

THOMAS ANSON'S ELEGANT ENTERTAINMENTS

After Lord Anson's death in 1762 Thomas inherited Moor Park, which he sold for £25,000 and Admiral Anson's London house, 15 St James Square.

This provided the opportunity for Anson's largest commission from Stuart. The old house was demolished in 1763, but construction of the new house took three years. It was the first stone fronted house in St James Square and the first house in London to use elements from Stuart's Antiquities of Athens, both externally and internally.

In June 1764 the first floor was reached.

Stuart wrote:

"The grand function of wetting the first floor was performed last Saturday when upward of 50 men had their bellies full of Beef pudding and Ale and your health was drank with very cheerful huzzas, the Masters treated themselves and I had the honor of being president"

Scheemakers worked extensively on details for 15 St James Square at the same time as his work at Shugborough, including volutes for capitals based on the Temple of Minerva Polias which also featured on the paintings by Dall in the Green House.

In September 1766 Stuart wrote to Anson, about the servants: *"the insolence of your people is insurportable."*

The house was completed in 1766, by which time Thomas Anson was the ratepayer. Stuart was very proud of the building writing that it was *"a topic of much conversation among the Connoisseurs in Architecture."*

THOMAS ANSON AND MUSIC

Lady Shelburne described a lavish event at 15 StJames Square in April 1769:

"Thursday Morning, April 13th. We breakfasted at Mr. Anson's, who gave a breakfast and concert to Mrs. Montagu, to which she very obligingly invited us. We called upon her and went together, and saw a very fine house, built and ornamented by Mr. Stuart. The company were Count Bruhl, Lord Egremont, Mr. and Mrs. Harris and their daughter, Mrs. Vesey, Mrs. Dunbar, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Scott, a M. de Vibre, M. de Maltête a President de Parlement, who came over expressly to see a Riot, but was deterred from going to Brentford by the French Ambassador, and condemned to pass this memorable morning in the calmer scene of Mr. Anson's house and entertainment. " (1)

Mrs Montagu was "the Queen of the Bluestockings", the leading intellectual hostess of the day. The bluestockings are often said to be named after Benjamin Stillingfleet's wearing of cheap blue worsted instead of black silk.

Thomas Anson (and Lady Anson) seem to have had close connections with this circle of intellectual ladies. Mrs Carter (Elizabeth Carter) was also a life long correspondent of Thomas Wright. Benjamin Stillingfleet was a botanist and musician (translator of Tartini's treatise on

harmony) and one of the friends who were left annuities in Thomas's will, though he actually died before Thomas.

It was Lady Montagu who had written from Hagley about Thomas, Stuart and Lyttelton's plan for the first Doric temple. She commissioned a house from Stuart herself, Montagu House, which was built (rather slowly) from 1775-82.

The recently published letters and journals of James Harris and his family refer to this same concert in honour of Mrs Montagu on the **13th April 1769**.

Louisa Harris to J Harris Jnr (original in French)

Today my father, mother and Gertrude are all at a concert at Mr Anson's, and this evening Gertrude is to go to Almacks with lady Mar Hume, but as far as me, having neither a ticket for Almack's nor an invitation to Mr Anson's concert I am spending my time pleasantly writing to you (2)

(Almacks was the location of J C Bach's concerts.)

18th April 1769 James Harris to James Harris Jnr:

Lord Spencer's and Mr Anson's houses by Stuart, Lord Shelburne's by Adams are models of Grecian taste, not unworthy of the age of Pericles

This concert was possibly the first of a series of events which show Thomas as patron of the foremost musicians of the day, and the latest music in the new classical style.

The Music Room at 15 St James Square still survives.

The leading musician at St James Square, and also at Shugborough, was violinist and composer, Antonin Kammel (1730-1784).

Kammel had been a student of philosophy in Prague, and then went to Padua to be a pupil of Tartini. He came to London in 1765 as violinist and as a timber merchant for Count Waldstein. He appeared as soloist in Bach and Abel's London concerts and many festivals. He wrote purely instrumental music in the early classical style, including several sets of string quartets (published c1770, 1774, 1775) when the form was just being developed by Haydn. One of his Op. 4 quartets was the first string quartet known to have been performed in public in London in 1769.

Kammel's 6 duets for two violins op. 5 (published sometime between 1768 and 1770) are dedicated to Thomas Anson Esq. (13)

Composer and diarist John Marsh probably heard these duos in 1769:

"There was also a Mr Woodington who was staying there who play'd a capital fiddle for an amateur who supported Mr Lethin & with whom he also played a duet of Kammell's."

A few years Marsh played Kammel duets with a Colonel Stoppard. He was “much pleased” with them. Later he wrote a duet in imitation of Kammel. In 1776 Marsh was disappointed by Kammel’s performance at the Salisbury Festival of St Cecilia “he by no means as a professor seems to rank above mediocrity” – though this was probably due to Kammels’ serious illness. Marsh clearly knew Kammel later as he visited a friend who staying at Kammel’s London house in 1779.

Kammel performed in London and led orchestras at provincial music festivals, including Salisbury where the festival was run by philosopher James Harris. Kammel also worked at country houses. He was at Shugborough in April 1772.

The Harris correspondence includes references to at least five different concerts, the first is the breakfast and concert for Mrs Montagu in April 1769, the others mentioned were in March and April 1772 and two in March 1773 only a few weeks before the 78 year old Thomas Anson died.

