The library of Thomas Coke and the creation of

an interior landscape at Holkham Hall

"Standing with one's back to the north-west Library window one can look, if all the intervening doors are open, across the long enfilade of twelve apartments to the east window of the Chapel at the far extremity of the house, three hundred and forty-four feet away. So exact is the alignment and so mathematically precise the joinery of the silky mahogany doors that, were they all to be shut and the locks of the keyholes opened, we could, it is authoritatively stated, see daylight from end to end".[1] James Lees Milne's poetic description of the south enfilade at Holkham Hall shows how, on a large and exaggerated scale, the two spaces most obviously set apart for private withdrawal and contemplation frame the public arenas of the drawing rooms and the saloon and how those contemplative spaces balance each other (fig. 1).

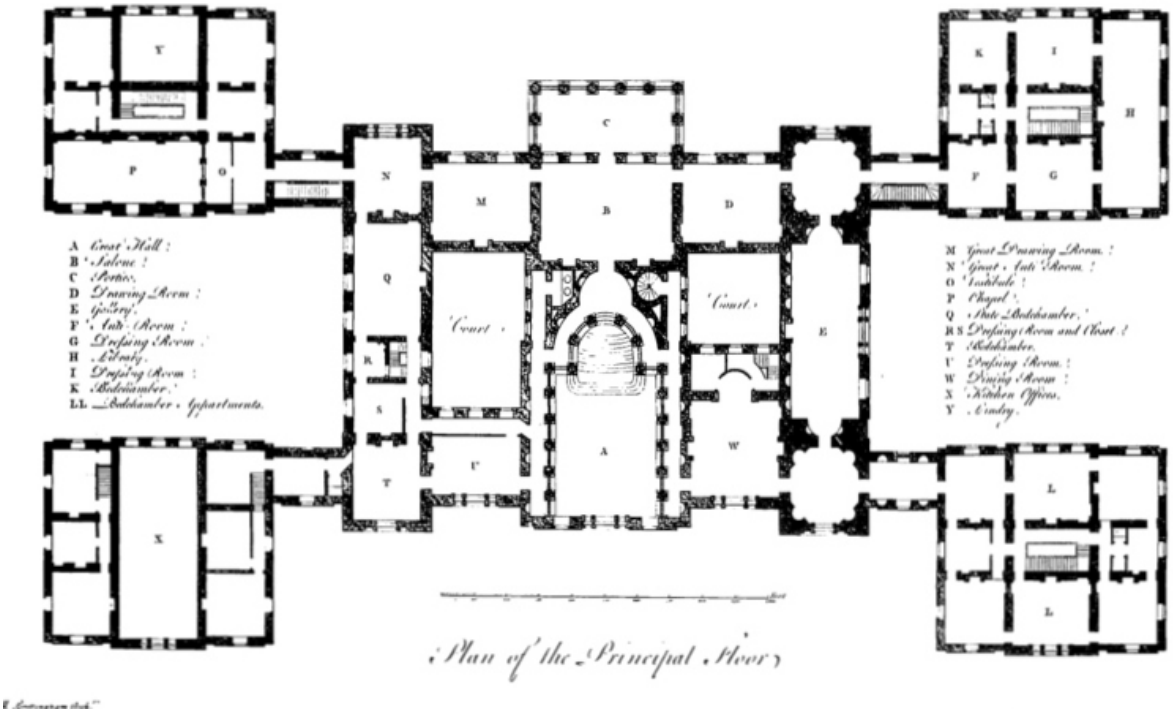

Fig 1. Holkham Hall, Plan. The Landscape Room is referred to here as the Great Ante Room ("N")

[1] J. Lees Milne, *Earls of Creation,* London, 1962, p260

This balance between Library and Chapel was not unusual.[2] Colen Campbell's second design for Wanstead sets them at opposite ends of the Principal Floor (fig. 2). The 1717 *Vitruvius Britannicus* plan of Lowther Hall shows the Chapel and Library facing each other across a grand court (fig. 3) and a similar arrangement existed at Stoke Park in Northamptonshire where they occupied Inigo Jones's pavilions either side of the terrace to the front of the house (fig. 4).

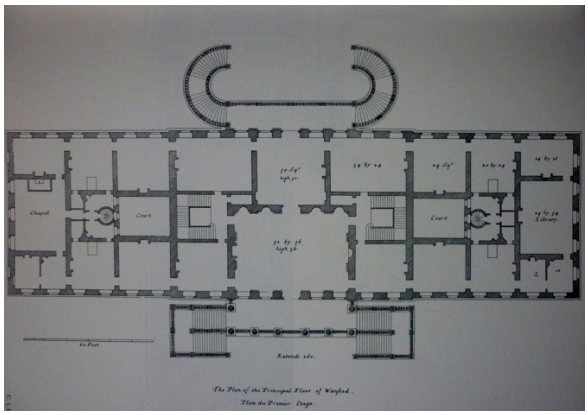

Fig. 2. Wanstead House, Plan. Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus,* Vol. I, Pl. 23,

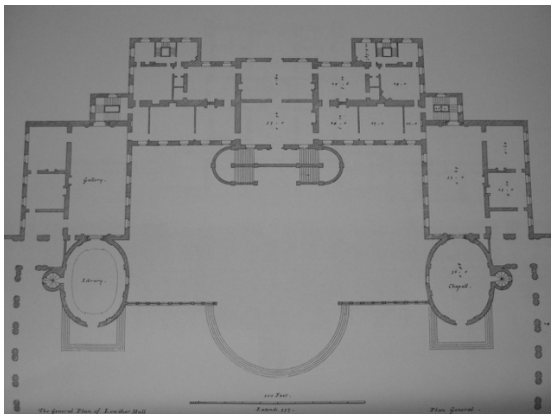

Fig. 3. Lowther Hall, Plan, *Vitruvius Britannicus* Vol. II Pl.78, 1717

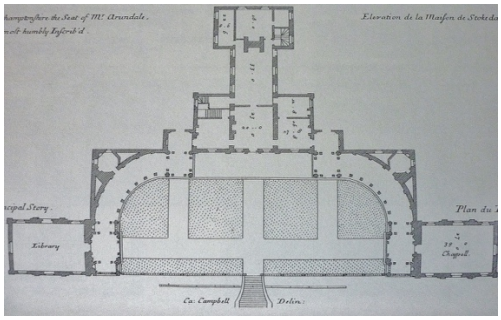

Fig. 4. Stoke Park by Inigo Jones. Plan of the principal storey. Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus,* Vol. III, Pl. 9, 1725

