

**F. Inigo Thomas: painterly architect and
neglected proponent of the concept of the garden
in relation to the house**



Figure 1. Barrow Court, Somerset. Photo: F. Inigo Thomas, c. 1890-1900, Historic England, TH003 01 082.

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Abbreviations

AWG: Art Workers' Guild

DRO: Dorset Records Office, Dorchester

ESRO: East Sussex Records Office, Brighton

RIBA: Royal Institute of British Architects

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Introduction

‘Inigo Thomas is a name which has not been known as it ought to be known (...). He is the pioneer of modern times in gardens’¹

This dissertation explores the life and work of F. Inigo Thomas (1865-1950) within the context of garden design in the late nineteenth century. It investigates his connection with the concept of the garden in relation to the house; it illustrates how Thomas’s garden design philosophy manifested itself; and it assesses the impact and legacy of his work. Thomas is less well-known in the public domain than some of his peers, but this dissertation seeks to present a more in-depth picture of the man and his work. Hitherto unpublished material is presented.

Historiography

In comparison to his contemporaries who have achieved greater public acclaim, such as Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942), Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) Thomas Mawson (1861-1933), Sir George Reresby Sitwell (1860-1943) and Harold Peto (1854-1933), Thomas has very little dedicated published writing about him, and there is a dearth from the point of view of garden history.

A surprising source of significant contextual information is Thomas himself. He is associated closely with the concept of the architectural and formal garden through the illustrations for the joint publication with Blomfield, *The Formal Garden in England*, yet the most important material on Thomas’s theory of garden-making is derived from his papers and articles over a thirty year timespan.² In 1896

¹ David Ottewill, *The Edwardian Garden* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 14, quoting Comper ‘Notes on Bodley by J. N. Comper’, c. 1940-5.

² Reginald Blomfield and F. Inigo Thomas, *The Formal Garden in England* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1892).

Thomas presented a paper to the Society of Arts.³ A similar paper was given in 1898 to the Art Workers' Guild (AWG). This gave rise to a series of articles for *Country Life Illustrated* (the title changing to *Country Life* in 1901), which continued into the early twentieth century with articles on fountains and orangeries.⁴ In 1912 he published *Keystones of Building*.⁵ Another paper on gardens was read in 1926 to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).⁶ These papers are analysed in Chapter Four. The gardens Thomas created were reviewed in writing by contemporary commentators such as H. Avray Tipping (1855-1933) and in editions of *Country Life*.⁷

The discussion taking place at the time between proponents of the architectural or formal garden and the wild garden, notably William Robinson, was aired publicly by Sedding, but with Sieveking and Statham also contributing.⁸ Edith Wharton, almost a decade later, linked the influence of the Italian Renaissance garden to the revived desire for formality and the requirement for architectural impact, and echoed Thomas, stating, 'the garden must be studied in relation to the

³ F. Inigo Thomas, 'The Garden in Relation to the House', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. 44, no. 2255 (7 February 1896), pp. 241-251.

⁴ F. Inigo Thomas, 'Of Garden Making', *Country Life Illustrated*, (1900), pp. 235-237, 293-294, 364-366, 424-426, 489-491; F. Inigo Thomas, 'Fountains as a Garden Decoration', *Country Life Illustrated*, Vol. 9, No. 234, 29 June 1901, pp. 832-834; F. Inigo Thomas, 'On Orangeries', *Country Life*, Vol. 26, No. 657, 7 August 1909, xlvi.

⁵ F. Inigo Thomas, *Keystones of Building* (London: John Lane, 1912).

⁶ F. Inigo Thomas, 'Gardens', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, Vol. 33, No. 15, 12 June 1926.

⁷ H. Avray Tipping, *Gardens Old and New* (London: Country Life Illustrated, 1900); Author unknown, *Country Life*, Vol. 6, 139, 2 September 1899 and Vol. 19, 494, 23 June 1906.

⁸ William Robinson, *Garden Design and Architects' Gardens* (London: J. Murray, 1892); John Dando Sedding, *Garden-Craft Old and New* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1891); Albert Forbes Sieveking, *Gardens Ancient and Modern: An Epitome of the Literature of the Garden-Art* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1899); H. H. Statham, 'Formal and Landscape Gardening', *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 176 (July 1892), 174-208.

house'.⁹ The argument persisted into the early years of the twentieth century with Godfrey and Sitwell.¹⁰

Muthesius acknowledged Thomas as being influential in the development of the formal garden, but since then Thomas has been overlooked by garden historians.¹¹ Thacker, in what was very much a seminal work on garden history, made no mention of him even in a section entitled 'The modern Renaissance garden'.¹² Turner, writing in 1986, offers a confused chronology, dismissing Thomas as one of several garden designers who appeared to copy the 'Italian Style' of Renishaw, a garden that was developed over many years but hardly begun at the time Thomas was creating Athelhampton, Dorset, although Thacker later writes that Thomas was consulted on Renishaw c. 1897.¹³ Ottewill was the first garden historian to dedicate noteworthy space to Thomas, according gravitas to his life and work.¹⁴ Ottewill opens his chapter on the revival of formal gardens in England with Thomas's own words: 'I think, as a nation, we are beginning once more to realise the charm of a formal garden'.¹⁵ Biographical details with well-established references are included and substantial descriptions of the principal gardens at Athelhampton, Barrow Court in Somerset and Chantmarle, Dorset, are provided, whilst acknowledging the gardens at Rotherfield Hall in East Sussex, Ffynone in Pembrokeshire and plans for Otley Hall, Suffolk. Laird ignores Thomas's gardens

⁹ Edith Wharton, *Italian Villas and their Gardens* (New York: De Capo Press, 1903 and 1904), p. 6.

¹⁰ Walter Hindes Godfrey, *Gardens in the Making* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1914); George Reresby Sitwell, *On the Making of Gardens* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1909).

¹¹ Hermann Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus* (Berlin: Warmuth, 1904), p. 217.

¹² Christopher Thacker, *The History of Gardens* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 254.

¹³ Tom Turner, *English Garden Design: History and styles since 1650* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1986); Christopher Thacker, *The Genius of Gardening* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1994), p. 288.

¹⁴ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, pp. 13-21.

¹⁵ F. Inigo Thomas, 'The Garden in Relation to the House', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. 44, no. 2255 (7 February 1896), 241-266.

even though his book is entitled *The Formal Garden*.¹⁶ Thacker in 1994 acknowledges Thomas's gardens referencing Ottewill.¹⁷ Thereafter much of this groundwork by Ottewill is recalled by Mowl writing about gardens of Dorset and Somerset, with substantial detail provided on Athelhampton, Chantmarle, Parnham, in Dorset, and Barrow Court.¹⁸ However, gaps in Thomas's biographical details have given rise to comments such as 'He remains a somewhat shadowy figure'.¹⁹ A gracious but cursory nod is given, too, by Whalley.²⁰ Ottewill is the first to provide invaluable biographical details about Thomas as reported in the diaries of his peers Charles Ashbee (1863-1942) and J. Ninian Comper (1864-1960).²¹ A doctoral thesis on Bodley and Garner provides insights into Thomas taken from Ashbee's diary.²²

An analysis of the various influences on Thomas's work is supported by contextual material from background reading relating to the social, political and economic conditions in the late nineteenth century, and the role that travel to Europe might have played.²³ Other possible influences have been investigated by studying published contemporary photographs of the gardens he visited in Italy and histories

¹⁶ Mark Laird, *The Formal Garden* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992).

¹⁷ Thacker, *Genius of Gardening*, pp. 287-288.

¹⁸ Timothy Mowl, *Historic Gardens of Dorset* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd., 2003); Timothy Mowl and Marion Mako, *Historic Gardens of Somerset* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd., 2010).

¹⁹ Patrick Taylor (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Garden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 468.

²⁰ Robin Whalley, *The Great Edwardian Gardens of Harold Peto* (London: Aurum Press, 2007), p. 189.

²¹ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, pp. 13-21.

²² David Mark Collins, 'Architecture of George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907) and Thomas Garner (1839-1906)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge 1993).

²³ Colin Matthew (ed.), *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert Holland, *The Warm South: How the Mediterranean Shaped the British Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018).

of English and Italian Renaissance gardens.²⁴ Elliott provides the context for the Victorian garden and credits Thomas with being a proponent of the formal garden.²⁵

Country Life Illustrated (renamed *Country Life* from 1901) is a source of information on Athelhampton, Barrow Court and Rotherfield Hall from articles entitled ‘Country Homes & Gardens Old & New’ from 1899 to 1906 which are explained in Chapters Five and Six. Historic England describes the principal gardens.²⁶ Athelhampton is described in its own guidebook by Keating and Davies, by Mowl (as are Chantmarle and Parnham), by Jekyll and Weaver, by Newman and Pevsner (as are Chantmarle and Parnham) and by Batey and Lambert (where Thomas’s name is mistakenly replaced by that of Inigo Triggs in a caption).²⁷ Barrow Court is described by Mowl and Mako and Pevsner.²⁸ Rotherfield Hall and Athelhampton are referred to by Jekyll.²⁹

This dissertation presents a novel, wider-reaching, composite picture of Thomas as far as is possible within its scope. Hitherto disparate strands of biography and his work are pulled together by assessing chronology, by analysing his writing and speeches, by interpreting contemporaneous commentary and by an investigation of primary source material, including hitherto unpublished material as explained below.

²⁴ H. Inigo Triggs, *The Art of Garden Design in Italy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1906); Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979); Geoffrey Jellicoe and J. C. Shepherd, *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993).

²⁵ Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1986), p. 227.

²⁶ <https://www.historicengland.org.uk>.

²⁷ Giles Keating and Owen Davies, *Athelhampton* (Dorchester: Athelhampton House, 2021); Mowl, *Dorset*; Gertrude Jekyll and Lawrence Weaver, *Gardens for small country houses* (London: Country Life, 1913); Nikolaus Pevsner and John Newman, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (London: Penguin Books, 1972); Mavis Batey and David Lambert, *The English Garden Tour: A View into the Past* (London: John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., 1990), pp. 295-299.

²⁸ Mowl and Mako, *Somerset*; Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol* (Great Britain: Penguin, 1973).

²⁹ Gertrude Jekyll, *Garden Ornament* (London: Country Life, 1918).

Research methodology

The research methodology focuses on the papers presented by Thomas to the Society of Arts, the AWG, and the RIBA, and the articles he wrote for *Country Life Illustrated*. Thomas's illustrations for *The Formal Garden* reveal influences. *Country Life* provides material from its articles on country houses at the turn of the twentieth century. To complement these sources, site visits have been undertaken to the three significant, extant gardens at Athelhampton, Barrow Court and Chantmarle, and a comparison made with archive and primary source material including paintings, descriptions, and photographs. Barrow Court's current owners have provided archive photographs of the work in progress which have not previously been used. Thomas family members have been contacted and material has been provided, including paintings, photographs, and an exhibition catalogue, published here for the first time. Photographs and plans by Thomas, not hitherto published, were discovered by the author in the Thomas collection at Historic England.³⁰ Photographs featuring Thomas in 1884, and not published in connection with him until now, have been sourced from an album in the archive at Pembroke College, Oxford.³¹ In the course of this research family correspondence in the East Sussex record office has come to light as has correspondence dating from 1975 indicating interest in Thomas from family and other unspecified parties: 'We are a triumvirate interested in this remarkable man's career (...) Gradually the mists are clearing and eventually I hope to be able to write an article about him', although there is no evidence of an article.³²

³⁰ Historic England, Swindon, TH003, The Francis Inigo Thomas Collection.

³¹ Pembroke College, Oxford, archive, PMB/N/18/18.

³² AMS6280, ESRO, letter from D. Leslie Barker Jones, Dyfed, to Major Freeman-Thomas 19 June 1975.

The Dorset and East Sussex record offices have been visited for primary source material including estate papers, sale documents, postcards, photographs, articles from magazines, correspondence, and family histories. The RIBA Library holds a file on Thomas and was also a source for *The Studio* which published an article by E. S. Prior containing a bird's eye view painting by Thomas of Athelhampton.³³ The AWG has verified Thomas's involvement, and a first-hand study of their Annual Reports and Minutes has provided additional new information.

Thomas's papers and articles refer to gardens that he visited in Europe, primarily, but not exclusively, in Italy. Contemporary primary sources provide pictorial and photographic evidence of these gardens at that time. These sources have been studied and comparisons made between features there and those in his work.

Further primary source material, as mentioned in the historiography, has been analysed for contextual background. Secondary published sources have been studied for background material on England and Italy in the late nineteenth century, and for the views of garden historians, the influence of Italian gardens and the role of art and nature in the garden.

On-line research has provided Ordnance Survey maps of the gardens, details from Historic England and Parks & Gardens UK, press articles as well as census information which provides new details of where Thomas was living, his occupation and his signing-up papers with the Imperial Yeomanry in 1900.

This dissertation commences in Chapter One with biographical details which are followed in Chapter Two by historical context. Chapter Three establishes the

³³ Thomas, 'Gardens', pp. 431-39; Edward S. Prior, 'Garden-making', *The Studio*, Vol. 21, No. 91, October 1900, p. 34.

background to the garden in relation to the house, and Chapter Four offers an exposition of Thomas's concept of the same. Chapters Five, Six and Seven treat Thomas's principal extant gardens in detail: Athelhampton, Barrow Court and Chantmarle. Thomas's views, where known, are explained, as are comments from primary and secondary sources, reports from site visits and an analysis of Thomas's influences in relation to each of these gardens. Athelhampton is the most well-known, and Barrow Court and Chantmarle, whilst less so, have significant, intact features. Chapter Eight provides a conclusion about Thomas: painterly architect, neglected, and proponent of the garden in relation to the house.

Chapter One: F. Inigo Thomas, biography

‘Thomas is little known today: he deserves better recognition’³⁴

The only published image of Francis Inigo Thomas is believed to be a self-portrait dating from 1903, depicting an elegant, middle-aged man dressed in a riding ensemble (Figure 2).³⁵



Figure 2. Photo of F. Inigo Thomas, believed to be a self-portrait, 1903. Copy of photograph from the Art Workers' Guild album, AMS6280/15.

³⁴ George Plumptre, *The Garden Makers: The Great Traditions of Garden Design from 1600 to the Present Day* (Great Britain: Pavilion Books Limited, 1993), p. 164.

³⁵ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 13.

It is an interesting depiction of a man who was well-connected socially and who worked as both architect and garden designer on relatively substantial country houses. However, it does not reflect other aspects of Thomas's life and character; namely, a man of artistic capabilities, interested in arts and crafts, a committed member of the AWG and displaying subtle yet firmly held beliefs in garden design.



Figure 3. Photograph of Thomas as a young boy, date unknown. Courtesy of Henry Harrison-Topham.

Thomas was born in 1865, the fifth son (Figure 3) of the Reverend C. E. Thomas and was baptised in Warmsworth, Yorkshire. His family was well-connected: Sir George Sitwell and the future Marquess of Willingdon (1866-1941), Viceroy of India, his first cousins.³⁶

³⁶ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 13.



