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A tale of two houses, transported : Virginia House and Agecroft Hall

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ABSTRACT

"A Tale of Two Houses, Transported: Virginia House and Agecroft Hall" by Heather Lynn Skilton, University of Richmond, M.A. in History, 1997, directed by Dr. John L. Gordon, Jr.

This thesis examines why and how two couples in Richmond, Virginia came to purchase and transport from England to America two ancient English manor homes. A brief overview of the backgrounds and ideas of Alexander and Virginia Weddell and Thomas C. and Elizabeth Williams, Jr. is offered, along with a look at the Richmond of the 1920s into which they brought these homes. As with any major undertaking such as this, the press and public had opinions to share, both in England and America, many of which are found in newspapers of the day. Articles, editorials, and letters to the editors are explored here in an effort to understand why citizens of both countries felt the way they did. The majority of the press coverage in England was negative, while American papers, notably in Richmond, were positive. The reasons for those contradicting views are studied here. The British government did not remain silent on the subject of the transportations. Although Parliament had given attention to ancient monument preservation prior to the time that Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall were transplanted, prompted new debates. Finally the fate and future of English building preservation is examined.

Approval Page

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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"A TALE OF TWO HOUSES, TRANSPORTED: VIRGINIA HOUSE AND AGECROFT HALL"

By

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents who have made everything possible and for whom thanks can never be enough.

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WEDDELLS, WILLIAMSES, AND RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

With the conclusion of World War I in 1918, the balance of world power appeared to have shifted. The powerful German Empire lay crushed and defeated while its neighbor France seemed a shell of its former self after years of being the world's battleground. Even Britain, the mightiest of the colonial nations, the possessor of the indefatigable navy, was weakened by four years of constant warfare. In contrast to the demoralized European peoples and governments, the United States emerged from the war stronger in status and economy than before. Many Americans voiced the opinion that it had been their involvement that had saved the Allies. In their social history of Britain between the wars, The Long Week-End, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge wrote "the Americans now regarded themselves as the leading nation in the world . . . with the indisputable glory of having decided the issue of the war, not so much by what they did as by what they threatened to do."[1]

Not satisfied with merely praising themselves, some Americans also found the need to berate their Allied friends. Europeans rarely enjoyed either, as Graves and Hodge pointed out when they wrote "minor engagements in which the American army took part became Austerlitzes and Waterloos. In the United States it was also believed that Britain had been prostrated by her war effort and would never again recover her former proud position. She was described [by Americans] as a mangy lion licking her sores . . . ."[2] British negativity toward America centered on participation in the war. American

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[1]Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, The Long Week-End -- A Social History of Great Britain 1918 - 1939 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1963), 12.

[2]Ibid., 37.

involvement "had never touched the British heart," and the loud American voices seemed only to care about "exaggerating their eleventh-hour services in France at the expense of those who had borne the heat and burden of the day."[3]

After its "eleventh-hour services" were through, America removed itself from the hearts of the British by the Senate's unwillingness to ratify the Peace of Paris. Finally, the American government seemed to try to disable Britain further by refusing to cancel war debts. Great Britain and France, in the spirit of victorious allies, mutually agreed to nullify their war debts, "but the United States naturally refused to give up their advantageous position as the greatest creditor nation."[4] This American attitude, while financially sound, did little to endear it or its people to the European nations which were facing the daunting task of regaining economic stability even without having to repay hundreds of millions of dollars in war debts. As A. J. P. Taylor pointed out, the British government was not alone in facing economic hardships after the war. He observed that the upper class was faced with "high rates of income tax, surtax, and death duties, introduced during the war, [that] were little reduced after."[5]

Despite any bitterness felt, the British could not help but admit that the Americans "national exuberance and the lead they gave in all social fashions, while withdrawing politically from co-operation in 'restoring world-order,' is a leading factor in the 1918 - 39 period."[6] Britain followed American leads in fashion, music, and entertainment -- virtually in all things described as "fun." American tourism across the

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[3]Ibid., 36.

[4]Ibid., 73-4,

[5]A. J. P. Taylor, English History 1914 - 1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 176.

[6]Graves and Hodge, The Long Weekend, 12.

Atlantic increased steadily in numbers after the Armistice was signed, and the majority traveled to Britain. It was while on these vacations that individual Americans began to anger the national pride of many English men and women just as their government had done. They used the power of money to add insult to injury.

"There was general disgust too with the way in which Americans, enriched by the woes of Europe, were buying up books and art treasures -- it seemed with more acquisitiveness than real taste," contend Graves and Hodge.[7] Americans swarmed over England with open pocketbooks and wallets, seeking to acquire what their English counterparts had. Unlike other European nations, such as Italy, Great Britain had no laws to limit the deportation of ancient art treasures, books, and even buildings. As Graves and Hodge observed, "they [Americans] even bought up ancient mansions, such as Great Lodge in Essex and Agecroft Hall in Lancashire, and transported them for re-erection, stone by stone, in the States."[8]

Ancient mansions, built in England and sustained there for hundreds of years, were disassembled and rebuilt on American soil. Bigger than books, more expensive than art treasures, more monumental than any other thing most Americans could hope to possess, these homes had in many cases been passed down through generations, had been seats of power, had resided in them the great men and women of England and had been visited by kings and queens. How had these mansions come to be available to Americans? What kind of person would hope to reconstruct an already existing house across the sea? What use would they have for the building once it arrived in America? How did the British people feel about this development? How did they express their

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[7]Ibid., 37.

[8]Ibid.

pleasure or displeasure? Did the British government act to encourage or halt the removals?

In Richmond, Virginia two houses sit side by side in an English inspired suburb on the banks of the James River. Virginia House, built by Alexander and Virginia Weddell, and Agecroft Hall, constructed by Thomas C. Williams, Jr. and Elizabeth Williams, both lie in the heart of Windsor Farms. Both once were in England: Virginia House was constructed of material from a priory in Warwick, England; Agecroft Hall from an ancient building in Salford. Thomas C. Williams, Jr., through money made from tobacco and industry, financed construction of an English village in Richmond with the two houses as centerpieces. Virginia House and Agecroft Hall are excellent examples to view the subject of re-erection. A career diplomat, Mr. Weddell later served as American Ambassador to both Argentina and Spain; he and his wife were international figures. Their names were often in the newspapers and they kept copies of most articles with which they were associated. Weddell was a history buff; historical books made up the bulk of his 7,500 volume library. He served as President of the Virginia Historical Society from 1943 until his death in 1948, and the Weddells built Virginia House with the hope that it would someday serve as the headquarters of the Society. Thomas C. Williams, Jr. was a prominent businessman in Richmond whose name often appeared in the headlines. His dream was for Agecroft Hall to become an art museum through which his family would be remembered in Richmond. Today both houses serve as historical homes in which visitors can view the past. The Mission Statement of Virginia House is that of the Virginia Historical Society, pledging itself as the center for Virginia history, collecting, preserving, and interpreting the commonwealth's past for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations. Agecroft Hall's Mission Statement vows to serve as a source for enjoyment, education and cultural activity for the general public.

describing itself as a unique educational center specializing in the British Renaissance 1485 - 1660. It is not surprising, then, that the Weddells and Williamses were very much aware of the places of their homes in history.

As with other American Country Place homes that were built, the money for both Virginia House and Agecroft Hall came from industry. The money to purchase and transform Warwick Priory into Virginia House came from Mrs. Weddell's inheritance after the death of her first husband, Henry Chase Steedman, in 1921. Steedman made his fortune manufacturing shell casings for bullets during World War I, and it was this money that helped the Weddells not only to build their home in Richmond, but also to live the life of ambassador and wife. It has always been true that those in the foreign service must be independently wealthy to maintain their lifestyle. Mr. Weddell's father was rector of St. John's Church in Richmond, a post which gave the family social standing but little money. Alexander Weddell supported the family his father left behind at his early death in 1883. Thomas C. Williams, Jr. inherited his fortune from his father, Thomas, Sr., who gained his wealth through tobacco and other industries. Along with his siblings, Thomas C. Williams, Jr., inherited not only his father's money, but also his philanthropic tendencies. The elder Williams donated funds to establish the law school at the University of Richmond which still bears his name.

In examining the phenomenon of reconstructing English homes in America, and most notably, Alexander and Virginia Weddells' Virginia House and Thomas C. and Elizabeth Williamses' Agecroft Hall, ties between England and America need to be assessed. As stated above, upper-class Americans travel to Britain increased after World War I, as did the desire to own things British. There have been many theories as to why this was, along with speculation as to why Americans crossed the Atlantic to purchase already existing homes.

One explanation is the desire of the American upper class to emulate the English aristocracy. From 1890 to 1930 a trend appeared in American architecture known as the American Country Place Movement. Occurring at the end of the Industrial Revolution, the American Country Place Movement was brought about by a class of new men with millions of dollars in the bank and ideas in their heads about how they could join the often cliquish upper class in American society. As so many wealthy Englishmen had done, newly affluent American men and women longed to turn their money into land and social prominence. "There was nothing new about the transformation of urban and industrial wealth into country property," wrote Mark Girouard, "it was the way in which the English upper classes had recruited new members since the late Middle Ages."[9] So, too, it was with the American industrialists. In The Architect and the American Country House, Mark Alan Hewitt maintained that the American Country Places that sprouted up across the country were built to "celebrate the achievement of capitalism."[10]

Perhaps the most famous American Country Place is Biltmore Estate near Asheville, North Carolina. Designed by Richard Morris Hunt and Frederick Law Olmstead and constructed from 1889 to 1895, the estate includes a working dairy and forest preserve. The finances for Biltmore came from George Vanderbilt, an heir to the large railroad and shipping fortune. Hewitt described Biltmore as "America's greatest country house, as defined by the English: the aristocratic seat of a gentleman landowner, from which he administers his estate lands."[11] Harvey S. Firestone, captain of the rubber and tire empire, constructed Harbel Manor outside of Akron, Ohio. Firestone admitted

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[9]Mark Girouard, The Victorian Country House (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 8.

[10]Mark Alan Hewitt, The Architect and the American Country House (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 1.

[11]Ibid.

that the house was too large, and Clive Aslet, author of The American Country House, theorized that Firestone was in fierce competition with Franklin A. Seiberling of Goodyear Tire who financed the construction of Stan Hywet Hall.

While some industrial tycoons chose to construct new manor homes, others, such as the Weddells and Williamses, elected to bring their homes from England. In his book The Buildings of Detroit, W. Hawkins Ferry discussed one particular type of home that was transported, the category into which Agecroft Hall and Virginia House fall. "The Tudor style became the popular favorite. The rugged business leaders of the day, largely of Anglo-Saxon origin, identified it with the stirring chivalrous world of their ancestors. At the same time its massive walls, cavernous interiors, and heraldic devices conveyed a message of awesome masculine dignity and prestige."[12]

American tycoons built their country homes in imitation of the great manor houses that dotted the British countryside. They longed to live like an English country gentleman, complete with landscape gardens, formal areas, room for leisure pursuits, and agricultural trappings.[13] American Country Places were designed with other things in mind as well -- they were stately homes, rural retreats, and, while most were within reach of a major city, they enabled the inhabitant to withdraw from the urban area.[14] The builders of these homes kept the surrounding community in mind, as exemplified by Alexander Weddell building Virginia House for lovers of history and Thomas C. Williams, Jr. creating Agecroft Hall to be used as a museum. The plans of Windsor Farms itself included parks for Williams's fellow Richmonders to enjoy.

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[12]W. Hawkins Ferry, The Buildings of Detroit (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968), 269.

[13]Hewitt, The Architect, 6.

[14]Clive Aslet, The American Country House (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 20.

Differences between English country homes and American country places can be seen alongside the similarities. Both Mark Hewitt and Clive Aslet, leading scholars of the Movement, agree that overall American houses were distinctly American in design. Differences between American and English houses stemmed from climate, social conditions, and landscape. Plantings in American gardens and lawns often differed from those in England because of the severe summer heat in much of America, as well as the rougher winters that swept over the nation. Social conditions in America played a part in the different types of houses found in the new world. More often than not, there were a limited number of families in an area who were wealthy enough to build great country houses. Furthermore, in England, the country homes were often the seats of power from which a family had ruled its territory for generations. That was not so with most American houses. In general, Hewitt felt that American Country Places represented "a connection to the past and to the many cultures that had created a new nation."[15] The past that most industrialists wished to be associated with was British. According to Aslet, "Like some aspects of the Colonial Revival this symbolized a closing of Anglo-Saxon ranks against the great numbers of immigrants from other countries who had arrived in the late nineteenth century."[16] This desire to show oneself as a descendent of British ancestors led to the creation of imitation English country homes.

The Weddells' place in the American aristocracy can be envisioned in the words of a fellow American stationed with them in Spain during Mr. Weddell's

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[15]Hewitt, The Architect, 6.

[16]Aslet, American Country House, 68.

ambassadorship. As a young member of Weddell's staff, Richard Baker often observed the couple and later recounted

> . . . I have always felt that probably the Weddells represented a sort of historic aristocratic tradition, not that they necessarily were aristocratic, but the thought of what inspired them to be was a sort of patrician aristocratic ambassador rank . . . . I think he more than the average American that I know he [sic] was interested in family connections of history and if I could have said to him 'You know, I am descended directly from Thomas Jefferson' I would have been elevated.[17]

Many who have studied the American Country Place Movement have tried to explain the abundance of English trappings. The southern part of the United States, and Richmond in particular, had certain ties to Britain. When William Byrd built his new city on the James River in the early eighteenth century, he felt that the river resembled the Thames, in particular where it flowed through the town of Richmond. It was for this English town that Byrd named his new city. After its partial destruction during the Civil War, Richmond was largely rebuilt as a Victorian city. English influence abounded. In Richmond -- The Story of a City, Virginius Dabney wrote that "expensive residences built in the [eighteen] eighties and nineties were in the prevailing late-Victorian style." He goes on to describe the new city hall, designed in 1882 as "American High Victorian Gothic."[18] Houses described as possessing an atmosphere of "Victorian splendor" are listed for sale today in Richmond newspapers. Along historic Monument Avenue, Tudor style mansions are situated next to Victorian dwellings. Southerners often made

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[17]Richard Baker, New York, telephone interview conducted by Gary Inman, Richmond, Virginia, December 18, 1993, Collection of Virginia House, Richmond, Virginia.

[18]Virginius Dabney, Richmond -- The Story of a City (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 239, 253.

romantic connections between the Southern and English aristocracies.[19] Mac Griswold and Eleanor Weller allege that considering Virginia's long heritage and linkage to England, "the affection for English styles in domestic architecture and gardens is hardly surprising."[20]

Attempts have been made to understand why many members of the wealthy industrial class in America transplanted English homes to America rather than merely designing and creating new ones. Hewitt theorized a number of things, including the desire to reclaim ancestral pedigree, the lure of consumption and the collecting itself, and a longing to leave a legacy of one's life in the great house.[21] Again, one is reminded of the desire of the elite to model themselves after the English and to create a symbol of their own lineage and linkage to the British. Some Americans traveled to Britain and studied the architecture extensively. W. Hawkins Ferry noted that Matilda R. Dodge, the widow of the Detroit automobile industrialist, journeyed to London for seven weeks during the 1920s while preparing to design a new home. Mrs. Dodge and her architect toured a different English home each day to select aspects of the ancient buildings. Clive Aslet saw transportation partly as a way to "overcome the difficulties of simulating age . . for those with the time and patience to pursue it."[22] Melanie Leigh, once assistant curator of Agecroft Hall and author of the thesis "Building From the Past: An Architectural History of Agecroft Hall" and "Notes on the Development of Windsor

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[19]Mac Griswold and Eleanor Weller, The Golden Age of American Gardens (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992), 207.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Hewitt, The Architect, 144.