[2] For a discussion of the positioning of the library in the country house see S. Jervis,"The English Country House Library" in N. Barker, *Treasures from the Libraries of National Trust Country Houses,* New York, 1999, p17-19

At Holkham, however, not only can one see the Chapel from the Library (and vice versa), but it is also possible to move from one to the other without leaving the house and without losing sight of either room. This essay will argue for the importance of this axis of retirement and contemplation and that it can best be understood by an analysis of the library and Thomas Coke's[3] book collection (both at Holkham and in London). It will argue that pivotal to an understanding of this idea of an interior space of repose and contemplation operating between the Chapel and Library is the Landscape Room which occupies the same physical axis, sits immediately next to the Chapel and provides an intellectual and cultural link with an important element of Coke's book and manuscript collection. I will start with a discussion and analysis of the Latin manuscripts collected by Coke on his Grand Tour, then consider how these reflected wider intellectual discourses derived from the literature of rusticity in that collection and how these discourses found expression in the landscape paintings gathered by Coke for the Landscape Room. It will argue that this intellectual progression mirrors the physical progression from the library through the state rooms and the Landscape Room to the Chapel. It will also argue that Coke's serious and erudite approach to collecting manifested in the landscape paintings has its origins in his growing library and must be read in the light of his book and manuscript collection. The library is, therefore, the foundation on which Coke created this place of retirement, withdrawal and interiority.

In his dedication to Thomas Coke of his 1742 translation of Xenophon's *Anabasis,* Edward Spelman writes of Coke's "superior Knowledge in ancient Literature, your Acquaintance with the most celebrated Authors, your sagacity in discovering, and Judgement in admiring their Beauties".[4] Coke's education would have been thoroughly grounded in classical literature and he retained this learning throughout his life. On his Grand Tour between 1712 and 1718 Coke began the process of compiling a large and important library of classical books and manuscripts. Four hundred manuscripts were collected during the Tour and although there were occasions when they were bought

[3] Although Coke was granted the title of Lord Lovel in 1728 and was then elevated to the Earldom of Leicester in 1744, for the sake of clarity, he will be referred to throughout this essay as Thomas Coke.
[4] Quoted in D.P Mortlock, *Holkham Library: A history and description,* Roxburghe Club, 2006, pp74-5

by the chest-full (such as at Padua in 1717 where Coke purchased thirty manuscripts from the Canons Regular of San Giovanni in Verdara during a two day visit[5]), Coke, guided by his tutor Thomas Hobart, himself a bibliophile and collector, appears to have adopted an organised programme of buying with the clear intention of creating what D.P.Mortlock describes as "a scholar's, as opposed to a collector's library".[6] A letter to his grandfather, Sir John Newton, shows the range of Coke's collecting, his personal engagement with, and discrimination in, the process of buying and the extent of his bibliophilic ambitions: "I have bought several of the most valuable authors that have writ in Italian or about the Country...if I missed the occasion of buying books, I should not be able to find severall of the best of them, and it is impossible to buy them to my mind, unless I myself am present, and certainly one of the greatest ornaments to a gentleman or his family is a fine library".[7]

Coke's Grand Tour manuscript purchases were extensive and wide-ranging in their subject matter but the greatest part of the collection reflects his education and interest in the ancient and, in particular, Latin authors. There was special depth in authors from the late Republic and early Empire. Amongst six manuscripts covering the whole of Ovid's poetry was a 1497 manuscript of the M*etamorphoses* (MS324) bought in Lyons (fig. 5).

Fig. 5.
MS, 324. Minos besieges Megara from *Metamorphosis VIII,* Ovid.
Vellum, 1497, Netherlandish Artist.
Holkham Hall

[5] *A handlist of manuscripts in the library of the Earl of Leicester,* OUP, 1932, p.ix
[6] Mortlock, op.cit. p38.
[7] Quoted in S. West, *The Development of Libraries in Norfolk Country Houses, 1660-1830* PhD. UEA, 2000, p285

Of greater significance in the context of early eighteenth-century moral and intellectual discourse was the collection of Horace and Virgil both of whom were regarded as imparting practical and ethical lessons through their poetry. Virgil's significance in relation to the collection of landscape painting will be considered later. Horace was seen as a moral exemplar, satirising the excesses of urban life in Rome and praising the virtue to be derived from the simple pleasures of country living.[8] These two poets account for fifteen manuscripts bought on the Grand Tour. Manuscripts relating to public and political life were also purchased, notably the speeches of Cicero. Of those shown in the Handlist of Manuscripts, sixteen collections of Cicero's speeches and letters were bought in Italy. The largest single category of Latin literature from the first centuries BC and AD was that of history, reflected in works by Caesar, Sallust and Tacitus and, most importantly for Coke, Livy. The cultural, moral and intellectual significance of history as a discipline in the eighteenth century will be considered further below, but before analysing the meanings and purposes of Coke's collection it is necessary to consider the nature and extent of his relationship to the work of Livy.

Amongst Coke's first manuscript purchases were the early books of Livy's *Histories* bought for ten pounds on 1st January 1714[9] and the first large purchase, from the library of the Discalced Augustinians at Lyon in 1715, contained at least six fourteenth and fifteenth century Livy manuscripts with illuminated initials and miniatures (figs. 6 and 7).