Figure 4. 'A Pembroke Group 1884' Thomas is in the middle row, third from left, Pembroke College, Oxford, 1884, N-18-18 f26v.



Figure 5. 'Pembroke College Common Room, Jun. Camm. Comm. 1884' Thomas is second from right, second row from back, Pembroke College, Oxford, N-18-18 f27r.

He matriculated at Pembroke College, Oxford on 30 January 1884 (Figures 4 and 5). Pembroke College indicates that his name was removed from the books in Michaelmas Term 1884 without explanation.³⁷ Thomas reminisced about his uncle, William Brodrick Thomas (1811-1898), and his role in landscape gardening and confirmed that ‘I came down from Oxford to learn architecture with the late Mr Bodley, living the while with the aforesaid uncle’.³⁸ The 1891 census reports that he was living with his uncle at 52 Wimpole Street and lists his profession as architect.³⁹ It can be ascertained that some influence on his garden creations would have been induced by his uncle.

Thomas’s view was that his ‘genial’ uncle had inherited the role of Humphry Repton (1752-1818) and Uvedale Price (1747-1829), giving up ‘fox-hunting for laying out the places of gentlefolk in the prevailing “landscape” manner’.⁴⁰ Elliott suggests that William Brodrick Thomas’s style of gardening in the 1860s echoed that of the Italian-influenced architectural style at that time, as promoted in John Arthur Hughes’s *Landscape Gardening and Garden Architecture* but then followed a less formal style creating lakes and Pulhamite rock gardens at Sandringham.⁴¹ William Brodrick Thomas was active in his field into the 1890s and on his death bequeathed property at Star Hill, Woking and land purchased from the London Necropolis Company in 1897 to Thomas.⁴²

From 1886-1889 Thomas trained with the architects G. F. Bodley and Thomas Garner, known for their Gothic and Elizabethan revivalist work (more

³⁷ Amanda Ingram, Pembroke College Oxford, email to the author, 6 May 2022.

³⁸ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 433.

³⁹ <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryui-content/view/8677231:6598> [accessed 22 May 2022].

⁴⁰ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 433.

⁴¹ John Arthur Hughes, *Landscape Gardening and Garden Architecture* (London: 1866); Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, p. 147.

⁴² AMS6280, ESRO, Will dated 12 February 1898.



Figure 6. Hickleton Hall, Yorkshire. Photo: Doncaster Free Press, NDFP-05-01-21-HickletonHall 8-NMSY [accessed 16 July 2022].

details on architects' practices in this period are provided in Chapter Three). About this time, he designed the gardens of Hickleton Hall (Figure 6) in Yorkshire which had been restored by Bodley.⁴³ From 1884 to 1891, Bodley and Garner were also involved in the reconstruction of Hewell Grange in Worcestershire for Lord Windsor. These gardens have been described by Elliott: 'outlined with lime hedges and arches, and filled with a fantastic elaboration of box arabesques and herbaceous plants'.⁴⁴ At about the same time, work was undertaken on Ufford Place (Figure 7) in Suffolk, the house being encased in brick and balustraded terraces created. Photos from the 1890s show a garden house, an avenue of trees, a lily pond, brick gate piers and a wrought-iron entrance gate.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, p. 224.

⁴⁵ <https://ufford.suffolk.cloud/gallery/ufford-place/> [accessed 16 July 2022].

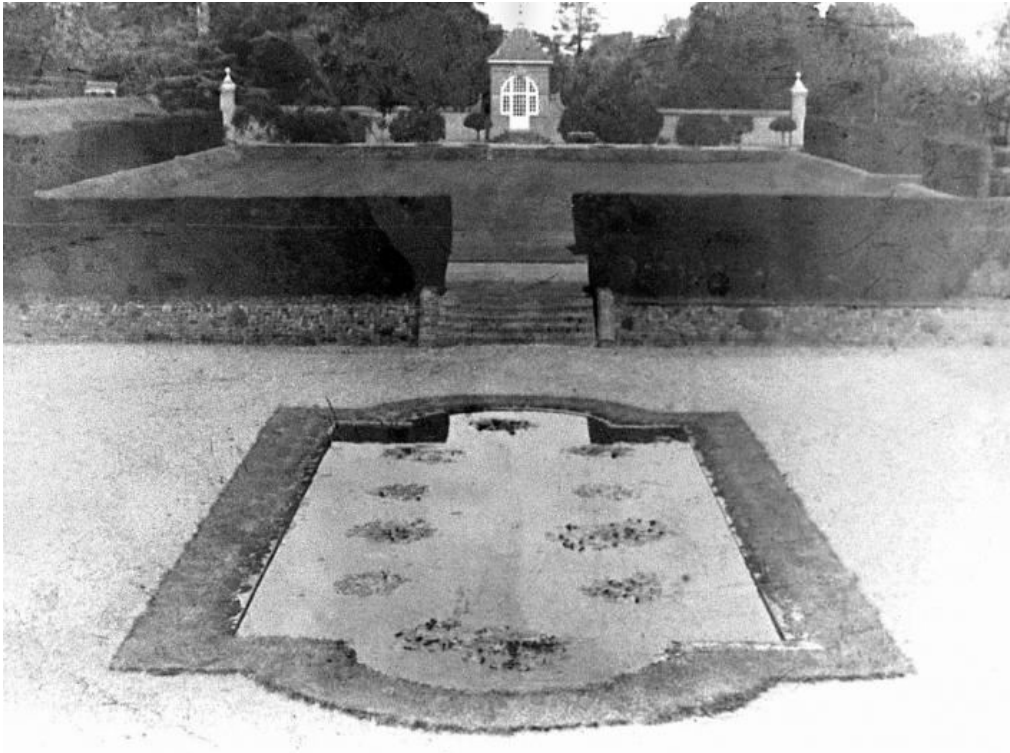


Figure 7. Ufford Place, Suffolk, Photographer unknown, c. 1890s.
<https://ufford.suffolk.cloud/gallery/ufford-place/> [accessed 16 July 2022].

Fellow pupils were Ashbee and Comper, part of the ‘curious lot’ described by Ashbee.⁴⁶ According to Collins’ unpublished work, Ashbee included a sketch of Thomas among those of fellow pupils at Bodley: ‘Thomas the aristocrat... A man of much power...shrewdly practical and good at facts for which I most sincerely envy him’.⁴⁷ The two men were to remain in touch, not least through their involvement in the AWG. Comper rated Thomas so highly that he wrote in the 1940s:

Inigo Thomas is a name which has not been known as it ought to be known, and the consequent loss to architecture has been great; of which his work at Hickleton Hall, Ufford

⁴⁶ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 204, quoting A. Crawford, *C. R. Ashbee* (Yale, Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 23-24.

⁴⁷ David Mark Collins, ‘Architecture of George Frederick Bodley (1827-1907) and Thomas Garner (1839-1906)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993), p. 224.

House, Athelhampton and elsewhere, is proof. He is the pioneer of modern times in gardens.⁴⁸

The combined effect of Bodley and Garner and the band of talented young architects who designed furniture, gardens and buildings would have been considerable.

Interestingly, Thieme-Becker references Thomas as an English garden-architect, landscape etcher and artist but also states that he was at Bodley and Garner from 1884; that he travelled in 1889 in northern Italy and Germany, in 1890 to Chartres, Poitiers and Holland, in 1892 to Laon and Alsace and in 1893 in Brittany.⁴⁹ Thieme-Becker appears to be the first reference to Thomas travelling to Europe in 1889 although it is not known what he did between the years 1884 and 1886 and indeed if he visited Italy during his time at Oxford. An inscription in what appears to be chalk on the window frame in Figure 5 reads ‘Manchester Florence 1884’ but enquiries of Manchester Harris College, Oxford, have not been productive. Thomas exhibited at the Royal Academy: 1893 *At Schlettstadt*; 1894 *Athelhampton Hall etc.*; 1895 *Church, house, and garden*; 1898 *Playing fields Eton College*; and 1902 *A suggested treatment of the Mall*.⁵⁰ It is not known what materials he used for these pictures but in 1926 he described how he furnished forecast sketches in oil of his proposed gardens as can be seen by the one for Drakelow, Derbyshire.⁵¹ Thomas told a RIBA audience that ‘Architects should, of course, be fairly competent painters

⁴⁸ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 14, quoting Comper ‘Notes on Bodley by J. N. Comper’, c. 1940-5.

⁴⁹ Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, Vols. 1-4 and Verlag E. A. Seemann, Vols. 5-37, 1905-1950), p. 61.

⁵⁰ Graves, Algernon, *The Royal Academy of Arts: a complete dictionary of contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904* (London: Henry Graves & Co. Ltd. and George Bell and Sons, 1905-6), p. 358.

⁵¹ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 430.

and something of sculptors'.⁵² As an artist of considerable talent, Thomas observed his own dictum.

The period from his time at Bodley and Garner until the end of the 1890s appears to have been a time of enormous creative productivity for Thomas. A first architectural commission in 1891 involved the house at Ratton, East Sussex which had belonged to his grandfather Inigo Freeman Thomas for his cousin Freeman Freeman-Thomas (later Baron Willingdon and Viceroy of India from 1931-1936).⁵³ The source of his patrons and commissions after this is not known. About this time, Thomas started work on restoring the house and creating new gardens at Athelhampton, but he had also found time to visit and illustrate the gardens featured in *The Formal Garden* with text by Blomfield.⁵⁴ By 1892 he was working on Barrow Court, a project that lasted until 1896. He also visited Italy again, intending to write a book on Italian gardens.⁵⁵ A previously unpublished plan was found in the Historic



Figure 8. Ken Hill, Snettisham, Norfolk. Plan by Thomas, 1896. Historic England, TH003.

⁵² Ibid., p. 432.

⁵³ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Blomfield and Thomas, *Formal Garden*.

⁵⁵ Thomas, 'The Garden in Relation to the House', 241-266; Thomas, 'Gardens', p. 435.

England records for Ken Hill, Snettisham in Norfolk, dated 1896 (Figure 8). It is not known if this design was executed. In 1897 he extended the house and designed the gardens at Rotherfield Hall (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Rotherfield Hall. Previously unpublished photo by Thomas, c.1897, Historic England, TH003.

Thomas was elected to the AWG in 1891.⁵⁶ He presented a paper to the AWG on 4 November 1898 on ‘Gardens’. The AWG Annual Reports reveal hitherto unpublished information that he spoke on 2 May 1912 on the subject of gardens once more and on 30 April 1926 on the subject of ‘Italian Gardens’ together with Geoffrey Jellicoe (1900-1996) and Tipping. He continued to give speeches on architecture and architectural features in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁷ It is unclear how

⁵⁶ Leigh Milsom Fowler, Administrator, The AWG, email to the author 18 May 2022.

⁵⁷ Annual reports, The AWG, 1891-1939.

much he would have been an influencer or the recipient of ideas, but the value of the membership is made clear by Thomas Okey, Master, in 1914:

the participation in the meetings, discussions, and practical demonstrations of a unique body such as the Art Workers' Guild, cannot be overestimated.⁵⁸

Thomas was also active in Ashbee's School of Handicraft in the early 1890s. At the end of a fruitful decade, on 14 February 1900 he enlisted with the Imperial Yeomanry, a middle-class volunteer force, to fight in the Boer War.⁵⁹ Ashbee visited him after his return from captivity by the Boers and remarked:

but a changed man to my thinking broader, bigger and more human, though I noticed De Brett's [sic] Peerage was still among the most prominent of the books on his table... He is a fine fellow all the same though the caste mark is difficult to efface. (...) And the net result of the war to him? An unmitigated waste of time said the architect, but the *man* told a very different story.⁶⁰

The electoral registers of 1902, 1903 and 1908 list Thomas as living at 44 Piccadilly. There is a rare and hitherto unpublished mention of Thomas in correspondence between Joan Oglander to her mother dated in 1903:

⁵⁸ Thomas Okey, date unknown, quoted from <https://www.artworkersguild.org/media/3731/awg-history-gavin-stamp-edited-feb-2022.pdf> [accessed 7 May 2022].

⁵⁹ https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryui-content/view/31909:61803?tid=&pid=&queryId=073ff24af42ed835a9f2ec46274b0a3b&_phsrc=iFN865&_phstart=successSource [accessed 22 May 2022].

⁶⁰ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 14, referencing Ashbee's journal, 8 April 1902.

Last night was quite delightful! (...) the 4th was a very nice man, Mr. Inigo Thomas, who is tremendously interested in architecture and wrought iron work and according to Captain K. sketches beautifully.⁶¹

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Thomas continued to restore historic houses and create gardens, notably at Ffynone in 1904 and Chantmarle in 1910. He suggested a scheme for Drakelow Hall. He was operating an architectural and design business, listed as an Employer in 1911⁶² and evidenced by Figure 10. With the outbreak of World War I, the investment in country houses that had taken place in the preceding decades came to a halt. His last garden scheme was planned for Otley Hall in 1915 but by this point his practice had been coming to an end.



Figure 10. 19, Mulberry Walk, Chelsea, SW3, designed by Thomas, c. 1914, <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/photos/item/IOE01/15570/09>, [accessed 9 July 2022].

⁶¹ Joan Oglander, letter to Florence Oglander, 5 April 1903, Isle of Wight Record Office, OG/CC/2114F.

⁶² 1911 census.

Ashbee, visiting Thomas in November 1914 in his new house at 2 Mulberry Walk, Chelsea, commented:

He had been spending the morning bringing rolls of drawings &c. from his office which he was shutting up... We agreed that during the last few years all the best work, and there was little enough of that, had been collared by Lutyens and Detmar Blow, we agreed that their genius helped them, but that the women helped them more.⁶³

There is scant detail about his life from World War I onwards although Williams states unceremoniously and without elaboration that ‘his activities in Russia and elsewhere during World War I spelled the end of his career’.⁶⁴ Thomas himself said in 1926 that his involvement in garden design ended with the outbreak of the war.⁶⁵ The foreword to a catalogue for an exhibition of fifty-one paintings by Thomas in Doncaster from 6 March to 27 April 1930 provides some elucidation:

During the second year of the Great War he was dispatched on a mission to Russia, and in the following year to Scandinavia, Holland and Spain. From then until 1928 he acted as a liaison between the Federation of British Industries and Government Departments.⁶⁶

The possibility of his role in promoting trade aligns with comments in his 1926 speech to the RIBA:

⁶³ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 14, referencing Ashbee’s journal, 26 November 1914.

⁶⁴ Robert Williams in Terukazu Akiyama [et al.], *The Dictionary of Art* (New York: Grove, 1996), p. 743.

⁶⁵ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 432.

⁶⁶ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, endnote 80, page 204.