[22]Aslet, American Country House, 81.

Farms," stated that once many men and women found their symbol, "they were not satisfied to simply make annual pilgrimages, instead they chose to bring it home with them."[23] There were American and English antique firms which specialized in buying entire rooms -- furniture, walls, and all. Even American department stores joined in -- in 1923 John Wanamakers' in Philadelphia helped a buyer to acquire three Tudor homes in their entirety. One of the homes was taken from Ashford in Kent and sold to Edmund S. Burke, who assembled the home on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio. Burke would later become the Chairman of the Fourth Federal Reserve Bank in New York and thus sold his English home to Leonard C. Hanna who again moved it, this time outside of Cincinnati.[24]

The structure of many American Country Places showed that if a portion or all of the house was not brought over, the owners often copied ideas from one or many English homes. These new houses were manipulated to appear old. One example is Lehman House in Tarrytown, New York, which used material chosen "to impart to its surface the suggestion of long usage and the elimination of everything that would proclaim the recent origin of the building."[25] Virginia House itself used this technique on Mrs. Weddell's sleeping porch which was added to the house in 1932. The stones were Indiana limestone chemically treated to match the stones of the Priory. For those with enough money, shipping an entire structure from England to America was a way to eliminate the trouble of aging new stones.

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[23]Melanie A. Leigh, "Notes on the Development of Windsor Farms," September 1992, Collection of Virginia House, Richmond, Virginia.

[24]Aslet, American Country House, 81.

[25]Ibid., 79.

Both the Weddells and Williamses hired Charles Gillette as their landscape architect in Windsor Farms. Gillette traveled abroad extensively in 1912 and was heavily influenced by what he saw in Great Britain -- the landscaped parks of Ireland, the cottage gardens at Stratford-upon-Avon, and the palace gardens at Hampton Court and other royal residences.[26] George C. Longest, in Charles Gillette and Landscape Architecture in Virginia, noted that Gillette created a Tudor style garden around the original land the Weddells had purchased, consisting of under one acre. In 1939 the Weddells purchased approximately eight more acres of land for their gardens, which makes up the property of Virginia House today. The style for Agecroft Hall was that of a "long lawn" normally seen leading to a rural retreat in England. Longest notes that for both homes Gillette "enjoyed and employed the romantic look of European cottages -- simple and unostentatious."[27]

One look at Virginia House shows that the Weddells' hearts were rooted in the heritage and traditions of their British ancestors. Examples of the Weddells' love of things English are everywhere, including an unusual source which surfaced shortly after their death on 1 January 1948. A memorial service was given for the couple at Lausanne, Switzerland by Mrs. Will Gordon, a "devoted friend of the Weddells for many years." The service was performed by a Reverend Maurice, who spoke of Mr. Weddell, lamented, "England has lost one of its very great friends . . . . A great lover of democracy, of institutions which are essentially British -- those age-long traditions and ideals which

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[26]Ibid., 208.

[27]George C. Longest, Charles Gillette and Landscape Architecture in Virginia (Richmond, Virginia State Library and Archives, 1992), 26.

had woven themselves into the very texture of British and American character . . . ."[28] Virginia House is filled with touches that emphasize the Weddells' Anglo-Saxon heritage and aspirations to the aristocracy. The additional sterling silver flatware pieces that Virginia Weddell purchased after her marriage were engraved with the Weddell crest. Alexander researched the coats of arms of his forefathers and had them framed and hung alongside his desk alcove in the library. While serving as Ambassador to Argentina, Alexander and Virginia Weddell took a short leave in England. During their visit, Alexander had his portrait painted by Philip de Laszlo (1869-1937), the premier portraitist of British nobility during the first part of the twentieth century.

In Thomas C. Williams, Jr., whose family background was Welsh, the Weddells found a soulmate. Leigh wrote that "for years Mr. Thomas C. Williams, Jr., brooded over a vision startlingly intriguing -- a vision of again planting an English village -- a glorified English village -- on the banks of James River -- on the hills and dales of his own charming estate of 500 acres."[29] Williams's dream involved much planning and he joined with John Nolen, a well known city planner, to bring the suburb into fruition. The news that Thomas C. Williams, Jr. had purchased land overlooking the James River was reported in the Richmond News Leader on 24 July 1924 in a small article titled "Valuable Lands on the James Bought." The story related how Williams had recently purchased a total of 18.5 acres of land that lay adjoining "considerable acreage" he already possessed through inheritance. At the time, Mr. Williams had not yet decided to purchase Agecroft Hall, so it is unclear whether he intended to use the additional 18.5 acres as land for himself and his wife or whether he was merely interested in acquiring

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[28]Richmond News Leader, 23 January 1948, p. 6.

[29]Leigh, "Notes on the Development of Windsor Farms," 1.

more land for what would soon become Windsor Farms. The front page article went on to announce that Mr. Williams's "plans in regard to his holdings have not been made public, the agents declining to state what he proposes to do with the tract."[30]

Williams's plans soon came to light when plots of the land were sold to those wishing to build homes. In 1926 Thomas C. Williams, Jr. founded and became the first President of Windsor Farms, Incorporated, created to oversee building codes and make sure English style homes were built. In the early days of Windsor Farms restrictive covenants were written and signed to ensure that those who wished to move into the neighborhood were of Anglo-Saxon heritage, and that Jews and blacks were excluded from owning land in the suburb. The corporation advertised this in the pages of its magazine, The Black Swan, declaring that "Windsor Farms has particularly desirable protective covenants running with the land which give stability to one's investment." Years later the covenants were revised as were the restrictions as to the types of homes built in Windsor Farms. Windsor Farms, Incorporated still has the power to approve all building designs from new homes to additions and fences. In the early days of Windsor Farms, the land was open and cows roamed freely. The first houses were built on lots which happened to possess trees. Mrs. Margaret McElroy lived in Windsor Farms most of her life. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. Randolph Williams, constructed one of the first homes, and later Margaret and her husband, John, owned their own house on Gun Club Road. Mrs. McElroy recalled that many of the first homes were Georgian style designed by William Lawrence Bottomley, and that all the river site homes went first.

Williams christened engineer John Nolen's streets in Windsor Farms with such English names as Sulgrave, Devon, Oxford, Canterbury, Dover, and Cambridge. Other

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[30]Richmond News Leader, 24 July 1924, p. 1.

street names, such as Tomacee and St. David's Lane honor members of Williams's family. John Nolen possessed a planning and landscape degree from Harvard University and was the distinguished planner of portions of Boston. Mrs. McElroy later remembered that "when he began laying out the lots he had an architect . . . build several houses, the Anne Hathaway cottage in the middle of Windsor Farms, and two or three other English type houses just to give it a start."[31] The corporation had a short-lived tea room in Windsor Farms, a tennis court for residents that is now the site of the Tuckahoe Women's Club, and playing fields which still exist. The Black Swan wrote that Windsor Farms was "an arrangement which permits the city dweller to reside amidst the tranquil loveliness of an English village, in a home whose picturesque beauty cloaks all the 'conveniences' which man's ingenuity has produced, and within ten minutes' drive of his office."[32] The Windsor Farms Corporation still maintains the community house and cares for the parks in the subdivision.[33] The authenticity of Windsor Farms was heightened after the Weddells journeyed to England and returned with the building materials from the Priory and the Williamses followed suit with Agecroft Hall. The Anglophiles lived side by side, enjoying their little piece of England in their native Virginia. The Black Swan described the arrangement, remarking, "the dream of this

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[31]Mrs. John Lee McElroy, "Memories of Windsor Farms," The Richmond Quarterly 11 (Fall 1988): 36.

[32]"Windsor Farms -- Approaching the Ideal," The Black Swan (February 1927): 13.

[33]Martha C. Vicks, "The 20th Century Account of Agecroft Hall," November, 1990, Collection of Virginia House, 28. This thesis, one of only two found that centered on Virginia House or Agecroft Hall, deals with many of the facts and logistics of moving Agecroft Hall, and also provides much background on T.C. Williams, Jr. and the beginnings of Windsor Farms. The second, "Building From the Past: An Architectural History of Agecroft Hall," by Melanie Leigh Matthews, discusses the architectural points of Agecroft Hall, both in England and America.

little group, which reached out across the mighty waters of the Atlantic and back into the musty atmosphere of by-gone centuries for beauty, did come true."[34]

What had the two homes in Windsor Farms been before they traveled across the sea? The stones for Virginia House originally had been quarried and shaped for the building of a priory of the Order of Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, founded by Henry, first Earl of Warwick, somewhere between 1114 and 1119. Commonly called the Order of St. Sepulchre, this monastic group was known for the care it gave to pilgrims returning from their voyage to Jerusalem. After the Crusades failed and Jerusalem fell in 1188, the priory came under the control of Augustinian monks and remained in their care until 1536. It was in that year that King Henry VIII dissolved much church land. Ten years later, in 1546, Warwick Priory was purchased by Thomas Hawkins, whose family held it until 1582. In that year the priory was sold to John Puckering, whose son Thomas added the Dutch gables to the front of the house around 1620. Warwick Priory was sold again in 1709 to a royal gardener of Queen Anne named Henry Wise. It was Wise's son Matthew who enlarged the priory in 1720 to over 100 rooms. The Wise family eventually allowed the home to become derelict and it was again sold in 1851, this time to the Birmingham and Oxford Junction Railway Company, which placed a railroad line along the far side of the Priory's park. Perhaps the close proximity of the railroad prompted a Mr. Scott to purchase the remaining land and house in an unknown year and then Thomas Lloyd, of the prominent banking family, to buy it in 1865. Lloyd restored the house and used it as a traditional English manor. It appears that the priory passed to a new family just as the previous owner was declining in fortunes. A new infusion of

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[34]Hulda, "Across An Ocean," The Black Swan (August, 1927): 14.

wealth was needed to keep the house in good condition, and so it was when the Weddells purchased Warwick Priory.

The owner of the priory when the Weddells happened upon it was S. L. Lloyd, a grand-nephew of Thomas Lloyd. Because of his questionable mental prowess, Warwick Priory and the rest of Lloyd's assets were controlled by a group of trustees. During a time of economic hardship for their ward, S. L. Lloyd's trustees felt that it was wise to sell the house and land for needed funds and originally put it up for sale on 25 July 1910.[35] No buyer for the complete house could be found, so they began to strip it and sell off pieces such as the staircase, some windows, and the paneling. By the time the Weddells heard of the final of several auctions in September of 1925, "what remained of the priory was veritably a shell, and the most recent buyer of the ruin intended to employ the naked walls in the erection of a factory elsewhere," wrote Robert L. Scribner.[36] One of the terms of the Weddells' purchasing agreement was that the stones of the priory should "be absolutely taken away."[37] It was clear the new property owner wanted nothing to do with the ancient building presently on his lot. The Weddells gratefully took the home off his hands. In order to ensure that their home would be sturdy, the Weddells' architect and friend, Henry Grant Morse, had workmen insert a small amount of explosives into the center of the house, crate and number only the pieces which remained intact, and transport them in the hulls of seven ships to the shores of America. Warwick Priory was about to become Virginia House. Wingate and Johnson, Ltd., of London oversaw the transportation of the home on the Bristol City Line, but some

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[35]Micheal Farr, "From England to America: The History of Virginia House," Lecture to the Virginia Historical Society, 3 April 1992, Collection of Virginia House.

[36]Robert L. Scribner, "Virginia House," Virginia Cavalcade 5 (Winter 1955): 23.

[37]Ibid.

problems did arise. The Black Swan reported that aside from the windows, very little of the building materials were boxed, instead

> the stone was simply thrown into the hold of a ship much as if it had been coal . . . a good deal of salt water got into the stone and corroded it . . . the stone was handled at Norfolk and again in Richmond, so by the time it was actually landed at Windsor Farms it was so soft that it would break up in one's fingers . . . it was necessary, therefore, to let it lie on the ground a month before it could be used for building.[38]

Work began on Virginia House in November of 1925 and the house was completed in 1929.

Two centuries after Warwick Priory was built the history of Agecroft began. In a pamphlet titled "The Story of Agecroft," Douglas Southall Freeman tells of its past. Constructed in Lancashire sometime in the fourteenth century, the house passed through generations of owners. The Pendleburys were the first to reside in Agecroft's walls beside the river Irwell. Joan de Tetlow and her husband, Richard de Langley, acquired the home sometime during the lifetime of John of Guant (1340-99), de Langley being a member of a family planted in England since the time of William the Conqueror. The family name changed when a female member of the de Langleys married William Dauntsey, whose name then became associated with the house. In later years, all prospective family owners changed their names to Dauntsey in order to acquire the house, but the original line died out before 1800.

The owner during the 1890s, John Buck, struggled in vain to keep the railroad away from Agecroft land. He spent 5,000 pounds fighting the path of the railway. Buck failed, and in the early twentieth century signs of industrialism were growing in Lancashire as on Agecroft's lands -- railroad lines and coal pits littered the lawns. By

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[38]Ibid., Hulda, "Across an Ocean," p. 14.

1905 the house lay empty because the coal pits had left the foundation weak and the home uninhabitable. When the Williamses came upon the house in 1925 it was decaying and on the verge of demolition. They purchased it and brought it to its present location in Richmond, thereby preserving portions of a building centuries old. The interior of the building was designed as a twentieth century home, while the exterior stones were constructed into a beautiful example of Tudor architecture.[39] Freeman ends his history of Agecroft noting that "the loss of Agecroft raised some protests in Great Britain and provoked a debate in the house of commons; but, in the end, England seemed to accept the judgment expressed by the Manchester Guardian, that Agecroft Hall was 'too reproachful a jewel to leave in that ruined landscape.'"[40]

Henry Grant Morse oversaw all of the work needed to dismantle and rebuild the home, labor performed by workmen trained in Tudor materials and craftsmanship before they began their jobs. The house was dismantled under the supervision of Lionel F. Phillips of Banbury, a gentleman who also aided Morse in locating buildings for sale for American buyers. Aslet wrote that half-timbered homes were fairly easy to transport and reassemble because they were much like kits. Morse had extensive photographs taken of the house in order to best reassemble it. He also numbered the windows and chimneys to match with the photographs. Only the best timbers were used to reconstruct Agecroft Hall in America. Helen Scott Townsend Reed, author of "Agecroft: An Elizabethan Manor House Moved From Lancashire to Virginia," wrote that Mr. Williams wanted only to use the "nicest and most interesting parts" of Agecroft Hall.[41] Reed called Agecroft

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[39]Douglas Southall Freeman, "The Story of Agecroft," pamphlet, Collection of Agecroft Hall, Richmond, Virginia.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Helen Scott Townsend Reed, "Agecroft: An Elizabethan Manor House Moved From Lancashire to Virginia." (M.A. thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1977), 68.