[8] Horace was also regarded, by the early eighteenth century as a stylistic exemplar. His pure and elegant style was praised by Dryden as demonstrating "continence". See R.M Ogilvie, *Latin and Greek: a history of the influence of the Classics on English Life from 1600 to 1918,* London, 1964, p56. This aesthetic quality was also, simultaneously, a moral one as can be seen in the consideration below of the history paintings commissioned by coke in Rome.
[9] Extract from Edward Jarrett's account book noted in the Brinsley Ford Archive (RBF/1/394), Paul Mellon Centre.

Fig. 6.
MS. 345. Livy Ab Urba Condita, Prologue.
Vellum. 15th Century, written or illuminated by Antonius Crivellus, probably at Milan
Holkham Hall

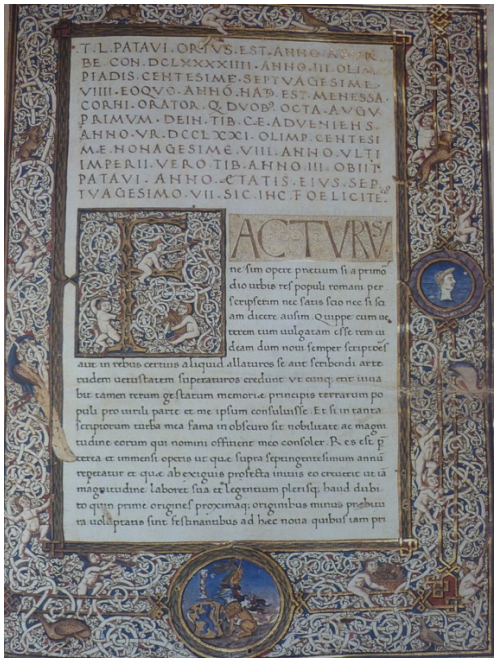

Fig. 7.
MS. 346. Livy *Ab Urba Condita*, Prologue.
Vellum. Late 15th Century, written by Johannes Rainaldus Mennius Surrentius. Illuminated by Nardo Rabicano.
Holkham Hall

Fourteen such manuscripts remain in the library at Holkham and Mortlock has suggested that forty printed editions of Livy were bought by Coke on his Tour. Coke's engagement with Livy was, however, deeper than simply buying books and manuscripts. For one of these manuscripts (MS. 344, thought to have belonged to Alfonso I, King of Naples) Coke commissioned, and William Kent paid sixty crowns to, Giuseppe Chiari to produce a frontispiece showing portraits of Livy and the late King (fig. 8).[10]

Fig. 8
Giuseppe Chiari. Portraits of Livy and Alphonso I added to 14th Century edition of Livy MS344 Holkham.
107mm diameter.

[10] Ibid.

While in Florence in April 1717, payments were made to Doctors Biscioni and Salvini "for collating the manuscripts of Titus Livius".[11] Later, with the manuscripts in his library at Thanet House in London, Coke lent thirteen of them "and four early printed editions of Livy to the learned Drakenborch, the best editor of that author"[12] who was preparing his seven volume edition of Livy for publication in Amsterdam and Leiden in 1738. Coke's interest in Livy was such that William Roscoe who was employed by Thomas William Coke in the cataloguing of the library at Holkham between 1815 and 1824, felt "that there is reason to believe that he (Coke) had at one time intended himself to give an edition of that author".[13] If Mortlock's argument that Coke's "genuine interest and his intellectual ability distance him from most of his contemporaries"[14] is accepted, then, given the profound attentiveness to Livian scholarship displayed by Coke, Roscoe's belief may have been well founded.

Thomas Coke's interest in Livy and other Roman writers of the Augustan age did not exist in a vacuum. As R.M.Ogilvie has shown, classical education among the elite in the early eighteenth century was not only of a high standard but adopted a programme which was directed "towards the practical and moral".[15] Coke's formal education (which was carried on at home) was curtailed (he left for the Continent when he was fifteen) but at this age, a schoolboy would be reading the whole of Horace's poetry, memorising *The Aeneid* and studying closely those classical works which provide practical knowledge in poetic form, such as Hesiod *Works and Days* and Virgil's *Georgics* which both concern agriculture. The prose works with which familiarity was expected emphasised the role of the intellectual elite in public life (such as Cicero's Speeches) and the importance of political and military history and here, Livy was the guide.[16]

The educational and intellectual significance of Livy in the early eighteenth century was threefold. First, Livy is telling the story of the founding of Rome, its collapse into

[11] Ibid.
[12] W. Roscoe "Some accounts of the Manuscript Library at Holkham in Norfolk, belonging to T.W.Coke Esq" in *Transcation of the Royal Society of Literature*, vol. ii, part ii, 1834, p 366
[13] Ibid, p367
[14] Mortlock, op.cit. p48
[15] R.M.Ogilvie, op. cit. p37.
[16] Ibid.

tyranny under the rule of the Kings and the city's subsequent moral regeneration with the rise of the Republic. For Livy the Roman Republic was a repository of hard won political and ethical values to be defended with constant vigilance. The resonance of this simple narrative with the early Hanoverian elite was obvious. As Philip Ayres argues, "by analogy with the defence of the Republic…the English oligarchy could image itself as the classically spirited guarantor of the liberties it had won for all in its fight against Stuart absolutism".[17] Secondly, and connected with this narrative, Livy's history conveyed a moral manifesto. The ideal political society reflected a series of strong ethical principles to be found in the virtuous life of Republican Rome. The *History of Rome (ab urba condita)* was written during the Principate of Augustus after the collapse of the Republic into Civil War and Livy is writing with the clear message that for Rome to be restored to glory, the earlier virtues of material simplicity, continence, moral seriousness and restraint needed to be adopted. A similar programme had been at work in England since 1688 with the overthrow of James II and a reaction against the licentiousness and luxury of Charles II's Court. In using the model of Augustan Rome, the creators of what Ayres describes as an "oligarchy of virtue" in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries looked to those figures from the Republic, "frugal farmers"[18] such as Cato and Cincinnatus, who had been, in their turn, Livy's moral exemplars. The third area of Livian influence is in the study of history as a discipline. As Susie West says, history "implicitly set bounds for proper conduct in the present through an ordered representation of the past".[19] That ordered representation was reflected in the collections of works of history in the libraries of eighteenth-century country houses that, according to West, "need to be viewed as texts that were understood to comment on the nature of the present, and that demanded an active role from the reader".[20]