Well – when the coal dispute is settled, when the League of Nations is again a happy party, when Moscow has ceased from propaganda and China from British boycott – then, perhaps, the outside world may begin once more to buy our British goods.⁶⁷

The same article indicated that Thomas also had flair, originality, and a sense of adventure, as illustrated by his acquisition of a donkey to visit the gardens near Frascati.⁶⁸

He remained actively involved in the AWG, but his professional achievements appear to have been overlooked thereafter, even by members of his family. His career seemed to move from architecture and gardens to the artistic. In 1929 he exhibited ninety-four pictures at Walker's Galleries in New Bond Street, London (Figure 11). The exhibition was called 'The Spell of England' and included a self-portrait, architectural notes, forecast sketches for proposed works at Hickleton, Drakelow, Eton Playing Fields, Ffynone, Barrow Court and Athelhampton, discussion drawings for house and gardens, an elevation for house and gardens and first proposals for lay-out of The Mall, London.⁶⁹ References to this exhibition have not been published previously.

⁶⁷ Thomas, 'Gardens', p. 439.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁶⁹ Walker's Galleries, catalogue, 7-19 October 1929, Thomas family papers.

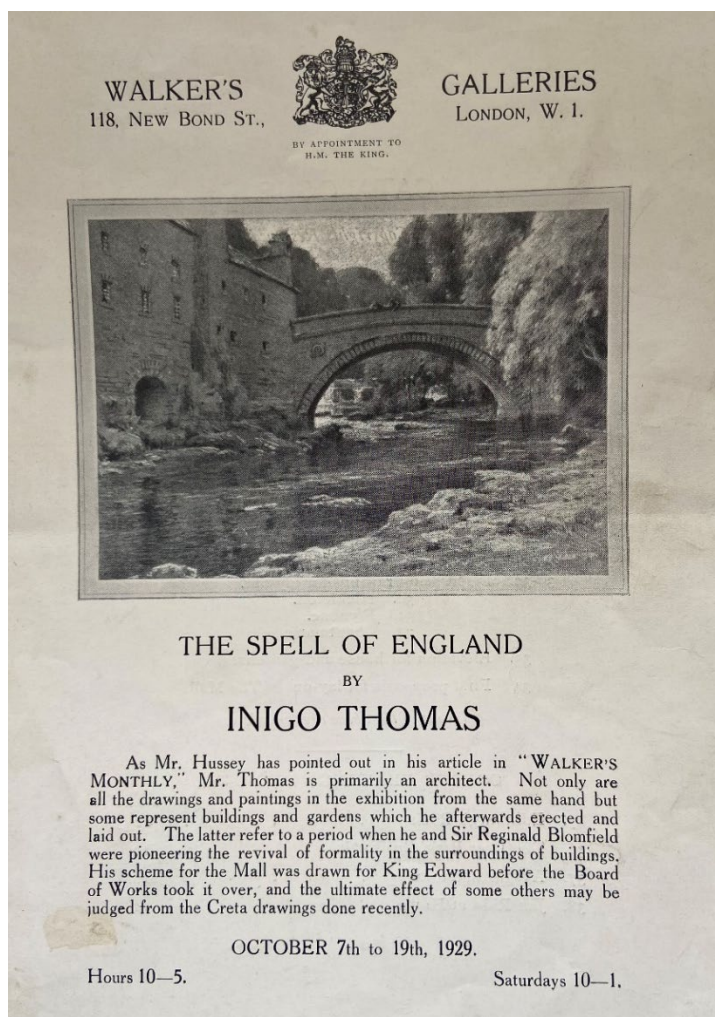


Figure 11. 'The Spell of England' Exhibition Catalogue. Walker's Galleries, 1929. Courtesy of Henry Harrison-Topham.

Correspondence in the East Sussex archives reveals several hitherto unpublished facts: he used the name Francis within family circles, signing himself Francis I. Thomas in letters to his family, with F. Inigo Thomas as his professional name. His nephew and niece referred to him as Uncle Franco.⁷⁰ Figure 12 shows a middle-aged Thomas. He was remembered fondly by his sister, Lucy, writing to a cousin in 1950:

⁷⁰ AMS6280, ESRO, correspondence.

He was always such a charming person and always so cheering and Mulberry Walk had been such a (..) place of welcome for so many years. But it was such an enviable passing as his loss of memory was most wearing and could any how [have] grown worse and worse.⁷¹



Figure 12. Photograph of Thomas, date unknown. Courtesy of Henry Harrison-Topham.

Thomas's niece and nephew also refer to him in glowing terms, remarking on his kindness. They admitted knowing nothing about his garden accomplishments, although acknowledging his paintings of gardens, some of which were in their possession, and stating at his house in Mulberry Walk there was 'a rather charming

⁷¹ AMS6280, ESRO, correspondence.

little garden with an aviary'.⁷² Thomas lived in Mulberry Walk until his death in 1950. There appears to have been no obituary. He was unmarried and left most of his estate to his nephew, Major Reginald Broderick Freeman Thomas, with bequests to a lady friend, Miss Jackson of Fawcett Street, to his cleaner and to his housekeeper; he was cremated, and his ashes scattered over his siblings' graves in Putney Vale Cemetery.⁷³

An unsigned and undated hand-written biography in the East Sussex archives indicated that Thomas was an 'ardent Freemason', but the United Grand Lodge of England could find no record of him, although Ashbee, Mawson and many other architect-members of the AWG are listed.⁷⁴

This chapter has used newly-discovered material to construct a more comprehensive biography of Thomas than has been published before, including details of his early life, his interests, his society, and family connections.

⁷² AMS6280, ESRO, correspondence.

⁷³ Thomas family papers, courtesy of Henry Harrison-Topham.

⁷⁴ Martin Cherry, Librarian, Museum of Freemasonry, email to the author, 29 July 2022.

Chapter Two: The last decades of Victorian England

‘The Art Workers’ Guild, indeed, has been dubbed: the last citadel of traditionalism’⁷⁵

Since the middle of the nineteenth century and the success represented by the Great Exhibition of 1851, Britain had witnessed remarkable economic and political power brought about by unprecedented industrialisation and an expansion of overseas colonies. Whilst agricultural production experienced difficulties in the 1870s to the 1890s, there was burgeoning wealth and power concentrated in the Victorian upper middle class so that by the late nineteenth century they were ‘probably the most free people in the world’.⁷⁶ Increased wealth translated into disposable income to invest in building, in towns and in the countryside. The flourishing upper middle class acquired country houses, with some land, but without the burden of grand working estates. The growth of the profession of architects parallels this and is explained in more detail in Chapter Three.

Concurrently, with the approaching turn of the century, a sense of unease and disquiet set in. This *fin de siècle* malaise exhibited itself variously from the new discipline of psychology to an aversion to industrialisation combined with a yearning for handcrafted goods and traditional crafts. Artists, sculptors, architects, and craftsmen were at the vanguard of this movement that sought a return to traditional values, craftsmanship and a principle of ‘learning by doing’, with many leading figures forming the AWG in 1884.⁷⁷ The preoccupation with traditional, hand-made arts and crafts was reflected in *The Studio*, founded in 1893. Under its first editor, Charles Holme, the magazine promoted fine and decorative arts, as well as the work

⁷⁵ C. R. Ashbee, 1938, from <https://www.artworkersguild.org/media/3731/awg-history-gavin-stamp-edited-feb-2022.pdf> [accessed 7 May 2022].

⁷⁶ Peter Davey, *Arts and Crafts Architecture* (London: Phaidon, 1980). p. 11.

⁷⁷ www.artworkersguild.org/about-us, [accessed 25 June 2022].

of architects, and was influential in the development of both Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts movement. In 1897, partly encouraged by the emergence of new printing techniques in the 1880s, *Country Life Illustrated* was founded to reflect the tastes, interests and buying-power of the upper middle class. *The Burlington Magazine* and *The Architectural Review* were also launched at this time.



Figure 13. Villa Piatti, Rome, belvedere, painting by George S. Elgood c. 1900, <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-belvedere-villa-piatti-rome-george-samuel-elgood.html> [accessed 1 April 2022].

Abroad, western Europe was enjoying the peace that followed the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the growth of railways throughout Europe facilitated travel. Southern Europe became more accessible. Attention turned to Italy once again as a destination for cultural exploration although a strong artistic expatriot community and vestiges of the Grand Tour of the previous century had remained. British political support for the protagonists of the *Risorgimento* had created a common bond. From the 1880s, when Thomas first travelled to Italy, until the outbreak of World War I, Italy was host to many British and American travellers,

interested in visiting her ancient villas and gardens. The influence of these magnificent, yet decayed, gardens cannot be overstated, although it is important to view the gardens as they were experienced by Thomas and his contemporaries at the time, and not to imagine them as their original Renaissance creations. There was also interest amongst the artistic community at large in Italian gardens with artists such as George S. Elgood (1851-1943) becoming known for the depiction of formal gardens at home and in Italy (Figures 13 and 14 and explained further in Chapter Three).

The artistic and architectural world, therefore, in the last decades of the nineteenth century was alive with a nostalgic desire for traditional craftsmanship whilst being susceptible to the influences of the Italian Renaissance.



Figure 14. Italianate garden, location unknown, painting by Elgood, c. 1900, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/george-samuel-elgood/an-italianate-garden-hkfVuIM6vvO93fQkiQCgKQ2> [accessed 1 April 2022].

Chapter Three: The garden in relation to the house in the late Victorian era

‘The formal treatment of gardens ought, perhaps, to be called the architectural treatment of gardens’⁷⁸

The architectural profession had been establishing itself since the early nineteenth century with the foundation of the RIBA in 1834. Thereafter there was a concerted divergence of professional architects and craftsmen or master builders. Although architectural courses did not start in England until 1889, there was a strong system of apprenticeships whereby students were articled to practices. From the time of the Great Exhibition in 1851 there was a fascination with retrospective Gothic and mediaeval architecture, encouraged first by the work of Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) and later by John Ruskin (1819-1900) who also criticised the role of machinery and industrialisation in manufacturing. From the 1870s domestic architecture and interior design introduced lighter interiors decorated with beautiful objects and at the same time there was a movement that reflected the architecture from the time of Queen Anne.⁷⁹ Architects such as George Edmund Street (1824-1881) and George Devey (1820-1886) introduced a more informal, vernacular style employing local materials and techniques. In furniture and fabrics William Morris (1834-1896) appeared to combine Pugin’s belief that the designer must be true to his materials and Ruskin’s that the imperfections of nature should be illustrated.⁸⁰ Morris anticipated developments in garden style when he wrote:

Large or small, it [the garden] should look both orderly and rich. It should be well fenced from the outside world. It

⁷⁸ Blomfield and Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Judith B. Tankard, *Gardens of the Arts & Crafts Movement* (Portland, Oregon: Timber Press Inc., 2018), p. 11.

⁸⁰ Davey, *Arts and Crafts Architecture*, p. 30.

should by no means imitate either the wilfulness or the wildness of Nature, but should look like a thing never to be seen except near a house. It should, in fact, look like a part of the house.⁸¹

In garden design there had been a progression during the nineteenth century from the legacy of the landscapers of the eighteenth century to a more formalised layout, conceived as a way of displaying new-found flowers and plants. These were discovered in tropical and sub-tropical corners of the earth by adventurous plant-hunters employed by burgeoning nurseries and frequently hot-housed at home. There appeared to be a return to traditional regular or symmetrical beds but transformed through new plants and the use of technology. Swathes of colour appeared in parterres and ubiquitous vases burst with bright flowers. The result was a contrived formality, an Italianate feel but artificial: reproduction that did not necessarily bear any relation of garden to house.

William Robinson (1838-1935) was a vocal opponent of this style of gardening and advocated a wilder and what he considered to be a more natural style created by horticulturalists using temperate plants and idealised in a cottage garden. Robinson encountered formidable opposition from the regiment of talented architects at the time, and a public discussion ensued about the role of architecture and landscape. H. H. Statham (1839-1924) broached the topic in 1889,⁸² whilst also at

⁸¹ Tankard, *Gardens of the Arts & Crafts Movement*, p. 43. referencing William Morris *Hopes and Fears for Art* (London: Longmans, Green, 1908 originally presented as a paper for the Birmingham Society of Arts in 1879), p. 128.

⁸² H. H. Statham, 'Architecture in its Relation to Landscape', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 901, 26 April 1889, pp. 515-529.

the forefront of the argument were the members of the AWG. Their June meeting was reported by *The British Architect*, the editorial in agreement, stating:

the architect as an artist has not only to make the picture, but also to frame it suitably, – to assimilate art with nature in such a way as to make the building and its surroundings harmonious counterparts of one and the same scheme.⁸³

In 1891 the architect J. D. Sedding (1838-1891) wrote about old-fashioned gardens. He emphasised how a garden displays man as master of nature, but that flowers, trees and water have always featured in gardens, and how a ‘true garden should have equal regard for Nature and Art’.⁸⁴ Sedding was known for his interests in church architecture, the Gothic style and the new movement that held a strong belief in the vernacular, the handcrafted, the regional and respect for tradition (to be known as the Arts and Crafts movement). He called for a sensible combination of the natural and the man-made, ‘the useful and the beautiful should be happily united’⁸⁵ and that whilst ‘a garden is, first and last, a place for flowers’,⁸⁶ it is also:

a deliberately contrived thing, a voluntary piece of handicraft, purpose-made;(..) only Nature may exaggerate herself – not Art.⁸⁷

Sedding was followed by Blomfield and Thomas who from the outset questioned, whilst deploying, the use of the term formal. They argued that the real purpose of the architectural treatment of gardens is to bring the house and its

⁸³ ‘The Architectural Treatment of Gardens’, *The British Architect*, Vol. 37, 28 June 1889, p. 459.