Hall in America "adaptive reconstruction," not "pure restoration."[42] Constructed of Agecroft material, the house is a 1920s dwelling. Aslet wrote that the final product, completed in 1925, looked newer than some houses treated to attain an older appearance.[43]

The decision of the two Virginia couples to move Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall from their original settings to Richmond was not unique. A number of homes throughout America originated in England. In the 1920s automobile tycoon Henry Ford was constructing Dearborn Village, a "collection of buildings assembled from various parts of the country to illustrate the American way of life from the handicraft period to the machine age."[44] During this time Ford traveled to the Cotswolds in England and was taken with the cottages he saw there. He had an associate locate and purchase a typical cottage to bring to Dearborn, in order to "demonstrate the way in which our forefathers lived before they migrated to America."[45] The Cotswold cottage was reconstructed complete with Cotswold sheep on the lawn in Dearborn, Michigan in 1931.

Both Virginia House and Agecroft Hall are in possession of large amounts of information concerning everyone involved in the home's transportations. Because Virginia House is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society, many of the Weddells' papers are intact and readily available. Agecroft Hall is now managed by Agecroft Association, which has resources historians can use in researching the home's journey to America.

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Aslet, The American Country House, p. 81.

[44]Ferry, The Buildings of Detroit, p. 272.

[45]Ibid.

A better understanding of the uproar following the announcement of American ownership requires an examination of British and American attitudes. In looking at the Weddells' and Williamses' feelings and desires in acquiring the homes, it is easy to discern why they would be willing to endure the wave of anger that was to come. Studying the reaction of those involved helps to shed light on why events and responses occurred as they did. British newspapers contained much information on Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall, articles on their movements, and letters to editors written by readers. English reports and letters were for the most part negative, despite the fact that at the time of purchase both houses were already stripped and were little more than shells. Their value appeared to be little to the English people until it was announced they would be sold and transported to America. As the future home of the two structures, Richmond, Virginia, also had residents who were interested in the projects of the Weddells and Williamses. The two leading newspapers of the day, the Richmond News Leader and the Richmond Times Dispatch carried articles on the journeys of the Priory and Agecroft Hall from endangered English manors to American mansions.

After the completion of Virginia House in 1929, Mr. Weddell began a book describing the house and its contents, A Description of Virginia House. This book is a valuable resource for the historian to examine Alexander and Virginia Weddell's motives in acquiring the Priory. Mr. Weddell wrote that "the sight of the noble building, doomed to early destruction, fired them [Alexander and Virginia] with the ambition to build from its stone and timber the structure which they envisioned."[46] In keeping with Hewitt's theory of lineage and emulation, Alexander proclaimed:

> The creation of Virginia House may be said to represent an endeavor to evoke for the dweller, as for the friend or stranger within its gates,

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[46]Alexander Weddell, A Description of Virginia House (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1947), 5.

> something of the atmosphere and environment of that serene and stately life, -- fruit of gentle tradition and high thinking, -- which prevailed through some four centuries in the ancient structure from whence it sprung.[47]

According to Hewitt, Alexander "prized his Anglo-Saxon heritage," as did Virginia.[48] For most of her life, until detailed genealogical studies proved otherwise, Mrs. Weddell was under the impression that she was descended from the Washington family in England, another sign that she and Mr. Weddell were always attempting to try to align themselves with English backgrounds and those who were associated with it.

The Weddells' original plan had been to recreate Washington's ancestral home in England, Sulgrave Manor. There was a joint Anglo-American movement in the 1920s to restore Sulgrave Manor to its original state, a plan which was intended to strengthen ties between the two countries. This is one explanation for the Weddells' initial determination to recreate Washington's ancestral home. The Weddells' plans were covered by the press in both Richmond and England. In a 1925 Richmond News Leader front page article, "Reproduce Home of Washington's Ancestors Here," it was reported that the Weddells were to purchase materials with the purpose of building a replica of Sulgrave Manor. The article stated how the home would be a gift for the Virginia Historical Society, whose management was delighted to receive it as the Weddells assured them the new structure would be fireproof to protect the valuables in their care. The News Leader also reported that the Weddells were on route to England with their architect, Henry Grant Morse, "the celebrated New York architect and specialist in

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[47]Ibid., xi.

[48]Hewitt, The Architect, 143.

English manor houses," to study the plans of Sulgrave Manor.[49] The article stated that at the time a location for the house had yet to be chosen.

The following day the News Leader carried an editorial concerning the Weddells and their impending project. The short piece by the editor, "A Home Deserved," began "in planning a splendid fireproof home for the Virginia Historical Society, Mr. and Mrs. Alex. Weddell are assuring permanence to a work every discriminating student of American history appreciates."[50] The story was a glowing tribute not only to the Weddells and the gift they were making, but also to the Historical Society, an organization based in Richmond that was dedicated to the entire history of Virginia, including its ties with England.

In London, an article ran one week later in The Times titled "A Replica of Sulgrave Manor." The story included everything that the News Leader had, and added

> while in England Mr. and Mrs. Weddell hope to acquire examples of furniture and fittings of the period of Sulgrave Manor, their idea being to create in Virginia a building which will demonstrate to American and other visitors what constituted the home of their ancestors before they crossed the Atlantic.[51]

The Black Swan, subtitled "The Magazine of Virginia," was published by the Windsor Farms Commission and filled with articles, poems, and drawings done by community residents. Hulda was one such Windsor Farms author, one who preferred to remain anonymous, using only either the name "Hulda" or "Hulda Herself." Speaking of the newly renovated Sulgrave Manor in England, Hulda wrote

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[49]Richmond News Leader, 15 September 1925, pp. 1, 11.

[50]Ibid., 16 September 1925, p. 8.

[51]The Times (London), 22 September 1925, p. 11.

> one feels that the saddle-bags and liquor case which General Washington used during the Valley Forge Campaign would be much more appropriately placed in the Virginia House than in Sulgrave Manor, to which institution they have been presented by an American. It seems a pity to cement friendship between the two nations with our all-too-few antiques.[52]

The author's feelings closely resembled those felt by many in England, yet they were completely reversed. The British people felt that the ancient homes should be kept in England, just as Hulda felt the personal articles of Washington should be kept in America, in Virginia House.

After Warwick Priory was purchased, however, the plan to recreate Sulgrave Manor was abandoned -- a fact which caused misunderstandings on both sides of the Atlantic. The Weddells had their architect, Henry Grant Morse, and their architectural landscape artist, Charles Gillette, incorporate a wing in a copy of Sulgrave Manor. The Sulgrave Room is an exact replica of the Great Hall at Sulgrave -- from the placement of the fireplace, rush box and windows to the antique three-legged chairs. Only the floor of the Sulgrave Room differs from that of the Great Hall -- the stone floors of Sulgrave Manor were substituted with a man made product called Zenitherm. Morse also designed the service wing of Virginia House in the style of Wormleighton Manor, seat of the Spencer family, ancestors of the Spencer-Churchills. Morse was also the architect for Thomas C. Williams, Jr.'s Agecroft Hall, and he designed the two homes in "stylistically unified designs."[53] Gillette also was the landscape architect for Agecroft Hall and both gardens are of the English style. Virginia House's garden was an "Italian-flavored

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[52]Hulda, "By Hulda Herself," The Black Swan, February, 1927, p. 8.

[53]Griswold and Weller, Golden Age, 207.

English Renaissance design," but because of the differences in climate, the flora and fauna were not English.[54]

Hewitt described the Weddells' Virginia House as a "house as a hobby horse." The home, he observed, took on the look of a museum, and the house itself also became a "collected object."[55] Alexander and Virginia Weddell always maintained that while Virginia House was to be left to the Historical Society, it was a home first. Portions of the house are homey, yet it is at the same time not unusual to find such things as a fifteenth century Spanish alabaster statue directly inside the front door, or pieces of Spanish Colonial art in the same room as a record player. The showing of collected objects threatens to overrun the comfortable home. Griswold and Weller describe Alexander's and Virginia's collection of things historical as an "obsession."[56] Hewitt summed up Virginia House as a symbol of "the high-minded and passionate collector, the man reaching for a lost but noble ancestry through a building."[57] Alexander Weddell's father, who immigrated to the United States from Scotland, was the rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia. St. John's Church was an Anglican church of the Royal Colony of Virginia -- another tie between Weddell and England. As the son of such an important man in Richmond, Alexander Weddell always believed his family was prominent in society, although his father's vocation did not leave the family with much money. It was through his marriage to Mrs. Weddell that Alexander was able to create Virginia House. Thomas C. Williams, Jr., already wealthy through inheritance,

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[54]Ibid., 208.

[55]Hewitt, The Architect, 143, 144.

[56]Griswold and Weller, Golden Age, 207

[57]Ibid., 144.

believed Virginians "should have an example of English Medieval architecture to make them aware of their heritage."[58]

But before the houses were completed and furnished, they had to be purchased and shipped. It was these initial steps that created a furor in England.

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[58]Reed, "Agecroft Hall," p. 30.

CHAPTER 2

BRITISH PRESS COVERAGE AND PUBIC REACTION TO THE PURCHASE AND REMOVAL OF WARWICK PRIORY AND AGECROFT HALL

After months of thought and deliberation, both the Weddells and Williamses decided to purchase English manors and transport them to Virginia. Whether as a collected object, a symbol of lineage, or an obsession, the deals were done. What was the response? What did the British people think and feel? What did their government do? Were Americans, and specifically Richmonders, pleased to have these historic treasures in their midst? Newspapers of the time shed light on these questions. Strong opinions were formed about the issue of building transferences, and Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall brought to the surface both positive and negative cries about the issue. The following chapters will examine British and American newspapers in order to shed light on these questions.

British press coverage of Virginia House and Agecroft Hall ranges from articles commenting on the poor conditions of the houses to stories relating facts of the sales to features and letters that took sides on the exportation argument that was to follow. As Deborah Papier wrote, to the British "the sale of the properties [Virginia House and Agecroft Hall] was controversial. Though England had shown little interest in preserving its architectural heritage, the nation was appalled by the effrontery of the colonials."[1] The letters and articles in the British press were substantial in number, and took on many different tones in calling for a halt to Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall's removal. But

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[1]Deborah Papier, "Forever England," Mid-Atlantic Country 15 (January 1994):30.

before the editorials and letters were written, the state of the homes and the impending sales had to be reported on.

The Times (London) reported that there was to be a demolition sale of Warwick Priory on 18 July 1925. The article related how Warwick was to lose "one of its most ancient and interesting links with the past." It also noted there had been attempts to save the building, all ending in failure. "The local archeological society asked the town council to use its influence with the owner to prevent such a loss, but when a resolution recommending action in the matter came before the council it was lost by a large majority." The article explained that the government department which handled the preservation of ancient monuments, the Office of Works, was unable to provide assistance and could only wish that a local effort would be successful. Despite feelings of regret by local inhabitants , The Times reported that "a fine building site will become available" -- indicating that the home would not be standing and only the land would be sold.[2] Five days later the first of over one dozen letters concerning the future of Warwick Priory was published on the editorial page of The Times. Mr. W. S. Spanton wrote an impassioned letter telling of the "amazement" he felt when reading the building was to be sold.

> Will this fine specimen of domestic architecture, built in Shakespeare's lifetime be swept away, and replaced by the work of the jerry-builder? Are there not scores of Shakespeare scholars and readers of Landor who would regard it as a Paradise to live in? Can all the visitors, Americans and other, now flocking to Stratford, be indifferent to the fate of this piece of antiquity, so near to Shakespeare's birthplace? Every lover of old England will be the poorer if this relic of the past is destroyed.[3]

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[2]The Times (London), 18 July 1925, p. 14.

[3]Ibid., 23 July 1925, p. 10.

Spanton's cries were heard, but not by those whom he might have wished. He did mention Americans in his letter, but did not tell what he wished them to do. Give money to help save the house or perhaps actually purchase it and preserve it in its original location? If Spanton was calling for aid from the Americans, he was one of very few who felt that way. When all was said and done, it mattered almost as much to the people of England who saved the house as whether it was saved at all.

Two months later, on 28 September 1925, a small article was published in The Times which incited a negative communal response. The author of "Plans for Re-Erection in America" explained to his readers that the building was to be saved. However, despite this effort of reassurance, the public focused only on the void that would be created once Warwick Priory was transported overseas.

> If anything could reconcile Warwick people to the loss of Warwick Priory it would be the thought that this historic mansion will not perish, as was feared when the demolition sale began, but will be erected again in a new home in the United States. The purchaser is an American, whose name is not disclosed, but who is making great sacrifices to preserve this beautiful specimen of English architecture for the benefit of English-speaking people in America.[4]

The author of the article was one of the few with a positive attitude, and one of the very few who put such feelings into writing. Many people in Britain saw the Weddells' purchase of the home not as a salvation, but rather as another form of destruction.

On 3 October 1925 the Manchester Guardian printed a small story announcing the name of the new owner of Warwick Priory. The paper reported that Mr. Weddell had purchased the building for 800 pounds and intended to use it as both his home and the

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[4]Ibid., 28 September 1925, p. 7.

storage place for Virginia's archives and, upon his death, the home would become the property of the state. The paper reported that demolition had already begun.[5]

The calls to save Warwick Priory from being moved to the United States took on many forms and tones. Some British citizens called for government intervention, either local or national. The 17 October 1925 edition of the British journal, Spectator, there published a letter from L. H. Croxford, who wrote

> it is with great concern that I, and no doubt many beside me, read in the daily papers of the sale of Warwick Priory and its removal to America. This is not the first time that wealthy Americans have bought ancient buildings in England and removed them piece by piece to their own country. No doubt if the Tower of London were for sale they would buy and remove that. One can understand the Americans' desire and love for these historical relics, but why are they allowed to remove them from their natural setting? These buildings belong to England, and they lose half their real interest in America, to which they do not belong. Cannot a petition be made to Parliament asking them to prevent by law any further actions of this description?

The editor of the Spectator replied that the journal had heard that "the Priory had been gutted and that the stones were on the point of being sold and dissipated for various building purposes in this country. The American purchaser proposes, if we are correctly informed, faithfully to reconstruct the Priory in his own country and use it for a museum, which is at least a more reverent plan than had been formed here."[6] Although the editor did not have all of his facts correct, he was one of the few who pointed out what would happen to the Priory if it were to remain in England.

J. L. Higgins, writing to the editor of The Times on 1 October, 1925, called upon the Office of Works to intercede on behalf of "the public, to whom these treasures

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[5]Manchester Guardian, 3 October, 1925, p. 13.

