

PAGES FROM AN ARCHITECT'S NOTEBOOK

George Stanley Repton: his drawings for a house and a greenhouse for George Eyre, of Warrens, Bramshaw, Hampshire

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ABSTRACT

Warrens, Bramshaw is a substantial early-nineteenth century country house, about which very little has been published. Its owner, George Eyre, engaged John Nash as architect. Nash's assistant, George Repton, a son of Humphry Repton the landscape gardener, made drawings of a house, greenhouse and brewhouse inscribed with Eyre's name. These, and some related Eyre papers, are discussed in this account.

THE HOUSE

1799 must have been an exciting year for George Eyre. Not only did he gain his MA (he was a Fellow of All Souls), but also he was settling into the landed estate bought from Samuel Orr in the previous year. Apart from its having been owned during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by the Warren family, who sold to Samuel Young in 1746, and Young's son having sold to Orr in 1789 (*VCH* Hants 4, 624-5), we know very little of the house - 'Warrens', then in Wiltshire, and since 1895 in Hampshire. But Eyre had already determined to build anew and was actively seeking professional advice on how to go about it. To judge from the men he is known to have consulted, George Eyre (1772-1837) wanted something both fashionable and elegant: and the designs they produced (for both architects were flexible when it came to matters of style), reveal that he sought a building in the classical convention.

Perhaps hoping to make a fortune through speculative developments with which he became involved in that city, John Plaw (c 1745-1820) set up his architectural practice in Southampton shortly before Warrens changed hands. He was of course looking for business in the neighbourhood, and by the turn of the

century had secured several commissions in Hampshire, though Plaw is one of those architects remembered more for their books than for anything known to have been built to one of their designs. However, he did produce a Gothic cottage orné near Lymington (Plaw 1800, pl XVI) suitable for the 'liberality of its possessor, and the real comforts of life', and a domed bath house and fishing lodge at Brockenhurst House (Plaw 1795). That same attractive book shows a 'Villa in the Cottage Style' designed for a client in Wales (pl XX), based on Mr Drummond's fishing cottage on the Avon, near Ringwood. Houghton Lodge, a splendid cottage orné built by 1800 near Stockbridge with which Nash has been tentatively linked by Christopher Hussey (1951), is more likely by Plaw, as was conceivably Mr Lambert's Elm Cottage, which stood immediately adjacent to the surviving picturesque North Lodge to Nash's castle at East Cowes, and illustrated by William Cooke in 1808 (pl opp 139). Why Eyre selected Plaw is not known, but he was local, he may have advertised, and probably enjoyed some publicity from his first two books (another was about to appear), for that was normally the reason for such architects committing designs - built, or unbuilt - to print. Plaw's *Rural architecture*, published in 1785, had already run to four editions by 1796, and some of the architect's clients must have been known socially to Eyre, who had presumably seen Plaw's work.

At least four quite different designs for Warrens were submitted by Plaw, together with a variation on one of these plans (Eyre Papers). All bear Plaw's name and the date 1799, are similar for their essential symmetry and for their chastely handled classical style

(Fig 1). All but one show houses of modest scale that have some form of passageway linking the offices off – an arrangement favoured by Palladian architects, but sometimes considered to be inconvenient and uncomfortable by the occupants. The one grandiose design is symmetrical in appearance and thoroughly self-contained. Even stabling for six horses and stable yard is embraced within the single block – about 160 feet long (49 m) – the main front displaying pavilions and a pair of three-bay colonnades. There is barely a hint in any of these drawings of the picturesque or rustic styles that Plaw, as an author, was so industriously promoting. He met with disappointment at Warrens (as with his Southampton ventures), for none of these schemes appears to have been accepted, and the client turned to Nash. Though the hapless Plaw later emigrated to Canada, his drawings remain of interest not only for what they tell of himself and George Eyre. Two of the plans – one captioned ‘Design for Addition and Alteration of House at Warrens . . .’ – tell us virtually all that we know of the house Samuel Orr sold. However, if to that knowledge we add speculatively what can be gleaned from a very small and badly crazed image of a stone-coloured house on a small canvas that might depict old

Warrens (Eyre Papers), the likelihood is that Nash’s building replaced a substantial dwelling of early Georgian appearance which might, or might not, have stood on the present site.