⁸⁴ Sedding, *Garden-Craft*, p. 68.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

surroundings into harmony, and Chapter I of *The Formal Garden* raised a pertinent question:

Is the garden to be considered in relation to the house, and as an integral part of a design which depends for its success on the combined effect of house and garden: or is the house to be ignored in dealing with the garden?⁸⁸

The landscape gardener of the eighteenth century was criticised and old-fashioned Tudor and Jacobean gardens were praised. A wide range of features, garden furniture and architecture were identified and described such as courts, terraces, walks, bowling-greens, parterres, mounts, theatres, arbours, hedges, groves, bridges, gatehouses, balustrades, stairs, pergolas, aviaries, fountains, sundials, and statuary (Figure 15 is an example). The simplicity of the old formal garden is linked to its purpose as a place of retirement and seclusion. This echoed Renaissance sentiments which in turn revived the purpose of the ancient Roman garden. The formal garden also allowed for compartments to be ‘filled with roses, lilies, poppies, flowers for garlands. Because they give pleasure and delight. This after all is the only principle’.⁸⁹

The second edition of *The Formal Garden* in October 1892 contained in its preface a rebuttal of the attack made by Robinson and reiterated the view that a garden is a work of art created by man employing nature but that ‘there is no need to conceal the fact that the garden is an artificial thing, that it is the result of man’s love

⁸⁸ Blomfield and Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

of flowers and grass and trees, and of the care which he lavishes on them in consequence'.⁹⁰

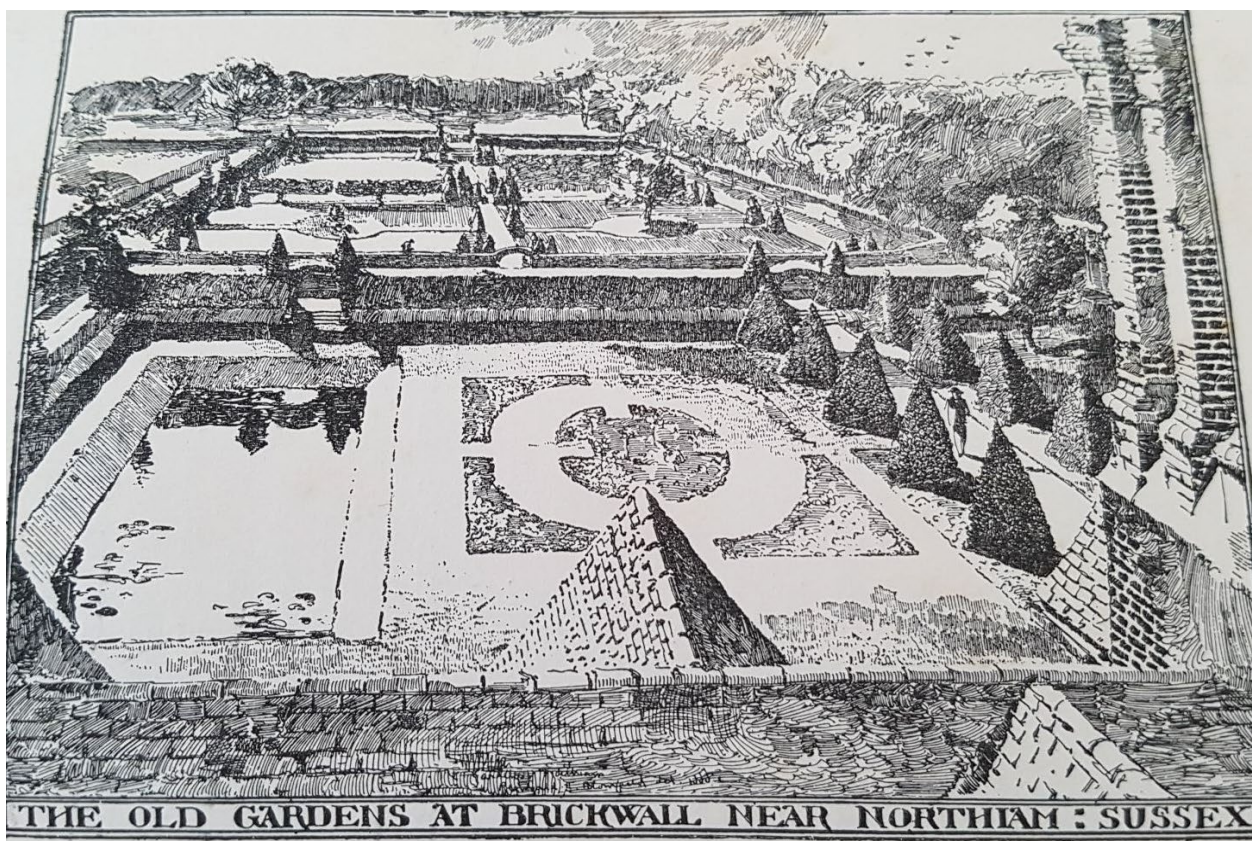


Figure 15. Brickwall, East Sussex, illustration by Thomas in Blomfield & Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. 148.

Thomas recalled the publication of the book stating ‘the storm of criticism it raised in the horticultural camp was remarkable. The issue might almost have been Free Trade and Protection. The battle raged in the press for a year or two’.⁹¹ The unresolved theme of art and nature in relation to a garden had surfaced once more and rumbled on for over a decade firmly and resolutely consolidating the role of the architect in garden design. In addition to the informal meetings held by the AWG, publications such as *The Studio* and *The Edinburgh Review* were vehicles for the promotion of the theme of art and nature, garden and art, formal gardens, old-world

⁹⁰ Blomfield and Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. viii.

⁹¹ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 433.

gardens, and the linking of gardens in England to those in Italy. The concept of the garden in relation to the house was adopted and promulgated by the architectural and artistic world at large.

Statham writing in *The Edinburgh Review* supported the promotion of the formal garden and agreed that planning a garden in relation to a house worked for all sizes of house, even smaller dwellings.⁹² *The Studio* took up the theme of the garden and its art with reference to Elgood's paintings stating 'The very word "garden" suggests an ordering of Nature's fantastic disarray to something approaching symmetry'.⁹³ The review uses Elgood's paintings as examples of how appropriate a formal garden is with its correct treatment of art, architecture, and horticulture. White argues that formal is charming, that architectural features can be delightful and that 'with the true "formal garden" the herbaceous plants again find a place'.⁹⁴



Figure 16. A formal garden in Rome, location unknown, painting by Elgood, date unknown, <https://pixels.com/featured/a-formal-garden-in-rome-george-samuel-elgood.html>, [accessed 1 April 2022].

⁹² H. H. Statham, 'Formal and Landscape Gardening', *The Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 176, Iss. 361, July 1892, p. 203.

⁹³ Gleeson White, 'The Garden and its Art', *The Studio*, Vol. 5, No. 26, May 1895, p. 51.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Elgood's paintings of gardens at home and in Italy (Figure 16) depict riotous colour and greenery mingling with stone seats, statues, balustrades, and walls.

As late as 1896 *The Edinburgh Review* remarked upon the bitter controversy but stated that 'The formal army are architects to a man; they are undoubtedly right in upholding the simple dignity and sweetness and quiet beauty of the old formal garden', whilst finding fault with their ignoring the resources of modern gardeners.⁹⁵ The resounding implication of the author is that gardening is an art requiring control and restraint in its creation of a 'garden-picture'.⁹⁶

The Scottish architect, J. J. Joass (1866-1952) contributed to the discussion in 1897 linking the features of Italian Renaissance gardens to those of the formal garden.⁹⁷ The architect E. S. Prior (1852-1932), heavily involved in the AWG, continued the argument about art and nature as late as 1900, writing in *The Studio* 'Since man is part of Nature, his natural garden will be that which shows itself his, not by its wildness, but by the marks of order and design which are inseparable from his work'.⁹⁸ Prior states that there is not only a fundamental connection between the house and the garden but in that connection lies scope for variety.⁹⁹ His allegiances are clearly those of another architect of this era being firmly on the side of the formal garden.

The result was that at the end of the nineteenth century garden design rose from the controversy and confusion to revert confidently to a more architectural and structural approach, joining the house to the garden so that one worked in

⁹⁵ 'Gardens and Garden Craft', *The Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 184, Iss. 367, July 1896, p. 178.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁹⁷ J. J. Joass, 'On gardening: with descriptions of some formal gardens in Scotland', *The Studio*, Vol. 11, No. 53, August 1897, pp. 165-176.

⁹⁸ E. S. Prior, 'Garden-Making', *The Studio*, Vol. 21, No. 91, October 1900, p. 28.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

conjunction with the other. Features of the English Tudor, Jacobean and Renaissance garden were re-introduced, albeit with simplicity and restraint. Flowers, shrubs, trees were given a prominence, but with a more natural treatment and would often reflect those in a cottage garden. The garden was to be a work of art, where the designer would improve upon nature, to create harmony and beauty. A new aesthetic had been created, perhaps typified by the more publicly acclaimed gardens of Lutyens and Jekyll (1843-1832) such as Hestercombe, Somerset, and elaborated further by Harold Peto (1854-1933) at Iford Manor (Figure 17), Wiltshire or Buscot Park, Oxfordshire. The garden had become once more an intentional series of outside rooms, with architectural features, to be useful and beautiful, working in unison with the house. Thomas was at the forefront of this generation of architects who consciously promoted the garden in relation to the house.



Figure 17. Iford Manor, Wiltshire. Photo: author, 1 September 2021.

Chapter Four: F. Inigo Thomas's garden concepts

‘A home should be an architectural conception of which the gardens really form a part. The several enclosures are the open air apartments in the making’¹⁰⁰

Whilst there is little in the public domain about Thomas and his is not a household name, research uncovers activity in the form of papers he read to prestigious societies including the Society of Arts, the AWG and the RIBA which were published subsequently in their respective journals, articles he wrote for *Country Life* and a book, *Keystones of Building*, published in 1912.¹⁰¹ Whilst Ottewill has referred to the papers, this is the first comprehensive analysis of all of Thomas's published work, in order of chronology and thereby seeking a relevance to his work. The time span of the papers, speeches and articles stretches from 1896 to 1926 and they provide invaluable insight into his concepts of garden design and the influences that may have guided him. Thomas was instrumental in producing *The Formal Garden* with Blomfield and whilst Thomas illustrated the gardens they visited around the country, ‘The book was the result of a series of talks between Mr. Blomfield and himself’, as reported from Thomas's reply to the vote of thanks for his paper.¹⁰²

At the age of thirty and having completed work on Athelhampton and Barrow Court, Thomas read a paper to the Society of Arts on 4 February 1896 which pronounced: ‘I think, as a nation, we are beginning once more to realise the charm of a formal garden’.¹⁰³ The paper falls into three parts with a conclusion: an historical review of English gardens from Elizabethan times; Italy as an influence and his

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 431.

¹⁰¹ Thomas, *Keystones of Building*.

¹⁰² Blomfield and Thomas, *Formal Garden*; Thomas, ‘The Garden in Relation to the House’, p. 251.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

travels there; and a description of his recent work in England, notably Athelhampton and Barrow Court. In the first section Thomas demonstrates an understanding and a fondness for Elizabethan gardens and their features, referring to Italian influences of that period. He speaks poetically of how Elizabethan gardens developed and of several features that he employed in his own gardens including ‘delicate grilles of hand-wrought iron [which] made the exits and entries into courts of green or parterres gay with flowers’.¹⁰⁴ Whilst praising old gardens, he criticises the so-called “Landscape Gardener” and particularly Kent and Brown.¹⁰⁵ He extolls the virtues of the old-fashioned divisions of a garden, each with its own character.¹⁰⁶ Thomas is conscious of the importance of long perspectives and that ‘the object of the old-time designer was to make a stage on which to play the drama of every-day life’.¹⁰⁷ He commits to the recent battle between Blomfield and Robinson on the side of the architect, but his tone is tempered and his arguments subtle. He states that English gardens were formal before the arrival of ideas from Italy, and whilst acknowledging the Italian style of Charles Barry (1795-1860), he is of the view that his gardens were ‘not all in harmony with English traditions’.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, he cannot remove himself from the Italian influence when he states ‘Italy is generally accepted as having been the main source from which we drew our inspirations’, before engaging his audience in a survey of the gardens in Italy he had visited.¹⁰⁹

The second theme deals with the Renaissance gardens in Italy he had visited one or two years earlier. Of the villa gardens near Rome, he includes synopses of Villa Mondragone (Frascati), Villa Torlonia (Rome), Villa d’Este (Tivoli), Villa

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, ‘The Garden in Relation to the House’, p. 241-251.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Aldobrandini (Frascati), Villa Falconieri (Frascati) and Villa Lante (Bagnaia). His paper was accompanied by slides, but images were not published in the journal.

Thomas was conscious of the architectural effect of columns and loggias, the architectural treatment of trees and also the use of bosquets and vineyards, turf, ilex, flowers, and fountains. He praises how water is manipulated to create surprise, but most admiration is reserved for the gardens at Villa Lante. ‘Of all the Italian gardens I have visited, none can compare with the Villa Lante for so much beauty in so small a compass’.¹¹⁰ Certain features at Villa Lante had a significant impression upon Thomas: the ‘boldness of the terracing, the quantity and elaboration of the stonework, the ingenious arrangement of the fountains, and lastly, the absence of wide lawns, that give the distinctive character to English gardens’.¹¹¹ The use of different levels as well as stonework are noticeable at Barrow Court, fountains are incorporated but definitely featured is that most English characteristic: an expanse of grass lawn.

The chronology of Thomas’s work and his visits to Italy are important. If these gardens had been visited only a year or two before the reading of this paper, he was working on the Barrow Court gardens contemporaneously. It is not unreasonable to accept that perceptions acquired during his travels in Italy would have influenced his work in England. Thomas’s paper contains emotional intelligence, a hint of sentimentalism, philosophising, and social comment, all of which pertain to a thoughtful and sincere young man, demonstrating a passionate understanding and involvement in the creation of gardens.

He states that:

¹¹⁰ Thomas, ‘The Garden in Relation to the House’, p. 241-251.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

on the face of every old garden or building is written the story of lives knit up with each other in a way that is hardly possible in the hurry of modern existence.¹¹²

The third section is devoted to the work at Athelhampton (although not named) and at Barrow Court. The work's progress is detailed with specific reference to the lines, axes, and vistas at Athelhampton but also the importance of the correct placing sundial, fountain, and wrought-iron gates. Thomas's description of Barrow Court conveys its idiosyncratic and statuesque achievements, emphasising a clear connection between the garden's design and its intended, lived-in use.

Thomas's concluding comments reinforce the position of the architect as the competent designer of the garden as well as of the house, declaring that if an architect cannot be trusted to design the garden, then that same person should not be trusted to design the house. Thomas does not deny the role of flowers in a garden, but the architectural treatment of the garden alongside that of the house is of the utmost relevance and importance.

After his 1898 paper to the AWG Thomas was approached by Edward Hudson (1854-1936), the founder of *Country Life Illustrated*. This led to a series of articles entitled 'Of Garden Making' written between February and April 1900. As well as illustrating a knowledge of garden history, these articles are used as a gentle yet indisputable vehicle to promote architectural gardens. However, his architectural garden is not devoid of flowers, and contains especially freely-growing flowers rather than beds of formally-planted flowers. He considers that the desire to produce rare and exotic plants has obscured what is 'the subtle charm that lies in a fusion of

¹¹² Thomas, 'The Garden in Relation to the House', p. 247-248.

well-designed architecture and symmetrical spaces with natural foliage'.¹¹³ In his article dated 24 March 1900, he describes a manor house with its walls 'festooned with a wealth of climbing roses' and 'splashes of sunlight and colour from garden courts' stating that with the disappearance of the enclosed spaces, the charm has gone too.¹¹⁴ Articles in *Country Life* in 1901 and 1909 respectively allowed Thomas to address fountains and orangeries, architectural features of gardens that enabled him to recall his travels. The daily usefulness of a garden was never far from Thomas's almost dreamlike writing:

In the ideal home that I have half promised myself to build for my declining years you will come to the orangery on the left as you step out into the court garden from the corridor beyond the hall. It (...) will form a buffer state between my own sancta at the end and the rest of the house which may be as noisy as it likes with women and children. You can picture to yourself the double row of well-kept shrubs (...) and the pleasant odours of flowering things that will take their place in the summer.¹¹⁵

In 1912 Thomas published *Keystones of Building* which treats the working relationship between and architect and client.¹¹⁶ Significantly he recalls *The Formal Garden* and states that it was a watershed that signalled a return to what he

¹¹³ Thomas, 'Of Garden Making', 24 February 1900, p. 235.