[6]Spectator, 17 October, 1925, p. 651.

belong." Higgins demanded "that the correspondence dealing with the whole question and all particulars relating to the ownership and sale of the Priory be published in the Press." He continued "the report of the sale of Warwick Priory to an American for demolition and re-erection in U. S. A. emphasizes the need for legislation to prevent vandalism of this kind in the future." Higgins even had a suggestion for what could be done with the priory. "To have purchased the Priory for use as a museum, the cost of which could have been recovered by an admission charge, would have been a first-class investment for the burghers of Warwick. And by doing so the Priory could have been preserved and handed down to posterity for all time."[7] As was true with so many of those who wrote their opinions on the editor's page, J. L. Higgins did not understand or appreciate what the Weddells, and later the Williamses, were intending for their homes in America. Because of the intervention of the Virginians, two homes that were on the brink of destruction were "handed down to posterity for all time." Higgins was calling for better preservation practices in England, for people of that country to attempt to save their historic buildings themselves. He was using the events surrounding Warwick Priory to warn the English people what could happen if they continued to sit by as their historic buildings deteriorated.

Some of those who wrote their opinions in the British papers called for voters themselves to do what the government did not. A. R. Powys, speaking for The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, called for

> such correspondence as has lately been carried on, and it is sure that the officers of the Ancient Monuments Department of H. M. Office of Works are not backward to note signs of an awakening interest. The fate of these buildings depends, through the newspapers, upon the interest shown in them by the

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[7]The Times (London), 1 October 1925, 10.

> people . . . for an old building, whether it be rebuilt in England or in America, loses all but very little of its interest. It is, then, against moving them at all that we should protest. With few exceptions, their repair or preservation could even now be secured by the 1913 Ancient Monuments Act . . . . To my committee it appears that the protection of such buildings as vanishing Warwick Priory and the neglected Lilleshall Abbey is in the hands of the public.[8]

And so it was against moving the houses that people protested. Letters concerning the destruction of either home by time and man were not forthcoming, only those protesting their movement.

On 12 October 1925 the Manchester Guardian ran a letter to the editor from Mr. R. S. Conway, Chairman of the Council of the Ancient Monuments Society, who called for new members to help prevent the destruction of ancient buildings. No mention was made of Warwick Priory, but the timing of the letter seemed fortuitous for a society with an agenda consisting of saving ancient buildings.[9]

On more than one occasion, the authors wrote scathing personal attacks against the Weddells, as Mr. Weddell wrote in his book A Description of Virginia House. "Such transactions as this are pure vandalism," wrote the editor of The Architect, "and do not reflect credit on either purchaser or seller . . . . The action shows greed on the part of the seller and vanity, ostentation, and bad breeding on the part of the purchaser."[10] An even more acrimonious article was related by Mr. Weddell, who also included some words of his own:

> `. . . a sinister light has been cast . . .as believers in sacred places and objects, it is desirable to traffic in them for a parcel of dollars . . .`

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[8]Ibid., October 8, 1925, 10.

[9]Manchester Guardian, 12 October 1925, p. 13.

[10]Weddell, Description of Virginia House, 7.

> [attacked those who] plundered and laid waste the Church 'in the days of Henry VIII,' with a few unpleasant reflections on the recent purchaser of one of these former ecclesiastical properties.[11]

Weddell did not enjoy the comments of Lt.-Commander J. M. Kenworthy who "howled for a full column against the transaction; in an editorial [in the Daily Mail] on October 2, 1925 entitled 'Hands Off,' the author in a Stonewall Jackson - Barbara Frietch exaltation implied that 'who touches a stone of yon gray shrine' deserved a dog's death."[12]

The implications of the sale of Warwick Priory were stretched to their limit in an article in the Irish News of October of 1925. The article, as repeated and commented on by Mr. Weddell, reads:

> ' [to] . . . thoughtful people . . . the removal of The Priory is regarded as a really important indication of the degeneration and approaching downfall of Christian civilization in the Southern part of Great Britain'! The writer continued, ignoring the trammels of grammar, by gratuitously suggesting that the purchaser of The Priory was 'perhaps one of those citizens of the U. S. A. who rejoices when an opportunity of making England ridiculous presents itself to their hands' . . . [if this is ever tried in Ireland] 'the seller and buyer can safely anticipate more trouble than ordinarily sane traffickers in merchandise may wish to face!'[13]

Some of the more humorous lines appeared in another of Lt.-Commander J. M. Kenworthy's editorials, entitled "Save Our Historic Treasures." After lamenting the sale of Warwick Priory, Kenworthy asked, "Where is this thing to stop? Are speculators to be allowed to buy the cottage in which Burns was born at Ayr, Shakespeare's birthplace at Stratford, Ann Hathaway's cottage, and Carlyle's house in Chelsea, and remove them

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[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., 6.

[13]Ibid., 7.

piecemeal across the Atlantic?" Kenworthy used exaggeration to make his point. "Caernarfon Castle, the finest example of a medieval fortress in Europe, is Government property. It and Stonehenge might be used to wipe out a substantial portion of our debt to America. There is no difference of principle, but only of degree, between such sales and the sacking of Warwick Priory."[14] Kenworthy went on to call for government intervention.

In A Description of Virginia House Weddell included some shorter examples of British negative reaction as well. He quoted an editor of the Evening News as finding the sale "at least distasteful."[15] Weddell wrote that "A correspondent in the Daily Mail about the same time, apparently confusing the word 'Priory' with 'Cemetery' declared the transaction to be 'an outrage to our honored dead.'"[16] One of the loftiest comments of the whole affair was quoted by Weddell, who wrote "A ponderous bit of editorial satire appearing in the Sunday Times, of October 4, 1925, ended with the sneering observation: 'We can only suggest that America try to cultivate an art of her own.'"[17]

Punch, the satirical weekly British publication, commented numerous times on the exportation of British houses to America. On 3 March 1926, the publication reported on a bill recently introduced into Parliament to prevent such actions, observing that

> Sir Henry Slesser, K. C., asked leave to introduce a Bill to prohibit the export from this country of works of art and ancient historic buildings. Mr. Rye, Unionist Member for Loughborough, opposing, assured the House that nowadays the stately homes of England were

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[14]Editorial, unknown British newspaper, unknown date, Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

[15]Weddell, Description of Virginia House, 6.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., 7.

> only kept from falling into decay because their impoverished but high-minded owners were able to rush an occasional Joshua Reynolds round to their Uncle (Sam). Evidently fearful lest Mr. Henry Huntington should take a notion to buy out the ruins of that ancient monument, the Liberal Party, and remove them bodily to California, Liberals followed Mr. Lloyd George into the Labour lobby; several Conservatives joined them, and leave to introduce the Bill was granted by a useful majority.[18]

The small article on the introduction of the bill was illustrated with a drawing of Henry Slesser as an owl perched atop an ancient vase with the caption "A Guardian of our National Arts" below.

A few weeks later, Punch again mentioned Slesser and his bill, this time publishing a long poem, "The Stately Homes of England," in the style of Thomas Campbell.

"The Stately Homes of England"

When stately homes of England
That grace our native land,
Whose towers have braved the ages,
can No more afford to stand,
Their glorious gables grow again
In other climes than this,
And rise to the skies
In Penn. or Conn. or Wis.
(Though battered age looks somehow wrong
In Penn. or Conn. or Wis.)

The spirit of our fathers
Still starts from every stone;
The ver lichen on the walls
Was ours -- our very own!
And still it's there (the stones were packed
With all the lichen on).
And it sticks to the bricks
In Wis. or Penn. or Conn.

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[18]"Essence of Parliament," Punch 152 (3 March 1926): 241-2.

(Though a Tudor brick looks rather odd
In Wis. or Penn. or Conn).

Britannia needs her mansions,
Her terraces and towers;
Why send them piecemeal o'er the pond
To a land that isn't ours?
Her storied halls, her native oak,
The pride of Englishmen --
Why should *they* pine away
In Conn, or Wis. or Penn.,
Unrooted in the newer soil
Of Conn. or Wis. or Penn.?

The lamp of England's honour
Shall never burn out clear
Till Slesser's patriot Bill be passed
And our buildings anchored here.
Then, then High Court of Parliament,
Our English ale shall foam
To the fame of your name
Who kept our homes as home,
When the stranger's voice shall not be heard
In the homes you kept at home.[19]

It was not only British subjects who cried out against Alexander and Virginia Weddell's purchase of Warwick Priory in British newspapers. Alexander mentioned "A Mr. Swartout, described as 'architect, and Director of the Fine Arts Federation of New York,' [who] is gleefully quoted by the Daily Mail of October 5 as referring to the purchase as 'a shame.'"[20]

The first hint in the British press that Agecroft Hall would be making the journey across to America appeared in the Manchester Guardian on 26 January 1926. In an article titled "Hall Being Taken to America -- Alderman's Secret," the paper reported

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[19]Ibid., p. 304.

[20]Weddell, Description of Virginia House, p. 7.

that Sir Francis Fox, "the eminent engineer," had given a lecture the previous evening in the Manchester Art Gallery focusing on "The Preservation of Ancient Buildings." The chairman of the Ancient Monuments Society, Alderman F. Todd, called for new members to join following the lecture. In his speech, Todd "went on to make a rather cryptic reference to a 'black and white' hall in the immediate neighbourhood of Manchester." The alderman stated that he could not reveal the name of the building, but added "I am afraid we are too late to save it. It has been bought, and is going to be pulled down and taken to America. If only the Ancient Monuments Society had been in existence two years ago we could probably have saved this building."[21] The alderman did not explain how the society could have saved the building had it in fact been in existence two years prior. However, he did continue to ask the audience to make donations to the society now that it had been formed.

The following day, on 27 January 1926, the Manchester Guardian divulged the name of the building that was to be transported to America -- Agecroft Hall. "The Flight of Agecroft Hall" began "the news that Agecroft Hall is to follow Warwick Priory across the Atlantic -- beams, balusters, heraldic glass, and all -- may well set us jogging the elbow of the Ancient Monuments Society." The remainder of the article was written both as a warning to readers that it was England's own neglect that made the transference possible in the first place as well as a begrudging thank you to those who saved it.

> . . . what, we may well ask, will go next? If rumor is right, and this quiet kidnapping of historic domestic architecture for re-erection in America is part of a set policy, we should do well to press on with the scheduling of such buildings as Agecroft under the Act which protects them, and so make certain, at least, that there is full discussion of their danger and ample chance for public or private effort to save

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[21] Manchester Guardian, 26 January 1926, p. 8.

> them . . . . Yet it cannot be denied that about the spiriting away of Agecroft there is a certain grim justice. It has been little enough regarded by the busy generation that has grown up around it . . . . Let us hope the future of the old place will be happier. A house that has crossed the ocean is presumably an object of some reverence. If we may picture Agecroft Hall queening it once more in ample meadows, with bright sunshine to throw up the clean, gay pattern of its timbering, and with its rafters echoing again to the sounds of a home, the rebirth will have its compensations.[22]

One very absorbing portion of this article, the line about a "set policy," is never fully explained. It would be interesting to know where the author received his or her information about a systematic American plan to remove ancient buildings.

That same day The Times contained an article, smaller in content, about the sale of Agecroft Hall. The entire article contained only three sentences:

> Agecroft Hall, an ancient wood-and-plaster Elizabethan mansion on the banks of the river Irwell, at Salford, has been bought by an American architect, and will be transferred to Virginia and re-erected. Among the principal features of the mansion are the rich wood carving and stained-glass windows. On the windows are the arms of the Langleys, the original possessors, and of John of Gaunt.[23]

Differing from both the initial Times article that announced Warwick Priory would be moved to America and thus rescued from demolition, and the Guardian story of the previous day, this article reported the facts in an objective manor. The effect of these brief articles was the same though, negative reactions were sent in and printed.

The Manchester Guardian printed a picture of Agecroft Hall as it stood on 28 January 1926. The caption read "Agecroft Hall, Pendleton, which has been sold and is to be sent to New Jersey, U. S. A. The building was begun in Tudor times and finished

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[22]Ibid., 27 January 1926, p. 8.

[23]The Times (London), 27 January 1926, p. 13.

in the seventeenth century."[24] The newspaper does not report where it received the incorrect information that the house would be moving to New Jersey, though it possibly came from the fact that Henry Grant Morse's offices were in New York and he resided for a time in New Jersey. Lacking from this story is a judgment of any kind.

Objections to the removal of Agecroft Hall came soon after its announced departure. On 1 February 1926 The Times published a letter by Mr. C. H. Calmady-Hamlyn, who wrote,

> Your announcement that Agecroft Hall is to share the fate of Norland Hall, and be transported, stick and stone, across the Atlantic, makes sad reading. When will the people of the United States realize that transactions of this sort are an artistic outrage, and that a house cut adrift from its surroundings and the family associations of centuries is little more than a mere empty shell?[25]

What Mr. Calmady-Hamlyn neglected to mention was that Agecroft Hall had in fact been an empty shell for two decades before the Williamses purchased it. Many of those who wrote editorials to British newspapers were unfamiliar with the facts of the houses which were to be taken from England. Their passion to keep England's possessions often clouded their views. What they would have possibly seen if they had tried was that the homes that were taken to America were lucky enough to survive, while many that remained were destroyed by neglect. Agecroft Hall and Warwick Priory were damaged houses situated in reduced landscapes. Agecroft Hall was the victim of railway lines and coal pits, while the park around Warwick Priory was made smaller by the coming of the railroad. Both houses were shells, empty of inhabitants, hollow and no longer the great manor houses they had once been. The current owners, like so many others, were no

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[24] Manchester Guardian, 28 January, 1926, p. 7.

[25] The Times (London), 1 February 1926, p.8.

longer able to afford the upkeep of appearances and structural soundness. Preservation societies, founded by well meaning citizens to preserve historical houses and monuments, lacked the funds and resources to purchase or save the homes. Government intervention was to prove ineffectual. Industry near Agecroft Hall and urbanization around Warwick Priory threatened to destroy the homes by swallowing up the land and soon the structures themselves. The Weddells and Williamses purchased the decaying structures, took them from the damaged landscapes to a new land where they were, in a sense, brought back to life.

In the 24 March 1926 issue of The Times there appeared a picture of the dismantling process then occurring at Agecroft Hall. The picture shows a group of men loading material of the house onto a flatbed truck. The caption to the picture reads "Agecroft Hall, a wood and plaster Elizabethan mansion at Salford, is being removed to Virginia, where it will be re-erected by its purchaser, an American architect. Workmen are seen loading a packing-case of numbered portions of the building, which is seen partly dismantled in the background."[26] As the Guardian had mistakenly claimed the building was destined for New Jersey, so the Times was under the wrong impression that Agecroft Hall had been bought by an architect, perhaps thinking of planner John Nolen or Allen J. Saville, Richmond's Director of Public Works and Mr. Williams's collaborator in Windsor Farms.

On 2 March 1926 the Manchester Guardian ran a long article describing the demolition and packing of Agecroft Hall. In "Norfolk, VA. -- With Care Thoughts on a Tie-beam and the Rooks," the author's tone is one of a helpless bystander who can neither save the building from departing nor condone its remaining in its present location.

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[26]Ibid., 24 March 1926, p. 20.

