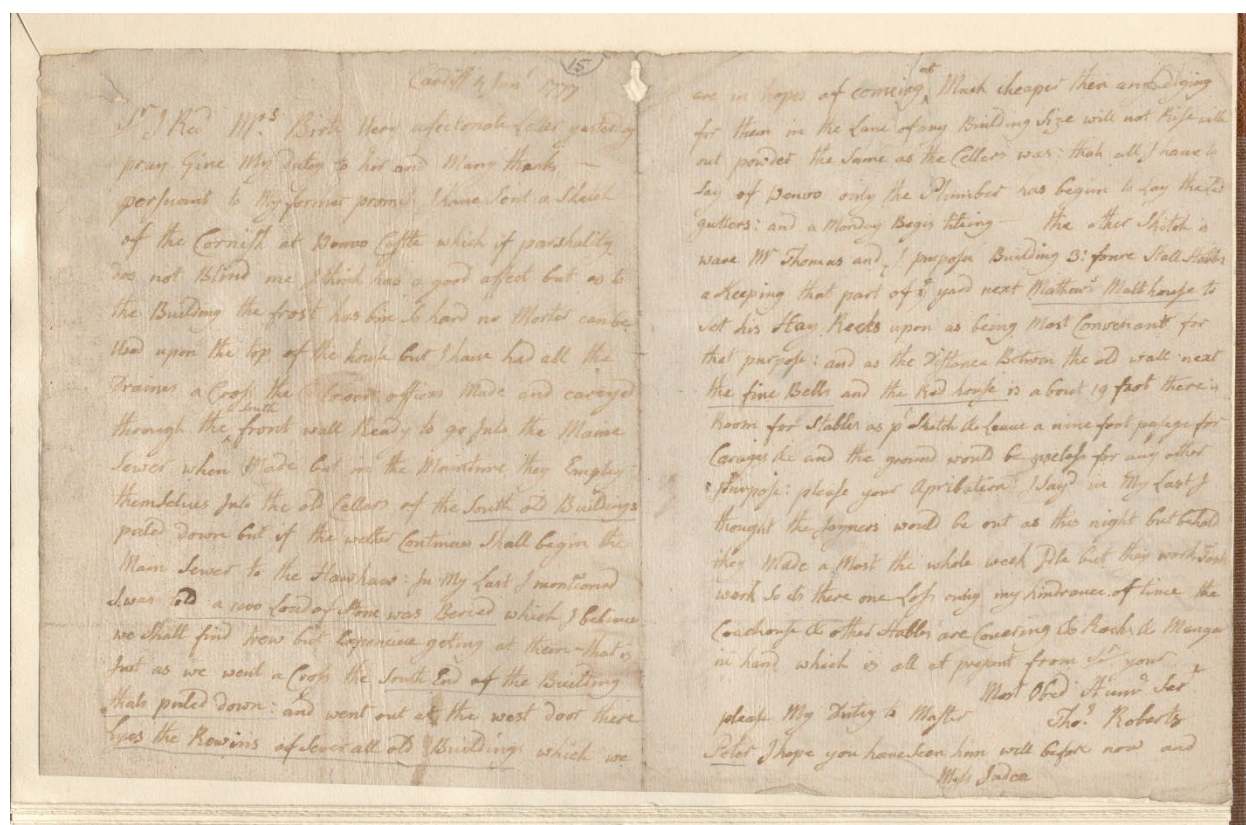


ELEVENTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

Sir I Recd Mrs Birt's very affectionate Letter yesterday pray give my duty to her and many thanks -- persuant to my former promise I have sent a sketch of the Cornish [Cornice?] at Wenvo Castle which if parshality [partiality] does not blind me I think has a good affect but as to the Building the frost has bin so hard no Mortar can be used upon the top of the house but I have had all the drains across the lower offices Made and conveyed through the south front wall ready to go into the Main Sewer when made, but in the meantime they employ themselves into the old Cellars of the South old Buildings pulled down but if the weather continues shall begin the Main Sewer to the Haw haw : for my Last I mentioned I was told a 1000 Load of Stones were Beried [buried] which I believe we will find trew [true] but expensive getting at them - that is just as we went a cross the South End of the Building that's pulled down : and went out at the west door there lyes [lies] the Rewins [ruins] of severall old Buildings which we are in hopes of coming at much cheaper than any digging [?] for them/ then / than [?] in the Lane of any Building Size will not rise with out powder [?? blasting ??] the same as the cellar was : that's all I have to say of Wenvo only the Plumber has begun to lay thaled [??] gutters : and a Monday Begins Tileing - the other sketch is where Mr Thomas and I propose Building 3 : four stall stables a keeping that part of the yard next to Mathews's malt house to set his Hay Recks upon as being most Convenant [convenient] for that purpose : and as the distance between the old wall next the fine / five [?] Bells and the Red House is about 19 foot

