

## Cowdray House



**Cowdray House.** The Gatehouse from the courtyard. For over 200 years the shattered remains of the once magnificent Cowdray House have seemed empty and lost, mouldering away in ivy-clad ruination. Now, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Cowdray Heritage Trust are investing £2.7 million to keep it as a romantic ruin. It currently offers a striking contrast to many other properties in care should not be missed.



**Fig 1. Cowdray House** - The west, entrance façade, completed in its entirety by 1545. The Gatehouse was constructed in the late 1530's, of rubble faced with ashlar with white stone quoins. It is of three storeys but has lost its floors and roof. From a watercolour of the 1780's by S H Grimm. BL Shelfmark: Additional MS 5675, f. 11 (no. 17). All the Grimm paintings in this article are reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

### Cowdray House - Midhurst.

"Its ruins are an absolutely consistent epitome of Tudor architecture at its plainest and most sober, very English in its understatement, its dignity and concern for volumes and solidity" - Nairn/Pevsner, *Sussex, The Buildings of England Series*, 1965.

#### Outline History:

13th/14th century. The de Bohun family moved from St Ann's Hill to a manor house, probably on this site.

Late 15th century. The last in the male line of de Bohun died. His daughter married Sir David Owen who pulled down the old house and started the quadrangular house, c 1520's.

1535 Owen died and Sir William Fitzwilliam, who had already bought the estate, moved in. He was in favour with Henry VIII and made Earl of Southampton, 1537, and Lord Privy Seal 1539. He added the Gatehouse and probably the hexagonal towers in the NE and SE corners.

1542. Fitzwilliam dies. His successor Sir Anthony Browne was actively converting Battle Abbey. It was probably his son who added the large windows to the western range and the upper part of the gatehouse.

1643. Cowdray was being held for the king but was abandoned to Parliamentary forces.

1793. The house was accidentally destroyed by fire.

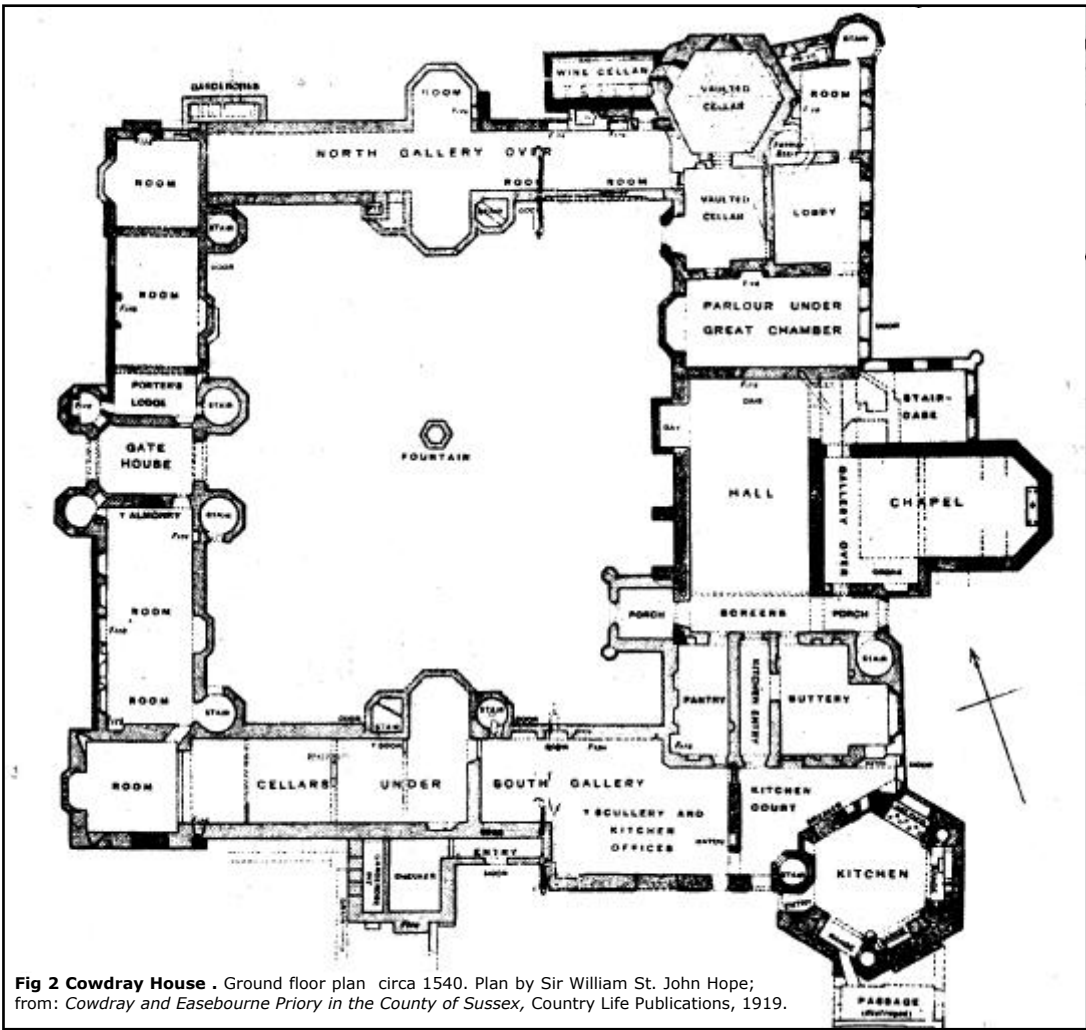
1910-14 The ruins were consolidated and opened to the public. In recent years they have been closed, pending conservation following recent receipt of an HLF grant.