The early eighteenth century therefore saw the growth of a culture of participatory history, a sense of a form of moral and poetic history which conveyed messages beyond the mere truth of the narrative. Following the example of Livy, it saw the past and its telling as an ethical undertaking through which a person's character and virtue could be shaped. It invited, as we shall now see, a literal engagement with stories and

[17] P. Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth Century England,* Cambridge, 1997, p3
[18] Ibid, p25
[19] S.West, op.cit., p468
[20] ibid. p469

characters and, in Coke's case, an imagining of oneself as an actor in the histories he collected on his Grand Tour.

At the Accademia di S. Luca in Rome between 1704 and 1711, the annual competition for Academicians set as its subject matter stories from the first ten books of Livy. It can therefore be assumed that, by the time Coke arrived in Rome in 1714, he did not want for images taken from Livian history. He commissioned six history paintings while in Rome, five of them representing moments from the *History of Rome*, the sixth from Virgil's *Aeneid.* In four of them, Coke himself was included as a character. In Sebastiano Conca's *Aeneas in the Elysian Fields* (fig. 9), Coke is shown as Orpheus who, through music, moves nature to emotion. The complex iconography of this image suggests a number of readings[21] but the significance for the argument proposed here is that Coke had himself pictured in an episode from a classical epic which he would have known intimately from his education at home and, importantly, from manuscripts which he was buying at this time.

Fig. 9. Sebastiano Conca *Aeneas in the Elysian Fields*
Oil on canvas

[21] Leo Schmidt reads this image as a foreshadowing of Coke's creation of the Hall and Park at Holkham while Louisa Bulman in "Moral Education on the Grand Tour: Thomas Coke and his contemporaries in Rome and Florence", *Apollo,* CLVII, 493, March 2003, pp27-34 sees the subject matter of Aeneas meeting his dead father and foreseeing his descendants as a "pictorial justification of his (Coke's) extensive Grand Tour".p.30

The commissions of episodes from Livy are representations of public, political life. One, by Andrea Procaccini (now lost) shows Numa Pompilius giving the laws to Rome (taken from Livy's first book). Giuseppi Chiari's *The Continence of Scipio* (also lost but surviving in a drawing attributed to his pupil William Kent) depicts the story from Book XXVI of the *History of Rome,* when Allucius's fiancée is returned to him by Scipio who forbore from seducing her on learning that she was engaged. Coke is shown as Allucius who, in admiration for Scipio's virtue, declares his loyalty to the Roman. Ayres sees this picture as an example of Coke "pre-incarnating himself into the antique past".[22] More than this, though, we can see Coke, through Chiari, celebrating those qualities of restraint, continence and reserve which were regarded by the intellectual elite of Augustan Rome, such as Livy, as the ethical ideals of the Republic to be imitated in pursuit of a moral regeneration.

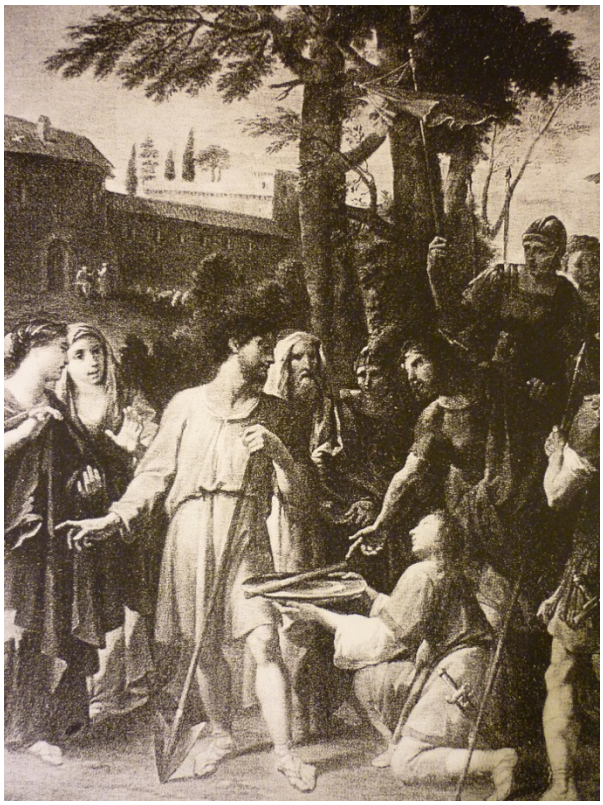

Fig. 10. Luigi Garzi (1638-1721)
Detail of Cincinnatus at the Plough c 1717
Oil on Canvas, 45x68 cm.
Holkham Hall

The commission which is informed most fully by the eighteenth-century borrowing of Republican virtue as mediated by Augustan literature is Luigi Garzi's *Cincinnatus at the Plough* (from Livy's *History*, Book III). Coke is shown as the messenger delivering to Cincinnatus the request from the senate that he leave his small farm and return to Rome to repel the Sabines who had laid siege to the army of Minucius (fig. 10). Cincinnatus's virtues as presented by Livy and recalled by Garzi, are twofold. First, he conforms to the Republican ideal of the simple, diligent farmer who has withdrawn from the world of luxury and gain to dig and plough his land and in

[22] Ayres, op. cit. p142

order to feed his family. His virtues derive, not from wealth, but from his humble, frugal life. His labour on the farm "is seen as purifying him of the contamination of the city".[23] Secondly, he reserves his greatest loyalty for the *res publica*, abandoning his home and farm to defend the city against its aggressors. In allowing himself to be placed at the centre of this painting, Coke is creating a classical self-image with the moral qualities that that implies. But in using the story of Cincinnatus, a further layer of semiotic significance is added for this is, as noted, an allegory of rustic virtue.[24] Rome, it is implied, will be saved and regenerated by those qualities located, like Cincinnatus, in the land. This is, therefore, a parable of the ethical supremacy of country life, a supremacy which Coke is, explicitly absorbing and endorsing.