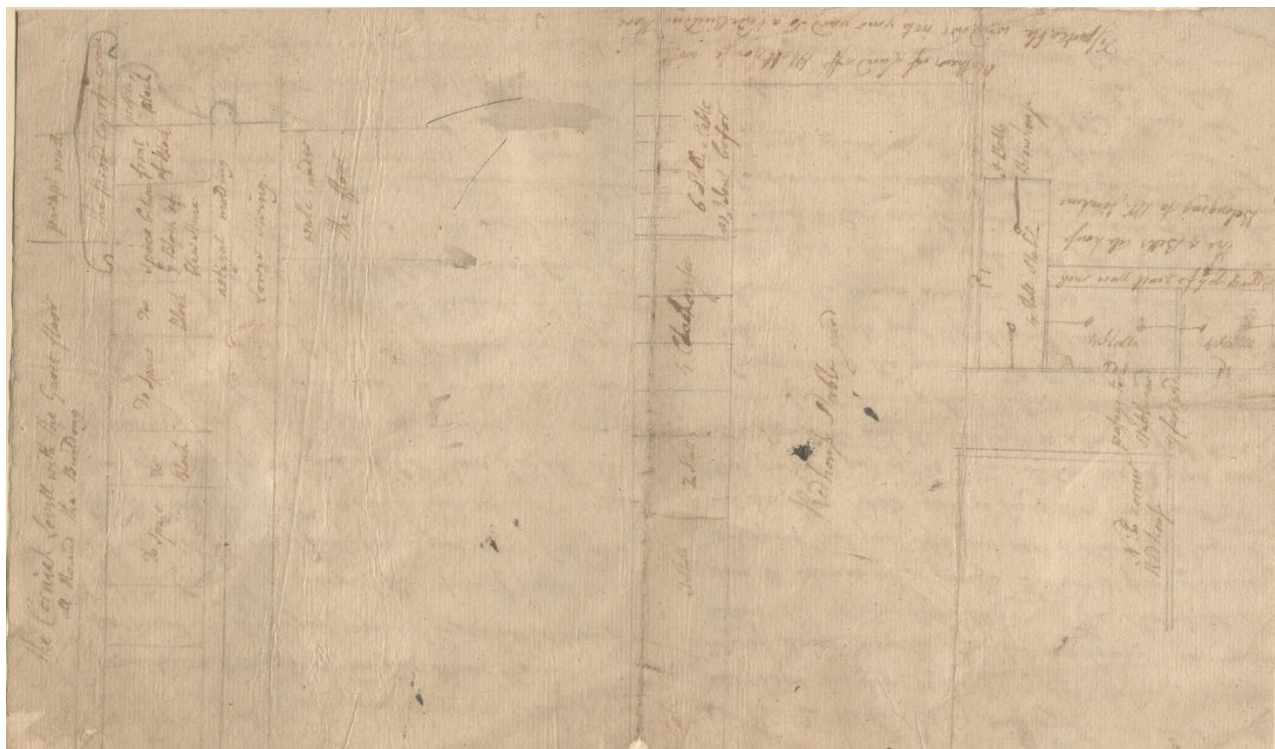
there is room for stables as pr sketch & leave a nine foot passage for carriages & the ground would be useless for any other purpose : please your apribration [approbation] : I sayd in my Last I thought the Joyners would be out as this night but behold they made almost the whole week so be but they work ... [?] work so its there one Loss only my hindrance of time the Coachhouse & the other Stables are Covering & Rocks & Manger [?] in hand which is all at present from Sir your Most Obed Humb Serv Thos. Roberts

please my Dutey to Master Peter⁸, I hope you have seen him well before now and Miss Judee [??]



[A drawing is included with this letter]

⁸ Peter Birt junior died at Chislehurst in Kent in 1788; leaving his father with four daughters.



THIRTEENTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

Cardiff 15 Februaury [February] 1777

Sir Since my last we have had but littal wether for Masons work consequently but Littel is done except yesterday and today the Masons worked well all as Hawkins's son was heare sawing free stone but we are all at a stand for want of the Plumber as none is yet come all though I have sent 3 times for them the Carpinter is as forward as he can gett all most till the Plumber & Mason gets forward the Resorvoyer [reservoir] is finished and is neare 6 foot deep it will hold above 30 tun of water and Hawkins has Made a good job of it : I Rec^d no Letter yesterday from you I suppose owing to snow or bad weather in the North as we have had a good deale of frost and snow this week heare but it soon melted and went off Being disopinted [disappointed] of your a costimed [accustomed] Letter I am at a loss for matter to wright about : but as I mentioned Last as the Report about is that you was[the son of a] Taylor and no Gentleman : this day 3 weeks

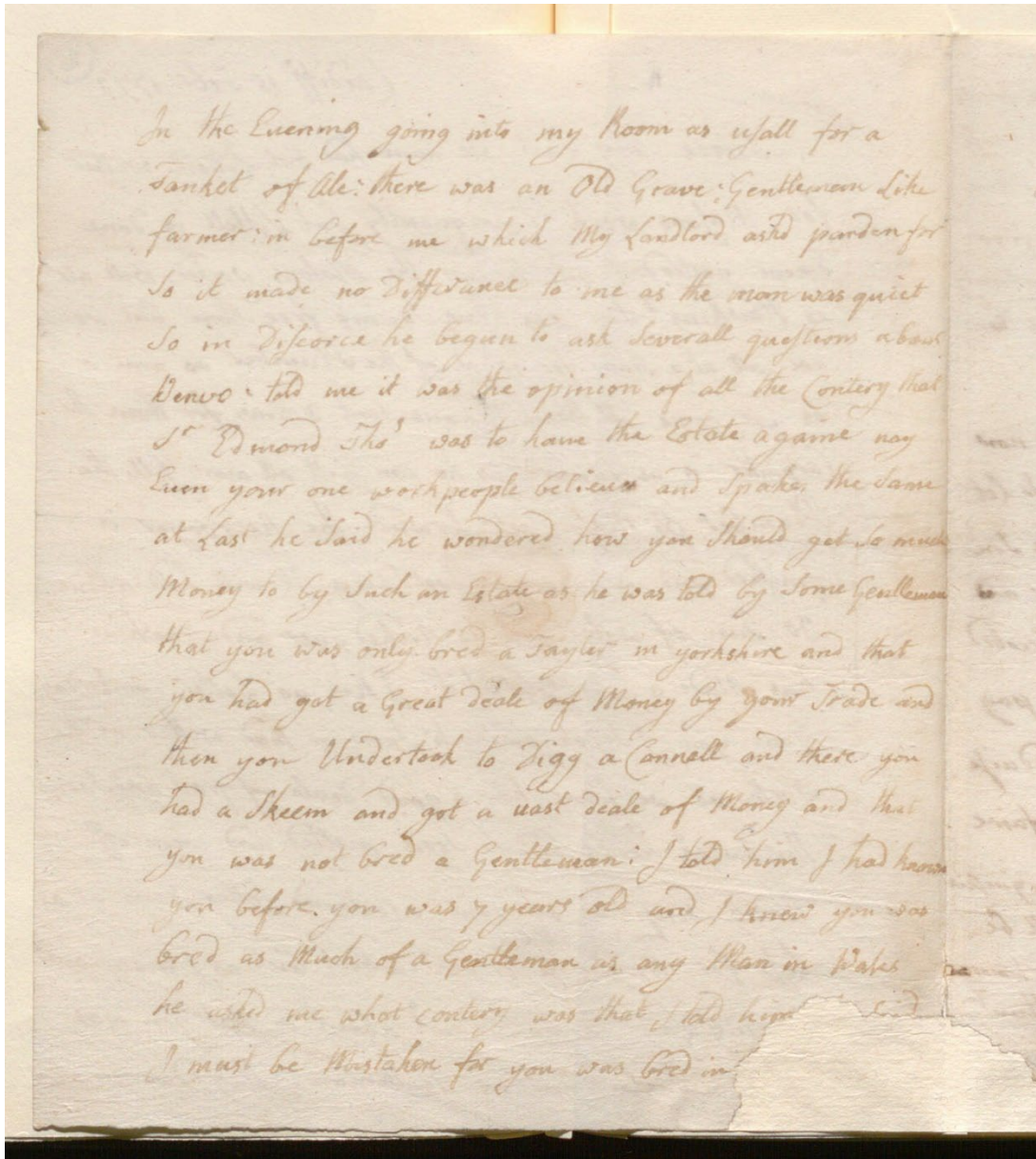
Cardiff 15 Oct 1777 (16)

