

RUG, CLWYD—II

THE HOME OF LORD AND LADY NEWBOROUGH

By RICHARD HASLAM

Repton's scheme for Edward Vaughan Salesbury's park was put into effect after 1795. The new house is not Gothic as he recommended but Grecian, and was designed by Joseph Bromfield. The wings added 100 years ago have recently been removed.



1—THE COMBINED IONIC PORTICO AND PORTE COCHERE OF 1799. While Bonomi made designs for the house, and used this feature elsewhere, the eventual architect was probably Bromfield, of Shrewsbury

WHEN Captain Edward Williams Vaughan inherited the Rûg estate of the Salesbury family in 1780, it was still really a 17th-century place, and could not have been regarded as fashionable by anyone who had the means to improve it. Little is known about the new owner, who soon added

Salesbury to his name, but he clearly had contacts outside his own district of Edeyrnion. His estate map of 1791, reproduced last week, is decorated with drawings of the house framed in Rococo (and outmoded) fronds. A possible link with the informed taste of his day is his remote connections, Sir Thomas and Lady Salesbury,

who had a house at Brondesbury Park, near Willesden, north of London.

Humphry Repton made plans for its park, now built over, in 1789, including his first major proposals for draining land and earth-moving. That commission could have led to his involvement at Rûg (pronounced like "league"), which he visited on July 29, 1794. The question of resiting the house had already come up, and Repton's ideas were persuasively argued to the new owner in one of the more important of his Red Books, with the result that most of his proposals for the park and the replacement of the house were adopted. These are worth examining on several counts, and so is the Elizabethan house he put forward. The house actually built at Rûg is neo-Classical, and the previous uncertainty as to its architect now seems capable of being settled satisfactorily.

The landscape at Rûg is one of the most beautiful in which Repton worked, and his plan (Fig 8) was carried out, mostly using the natural contours of the ground, which needed no improvement, with plantations of beech, sycamore and oak. These and the many huge conifers are now failing, and are being replaced with the guidance of the Red Book. The lake was enlarged as suggested, taking in the old rectangular fishponds and "flat boggy ground", so that "its termination being hidden may appear to have



2—VIEW FROM THE NORTH TOWARDS THE BERWYNS. The 19th-century wings have been reduced to a single storey

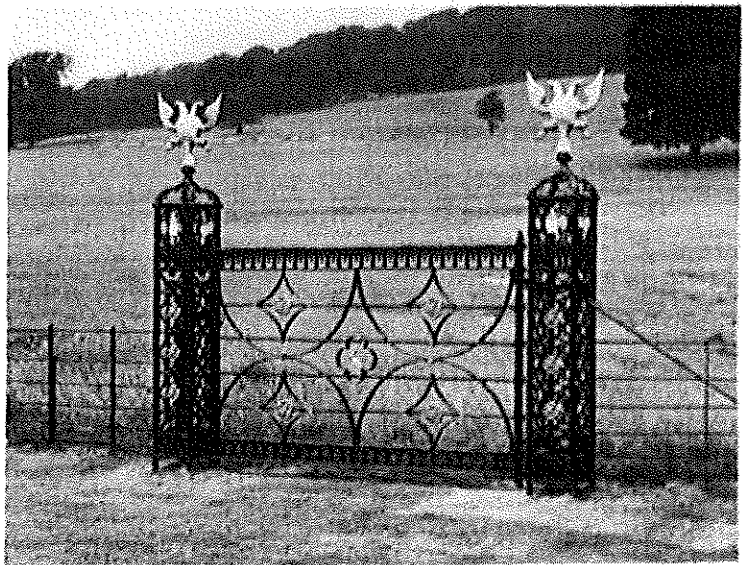


3—RUG SEEN ACROSS THE LAKE. Repton's park and irregular sheet of water are being restored now that the house is completed