The association of the landscape with moral regeneration is a central trope of the literature of Augustan Rome which, as we have seen, formed a significant part of Coke's Grand Tour manuscript collection. It is, however, a complex idea with several interwoven strands all of which are represented, not just in Coke's library but also in his other collections at Holkham. In considering this theme and how it is expressed particularly in the printed material and the landscape paintings, we can discern a pattern and a programme which links Coke, intellectually and morally, to the rural.[25]

The story of Cincinnatus is, as we have seen, an encomium to the frugal farmer and his ethics of *diligentia* and *pietas.* The most celebrated poetic treatment of this idea in first-century Rome is Virgil's *Georgics.* Six of the Virgil manuscripts collected by Coke included the *Georgics* (MSS 303-307 and 310) and he also purchased a fifteenth century copy of Servius's fourth-century commentary on Virgil (MS 312).[26] These poems celebrating the life and work of the farmer, under the guise of a handbook of agricultural instruction, resonated strongly with writers in the early eighteenth century. Dryden's 1697 translation was given an introductory essay by Joseph Addison but the most influential use of the *Georgics* was James Thomson's *The Seasons* (first

[23] J.Ackerman *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses,* London, p12
[24] R.M.Ogilvie, in *A Commentary on Livy Books 1-5,* Oxford, 1965, makes it clear that the tradition of Cincinnatus being called from his plough is pure legend. This use of mythic history creates an intellectual space which allows for "the emphasis which Livy wishes to place on the moral character of Cincinnatus" (p441). Coke's commissions of history paintings based on stories from Livy, particularly those in which he features, all demonstrate an overriding concern with "moral character".
[25] Although this essay is focusing on a section of the manuscript and painting collections, these rustic themes can be discerned also in the sculpture collection. See E. Angelicoussis, *The Holkham Sculptures,* Hunstanton, 1999, pp. 12-14
[26] *A handlist of manuscripts in the library of the Earl of Leicester,*p 25 and 26.

published between 1726 and 1730), "both a native georgic and an apology for the social values and virtues of Roman civilization, both Republican and Imperial".[27] It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyse in detail Virgil's poem, its translations and imitators but it is important to note that, in collecting manuscript copies of the *Georgics,* Coke was, from a young age, demonstrating his engagement with significant elements of the intellectual current of the time which, in turn, engaged with those of classical Rome: the beginnings of a serious and scientific interest in agriculture and a poetic conception of the moral and civic virtue of the farmer derived from the land.

The intellectual and artistic manifestation of Coke's sense of the qualities inherent in country life are brought more sharply into focus when we consider that his collection of Grand Tour manuscripts was kept in his London home, Thanet House. In part this was, no doubt, for practical reasons while Holkham Hall was being built but even when the library was finished in 1741 (the first room to be completed), the manuscripts remained in London. If the country was the repository of moral virtue, the town was its antithesis, a place of luxury, indulgence, frivolity and excess. This literary and artistic conceit was, again, borrowed in the eighteenth century from first-century Rome. So familiar an idea was it in Augustan literature that it has been described as "a tired rhetorical cliché"[28] but it is one with which Coke would have been familiar from his manuscript collection. In Naples, he bought a fifteenth-century manuscript of Pliny the Younger's letters (MS. 396) from the collection of Giuseppe Valletta among which were Pliny's descriptions of the restful antidote to daily business in Rome offered by his villas at Laurentium and Tusci. In the same purchase were Juvenal's *Satires*, those mordant critiques of urban life. The writer who addressed most extensively the urban-rustic divide was Horace, whose fullest treatment of the idea, *Book II, Satire VI,* telling the story of the Town Mouse and the Country Mouse, was recreated in an imitation by Pope and Swift in 1738 thus demonstrating its central position in the early Georgian cultural imagination. Three of Coke's manuscript purchases of Horace included the *Satires* and so it is impossible not to see Coke as a participant in the debate, inherited from Augustan Rome, distinguishing rustic virtue from urban vice. Viewed from the city where Coke would have read his manuscripts, Horatian satire forced him to ask: "When shall I see that place in the county, when shall I be free…to sleep or idle,

[27] Mary Jane Scott, *James Thomson, Anglo-Scot,* Athens Georgia, 1988, p175, quoted in Ayres, op.cit. p35.
[28] C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*, Cambridge, 1993, p169.

drinking in a blissful oblivion of life's troubles?"[29] The rural life encountered by Coke in his London manuscript library offered a place not only of moral probity but also of retirement, idleness and pastoral repose.

In a recent essay, Susie West has argued for the library "as key site for discourse around knowledge and identity for the English elite from the seventeenth century onwards".[30] Thomas Coke's library clearly conforms to this proposition not only because of the depth and extent of its collections but also because, as we have seen, in its detail it reflects a conscious engagement with contemporary intellectual currents. Coke's library carries a further significance, however, in that it can be seen as a starting point for other aesthetic and intellectual exercises. It is the intellectual fount from which other aspects of his Holkham collection derive and from which that collection can be read. If we consider Coke's commissioning of Garzi's *Cincinnatus called from the Plough,* it can be seen as an explicit linking of an important section of his library with his collection of painting, the transfer of an idea from manuscript to canvas. This connection between literature and illustration manifests itself further in Coke's collection of drawings of antique sculptures and busts. As Louise Connor Bulman says, these "were not selected for their aesthetic value. Instead they supply details to facilitate the understanding and accurate depiction of ancient history".[31] Republican heroes from the Roman histories were the most frequently collected subjects: farmer-statesmen such as Cincinnatus and Cato and defenders of the city against monarchy and tyranny such as Brutus. Connor Bulman describes these drawings as being "for instruction, not connoisseurship, and their place was in folios in the library".[32] Here, then, literature and the image overlap, the picture growing out of and then subsumed within the written word.