> Under the walls of the house a few workmen stood round some long white-wood packing cases. One of them had a stenciling outfit, and letter by letter he jabbed on to the wood 'Glass -- with care.' And lower down 'Norfolk, Va.' . . . . It was not difficult, as one approached the hall, to see why it was going. It is too reproachful a jewel to leave in that ruined landscape. . . . It has been treated with contempt, subjected to every conceivable indignity. . . . It is no use to sigh over Agecroft now. The hammer and chisel have begun their irrevocable work. . . . Wonderful to pick up a piece of that daub and crumble in your fingers stuff that was laid on five hundred years ago. . . . They knew how to build and what to build with! Centuries old, they would last for centuries yet. . . . gaps smashed through the walls let us see out into the long-neglected gardens that looks singularly forlorn on this March day; the man with his stenciling outfit goes on remorselessly inscribing the destination of this supremely English thing: 'Norfolk, Va.'. . . . That tie-beam, now -- who shall put a term to its survival? It goes now across the Atlantic. One's fancy goes the length of seeing it, in, say, another five hundred years, crossing the Pacific to gratify the whim of some Japanese connoisseur, and taking the rest of the building with it. And perhaps five hundred years from then our national conscience will prompt us to buy it back. One thing is certain: short of fire, that tie-beam will be there then to complete its circumnavigation of the globe.[27]

This article is very interesting in foreseeing the future of American buildings being purchased by the Japanese. As more and more Japanese companies acquire land and structures in the United States, the cries from Americans are as loud as those heard decades ago in England.

A few days later the Guardian reported at length on the introduction into Parliament of Sir Henry Slesser's bill. The unnamed author informed readers that

> Its enactment will save us from further national losses such as the deportation of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall. It will also save some Americans from making a foolish use of their spare money Part of the perfection of a perfect house is its complete affinity, in every sense, to the place where it was built . . . . A half-timbered house where there are no forests . . . [is a] departure from that

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[27]Manchester Guardian, 2 March 1926, p. 13.

> rule of congeniality between a building and its site which, if perfectly carried out, makes a house appear to spring from the soil it almost as naturally as a plant . . . . [Those that have been moved] become, in some degree, functionless and absurd, like the Swiss chalets which a few thoughtless enthusiasts used to build in England because their models had looked beautiful and purposeful in the Alps . . . . These things are apt to be forgotten by rich people who find their money able to do so much that they easily fancy it can do more . . . . The Swiss have guarded their mountains by law against the consequences of such mistakes, and why should not we guard our countryside too?[28]

On 23 March 1926 the Guardian published another picture of Agecroft Hall in the midst of being dismantled and a small article titled "Antique Furniture from Agecroft Hall." It told how Sir Lees Knowles of Westwood, Pendlebury purchased a portion of the dining room from Agecroft Hall and had sent it to the museum in Peel Park until it was known what to do with it. The furniture was purchased as a gift for the Corporation of Salford to commemorate the mayoralty of Alderman Delves. The mayor was remarked to have gratefully accepted the furniture from the home which was to be dismantled and taken to America.[29]

In A Description of Virginia House Weddell seemed quite relieved to report that when the public had finally "become[e] tired of the subject . . . an English rhymester had become sufficiently conscious of the funny side of this affair to write and to have published in (English) Country Life (April 17, 1926) the following jingle:

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[28]Ibid., 6 March 1926, p. 10.

[29]Ibid., 23 March 1926, p. 12.

"'On the Transportation to America of A Certain British House
of Historical Interest:'

Of old, when Orpheus harped and sang.
The woods with heavenly music rang,
And rapt trees left the rooty bed
And followed wheresoe'er he led.
Today the more ingenious Yank
Need only let his dollars clank,
And straight the houses here grow frantic
And bound across the broad Atlantic."[30]

Not all of the coverage of the removal of Warwick Priory in England had been negative, there were some supporters of the Weddells' cause. The London Times, which had printed so many negative remarks from readers of the Weddells' actions, managed to include at least two positive commentaries. The first was from October 3, 1925, written by a Clarendon-Square resident, Frank Glover.

> However much the residents of Warwick and the neighbourhood may regret the sale of the Priory, it has never been a show place, but always a private residence . . . . The suggestion of your correspondent Mr. Higgins, "to have purchased the Priory for use as a museum," is belittled by the fact that there is already a museum in Warwick in the centre of the market-place.[31]

Mr. Glover seemed to point out that most of those who spoke out against the sale of Warwick Priory to the Weddells were misinformed.

In The Times on October 20, 1925, the Weddell's good friend, playwright Henry Arthur Jones, wrote in praise of Alexander and Virginia. He implored readers to look at the situation in a different light.

> In this instance we may abate of indignation, seeing that the removal is to be made by a cultivated American and his wife, not from motives

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[30]Weddell, Description of Virginia House, 9-10.

[31]The Times (London), October 3, 1925, 6.

> of personal display but with the intent to put up an endearing memorial of England in the heart of America. The probable result of the transference will be to stimulate, in some small measure, friendly thoughts of England amongst Americans. Rather than fret ourselves about the departure of Warwick Priory to a place where it will be lovingly preserved and admired, let us chide ourselves to remember that all over England beautiful homes are being daily destroyed by modern builders, or are dropping into decay by reason of our neglect or the poverty of the owners.[32]

Jones's line stating that the Weddells motives were not of "personal display" conflicts with Hewitt's theory that the Weddells were very interested in what the house would say about them. While it is true that the Weddells believed their home would be both a "memorial of England" and tie between England and America, it would be hard to argue that they did not think of themselves in their plan as well. As soon as the decision to purchase Warwick Priory had been made, the Weddells would have known that publicity would follow, and judging from their actions in catering to the press, they would have welcomed it. That is not to say that they did not wish the house and the Virginia Historical Society to benefit from the press, but they themselves would have been aware of how they might be seen as the rescuers of the ancient building.

One unknown author brought up a point which many others must have been thinking. Appearing in Truth on October 7, 1925, the writer asked,

> The fuss over Warwick Priory seems silly. The local people apparently had no objection to its being pulled down and the materials being flung on the dust heap. But they are outraged by the proposal to remove the building and re-erect it as an international memorial in America . . . . If the local people are so concerned about Warwick Priory why do they not buy the old place and preserve it for the public?[32]

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[32]Ibid., October 20, 1925, 10

[32]Weddell, Description of Virginia House, 8

While any response the Williamses may have made to the outcries concerning the removal of Agecroft Hall is not seen in the newspapers, the Weddell's made statements to both the British and American press in early October 1925. The Times reported on 5 October that the Weddells were clarifying their position. It was reported that the couple stated "they were not vandals. They were only taking [Warwick Priory] when it was on the point of destruction and putting it into a structure at Richmond, on James River, to be a shrine for Americans and Britons in the United States."[33] The newspaper continued to give the Weddells a chance to defend themselves, quoting Alexander Weddell as declaring "we are taking the Priory in a spirit of reverence to build what will become a national monument. It will be a gift to the American nation from my wife and myself."[34]

In his introduction to A Description of Virginia House, Mr. Weddell outlined his feelings on the building of Virginia House and his desire to see it succeed as a museum. He ended his remarks by adding that "all these encumbering details [are] cited by way of explanation and apologia in the light of subsequent events." Weddell is giving the reader an introduction to the negative press to which he and his wife were subjected. On the same page, Weddell's displeasure with the way he was treated by many British is evident.

> For while the bare announcement of the impending demolition of a venerable and historic building had stirred the indignation, -- but only the indignation, -- of many Britons, their cries and protests were as a psalm and a prayer compared to what was said in the press and elsewhere when it became known that the ultimate purchasers were Americans, (not even Colonials), and who proposed to remove this treasure to the United States . . . . Yet when their alien identity was known a storm of abuse broke about the heads of the innocent purchasers, who, were, (as they still are), in their inmost hearts

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[33] The Times (London), 5 October 1925, p. 11

[34] Ibid.

> Anglophiles and considered their gesture as one tending to promote closer ties between Briton [sic] and America![35]

According to Weddell, Lord Lee of Farehem, an "honored friend," had urged "that a reply be made to these captious critics."[36] The Weddells did respond, using Alexander's power and knowledge of international affairs to put out a statement to the British press.

> There has been a misconception of our ideas and plans . . . . Before we had even heard of Warwick Priory, and before our arrival in England, the old place had begun to be stripped of practically everything . . . and the empty shell was announced for sale at auction in September. It was then bought in by a local contractor who intended to dispose of the stone and brick to builders in the neighbourhood. At this time my wife and I made an offer which he accepted, and this material thus became ours . . . . It has seemed to us that the use of the stone and brick from this old place material with the bloom of centuries upon it, would not be inappropriate for a structure which will become eventually in the nature of a national monument . . . whose work has incidentally been a powerful factor in the promotion of a better understanding . . . between two countries . . . . It really seems to me that between the use of this material for a factory in Warwickshire and its use to form the walls of a public institution in Virginia devoted to the promotion of historical studies, the true Briton could make but one choice.[37]

Weddell later stated that "because the public was becoming tired of the subject, the appearance of this statement practically put an end to hostile comment . . . ."[38]

The articles and letter in the British press did open many eyes to the plight of ancient homes and monuments in Great Britain. The many citizens who wrote to the

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[35]Weddell, Description of Virginia House, 6.

[36]Ibid., 8.

[37]Ibid., 9

[38]Ibid

newspapers calling for aid could only benefit the many homes which were in need. Eventually though, the British public finally let go of the thought that they could save Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall and moved on to other topics. Yet in one area of English life, the fight raged on. Before, during and after the exportation of the two houses Parliament was discussing building preservation acts. While British citizens called out for action, Parliament was listening. But before examining steps Parliament took in legislating preservation, American press coverage needs to be examined. How American citizens reacted to the transportation of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall is an important balance to the British press.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICAN PRESS COVERAGE AND PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PURCHASE AND REMOVAL OF WARWICK PRIORY AND AGECROFT HALL

Coverage in American newspapers of the transportation of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall was consistently more favorable than the British, especially in Richmond papers. The Richmond News Leader and Richmond Times Dispatch both had positive opinions of the city's favorite sons, and the feeling was reciprocated by the two Anglophiles. In an article he wrote for the monthly publication of the Chamber of Commerce, called Richmond, Alexander Weddell's admiration for his hometown shines through. In "Home Thoughts, From Abroad," written while he was Consul-General in Mexico in 1928, Weddell stated that writing about Richmond was a subject "which cannot be treated objectively; it is solely and entirely subjective, intimate, personal . . . . I might as well break down and confess to a hopeless and incurable prejudice in favor of my native city."[1] There appeared in this Chamber of Commerce publication ads by the plumbing, heating and painting firms which had worked on Virginia House and Agecroft Hall. The companies attempted to garner business by advertising that they had done work for the two houses. The mutual adoration both city and man felt for each other is quite evident in the writings of the time.

The Weddells' purchase of Warwick Priory was reported in Richmond on 3 November 1925, over a month later than it had been in England. The article in the Richmond News Leader was titled "Use Material of Warwick Priory" and related the facts of the home's future structure. Reporting that the home would still suggest

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[1] Alexander Weddell, "Home Thoughts From Abroad," Richmond 14 (March 1928) 1

Sulgrave Manor, the article explained that it also would incorporate parts of Warwick Priory, whose materials were being used to build the structure. The author was unable to identify a location for the home in Richmond, but noted that a site would be announced in the coming days. The News Leader failed to mention the uproar that the purchase was raising at the time in England and spent very little time on the details of the move, reporting only that "Warwick Priory . . . is being torn down now. The material will be sent to Richmond. A sailing ship will bring it into Hampton Roads and up the James River, just as the ships of the seventeenth century used to bring supplies to the colonists."[2] The Virginia paper made note of the Commonwealth's ties to England with this mention of the colonists, an example of the thought process of many Virginians, the Weddells and Williamses included, who still saw themselves as bound to the mother country. The article of 3 November ended with a line from Alexander Weddell, one of Richmond's favorite sons, observing that while he was planning to remain in the Consular Service for a number of years, that "with this house here the temptation to come back will be very great . . . ."[3]

The New York Times also reported a number of times on the sale of Warwick Priory and of its journey to America. On 26 September 1925 the newspaper announced to its readers "Warwick Priory Is Sold," informing them that

> the remaining portion of the Warwick Priory has been sold at a high price to an American and will be taken down, stone by stone, and transported to the United States, it was announced at Warwick today . . . . The whole building will be reconstructed on its arrival in the United States.[4]

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[2]Richmond News Leader, 3 November 1925, p. 22

[3]Ibid.

[4]The New York Times, 25 September 1925, p. 2.

A more comprehensive article appeared on 2 October of the same year, naming the Weddells as the purchasers of the manor and reporting that the stones of the priory would be used to recreate Sulgrave Manor, a mistake which would result in a letter to the editor appearing a few days later. The article called the previous reports "mysterious," and that they were explained by the announcement of the Weddells' purchase.[5]

The following day The New York Times ran an editorial entitled "This Scheme Should Be Dropped." The unnamed author was under the mistaken impression that the Weddells were still determined to recreate Sulgrave Manor using the stones from Warwick Priory. The author admitted that "there is no little difficulty in understanding why any American should buy in Europe an old building and remove it for erecting again in this country." The author's complaint came from believing that the stones would be "used in making a replica of a quite different building." The editorial ended by adding,

> the comments of the London papers on this precious plan are earnest, but not half so harsh as would be expected. It remains, therefore, for the Virginia Historical Society to make fitting comment on a scheme which, if carried out, would convict the society as an accomplice in a deed of vandalism.[6]

Another article concerning British houses lay directly beneath the story of 2 October in which the Weddells were named new owners of the priory. In "Britain to Protect Ancient Buildings," The New York Times reported that the British Government was having discussions concerning legislation to limit the removal of historic houses. The American paper quoted the The Daily Mail (London) as lamenting,

> we cannot prevent Americans from acquiring our famous pictures, our old furniture and our rare books, but when it comes to pulling

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[5]Ibid., 2 October 1925, p. 12

[6]Ibid., 3 October 1925, p. 14

> down ancient and beautiful buildings, which are the bony skeletons of history and the eloquent reminders of our great past, it is time to cry hands off. England without her historic remains would not be England, while these same remains, transplanted to America, would lose all their meaning and romance.[7]

On 17 November 1925, the Richmond News Leader contained the story "Sulgrave Manor Replica To Beat Windsor Farms," announcing that the Weddells had determined a site for the future home for themselves and the Virginia Historical Society. The story quotes Allen J. Saville, former Director of Public Works and the man hired to grade the roads in Windsor Farms. "'We went to Philadelphia for a certain kind of paving bricks, and we declined to permit the planting of trees that do not grow in England,' he stated. 'The houses were all to be of English type. All the streets have English names . . . . Virginia House will merge into this setting perfectly.'" Mr. Saville also stated that he was "'delighted with the prospect of doing this work . . . . Just think of handling building material which has been a part of an English priory since the 1100's.'"[8] The excitement of everyone involved in both Windsor Farms and Virginia House is evident in the pages of the News Leader.

