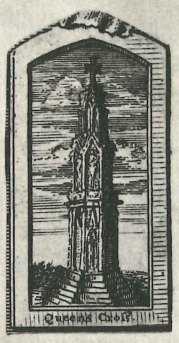
Choice 10

Walpole's Copy of *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 4 vols., Strawberry Hill 1762–71

This, the most ambitious of Walpole's works, was based on forty notebooks compiled by George Vertue, the engraver and antiquary (1684–1756), with a view to writing the first history of painting in England. Walpole records in "Short Notes" and the "Journal of the Printing Office" that he bought Vertue's notebooks and drawings from Vertue's widow in 1758 for £100 and that in 1759 he "began to look over the notebooks in order to compose the lives of English painters." The result was *Anecdotes of Painting in England, with some Account of the principal Artists; And incidental Notes on other Arts; Collected by the late Mr George Vertue; And now digested and published from his original MSS, by Mr Horace Walpole,* 4 vols. 1762–71. "Mr" was no longer "a Gothic abomination" as it was in Choice 5.

Walpole's Preface states that owing to the paucity of native-born geniuses, England "has not a single volume to show on the works of its painters. This very circumstance may with reason prejudice the reader against a work, the chief business of which must be to celebrate the arts of a country which has produced so few good artists. This objection is so striking, that instead of calling it *The Lives of English Painters,* I have simply given it the title *Anecdotes of Painting in England.* The indefatigable pains of Mr Vertue left nothing unexplored that could illuminate his subject, and collaterally led him to many particularities that are at least amusing: I call them no more, nor would I advise any man, who is not fond of curious trifles to take the pains of turning over these leaves." Walpole brought his work down to the end of George II's reign in 1760. He included "other arts," "Statuaries, Carvers, Architects, and Medallists," and closed with an "Essay on Modern Gardening."

Over thirty of Vertue's notebooks have been printed *verb. et lit.* by the English Walpole Society from the originals, which are now mostly in the



I cannot paſs over the Princeſs Eleanor, ſo much celebrated by our legendary hiſtorians for ſucking the poiſon out of her huſband's wound, without mentioning the croſſes erected to her memory, which Vertue with great probability ſuppoſed were built on the deſigns of Peter Cavalini, a Roman ſculptor, and whom from various circumſtances he diſcovered to be the architect of the ſhrine of Edward the Confeſſor.

The reader, I am perſuaded, will be pleaſed to ſee how ingeniouſly my author traced out this hitherto unknown fact.

The original inſcription on the tomb ran thus:

Anno milleno Domini cum ſeptuageno
Et bis centeno, cum completo quaſi deno,
Hoc opus eſt factum, quod Petrus duxit in actum
Romanus civis: Homo, cauſam noſcere ſi vis,
Rex fuit Henricus, ſancti praeſentis amicus.

The words *Petrus duxit in actum Romanus civis* were diſcernable 'till very lately. Some old authors aſcribe the erection of the ſhrine to Henry himſelf, others, to Richard de Ware the Abbat, elected in 1260. It is probable that Both were concerned. The new Abbat repaired to Rome immediately on his election to receive conſecration from Urban IV. At that time, ſays Vaſari, flouriſhed there Peter Cavalini, a painter and the inventor of Moſaic, who had performed ſeveral coſtly works in that city. About four years before the arrival of Abbat Ware, that is in 1256, had been erected a ſplendid ſhrine* for the martyrs Simplicius and Fauſtina, at the expence of John James Capoccio and his wife, adorned with twiſted columns and inlaid with precious marbles exactly in the taſte, though not in the preciſe form of that of St. Edward. Nothing is more probable than that a rich Abbat, either at his own expence, or to gratify the taſte of his magnificent maſter ſhould

* The remains of this shrine with its beautifull twisted mosaice columns are now in a chapel erected for them at Strawberry hill.