The clearest example of this symbiotic relationship between literature and image is the collection of landscape painting brought together in the specially conceived Landscape Room at Holkham. These paintings echo Coke's collection of classical literature of rusticity and represent a pictorial extension of these writings. They also

[29] Horace, Satire II.6 lines 60-62, tr. Niall Rudd, Penguin, 1997
[30] S. West, "Life in the Library" in G. Perry, K. Retford and J. Vibert (eds) *Placing faces: The portrait and the English country house in the long eighteenth century*, Manchester, 2013, p63.
[31] L. Connor Bulman, op.cit. p32
[32] Ibid.

reflect the ideas of repose and withdrawal from the world of *negotium* which lies at the heart of Coke's building and collecting project at Holkham. What we are seeing with the Landscape Room is a tying together of image, word and idea to create an imagined *locus amoenus* "insulated from the world of public affairs".[33]

Coke collected landscape paintings throughout his life and all the pictures in the Landscape Room had been purchased by the time of his death in 1759.[34] As with other aspects of Coke's collecting, he appears to have adopted a scholarly programme and this is particularly evident in the arrangement of the paintings in the Landscape Room which was, as John Cornforth has said, "worked out by Leicester".[35] The Landscape Room will be considered in further detail below but, first, the direct link between written and painted pastoral in Coke's library will be investigated.

As with the paintings commissioned in Rome, the landscape paintings collected by Coke are connected with his classical library: in this instance through the poetry of Virgilian pastoral. Among the four manuscripts which contained the *Eclogues,* is one purchased in the group from Lyon, written in Paris in about 1400 and containing what the Handlist describes as "sixteen remarkable miniatures"[36] by the Lucon Master. Michael Liversidge has written about the extent of the use of Virgilian illuminations during the Renaissance and how these subsequently influenced the origins of landscape painting. Consider the illuminations by the Lucon Master from the Second and Fifth Eclogues (figs. 11 and 12).

[33] M. Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art,* Oxford 1999, p53
[34] They are all in the 1760 inventory. See T. Murdoch (ed), *Noble Households: 18th Century Inventories of Great English Houses,* John Adamson, 2006
[35] J. Cornforth, "A subtle sequence reconstructed", *Country Life,* June 13, 1991, p169. This view is also supported by Francis Russell "The Hanging and Display of Pictures, 1700-1850" in G. Jackson-Stops et al. (ed), *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House,* Washington, 1989, p137
[36] *A handlist of manuscripts in the library of the Earl of Leicester,* p25. See also Mortlock, op.cit. p39.

Fig. 11

MS. 307. Virgil, Eclogue II.
Vellum. c1400. Illuminated by the Lucon Master, Paris.
Holkham Hall

Fig. 12
MS. 307. Virgil, Eclogue V.
Vellum. c1400. Illuminated by the Lucon Master, Paris.
Holkham Hall

Many of the familiar elements of later pastoral landscape painting are present: the shepherd or goatherd with his animals, the mixture of wild, rocky landscape and flowery meadow, the music making. These illuminations are, of course, taking their images directly from Virgil's poems they illustrate and so reflect the broader Renaissance rediscovery of classical culture. They thus represent the beginnings of a Renaissance tradition which is expressed in Italian pastoral literature of the sixteenth century, most notably Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* published in Venice in 1519, a manuscript copy of which was owned by Coke.[37] All these elements, whether pictorial or written, from the manuscript library form a web of influence which together, inform, if not exclusively, then in large part, Coke's collection of seventeenth and eighteenth-century landscape paintings. Claude's or Dughet's shepherds or Salvator Rosa's rock-strewn wildernesses exist in a direct linear relationship to the Virgilian miniatures acquired by Coke on his Grand Tour.

Beyond these direct influences is the idea of the association of landscape with retirement and withdrawal, what H.F.Clark has called the "literary and philosophical approach to the landscape".[38] The pastoral literature of repose found expression in

[37] MS 522. *A handlist of manuscripts in the library of the Earl of Leicester*
[38] H.F.Clark, "Eighteenth Century Elysiums: The Role of 'Association' in the Landscape Movement", *JWCI,* Vol.6, (1943), p165

the images of painted landscape. Coke's landscape collection grew as Holkham itself grew. The Hall that represented his place of retirement from the city was being built with a room to house the group of pastoral paintings influenced by poetry, collected in Coke's youth, which was rooted in the idea of the superiority of country life. It is hard not to see an intellectual and aesthetic programme at work similar to that which inspired Coke to commission history paintings showing him as a character in scenes from Livy's histories. As Coke had been shown associated with Cincinnatus's being called from the country back to the city, so was he now associating himself, through the painted image, with a return to a rustic retreat (albeit a more lavish and extensive one). John Cornforth describes the Landscape Room as offering "the unique opportunity… to turn from the Italianate landscapes on its walls and see through its Venetian window the English classical landscape".[39] Coke no doubt intended an association to be made between the paintings and the fashionable new landscape park. However, the Landscape Room can be read not simply as an expression of the relationship between the painted country and the real but also as an expression of Coke's own interior, intellectual landscape of retirement, brought out of the library and represented now in pictorial form in his self-imagined *locus amoenus.*

John Barrell has argued that the contemplation of landscape in the eighteenth century was not passive but "involved reconstructing landscape in the imagination".[40] In 1708, French writer Roger de Piles had been "the first to re-evaluate the landscape genre in a theoretical work".[41] For de Piles, landscape painting was a work of the imagination, not a mere imitation of a natural scene: "thus painting, which is a kind of creation, is never more so than in the case of landscape".[42] This idea was a radical one, landscape painting having occupied a "relatively lowly position" in the "humanist discourse on art [which] often revolves round the question of value".[43] Margaretha Lagerlof traces how this value system altered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the incorporation into landscape painting of elements from history painting, antique literature, particularly tragedy and poetry.[44] De Piles saw this development in