The architect John Nash (1752–1835) entered into partnership with the landscape gardener Humphry Repton (1752–1818) in about 1796. Repton’s two architect sons – John Adey Repton (1775–1860) and George Stanley Repton (1786–1858) – were assistants in the practice, which ended acrimoniously in about 1802. As a result John, (who was deaf) joined his father (who had no formal architectural training), and George remained with Nash to become his chief assistant. He left Nash’s office, not long after marriage in 1817, for independent practice. During his years with Nash, George Repton kept several notebooks. We are concerned here with only two of them (PNB and RNB).

One of Repton’s notebooks contains a plan and elevation of Warrens, and designs for a greenhouse bearing Eyre’s name (PNB 42, 43, below). These drawings are supplemented by another elevation of the house (RNB 43r), differing from the former in having four urns placed on the loggia parapet. There are also designs for a brewhouse inscribed ‘G. Eyre Esqr near Lyndhurst Hants’ (RNB 31v, 32r).



Fig 1. ‘East Elevation for Warrens Wilts.’ Watercolour signed by J Plaw Southampton 1799. Private collection. (Author)

Warrens has passed almost unnoticed by architectural historians. Terence Davis (1960; 1966) does not mention it, and Summerson's only reference is in his list of Nash's works (1980, 192), 'c. 1805' – a date repeated by Pevsner and Lloyd (1967, 137), who add 'Probably designed by Nash'. The fullest account is an article by Hitchens (1966), but he concentrates on Eyre and his descendants (who still live at Warrens) and adds little on the house.

Eyre's papers have been scrutinised for this study, and we are now in a position to tell much more about Nash's activities at Bramshaw. The documents include George Eyre's small leather-bound notebook dated 1799 on the cover, and on the title page inscribed, 'Amount of Money Expended in repairs &c at Warrens 1799-'. Eyre's journal opened on January 2. It is recorded on the last leaf that by June 30, 1805, a total of £12,286 2s 2d had been spent 'on building etc of every description' (Eyre Papers).

Plaw having been despatched, Nash made his first recorded visit to Bramshaw on October 12, 1800. In a later letter to Eyre, he wrote that he had extracted dates of some journeys he had made 'from a Journal that I always keep'. By February 2, 1804, a total of twenty-eight visits – thirteen of them in 1801 alone – had been made. From London to Warrens was 88 miles, and Nash allowed for one day's travelling in each direction, plus one or two more on site. Before signing his agreement with Eyre, Nash's fees were as normal at that time – 2 guineas per day (including travelling time) and 1/6d per mile for travelling expenses. Once it had been agreed to proceed, the scale altered. Nash then charged only the actual cost of travelling, plus two guineas a day for that time, and nothing for those days he spent 'at the Spot'. After signing the agreement (and then some minor amendments to it), this meant that Eyre was charged only five guineas expenses per visit: previously it had cost him several times that amount.

Finally it was agreed that for the sum of £6,675 16s 7d (plus commission etc), Nash would build the house, its kitchens, offices, brewhouse, the wall and gates enclosing the

kitchen court, and drains, privies, etc, according to the plans and particulars at that time annexed to the documents. It is of interest to note that a balustrade over the 'bow' window, and a cupola and weathercock for the brewhouse range are specifically mentioned in the estimates. The greenhouse is not, though one is indicated in Repton's notebook (PNB 22).

Nash's commission, his estimating fee of £100 2s 9d, and indemnification, added £667 11s 6d to the estimates; and then there was the clerk of works' wage of 1½ guineas a week, bedding and hay for the horses and other such details, bringing the final gross estimate to £7,571 15s 0d. Seventy-three weeks later – by 25 June, 1802 – the work was to be finished, but of course it was nowhere near completion on time.

The professional contract between architect and client was drawn up and agreed when Nash was at Bramshaw on 2 May 1801. His responsibilities included making all plans and designs, keeping and auditing accounts, and making contracts, etc. His commission (10 % on the final net estimate) was to be paid in three equal instalments – one third on covering in the offices, a second one-third when the house was covered, and a final payment on completion. Outstanding expenses would also be settled on those occasions. Eyre paid Nash £292 19s 6d (which included expenses) in July 1801, £222 10s 6d plus travelling expenses of £26 5s 0d in December of that year, and a final settlement, including £222 10s 6d plus £68 5s 0d for travelling, in August 1804. At the end of a letter written to Eyre by Nash during or after February 1804, a postscript notes his visiting dates with payments receipted alongside. By deduction Eyre took up residence in the new house between 15 December 1801 and 9 February 1802. (Nash's dates and those recorded by Eyre do not necessarily coincide to the day. Nash could have entered his day of departure from base, his date of arrival or departure from Warrens, or the date of his return to base.)