#### Its Tudor Origins:

Cowdray House was probably built in three phases taking about twenty-two years to complete. Subsequent small alterations and additions were made over the following two centuries until 1793, when it was ravaged by fire and never re-inhabited.

Sir David Owen commenced Cowdray between 1520-30 after he had cleared the site of an earlier moated building. He started the east range - hall, chapel, and kitchen - but only completed half the work; it seems likely that the roughly square plan with the quadrangular court that was finished later was part of his design.

The man responsible for the completion of Cowdray was Sir William Fitzwilliam. He purchased the house in 1529, though Sir David was allowed to stay there until his death in 1535, after which Sir William moved in and finished the



house. In 1532, he had been granted a 'licence to crenellate' by Henry VIII to, "empark 600 acres of land, meadow, pasture and wood lying in Easebourne and Midhurst, 'to be called and named the park of Cowdray for ever,'" and "to build, make and construct walls and towers with stone, lime and sand, around, upon and within their manor of Cowdray... and to enclose that manor with such walls and towers and also to embattle or fortify, crenellate and machicolate those walls and towers."

Sir William's building programme was in two parts; the first in 1535-39 when he completed the basic structure and plan of Cowdray, adding the gatehouse, hall porch and hexagonal strong tower, and the second between 1539-42

when he made many additions and alterations. These were probably made as a result of his being created Earl of Southampton in 1537 and on several occasions he entertained Henry VIII at Cowdray. So the alterations were further improvements as he sought to honour his Royal visitor as well as to signify his elevated status.

On Sir William Fitzwilliam's death in 1542, the estate went to his half brother, Sir Anthony Browne and it is with this family that Cowdray remained until its destruction by fire in 1793. When complete, Cowdray House occupied about one acre in the south-west corner of its 600 acre park. A 400-yard long raised causeway, once lined by a double row of trees reached the house running form North Street, Midhurst, to





**Fig 3 Cowdray House.** The west, gatehouse facade. Gatehouse circa 1535-40 with alternating nominal gun loops and decorative arrow slits. The canted bay windows in the NW and SW corner towers were probably later. The Heritage Lottery Fund have recently agreed to a £2.7 million campaign of conservation and the consolidation of the Gatehouse is the first phase of this work.

the stone bridge over the River Rother, fifty yards from the front of the house.

Cowdray House is approximately square in plan, having an overall dimension of about 230 ft square. Within is a large court, measuring 125 ft from north to south and 105 ft from east to west. On the east are the principal rooms; the gate house entrance is on the west and joining the two are the more fragmentary north and south ranges. One hundred yards to the north of the house is an octagonal building, 30 ft in diameter and originally two stories in height. This was the **Conduit House, Fig 4** (sometimes known as the Round House) from



**Fig 4 Cowdray, The Conduit House.** All the rooms are triangular as they radiate from a central pillar. It is now called the Round Tower and used to be the home of the resident custodian.

which the water for the house was supplied. There used to be steps leading to the first floor on both sides, but little is known of how the water was supplied and stored. The Conduit House, being on slightly higher ground than Cowdray, allowed the water to flow downhill through special pipes to service the fountain and other water-using parts of the great house.

### The West, Entrance Range:

If you arrived at Cowdray in the early 1780's, during the time of the seventh Viscount Montague, you would have entered through the great double door of the **Gatehouse (Fig 1)**. The imposing gun-looped gatehouse was three storeys high, with an octagonal turret at each of its four corners. Above the entrance arch are the coat of arms of Anthony Browne, first Viscount Montague and at the very top, just below the embattled parapet, there was a single handed clock, another face of which was on the court side of the gatehouse.

Through the inner doorway, you enter the quadrangular court, in the centre of which was an early sixteenth century Florentine bronze fountain, that replaced an earlier, smaller one. The Conduit House supplied the water that flowed to it.



**Fig 5.** The original bronze Florentine 16th century fountain from the courtyard now in the V & A. Museum.



**Fig 6. Cowdray House.** The East Range. To the left of the rectangular oriel window of the Hall are the Elizabethan canted bays to the Parlour & Great Chamber and vaulted cellar (access currently boarded acting as a temporary door) and above, the Dressing Room.