[39] Cornforth, op.cit. p168
[40] J. Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*, *1730-1840*, Cambridge, 1972, p6
[41] M. Lagerlof, *Ideal Landscape, Annibale Carracci, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain,* New Haven, 1990, p29.
[42] R. de Piles, *Le Cours de peinture par principes,* translated as "The Principles of Painting", London, 1734. Quoted in ibid, p29
[43] Lagerlof, op.cit, p34.
[44] See in particular Chapter 2, "Nature as Creation and Drama: Landscape and the Humanist Theory of Art".

landscape painting as concentrated into two "styles of landskip…the heroic, and the pastoral or rural; for all other styles are but mixtures of these".[45] Later in the eighteenth century, Joshua Reynolds argued that "a painter of landskips…sends the imagination back into antiquity; and like the Poet, he makes the elements sympathise with his subject".[46] Thus, the status of landscape art was seen as important only when "it could be seen as a manifestation of some higher conception".[47] Coke's collection of landscape paintings during his life and the creation of the Landscape Room demonstrate his active intellectual engagement with contemporary artistic and theoretical developments. They also show how it is possible, given the connections discerned by de Piles and Reynolds, to link Coke's Grand Tour library of Latin pastoral literature with his collection of painted landscape. This link will now be considered in further detail.

"There have always been two kinds of arcadia: shaggy and smooth; dark and light; a place of bucolic leisure and a place of primitive panic".[48] The Holkham Landscape Room contains both. As the viewer stands, back to the window, reading the pictures from left to right (west wall to east wall: see figs. 13, 14 and 15), the painted landscape moves from the wild to the calm, from untamed emotion to pastoral contemplation.

[45] R. de Piles, *Le Cours de peinture par principes,* translated as "The Principles of Painting", London, 1734. Quoted in M. Andrews op.cit. p93.
[46] *Discourses on Art, Thirteenth Discourse*, quoted in ibid, p97.
[47] D. Ditner, "Claude and the Ideal Landscape Tradition in Great Britain", *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art,* Vol.70, No.4 (Apr. 1983), p147
[48] S.Schama, *Landscape and Memory,* New York, 1995, p517.

Fig. 13.
Holkham Hall, Landscape Room, West Wall.

Locatelli

Classical Ruins with figures

Salvator Rosa

Rocky cliff with three figures

Locatelli

Classical Ruins with figures

Buildings on left

Francesco Grimaldi

Wooded landscape with St John Baptising the Saviour

Domenichino

Rocky Landscape with the sacrifice of Isaac

Gaspard Poussin

Classical Landscape with two men and a dog and buildings

Gaspard Poussin

Classical Landscape with man fishing and man with goats

Gaspard Poussin

Classical Landscape with two figures, castle and viaduct

Fig. 14.
Holkham Hall, Landscape Room, North Wall

Jan Frans von Bloemen

Classical landscape with figures at a well

Luca Giordano

St John the Baptist preaching

Jan Frans von Bloemen

Classical landscape with figures by a pool with fishermen

Gaspard Poussin

Classical Landscape with man fishing and man with goats

Claude Lorrain

Queen Esther approaching the Palace of Ahasuerus

Gaspard Poussin

Classical landscape with a river valley and a castle on a hill

Fig. 15.
Holkham Hall, Landscape Room, East Wall

Claude-Joseph Vernet

Rocky coast scene with shipwreck

Claude Lorrain

Landscape with Erminia with Shepherds and children

Claude-Joseph Vernet

Landscape with Waterfall, Viaduct and Castle

Claude Lorrain

Rocky coast with Perseus and nymphs and Medusa's Head ("Origins of Coral")

Claude Lorrain

River scene with a view of the town; cattle and sheep in the foreground

Claude Lorrain

Landscape with Argus guarding Io with two nymphs

Claude Lorrain

Landscape with Apollo guarding the herds of Admetus with Mercury stealing them

Claude Lorrain

View of seaport and amphitheatre and Colosseum

Above the door on the west wall are Domenichino's *Rocky Landscape with the Sacrifice of Isaac* (fig. 16) and Salvator Rosa's *Rocky Cliff with three figures.*

Fig. 16. Domenichino 1581-1641. *Rocky Landscape with Sacrifice of Isaac*
Oil on Canvas. Holkham Hall

Domenichino, as one of the influential pioneers of early modern Italian landscape, serves as an historical starting point for the collection but the wild, austere scenery of the Holkham painting represents an influence on the work of Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) whose images reflect the primitive arcadia of pre-classical Greece, the landscape as a place of fear. John Barrell has described Rosa's paintings as representing a "dramatic and rhetorical appreciation of landscape" and argues that the taste for Rosa was about the emotions suggested rather than an admiration for the accuracy of the depiction of a particular landscape.[49] The other paintings on the west wall, while less physically and emotionally dramatic than the Rosa and the Domenichino, reflect a sense of an overgrown, dark and claustrophobic landscape into which the individual is placed but is never entirely comfortable. Consider, for example the two works by Locatelli (either side of the Salvator Rosa). Although the figures in the landscape with classical ruins repeat the basic elements of Claudean vocabulary,

[49] J. Barrell, op.cit, p6. Eighteenth-century England saw a marked interest in Rosa's work which can be explained in part by the growth of aesthetic appreciation based on the philosophical ideas of sublime. Helen Langdon has described his landscapes as conveying "the pleasures of retreat in a mountainous and wild landscape". Grove Art online.

the derelict buildings are much closer to the figures and to the viewer than would be the case with Claude where everything is subsumed within the landscape. The size of the ruins, their being pushed into the foreground and the extent to which they are overgrown seems to generate an effect of menace.