It was presumably as a result of over-running the completion date that Pickering, clerk of works, entered into an agreement with

Eyre in November 1802. In future, he was not to be paid a wage, but by admeasurement and valuation of work done: there was even then plenty to be completed, both inside the house (such as finishing the library columns) and around the offices. Then there was such additional work as Mr Nash might order. But Pickering soon ran into trouble. As completion drew near, the men were taking advantage of his preoccupation by drinking, sharpening knives, and not extending themselves. Acting on Nash's instructions and with Mr Eyre's advice, Pickering discharged all but two of the men. Yet there was still much to be done. Locks, gutters and work in the gardens had to be finished, and there was difficulty in finding new men for the task. Pickering wrote to Nash at Dover Street on 21 November and Nash wasted little time in setting out for Bramshaw, for he had departed prior even to Pickering's having written a second time six days later.

Reference should be made to the chimney pieces. Some were removed from the old house and sold. It is possible that others were reused, but all the main ground floor rooms had new. One Thoms (?) provided the drawing-room chimney piece (bill dated December 1802), and 'Adron' those for the library and eating room. This was presumably William Adron (fl 1792-1832), later employed at Longleat and Buckingham Palace. He was assisted in his business by his son Charles.

That the two elevational drawings George Repton made of the entrance front of Warrens (one in either notebook) differ only slightly, in detail, has been mentioned. As the earlier notebook (RNB) appears to date from about 1800, it is possible that the drawing in it could have been made at the time of building. The later notebook (PNB) is dated 1805, by which time we now know the house had been finished. While we can but guess why George Repton made his second drawings (Figs 2 & 3), they provide evidence that we can not take it for granted that designs appearing in the second notebook necessarily represent commissions being undertaken by Nash at the time such drawings were made.

On comparing these drawings with the

yellow-brick house as it stands (Figs 4 & 5), one finds minor differences. The drawings show a projecting *voussoir* at the head of each ground floor opening, yet the dished roundels in the twin gable-ends are not to be seen in either of the Repton facades. Of features more readily altered after construction, the symmetrically grouped chimneys have gone, and the centre upper window has been deepened, while the loggia openings were recently glazed. However, an undated water colour, painted with some precision, shows the key-stones quite clearly, and the roundels to contain sculptural forms: and a sphinx tops a shallow panelled plinth, built into the parapet above the same centre window – shown to be deep. Perhaps this water colour is a visualisation made at some intermediate stage.

George Repton's plan of Warrens (Fig 2) shows nothing closely comparable with other plans seen of Nash houses, though the stairs, octagonal room, and 'Anti-room' are typical of his manner. Little is shown of the offices. These might well have incorporated part of the earlier building, and an allowance was made for reusing materials from the old house in constructing the new. While there is nothing in Repton's plan to suggest retention of any part of Samuel Orr's house, two of Plaw's proposals incorporated an existing room with a large canted bay window. Perhaps Nash's drawing room echoes this feature which, from outside, appears to have been heightened to the eaves at some time after its original construction. If so, we might account for Nash's estimates referring to a balustrading over the 'bow' window: especially as George Repton, in his specification for Rose Cottage, Blaise Hamlet, refers to its small canted bay window as a 'bow' window (Temple 1979, 130).

Since 1804 Warrens has doubled in size, George Eyre having himself added accommodation for the large family resulting from his first marriage, to Frances Hulse (daughter of Sir Edward Hulse, of Breamore). His grandson, George Edward Briscoe Eyre, made further substantial alterations. Recently, servants' quarters adjacent to the entrance have been demolished, the service wing and offices