¹¹⁴ Thomas, 'Of Garden Making', 24 March 1900, p. 364.

¹¹⁵ F. Inigo Thomas, 'On Orangeries', *Country Life*, Vol. 26, No. 657, 7 August 1909, xlviii.

¹¹⁶ Thomas, *Keystones of Building*.

considered to be a ‘sensible system of planning the house and gardens simultaneously’.¹¹⁷

Thomas appears to have stopped creating gardens during World War I, but he was still active in the design and architectural world, speaking at meetings of the AWG on diverse subjects including ‘The application of colour to wood and stone’ (4 July 1913) and the ‘Architecture of Sweden and Denmark’ (15 January 1926).¹¹⁸ In 1926 he presented a paper to the RIBA entitled ‘Gardens’.¹¹⁹ His opening comments recall the controversy of the early 1890s and place him firmly on the side of the architects as he stresses that gardens and houses belong together. His intentions in garden design are practical in that ‘Sun, shelter and shade, both for human and vegetable occupants, should be the first consideration’.¹²⁰ His earlier beliefs of the garden in relation to the house are reinforced vigorously but he also explains how an architect should be a competent artist or even a sculptor. This is a novel theme that has evolved from the previous argument of the architectural garden. The paper is replete with consequential statements along these lines: ‘Let the guiding principle be to create, with a reasonable element of time, such foregrounds, middle distances and backgrounds as would delight a painter’.¹²¹ Stressing the importance of a painterly approach to garden creation, Thomas explains his working methodology, which included sketches in oil and a drawing to small scale of the entire plan. Figures 18 and 19 are previously unpublished paintings by Thomas and, although now faded with age, give an indication of the beauty and colour anticipated by Thomas.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

¹¹⁸ AWG, Annual Reports.

¹¹⁹ Thomas, ‘Gardens’.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 431.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 432.



Figure 18. Athelhampton, Dorset, painting by Thomas, date unknown. Courtesy of Henry Harrison-Topham.

The same paper delves into examples of gardens Thomas saw in Italy and praises the work of Shepherd and Jellicoe.¹²² He laments the abandonment of his own attempts to publish a book of surveys of Italian gardens. Accompanied by pictures he had taken on earlier visits to Italy, Thomas highlights gardens on Lake Como, in Genoa, in Rome and environs, and in Sicily. Features that could have been influential are the terminal figures on a terrace at Villa Farnese at Caprarola, isolated temples, garden courts, niches, fountains and water features, and the contrasts of light and shade. Explicitly he states ‘a certain relation exists between loggias or cloisters and groves and avenues. The first mark the passing from covered blocks to open air, and the second from enclosures to open country’.¹²³

¹²² J. C. Shepherd and Geoffrey Jellicoe, *Italian Gardens of the Renaissance* (London: Ernest Benn, 1925).

¹²³ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 438.



Figure 19. Athelhampton?, painting by Thomas, date unknown. Courtesy of Henry Harrison-Topham.

Thomas's concepts and methodology in garden creation were echoed in subsequent years. Jekyll and Weaver reinforced his message with a clear opening statement: 'It is upon the right relation of the garden to the house that its value and the enjoyment that is to be derived from it will largely depend' and the coronet garden at Athelhampton is given as an example of an ambitious and successful treatment of a small space.¹²⁴ Sitwell, having consulted Thomas on the gardens at Renishaw Hall in the 1890s, went on to echo Thomas's ideals of light and shade, variation, surprise, the use of water and architectural structures, in his writing and his work.¹²⁵

Thomas's philosophy of garden design as demonstrated by his papers and articles affirmed him as a member of the movement of architects at that period who

¹²⁴ Gertrude Jekyll and Lawrence Weaver, *Arts & Crafts Gardens: Gardens for small country houses* (London: Country Life, 1912, revised edition Antique Collectors' Club, 1981, 1997), p. 13 and p. 28.

¹²⁵ Sitwell, *On the Making of Gardens*.

believed strongly that the role of the architect was to design the garden in relation to the house, that the divisions of the gardens were outside rooms connected to the house and, in fact, part of the habitation, and that horticulture should not be confused with design. In addition, he understood that there was merit in the old-fashioned garden dating from Elizabethan times which had been influenced by Italian Renaissance gardens and there were features in Italian gardens that could be reproduced in an English setting. Gardens had value as a container of happy memories and were to be valued in conjunction with their house: whether cottage plot or estate of the landed gentry or business owner. Most significant, though, are his views that architects should work with the vision and skill of a landscape painter, and that colour was probably the most important element of the garden. In this Thomas denotes a shift from the purely architectural to the painterly, whilst not forgetting the relationship of garden and house.

The next three chapters form an analysis of his three gardens deemed to be the most successful and extant: Athelhampton, Barrow Court and Chantmarle.

Chapter Five: Athelhampton

‘Athelhampton as it stands (...) is, in the main, in design and principle, the work of one who is an architect in the widest sense of the word’¹²⁶



Figure 20. Ordnance Survey Map, Six-inch, Dorset Sheet XLI.NW surveyed 1887, published 1888.

Athelhampton Hall (postcode DT2 7LG) is situated about six miles to the north-east of the Dorset county town of Dorchester, in the valley of the River Piddle. Its National Grid Reference is SY7685794330. The building of the present house commenced c. 1485.¹²⁷ From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, the house had a succession of owners until, in 1891, Athelhampton was bought by a wealthy young gentleman, Alfred Cart de Lafontaine (1865-1944). Figure 20 shows the site at the time of the purchase. He commissioned Thomas to work on the restoration of the house and to create new gardens from a site previously occupied by ‘cowsheds

¹²⁶ ‘Athelhampton Hall, Dorchester’, *Country Life Illustrated*, Vol. 6, 139. 2 September 1899, p 272.

¹²⁷ Athelhampton, Historic England, list number 1000430.

and dilapidated outbuildings'.¹²⁸ There is no indication of how de Lafontaine came to be acquainted with Thomas. They were of a similar age, and both had been at Oxford, although records indicate that de Lafontaine matriculated in 1885, after Thomas is understood to have gone down.¹²⁹

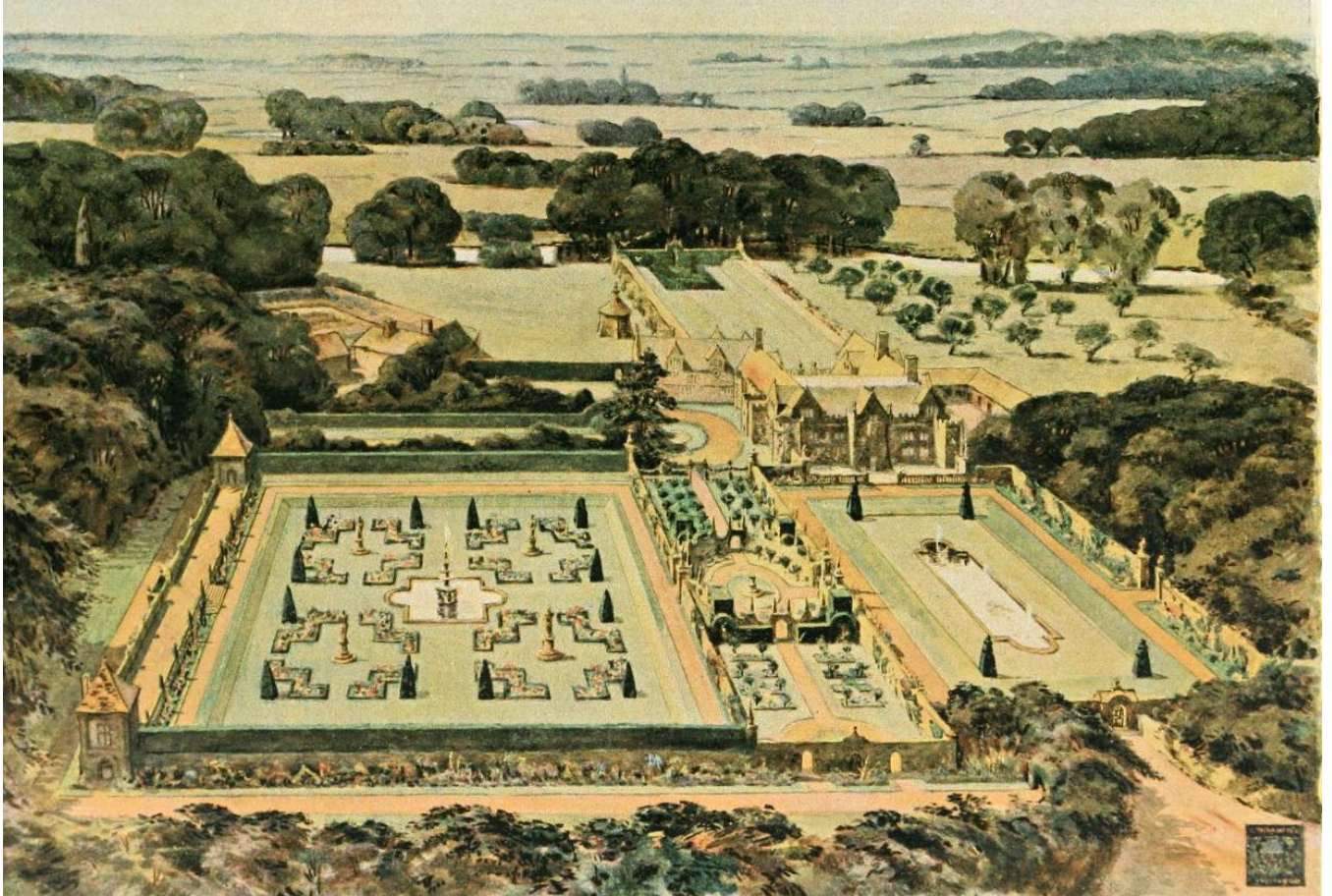


Figure 21. Athelhampton, bird's eye painted view of the proposed design by Thomas, *The Studio*, October 1900, Vol. 21, No. 91, p. 34.

Thomas's plans are encapsulated in his bird's eye painting (Figure 21), an exercise he described as integral to his working methodology.¹³⁰ He described his aims and dreams for the garden:

Visions of a sunny court of green on the south front, with a long pool down the centre, seemed to map themselves out on

¹²⁸ Alfred Cart de Lafontaine, *The Visitation to Athelhampton Hall* (Dorchester: Athelhampton Hall, 2021, transcript of a talk in 1899 to the Dorchester Field Club), p. 24.

¹²⁹ Joseph Foster, *Oxford men, 1880-1892* (Oxford: J. Parker, 1893), p. 103.

¹³⁰ Thomas, 'Gardens', p. 432.

the survey. (...) the idea took shape (...) to make an upper garden, with raised walks all round and a long terrace beyond, with a pavilion at either end. The terrace would command the whole, and tea could be served in the pavilions in sweltering dog-days, while the fountain below plashed coolly and Zephyrus, or his brother wind in the carving on the lintel, might suggest a breeze while no leaf stirred.¹³¹

This is a picturesque vision: of vistas and reflections, of shade and light, of grass and flowers, of stone, iron, and water, of usefulness and of fancy. Where the bird's eye painting indicates axes, Thomas spoke of vistas. The purpose of the heart of the garden (Figure 22) was described in this way:

For in the middle (...) some errant fancy dictated a coronet in stone, a circle of pinnacles on ramps, with a sundial in the centre and steps down from the upper garden, with wrought-iron gates and baskets of fruit in stone.¹³²

Colour and fragrance were intended when he wrote: 'rampant roses and creeping clematis clothed the pinnacles'.¹³³

¹³¹ *Country Life Illustrated*, 2 September 1899, p. 275.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*



Figure 22. Athelhampton, coronet garden. *Country Life Illustrated*, Vol. 6, No. 139, 2 September 1889, p. 272.

In ‘The Garden in Relation to the House’, he mentioned that ‘lines were laid down to make vistas through the centres of the courts’ and that there were ‘three main lines on which the work is planned’.¹³⁴ One axis ran through the house from the south garden with its long pool down the centre of a planned tennis lawn and across a planned pool to a statue in a yew hedge just before the river. Another axis centred on a window in the left wing and passed down a rose garden, through the coronet garden to a niche fountain between two arches. The third axis crossed from a summerhouse in a grove to the east, across the south garden, through the coronet garden, up a flight of steps, through a wrought-iron gate, across the sunken garden and its fountain, before continuing up another flight of steps to a stone seat at the

¹³⁴ *Country Life Illustrated*, 2 September 1899, p. 275.

back of a terrace. Water played a prominent part in the shaping of the gardens, even though the River Piddle that runs around two sides of the grounds was ignored, with views to the river itself (and its flood plain) being closed off by walls and trees. As well as water, architectural features such as terraces with balustrades, summer-houses, sundial, fountains, niches, and wrought-iron gates were important in the layout. Thomas was emphatic about how the ‘purchase and planting of yew and box, of turf and flowers and creepers’ was an integral part of the work.¹³⁵



Figure 23. Athelhampton, the West Court. *Country Life Illustrated*, Vol. 6, No. 139, 2 September 1899, p. 273.

The author of the *Country Life Illustrated* article writing eight years after most of the work had been completed formed a favourable impression:

Time and Nature seem to have dealt kindly with his work,
and to have overlaid the bar form with royal robes of

¹³⁵ *Country Life Illustrated*, 2 September 1899, p. 275.

clematis, roses, and honeysuckle, leaving just a hint here and there of architectural form.¹³⁶

The bird's eye painting (Figure 21) is a source of additional intended features. The garden was to have four enclosed sections. Starting on the western edge, the painting indicates the sunken garden with a pond and fountain at its centre, bordered to the west with a terrace and with summerhouses or banqueting houses at each end (Figure 24). Obelisks can be seen at regular intervals along the top of the balustrade. The layout of the sunken garden was symmetrical and divided into four sections, each with a statue at the centre of four flower beds. At the outer corner of each was placed a yew tree, twelve in all. To the north of the coronet garden the rose garden is indicated, and to the south of the coronet garden, flanked by a turreted yew hedge, are symmetrical beds of what appear to be shrubs and flowers. Creepers can be seen adorning both sides of the walls. Flowers, too, are indicated in the long border at the southern end of the sunken garden. The pool garden to the south of the house should have had two fountains at least and yews are shown planted in each of the four corners of lawn surrounding the pool (Figure 23). The *Country Life Illustrated* article of 1899 remarks that the sundial at the centre of the coronet garden had been 'usurped' by a fountain and the four figures or statues planned for the centre of each of the parterres of the sunken garden were non-existent.¹³⁷ The same article shows an abundance of flowers and the driveway to the forecourt of the house was lined with box shaped architecturally to resemble turrets.