Since my Last we have had but little weather
 for Masons work Consequently but little is done
 Except yesterday and to day the Masons worked well all
 as Hawkins & Son was here Sawing free Stone but we
 are all at a stand for want of the Plumber as none is
 as yet come all though I have sent 3 times for them the
 Carpenter is as forward as he can gett all most till the
 Plumber & Mason gets forward the Reprooyer is
 finished and is neare 6 foot deep it will hold about
 30 Tun of water and is Arched over and Machine
 has Made a good job of it. I Recd no Letter yesterday
 from you I suppose owing to Snow or Bad weather in the
 North as we have had a good deal of frost and Snow
 this week here but it soon melted and went off
 Being disappointed of your a Costumed Letter I am at a
 loss for Matter to wright a bout but as I mentioned
 in Last as the Report about is that you was
 Taylor and no Gentleman: this day surely

THIRTEENTH LETTER / SECOND PAGE

In the evening going into my Room as usall [usual] for a Tanket [tankard] of Ale : there was an old Grave
 : Gentleman like farmer : in before me which my Landlord asked pardon for so it made no difference to
 me as the man was quiet So in the discorce [discourse] he began to ask several questions about Wenvo
 and told me it was the opinion of all the Contery [country] Sr Edmond Thos was to have the Estate again
 nay even your one [own] work people believe and spoke the same at last he said he wondered how you
 should get so much money to buy such an estate as he was told by some Gentlemen that you was only
 bred a Taylor in Yorkshire and that you had a great deale of Money by your Trade and then you

Undertook to digg a Cannall [canal] and there you had a skeem [scheme] and got a vast deale of Money and that you was not bred a Gentleman : I told him I had known you before you was 7 years old and I knew you was bred as much of a Gentleman as any Man in Wales he asked me what contery [country] was that I told him [he told me] I must be mistaken for you was bred in

