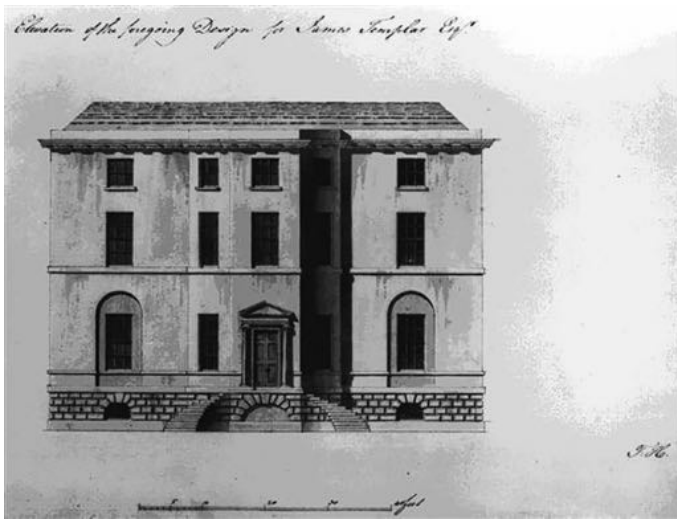


Stover Park – an update

Stuart Drabble

In July 2012 the Devon Gardens Trust held its AGM at Stover School, near Newton Abbot, after which members were given a presentation on the history of Stover Park by Stuart Drabble, Archivist, and Clerk to the Trustees at the school, followed by a tour of the estate. A topical issue at the time was the placing on the English Heritage (now Historic England) 'At Risk' Register of the school's Grade II* listed eighteenth century stable block, together with the whole of the surrounding historic parkland, including Stover Country Park. This paper aims to remind readers of the significance of the Stover estate and to review progress towards conservation objectives for the estate in the last three years.



Front Elevation of Stover Lodge by Thomas Hardwick (c. 1774)

Historical Associations

Stover Park is a fine example of a Georgian designed landscape of the late eighteenth century with further nineteenth century additions. It is situated between Newton Abbot and Bovey Tracey, immediately west of the village of Teigngrace. It sits on the edge of the Bovey Basin, an area rich in ball clay and other mineral deposits. To the west is Dartmoor, and to the east is the estuary of the River Teign and the open sea at Teignmouth. Three generations of the Templer family established the Park between 1765 and 1827, then ownership transferred to Edward Adolphus Seymour, the eleventh Duke of Somerset. Three generations of the Seymour family owned and embellished the estate but from the 1920s it was progressively broken up.

In 1995, 440 acres of the original parkland were added to the English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* with grade II status. Fourteen years later that Park was placed on the 'At Risk' Register for the following reasons:

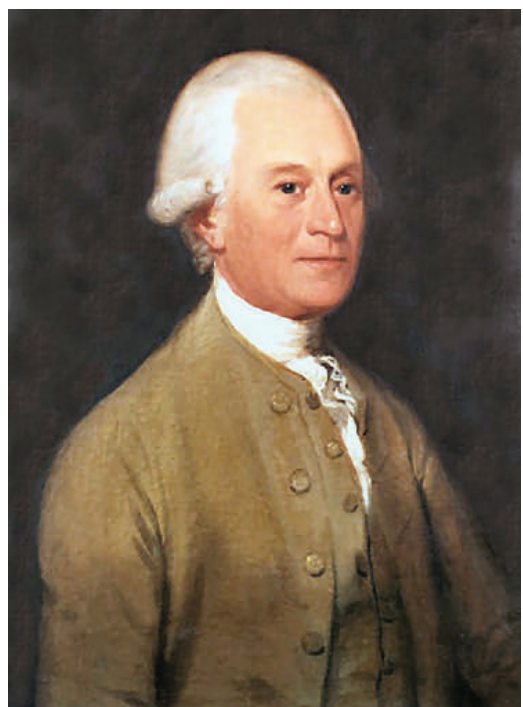
Divided ownership. Large area of the Park now run by the County Council as a country park, another part is an actively worked quarry and the remainder is in use by a school, farmed and in private residential ownership. Setting also under threat with pressure for hotel, retail, residential and industrial development associated with A38 trunk road.¹

The Templer Family

The Park was the vision of James Templer (1722–1782), an eminent Naval Dockyard Contractor, to whom armorial bearings had been granted in 1763.² In 1765 he purchased Stoford Lodge, the Manor of Teigngrace and fourteen closes in the parishes of Teigngrace and Highweek, comprising about 176 acres.³ Donn's *A Map of the County of Devon* (1765) confirms Templer's residence there.⁴ Most of the land comprised barren and boggy heathland, which Templer began to drain and reshape into a functional, designed landscape. Local brooks were bridged and diverted into a lake and ornamental waters, providing a new setting for Stoford Lodge. Some years later Templer replaced Stoford Lodge with a grander mansion on higher ground, which he named Stover Lodge (1777), together with a contemporary stable block (1779) discreetly hidden in the landscape. Stoford Lodge was then retained for at least another sixty years for ancillary accommodation and stabling.⁵ The evidence from design drawings by Thomas Hardwick (1752–1829) establishes the new mansion as a rare survival of his work.⁶ Built in local Haytor granite, the interior finishes are in the Adam style with particularly fine plasterwork, fire surrounds and fittings.