Page 17 from Walpole's copy of *Anecdotes of Painting in England.*

British Library. The originals show that Walpole's description of them, "indigested" and "unreadable," is charitable—"chaotic" and "illiterate" would not be unjust. The *Anecdotes* show that Walpole was a superb editor who brought order and style out of Vertue's incoherence. Take, for example, Vertue's note on Rembrandt, "Rembrant van Rhine was in England liv'd at Hull in Yorkshire about sixteen or eighteen months reported by old Laroon who in his youth knew Rembrant at York where he painted several gentlemen and sea faring mens pictures, one of them is in possession of Mr. Dahl, a sea captain with the Gentlemans name. Rembrants name and York. & the year $^{62}/_{1661}$." Walpole demoted this entry to a footnote at the end of his introduction to the Reign of Charles II: "Vertue was told by old Mr Laroon, who saw him in Yorkshire, that the celebrated Rembrandt was in England in 1661, and lived 16 or 18 months at Hull, where he drew several gentlemen and seafaring persons. Mr Dahl had one of those pictures. There are two fine whole lengths at Yarmouth, which might be done at the same time. As there is no other evidence of Rembrandt being in England, it was not necessary to make a separate article for him, especially at a time when he is so well known, and his works in such repute, that his scratches, with the difference only of a black horse or a white one, sell for thirty guineas." Besides making Vertue's notes readable, Walpole added much new material and closed the gaps in Vertue's account. "From the reign of Henry III Mr Vertue could discover no records relating to the arts for several reigns," Walpole wrote. "I shall endeavour to fill this hiatus by producing an almost entire chronologic series of paintings from that time to Henry VII when Mr Vertue's notes recommence," and he did so in twenty-one pages.

The first two volumes of the *Anecdotes* appeared in 1762, the third volume and *Catalogue of Engravers* in 1763; the fourth volume was printed in 1771, but was held up until 1780 because Walpole didn't want to offend Hogarth's widow by his strictures on the artist's "Sigismonda." (We shall come to "Sigismonda" and Mrs Hogarth in Choice 23.) All five volumes were reprinted in 1825 and 1849. I hope one day that the Lewis Walpole Library will publish another edition that will make clear the contributions of both Vertue and Walpole to their pioneer history of painting in England.

Like Vertue, Walpole was an indefatigable visitor to country houses. He made extensive notes on some ninety of them in his Books of Materials, Choice 4, that were edited by Paget Toynbee for the Walpole Society. He described the houses, their situations, and their notable contents. His

letters report finding masterpieces suffering from damp and neglect in passages and housekeepers' rooms and tell how he got their owners to take better care of them. He had a very good eye for artists of all schools and for sitters, but at Farmington there is a blunder: a portrait the *Description of Strawberry Hill* calls Milton turns out to be Sir William Killigrew.

Walpole's reputation as a connoisseur and authority on painting was established by his *Aedes Walpolianae, or a Description of the Collection of Pictures at Houghton Hall in Norfolk, the Seat of the Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole Earl of Orford,* 1747. The preliminary list of the collection, which he made in 1736 in his nineteenth year, is in the Pierpont Morgan Library. In 1926 I acquired the manuscript of the *Aedes* which Walpole extra-illustrated with prints and drawings and had bound in a large folio. I had it and, unfamiliar with Walpole's early hand, let it go to the Metropolitan Museum! This is the greatest regret of my collecting life. The 1747 edition of 200 copies had many typographical errors each of which Walpole corrected in his own hand. A second edition was published in 1752, a third in 1767. The book, like so many of Walpole's publications, was a pioneer work. His object, he tells us in his Introduction, was not only to describe his father's collection, which was unrivalled in England, but to enlarge public understanding of painting. "The numerous Volumes on this art," he wrote, "have only served to perplex it. No science has had so much jargon introduced into it as painting: the bombast expression of the Italians, and the prejudices and affectation of the French, joined to the vanity of the professors and the interested mysteriousness of picture merchants, have altogether compiled a new language" that is still spoken.