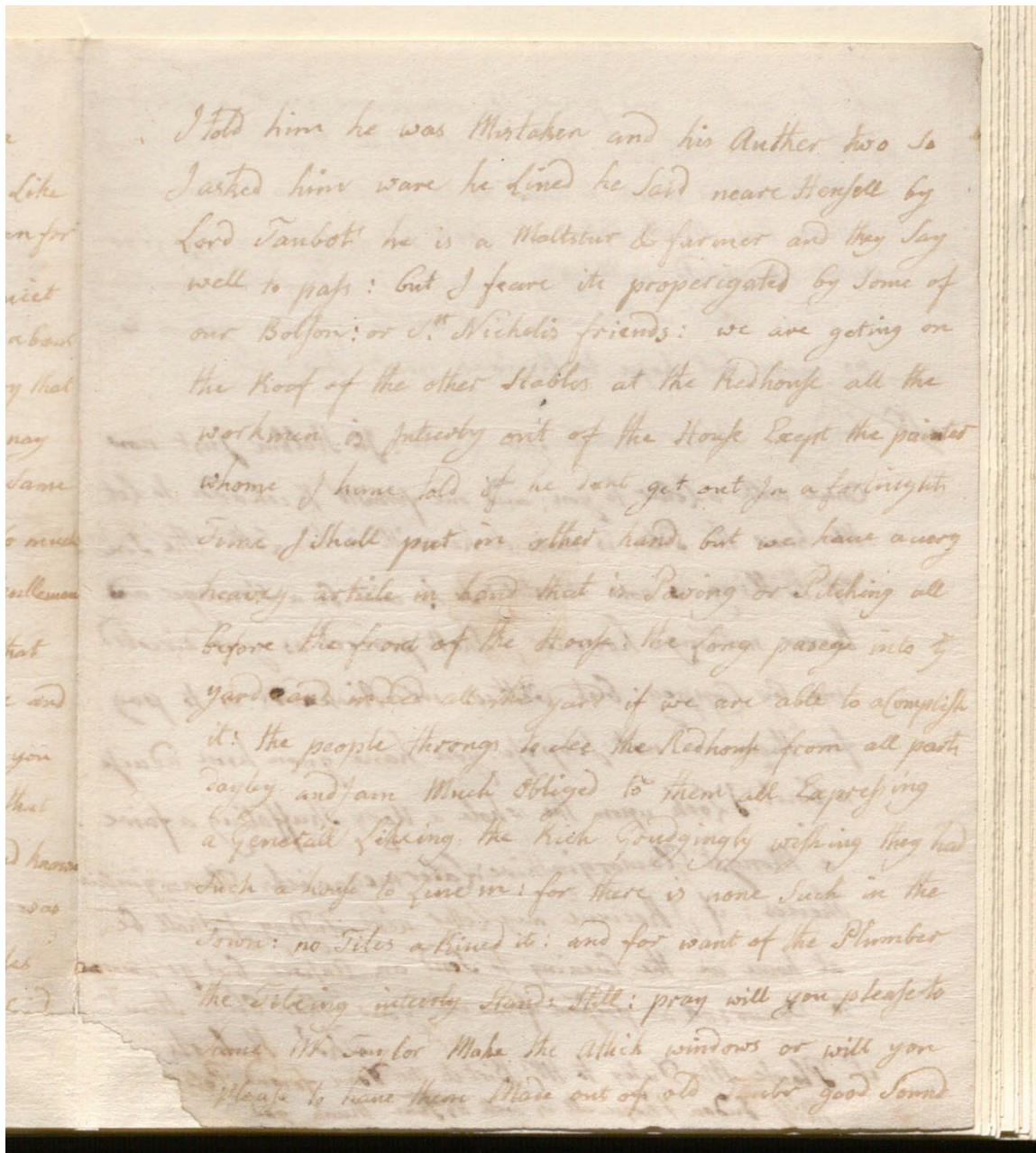


In the Evening going into my Room as usual for a
 Tanket of Ale: there was an Old Gentleman like
 farmer: in before me which My Landlord said pardon for
 So it made no Difference to me as the man was quiet
 So in Discourse he began to ask severall questions about
 Denno: told me it was the opinion of all the Contery that
 S^r Edmund Tho^s was to have the Estate againe nay
 Even your one work people believe and speak the same
 at last he said he wondered how you should get so much
 Money to buy such an Estate as he was told by some Gentlemen
 that you was only bred a Tayler in yorshire and that
 you had got a Great Deal of Money by your Trade and
 then you Undertook to digg a Cannell and there you
 had a Skeem and got a vast deale of Money and that
 you was not bred a Gentleman: I told him I had known
 you before you was 7 years old and I knew you was
 bred as much of a Gentleman as any Man in Wales
 he asked me what contery was that I told him
 I must be mistaken for you was bred in

THIRTEENTH LETTER / THIRD PAGE

I told him he was mistaken and his author two [source too] I asked him ware [where] he lived he said
 neare Hensell by Lord Tauboth [?] he is a Maltstur & farmer and they say well to pass : but I feare its
 properigated [propagated] by some of our Bolson [?]: or Sir Nicholis friends : we are getting on the Roof
 of the other stables at the Redhouse all the workmen is intirely [entirely] out of the House except the
 painter whom I have told if he don't get out in a fortnights time I shall put in other hands but we have a
 very heavy article in hand that is Paving or Pitching all before the front of the House : the long passage
 into the yard and indeed all the yard if we are able to accomplish it : the people throngs to see the

Redhouse from all parts dayley and I am much obliged to them all expressing a general liking : the Rich
 grudgingly wishing they had such a house to live in : for there is none such in the town : no tiles arrived
 ... and for want of the plumber the Tiling entirely stands still : pray will you please to have Mr Taylor
 Make the attick [attic] windows or will you please to have them made out of old Timber good sound