¹³⁶ *Country Life Illustrated*, 2 September 1899, p. 276.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

An exploration of the grounds today highlights features not hitherto described in published material. Of note are the two stone sculptured faces that were placed above the door on the front of each of the raised summerhouses on the terrace above the sunken garden. A smiling one (Figure 25) on the western end represents summer or joy and the other on the chilly eastern side drips icicles, representing winter or unhappiness (Figure 26). Beneath the balustrade of the terrace would have been two water troughs, filled from the stone faces of Zephyrus adorning the column below each obelisk. The niche fountain at the southern end of the garden beyond the coronet garden has intricate stonework and a carved lion's head to spout water.



Figure 24. Athelhampton, terrace. *Country Life Illustrated*, Vol. 6, No. 139, 2 September 1899, p. 276.



Figure 25. Athelhampton, summer. Photo: author, 29 April 2022.



Figure 26. Athelhampton, winter. Photo: author, 29 April 2022.

The face of Pan lurks in two niches at the southern end of the southern pool garden, facing the house. Also invisible in the painting is the dainty yet striking wrought-iron gate that leads from the coronet garden to the sunken garden (Figure 27). It is not known if Thomas designed this, but his interest in wrought-iron work was referenced later in his life by dining companion, Joan Oglander.¹³⁸ Athelhampton is renowned today for its twelve gigantic yew trees, and although distinctive, it cannot be confirmed that such growth was in keeping with Thomas's original plans. The structure and stonework of the garden determine a longevity complemented by charming detail in the wrought-iron gates and the carved faces of Pan, Zephyrus, summer, and winter.



Figure 27. Athelhampton, gates. Photo: author, 6 March 2022.

¹³⁸ Oglander, letter, 5 April 1903.

Ottewill concludes that ‘Athelhampton is one of the most successful surviving examples of the formal garden revival in its pioneering years’.¹³⁹ Mowl states that ‘Athelhampton was no tentative experiment but a flamboyantly committed demonstration of architecture in the service of lawns, pools and flowers’.¹⁴⁰ Helmreich suggests that ‘F. Inigo Thomas’s design for Athelhampton went as far as to propose the garden as the overarching design, with the house as a central feature in it, as opposed to the typical opposite configuration’.¹⁴¹



Figure 28. Hewell Grange, Worcestershire, c. 1890-1908. Historic England, CC5200630.

Thomas’s garden at Athelhampton can be attributed to several possible influences. In assessing these it is important to view the gardens within the context of Thomas’s life and experiences at that point. He was a young man in his mid-twenties, yet he had trained as an architect in the offices of a leading architectural practice of his day alongside colleagues who would become household names. The

¹³⁹ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ Mowl, *Dorset*, p. 123.

¹⁴¹ Helmreich, ‘Body and Soul: The Conundrum of the Aesthetic Garden’, p. 275.

work at Hewell Grange (Figure 28) between 1884 and 1891 almost certainly influenced him. Here formal gardens were created and contemporary photographs indicate obelisks, gate piers and balustrades as well as parterres.



Figure 29. Montacute, Somerset, illustration by Thomas in Blomfield & Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. 93.

Linked to this mood of Elizabethan revivalism, the gardens at Montacute, about thirty miles from Athelhampton, illustrated by Thomas in *The Formal Garden* (Figure 29), were probably an elemental influence. However, he also illustrated sundials, gates, and topiary in gardens such as Brickwall, East Sussex, and Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire. It is known that in 1889 Thomas travelled to Europe including northern Italy. From his later papers and his photographs, there are features at Athelhampton (and at Barrow Court and Chantmarle) that can be identified as having been influenced by the Italian Renaissance gardens he saw or would have seen. Obelisks are a feature at the Italian gardens of Villa Lante (Figure 30), Isola

Bella, Lake Maggiore, and the Quirinale Palace, Rome. Wrought-iron gates can be seen in photographs by Wharton and Platt of the Royal Villa Portici, near Naples, Villa Alario, near Milan, and Villa Borghese, Rome. Enclosed gardens were to be found at the Colonna Gardens, Rome, and magnificent gate piers at the Botanic Garden, Padua. Villa Aldobrandini possessed stone seating (reflected in Figure 31) and most gardens in Tuscany and the vicinity of Rome were terraced (as was Montacute).



Figure 30. Villa Lante, Bagnaia, Fountain of the Moors, c. 1892, in Charles A. Platt, *Italian Gardens* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894, reprinted London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 21.

Symbolism and sculpture, both classical and mythological, were features of Italian Renaissance gardens and the use of Pan, Zephyrus, and the summer and winter faces at Athelhampton can be said to represent Thomas's discreet and English interpretation of typical Italian features. It is not known if he was familiar with Tuckermann's book on Italian Renaissance gardens, but this seminal work of 1884 coincided with an increased interest in Italian gardens leading to many more

published accounts and photographs.¹⁴² The layout of Athelhampton with its regular rather than symmetrical enclosures has echoes of Elizabethan and Italian Renaissance gardens. The scale is sympathetic and there is delightful variety. The influence of the Renaissance device of the *giardino segreto*, which created an enclosed, private garden, is obvious.¹⁴³ Thomas exploits the natural site, using the confines created by the river, its flood fields, and the road to his advantage. Rather than opening out, he enclosed. The garden has formality in its layout, its architectural elements, and its structural planting, yet it also has a charm, a playfulness, and a human scale.



Figure 31. Athelhampton, stone bench. Photo: author, 29 April 2022.

¹⁴² W. P. Tuckermann, *Die Gartenkunst der Italienischen Renaissance-Zeit* (Berlin: Verlag von Paul Parey, 1884).

¹⁴³ Patrick Taylor (ed.), *Oxford Companion to the Garden*, p. 192.

Athelhampton demonstrates Thomas's embarkation on a journey to establish that the garden does relate to the house with its real and imaginary axes, but also showcases elements that are both retrospective and forward-looking. Its forebears are Italian Renaissance and English Elizabethan gardens, but it anticipates the flowering of the architecturally- and horticulturally-rich gardens of the Arts and Crafts period which were to follow. Athelhampton establishes Thomas as a leading proponent of the concept of the garden in relation to the house.

Chapter Six: Barrow Court

‘It is an architect’s garden, as will be discovered, and, *pace* those who would hold back the architect to the barrier of the house wall, it is not to be gainsaid that the effect is very fine’¹⁴⁴

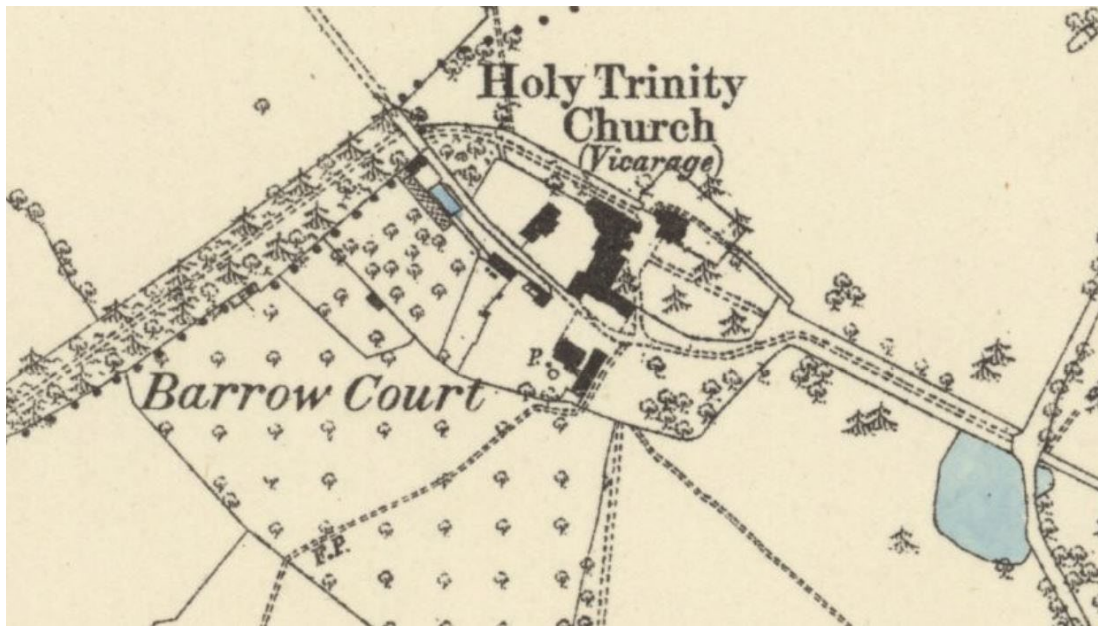


Figure 32. Ordnance Survey Map, Six-inch, Somerset V.SE. surveyed 1882-3 published 1884.

Barrow Court (postcode BS48 3RP) at Barrow Gurney in North Somerset is located about six miles from Bristol on the Backwell ridge.¹⁴⁵ Its National Grid Reference is ST5123368588. After the Norman conquest the site was owned by Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutances. The house was altered over the centuries and in 1883 (Figure 32 shows the site at that time) was acquired by Henry Martin Gibbs, whose family home was nearby at Tyntesfield. The house was remodelled between 1887 and 1891 and in 1892 Gibbs commissioned Thomas to produce a new garden. Work on the gardens continued until 1897. Chronologically, Barrow Court is Thomas’s second major garden and whilst there are some features drawn from

¹⁴⁴ *Country Life*, ‘Barrow Court, Somerset’, Vol. 11, 263, 18 January 1902, p. 84.

¹⁴⁵ Barrow Court, Historic England, List number 1000562.

Athelhampton, at Barrow Court both landscape and his skill have been used to much bolder effect. Figure 33 shows the plan of the grounds.

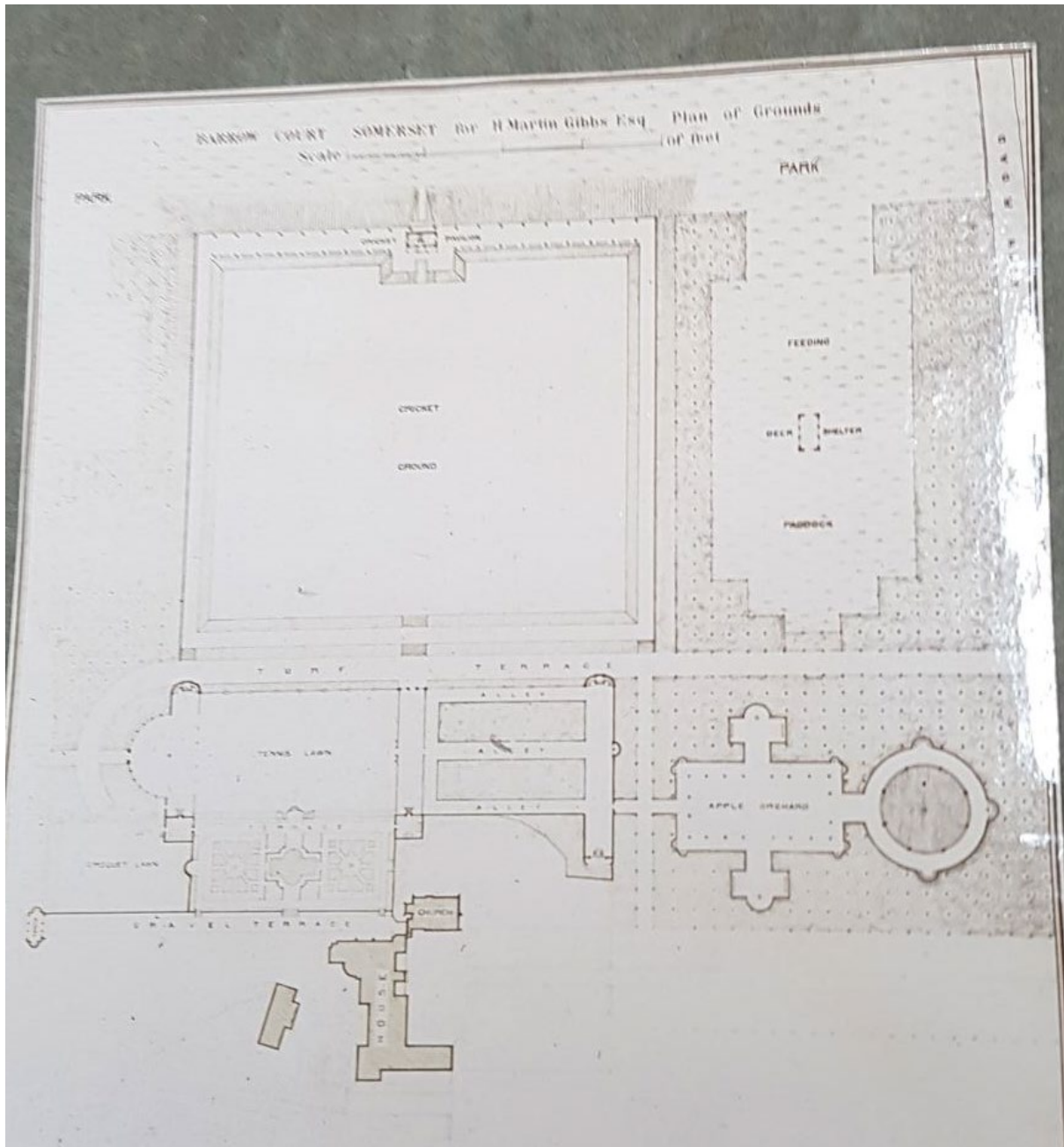


Figure 33. Barrow Court, Somerset, plan by Thomas, undated. Historic England, TH003.

Thomas commented on his work here in his speech to the Society of Arts in 1896.¹⁴⁶ He noted that almost everything he planned had been implemented, although with some modifications: ‘the large stone vases that complete an architectural arrangement at the far end of the central alley were hoisted into position last week’.¹⁴⁷ His tone was matter-of-fact as he describes the features, less poetic than his description of Athelhampton but nevertheless human as he described the practical use of the features he had created:

You will notice two walled suntraps, one at each end of the terrace. That at the further end is furnished with hooded seats and a stone table for al fresco teas, and set round with shrubs at intervals. The nearer one has an oak arcading on two sides supported by a lead roof, and I hope it will be a tempting spot for an easy chair and a novel.¹⁴⁸

Contemporary photographs (Figures 34 and 35) illustrate the gardens at different stages in their completion. Apparent is a combination of the structural and the horticultural; seating for pleasure and spaces for vistas are obvious. Yew hedges have windows, parterres are turf-edged, there is symmetry and yet the flower beds burst with a profusion of shapes, sizes and, presumably, colours. Obelisks, stonework, and roofs of the garden houses were visible across the garden.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas, ‘Garden in Relation to the House’, p. 248.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.



Figure 34. Barrow Court, parterre, c. 1890s. Gibbs family photographs, 01.03.

About six years after completion the garden was described in *Country Life* as having ‘simplicity and appropriateness of character’, as ‘delightful’, and as a ‘monitor of the passage of time. It bears on its face the signs of changing seasons’ as illustrated by sundials and the terms.¹⁴⁹ Also noted was the use of water with the lily pond, a fountain from a terrace to the lawn and an iris pond referred to as ‘a veritable world of water-gardening’.¹⁵⁰ The author’s impression is favourable, highlighting the architectural features, the symbolism, and the stonework, which was called ‘a true poem in stone’ and culminating in a comment that ‘the garden architect has worked well, and with force and character that are not to be gainsaid’.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *Country Life*, ‘Barrow Court’, p. 84.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 35. Barrow Court, parterre, c. 1890s. Gibbs family photographs, 01.02.