27th March 1772 Elizabeth Harris to James Harris Jnr:

Yesterday morning we were all at that most elegant house of Mr Anson’s to a breakfast and concert after, ever thing suiteed the elegance of the house. When breakfast was ended the room were open for people to walk about and admire – after that the concert, for which he had collected the best hands in town – Madame Sirman, Grasi, Fischer, Crosdale, Ponto, Kamell etc. Got home in time enough to snap a short dinner before the opera.(12)

These names are indeed the leading musicians of the moment – and note the “etc”.

Maddelena Lombardini Sirman was a Venetian violinist and composer who had recently arrived in London. Madame Grassi was one of the leading singers, later married to Johann Christian Bach. In April 1772 she appeared in Bach’s “Endimione” at the King’s Theatre.

This serenata featured arias that Madame Grassi could have performed at Thomas’s concert. It also included a showpiece aria for tenor with solo oboe and horn. Fischer and Punto were the star oboist and horn player in London it is quite possible that this aria would have been performed at Thomas’s concert if there had been a tenor available among the “etc”.

Assuming there was at least a full quartet of strings there might have been quartets by Sirmen and Kammel as well. Sirmen’s quartets are very expressive. She also published violin concertos in 1772.

On **14th April 1772** Elizabeth writes “To morrow no music; Thursday again at Mr Ansons” Curiously James Boswell’s correspondence reveals that Boswell met Thomas Anson on this same day at Mrs Montagu’s. (4)

On **April 25th 1772** Sir William Bagot had written a poem looking forward to party at Shugborough which implies that Kammel was performing there too. Thomas and his music were moving back to Shugborough for the Spring after the Winter season.

'Bring Attic Stuart, Indian Orme,

*Kammell unruffled by a storm
Shall tune his softest strain;
And my Louisa will rejoice
To notes like his to tune her voice
With health restored again.'*

On **5th March 1773** James Harris's daughter writes to her brother (original in French):

"We were at a breakfast and a concert this morning at Mr Anson's. Everything bespeaks good taste; the house is charming and exquisitely appointed, the music is by the best hands in England: in fact it was a total delight."

On the **23rd March 1773** Elizabeth Harris writes:

"Friday at a breakfast and concert at Mr Anson's at which all the fine world were assembled and all elegant to a degree."

It seems likely that Anton Kammell was responsible for all these concerts, and that there was a series between 1769 and 1773, and that the music continued at Shugborough in the Summer. The music making was of the highest possible standard, with the best and most expensive musicians, and the music itself would have been largely newly composed in the new classical style. There was very little interest in old music, apart from the lasting enthusiasm for Handel.

Music must be considered one of the key aspects of Thomas Anson's life. As well as his own concerts there were J C Bach's concerts at Almacks and various opera companies. It is very likely that he would have used his wealth to support other music and it may be that further research will discover evidence for this.

After his death Elizabeth Harris wrote of his "elegant entertainments".

In June 1773 Kammell wrote to his Bohemian patron Count Waldstein:

'My dear good old friend Mr Anson, the brother of the Admiral who defeated so much the Spaniards, died two months ago. I do not like to lose good friends, his death contributed a lot towards my illness, in his testament he left me 50 gineas yearly for the time of my life, my friend George Pitt, when he saw me so distressed after Anson's death, he also gave me by the law 50 gineas yearly, now I have 100 gineas yearly to spend as I wish..' (13)

What was probably the first complete public performance of Kammell's duets op. 5 took place at Stafford Library on September 8th 2007.

JAMES HARRIS

James Harris, whose letters and journals are a source of information about Thomas's musical activities, is a little known but important figure in the Greek Revival. Harris is the philosophical

parallel to Stuart's architecture. He devoted his life to reviving interest in Greek philosophy by publishing his own works, which have important and original ideas of their own, heavily annotated by references to classical writers.

Both Harris's "Three Treatises" and "Hermes" have frontispieces by James "Athenian" Stuart. "Three Treatises" (on Art, Music and Painting, and Happiness) in particular is, with its elaborate notes, a handbook to the philosophical ideas that match the artistic ideas of the Greek revival.

It mixes Aristotle, Stoicism (Harris assisted Elizabeth Carter in her translation of Stoic texts) and Plato.

The revival of Platonism helped fuel the romantic spirit later in the 18th century and Harris is in direct line with Thomas Taylor and Coleridge through his own support of Floyer Sydenham, a penniless scholar who began translating Plato and whose work was completed by Thomas Taylor at the end of the century.

Harris's works were in the library at Shugborough and his "Philological Inquiries" includes Thomas's story of the Greek fleet at Tenedos.

Harris also had an indirect family connection with Thomas through the Earl of Hardwicke. Harris had a step daughter who was the Earl's niece. Admiral Anson was married to the Earl's daughter. Thomas Anson and James Harris, with Thomas's cousin Thomas Parker, were joint trustees in parts of Lord Hardwicke's will.

(1) (<http://secondat.blogspot.com/2006/04/diary-of-lady-shelburne-11th-post.html>)

(2) Rosemary Dunhill and Donald Burrowes: Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The papers of James Harris 1732-1780, OUP 2002

(3) Mikhaila Freemanova and Eva Mikanova: 'My honourable Lord and Father' ... 18th century English musical life through Bohemian eyes, Early Music, May 2003

(4)

<http://books.google.com/books?id=D0cP6mm6VZcC&pg=PA177&lpg=PA177&dq=james+boswell+%22thomas+anson%22&source=web&ots=NNttUya-mk&sig=0zKNKKC5zyMN4B3blW8EgtsxYNc>