### The East - Hall - Range:

On the east side of the courtyard is the great bay/oriel window of the **Hall**, flanked on the left by two lesser bays and on the right is the four-centred entrance **Porch**. Above, on the roof of the great hall was a large carved wooden **louvre**, with nine golden vanes supported by beasts. To the north and south were simpler, two storey ranges. In the centre of each was a large three storey bay, flanked on both sides by turrets. To the west, on either side of the gatehouse, were two more bays and a turret in both the north and southwest corners of the court. Above the entrance to the porch are the royal coat of arms of king Henry VIII, (**Fig 7**), inserted by the Earl of



**Fig 8**

Southampton to commemorate the King's visits in 1538 and 1539. It sits in a Renaissance frame.

Inside, the **porch** is nearly square and the floor was paved with marble slabs. Above is an intricately carved low-relief stone fan-vaulted ceiling. In the centre is a rose with a crown and around this are eight cusped quatrefoils. In the corners the fans are each divided into four sections (**Fig 8**), in which alternate a large anchor and a trefoil bearing the letters, W.S., referring to the builder, William, Earl of Southampton. The anchor alludes to the Earl of Southampton as the Lord High Admiral of England. Also, among the spandrels of the south-west corner fan, there are four heads, two appear to be cherubim, while the



**Fig 7**





**Fig 9 Cowdray House.** Late 1530's entrance porch to the Great Hall, added by Sir William Fitzwilliam, giving access to the screens passage, with the hall to the left. The Great Hall has three perpendicular windows, high up, each of three lights with cusped heads and a transom. The motif of the alternate white and dark- polychrome - ashlar is carried forward from the gatehouse into the mini turrets

others are that of a mature man and woman, possibly that of the Earl and his Countess. All in 'an astonishing mixture of Gothic and Renaissance detail' - Pevsner .

The porch is one of the best preserved portions of the house. The marble floor has gone, as has the plaster on the walls, but the carved ceiling is nearly fully intact and the carving still very crisp. The exterior of the porch also remains reasonably well preserved, except for the Royal coat of arms, which has either worn or been badly mutilated, but is 'one of the few mean touches in the whole building' - Pevsner.

#### **The Great Hall:**

The porch protects the screens passage that runs across the lower end of the Great Hall to an opposite entrance giving access from the east, or

garden front. To the right are three entrances leading to the pantry, kitchen corridor and the buttery. The kitchen corridor gives access to the Kitchen Court and Tower. To the left, through the screens, leads into what was once the magnificent four bay Buck Hall. The hall was one of the finest buildings in England of its date and type, built in the style of the halls at Wolsey's Hampton Court (97 x 40 ft) and Christ Church, Oxford (114 x 40 ft), possibly by the same designer, John Nedeham. Cowdray is 60 x 28 ft and 60 ft from the originally paved marble floor to the apex of the great steep-pitched hammer-beam roof.

Along the north, east and west walls ran very high paneled wainscoting of cedar, on which were fine paintings. Above this, on the west side, are three windows with steeply slopping sills and further to the north, the oriel window with its



**Fig 10 Cowdray House** - Buck Hall, c 1780, showing the Buck motifs of Sir Anthony Browne. Looking south toward the screens passage. Watercolour, Shelfmark: Additional MS 5675, f. 14 (no. 20).

sixty openings, which flanked the dais that ran across the north end of the hall. All the windows in the Buck Hall had stained glass, bearing the coats of arms of the Browne family and royalty. Above was a gallery, which corresponded with the screens passageway below. Around the walls, above the wainscoting, were brackets upon which were mounted eleven life size wooden bucks which gave the hall its name. Two bucks were sitting on their haunches in front of the screen (**Fig 10**) holding rods with ornamented vanes bearing the royal arms and those of Lord Montague. Around the neck of one was hung a bow and arrow used by Queen Elizabeth I during her stay at Cowdray in 1591. There were four more bucks along each side of the hall; those on the west lying down, while those on the east were standing. The final buck stood in the centre of the north wall above the dais. The bucks were the work of Sir Anthony Browne (1542-1548) because they featured as part of his family crest.

The steeply-pitched hammer-beam oak roof was divided into four bays. The carved brace attached to the wall posts and the braces under the collar beams were filled with cusped and traceried

openings. In the southern **gable** (**Fig 10**) were a group of traceried windows, designed to correspond with the openings in the roof. In the second bay from the north, was the open **louvre** (**Fig 11**) that nominally received the smoke from



**Fig 11 Cowdray House** - The louvre of the Great Hall, perhaps by Anthony Browne, 1540's. Two storeys in height. A detail of the S H Grim watercolour (Fig 14).

the central open fire hearth. The six-sided louvre, a 'beautiful combination of tracery and pinnacles', was itself two storeys high. It had windows in each side and buttresses at its angles. It must have been one of the most striking features of Cowdray.