In 1908 the Barrow Court gardens were illustrated in *The Gardeners' Magazine* by a series of photographs showing a serene combination of architectural features, clipped yew hedges with windows, an avenue of limes and hollies leading to the semi-circle, now replete with statues, and nearby 'collections of flowering trees (...) lilacs, syringas and spiraeas'.¹⁵² Also visible are clipped bay or Portugal laurels in tubs, pots of sub-tropical flowers, herbaceous and rose beds, wooden seating and a tennis court on the lawn. This article also praised the terms, 'The Daughters of the Year' (Figure 36), 'where each of the sculptures representing an age of woman is adorned with seasonal flowers: snowdrops for January, daffodils for

¹⁵² *The Gardeners' Magazine*, Vol. 51, 16 May 1908, p. 376.

March, roses for June, fruits and grain for October and holly and mistletoe for December'.¹⁵³



Figure 36. Barrow Court, exedra. Photo: author, 27 April 2022.

Ottewill, commenting more recently, considered that ‘the dominant theme is architectural, with a preponderance of monumental stonework’, and that ‘important is the bold handling of spaces and overall breadth and simplicity of treatment’.¹⁵⁴ He highlighted Thomas’s influences as follows:

garden houses, gateways, balustrades, piers, balls, vases and obelisks (...) derived from local examples, such as Montacute, or with reference to Italy, as in the stone table for al fresco teas in the east court or the semi-circular arrangement of terminals outlined against the landscape.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *The Gardeners’ Magazine*, p. 376.

¹⁵⁴ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The observations of Mowl and Mako were more theatrical:

Everything is exuberantly carved: stone fruit tumbles from heaped urns, swags loop and scroll, and the overscaling has an Alice in Wonderland effect, as if the gardens had been laid out for lazy giants confined to wheelchairs. The Exedra is at least twenty-five feet high, and that scale is standard. The surprises come geometrically, and their historical reference is compressed: Tudor, Jacobean, Palladian; all with a fruity dash of Beaux Arts.¹⁵⁶



Figure 37. Barrow Court, July. Photo: author, 27 April 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Mowl and Mako, *Somerset*, p. 190.

A site visit by the author revealed features that delight in their composition of natural materials (stone, brick, and wood) and the scale of the stonework and sculpture which is in harmony and proportion to the site with its panorama of wooded hills and fields that stretch to the horizon. Most of the original statuary is *in situ* and the terms, carved by Alfred Drury (1856-1944) still captivate as they reflect the stages of life of a woman from girlhood to old age (Figures 36 and 37). Enchanting, too, are the two suntraps: one (Figures 1 and 39) with wooden seating (in what appeared to be stained, dark wood) under a carved wooden arcade with trelliswork and the second with a stone table, reminiscent of Villa Lante, and wooden seat with roof under a stone carving of fruits (Figure 38). These are outside rooms, acting as extensions of the house, and unquestionable examples of the concept of the garden in relation to the house.



Figure 38. Barrow Court, outdoor room. Photo: author, 27 April 2022.



Figure 39. Barrow Court, outdoor room. Photo: author, 27 April 2022.

The garden has enclosed spaces without the garden feeling divided or enclosed, yet there are areas that surprise and are full of variety (Figure 40). Wherever the visitor stands or sits, elements of architecture can be glimpsed in different directions. The garden displays a sense of grandeur combined with very human elements such as the faces of the terminal figures and the implementation of a garden intended for human utilisation.

Whilst Mowl and Mako state that Barrow Court is a ‘place where stone has flowered at least as vigorously as the plants’, they also assert that it is ‘surely one of the most evocative gardens of its time’.¹⁵⁷ The contemporary author of *Country Life*

¹⁵⁷ Mowl and Mako, *Somerset*, pp. 188-190.

invokes Barrow Court as a didactic example of the argument that had raged not long before about formal garden design.¹⁵⁸



Figure 40. Barrow Court, coronet exedra. Photo: author, 27 April 2022.

Barrow Court displays a bold confidence, with Thomas capturing and using the setting to masterly effect. The wide horizon, with echoes of Villa Mondragone, allowed Thomas to devise a garden with changes of pace; with vistas, open space, enclosures and surprises. Influences here are less old-English than Italian Renaissance, executed with more than a sprinkling of the AWG, illustrated especially by the sculpture and the finely crafted woodwork including garden seats and trelliswork. The exedra of terms is reminiscent of the Villa Farnese and the Villa Piatti, Rome; the obelisks, the stone table and the garden temple have echoes of Villa Lante (Figure 41); and the gates resemble those at Villa Portici. The classical

¹⁵⁸ *Country Life*, 'Barrow Court', p. 85.

columns, though, are embellished with leaves and flowers, so dear to the Arts and Crafts movement. Old-English influences surface in the turf parterres and the urns, reflecting those at Penshurst Place, Kent (Figures 42 and 43) and illustrated in *The Formal Garden*.¹⁵⁹ The exaggerated gate piers reflect those at Villa Mondragone and Villa Falconieri; stone seats recall Villa Aldobrandini. These features were to be found in the Italian gardens Thomas visited and photographed.



Figure 41. Villa Lante, stone table. Photo by Thomas. Thomas 'Gardens', p. 437.

At Barrow Court, the division of the space into outside rooms relates the garden to the house and brings the house into the garden. Thomas's concept that a garden must have shade, light, water, and colour is also put into practice. The use of vistas, frames, and perspective is not only of the Renaissance, but painterly too. It is the creation of not just an architect, with a regularity, but of an artist who understands how a garden lives and gives life. Whilst the concept of the garden in

¹⁵⁹ Blomfield and Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. 221.

relation to the house is prevalent, Barrow Court represents the exuberant flowering of a confident and innovative designer, who has injected his own artistic skill into a space that also draws strongly on traditions derived from the Renaissance, both English and Italian.



Figure 42. Barrow Court. Photo by Thomas. Historic England, TH003 01 087, c. 1890-1900, accessed 28 April 2022.



Figure 43. Penshurst Place, Kent, lead vase, illustration by Thomas, in Blomfield & Thomas, *Formal Garden*, p. 221.

Chapter Seven: Chantmarle and other gardens

‘Chantmarle is a most accomplished garden’¹⁶⁰

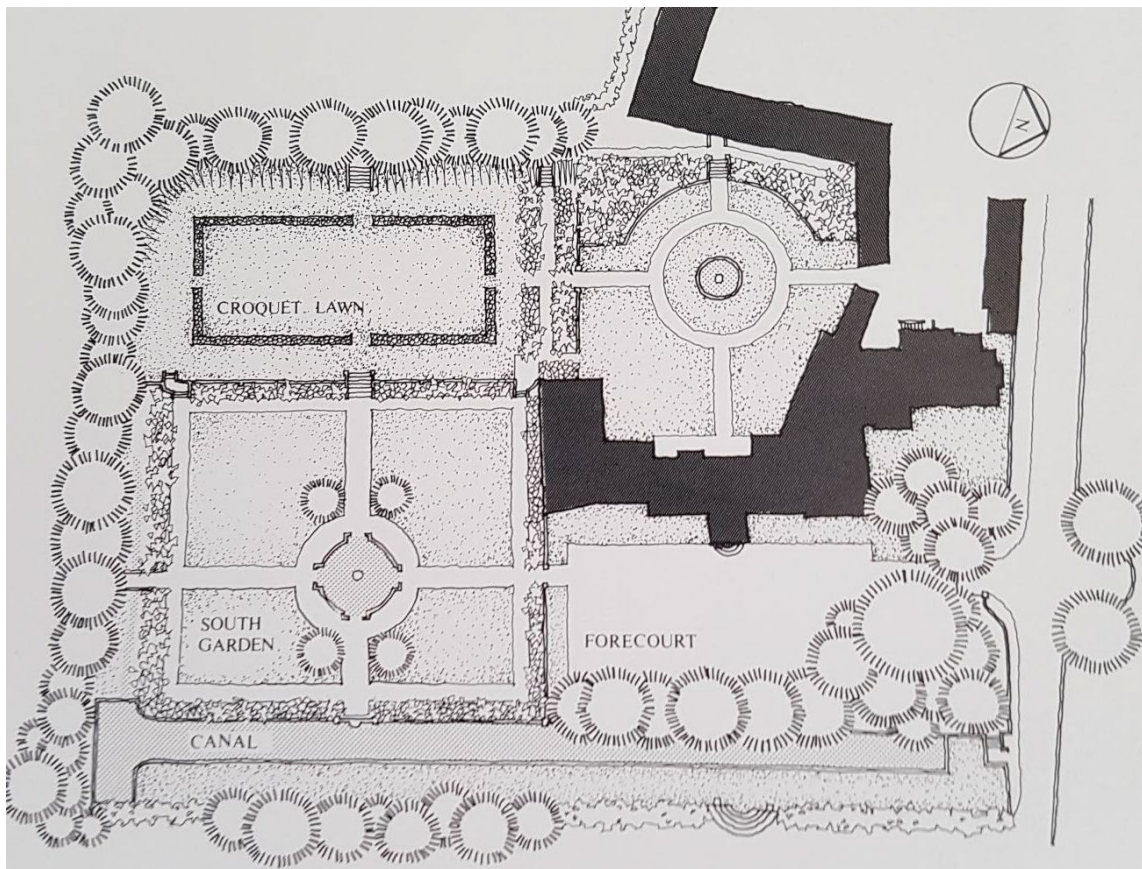


Figure 44. Chantmarle, Dorset, plan by Miranda Ottewill in Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 19.

Chantmarle (postcode DT2 0HD) in the parish of Cattistock, Dorset. Its National Grid Reference is ST5882402160. A house dating from the Middle Ages was re-modelled in the early seventeenth century by Sir John Strode (1561-1642), whose family owned nearby Parnham. After being tenanted in intervening years, the house was acquired in 1907 by Francis Savile who engaged Thomas to re-design the gardens. The task at Chantmarle was two-fold: to re-establish a garden in keeping with the refurbished Jacobean house and to protect the house and garden from the

¹⁶⁰ Mowl, *Dorset*, p. 135.

railway line that had been constructed some sixty years previously, and which was approximately one hundred metres from the house.



Figure 45. Chantmarle, gates. Photo: author, 22 June 2022

Thomas's garden at Chantmarle dates from 1910 (plan in Figure 44), some twenty years having elapsed since Athelhampton. Thomas is seen in a more mature and subtle mode whilst still employing favourite features: stone piers, stone bench, semi-circular stone steps, balustrading, terraces, obelisks, yew trees, fountains, and wrought-iron gates. His deployment of water at Chantmarle is bold and dramatic; his engagement with the landscape and the manipulation of the setting is exemplary. Features of the garden such as the sunken lily-pond and fountain surrounded by a low, stone balustrade with balcony, and yew exedras demonstrate the influence of the Italian Renaissance gardens Thomas mentioned in his 1896 and 1926 papers. The garden exemplifies Thomas's tenets of structure with axes, real and subliminal, eye-catching ornamental work in stone, flower borders, but also theatricality combined with contemporary usefulness. As Thomas indicated in 1896 in praise of old-

fashioned gardens, the garden was not only a stage for life but ‘unlike the stage, the scenery was real, and the acting an unaffected pleasure in existence, and in the sights and sounds and scents of nature’.¹⁶¹



Figure 46. Chantmarle, lily pond. Photo: author, 22 June 2022.

A site visit by the author revealed an unobtrusive garden, divided into unequal parts, with enclosures created by stone walls and boundary trees. The wrought-iron gates (Figure 45) at the entrance, supported by tall piers capped with a crown-like finial, reminiscent of Montacute, are impressive. Beyond the forecourt and to the side of the house, reached through a gateway in the wall, are layers of garden. At its centre stands a large lily pond with fountain (Figure 46) enclosed by a low, stone balustrade, surround by four parcels of lawn and wide flower borders. Giant yews line the pathway to the side of the canal. A 1950 *Country Life* article

¹⁶¹ Thomas, ‘Garden in Relation to the House’, p. 244.

indicates that these were once rose beds.¹⁶² Behind the house is a second courtyard, with a fountain at its centre, enclosed by a circular path and bordered by wide flower beds.



Figure 47. Chantmarle, canal. Photo: author, 22 June 2022.

Ottewill describes Chantmarle as ‘possibly his finest garden scheme’ and Mowl writes that ‘Chantmarle’s garden is so commandingly yet effortlessly gracious’.¹⁶³ At Chantmarle Thomas has deployed several of his trademark features yet with a subdued subtlety. There is none of the boisterous, exuberant architecture at Barrow Court, nor the obvious Elizabethan elements at Athelhampton. Structurally the greatest feat was the building of the canal (Figure 47), which ranges from 3ft to 12 ft in depth. In creating this, Thomas called upon his travels in Italy, where water is used so effectively, and implemented an old-fashioned moat, in keeping with the house, and possibly reinstating what had existed previously.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Arthur Oswald, *Country Life*, ‘Chantmarle, Dorset, I’, Vol. 107, No. 2789, 30 June 1950, p. 1969.

¹⁶³ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 17; Mowl, *Dorset*, p. 137.

¹⁶⁴ Oswald, *Country Life*, ‘Chantmarle, Dorset, I’, p. 1971.

Chantmarle's obelisks, yews, balustrades, stone bench, and round court with fountain all reflect typical elements of Thomas's work. If the flower borders alongside the walls are the original width, these are a development in that they are wider than those at Athelhampton and Barrow Court and possibly reflect the fashion in the use of flowers fifteen to twenty years on. Importantly, the use of axes allows for vistas from various angles of the garden. The eye takes obvious and less obvious paths. Diagonal vistas stretch through gateways at different levels. The division of the garden into sections allows for variety and surprise, important to Renaissance gardens, and the creation of outdoor rooms reflects Thomas's work elsewhere. Even the canal, itself such a feature, is enclosed with the wall on one edge and a strip of lawn bordered by a yew hedge on the other side.



Figure 48. Chantmarle, porch. Oswald, 'Chantmarle', p. 1967.

In designing Chantmarle, the house was Thomas's muse, and its architectural features were incorporated into the garden. The mouldings of the oriel from the porch (Figure 48) have been copied in the corbelling in the balustrade above the canal. The semi-circular steps leading to the house are reflected in a flight of semi-circular steps (Figure 49) on the far side of the canal, recalling Bramante's Belvedere Cortile in the Vatican Gardens. There is a charming symmetry and small sections of the garden can be viewed as delicate, independent compositions. There is an overwhelming feeling of intimacy but with many framed delights. Elements of the Italian Renaissance garden are the harnessing of water and the stone seats (harking back to Villa Aldobrandini) and the wrought-iron gates. The terracing exploits the terrain to good advantage, this being a feature of both Elizabethan and Italian Renaissance gardens.



