



Building

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY was a time for building and Aubrey could not have been better placed to be a part of it. By the time he inherited he could count amongst his friends not only John Evelyn, the polymath and pioneering architectural translator and theorist, but also Christopher Wren, who would soon make a name for himself in the ashes of post-Great Fire London.⁴⁰ He was an admirer of Inigo Jones, whose life he would later write, and visited the great architect's sometime assistant, John Webb, at Jones's former home of Butleigh, Gloucestershire, as early as 1656.⁴¹

In that same year, or perhaps a little earlier, Aubrey had made another pilgrimage to another country estate, one that would haunt his dreams for many decades after.⁴² This was his idol Francis Bacon's estate near St Albans, embracing the Elizabethan main building, Gorhambury House, Bacon's custom-built summer residence, Verulam House, and the gardens that surrounded them. When Aubrey arrived the shadows were already lengthening on this once magnificent landscape: the 'delicious Parquet' was 'plowed-up; and spoil'd', the fish ponds were 'overgrown with flagges and rushes', but, as he would later write, 'I little suspected [Verulam House] would be pulled downe for the sale of the Materialls', as it indeed was in 1665–6; his account is the last and most detailed we have of the Lord Chancellor's retreat.⁴³

This is a more considered reworking of the ideas on folio 5r. There is now a flight of steps between the lower levels of the garden, but access from the top terrace is still unresolved, save by a sloping path outside the main

garden. There appears to be a projected cascade on the near slope aligned on the gate piers in the foreground. The roof of the villa is clearly shown as slate in this drawing, which also implies rendered walls with stone quoins.

40. For these friendships see Jackson Williams, *The antiquary*.

41. *Brief Lives*, ii. 1487.

42. The visit is dated by him to 1656 (*Brief Lives*, i. 212), but Bennett rightly observes that Aubrey tended to use this date as a catch-all for his happy, post-inheritance life (*Brief Lives*, ii. 1049).

43. *Brief Lives*, i. 212–13, 215, ii. 1049.