Since the fire, the roof has gone, as has the marble floor, the screens, the wainscoting, the paintings, the bucks, the stained glass and even half the north cross-wall has fallen. The windows survive like giant skeletons and between them, remain the shattered corbels that once supported the roof. Recesses in the walls show where the wainscoting was fixed. Even though the room is a shell, the few remains give the room a hint of its former splendour.

A door in the northeast corner of the hall leads into a small hallway in front of what was the **great staircase**. The large area taken up by the stair replaced a much smaller stairwell on the same site. The later stair, ascending in a clockwise direction, filled the entire area of 34 ft x 17½ft. There used to be two tall late 17th century windows in the north wall (**Fig 12**) but these were possibly filled in and covered with plaster on which was a series of fine paintings by Pellegrini. Pellegrini was active in England from 1708-1713, and again in 1719.

To the south of the staircase, is the **Chapel**, (**Fig 13**) still instantly recognisable by its shape - its three-sided apse, and the remaining plaster decorations on the walls. Like the hall and many of the rooms in this part of Cowdray, it had been one of the first to be built. St John Hope believed that the bay was added to an original small square headed chapel. However the tracery is similar to that of the hall, the





**Fig 12 Cowdray House.** The stairwell block adjacent to the Chapel that houses the stairway to the first floor apartments. There had been long windows in the north wall (now blank) blocked in the early eighteenth century to accommodate the Pellegrini paintings.

windows of which have the same hood string-course, which is believed to date from 1520-30. A chapel with a similar plan - a three-sided apse - is that at the Vyne in Hampshire, 1518-27<sup>1</sup>, so stylistically the form as seen today could have been built at the same time as the hall. Two more windows on the south side were later blocked up and a deep bay in the southwest corner was made for an organ and gallery above, which extended across the back of the chapel. In the south wall there is a bricked up doorway that probably led to a vestry. The chapel measured 50 ft long and 24 ft wide, extended to 30 ft under the organ gallery. The floor was paved with medieval tiles, and the length of the chapel was divided by a stuccoed arch, 16 inches in thickness. The sidewalls were covered by simple mahogany wainscoting up to height of 7 ft and above this were elaborate seventeenth century plaster decorations. On the east side of the stuccoed arch, traces of where it joined the walls are still visible, were two full sized figures, a woman on the north and a man on the south. These are also clearly visible, though they have greatly deteriorated, as has some of the unusual plasterwork on the other side of the arch. This takes the form of an exact imitation of closed



**Fig 13 Cowdray House.** The Chapel - 1520-30. The three-sided apse. The chapel's position behind the Great Hall is similar to the location of the chapel at Thornbury. The crenellations are a later addition, circa 1535.

paneled cupboard doors, even including their hinges.

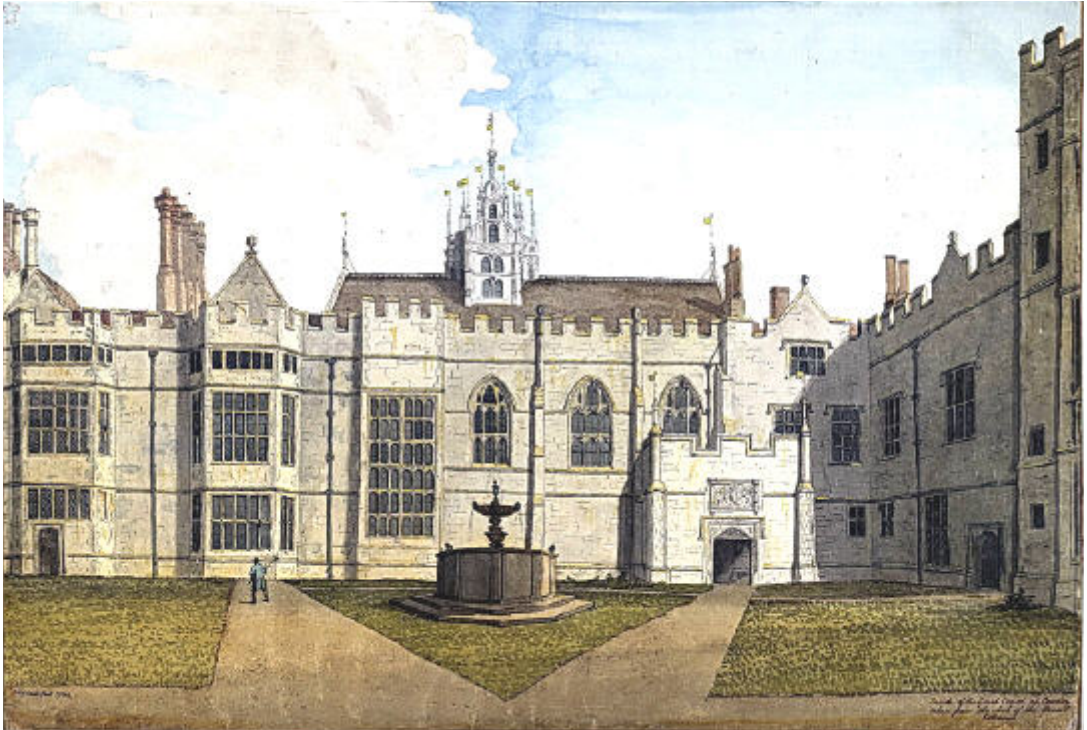
There were several changes in altar design in the chapel. The earlier ones seem to have been quite small, but the last was so large that the centre window in the apse had to be bricked up. On the high altar-back was hung a painting of the Resurrection by Jacopo Amigoni (active 1729-36) and above it was an entablature surmounted by a cross. Above the whole was a flimsy canopy supported by four lofty poles. (Figs 16-19).