Walpole's advent at an exhibition was an occasion. Mr Walpole had arrived. His catalogues of the Royal Academy exhibitions belong to Lord Rosebery; those of the Society of Artists and the Free Society are at Farmington. All are profusely annotated with identifications of the sitters and comment on the pictures. Walpole's notes identify scores of sitters among whom are two of Reynolds's portraits each described in the Royal Academy's Exhibition catalogue of 1770 merely as "Portrait of a Gentleman." Walpole identified the first in his catalogue as "Dr Goldsmith" and the second, "Dr Johnson." Doubtless this is the exhibition mentioned in his letter to Miss Berry of 26 May 1791, shortly after Boswell's *Life of Johnson* was published. "I do not think I ever was in a room with [Johnson] six times in my days. The first time I think was at the Royal Academy. Sir Joshua said, 'Let me present Dr Goldsmith to you' and he did. 'Now I

will present Dr Johnson to you.'—'No,' said I, 'Sir Joshua, for Dr Goldsmith, pass—but you shall not present Dr Johnson to me,' " and he explained why: Johnson's attacks on Sir Robert Walpole and his "known brutality."

I learned in 1934 that Walpole's copy of the first edition of the *Anecdotes* and twenty-two letters to and from him about *Historic Doubts of Richard III* were at Knowsley Hall, Lord Derby's great house in Lancashire. My introduction there was managed by R. W. Chapman, the Secretary to the Delegates of the Clarendon Press at Oxford, a notable Johnsonian and the leader of the Jane Austenians (as he said they should be called). He wrote me in 1926, having heard of me from Paget Toynbee, to ask for the bibliographical explanation of the "Additional Lives" in the *Anecdotes of Painting*. I had no idea what it was and said so, but he asked me nevertheless to lunch one day the following summer at Oxford. I learned then that he and his colleague, Humphrey Milford, Publisher to the University, were sailing soon for New York and changed my passage to be with them on what proved to be the most memorable of my sixty-four crossings of the Atlantic. When he and Milford came to Farmington for a weekend shortly after we landed I was able to tell them that I had just become engaged. During the next thirty years Chapman did me countless kindnesses of which my introduction to Knowsley was one. Another was sending me Mrs Paget Toynbee's correspondence about her edition, which her husband bequeathed to the Clarendon Press for the use of the next editor of Walpole's letters. In 1929 after Chapman discovered that I keep all my letters and so am Posterity he wrote me regularly as long as he lived, a total of some 1300 letters that came every week or so. What he sent was more of a journal than letters and was written in his very difficult hand sometimes on the backs of calls to meetings, proof sheets, and his children's school exercises. Before he died he began returning my letters to him and after his death his widow sent many more to me; in all, there are about 600 of mine. Among the letters from him is my obituary that he wrote for the London *Times*. It is odd to reread one's letters years after they were written, to revive their forgotten concerns, hear dead friends, and see the person who was yourself; it is particularly strange to read your own obituary. My letters to Chapman are full of Walpolian finds, from whom I got them and for how much. My handwriting is almost as illegible as his, but the letters have brought back my visit to Knowsley in 1935 and the sale of its library nearly twenty years later.

The Knowsley Librarian was Major Henry Milner, D.S.O., who had

been at Wellington with Lord Derby. I learned later that in 1888 at the age of twenty-four he had married the Dowager Duchess of Montrose, a lady forty-six years his senior who raced at Newmarket under the name of "Mr Manton." He sent the Knowsley chauffeur to pick me up at the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool and bring me to the house at ten on a morning in July 1935. A footman showed me to a little room off the entrance hall where I found the most elegant librarian I have ever seen. After forty-odd years I can't be certain that he was wearing striped trousers, a short coat, and an Ascot, but I have a sense of them. He rose, very military, very erect, nodded briefly, and stared at me silently. "I've come to see the Walpoliana," I reminded him.

"Oh, yes, of course," he replied briskly and opened a door behind his desk into a billiard room on the table of which were placed separately the twenty-two letters to and from Walpole about his *Historic Doubts of Richard III*. I walked slowly round the table reading and admiring each letter separately. Then I asked, "You have some books from Walpole's library?"

"How did you know that?" he asked rather sharply.

"You wrote me you have."