Templer died in 1782 after 22 years' work at Stover, leaving his eldest son, also James Templer (1748–1813), to continue his work. By then, James Templer (the elder) had amassed a handsome fortune from his industrial concerns, leaving other estates in London, Kent, Middlesex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Devon, as well as substantial nominated Bank stocks.⁷ All five of his surviving children became wealthy individuals in their own right. In particular, James Templer II was able to sell his inherited lands beyond Devon, through a Private Act of Parliament, to consolidate and enlarge his Stover estate by purchasing land nearby in lieu.⁸

By 1801, 200,000 trees had been planted in the Park, which by then extended to over 3,000 acres. The ornamental waters and lake had matured. A pleasure garden with a



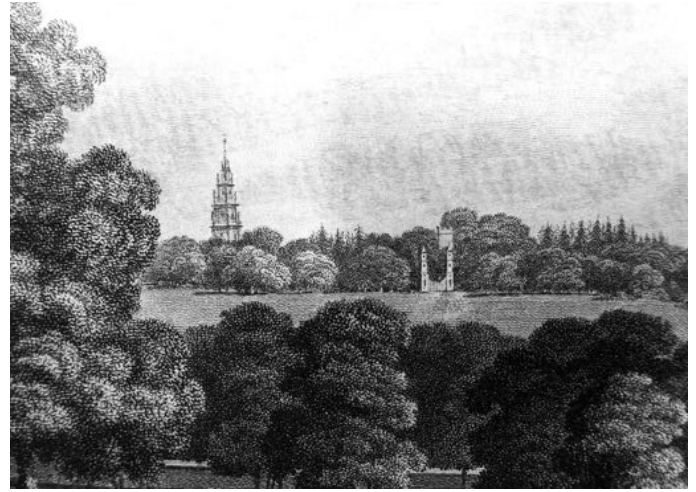
James Templer (1722–1782)

pinnacled gateway (extant) incorporating a Coade stone tablet, and follies, including bastions, turret and a pagoda in the Chinese style, had been established within a pre-existing mediaeval walled garden. This walled garden may also have been the site of the ‘pleasant garden’, described in 1803 as having ‘a hothouse attached to it’.⁹ Estate drives had been laid out from three principal entrances, ensuring that visitors enjoyed ‘peep’ views of the mansion and the full beauty of the landscape from every vantage point. The church in Teigngrace had been rebuilt by the family in 1787 and dedicated to the memory of their parents, the new spire being visible from far afield. These and other features were described in detail in an anonymous poem *Stover Lodge – A Poem* (1801) and illustrated in the original Ordnance Surveyor’s drawing (1801) and in an engraving of *Stover Lodge The Seat of James Templer* by T. Bonnor, published in 1793.¹⁰ The whole design and concept is a classic example of the ingenuity and skill of an informed landowner of the later eighteenth century.

James Templer II developed the extraction and export of clay on a commercial scale, constructing his Stover Canal in 1792. His barges carried clay 1.8 miles from Ventiford Basin to the Teign estuary and thence to Teignmouth harbour where it was transferred by hand to larger coastal vessels. The barges returned, laden with coal or lime and sea sand, the latter two which his tenant farmers applied to the poor soil and waste lands along the line of the canal. By these means, and liberal overflow of water from the canal, were created ‘the best managed water meadows I have seen in the County of Devon’.¹¹

James Templer II died in 1813 after a 31 year stewardship of the Stover estate and was succeeded by his eldest son, George Templer (1781–1843). George was a popular patron of the Arts, a passionate sportsman, founder of the South Devon Hunt and the Teignbridge Cricket Club.¹² He was also an innovative, if ultimately unsuccessful, business man.

George Templer added little to Stover Park but, having anticipated the need for granite in the construction of Regency buildings in London, he built his Haytor granite tramway (1820) which ran for 8½ miles from his quarries on Haytor Down to his canal basin at Ventiford, where granite blocks were transferred to barges for passage along the Stover Canal and the Teign estuary to Teignmouth, in addition to shipments of clay. Templer built a new Quay in Teignmouth in 1820, so that larger vessels could be brought alongside for loading; much of the clay was destined for the



Abstract of Bonnor’s print showing follies in the pleasure garden

Potteries in Staffordshire.¹³ A wharf on the Thames was also leased to receive granite shipments.¹⁴ The largest single contract for Haytor granite was 23,000 tons for the new London Bridge, built 1825–1831.