The announcement that Agecroft Hall would be joining Warwick Priory in Richmond was front page news at the beginning of 1926. A heading in the 27 January 1926 Richmond News Leader read "Another English Mansion Will Be Brought to City." "Another old English Mansion, Agecroft Hall, is coming to Richmond to keep company with Warwick Priory, portions of which have already arrived in this country, according to an Associated Press dispatch today from Manchester, England."[9] What stands out in this

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[7]Quoted in The New York Times, 2 October 1925, p. 2

[8]Richmond News Leader, 17 November 1925, p. 1, 24

[9]Ibid., 27 January 1926, p. 1

article is how it unknowingly points out one difference between the Weddells and Williamses. While Alexander and Virginia Weddell constantly kept the press up to date on their activities both overseas and in Richmond concerning the house, going so far as to announce the proposed location for Virginia House at a press conference, the Williamses were much quieter about their affairs. Their names do not appear in the article about the sale of Agecroft Hall; in fact, it is mistakenly reported that the hall "is understood to have been acquired by the purchaser of Warwick Priory, according to the dispatch. He is Alexander W. Weddell, of Richmond, now consul-general to Mexico."[10] The newspaper stated that the firm of Allen J. Saville could only disclose that the new structure would not be incorporated in the one already proposed by the Weddells. Another interesting and mysterious aspect of the article states that "a Richmonder, who was in England for a period last year, expressed the opinion today that the hall is one for the preservation of which, a movement was started in that country last year. At the time it was said to be one of the finest examples of the architecture of the period then extant."[11]

On 13 February 1926 another article appeared in the News Leader about Agecroft Hall, this one confirming that the house would be reconstructed in Windsor Farms, but still not naming Williams as the purchaser of the home. Richmond newspaper bias is evident at first glance -- the article, titled "Rebuild Manor of Agecroft at Windsor Farms," begins with the line "Agecroft Manor, the gorgeous old Elizabethan house which today stands in Manchester, England, was bought by the Windsor Farms Corporation of Richmond, it was announced today by Allen J. Saville, whose engineering company will handle the property." The story mentioned the effort by many in Manchester to save the

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[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid

house from certain destruction, and stated that "the movement must have failed." This article is the first to mention any British disapproval, reporting that "there were numerous complaints by Britons when it was reported that Warwick Priory would be removed to America, but so far as is known today the English have not recorded objections to the removal of Agecroft Hall."[12] As we can see today, this statement is not true, that in fact dissatisfaction had been expressed in England concerning Agecroft Hall just as it had been in the matter of Warwick Priory. Both the Richmond News Leader and the Richmond Times Dispatch neglected to report many facts of the transportation of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall. The question arises -- Why? Perhaps the Richmond newspapers were interested in protecting the good names of two of the town's favorite sons. Both the Weddells and Williamses were influential couples in Richmond business and society. Reporting the negative British press would be bound to anger more than just the families involved. Windsor Farms was a new suburb; if Richmonders felt that British feelings had been angered, perhaps they would not be so quick to purchase land there.

The negative press in England contrasted sharply with the feelings that many Virginians had about their relations with Great Britain, both as a nation and as a mother-country figure. By concealing the disapproving feelings of Englishmen and women, the Richmond newspapers were able to protect the reputation of the two couples, Windsor Farms, and Virginia's ties to England. But it is also possible that journalists in Richmond knew nothing about the reactions in Britain to the exportation of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall. The disapproving articles and letters in the British press were exactly that, in the British press. If no Richmond newsman or woman happened to be reading English newspapers, either overseas or in Virginia, they would have no way of

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[12]Richmond News Leader, 13 February 1926, p. 1

reading the reactions for themselves. The disavowing American views on the transportations of the two homes were of no concern to the Richmond newspapers, their articles chose instead to reflect the positive feelings of native Richmonders. What little facts the Richmond News Leader did have about anti-American feelings regarding Agecroft Hall, it did mention. But the paper failed to follow up on its claim that there had been no negative reactions to the exportation of Agecroft Hall.

Two weeks later the true owner of Agecroft Hall became known when the News Leader ran a story titled "Agecroft To Be Williams Home." The paper used the interesting description "new-old home" to describe what the Williamses had purchased and brought to Richmond.[13] As with plans of the Weddells' home, Agecroft Hall went through many changes as well. The News Leader reported that "Agecroft Manor is so large that when Mr. Williams' home is built there will be material left over with which to build other residences, it was stated."[14] Agecroft was completed as one large building on the Williamses' property, a home smaller than the one previously constructed in Lancashire. The article observed that the house would be in harmony with the design of Virginia House, as well as neighboring houses in Windsor Farms.

The news of Thomas C. Williams, Jr.'s death was reported on the front page of the Richmond Times Dispatch on 15 February 1929. The paper quoted Dr. F. W. Boatwright, President of the University of Richmond, who remarked "Thomas C. Williams, Jr. was one of the most distinguished alumni of the University of Richmond." Boatwright went on to add that "our city has lost one of its foremost builders and

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[13]Ibid., 26 February 1926, p. 11

[14]Ibid.

Virginia has lost one of its purest and greatest citizens."[15] Williams's neighbor Alexander Weddell was listed as one of the honorary pallbearers.

On 25 February 1929 it was announced that Agecroft Hall was to be given to the city of Richmond to be used as an art center and museum upon the death of Mrs. Williams. The following day the News Leader's editor spoke highly of Thomas C. Williams, Jr. and his gift.

> The sure judgment so often displayed in business led Thomas C. Williams, Jr. to believe that Agecroft would make an ideal art-museum for Richmond. The strong love of his city, exhibited in a hundred ways, prompted him to bequeath the place to the public and to endow it handsomely. Mr. Williams' judgment did not lead him astray. With a background distinctly English, Richmond naturally will collect objects of art that are English in their inspiration . . . . If the terms of the will are correctly reported, Mrs. Williams is to have a life-interest in Agecroft, as, of course, is fitting and proper. She is a young woman and should live long in her deserved enjoyment of the high respect of the city. Richmond hopes that she will be mistress of Agecroft for many, many years . . . .[16]

On the same page, the editor also wrote of an overheard remark of a visitor to Richmond. "'Lucky Richmond,' said he. 'Somebody is always making the city a great gift . . . .'"[17] The editor went on to agree.

Richmond got lucky again in June of that same year when the title of Virginia House was passed to the Virginia Historical Society, formalizing a plan which had been made public a few months before. The Richmond News Leader declared that the house would be "a museum and show place for Richmond . . . . Virginia House is one of

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[15] Richmond Times Dispatch, 15 February 1929, p. 1.

[16] Ibid., 26 February 1929, p. 11.

[17] Ibid.

Richmond's greatest architectural and historical treasures."[17] The article explained that the Weddells had given the house to the Society by deed instead of will in order that their wish not be contested or revoked. One of the few mentions the Richmond press made of the house in England occurred in this article, when the author wrote that the building was "in the process of demolition when the present grantors who were traveling in England . . . purchased it from the housewreckers, thus preserving the historic building, if in an altered state."[18] At the time of the sale, the Weddells' initial bid was lower than that of a demolition company, and Henry Grant Morse had to check with his clients to raise their offer. Morse then purchased the house from the demolition company. In the News Leader article the Weddells seemed the heroes, arriving just in time to rescue a house already being dismantled, not by an owner with a name, but rather by a faceless group of destructive workmen, and save a "historic building." The housewreckers were thwarted in their task and the Weddells were the proud owners of a new ancient building.

The Weddells' home was as important to Richmond as was the couple. For years following the completion of Virginia House, both home and owners were mentioned in local papers. Praise for both the Weddells and Virginia House was seen when it was announced Mr. Weddell would be retiring from the Consular Service and returning with Mrs. Weddell to Richmond. The Richmond News Leader announced in a front page article on 23 August 1928 that "Consul General in Mexico, donor of Virginia House, Returning Here."[19] In the same issue, on page eight, the editor wrote that "[Weddell's]

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[17]Ibid., 1 June 1929, p. 1

[18]Ibid

[19]Ibid., 23 August 1928, p. 1

interests are wide and his devotion to the Old Dominion is great. Richmonders hope he will make his residence here to the end of his days."[20]

Protection of Richmond's own was evident in an article in the News Leader from 3 November 1941. The paper reported on the accusations that were being directed at the Weddells in the New Republic, labeling them fascists and appeasers, probably due to the fact that they were stationed in Spain very soon after Franco's civil war.

> In front of Virginia house in Windsor Farms yesterday there was endless grinding of brakes and shifting of gears. The interesting facade of the home of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander W. Weddell was being shown by hundreds of Richmond motorists to soldier-guests whom they had entertained at dinner . . . . About Virginia House, in short, even on a Sunday when thousands passed by, there was nothing forbidding, nothing inhospitable . . . . Good citizens Mr. and Mrs. Weddell are and always have been. Since they came back and settled in Mr. Weddell's native city, they have withheld no service from the community.[21]

The article continued with examples of the Weddells' philanthropic works and love for Richmond. In response to the cries of appeasers and fascists, the News Leader informed its readers that the accusations were not true, that during Mr. and Mrs. Weddells' time in Spain, when Mr. Weddell had been Ambassador, they had found it necessary to work through the existing government to reach those who needed their help. "Was she [Virginia Weddell] expected to operate through undercover, outlawed republican agencies?" asked the article. "We mention these libels because they outrage all Richmond. At home, where reputations usually are most accurately weighed, the falsity of these charges would make them laughable were they not malicious."[22]

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[20]Ibid., p. 8.

[21]Ibid., 3 November 1941, p. 10.

[22]Ibid.

On 19 April 1942 the Richmond Times Dispatch featured the Weddells in an article entitled "Making Friends for U.S." The article gave a short biographical study of both Alexander and Virginia Weddell and spoke of the work they had done for the United States during Mr. Weddell's term as ambassador to Spain. "Six Two and Every Inch a Diplomat -- He's Richmond's Alexander Weddell," read the subheading.[23] The full page article sang the praises of both Weddells. Mr. Weddell's installation as Virginia Historical Society President was reported in the News Leader on 9 December 1943, and his decision to publish a book about Virginia House was reported on 10 October 1947.

The article explained that Mr. Weddell took Horace Walpole's Description of Strawberry Hill as his inspiration for A Description of Virginia House. This was the only article to date which mentioned those people in England who had spoken out against the Weddells' decision to transport Warwick Priory to America. After explaining to readers that the Weddells had purchased the stones from a "house-wrecker," the News Leader noted that in the book; "an account of the hue and cry raised in England when it was announced that the building had been purchased by Americans follows."[24] Only by purchasing Weddell's book would most Richmonders be able to learn of the "hue and cry," as neither Richmond paper had reported on it as it was happening.

The Weddells' deaths on New Years Day 1948 brought forth much of the same praise that had been given Thomas C Williams, Jr. upon his death in 1929. The Weddells were traveling by train from Richmond to Arizona when a blinding snow storm resulted in a crash with a death toll of fourteen -- three of whom were the Weddells and

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[23]Richmond Times Dispatch, 19 April 1942, sec 4, p 1

[24]Richmond News Leader, 10 October 1947, p 13

their servant, Violet Andrews. The editor of the News Leader wrote under the heading "Blessed Are They Who Return," declaring that

> . . . there was universal expression of gratitude for what the dead savant and his gracious wife had done for their city . . . . They had traveled everywhere; they could have lived anywhere . . . . They chose to come back to the town where Alex. Weddell had started as a minister's son. Nowhere and in no way could they have done more good, or have invested their cultural interests more profitable . . . . Blessed are they who, if they must go, will return to enjoy their heritage and to share their acquisitions.[25]

These articles, while not concerning Virginia House directly, are presented to show the way in which the Weddells were portrayed in the Richmond press. A visible partiality existed in the Richmond press toward both the Weddells and Williamses, and through examination it is possible to see how the Richmond press not only obscured much of what was occurring in England, but gave its readers somewhat trivial information instead.

Positive press reactions were neither limited to the Weddells nor to Richmond. The matter of the removal of Warwick Priory did produce some agreeable mentions on both sides of the Atlantic. In the years following the purchase, praise for Alexander and Virginia Weddells' efforts to save the shell of Warwick Priory were written by many authors. In his history of Sulgrave Manor, Clifford H. Smith wrote that "a wing of Virginia house, Richmond, Virginia, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Weddell, is a careful and beautiful reproduction of Sulgrave Manor."[26] Philip Daniel, a historian of the Knights of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, wrote many years later,

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[25]Ibid., 3 January 1948, p. 4

[26]Clifford H. Smith, Sulgrave Manor and the Washingtons (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1933), 219.

that "much honour and many thanks are due to the Americans who saved this historic house . . . ."[27]

The Richmond Chamber of Commerce's publication, Richmond, spoke of both Virginia House and Agecroft Hall in its edition of March 1928. The author, John Archer Carter, uses both praise of the two owners and recollections of British ancestry in his article "Two Oldest Homes of the New World are now Located in Richmond." Speaking of the houses, Carter observed that "they sit on the banks of a river which more than any other in the world connect America with England -- the James." Carter called the Weddells, the Williamses and Allen J. Saville "dreamers." He talked about Thomas C. Williams, Jr.'s dream to build an English village, and what he did to create the English atmosphere of Windsor Farms. The Weddells' trip to England is recounted, as is their search for the perfect spot to build. Carter never mentioned the criticism in England, but did remark

> what Englishman, looking upon these two homes today, would resent their removal from England? For they sit upon hallowed soil . . . . Certainly any Englishman would be gratified over the present home of Agecroft and Warwick Priory. For the entire area of Windsor Farms symbolizes the Englishman's traditional love of freedom and of privacy, with its gardens, its hedges, its wide lawns and its rejuvenating quietude.[28]

John Vavasour Noel wrote the article "Rambling Through the Mid-South," for the 15 May 1928 issue of the magazine The Spur. Noel tells of his journey to Windsor Farms, calling the neighborhood

> a titanic, truly American task, stimulated by the love of things beautiful, made possible by ample financial resources and consecrated to the memory

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[27]Philip L. Daniel, "An English Shrine in America," The Ransomer 32 (Novena, 1993): 29.

[28]John Archer Carter, "Two Oldest Homes of the New World are Now Located in Richmond," Richmond 14 (March 1928): 18.

> of those early Colonial pioneers who suffered hardships to emplant their civilization, which is ours, on this soil.[29]

Noel told how the homes of Virginia had always followed English style, from the colonists copying their previous homes in England to Georgian homes which are so popular in the Commonwealth. Noel sang the praises of Windsor Farms for its atmosphere and charm.

American newspapers were not void of disapproving voices where Virginia House and Agecroft Hall were concerned. As in England, those who disagreed with the Weddells' and Williamses' methods voiced their opinions. In the American magazine, Nation's Business, Raymond C. Willoughby wrote an article entitled "Ourselves as Others See Us," in which he quoted the Manchester Guardian Weekly. The article spoke of a bill introduced into Parliament earlier in 1926 which addressed the sale of Warwick Priory and other English estates for the sole purpose of being re-built in America.