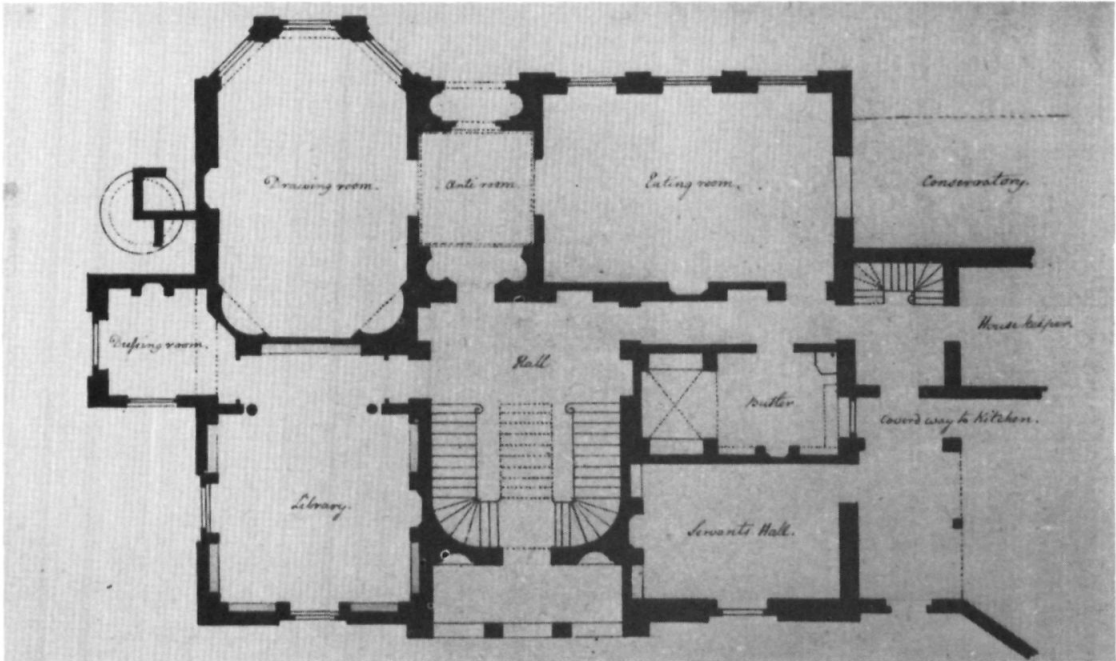


Fig 2. Plan of a house for George Eyre, from George Repton's notebook. (PNB Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton)

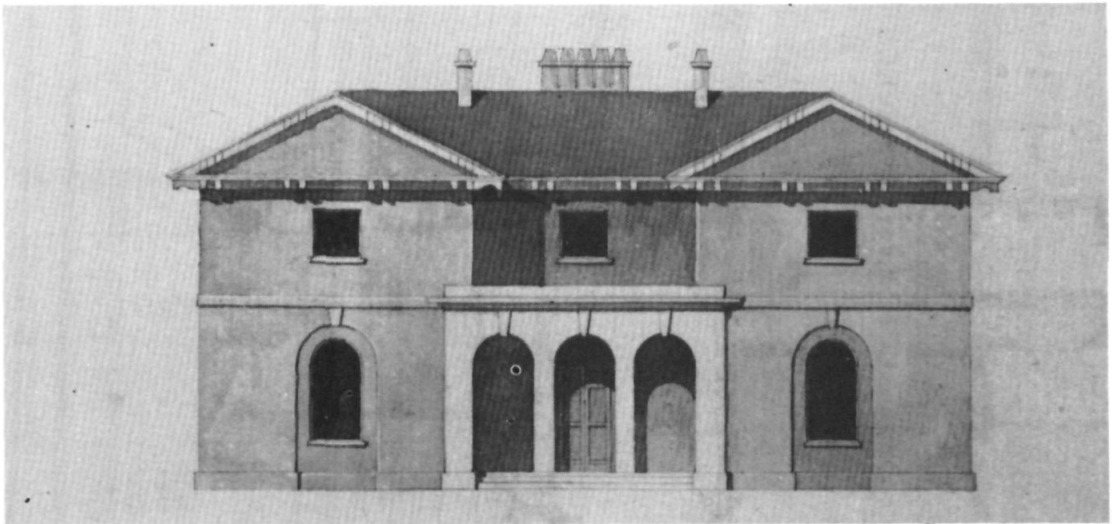


Fig 3. Elevation of a house, inscribed 'Mr Geo Eyre' from George Repton's notebook. (PNB Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton)