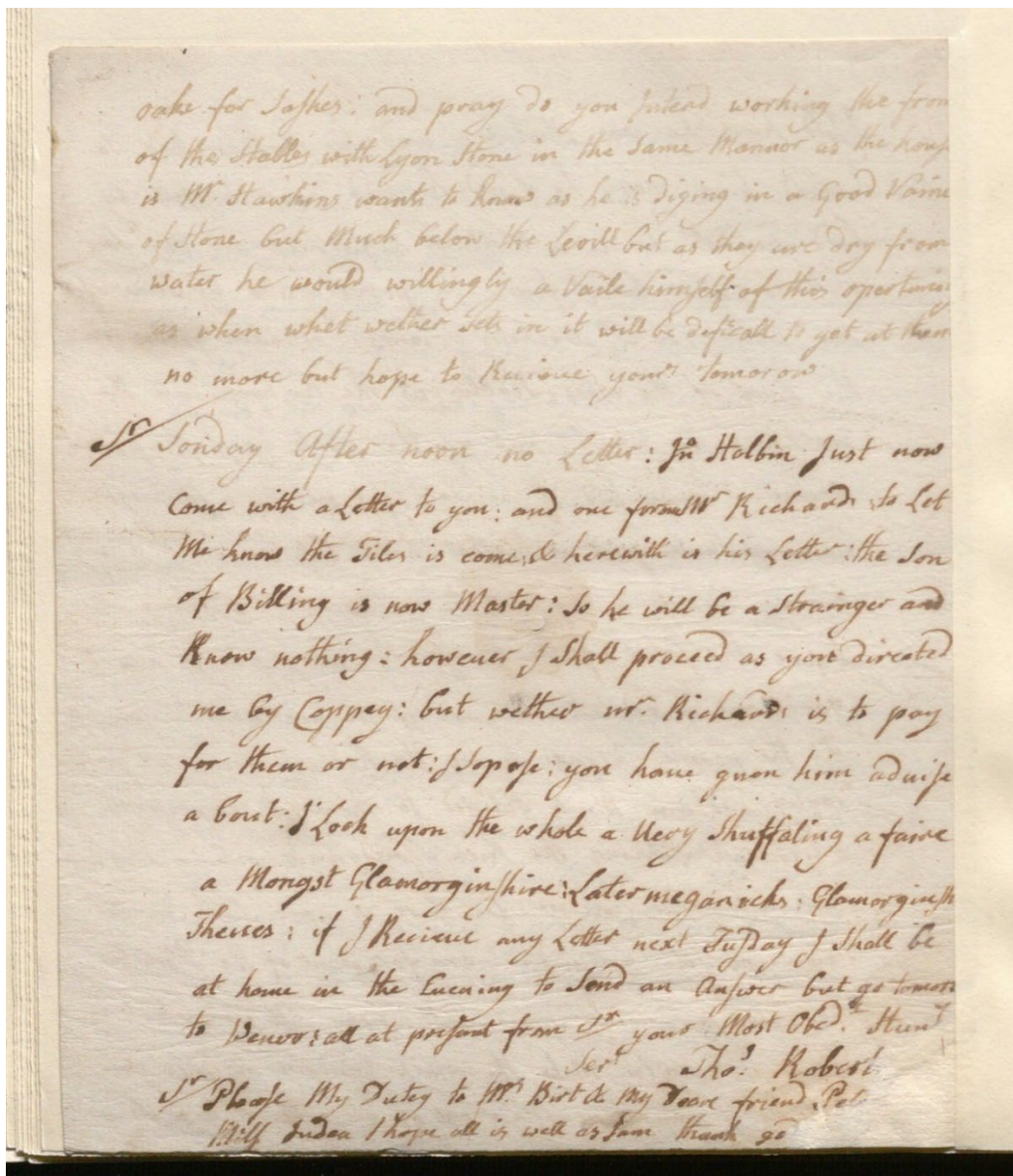
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 Lord Tansbot he is a Maltster & farmer and they say
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 have Mr Taylor Make the Attick windows or will you
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THIRTEENTH LETTER / FOURTH PAGE

oake for safskes [??] : and pray do you intend working the front of the stables with Lyon stone in the same
 mannor [manner] as the house is Mr Hawkins want to know as he is digging in a God Vaine [vein] of
 stone but Much below the Levill but as they are dry from water he would willingly a Vaile [avail] himself
 of this opertunity [opportunity] as when whet wether sets it will be dificall [difficult] to get at them no
 more [any more] but hope to Receive yours tomorrow.

Sir Sunday after noon no Letter : John Holbin just come with a letter to you : and one for [?] Mr Richards to let me know the Tiles is come & herewith is his letter : the son of Billing is now Master : so he will be a stranger and know nothing : however I shall proceed as you directed me by coppey : but wether Mr Richards is to pay for them or not : I sopose [suppose] you have given him advice about : I look upon the whole a very shuffaling afaire [shuffling affair] amongst Glamorginshire : later meganicks [mechanics] : Glamorginnesses [??] Theves [??] : if I Receive any letter next Tuesday I shall be at home in the Evening to send an answer but go tomorrow to Wenvo : all at present from Sir your Most Obed Humbl Ser^t Thos. Roberts

Sir Please my Dutey to Mrs Birt & my deare friend Peter Miss Judee. I hope all is well as I am thank god.