> Enactment of Sir Henry Slesser's bill to prevent the uprooting and exportation of 'old, rare, and beautiful British houses would save England from further national losses such as the deportation of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall,' and would also 'save some Americans from making foolish use of their spare money.'[30]

Willoughby's article in Nation's Business continued to quote the Manchester Guardian Weekly on the more aesthetic points about house demolition and re-erection.

> A house built to be snug in spite of the wet winter mists of an East Lancashire river valley or of the Cotswold Hills has no business in the State of New York or Virginia. There it must become in some degree, functionless and absurd, like the Swiss chalets which a few thoughtless enthusiasts used to build in England because their models had looked beautiful and purposeful in the Alps . [31]

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[29]John Vavasour Noel, "Rambling Through the Mid-South," The Spur, collection of Agecroft Hall.

[30]Raymond C. Willoughby, "Ourselves as Others See Us," Nation's Business (July 1926): 56.

The facts of the purchase were still appearing three years later in the society column of the Sunday Star of Washington, D. C.. In her column "Tales of Well Known Folk in Social and Official Life," Margaret B. Downing summarized the affair for her readers.

> Mr. and Mrs. Weddell were in London and they offered a generous sum for the old mansion, which was accepted, had it taken apart most painstakingly, and removed across the ocean, a process which required two years. But Warwick people who would not save the relic bitterly opposed its removal and controversies have raged in Parliament still [sic] this time.[32]

In Preserving Historic New England -- Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of Memory, James M. Lindgren wrote of William Sumner Appleton, Jr., a descendent of Puritans, grandson of New England industrialists and a "neophyte preservationist," who was strongly against the removal of English houses to America. Lindgren wrote that Appleton was not eager to make his negative feelings known in order to protect his organization, the Society for Preservation of New England Antiquities. Appleton felt there was a "possibility that the individual having this particular bit of destruction in mind may be one of our friends and helpers." Appleton told English preservationist John Swarbrick that to "sever them from their original soil and merely re-construct a few fragments on a remote continent was robbing them of their place and time." He warned his English friend by reporting that "the amount of money available for such things here is absolutely unlimited, the number of people having large fortunes is extremely great. All of them will feel that if they don't take what they want the next person will get it." Lindgren also reported the reaction of the American Institute of

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[31] Ibid.

[32] "Tales of Well Known Folk in Social & Official Life," Sunday Star, 24 June 1928, 8.

Architects, who "denounced the 'craze.'"[33] It should be noted that while some Englishmen and women were writing that America had no culture or history of its own and was forced then to purchase it, preservation societies were being formed in America. Organizations such as the Society for Preservation of New England Antiquities (1910) and the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (1889) and numerous historical societies, such as the Virginia Historical Society (1834) were striving to preserve the pieces of the past which America did possess.

In contrast to the volume of negative response in Britain, Americans appeared to be more forgiving toward the Weddells and Williamses. As Weddell related, "in general American comment was good-humoredly favorable or tolerant."[34] A small note appeared in the magazine International Studio, which spoke these words of praise: "today the collectors of this country display a keener appreciation of these emblems of the historic past than do their former owners."[35]

As seen by the remarks made in The Times, the Weddells were vocal in their reasons for acquiring the Priory. Alexander Weddell spoke in response to the charges of vandalism while visiting Sulgrave Manor in the beginning of October 1925, and his words were reported on both sides of the Atlantic. The New York Times reported from London on 3 October 1925 that the Weddells had replied the day before to criticism in England. Mr. Weddell, the article reported, reminded people that the interior of the Priory had already been stripped before he and his wife had purchased the shell, and that

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 7-8.

[35] Aslet, American Country House, 81

the remaining materials were to be used to build a factory. The article quoted Weddell as saying,

> It seems to us . . . that it would not be inappropriate to use the brick and stone from this old place to build a structure which eventually will house the Virginia Historical Society, which for many years . . . has been a powerful factor in the promotion of better understanding between two great countries.[36]

Both the Weddells and the Williamses were hoping to strengthen the ties between Richmond and England with the purchase and re-erections of their new homes. The two sets of Anglophiles saved two ancient structures from destruction while at the same time assuring their own status as country estate owners. The American press covered the story and reacted more favorably than many in Britain. Richmond newspapers especially concentrated on the positive effects of the transportations, showing both the couples and the city in a benevolent light. Just as the Richmond press did not report fully on the furor in England caused by the homes removals, they also neglected to mention the struggle in Parliament to preserve English homes in England. For years before the transportation of Warwick Priory and Virginia House, Parliament had been discussing preservation legislation. The tendency of Americans to remove entire homes or just portions heightened the debate.

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[36] New York Times, 3 October 1925, p 24

CHAPTER 4

THE BRITISH GOVERMENT'S ATTEMPTS AT HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Four decades before the Weddells and Williamses purchased their new homes, the government in Britain had become interested in the preservation of ancient buildings and monuments. Parliament had debated, voted on and passed legislation to deal with the protection of buildings and monuments from both decay and vandalism before the removal of English houses began, and discussions on more comprehensive legislation occurred at regular intervals. The purchase and subsequent transference of Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall, and others like them, created a new situation in Parliament. Whereas the previous bills attempted to prevent decay from age and neglect, in 1925 a preservation dilemma of modern proportions arose.

The problem of dilapidated buildings came to the forefront in 1882 when a preservation bill was introduced in the House of Commons. Sir John Lubbock proposed the bill on 16 February 1882, calling "the attention of the House to the desirability of taking some steps to put a stop to the continued destruction of our ancient national monuments . . . ."[1] Lubbock called for the appointment of an inspector to "point out to the owner and occupier [of an ancient home or monument] the interest and value of a monument he was about to desecrate [so that] the hand of destruction would certainly often be stayed."[2] Lubbock's proposal was supported by George Shaw-Lefevre, who spoke on behalf of Gladstone's Liberal government. Despite opposition from some who

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[1]Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 3rd ser., vol. 266 (7 February-2 March 1882), 884.

[2]Ibid., 885-6.

felt the bill was "an attempt to invade the rights of property, because, if a man had any ancient monuments upon his land, he was as much entitled to them as anyone else," the first reading was passed.[3]

Further readings of the proposed Ancient Monuments Bill were halted in the House of Commons due to unwavering opposition. The motion instead surfaced in the House of Lords on 18 July 1882 and discussion on the bill occurred on 28 July 1882. The Marquess of Salisbury, leader of the Conservative opposition, spoke out, calling for the protection of owner's rights. The Lord Chancellor, who had introduced the bill, assured the House that the bill was completely voluntary, and no more arguments arose. The bill passed after a second reading in the House of Lords and was sent to the House of Commons, where it was considered again.[4]

On 15 August 1882 discussion on amendments and final wording took place in the House of Commons. Funds needed for the maintenance of ancient buildings or monuments would be granted by Parliament after approval by the Treasury. To insure the voluntary aspect of the bill, a clause which granted commissioners the power to cause monuments to be inspected was voted down. Wording of the bill was changed to include "Great Britain" instead of "England," and it was decided that once a building was termed an ancient monument, all future owners were bound to it. The power to appoint Inspectors of Ancient Monuments was transferred from the Office of Works to the Treasury, and it was decided that monuments not of a "like character" would "form the subject of fresh legislation."[5] On 15 August 1882 the Ancient Monuments Protection

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[3]Ibid., 888

[4]Ibid., vol. 273 (28 July-18 August 1882), 16.

[5]Ibid., 1850.

Bill was read a third time and passed, and on 18 August it was included in the list of bills receiving Royal Assent. Ancient Monuments and buildings could now be inspected and protected, at the owner's request, by appointed commissioners of the government.

Parliament remained interested in building preservation, taking time in 1900 to re-examine the 1882 bill and assess its accomplishments. On 15 May 1900 Lord Avebury brought attention to the act, stating that "so far, indeed, as its provisions extend, the [1882] Act has done much good . . . the great majority of the owners of the monuments scheduled have voluntarily placed them under the Act."[6] Avebury suggested strengthening the existing bill by including "any structure, erection, or monument of historic or architectural interest," citing a clause in the 1882 act which allowed for new inclusion amendments after discussion.[7] On 22 May 1900 the Lord Chancellor's proposed amendment was passed, as was the clarification of some of the vocabulary as to who owned the monuments, and to whom they would pass, to ensure that the rights of the owners were not violated. The amendments to the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Bill were formally agreed to on 2 August 1900, and Royal Assent was granted on 6 August 1900. The latest Ancient Monuments Protection Bill broadened the range of structures which could be placed under the protection of government inspectors, all of which would still be placed on the list voluntarily by owners.

After another decade Parliament again examined the protection of ancient buildings and monuments, this time in the House of Commons. On 22 March 1911, during an oral answer period, members of the government were faced with inquiries relating to strengthening preservation tactics. The Treasurer of the Household, Dudley

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[6]Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords), 4th series, vol. 83 (14 May-28 May, 1900), 154.

[7]Ibid.

Ward, representing Southampton, and speaking on behalf of the First Commissioner of Works, assured the Commons that the government had not lost sight of its desire to protect ancient monuments.[8] In May of 1912 it was reported that the government was requesting that its representatives abroad report on the preservation tactics of other nations.[9] Questions were raised throughout 1911 and 1912 concerning the protection of Ancient Monuments, yet aside from that interest shown, nothing was accomplished.

In April of 1913 a new and stronger Ancient Monuments Protection Bill was introduced, this time in the House of Lords. On 24 April 1913, discussion took place on some of the finer points of the bill. The first to speak was George Nathaniel, Earl Curzon of Kedleston. Curzon was a noted preservationist of his own home, Kedleston Hall, in Derbyshire, as well as Montacute House in Somerset, which he rented for his mistress. The list of homes which Curzon helped to preserve in England also included Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire and Bodiam Castle in Sussex, both of which he later bequeathed to the National Trust. Curzon's preservation efforts extended to the Empire as well. While he was Viceroy of India he created the first commissions intended for the protection of historic buildings and lavished much of his own money on the restoration of the Taj Mahal.[10] Curzon and his second wife, American-born Grace Hinds, were acquaintances of the Weddells, and a signed picture of Hinds is framed in the withdrawing room of Virginia House. During the debates of 1913 Curzon expressed concern as to whether ancient buildings could be sold to others, and what responsibility the new owners would have to the structures. He stated that under an existing law, a fine of twenty pounds was

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[8]Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 23 (20 March-7 April 1911), 410.

[9]Ibid., vol. 38 (6 May-22 May 1912), 1900.

[10]Guidebook to Kelston Hall, Derbyshire (Great Britain: The National Trust, 1988), p. 77.

levied upon anyone who defied the law and sold or moved any part of an ancient monument or building. Curzon felt the penalty was insufficient to deter sales, noting examples of portions of homes being transported to America.

The 1913 bill granted more power to monument inspectors. Free advice could be given to owners concerning preservation tactics. Royal Commissioners were granted the power to step in to halt decay if it appeared a building's owner was doing nothing to prevent it, although they were still required to have permission of the Ancient Monuments Board. To ensure that a Preservation Order would not be argued by the owner once it was issued, it was decided that suggested improvements be "reasonable" and "generally approved of."[11] The 1913 Ancient Monuments Act also conveyed more power to local authorities. After amendments to clarify wording, the new bill was passed in both houses and granted Royal Assent on 15 August 1913.[12]

In the following decade the Ancient Monument Protection Act was again the focus of Parliamentary attention, and this time Virginia House and Agecroft Hall took center stage. On 15 December 1924 the Ancient Monuments Preservation Order Confirmation Bill was read for the first time. During the next two years the Ancient Monuments Act would be discussed on a regular basis, and both Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall were featured prominently in the course of the arguments.

During the supplementary estimates of funds for 1925, a motion was made to give and additional sum of 54,000 pounds to preserve public buildings, including historical buildings and ancient monuments. During the debate which followed, Colonel Josiah C. Wedgwood, representing Newcastle-under-Lyme, stated that he hoped parliamentary

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[11] Parliamentary Debates (Lords), 5th ser., vol. 13 (21 April-8 May 1913), 318.

[12] Ibid., vol. 14 (10 March-15 August 1913), 1954.

appropriations would be used for more historical and ancient buildings, most notably for the maintenance of ancient castles. He continued:

> There are numbers of these ancient historical monuments crumbling to pieces for want of a little expenditure on cement and brickwork and maintenance work of that sort. I do not believe that there is a better subject for such expenditure than some of these historical monuments which are scattered about the country and which the counties cannot keep up on account of the smallness of the funds at their disposal.[13]

Although the Protection bill of 1913 had given stronger powers to local authorities, Wedgwood felt that more Westminster money would need to be granted as the National Government controlled a larger pool of funds. Godfrey Locker-Lampson, speaking as the Under Secretary of State for the Home Department and representing Birmingham, replied that out of 70,960 pounds being spent on public building maintenance, 37,000 of it was set aside for the preservation of Ancient Monuments.

Ancient monument exportation was addressed in Parliament in July of 1925, prompted by what many saw to be an increase in the number of homes nearing demolition. Sir Walter de Frece asked Locker-Lampson during question time, if "in view of the large number of ancient and historical building now coming to the market for sale or removal, and seeing that there is no compulsion on the owners to report the fact to the authorities with a view to securing their preservation, he will consider the desirability of legislation to that end?"[14] Speaking for the First Commissioner of Works, Locker-Lampson answered that the government was at that moment considering amendments to the existing law.

Warwick Priory came up by name for the first time on 27 July 1925. During oral answers, Sir W. Martin Conway, representing the Combined English Universities, asked

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[13] Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th ser., vol. 180 (10 Feb-27 Feb, 1925), 211.

[14] Ibid., vol. 186 (6 July - 24 July, 1925), 2401-2.

Locker-Lampson, "whether he is aware that Warwick Priory, a fine Elizabethan house with a later wing in the English Renaissance manner, is threatened with early demolition; and whether the Ancient Monuments Department of His Majesty's Office of Works is putting the Ancient Monuments Act, 1913, into action with a view to preventing the loss of this building?" Locker-Lampson replied

> The First commissioner is aware that this building is threatened, but he very much regrets that, for financial reasons, he is unable to intervene under the Act. I may say that the First Commissioner is acutely conscious of the loss which the district would suffer by the destruction of this fine old mansion. He very much hopes that a local effort will be made to save it, and has appealed to the Mayor of Warwick to use his influence to this end.[15]

Unable to do any more than provide the owner with information on preservation tactics, the government turned as it had in the past to local authorities, presumably with the assumption that because the home was in their own backyard, they would feel a stronger desire to save it and find a way to prevent the home's transportation.

Basil Peto, concerned again with where government funds were going to, asked during question time on 29 July 1925 whether the First Commissioner, taking into account the need for public housing, intended to reduce the amount of money spent on the protection of ancient monuments. Locker-Lampson answered that "the first commissioner considers that it would be a profound mistake to postpone necessary works of repair to ancient monuments and historic buildings, in which the public take a great and growing interest."[16] Locker-Lampson also reminded Peto that the preservation of some historic buildings was funded by admission fees paid by the public. Peto replied

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[15]Ibid., vol., 187 (27 July-7 August , 1925), 23.

[16]Ibid., 424.

that he was of the notion that the public would pay a greater sum to see buildings not touched by modern man.