Figure 49. Chantmarle, semi-circular steps. Oswald, 'Chantmarle', p. 1968.

At Chantmarle, the house and garden, in proximity, reflect one another with a fluidity, still very much in the tradition of the garden in relation to the house, and with flower beds and croquet lawn combining Thomas's tenets of beauty and usability. However, it is perhaps Thomas's skill as artist that is the greatest influence, creating understated painterly scenes in miniature, and in this he is true to himself.

Constraints of space prevent Thomas's other accomplishments being advanced in detail. It is known that he created gardens at Rotherfield Hall in 1897 and Ffynone in 1904. Comper mentioned Hickleton Hall (Figure 6) and Ufford Place (Figure 7). At Hickleton he transformed the east front, adding balustrading and summerhouses. He incorporated obelisks, urns, and statues, and established the relationship of the garden to the house by extending curved walls from the house into the garden and utilising axes through the house into the garden.¹⁶⁵ It is known that he planned gardens, with canal, bosquet, quincunx, formal garden, and a wild garden at Otley Hall in about 1915.¹⁶⁶ The garden at Parnham House is attributed to him. Its 1910 sale documents mention sundial, bowling green, Italian iron gates, sculptured masks and drapery festoons, yew buttresses and hedges, a rose garden with ramblers growing over columns, turf and gravel walks, stone steps, and an arbour terrace with balustrading.¹⁶⁷ The creation date of these features is unknown. A letter from the Marquess of Northampton responding to information about possible garden designs at Castle Ashby stated that there was a layout in their records for a parterre embodying coronets, but this was not implemented.¹⁶⁸ There is a sketch in oil by

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.mansionhousedoncaster.com/hickleton-hall/> [accessed 3 August 2022].

¹⁶⁶ Ottewill, *Edwardian Garden*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁷ D-DSP/8/20, DRO, Parnham particulars, 1910.

¹⁶⁸ AMS6280, ESRO, letter, 10 August 1965.

Thomas of proposals for a scheme involving water, planting and architecture at Drakelow Hall (Figure 50) which was unexecuted.¹⁶⁹ However, Historic England lists work on sunken gardens, walls and terraces as having been carried out by Blomfield in 1902.¹⁷⁰ The catalogue for the exhibition ‘The Spell of England’ as mentioned in Chapter One as confirms plans for Hickleton, Eton Playing Fields and The Mall. Thomas designed the Tirah Memorial, Oxford, in 1900 (Figure 51).

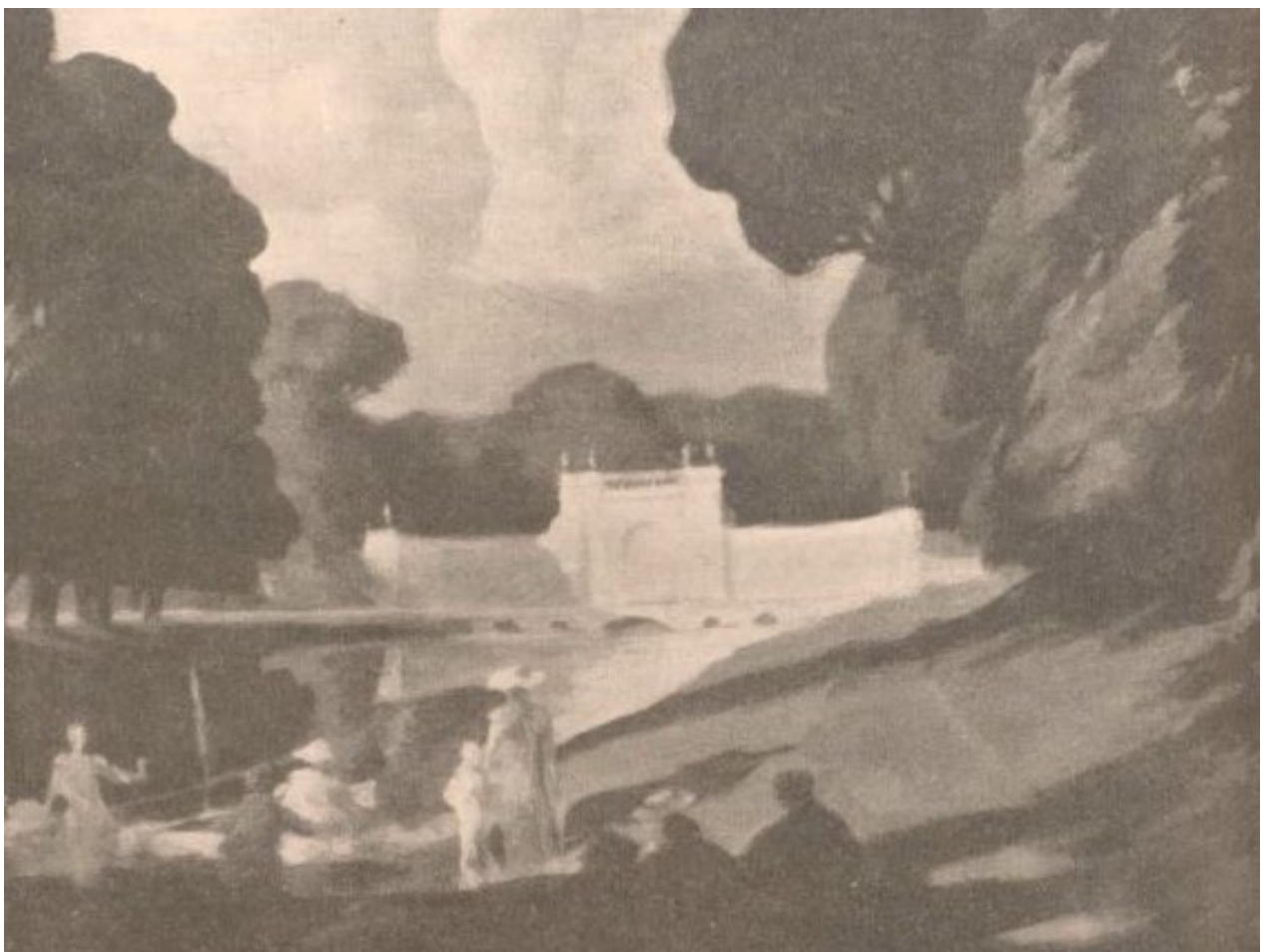


Figure 50. Drakelow, oil sketch by Thomas, undated. Thomas ‘Gardens’, p. 430.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 430.

¹⁷⁰ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1334614?section=official-list-entry> [accessed 9 July 2022].



Figure 51. Tirah memorial, Oxford, by Thomas, 1900.
<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/oxfordshire-light-infantry-memorial-266705>
 [accessed 9 July 2022].

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

‘The prattle of fountains among fanciful architecture and colour is the keynote of the place [Villa Lante].’¹⁷¹

This dissertation has explored and affirmed Thomas as a painterly architect and neglected proponent of the concept of the garden in relation to the house. Its aims have been achieved through a thorough investigation and careful analysis, in chronological order for the first time, of his speeches (to the Society of Arts and the RIBA), writing (articles for *Country Life* and *Keystones of Building*), illustrations (for *The Formal Garden*) and garden designs (bird’s eye view of Athelhampton, plan for Ken Hill and paintings, previously unpublished, of Athelhampton) as well as a collation of newly discovered source material including photographs (from Pembroke College, the Thomas family, and Historic England), family correspondence (from the East Sussex records office), the Oglander correspondence, references to speeches he gave (from the AWG Minutes and Annual Reports) and a detailed study of secondary literature. A more composite and comprehensive picture of the man as architect, artist and garden designer has been created than has existed in the public domain previously, with many snippets of new information, gleaned from a variety of sources, contributing to the whole.

This dissertation underlines the fact that Thomas has been very much overlooked and neglected over the years by garden historians (although Ottewill was the first to realise there was more to be discovered about Thomas) and the public alike, probably because missing biographical details such as his Oxford experience, the dates of his travels abroad, and the lack of productivity in the field of garden

¹⁷¹ Thomas, ‘Gardens’, p. 438.

creation from the time of World War I, meant that he was harder to determine. There is no Thomas archive that contains his plans, paintings, and writings in one place and there is no comprehensive list of gardens he may have designed, or plans produced but not implemented. It is notable, too, that at least two of the houses whose gardens he designed have been lost or have deteriorated: Ufford Place was demolished in 1956 and Hickleton Hall has been both school and care home since World War II and is currently derelict. However, an absence of facts about Thomas does not mean the void should be filled with speculation and conjecture, for example confusing his relationship with Renishaw Hall in the 1890s or linking his experiences in World War I with the lack of garden designs thereafter. A careful establishment of the chronology as indicated on page 6 and the new information from family correspondence and the Thomas family provide more biographical clarity which helps to explain his concepts, influences and working methodology.

Thomas belonged to a long line of architect-garden designers who adhered to the fundamental Renaissance principles of harmony and regularity and the concept of the house and garden working together. These gardens were intended for entertainment, relaxation, and contemplation. This concept was exported and translated to reflect the culture and climate of Elizabethan England. It continued through the seventeenth century with additional French and Dutch formal influences, survived the eighteenth century with its apparent sweeping away of compartments and symmetry, into the nineteenth century to the Italianate gardens of Barry. Whilst Thomas worked to the principles of the architectural garden, deploying elements of the Elizabethan and Italian Renaissance gardens, as evidenced in the extant gardens at Athelhampton, Barrow Court and Chantmarle and photographic evidence of Hickleton Hall, he did not borrow entirely but he injected his own style by

combining architectural structure with softness and colour from flowers and plants. These attributes have been illustrated in detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven respectively.

It is significant that Thomas's first public speech in 1896 to the august Society of Arts was entitled 'The garden in relation to the house'. An analysis of his writing and his work over several decades, from the illustrations of *The Formal Garden* to his speech at the RIBA in 1926, illustrates how his garden design concepts moved from revivalist formality with axes and a recognition of the importance of flowers at Athelhampton, to the Renaissance principles of respecting location and surroundings, strong architectural features such as terms, garden houses, temples, outside rooms and secret gardens as demonstrated by Barrow Court, and to the more painterly at Chantmarle, still with a focus on vistas, but incorporating a dramatic use of water and a creation of miniature artistic scenes. In each case the house and garden were conjoined and in harmony; the garden was both beautiful and useful; and the senses were stimulated by structure, sound, and colour. From gardens such as Hickleton Hall to the miniature scenes he created at Chantmarle, there is a progression from the architectural to the artistic. This progression is reflected in his writing which is visual and replete with references to painting, colour and vistas and confirmed by his methodology of producing painted bird's eye views and sketches in oil. From this research it has been established that Thomas employed an increasingly painterly approach combined with architectural principles and vision to design gardens that were at the forefront of a reinvigorated and vocal drive to create gardens and house in unison and in sympathy with each other at the end of the nineteenth century. He successfully married architecture with horticulture.

Whilst Thomas's gardens are not as numerous or as well-known as those of his better-known peers, it is probable that he was more influential in the years 1890 to 1915 than has been recognised. His family and society connections and his involvement with the architectural and design world were considerable. Later garden designers such as Jekyll and Sitwell echoed his concepts (highlighted in Chapter Four). Even after World War I he would have continued to assert an influence, unbeknown to the public, amongst the respected household names who were members of the AWG.

Thomas, as an artist, imbued his gardens with painterly perspective and vistas, based on a foundation of architectural principles. His influence was certainly more substantial contemporaneously and then later neglected. He can be viewed as the executor of the architectural garden and the anticipator to the flourishing of Arts and Crafts gardens, whilst the grandeur of Barrow Court marks Thomas as a man of the Renaissance. Moreover, his formula of structure and perspective, the garden as useful and as living apartments continues into late twentieth century garden design. Subtle, talented, adventurous, soulful, and human, Francis Inigo Thomas should resonate today and his legacy, hitherto neglected, should be discernible.

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Appendix A F. Inigo Thomas: Timeline

- 1865 Born Warmsworth, Yorks. Fifth son of clergyman Charles Edward Thomas
- 1884 Matriculated Oxford University, Pembroke College. Left same year.
- 1886-9? Trained as architect under G. F. Bodley and Thomas Garner
- 1884-1891 Hewell Grange, Worcs. By Bodley and Garner
- 1889-1894 Travelled in Italy, more than once presumed
- 1890 Designed Athelhampton, Dorset for Alfred Cart de Lafontaine
- 1891-3 Athelhampton garden was built
- 1891 Working on illustrations for Reginald Blomfield's *The Formal Garden in England* (published 1892)
- 1891 Ratton, East Sussex (destroyed by fire 1891) and rebuilt by Thomas for his cousin, Freeman Freeman-Thomas (created Baron Willingdon 1910, Viceroy of India 1931-6)
- 1892-6 Barrow Court, Somerset
Hickleton Hall, S. Yorks and Ufford House, Suffolk
- 1896 4 Feb, *Journal of the Society of Arts*, lecture, 'The garden in relation to the house'
- 1897 Rotherfield Hall, East Sussex
- 1900-1902? Enlists in the Imperial Yeomanry. Active service in the Boer War and taken and prisoner of war
- 1900 Series of articles, 'Of Garden Making' in *Country Life Illustrated*
- 1901 29 June, Article in *Country Life Illustrated*, 'Fountains as a Garden Decoration'
- 1902 Donates chalk portrait of his composer cousin Arthur (1850-1892) to the National Portrait Gallery
- 1904 Ffynone, Pembrokeshire
- 1909 7 August, Article in *Country Life*, 'On Orangeries'
- 1910 Chantmarle, Dorset
- 1911 Parnham – only attributed to Thomas
- 1912 *Keystones of Building*, published
- 1915 Otley Hall, Suffolk, plans
- 1926 Paper read to the RIBA, 'Gardens', published in the *RIBA Journal*, 1926, Vol 33, p. 433

- 1929 Exhibited 94 items at Walker's Galleries, New Bond Street, London, 7-19 October, entitled 'The Spell of England'
- 1930 Exhibited 51 paintings in Doncaster, 6 March-27 April, entitled 'The Spell of England'
- 1950 Died, 27 March, aged 86, London

Appendix B F. Inigo Thomas: Italian gardens

This is a compilation of the Italian gardens that Thomas refers to either in his paper to the Society of Arts in 1896 and/or in his paper to the RIBA in 1926.

Rome area

Villa Mondragone, Frascati

Villa Falconieri, Frascati

Villa Aldobrandini, Frascati

Villa d'Este, Tivoli

Villa Lante, Bagnaia

Villa Farnese, Caprarola

Tuscany

Boboli gardens, Florence

Villa Cetinale, Sovicille, near Siena

Lakes

Isola Bella, Lake Maggiore

Genoa

Villa Scassi, Sampierdarena

Rome

Villa di Papa Giulio

Villa Madama

Villa Bosco Parrasio

Villa Torlonia

Sicily

Villa Palagonia, Bagheria

Villa Valguanera, Bagheria