Thackeray described the expenses of the granite tramway, said to exceed £30,000, as ‘Templer’s ruin’.¹⁵ Templer tried to recoup some of his losses by forming a Joint Stock company in 1825, ‘The Haytor Granite Company’, but that move was too little, too late. He had mortgaged the Stover estate for £12,000 to Sir John Palmer Acland and in April 1826 was forced to sell parts of it when Acland called in the mortgage and threatened bankruptcy. A three day sale was advertised and arranged at the New London Inn at Exeter for the potential disposal of the whole estate. The sale plan, drawn and lithographed by Charles Dean, shows the extent of the 3,000 acre Stover estate at the time.¹⁶

In the event, sufficient funds were secured by the sale of outlying farms and other property so the sale of the mansion and parkland was cancelled. Nevertheless, without income from tenants to support his lifestyle, Templer’s departure from Stover was inevitable. After the sale the mansion and surrounding lands, the canal and tramway were all advertised for sale by private treaty and were purchased in October 1827 by Edward Adolphus, eleventh Duke of Somerset.¹⁷

The Seymour Family

Edward Adolphus Seymour (1775–1855) originally bought the Stover estate for his heir, Lord Seymour (1804–1885).¹⁸ Stover then became an occasional country seat for Lord Seymour and the eleventh Duke, who made significant alterations and extensions over time. By the end of 1833 a Portland stone *porte-cochère* had been attached to the front of the mansion and the surrounding ground levels raised.¹⁹ A new entrance lodge had been constructed in Haytor granite on the Plymouth to Exeter road.²⁰ A new stable block was built inside the walled garden by 1843 and some of the Templer follies were demolished.²¹ The original Templer stables were gutted of internal fittings to become the centrepiece of a new Victorian pleasure garden and arboretum to the north of the mansion. This work was undertaken by the horticulturalist, James Veitch of Exeter, who appears to have been at work on the landscape at Stover for over ten years from 1834.²²



Bonnor’s original engraving



1826 sale map by Charles Dean
Courtesy of John Pike



1855 Engraving by Daimond for twelfth Duke of Somerset showing improvements including Ionic temple, terraces and new servants' wing

By 1847 new terraces and flower gardens had been laid out below the mansion, designed by Sir Robert Newman of nearby Mamhead. Large parts of the estate had been drained by Mr Bearne of Teigngrace, the Duke's local Agent, under the direction of the Duke's chief Agent, Mr Festing from the Duke's estate at Maiden Bradley in Wiltshire. Bearne was also experimenting at Stover with different types of manure 'none of which performed as well as guano'.²³ A lithograph of 1855 by G. Daimond shows some of the completed alterations, including a new servants' wing, an Ionic temple, the terraces and associated garden walls.

The eleventh Duke died in 1855 after 28 years stewardship of Stover and Lord Seymour inherited the title. He retained ownership of Stover until his own death in 1885, by when he had changed his family name from Seymour to St Maur, its original Norman style. He constructed the estate's perimeter walling, two smaller entrance lodges, driveways and a variety of houses for estate workers.

The twelfth Duke had two sons, both of whom predeceased him, leaving no lawful heirs. However, his eldest son, Ferdinand, Earl St Maur, had two illegitimate children, Ruth and Harold St Maur, from a relationship with a kitchen maid in Lady Bathurst's household. The children spent much of their formative years at Stover.²⁴ Reflecting his predicament of having no legitimate heir, the twelfth Duke altered his will and left all his land and properties in and around Newton Abbot to Harold St Maur. The Dukedom, including the Maiden Bradley and Berry Pomeroy estates, with sundry other estates, passed through the family blood line to the twelfth Duke's younger brother, Archibald.²⁵

Harold St Maur (1869–1927) was still a minor when his grandfather died in 1885, so his inheritance was held in Trust by two uncles, appointed by the late Duke as guardians, until he attained the age of 25 years.²⁶ The Stover estate was finally conveyed to him in 1894. Soon afterwards he constructed a private nine-hole golf course on both sides of the Newton Abbot road, which was opened to the general public in 1897, later to become the Stover and Mid Devon Golf Club in 1899.²⁷

The 1905 OS map showed that the Veitch pleasure garden and terrace walls had been extended and some driveways realigned since the 1885 map. A new rock and water garden had also been established, probably by F.W. Meyer, a German landscape architect who was employed by Robert and then Peter Veitch between 1875 and Meyer's death in 1906.²⁸