Cardiff 18 March 1777

Sir I hope you are safe and well a rived in Bristol as you purpose on going on immediately with the back stairs and they will cross the windows : it will be proper to put sash frames in before the stairs are up or it will be difficall [difficult] if practicable [impractical] after wards therefore if youll please to order one of each storey to be sent as soon as can be as there are differences in the frames ght of all the storeys but as to there bredths are all a like Except some few : please to Remember some Riga timber for Bridging joysts : or any other sort what you please : and get the number and size of all the sash squares and then I can compare them with my directions when you come to Wenvoe Castle : about the 25 I shall order Business to be at Cardiff to meet you and I believe Mr Thomas will be get into the Redhouse by that time as they at present purpose doing which is all at present from Sr your most Obed Srvt Thos. Roberts

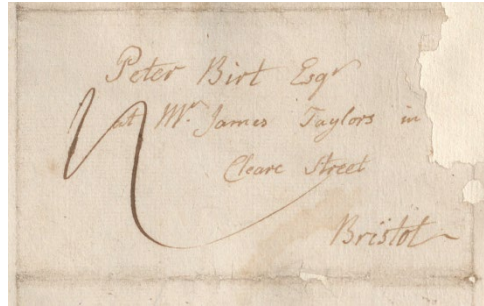
Cardiff 18 march 1777 (17)

Sir

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and they will cross the windows : it will be proper to
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all at present from Sr your most Obed Srvt
Thos. Roberts

Envelope address:

Peter Birt Esqr
at Mr James Taylors in
Cleare Street
Bristol

A photograph of a piece of aged, yellowed paper with handwritten text in brown ink. The text is written in a cursive script and reads: "Peter Birt Esqr" on the first line, "at Mr James Taylors in" on the second line, "Cleare Street" on the third line, and "Bristol" on the fourth line. A large, stylized flourish or initial 'N' is written on the left side of the paper, partially overlapping the text.

FIFTEENTH LETTER / FIRST PAGE

Sir

If this is not to late for you : I begg youll Bye the Glass : for the Garet windows : as the sashes are all Ready : and the Raines drives in there very much : and Bristol Glass is good a nough for that purpose : there will want 120 squares 16 inches and $\frac{1}{4}$ high and $11 \frac{1}{8}$ in wide : Each Square but I think it will be proper to have a few square more : for fiere [fear] of some being broake in the caredg [carriage] : I have bin told the Melin Griffey [?] company sells good glass : that is Reynals and Gatley &c &c Thos Roberts

Cardiff 21 March

1777

Sir the above was wrought [written] to go off a friday morning I wrought to London which I hope

17a
 Sir if this is not to late for you: I begg
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 the Sashes are all Ready: and the Raines drives
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 16 inches and $\frac{1}{4}$ high and $11\frac{1}{8}$ ⁱⁿ wide: Each Square
 but I think it will be proper to have a few Square
 more: for fiere of some of them being broake in
 y^e Care: I have bin told the Melin Grifey company
 sells good glas: that is Reynolds and Gattley de de
 I wish you helth: and Safe to Wenwoe Castle
 and I am Sir your Most Obedt Hum^l Ser^t

Cardiff 21 March

Tho^s Roberts

1777 Sir the above was wrought to go off
 a Friday night but upon the Reciept of Miss Bicks
 a Friday Morning I wrought to London which I hope

FIFTEENTH LETTER / SECOND PAGE [continues the above]


you have Received and this morning I Recd yours from London I am glad you got safe there I hope youll do the same to Wenvo Castell but first I hope to meet you in Cardiff I this morning Rec'd advice of the free stone being in the River ten tun : and Likewise a letter from Mr Hill were in [wherein] he says he has sent the pipes & sheet lead to my orders if he had the cistorn [cistern] would a bin finished and the gutters &c covered and had the free stone bin in time the batelments [?] [battlements] would a bin neare all finished and the tiles would a neare finished by Saturday night next we shall not get the stone out of the Vesell I suppose before Tuesday morning but I will dispatch it as fast as possible all at present from Sir your most Humb

Srvt

Thos. Roberts

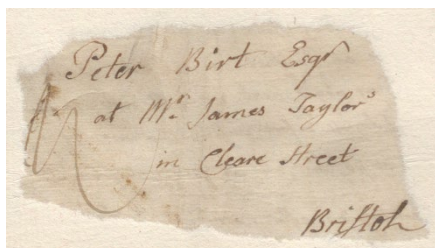
Sunday 23 after noon
1777

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as fast as possible all at present from Sir your most Humb
Sunday 23 after noon
1777
Sir Tho Roberts



Envelope:

Peter Birt Esq.
at Mr James Taylors
in Cleare Street
Bristol



The Stables:

John makes no mention of the stable block at Wenvoe as they may well have been added later and after his death in 1783. The block was attached to the eastern pavilion at the end of the long facade and did not come under the wrecking ball in 1930. There is no evidence that Adam designed the stables and the style is different from the house, being classical and not battlemented and all the evidence points to this being the work of Adam's rival architect Henry Holland. Many writers have pointed out that the Wenvoe stables are close in design to a stable block Holland designed at Berrington Hall, Herefordshire in the late 1770's.



