



Daines Barrington: a Georgian Dilettante

Abridged text of an article by **Master Simon Brown**, past Master of the Garden, about the transformation of the ‘Picturesque’ Great Garden under the direction of Baines Barrington, when the second embankment was built in the 18th Century.

The Enlightenment during the 18th Century produced numerous books, essays, inventions, scientific discoveries, laws, wars and revolutions. It was an intellectual movement that advocated reason as a means to obtain objective truth about the whole of reality. In his essay *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784), philosopher Immanuel Kant summed up the era’s motto: “*Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!*” Intellectually minded amateurs, known as *virtuosi* or *dilettante*, followed this rubric by feverishly investigating everything in order to back up their myriad ideas for earnest discussion with their peers in clubs and societies. Daines Barrington was such a man. He was an important figure in Georgian society and in the natural world but his enduring legacy is far greater: the ‘Picturesque’ Great Garden of the Inner Temple.

The Honourable Daines Barrington (1727-1800) had a classical education at Harrow School and matriculated at the Queen’s College, Oxford in 1745. He left immediately, without studying or graduating, to be admitted, like his father, to the Inner Temple and was called on 9 February 1750. He practised only briefly on the Oxford Circuit and was junior counsel for the prosecution in the infamous patricide case of Mary Blandy: she poisoned her father with arsenic at the behest of her disapproved lover.

His eldest brother, William, was a powerful government minister for 25 continuous years from 1746 to 1782. His patronage provided his younger brother with a number of offices. In 1785, Barrington resigned all except the valuable sinecure, Commissary General of Stores in Gibraltar which paid him over £507 10s a year until his death. It was not a distinguished judicial career; a lack of ambition and his

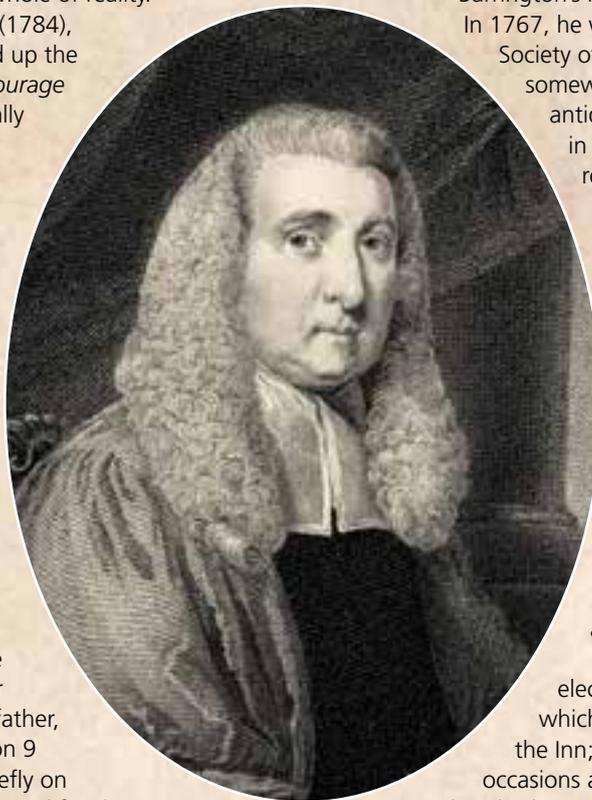
interest in a wide variety of other things prevented his advancement in the law. Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham viewed Barrington as an indifferent judge; a quiet good sort of a man – not proud but liberal.

Barrington’s reputation lies outside the law.

In 1767, he was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He achieved a somewhat notorious reputation as an antiquarian. He was over credulous in his enthusiastic use of anecdotal research spread too thinly over too wide a range of subjects: Welsh castles, archery, gardening, card-playing, Caesar’s invasion of Britain, and the history of the Cornish language. Both Horace Walpole and Thomas James Mathias ridiculed his papers and he was reported by Baron Mendip to have accepted a 17th Century watch as having belonged to Robert the Bruce. Nevertheless, he served as a Vice President of the Society and exhibited numerous curious items at its meetings.

In 1767, Barrington was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, which had a close association with the Inn; it used to dine in the Hall on occasions and make use of its kitchens. The door had opened into a network of wealthy active amateur patrons, *virtuosi* or *dilettantes*, eager to explore all areas of the natural world on the planet.

The Inner Temple was his home. A bachelor, he was called to the Bench in January 1777 and purchased a life interest for £400 in chambers in 6 King’s Bench Walk. Barrington was keen to devote his life to the Inn; the Calendar shows that he often gave books and manuscripts to the library and acted in a quasi role of one of two Masters of the Estate viewing Chambers as they became vacant and available for sale.



Barrington's main interest was the Great Garden of the Inn. The bird's eye view of the Temple in 1720 depicts the early Georgian formal garden still in the Dutch manner brought over by William and Mary. Created in 1703, it had four main walks down to the river besides three grassed areas, each with paths and three sets of topiarised circles within them. At the bottom, the embankment cut in from the east and then out again to Temple Stairs where the boats to take lawyers to work in Westminster Hall would be plying their trade. The exquisite Gray's Inn Amity Great Gate was added in 1730. By Barrington's time, increasing colonial trade and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution led to the building of a third bridge over the Thames at Blackfriars. Construction was completed in 1771, with the Inn eventually paying the City £1,150 in 1780 towards the embankment and for the additional land which was then handed over to

Barrington's appointment coincided with a national mania for botany and gardening. London was its capital fostered by the King, Sir Joseph Banks, Erasmus Darwin, Kew, the Royal Society and ubiquitous nurseries in and around the City providing the plants brought back from the colonies as specimens or seeds in numerous daring expeditions. The number of nurseries in and around the City increased from 15 to 200 by the end of the century, with many of the trees and plants coming from expeditions.