### The Great Parlour:

Returning back through the hallway, past the staircase, you enter the **Great Parlour**, which was renamed as the **Dining Parlour** in the seventeenth century. Today it looks like an extension to the Buck Hall because most of the dividing wall has fallen. The room was 40 ft long by 21 ft wide and at its south end, the east wall has also fallen and so gives a poor impression of the room's former size and splendour. Along the walls ran wainscoting and plaster panels designed to display a fine series of history paintings (oils).

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Wood, *The English Mediaeval House*, 1965, p 242





**Fig 14. Top.** Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, 1782: Watercolour: A view of the inside of the great court at Cowdray taken from the arch of the great entrance' in (West) Sussex. British Library Ref: Additional MS 5675, f. 12 (no. 18).

**Fig 15. Below.** Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, 1780-1791, Watercolour, A watercolour view of the west side of the great court, looking toward the Gatehouse, at Cowdray in (West) Sussex. British Library Ref: Additional MS 5675, f. 13 (no. 19).









**Figs 16 -19 Cowdray House - The Chapel.** The chapel has undergone many changes. First picture is a drawing circa 1780's. Second is the plastered east window reflecting the changes seen in the drawing. Third and fourth images are of the late seventeenth century? plaster figures on the north and south walls, now almost completely obliterated. **Fig 16** S H Grimm, 1780, Watercolour, Shelfmark: Additional MS 5675, f. 90 (no. 161), British Library.

### Cellars:

Beyond the Dining Parlour were two ante-rooms (marked 'lobby' and 'room' on the plan) and two in-line cellars. Very little remains of the ante-rooms, except for three of their walls, but the cellars are still intact. The first cellar is now only accessible by the doorway in the base of the large bay in the northeastern corner of the court. (Fig 6 & 21) Previously it could have been entered from the Dining Parlour, and one of the ante-rooms. The doorway from the court leads into the base of the large bay in the northeastern corner of the court. Inside, the room is quite spacious, measuring 23 ft x 18 ft. It has a plain four-centred vault roof. To the north is a doorway that leads down three steps to the base of the **hexagonal tower** where there is a much larger

cellar. It is paved with square stone slabs and massive chamfered cross and wall ribs of stone support the vaulted roof. A large iron ring hangs from the middle keystone. (Fig 20) In the north-west side is doorway leading into a seventeenth century wine cellar. All the cellars are intact and used for storage.

Ascending the great staircase would have led up to the first floor of the house. On the left at the head of the stair is a door leading to the private chapel gallery and ahead would probably be a window or small balcony overlooking the dais in the Buck Hall below. To the right a door would take you into the **Great Chamber**, later called the **Grand Drawing room**, the room above the Dining Parlour. The room was lit from the west by the upper part of the canted bay windows and along the north wall was a Tudor fireplace that is still visible today. After the fire, the floor, south and east walls collapsed.

Above the two ground floor ante-rooms was the **second Drawing Room** (perhaps a **'Privy Chamber'**) and to the west, above the cellar, the **dressing-room** leading to the **Velvet Bed Chamber**. The Bed Chamber itself was above the vaulted cellar in the hexagonal tower and both it and its dressing-room still retain their floors, which are accessible by climbing a rough stairway up the remains of the broken ground floor wall. There was an attic room above the Bed Chamber, of which a fireplace still remains.



**Fig 20 Cowdray House.** The rib vaulted chamber or cellar of the hexagonal strong tower, built circa 1520-30's which housed the bedchamber of the Earl.



**Fig 21 Cowdray House.** The hexagonal north-east strong tower containing the bed-chambers of the Earl, with access to the first floor of the north range. The phalanx of chimneys highlights that this north-east corner of the house is high status. Although the tower is hexagonal, it is not a visual companion piece to the kitchen tower in the SE.