The interior:

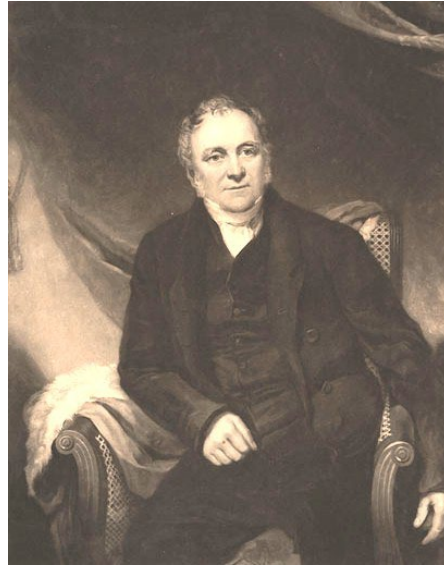


THE BIRT FAMILY – ROUGH NOTES

Peter Birt was married by License on 15 May 1747 to Ann Wood age 20 from the parish of Woodkirk, Yorkshire

Peter and Ann had the following children:

1. Ann. She married in 1773, a widower Robert Jenner from an old south of England family and it was their descendants who made Wenvoe their home.
2. Barbara she married Robert Dyneley on 1 February 1770 5 Barbara died May 1836, St. Leonard's-on-Sea, Sussex.
3. Mary she married John Richards. They had one child Ann Maria who married John Homfray of Penllyne Castle, Glamorgan.
4. Judy was born in 1760. She married, Sir John Nicholl (1759 – 1829) of Merthymawr on 8 September 1787. Judy died in Bruton Street, Piccadilly, on 1st December 1829, aged 70.
5. Peter (died as a young man unmarried)



Herbert Furst Jenner (1778–1852), Peter Birt's grandson

His youngest daughter Judy married Sir John Nicholl (1759 – 1829) of Merthymawr, in the county of Glamorgan had one son and three daughters. Only the son had children, and he inherited his father's estate.



Peter Birt's daughter Mary married John Richards, Esq. of The Corner House, Cardiff, Glamorgan, and they had a daughter Ann Maria Richards, who on 24 October. 1843, married Richard Bassett.

The Wenvoe estate passed to Birt's grandson, Robert Jenner, and the Jenner family held the estate until the 1930s.

The Dyneley marriage had no descendants as shown below:

Barbara Birt and Robert Dyneley had the following children:

Robert Peter Dyneley (1771-1815) No children

John Dyneley (1774-1839) No children

Birt Dyneley (1777-1807) He married Agnes Cooper and they had a daughter but she did not marry.

Lt.-Col. Thomas Dyneley He married Hon. Mary Frederica Law, d. 16 Sept. 1851, Bytown, Canada East [Now Ottawa]. He Married 10 July 1827 at St. James's, Piccadilly, London, Middlesex



Lord Ellenborough whose daughter Mary Frederica Law married Thomas Dyneley

Children

1. Captain Edward Eldon Robert Dyneley, b. 25 April 1828, d. 4 May 1858, Calcutta, (Age 30 years). No children

+ 2. *Lt.-Gen. Henry Ellenborough Dyneley*, b. 23 May 1829, Marylebone, London, Middlesex. d. 10 Dec. 1893, Spring Lodge, Heathfield, Sussex. (Age 64 years)

3. Amelia Frederica Dyneley, b. 13 Sept. 1830, d. After 1873 (Age > 44 years)

4. Douglas Dyneley

Lt.-Gen. Henry Ellenborough Dyneley married Sarah Maud Estella Shortland 5 Feb. 1850 St. George's Cathedral, Madras, India.

Children

1. Amelia Mary Dyneley, b. 18 Feb. 1853, Bangalore, Madras, India No children

Family 2 *Lt.-Gen. Henry Ellenborough Dyneley* married Constance Angela Mary Burdett, b. circa 1849, Windsor, Berkshire. Married 12 Oct. 1882 St. Mary's, Oxted, Surrey.

Children

1. Frederica Constance Dyneley, b. 22 Dec. 1884, Chelsea, Middlesex. No children
2. Mary Selina Dyneley, b. 25 March 1886, Marylebone, London, Middlesex. No children
3. Catherine Beatrice Dyneley, b. 11 May 1887, Spring Lodge, Heathfield, Sussex, d. 2 Aug. 1974 (Age 87 years) No children.