The debate during the 1920s focused on the exportation of historic buildings as well as natural decay or destruction brought about by neglect. The first call for a bill to prevent the exportation of ancient and historic buildings as well as works of art was introduced into the House of Commons by Sir Henry Slesser, member for Leeds, South-East, on 23 February 1926. Slesser noted that the "need for a bill such as this has increased very much of recent times." He spoke of "one nation containing persons of great wealth who have paid this compliment to England and Scotland that they have been prepared, and are prepared, to pay great prices for our national possessions."[17] It was in giving examples of works leaving the country that Slesser mentioned Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall by name.

> First of all, if we take the case of the removal of a whole house, we have had recently the case of the Priory House at Warwick, a beautiful old building which has been totally removed, and I believe is to be erected, or actually has been re-erected, in the United States of America, though whether it has been erected with improvements or alterations I do not know. Then there is the case of Agecroft Hall, Salford, which I believe has not actually departed this realm, but is about to go; we find exactly the same thing happening . . . .[18]

Slesser reminded the House that, under the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1913, buildings could be placed on the schedule and thus prevented from being disassembled, yet while the act provided protection against the removal of certain buildings from their original sites, it did not include buildings which were used as "dwelling-houses." Slesser

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[17]Ibid., vol. 192, (22 February-12 March, 1926), 312.

[18]Ibid.

was proposing a bill which would "prohibit the export from the United Kingdom of certain works of art and ancient or historic buildings and monuments "[19]

F G Rye, representing Leicester, Loughborough, rose to oppose the bill, arguing,

> Although I recognise the loss to this country of any works of art, whether in the nature of pictures, furniture, or old buildings, I venture to suggest that the House should hesitate before taking a step which will interfere with the liberty of the subject and the privileges which we to-day possess After all, we are supposed to live in a free country, and it seems to me that we shall be going rather far if we pass a Measure which will prevent anyone from dealing in any way which he or she may think fit with his or her own possessions.[20]

Rye continued his speech by focusing on Warwick Priory itself He attempted to reassure his peers as to the nature of the Weddells' desire to purchase and remove the house, saying that misunderstandings led many to believe that

> here was the wanton destruction and the wanton pulling down of an old historic building for the express purpose of taking the materials of such building and re-erecting those materials in America The real facts in regard to Warwick Priory are that the house was offered on at least two occasions to the Corporation of Warwick on what, I believe, to be reasonable terms to be used by the corporation for the benefit of the people of Warwick, and the corporation declined on each occasion to buy that old and historic house Then in July last year the owner, not being able to find a purchaser put up the materials at that auction the internal materials were sold, and the house was to all intents and purposes dismantled . . . . It was following that sale that an American gentleman came forward and bought what in effect were the *debris* of Warwick Priory, and then decided to take the materials over to America If that had not transpired, we should have seen Warwick Priory in a dismantled condition falling to ruin and decay . . . I venture to suggest to the House that, in those circumstances, it was better that those old material should

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[19]Ibid., 311

[20]Ibid., 314

> have been erected in a foreign land, so that someone should have seen it in its old form with all its old charm rather than that the materials should have been scattered over the face of the land.[21]

Rye also emphasized that homeowners should be allowed rights when dealing with their own homes. As for the sale of art, Rye reminded the House that it was only by selling pieces of collections that many homeowners were able to fund the upkeep of fine homes. It was because of that fact and the desire to let landowners make their own decisions that Rye opposed the bill.

The Commons then voted on whether or not to introduce a bill to prohibit the exportation of certain buildings and works of art, the results being Ayes, 195; Noes, 144. Those included in the writing of the bill were Sir Henry Slesser and the author of one newspaper editorials, Lt.-Commander Joseph Montague Kenworthy, representing Kingston-upon-Hull Central. The published debates of the 1926 sessions of Commons stated that the bill was to be read on March 5 of that year. On that date, the debates report that the reading of the proposed bill was to be postponed for four days, on which date, March 9, there is no mention of the bill. The bill was dropped after a second reading was postponed on four separate occasions. The next appearance occurs on June 9, 1926, again at the instigation of Slesser.

His opportunity arose during question time when Slesser asked Captain Douglas H. Hacking, who replaced Locker-Lampson as Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and represented Lancaster, Chorley, "whether, he is aware that no less than four ancient buildings have been exported to America during the present year . . and whether, as the Office of Works lack legislative power to interfere with the destruction of ancient buildings capable of being inhabited, steps will be taken by legislation to prevent

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[21] Ibid., 314-15

the continuance of this practice?"[22] Hacking replied "as has already been indicated to the honorable Member, it is not a question of legislative powers as much as of finance."[23] Slesser repeated his question, asking if inhabited homes were to be protected. Hacking answered the same -- that "legislation must be coupled with finance," and that only through the purchase of these houses by the government, which was financially impossible, would the exportation be stopped. A sarcastic tone was set by Thomas Johnston, member for Burgh of Dundee, who rose to inquire if Hacking was aware of "a considerable number of ancient buildings in the county of Lanark which were condemned . . . and will he undertake to have them exported to America?"[23] John Joseph Jones, representing West Ham, Silvertown, joined in, asking "might we not sell one of our most ancient buildings, the place next door?"[25]

Slesser again pressed the issue concerning the exportation of ancient houses during a session of written answers on 23 June 1926. He asked the Under-Secretary of State if any legislation would be introduced to prevent the transportation of Garrards House, Lavenham. Captain Hacking answered that "intervention by the Office of Works under the Ancient Monuments Act [of 1913] would involve purchase or the payment of compensation, for which at present funds are, unfortunately, not available."[26] Because Slesser was unable to get his proposed bill passed, the 1913 bill with its limitations was the only deterrent available.

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[22]Ibid., vol 196 (17 May-18 June 1926), 1462

[23]Ibid.

[23]Ibid , 1463

[25]Ibid

[26]Ibid., vol 197 (21 June -9 July, 1926), 378

The last mention of Ancient Monuments during the 1920s came on 15 February 1927 during a debate on money matters concerning new home building in England. Slesser rose to speak once more, asking if he had heard correctly that money for the new homes would be taken from funds which had previously been used to protect Ancient Monuments. Captain Hacking assured Slesser that he had been misinformed, and that the funds allotted were to remain intact.

Among the Weddells' papers is a letter from F. G. Rye, dated April 13, 1926, which suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Weddell were interested in what was happening in Parliament, and also that they acted to explain their situation. Rye's letter reads:

> As the case was presented by Sir Henry Slesser it appeared that an ancient and historical building had been pulled down for the express purpose of re-erection in America, and that, consequently there had been an act of vandalism. As a fact this was not the case, for had you not stepped in and bought the material of a partially demolished structure, they would have been lost for all time, where as now they will be utilized in the erection of a new building. Personally I consider that thanks are due to you and your wife for your action. I regret that there should have been any harsh and unjustifiable criticism, but clearly the facts were not known.[27]

The fact that the Weddells were in touch with a member of Parliament and that they desired to have their side of the story told is not surprising. Both Alexander and Virginia Weddell were involved in each step required in creating Virginia House, from designing the house to picking out the stones which would be used. In choosing the stones of Warwick Priory, the Weddells accomplished a task worthy of Anglophile history buffs. They rescued an ancient house from imminent destruction and created a home in which to keep that history alive.

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[27]F. G. Rye to Alexander Weddell, 13 April 1926. Collection of the Virginia Historical Society.

A few years after Parliament began discussing building preservation laws, an organization was founded which would change the way land and structures were protected for years to come. The National Trust had been founded in 1895 with the original intention "to act as a corporation for the holding of lands of natural beauty" and "to preserve places of historic interest or natural beauty permanently for the nation to enjoy."[28] The forming of the National Trust was the idea of three persons of different background but similar in their passion for conservation: Octavia Hill, a philanthropist; Robert Hunter, a solicitor to the Royal Post Office as well as the Commons Preservation Society; and Hardwicke Rawnsley a Canon of Carlisle and a defender of the Lake District. The original purpose of these founders to preserve land soon grew to encompass all that the National Trust holds today.

In The Historic Houses of Britain, a National Trust publication describing the homes it protects, Gervase Jackson-Stops explains that the Trust has only looked after homes since the early twentieth century, and only a very few at first. It was only after the First World War when "the appalling loss of pictures, sculpture and furniture through the auction rooms" ran rampant that Trust "began to realise it must act, if this great national asset was not to be wholly squandered."[29] Demolition and destruction of houses were on the rise as well. Sixty-three houses had been destroyed between 1875 and 1918. The figure for the years 1918 through 1945 rose by to a staggering number: 458 houses destroyed.

In The Historic Houses of Britain, Adrian Tinniswood contends that the National Trust was the perfect choice to take over the cries of individuals calling for help in

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[28]The National Trust Handbook for Members and Visitors (Great Britain: The National Trust, 1996), 4.

[29]Adrian Tinniswood, The Historic Houses of Britain (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 9.

preserving historic houses. By 1936, bolstered by its successes in protecting British land, the Trust admitted that it could be a force in preservation. The first attempt to garner support for the National Trust in building preservation was a failure. MacLeod Matheson, the Trust's secretary, had the idea to aid homeowners with tax problems in return for public access and information to their homes. The owners were vehemently opposed to giving up any of their independence, and the government was unwilling to grant tax breaks to the class still considered the wealthiest in the nation.

Matheson did not give up. With the aid of the National Trust's chairman, Lord Zetland, he polled homeowners and Parliament members to find a solution with which everyone could live. Matheson pinned his hopes on a law designed to overcome the barriers facing the trust, one which ensured the homeowners and family their autonomy. Parliament passed the desired legislation, under the titles the National Trust Acts of 1937 and 1939, but commonly known as the Country House Scheme. The bills ensured that the family could reside on the estate although it was owned primarily by a charity, providing that a monetary sum was given as well to aid in upkeep and preservation.

In 1996, the National Trust's inventory stood at more than 200 historic houses, 160 gardens, 25 industrial monuments, 240,000 hectares of countryside, and 550 miles of coastal property, all of which is open to the public. The National Trust possesses the power to declare lands "inalienable -- such land cannot be sold, mortgaged or compulsorily-purchased against the Trust's wishes without special Parliamentary procedure."[30] The National Trust is completely separate from the government and relies on membership subscription, gifts, legacies, and volunteer contributions to function.

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[30]The National Trust Handbook, 4

In the end Parliament was unable to garner the support or funds needed to protect many of the historic homes in Great Britain. Steps were made to educate owners on ancient building preservation and small penalties were introduced, but the government could not bring itself to make home preservation mandatory. The National Trust grew out of the interest in preservation shown by voters and elected officials. Today it is that organization that continues to maintain Great Britain's history, just as many members of Parliament had attempted to do for almost a century.

CONCLUSION

The American Country Place Movement was an era in American architectural history during which the best of many worlds were combined to create uniquely American dwellings. The desire of many wealthy Americans to emulate their English peers led them on a quest for the best of everything -- a search that often took them to other nations. Homes were large country estates with beautiful gardens and furnishings designed to show wealth, prestige, and a tie to Europe, especially England, Created with both the inhabitants and the surrounding community in mind, American Country Places stand today as superb examples of an architectural movement that is purely American.

In Richmond, Virginia, two wealthy and wordly couples were anxious to be part of the American Country Place Movement. Alexander and Virginia Weddell and Thomas C. and Elizabeth Williams desired to build large homes in the Windsor Farms community, a new suburb of Richmond created through the vision and finance of Williams. Designed as a modern English village, Windsor Farms offered exclusive living on the edge of Virginia's capital. The Weddells and Williamses were perfect candidates for Windsor Farms -- wealthy, influential, and all admitted Anglophiles. Different in background and vocations -- Alexander Weddell was a career diplomat who had acquired wealth upon his marriage while Thomas C. Williams was born into a prominent industrial family and continued the family businesses. What made these two men and their wives different from other Windsor Farms residents and American County Place patroneers was their decisions to build their homes from material of existing English manors.

Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall were century old English homes on the verge of decay and eventual destruction. The priory was a religious building transformed into a

dwelling which passed through many families. Agecroft Hall was built as a family seat, one which had remained primarily in one family. But by the middle of the 1920s, both homes were falling apart. Like so many other ancient and historic homes in England, Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall had felt the pull of taxes, post World War I burdens, and most of all, industrialism and urbanization. Fortuitously for both the Weddells and Williamses, the homes were available for purchase at the time they were in the market for new homes. By purchasing Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall, the Richmonders preserved pieces of English history, yet many people in England did not view the situation in that light.

After World War I, Britain had a dim view of Americans, particularly when it came to their buying power. A barrage of negative press fell upon the Weddells and Williamses when it was discovered that Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall were bought by Americans planning to remove the ancient buildings. Many people in England were not privy to the facts concerning the homes' dismantling, and passion often overtook reasoning. The people of England were faced daily with reminders of centuries of history, and the thought that two examples were to be taken across the Atlantic understandably filled some with dread. Articles and letters in British newspapers called for the halting of building exportation on many levels. Authors were irate, upset, disappointed, civic minded -- filled with many emotions and opinions on how to save their buildings.

American newspapers, especially Richmond newspapers, were also filled with the plans to bring Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall to America. As in England, the news brought forth both negative and positive reactions, but more of the latter. As much as they could, the Weddells' and Williamses fought to clarify their actions in order to keep the goodwill of Englishmen and women everywhere. After all, it was these same

Englishmen and women with whom the Richmonders were attempting to identify.

Finally, the British government was called upon to serve the preservation cause. Laws that had been enacted decades before were rehabilitated and Parliament attempted to strengthen them as exportation became a viable circumstance. The 1926 session of Parliament saw a split in the houses between members who felt anti-exportation laws were necessary and those who believed they intruded in citizens' rights. In the end, it was the National Trust, a charity-based organization with government backing, that managed to preserve the majority of ancient English manor houses.

What remains after the controversy is Virginia House and Agecroft Hall, two prime examples of the American Country Place movement. Situated in beautiful Windsor Farms, the houses stand as historical monuments, a fact that would certainly please their original owners. Lovers of history are welcome into the Weddells' home to look and learn, both about America and England. Virginia House is open to visitors who wish to learn of the whimsical lifestyle in which the Weddells lived. Agecroft Hall has been transformed into a copy of a seventeenth century English manor, something rather unusual in the middle of Virginia. The story of the Weddells' and Williamses' newspaper fights concerning the houses only add to the already rich history seen in every stone. British reaction is understandable, the story of people who did not wish to see ancient houses taken by disinterested Americans. English doubters can find solace in knowing that Warwick Priory has been transformed into Virginia House, a living museum of history; and Agecroft Hall has turned back the clock, presenting life as it had been centuries ago. Both houses host thousands of visitors a year, people interested in learning more about the inhabitants and their homes. It is important to remember that had Warwick Priory and Agecroft Hall been left in England, it is very probable they would not exist for anyone to see. What the Weddells and Williamses did was to

preserve two ancient buildings that even the most protective in England were unable to save. American money and purchasing power, although disputed at the time as destructive to England, in fact helped to preserve the history of that country by transporting it across the ocean.

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