### The North Range:

Only the foundations of the north range remain to indicate its plan. It was 109 ft long and 14 ft wide internally and two storeys. In the centre were two large deeply canted bays of three stories that projected from both the north and south sides of the range. The bay on the south was flanked by two turrets, the one on the east containing a stair, the western being a garderobe, or privy. Little is known about the ground floor, but the first floor is known to have been a **Long Gallery**. It was in this gallery that the valuables of the house were stored while the rest of Cowdray was being renovated. A fire broke out only yards away and destroyed all the gallery's contents. A large garderobe tower, that served all the floors, was sited at the western end on the north side. The northwest corner block of Cowdray was three stories high. Now only a pillar of brick remains in the corner. (Most of the house was faced with ashlar on a brick core). It was here, on the second floor, that the fateful fire started on the night of the 24th September 1793.

To the south was a two storied range joining with the gatehouse. It had one large ground floor room and two bed chambers, the Yellow and Damask rooms, on the first floor. These were lit by a bay on the east side and the windows along the west front. Only a small portion of the west wall stands above ground level, the rest, except for the gatehouse wall to the south has fallen.

### The West Range:

The three storey **gatehouse**, relatively tall and narrow, stands in the centre of the west range. To the north of the spacious gateway carriage hall was the porter's lodge. The two western turrets were empty, except for a fireplace in the northern one, while the eastern turret had stairs to the upper floors. These two were originally surmounted by ogee domes topped by vanes. The gatehouse is now a shell with all the floors missing; it was known that the billiard room was on the first floor. The old bell-pulls on the northeast and southwest turrets are still in their place, as is a bracket for

holding a lamp on the north west turret. Although both the clock faces have gone, the single clock hand on the western side of the gatehouse is still in place. The range to the south of the gatehouse was similar to that of the north, except it had three ground floor rooms and the first floor was occupied by the **Red Bed Chamber**. Only the western wall of the section is still standing. The southwest corner block matches that to the north, though it was a little larger and more remains of the south and west walls, complete with bay window. The library was on the first floor and held a grand collection of books in glazed cases.

### The South Range:

The south range, like that to the north, is reduced to its foundations, but unlike its counterpart it was divided into two sections and was much wider, widening even more at its eastern end. On its interior court side it had a large bay with two flanking stair turrets, to mirror exactly that to the north, while to the





**Fig 22 Cowdray House.** To the left is the demolished **south range**. Centre right the west range gatehouse. The south range originally contained a long gallery at first floor level, to mirror that on the north range. It was later altered into accommodation units.

south it had a square tower containing a passage, small room and garderobes. The ground floor of the range appears to have been used as a cellar except at its wider eastern end, where it was probably used for the kitchen office and scullery. The first floor was one **long gallery** until 1784 when it was converted into a suite of bedrooms and dressing rooms. The south range joined with the east at the pantry. Above this was the breakfast room and in the east corner, over the buttery, was a spiral stair leading down to the main hallway running through the house. The three doors to the south led to the buttery, kitchen entry and pantry, all contained in a rectangular block between the hall and kitchen. The way to the kitchen was through the kitchen entry, a narrow passage 26 ft long and 7 ft wide. This came out into an open triangular kitchen court, across which meals had to be carried. The court was later covered over.

### The Kitchen Tower:

In the southeast corner of Cowdray is the massive hexagonal **kitchen tower**. It is the only tower that feels castle-like in its substantiality, and could have been copied from the hexagonal

vaulted Kitchen Tower at Raglan. Its internal diameter is 26 ft or 30 ft from corner to corner and because it was so substantial it was the only part of the house that did not get badly damaged in the fire. The kitchen is on the ground floor and within the four massive arches along its south and east sides are the fireplaces. Two of these are of special interest. The north-east is filled with a large hot plate with two rows of round holes for saucepans and dishes, which was heated by two fires beneath. Behind the hot plate is a window giving light to the working area. In the flue of the eastern arch are the original spit wheels and fans that used to be turned automatically by the rising heat, like that in the kitchen of the Royal Pavilion, Brighton. The iron range and hole in the floor for the basting pan also remain. On the north side of the kitchen, the old serving hatches have also been blocked up. The kitchen was lighted by a lantern-like series of four large seventeenth century windows, places high up. Some still retain fragments of their original glass.

On the outside of the Kitchen Tower, going up the west side, is a stair turret leading to the room above the kitchen. At the time of the

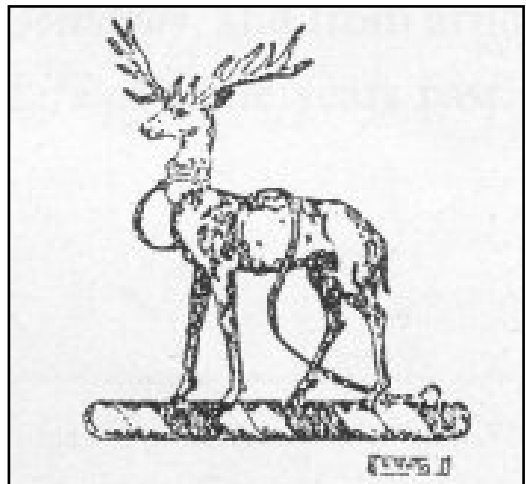


**Fig 23. Cowdray House. The Kitchen Tower.** A far more solid castle-like affair than any of the other towers or blocks. The other buildings seem flimsy by comparison. There are some similarities to the hexagonal Kitchen Tower at Raglan.