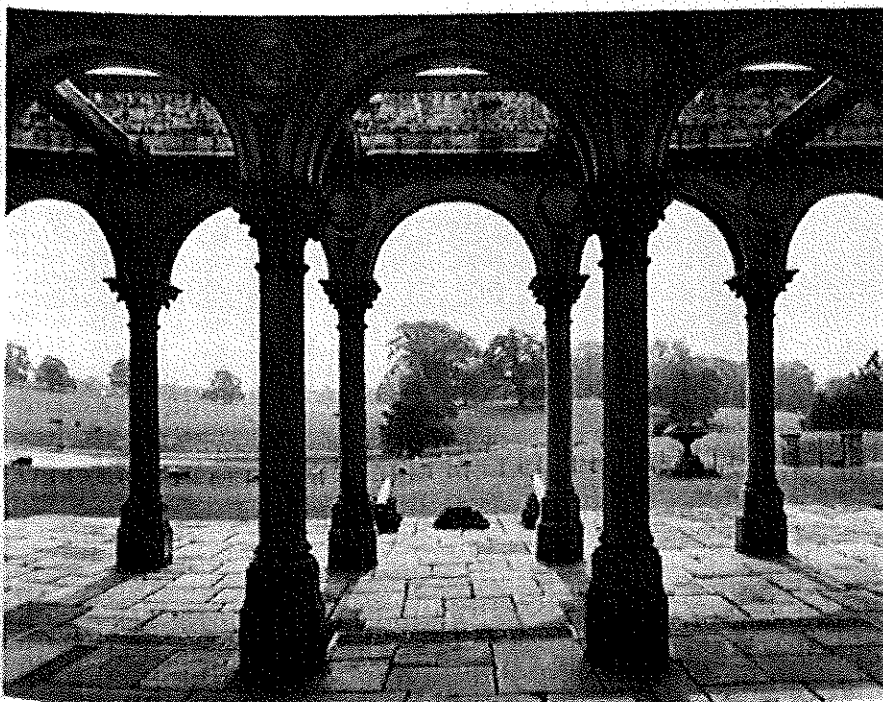
some connection with that distant glimpse of water which is the conflux of the Dee and the Alwin". Its banks were to be "artificially shaped in regular scollops". In 1976 the outlines were restored by bulldozers, and the mud spread 1ft thick over the farther hill.

Repton's approach was beguilingly phrased, as ever. In an introduction, he enumerated the advantages of "ascertaining effects before they are actually produced . . . [and of] furnishing hints for carrying the plan into execution by degrees from year to year, without having to regret any partial improvements on a small scale". He then gave sections on Character, Situation, The Old House, Utility, The Water, Plantations, Prospects, A Picture and Conclusion, interleaved with one panorama with "slides" taken from the site of the new house and two panoramas looking across the lake towards it (that in Figures 6 and 7 is taken from the new approach); and with one or two grisaille views of the surrounding valleys, with the chapel, subjects which he described as "too varied and too complicated for a picture".

The Red Book is dated March 1795, and was therefore written when the Picturesque controversy with his friends Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price was at its height. It includes passages deliberately framed as answers to their criticisms, which he reused in *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* in 1803. The difference was hard-fought in the public arena, but Repton seems to have remained on good personal terms with Price and Knight, going to stay with them in mid-Wales in 1795 and



4—A GATE OF 1825 FROM GLYN-LLIFON, THE FORMER SEAT OF THE NEWBOROUGHs. (Left) 5—COLONNADES AND CANNON. Looking out over the park from the old winter garden



recommending Downton as a model for Stange in 1803.