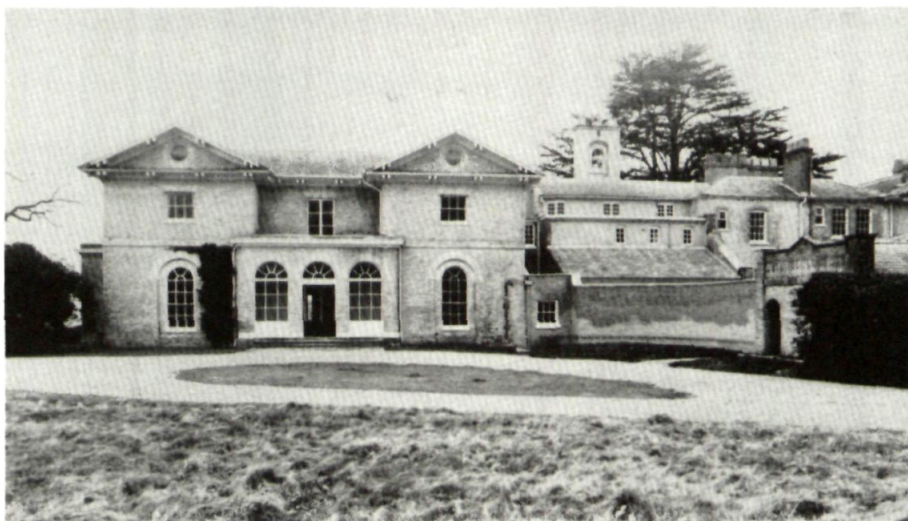


Fig 4. Warrens, Bramshaw, Hampshire: the approach front, 1981. (Author)



Fig 5. Warrens, Bramshaw, Hampshire: the garden front, 1981. (Author)

now being screened from the approach by a concave wall, very much in the manner that Plaw had suggested on one of his designs. The house shown in Repton's plan has been very little altered, and the whole is unusually well maintained.

We cannot investigate these later developments; yet neither can we let the important and extensive alterations made by Philip Webb pass unmentioned. Drawings for his work at Warrens are in the RIBA Drawings Collection.

THE GREENHOUSE

More than twenty greenhouse designs can be assigned either directly to Nash's office, or are recorded through drawings by John and George Repton. Greenhouses (this term, as used by George Repton, will be employed in this account referring to such structures at large) associated with Nash can be classified in various ways. They might be free-standing, or be conceived as an essential component of a new house, or be added to an existing dwelling. While any of his greenhouses might be decorated in Gothic, Tudor, classical or exotic styles, the underlying freestanding form most favoured by Nash was of a Parthenon-like overall appearance – usually columned, standing on a shallow plinth, and with pedimented end elevations. But even within this classical concept he might apply oriental rather than Grecian details, and build in stone or in trellis.

A design for Samuel Thornton of Albury Park, Surrey is one example of the Parthenon-like form, and Mr Musgrave's, at Barnsley Park, Gloucestershire, another. George Eyre's version completes a Grecian trio. Both the last-named clients required free-standing greenhouses. While the rear sheds and stokeholes indicate this, it is still a point to be borne in mind in the Warrens context. It will also be seen that a double (return) flue runs along the back wall only. There are no peripheral underfloor ducts (as there once were at Barnsley Park). Neither is there any indication that planting beds were intended, though the

total absence of columns from the main (glazed) elevation suggests that good light was of more importance than maximum heat, especially if the building was sited so that an end wall faced south. The glazed panels were fixed, unlike the removable ones that Nash suggested to Musgrave would be advantageous at Barnsley, if not actually fitted, although he did put this idea into practice on extending his own house at East Cowes.

Cast-iron trusses were to span all three roofs, yet no two were made from the same pattern. Although iron and glass were to be the key to constructing more efficient and even exciting architectural forms shortly to evolve through the experiments of pioneers such as Thomas Andrew Knight and John Claudius Loudon (who dubbed the new adventurous half-dome, curvilinear and acuminate forms 'non-architectural' for their lack of historical style and applied ornament), there is no suggestion that Nash was creatively aware of their aesthetic and functional potential. At Brighton Pavilion and in columns at Carlton House Terrace and Buckingham Palace cast iron was used by him both structurally and decoratively, but it had little bearing on the three-dimensional forms that his buildings assumed. Yet there is a possible exception. At Royal Lodge, Windsor, Nash provided a greenhouse made of cast-iron trellis and a great deal of glass (at an estimated cost of £2,737). Even so, depictions of the building suggest something simple, light, large and airy rather than an adventurous or 'rational' shape. It is interesting to note in passing that Humphry Repton produced a pheasantry for the same royal client at Brighton, chiefly of glass supported on a thin cast frame, in 1808 – six years prior to Nash's work at Royal Lodge.

