

# Origins of the Gothic Architecture at Newlands Manor

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Milford at the beginning of the 18th century was a small inland village – very much off the beaten track, because there was no need for anyone to go there. It was more or less at the end of the lane turning off the road from Lymington to Christchurch. An inland village, it was probably nearly a mile from the sea; for the sea shore in those years and earlier was exposed to the danger of pirates or the French descending at any time.

So how did it happen that, after the fire of 1800, Newlands Manor was rebuilt in what was then the very latest style? Why should people think of such a form of architecture? Why couldn't they remain with the classical origins of the traditional Georgian house like Milford House? Why were they so obviously in search of something new?

Villages in those days before the industrial revolution made many of their own goods by loom, carpenter or smith. The towns principally lived by their markets where goods were exchanged. Lymington was a small market town, but the nearest towns of significant size were Southampton, Romsey and Poole, which underlines the remoteness of Milford.

Again, the roads were deplorable. The Parish was responsible for their condition and they were resurfaced by "ploughs" pulled by 8 or 10 horses at the end of April when they were drying up. The waggon was still the main transport and the horses had bells on the collars because by custom the waggon had the right of the road. The bells forewarned travellers to get out of the way. You could travel on moonlit nights, when you could see where to walk or ride. George Eliot in "*Silas Marner*" describes travel in the winter when women and girls

rode behind men on horseback. This was about 1805.

For these reasons the bulk of the population was static, but the wealthier folk were mobile and brought in new ideas. The majority who could get away would have gone to Southampton and Salisbury for their season or perhaps to Bath. Only the very wealthy could afford to visit London for the season. But some strangers were arriving here to live. The Rickman family came to Milford from Portsmouth in the early part of the century and built the Georgian edifice known as Milford House. Later a London merchant called Reynolds purchased it.

The 18th century was, indeed, a time of great change in the country, where there was increasing prosperity. The population was rising, slowly at first, but rapidly in the last third of the century. Until the Napoleonic Wars of 1793, war was remote and not many people were involved. Wealth was being brought in by trade across the Atlantic and from the East. It was the age of the Grand Tour and a time when classical scholarship was regarded as essential for a gentleman. Burke, writing the "*Letters of a Regicide Peace*," made the suggestion that all aristocracies are interested in the status quo, so that there was more fraternity among the aristocrats than among the democrats in the 18th century – a kind of international "jet set".

A little later *The Lounger* opines that "the well-educated British Gentleman is of no country whatever, he talks and dresses French, he sings Italian, rivals the Spaniard in indolence and the German in drinking. His house is Grecian, offices Gothic and furniture Chinese." It was also a time when

more and more large private houses were being built because of the increased wealth from trade and more productive farming. Each had a library and the library had to be of a size to do credit to the owner. Jonesmanship was just as important then as now! Typically a private library would have books on local history and on archaeology, as shown by the number of current publications. They would have illustrated books on foreign travel too, for after all it was estimated that some 40,000 English milords with their tutors and servants might be travelling at any one time. The library would also have books of engraving and prints. Then in 1755 Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* - the first in the English language, was published and gave further impetus to study.

There were circulating libraries from 1740 and Southampton was known to have a good one which was well used. In the theatre, which was to be found in provincial towns, plays like "*Hamlet*", "*The Beggar's Opera*" and "*Les Beaux Stratagemes*" were played, and strolling players took entertainment round the country. In fact, a lot of new ideas were being spread around.

It was an age of enquiry, when people who had the leisure wanted to know about all manner of subjects. James Boswell travelled with Dr. Johnson round Britain and brought out an up to date travelogue in 1765. Edward Gibbon, whose father owned an estate at Buriton, near Petersfield, wrote part of his famous "*History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*" while sitting as M.P. for Lyminster (1781/3). Twenty years before he had served in the Hampshire Militia. Thomas Gray wrote his "*Elegy in a Country Churchyard*" but in more Gothic vein he also wrote "*The Bard*" (1759), a reconstruction of the extermination by Edward I of the Welsh bards.

Thomas Warton (1728-90) wrote poetical reconstructions of mediaeval scenes, "*The Crusade*" and "*The Grave of King Arthur*."

These authors, by their researches among mediaeval documents promoted an interest in the Gothic, which was to burst upon the scene when fickle public taste suddenly turned against the Palladian fashion.

Edward Young (1683-1765) wrote "*The Complaint, or Night Thoughts*", which appealed to the growing taste for meditations on mortality, for haunted ruins, cypress groves and distraught ladies weeping over funerary urns. Horace Walpole (1717-97) had a great passion for mediaeval antiquarianism. He bought a house in Twickenham and, by lavish use of plaster, converted it into a miniature Gothic castle. The battlements fell down and had to be replaced three times in his lifetime. During this period he wrote his fantastic novel, "*The Castle of Otranto*." This in turn suggested to Mrs. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) the idea of writing "*The Mysteries of Udolpho*" (1794) with romantic scenery, ancient ruins and nameless deeds in remote abbeys, thrilling her readers with suspense, mystery, surprise. Jane Austen ridicules its readers through the pages of "*Northanger Abbey*" (1803). It was if the academics and the very rich were playing with mediaeval gothic in literature, architecture, art and poetry.

Despite some excesses and consequent ridicule, this novel gothic style was welcome as a change from the Palladian, which had become so common over the south of England that in 1780 you could buy a ready-made temple in Turnham Green. The fact that Gothic was a home-grown style was especially attractive when the outbreak of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars were turning people away from foreign culture and the

strictly regular symmetrical lines based on classical studies. The Gothic taste showed itself in different ways. Sometimes a house like Yaldhurst was decorated with a gothic window; or another, like Foxlease, had two beautiful rooms (1775) in the style of Strawberry Hill. By the Watersplash in Brockenhurst you again find a cottage with pointed lights; while at Newlands a whole new wing was added in the fashionable style.

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