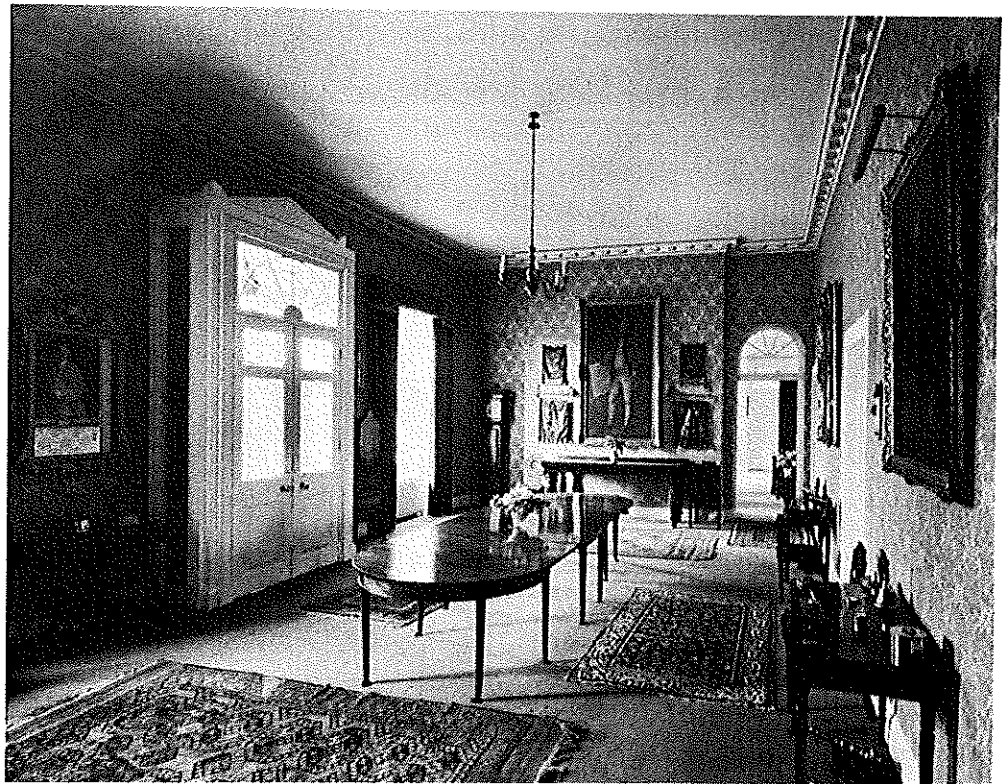
He began his argument under the heading of Utility. "The public manner in which my profession has lately been attacked, by two Gentlemen of acknowledged taste and abilities, R. P. Knight and U. Price Esqrs. makes it necessary to avail myself of every opportunity to defend the art, by shewing that a study of pictures (however useful) is only a secondary consideration in forming the plan of an English Garden." He noted, in the plan reproduced in Figure 8, that "the arrangement and disposition of the mansion, the offices, stables, kitchen garden, farmyard, roads of approach and back road to the house, with the walks and plantation, are I trust laid out with the fullest reflections on the utility, convenience and connection of each with the other".

There is no way of telling whether Mr Salesbury was expecting the long theoretical discussion which follows, under the headings of Utility and A Picture. If he was, it is surely to his credit. "I feel convinced that a mere landscape painter, or picture connoisseur, would not make a good landscape gardener, if

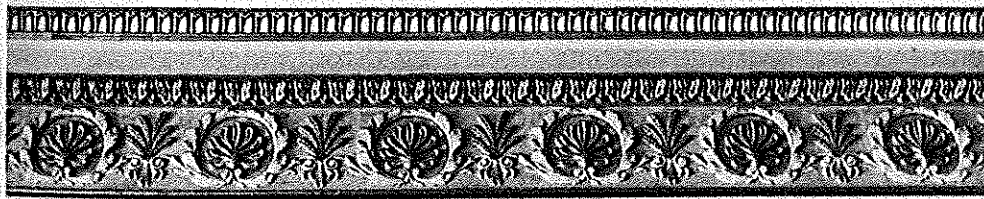
by a modern box . . . I am however restrained from indulging to its full extent my veneration for Antiquity, by reflecting that modern *comfort* and *convenience* are the first objects to be consulted in improvement of a Modern residence."

Edward Salesbury took another four years to decide what to do. Having rejected the Wilkins-J. A. Repton plan, he went to Joseph Bonomi, who by 1797 had produced three designs. The latest was for an austere, three-storey block entered from the south, and it resembles what was finally built in 1799 only in the arrangement of the main rooms. The new house, strangely, borrows from Bonomi one of the striking features of his other houses, such as Longford Hall in Shropshire (of 1789), a giant portico that acts as a porte cochère. That in turn is one pointer to the architect of Rûg, who in all likelihood was Joseph Bromfield of Shrewsbury (c 1743-1824).

There is quite a bit of circumstantial evidence for this. Bromfield worked on several Classical houses in North Wales, including Nannau in Merioneth, the home of the Vaughan family to which the new owner of Rûg belonged, and another severe Ionic house in Cefn sandstone ashlar, Glansevern in Montgomeryshire (of 1801). He even owned a cottage in Llandrillo, the next parish to Rûg, at the time of his death—a small



9—THE HALL. The internal porch was inserted in 1976



10—DETAIL OF THE DINING-ROOM FRIEZE. The wheat-ears are typical of Bromfield

Gothick house called Branas Lodge. The determining link may be the frieze in the original dining room at Rûg (Fig 10); this contains palmettes formed of ears of corn, reminiscent of similar motifs, in a more Rococo spirit, in the drawing room at Oakly Park. Bromfield began his career as a plasterer.