On George Repton's plan of Warrens (Fig 2) a space is inscribed 'Conservatory'. This suggests either that one was to be built there, or that one had already been constructed: alternatively, that an earlier structure was to be retained. Whatever the intention, this area could not have been meant for George Repton's design (Figs 6 & 7), for quite apart from the stoke-hole and shed, there are projecting

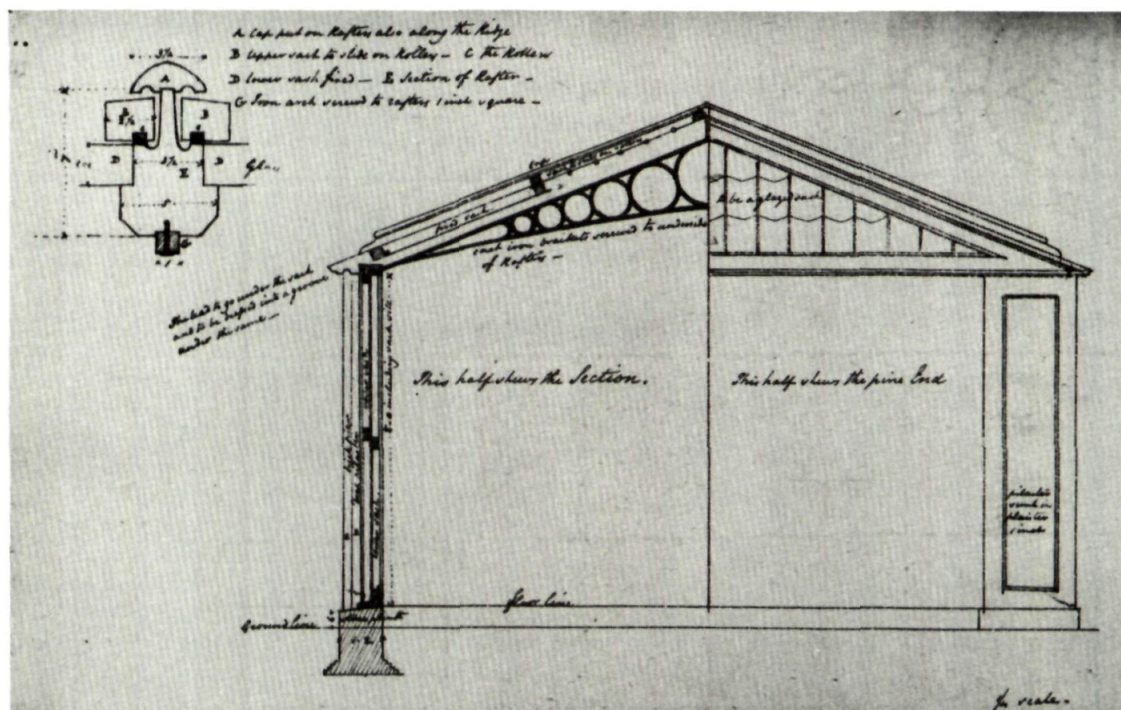


Fig 6. Transverse section and detail section of a greenhouse for George Eyre from George Repton's notebook. (PNB Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton)

pilasters at all four angles. Moreover, these are overhung by the pediments, and there are solid end walls on the plan, just as for the back. Whatever stood in the 'Conservatory' space would, if not earlier, have been swept away when the 43 foot (13.11 m) hall was built; the one fitted out by Philip Webb in 1898–1899. Yet there is no mention of either a greenhouse or conservatory in Nash's 1801 estimates, or in the contract subsequently drawn up with Eyre. No bills or accounts have come to light either. Such a free-standing structure built to Nash's design might have been sacrificed when Warrens was extended to the south-west, but if such developments had already been mooted, Eyre would presumably have chosen a less vulnerable site for his greenhouse. One is therefore drawn to the remains of a camellia house – devoid of all glass and sashes – some 70 yards (64 m) beyond the much-lengthened main building where, facing south-east, the surviving paved

plinth and planting beds are contained by solid end- and back-walls, behind which is a stoke-hole and shed.

Camellias normally need protection only from frost, and houses for them are not necessarily provided with beds for raising the plants. Staging, stepped down from a heated back wall may be used, the potted specimens being progressively lowered as their tips approach the glass roof. So the construction drawn up by George Repton might have been intended for some such purpose, the absence of columns allowing enhanced frontal light while a solid end wall could offer protection from leaf-scorching heat, given suitable orientation – not facing south. Unfortunately, there is no reason for associating the camellia house with Repton's drawing. Even the major dimensions are at variance, and existing details do not square up with the plan. Yet, one is still drawn back to it.