"Oh, yes, of course." He was disconcerted; a major transformed to a rattled librarian who hadn't the faintest idea where anything was. "Norris!" he called out in alarm. Through an open door into one of the seven libraries I saw a little man on the top of a ladder. He came clattering down and entered the billiard room bowing and washing his hands deferentially. "Mr Lewis would like to see our books from Horace Walpole's library," Milner announced. Norris was delighted; no one had ever asked to see them before. He went and came, back and forth, happily bearing thirty books, including the first edition of the *Anecdotes* in which Walpole wrote "My own Copy, H.W." and which he annotated and extra-illustrated. I made a hasty list of these treasures before lunch, which Milner and I then had alone. Afterwards he took me round the house to see the fifty-seven pictures and *objets d'art* the 13th Earl had bought at the Strawberry Hill sale in 1842 under his own name, including the large Chinese "vase" in which Walpole's favorite cat, "the pensive Selima" of Gray's poem, was drowned. When the time came for me to leave for Liverpool and the "up" train to Paddington Milner joined me, as he had gone down to Knowsley solely to wait on me. The housekeeper put up supper for him in a paper box that I persuaded him to leave behind in our railway carriage and to join me at dinner. At lunch he had made it clear that he liked wine and

as we worked through a bottle of Bordeaux he confided that he had had a personal crisis years ago too dreadful to describe. "And who was the first to come to my side? Edward Derby!" a loyalty expressed by Milner's appointment as "librarian" at Knowsley. When he and I reached the brandy and long Havanas I brought up the question of reproducing the letters. I assumed that Lord Derby would not part with them. "Good God, no!" said Milner, appalled. It was, I explained, very important for the Yale Walpole to be edited if possible from the originals or "roto-graphs" of them, the word then more in English use than "photostat." "And what is a roto-graph?" the Major asked. I explained it is a sort of photograph, only white on black. "Good God!" he said again. "And how does one get a roto-graph?"

"I have mine done at the British Museum. They're very reliable people," I assured him.

"I don't see why we shouldn't do this," the Major volunteered firmly.

Would he help me with my letter to Lord Derby asking for the roto-graphs and permission to reproduce them in the Yale Walpole? Yes, he would and turned over his menu, going to work at once, breathing heavily, by now the color of an eggplant. He flourished his cigar on which he had preserved a long ash in tribute to its quality. The ash fell off upon his composition and upon himself and was swept and brushed masterfully aside. By the time the letter was finished we had reached Paddington. Could I not take him home? No, he thanked me hastily, he would get there on his own, rescuing the supper the Knowsley housekeeper had put up for him. The Walpole letters went to the British Museum—registered, but not insured, his letter told me—and got back to Knowsley safely. I sent him, Lord Derby, and Norris some of my little Christmas books for which I received grateful acknowledgments. A few more friendly letters came from Milner before he died, a pleasant memory of a type that is incomprehensible to most born after 1935.

In 1953 the present Lord Derby was faced with very heavy death duties. Should he sell his horses or his books? Fortunately for me he parted with the books. Professional advice was needed to determine which should go up to Christie's, and, fortunately again for me, the architect who was to pull down two of the seven libraries turned to Chapman for help. The List of Purchasers at the Strawberry Hill sale shows that the books and manuscripts I saw at Knowsley had all been bought by Boone, the bookseller. He bought 339 volumes—some doubtless for stock and other customers, but mostly for Lord Derby. I reported his purchases to Chapman, deducting

the twenty-two at Farmington and elsewhere. Chapman and Miss Dorothy Povey, the librarian at Knowsley, went through the seven libraries and found upwards of 200 volumes Boone had bought. Some of them had been rebacked or rebound and showed no signs of Walpole's ownership. What, Chapman asked, did I want to do about them? Send them all up to Christie's, I said, and I would take a chance on their being "right." How happy this decision was is shown in Choice 12. Kenneth Maggs bought for me a total of 196 titles, the largest number of books sold from the Strawberry Hill library since 1842. Among them were the letters to Walpole about his *Historic Doubts* that had been rotographed for me at the British Museum and his heavily annotated extra-illustrated set of the first edition of the *Anecdotes.* I also got his annotated copy of *A Catalogue and Description of King Charles the First's Capital Collection of Pictures, etc.* (prepared by Vertue shortly before his death) for which Walpole wrote a Preface. One book that escaped us went to the University of Liverpool, but thanks to Miss Povey and her brother Kenneth, who was its librarian, the University gave it to me. Other of my Knowsley purchases were dozens of Vertue's drawings of celebrated persons from Chaucer to Sir Robert Walpole. We already had at Farmington Vertue's copy of *A Description of the Earl of Pembroke's Pictures,* 1731, with his drawings and notes and extensive annotations by Walpole; thirty-four of Vertue's drawings of artists in the *Anecdotes,* his copies of the Harleian sale catalogues with seventeen drawings, and a folio for which Walpole made a title-page, "Original Drawings of Heads, Antiquities, Monuments, Views, etc. by George Vertue and others," and annotated fully. We also got three of Vertue's drawings for *Historic Doubts of Richard III,* which we shall come to in Choice 16.