In 1912 St Maur began a series of estate sales. Fishwick and Teignbridge Marshes, both part of the Stover Estate, were the first properties put up for sale.²⁹ Harold St Maur pursued a military career, serving as a Major in the Boer War and in World War I. In the latter conflict the mansion at Stover



Granite Lodge entrance (1833) Historic England Grade II* and on 'At Risk' register



Templer's original stable block (Grade II) 'The most significant building on the estate' (Historic England) and on 'At Risk' register*

was converted to a Red Cross hospital and 700 acres of woodland on the estate were cleared for war purposes by 250 timbermen from the Canadian Forestry Corps.³⁰

After the war Major St Maur settled at Chipping Sodbury in Gloucestershire and later in Kenya, and the Stover estate was progressively broken up. A sale in 1921 disposed of most outlying properties. In 1925 St Maur conveyed 'the Mansion House with the Home Farm, Pleasure Grounds, Woods, Lodges, Farms, Lands and Hereditaments' to a family company, Stover Estates Ltd. Two years later the Major died in Kiripiri, British East Africa, leaving his estate to his three children, the eldest of whom, Richard St Maur, lived in the 1843 Stable Block for some years afterwards.

Ownership after the Seymours

The dispersal of the Stover estate after the death of Harold St Maur in 1927 has little to do with the purpose of this paper. Suffice to say that Stover Estates Ltd. leased the mansion and surrounding grounds for the creation of Stover School in 1932 and sold a number of farms and pieces of woodland in 1937. In March 1938 the remaining freeholds of Stover Estates Ltd., including the lands leased to the school, were sold to Evans & Reid Investment Co. Ltd. of South Wales, subject to existing leases and rights. Over time, Evans & Reid sold off their interests, leading to the present divided ownership. During World War II, an American army field hospital was set up on land adjoining the Golf Club and after the war the field hospital was used to house Polish refugees, later becoming the Ilford Park Polish Home.

In 1979 the Forestry Commission sold 114 acres of land to Devon County Council to be used as a country park. Stover Country Park has since become a leading tourist attraction, being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1984. From 1955 onwards, English Heritage listed several buildings including the 1843 Stables (Grade II*), the Granite Lodge (Grade II*) and the Arched Bridge (Grade II). Most of the other buildings in and around the Park were listed in the 1980s, including the Ice House (Grade II), the Mansion itself (Grade II*), the former stables (Grade II*), Stover Bridge (Grade II), the Ionic Temple with the terraces, steps and urns (Grade II) and Higher Lodge (Grade II).

Recent Developments

In response to placement on the 'At Risk' Register, Natural England has funded a consultant report '*Stover Park – Parkland Plan*' with top-up funding from Devon County Council (DCC) and Stover School. This was produced in June 2014 by Askew Nelson Partnership of Burford, Oxon., as a blueprint for conservation management in the Park for the next twenty years. In parallel to the above report, the *Stover Historic Landscape Trust* has been registered as a not-for-profit company to promote the objectives of the parkland plan. The immediate aim of the Trust is to secure charitable status with the Charity Commission so that effective fund-raising can commence.

A Heritage Lottery Grant application is being prepared by DCC under the HLF/Big Lottery *Parks for People* Programme. This is being supported by Natural England, Historic England (formerly English Heritage), freeholders within the designated parkland and other interested organisations. It will set out a five year programme, with follow-up maintenance programmes, for conservation and partial restoration to structures, ornamental waters, carriage drives, gardens, woodlands, Stover Lake and ecological habitats within the park. It will also incorporate aspects of accessibility, interpretation, education and staffing so that



Early twentieth century photo showing balustrades in place

larger numbers of the general public may have access to greater areas of the historic parkland than hitherto. One hundred and twenty school visits are made to Stover Country Park each year and a key element of the HLF bid will be to secure funds for an expansion of that programme, which will see the Granite Lodge restored as an educational facility.

The Teignbridge Local Plan 2013–2033 anticipates over 12,000 new homes in the District, 60% of them to be constructed within a 15 minute drive of Stover Park.

New roads, schools, industry and leisure facilities will accompany this huge expansion. The proposed restoration and improvements at Stover Park will hopefully be seen as a priority, helping to conserve a vital amenity for the future prosperity of Devon.

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14. 'Haytor Wharf, Southwark Bridge' in *Morning Chronicle*, 9 July 1825.
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16. *Trewman's Weekly Advertiser*, 7 March 1826, auction on 18/19 April 1826. There were 3,000 acres of enclosed land, but also 6,000 acres of unenclosed land – probably including lands near to the granite tramway and other common land.
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