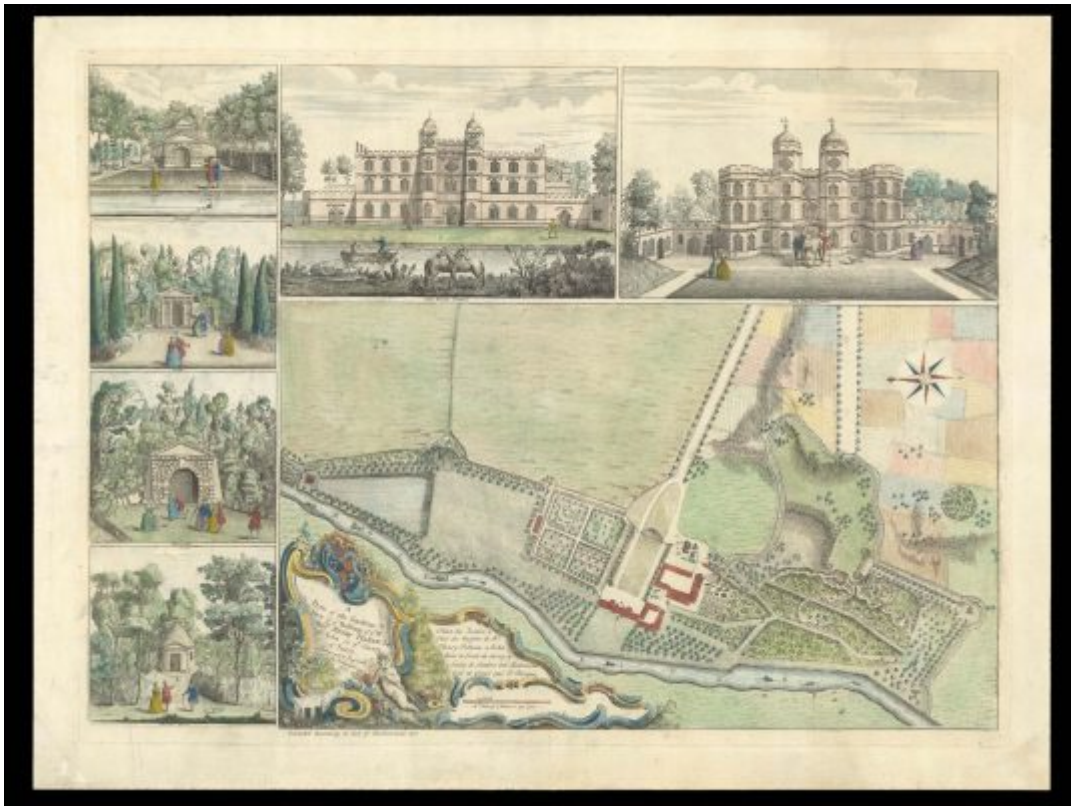


Engraved plan with four inset views.

PELHAM’S ESTATE AT ESHER

A Plan of the Gardens & View of ye Buildings of ye R.t Hon.ble: Henry Pelham Esq. at Echa [Esher] in ye County of Surry.

Author
ROCQUE, John

Publication date
1737.

Publisher
By Act of Parliament,

Publication place
London,

Physical description
Engraved plan with four inset views.

Dimensions
480 by 630mm. (19 by 24.75 inches).

Notes
This rare plan of Esher Place is a fine example of John Rocque’s work beyond the mapmaking for which he is most famed. Esher Place was originally built in the latter half of the 15th century, on an estate in Surrey owned by the bishopric of Winchester. William Waynflete, who was then the Bishop of Winchester, ordered the previous structure to be torn down in order to make room for a large

brick residence. In the same role, Cardinal Wolsey possessed the estate, and was forcibly kept there under house arrest until Henry VIII eventually seized the property. Throughout the following centuries Esher Place passed through the hands of a number of magistrates and court-officials favoured by the crown. Notable among these was the Drake family, to whom it had been grante under Elizabeth I, during which time it was used to hold three Spanish admirals captured after the Armada's failed attack. In the early 18th century, part of the land was sold to the Duke of Newcastle, and in 1729 his brother, Henry Pelham, bought the house itself. Over the course of the 1730s, the property and its gardens were renovated extensively by William Kent in a Gothic revival manner, one of the earliest examples of the movement in England.

So meticulously arranged were the gardens, that their tranquility impressed three of Pelham's most prominent guests. Horace Walpole declared that he preferred Esher to all villas, James Thomson that he found himself "in the sweetest solitude embraced" when visiting, and Alexander Pope dedicated a verse to the property:

"Pleased let me own, in Esher's peaceful grove
Where Kent and nature vie for Pelham's love"

The inset views on the left border of the plan display some of the gardens' details, namely a temple, grotto, hermitage and thatched house. Along the upper border two views of the West and East fronts present the splendid property in all its glory, complete with residents arriving by horse and rowing in the adjacent River Mole. The bright colours and light-hearted scenes depicted on this plan show it to be a decorative piece, although text below the lower margin states that it was "publish'd according to Act of Parliament 1737". This is surely the 1737 land tax act, in response to which it would have been in the interests of land-holders to have their property surveyed. As a young man, it is believed that John Rocque was involved in gardening, perhaps alongside his brother, who was a landscape gardener. He certainly produced many plans both for propsed gardens and of existing properties, and later became responsible for the surveys of many important manors, particularly in Surrey. None of the gardens or buildings of Esher Place survive today, except for the gatehouse, an original feature but hugely embellished by Kent.

This is a rare example of Rocque's work; we have been able to trace only three institutional copies, and no others appearing on the market.

Bibliography
John Harris, 'William Kent and Esher Place', Studies in the History of Art Vol. 25, pp. 13-26.

Provenance

Price: £2500

Inventory reference: 15040

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