Despite having to shelve this second pos-

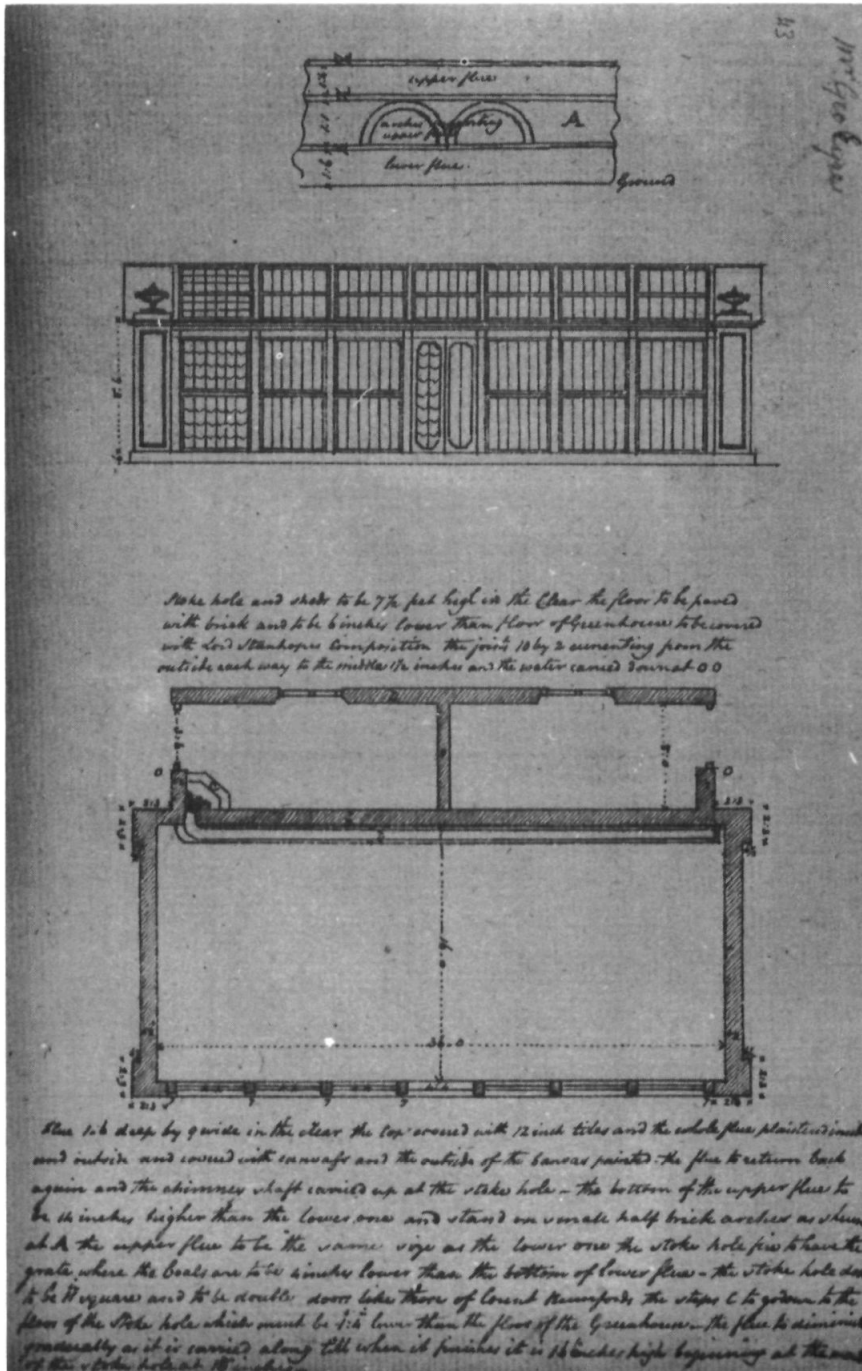


Fig 7. Elevation, plan, detail and notes for a greenhouse, inscribed 'Mr Geo Eyre' from George Repton's notebook. (PNB Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton)