With Rosa, Domenichino and Locatelli, the viewer senses a landscape that overwhelms in contrast to the Claudean pastoral image which invites the viewer into a world of retirement and contemplation. Claude's arcadia, which dominates the east wall, is the one of pastoral and bucolic poetry, of shepherds and cowherds who seem to exist in a state of permanent leisure and whose animals are little more than adornments to this life of rest, music and love. The inviting softness of this world is mirrored in the way in which the viewer is pulled into the image. Claude's landscape paintings operate therefore in an indexical relationship to their subject matter. Their association with the Virgilian pastoral of rustic withdrawal is represented in the technical and formal presentation of the material. Audrey Tyndall has described how the lower edge of Claude's landscapes often invite the viewer to "step into the scene"[50] through the use of a foregrounded figure or natural element such as a rocky ledge. Once in the picture, we are drawn back through a series of planes or stages given definition by tall trees, distant ruins, and a river or lake, until we reach the horizon: consider *Argus guarding Io with two nymphs* which utilises all these techniques (fig 17).

[50] A. Tyndall, *Claude and the Poussins,* National Gallery, London, 1976, p9

Fig 17. Claude Lorrain (1604-1682).
Landscape with Argus guarding Io with two nymphs
Oil on Canvas 126x101 cm. Holkham Hall

What is being achieved is "a depth of landscape",[51] a sense that, as the eighteenth-century landscapist Richard Wilson put it, "you may walk in Claude's pictures and count the miles".[52] The formal structure of the image encourages withdrawal into the landscape of repose. A more explicit indexical relationship can be seen between Claude's use of light and colour and the representation of the central pastoral trope of the Golden Age. If we consider only Virgil, each of his poems (or collections of poems) has a description of the Age of Saturn, the Golden Age, "when the earth spontaneously produced her bounty".[53] Claude's landscapes are the uncultivated, unworked landscapes of the Golden Age, "rendered with a golden light that suffuses the distance and gilds both the foreground figures and the forms of the natural setting"[54] (see fig. 18 for an example from the Holkham collection). Thus are combined in a unified, idealistic whole, classical pastoral poetry, the subject matter of landscape painting and its formal techniques.

[51] J. Barrell, op.cit, p2.
[52] Quoted in ibid, p2
[53] C. Pace, " 'Free from Business and Debate': City and Country in responses to Landscape in 17th-Century Italy and France" *Journal of Art History,* (2004) 73:3, pp158-178, p161. The relevant sections from Virgil are in Aeneid VIII, Georgics II and Eclogues IV all of which would have been familiar to Thomas Coke.
[54] M. Andrews, op. cit. p97

Fig. 18. Claude Lorrain (1604-1682)
Landscape with Apollo guarding the Cattle of Admetus and Mercury stealing them
Oil on Canvas 115x75 cm. Holkham Hall

The placing of the majority of the Claude landscapes on the East Wall is also significant. They are the first paintings seen as the viewer enters the room and last before leaving to go into the corridor to the Chapel. Thus they provide the key to the balance between the Chapel and Library. Paintings inspired by poems, copies of which would have been in the Library at the other end of the enfilade and rare manuscripts of which would be brought to that library after Coke's death, marked the boundary between the pastoral retirement of classical poetry and landscape and the more profound withdrawal of the Chapel.

"A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation".[55] Raymond Williams's celebrated observation suggests that in order for a landscape to operate as a meaningful space, it requires its own integrity and detachment from the world. Claude's landscapes with their poetic borrowings, recessed planes, soft light, gentle scenery and their small human figures

[55] R.Williams, T*he city and the country,* London, 1975, p120

absorbed into the country, have this sense of separation, what Ditner calls “a closed system”.[56] Lagerlof sees this creation of an ideal, unreal land as a form of utopianism which “casts a different light, evoking the dream of some longed-for perfect life, while in a metaphysical light we ask ourselves whether the order visible in the pictorial space of these landscapes springs from the eternal verities of ideas or of God”.[57] Lagerlof further defines the ideal landscape as a representation of nature where “the emphasis is on a metaphysical or subjective spiritual quality”.[58] The Holkham Landscape Room provides two important examples of how this interior, religious reading of landscape painting operates.

Luca Giordano’s *St John the Baptist preaching* conforms the least readily of all the pictures in the Landscape Room to the norms of landscape painting. However, it does show St John and the other figures in a wild landscape setting with the River Jordan in the background. The landscape, although subsidiary to the main subject, is an important element in the picture for St John himself withdrew into the landscape of the desert and so represents a model for that profound, spiritual retirement from the world. St John the Baptist is also, of course, the forerunner of Christ whose birth, early and medieval Christian tradition maintained, was anticipated in Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue, thus ushering in a new Golden Age. A religious image therefore provides here an associative, if not actual, connection with the idea of a spiritual, pastoral landscape by means of a classical text.

[56] Ditner defines this closed system as the presentation to the spectator of “an impersonal commentary on the consonance between the perfectly constructed landscape and the historical or literary narrative depicted”. op.cit. p158
[57] Lagerlof, op.cit. p17
[58] Ibid, p 20

Fig. 19. Claude Lorrain (1604-1682). *Landscape with Erminia and the Shepherds*
Oil on Canvas 137x92.5 cm. Holkham Hall

The River Jordan reappears in the Landscape Room in Claude's *Landscape with Erminia and the Shepherds* (fig.19). This painting borrowing from Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata,* shows the part of the story where Erminia, a princess from Antioch, wakes by the banks of the Jordan to the sounds of a shepherd's music. When she speaks to him, he describes how he has given up the Court for a life of pastoral retirement. Erminia represents the world of aristocracy and public action but here she is being invited to withdraw into a scene of "serenity in an idyllic landscape",[59] an invitation which would have resonated with Thomas Coke as he walked the enfilade from his Library through the state rooms, into the Landscape Room and under this painting by Claude, and into his Chapel.

[59] C. Pace, op.cit. p169

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