### The Contents:

The house is known to have had a very fine collection of paintings by many of the great artists of the period like Raphael, Rubens, Van Dyke, Gainsborough and Holbein. Also, it may safely be assumed many important pieces of furniture. More valuable than all the rest, was a collection of relics of the Norman Conquest, taken from Battle Abbey when the Montagues owned it. These included, reputedly, the sword of William the Conqueror, his coronation robe and the famous Roll of Battle Abbey, of which, fortunately, copies had been made. The relics were at Cowdray because, following the dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536-39, Battle Abbey and its lands were given to Sir Anthony Browne as part of the family estates. In 1717 it was sold, but some of its relics were kept and brought back to Cowdray.

fire, this room was used as a muniment chamber for storing documents and manuscripts. After the fire, there were pitiful accounts of how the documents were left in the room to decay for over fifty years, open to the ravages of the wind and rain and any casual visitor who cared to enter. The room is now used as the 'Museum', containing a collection of relics from Cowdray, (including an engraving of the Grimm watercolour of the Fountain Court) plus other items of local and Sussex historical interest. Shortly after the fire, another floor was inserted in the kitchen about 12 ft up, to form another room that was used as an audit chamber. It was lighted by the existing kitchen windows. One of the two fireplaces that were built for it still remains up on the south side of the kitchen. During the consolidation of Cowdray in about 1915, the floor was removed and the kitchen restored to its full height.







**Fig 24. Cowdray House.** The hexagonal residential tower in the north-east corner, with its fashionable pattern of interlocking brown and white quoins. The huge bay window is probably a later Elizabethan enlargement.

**Cowdray House** was built as a great Tudor mansion - a trophy house. It maintains castellated features as a *style*, built without being a castle in the aggressive military sense. Its construction began in 1520 or before, being virtually completed by 1542.

The house forms a group of great houses devised and constructed in the early part of Henry VIII's reign, and is just contemporary with **Thornbury Castle**, Gloucestershire. Whilst Thornbury was also not built as a castle, it nonetheless included some military features that could have allowed it to be stoutly defended. These features were actual and functional. They were sufficient for Henry VIII to regard the Duke of Buckingham with suspicion leading to his execution in 1521.

On the other hand, Cowdray House - never originally designated 'Castle' built by reliable courtiers William Fitzwilliam and Anthony Browne had no pretence of defence, even though there are some decorative? gun loops in the gatehouse. A tour of the shattered remains indicate that the defensive features are simply stage props that could not have formally func-

tioned if ever the house was put to the test in a serious attack. Like Hardwick Hall, Cowdray House is (or was) more glass than wall. Crenellations rarely had a wall-walk behind them, making them functionally useless.

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## Cowdray House and Architectural Fashions of the 1520-30s.

There are four architectural or domestic planning features that are of interest at Cowdray and other comparable early Tudor great houses. First is the unusual location of the chapel situated behind the great hall and divided from it by a narrow hallway; the general development of both internal and external symmetry; the appearance of a residential strong tower for bed-chambers as the last room in the planned sequence of public audience chambers and increasingly private spaces; the coordinated use of brick and light coloured dressed stone with chequer-work or alternating patterning; the appearance of tall 'swagger' chimneys and the enhanced use of glass; all individual features that indicated an age of ever-growing conscious and conspicuous consumption.

The situation of the chapel at Cowdray, built 1520-30, to the east of the great hall was once considered unique.<sup>1</sup> It is now known that Thornbury Castle's chapel was also located to the rear and east of the hall, although much further away from the private apartments. Thornbury's configuration preceded Cowdray, and awkwardly required a covered external gallery to reach it in private. Seen here at Cowdray is the embryonic emergence of what was later to be called the 'double pile' arrangement in which a sequence of rooms would run parallel behind the hall itself and the hallway effectively used to bypass it.