At the time of his appointment, Barrington read a letter to the Society of Antiquaries 'On the progress of Gardening', published in *Archaeologica* in 1785: "As the progress in architecture from the earliest and rudest times hath frequently been the subject of dissertation, perhaps it may not be uninteresting to trace the gradual improvements in both fruit and pleasure gardens". The antiquarian traced

"The true test of perfection in a modern garden is that a landscape painter would choose it for composition."

the Inn. The size of the Great Garden was almost doubled, with the boundary just short of the mound that now accommodates the tube. In 1775, the employed surveyor, Mr Gorham had been instructed by the Benchers to draw up an estimate for the landscaping of the garden and, in 1782, Masters Annesley and Barrington were appointed as its Superintendents with authority to give orders to the gardener, Mr Allen. The gardener was paid an extra £5 a year and his wife was engaged to clean the new summer houses at each end of the walk by the river and the garden seats. A watering machine costing £30 was procured.

the history of gardening from classical times. He demanded greater relationship between literature, painting and gardening: "the true test of perfection in a modern garden is that a landscape painter would choose it for composition. Kent has been succeeded by Brown who hath undoubtedly great merit in laying out pleasure grounds".

William Kent (1685-1748) "was a painter, an architect, and the father of modern gardening. In the first character he was below mediocrity; in the second, he was a restorer of the science; in the last, an original, and the inventor of an art that realises painting and improves nature. He leaped the fence,



View of the Temple as it appeared in 1671

and saw that all nature was a garden" (Horace Walpole). His style was known as the 'Picturesque'.

Edmund Burke's treatise, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas for the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), had moved the landscape to the fore in philosophy and art. For landscape artists, the sublime was essentially the evocation of awe and terror, the beautiful meant soft and aesthetically pleasing, while the 'picturesque' – literally 'in the manner of a picture' – was defined as irregular, ragged and asymmetrical.

The garden was transformed during Barrington's 18-year tenure as Superintendent. In 1800, Samuel Ireland (1744-1800), author and engraver, published *Picturesque views with an historical account of the Inns of Court*. He eulogises about the outward unhindered views: the fine prospect of uninhibited view over the Thames to the Surrey hills, all that is upon it, the river, its bridges of Blackfriars and Westminster – "two of the finest bridges in the world" – and the "richest specimens" of Gothic architecture of Westminster and Lambeth to the west and the "paragon of modern edifices" of St Paul's to the east. He waxes lyrically about "the remaining parts of the picture beautified by an extensive range of towers and spires of churches that show at once the immense size and consequence of this great city, the envy and emporium of the world". From the new embankment, you can sense the "genius of the place"; its power, and of those who adorn it, between church and state whilst overlooking the unceasing river – the major thoroughfare of London.

The transformation led to the garden being opened to the public during Barrington's time. At a meeting of Members of the Society at Devil Tavern on 15 June 1784, they demanded keys to the garden. The Sub-Treasurer responded "that the Treasurer and Masters are extremely desirous that every member may enjoy the use of the garden ... and have ordered that the gardener shall at all seasonable times admit every member at the gate next to Harcourt's Buildings or at the great gate next the hall at the usual times attending there". In May 1789, an order was made that the garden should be open to strangers, in summer on the week days from 10.00 am to noon and from 3.00 pm to dusk in the evenings, and on Sundays from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm in the afternoon and from 6.00 pm to dusk in the evenings, and no admittance during divine service. The onset of war with France in 1798, led members and inhabitants to enroll themselves by the name of the Temple Association and they were given the use of the garden at all times convenient for their military exercises. This indulgence was later given to the Fleet Street Association who had joined the Guildhall Volunteer Association in 1799.

Barrington's dedication to his beloved Inn was recognised by his fellow Benchers; he was elected Treasurer in 1785. However, his fine reputation was besmirched by Charles Lamb (1775-1834), the essayist who was born in Crown Office Row. His Essay, *The Old Benchers of Inner Temple* caricatured the Benchers pacing around the garden undertaking their "walking exercise" whilst in deep conversation. He described them as dressed in long black coats "pacing the terrace with

the roguish eye"; Thomas Coventry, "of the elephantine step, the scarecrow of inferiors, the browbeater of equals, who made a solitude of children wherever he came, who took snuff by palmfuls"; Peter Pierson "perambulating the terrace with hands folded behind him"; and finally Daines Barrington as "a burly, square man".

This is a bygone age and Barrington lies in the vault in the Temple church. Gardens are ephemeral but Barrington's still exists behind the Victorian embankment between it and the river. If you want to sense this era, picture yourself in the garden on a quiet early sunny morning in mid April and stand in the dark green shadows of the three giant plane trees near the pool and look to the left and to your right. Imagine a group of figures in elegant conversation by the Thames, another couple huddled together in the summer house at the end of the walk, a gardener scything the lawn, and a burly figure dressed in a long black coat pacing towards you along the 18th Century embankment of the river with a record book in hand, looking for a glimpse of the first swooping swallow of the season. Then put your hand on the large healthy tree besides you; it was planted by Barrington's gardener, Mr Allen.

You are touching history.

Master Brown