sible site for lack of convincing evidence we are not at a complete loss, for as late as September 1807 Nash wrote to Eyre a letter suggesting that a greenhouse not altogether unlike the one drawn by George Repton was actually built at Warrens. Apparently, Nash had been consulted about making improvements to the Court room and Great House at Lyndhurst (Eyre was a New Forest Verderer). Nash touches on his advice before turning to Warrens, where there had been water-supply difficulties, there being no permanent spring at the place where one was needed – which might or might not have been about the gardens. Building a tank was suggested, and on 1 March 1808 John King communicated from Southampton with Eyre about Parker's Cement – frequently specified by Nash. Three days later Nash's assistant, James Morgan, wrote from the London office with estimates for cement to bed tiles in a tank. But of more immediate interest is Nash's opinion on a greenhouse as it then was: '... I think it too plain for its situation – the prettiest way of finishing the front would be (I think) to treat the whole as Trellis planting any small leaved bushy growing plant within the Trellis work and keeping it cut fair with the face of the trellis work so that the form of the Trellis might be preserved and appear to enclose the plants. and there should be a trellis border under the Eaves.' It will be seen that PNB 43 (Fig 7) shows the terminal piers to be surmounted by shallow urns similar to those above the house in the elevational drawing (RNB). Nash was disappointed, for his letter states that he had always wanted the greenhouse piers to be finished with vases.

We are left with little doubt that Eyre did build a greenhouse to Nash's design and that he had done so, if not to the letter, before 1808: moreover, there were features shared with Repton's elevational drawing.

The remaining set of drawings George Repton made for Warrens are for the brewhouse (RNB 31v, 32r) – which invites comparison with drawings made by George Repton for Frankland Lewis, of Harpton Court, Radnor, and Sir William Oglander, of

Nunwell, Isle of Wight, and Parnham Hall, Dorset (Temple 1988). Nash's estimates for Warrens included costing for such provision and refer to a cupola and weathercock for that range of outbuildings of which the brewhouse formed part. The sashes were to be hung in November 1802, but it will be remembered that Pickering (George Eyre's clerk of works) was having trouble with the men. One bill including work at the brewhouse is dated March 1804. No doubt all was completed in due course, and in the courtyard there stands a range of buildings topped by a cupola and weathervane. A rapid survey has not identified accommodation closely comparable with that shown in Repton's section and plans. Even so, there is ample evidence that a brewhouse was constructed under Nash's direction, and there is no reason for supposing that it was other than the RNB notebook record shows.

An undated note in the Eyre Papers suggests that £500 was initially allowed for the gardens, on which Mr Naish (the gardener) had begun work by late 1802 and in which he was laying turf in the spring of 1804. His 'improvements' were continuing in October of that year. George Eyre's grandson, George Edward Briscoe Eyre, introduced specimen conifers he brought from South America, and reshaped the gardens, as well as enlarging the house.

At this point we must leave Warrens, having conclusively connected its building with Nash, but having found no evidence that his assistant George Repton was directly involved in any capacity in a commission which Nash must have considered particularly important to have demanded so many visits by him during the course of construction. Some journeys were presumably made *en route* to or from other clients, for example to Lyndhurst, where Nash enlarged Northerwood for Mr Mitchel.

In a letter (undated, but written not later than 1804) to George Eyre, Nash enclosed another from a Mr Thornton requesting Eyre's advice on how it should best be answered. It appears (though there is some ambiguity) that Nash, as a compliment to Eyre for his kindness and his 'connexion', had preferred not to

charge this Mr Thornton a fee, but just professional expenses. PNB 26–29 show drawings of the greenhouse for Samuel Thornton (Temple 1987, 61ff). Though such a structure was probably not built at Albury Park, one of the same design appears in the depiction of a Bedfordshire garden known to Humphry Repton and one of his sons. In his letter Nash thanked Eyre also for his 'introduction to Mr Mitchele'. It appears that Nash owed more

than one subsequent client to his engagement by George Eyre.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Eyre Papers: private collection, as are the Plaw drawings and the painting referred to.

PNB Notebook in the Royal Pavilion Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton. A leather-bound pocketbook inscribed with George Repton's name and the date January 1805 inside the upper board. There is no complete watermark, but fragments make up 1799. The volume has modern pagination. There are fifty subjects. Four pages contain drawings for George Eyre's commissions. All are reproduced with this article together with comments drawn from an unpublished catalogue raisonné of the Brighton notebook, made by the present writer.

RNB Notebook in the British Architectural Library Drawings Collection at the RIBA, London. A leather-bound pocket book similar to PNB, forming a companion volume. It is not dated, but the contents suggest that it was in use from about 1800 to 1805. The paper is watermarked 1798. The volume has modern foliation.

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