The trend toward external symmetry was established well before Cowdray and should not necessarily be linked to any Renaissance influence. It can be seen in fifteenth century houses such as **Bodiam Castle** (1385), **Herstmonceux** (1441), **Stansted Park**, West Sussex (late 15th/early 16th century) built by the Earls of Arundel, (e.g. Kip's view of the garden front); **Otford**, Kent, of 1514-18; **Titchfield Abbey**, Hampshire, for Thomas Wriothesley, 1530's; **Netley Abbey**, Hampshire, Sir William Paulet, 1530's; **East Barsham Manor**, Norfolk, 1520-30; **Shurland House**, Isle of Sheppey, Kent, by 1532. Most of these were by Henry VIII's men, who, with newly acquired properties wished to make a mark by turning them into the most fashionable of residences, although the acquisition of monastic sites may have constrained their designs when compared to a greenfield site such as Cowdray. Cowdray had a carefully controlled unified decorative scheme where visual order was clearly intended, although the east range



**Titchfield Abbey** - 1530's, The Gatehouse - all that remains of Thomas Wriothesley's great house in Hampshire.

maintained the asymmetric hall and screens passage convention. The architectural motif of the gatehouse with its octagonal turrets on either side is clearly seen in Grimm's watercolour views of Cowdray (1783) (**Figs 1, 15**) looking from the east Hall range back to the gatehouse range. Both the north and south ranges mirror both each other and the gatehouse with their semi-octagonal placement of turrets either side of deep canted bays. Later changes to the fabric have disrupted some Cowdray's external symmetry.

The addition of the hexagonal tower in the north-east corner of Cowdray allowed axial, in-line planning of apartments receding from the Great Hall. The Great Staircase led to the first floor Great Chamber, followed by the Withdrawing Chamber then to the 'Dressing Room' or Privy Chamber, and finally the Bedchamber in the vaulted hexagonal tower. Something very similar had been designed and completed by the Duke of Buckingham between 1514-20, using the strong south-west tower as his closet.. Thus Cowdray's east front was not too dissimilar in planning terms to Thornbury's south wing.

The southern counties - Kent, Sussex, Hampshire see numerous new courtier houses of the elevated gentry classes fashioning their buildings in the classic early Tudor style - gatehouse blocks with octagonal turrets, with quoins in contrasting alternating bands of ashlar; quadrangular ranges with tall deep bay windows looking outward, but still maintaining the castelated features that announced to the world that they had the king's favour and patronage. Yet they needed to be careful to dissociate themselves from blatant self-aggrandizement, or they would suffer the fate of the Duke Buckingham and the Earl of Surrey.

<sup>1</sup> T. Trotter, *Cowdray* (1934), 39-41



### Some notes on the Cowdray 'Repair' Project.

In February 2005 the Chichester District councillors voted at a meeting of the executive board to release £120,000 from cash reserves to go towards the £3.8 million Cowdray repair project. The Heritage Lottery fund have been the largest donors of funds at £2.781 million. Other funds have come from The Cowdray Estate, English Heritage, West Sussex County Council, Midhurst Town Council and Easebourne Parish Council and other private contributions. Chichester District Council's addition takes the total to almost the full amount needed and the local *Observer* is now backing the search to find the rest. The figure required is about £150,000. The project is being coordinated by the Cowdray Heritage Trust, and Colin Hughes is their spokesman and contact.

The consolidation / conservation project aims at conserving much of the site, including modernising its access, repairing the building itself, and setting up a visitor centre. Colin Hughes stated: 'It means we no longer call it Cowdray Ruins - but return it back to its real name, Cowdray House'. Extensive repair to the stone structure of the ruins will be carried out, along with the surfacing of the causeway, building of visitor facilities, repairs to the iron railings and creation of a pathway to the gatehouse and the building of display areas.

Scaffolding is already up around the house to carry out preliminary work. The main aim is to allow greater public access to the site and help people understand its history. Those behind it believe the new visitor centre, equipped with audio tour headphones and graphic displays will attract people from around the country. The CHT have also announced that it has appointed



**Cowdray House, Entrance Gate.** S H Grimm, Ink wash on paper Shelfmark: Additional MS 5675, f. 10 (no. 16), British Library.

four firms from a list of 79 applicants bidding for the prestigious project - a professional team of architects, managers, engineers and surveyors to carry out the work. The four companies chosen are: Osprey Mott McDonald, (management); Martin Ashley, (architects); SFK Consulting (engineers) and Dearle & Henderson (surveyors). With everything in place the Trust is looking to a completion date and opening ceremony in September 2006. Anyone wishing to donate to the project or find out more can contact the Midhurst Resource Centre - 01730 813711, or email [mrcadmin@midhurst.org.uk](mailto:mrcadmin@midhurst.org.uk).

Address: Rosemary's Parlour, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex. GU15 9DR. The CSG was welcomed on site by the English Heritage Inspector, South-East Region, Judith Roebuck, 01483 252048, who explained the background to the project and the future plans. Our thanks go to Judith and conference organiser Bill Woodburn for arranging access to Cowdray. The building will no doubt be shortly off the 'Buildings at Risk' register. The Castle Studies Group has made a contribution of £300 towards the project, with funds drawn from the 2005 Conference receipts.



**Cowdray House,** S H Grimm, Watercolour, Shelfmark: Additional MS 5675, f. 9 (no. 15), British Library.