The fourth volume of the *Anecdotes* ends, as I have said, with Walpole's essay "On Modern Gardening." It is another pioneer work that was reprinted in 1975 for the tenth time. The Walpole Printing Office of Mount Vernon, New York, brought out an edition of it in 1931 for Young Books, Inc. of New York for which my wife wrote a bibliography and I wrote a Preface. I explained the appearance of the "Essay on Modern Gardening" in the *Anecdotes* by quoting Pope's dictum, "Gardening is painting." To Walpole and his contemporaries gardening was no longer formal beds of herbs or "giants, animals, coats of arms and mottoes in yew, box and holly," but a large-scale enterprise that dealt with landscape. Woods and rocks and water were needed to "improve the view" and create the "romantic" garden on a scale commensurate with the owner's magnifi-

cence. Modern taste, Walpole pointed out, dawned with Charles Bridgman, George II's gardener, whose innovations included the destruction of walls for boundaries and the substitution of sunken ditches "that the common people called 'Ha! Ha's!' " Bridgman was followed by William Kent who, Walpole wrote, was "painter enough to taste the charms of landscape. . . . He leaped the fence and saw that all nature was a garden." The influence of the painters, especially Claude, Gaspard Poussin, and Salvator Rosa, was strong. "If we have the seed of a Claude or Gaspar amongst us," Walpole wrote, "he must come forth. If wood, water, groves, alleys, glades, can inspire poet or painter, this is the country, this is the age to inspire them." Walpole's patriotism extended to England's rocks and rills.

The Journal of the Printing Office records that in 1785 the Press began to print the translation by the Duc de Nivernais of Walpole's "Essay on Modern Gardening" in an edition of 400 copies, half of which were sent to the duke. The manuscript of the translation came to Farmington from Mrs Albert E. Smith of Hollywood, whose husband was a pioneer in the movie industry. Walpole noted on the inside cover: "This beautiful Manuscript was written at Paris in 1785 by order of the Duc de Nivernois. Mr Walpole having desired to have a very accurate and legible copy of the Duke's Translation, that the printer at Strawberry Hill, who was not accustomed to print French, nor indeed understood it, might make no mistakes. From this MS the Edition was printed. H. Walpole." Among the sixteen copies of it at Farmington is one given by Nivernais to Lady Clarges and by her to Richard Bull. With Bull's many extra-illustrations is a newspaper cutting that describes the Duke lying on straw in a prison during the French Revolution. Another red morocco copy at Farmington, most beautifully tooled, was given by Walpole to his Richmond neighbor General Fitzwilliam. In it is Walpole's draft of a two-page note to page 136 with many corrections, the only such manuscript of his I know of. The book, which later belonged to Mortimer Schiff, was given to Yale by his son John for permanent deposit at Farmington. In it Fitzwilliam wrote:

Richmond Surrey October 1785.
General Fitzwilliam has often thought himself obliged to Mr Horace Walpole who has not only given to him this book of his Essay on Modern Gardening but also most of his other publications, a collection not only instructive, but very curious and entertaining.

Mr Walpole is so well known and celebrated in the learned world, that it would be needless to speak of his works; but, what would that part of it say of

him, who, like me, have been honored by his good will and attention? His natural talents, his cheerfullness, the sallies of his imagination, the liveliness of his manner, the unexpected impression on the ear of those who hear and listen to him, comes on, like a shooting star, or, like Uriel, gliding on a sun beam. I never met him, but with pleasure, and never left him but with regret.