The only distinguishing external features of the new house are the tetrastyle portico of exceedingly slender Ionic columns, which carry an entablature but no pediment; and the same order on the south side, where the four columns are engaged in the central (and undomed) bow. The bow lights the central room on this side, originally the library and now the dining room. The books it once contained disappeared early, and in the renovation of 1974-76 the kitchen was brought into the Georgian house and occupies the old dining room. The detailing is otherwise quite plain, except in the hall (Fig 9), where the perennial draught problem of neo-Classical porticos was solved by Donald Insall and Associates by the insertion of an internal porch.

Having transformed Rûg, Edward Salesbury died, unmarried, in Sicily in 1807. His heir was his younger brother Col. Griffith Vaughan, who also had no children, and on his death in 1848 the estate passed, encumbered with debt, to his nephew Sir Robert Williams Vaughan. For a few years Rûg sheltered the famous library of the genealogist Robert Vaughan, of Hengwrt near Dolgellau (1592-1667), the finest collection of Welsh manuscripts ever assembled by an individual. He left on Sir Robert's death, again without children, in 1859, and since 1905 have formed the nucleus of the National Library of Wales. The 18th-century gates on the old back road at

Rûg, not dissimilar to the Davies Brothers' Black Gates at Leeswood, are the chief relic of the Nannau family's occupation.

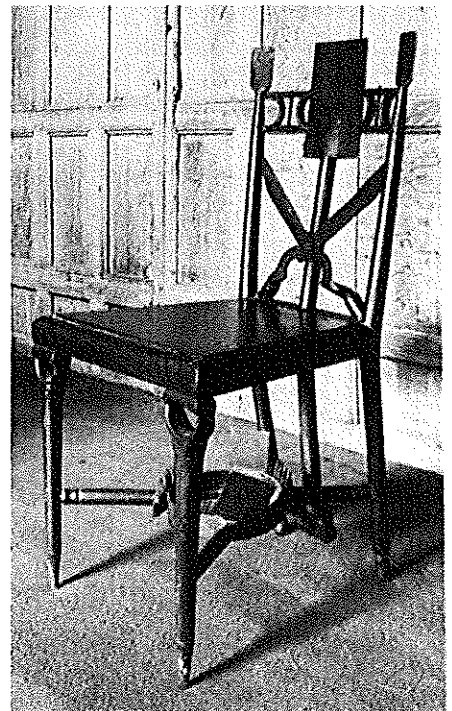
The heir this time came from a new family; it was the Hon. Charles Wynn, third son of the 3rd Lord Newborough, and grandfather of the present owner. The Wynns descend from Collwyn ap Tangno, and after some 15 generations are found living in the 16th century at various houses in Lleyon including Boduan. In another five generations, Sir Thomas Wynn, an equerry to George II and the first baronet, married Frances, the eventual heiress of the Glyns of Glynllifon nearby, from a line going back by Llywarch Hen to the 3rd century.

It is the additions made to either side by Charles Wynn that have recently been removed. Large service quarters stretched westwards towards the walled garden with its octagonal, 18th-century summerhouses, and on the east a tall wing of about 1880 contained an arcaded winter garden in a faintly Quattrocento style, which has been retained as a loggia (Fig 5). Behind that was a billiard-room, devised with an hydraulically operated floor so that the table could be lowered and sections of floorboards inserted to make a ballroom. The machinery was so perfect that a game could be resumed when the table was raised again.

Remodelled by Edward Haycock in the 1830s, Glynllifon grew to an immense neo-Classical house, and has been the county's college of further education since 1954; the 17th-century house at Boduan remained Lord Newborough's home till the 1960s. These two are represented at Rûg by the "£100 gate" made for Glynllifon by R. Hughes of Wrexham in 1825 (Fig 4), and by the delightful garden

chair from Boduan (Fig 11). There is also a long Wynn tradition of practical jokes involving water; at Glynllifon the stump of a tree and at Boduan a rock would soak the unwary. "Mr Jones" does the same job in a converted privy at Rûg. Highfield School left after occupying Rûg for 20 years. In an age when Wales is not exempt from the general breaking-up of houses, Rûg's restoration is an elegant exception.

Illustrations: Christopher Dalton.
(Concluded)



11—A CHAIR MADE IN THE FORM OF GARDEN TOOLS. It comes from the old home of the Wynn family, at Boduan on the Lleyon peninsula