

Drebbel, active with garden design at New Hall; 1624 – 1627

New Hall, also known as The Palace of Beaulieu, is near Chelmsford in the UK.

The estate on which it was built, the manor of Walkfares Boreham was granted to the Canons of Waltham Abbey in 1062. After various changes of possession it was granted by the Crown to the Earl of Ormond in 1491. By this time it was called New Hall. In 1517 New Hall was sold by Thomas Boleyn to Henry VIII. The king rebuilt the house in brick. He gave his new palace the name Palace of Beaulieu. In October 1533 the daughter of Queen Katherine of Aragon, Mary, who had been staying at Beaulieu for some time, was evicted as the palace had recently been sold to Lord Rochford (Anne Boleyn's brother). Elizabeth I granted the estate in 1573 to Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Sussex, who rebuilt the north wing.



Portrait of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628), by the Dutch artist Michiel van Mierevelt (1567-1641) at Lamport Hall, reproduced without kind permission of the Trustees.

In 1622 New Hall was sold to **George Villiers**, the favourite of King James I – VI, first **Duke of Buckingham**.



Chelmsford (red bullet)

New Hall Several of the original features still exist today including a stunning clock tower, a chapel with gilded ceiling and the avenue of limes and great staircase, installed by the Buckingham family in the sixteenth century. www.newhallschool.co.uk

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A note on Cornelius Drebbel by Philip McEvansoneya

On 23 August 1627 £50 was paid by Sir Sackville Crowe, the Duke of Buckingham's controller of accounts, to 'Mr Cornelius Dribble' (1). The payment occurs in a list of expenses detailed during preparations for the La Rochelle expedition. The expedition was chronically short of competent engineers and Buckingham, the commander, had written to Secretary Coke in July asking him to sort out Cornelis, the Dutch engineer who will come if His Majesty encourage him (2). These references must be to Cornelius Drebbel who is stated to have been in charge of the fire ships at La Rochelle at a salary of £150 per month (3), but whose 'several machines and engines for the aid of La Rochelle had no effectiveness (4).

Now Drebbel is credited with the invention of the submarine, the microscope and a perpetual motion device *inter alia*. He was born at Alkmaar in Holland in 1572 and died in London in 1634¹. A friend and copyist of Goltzius (5), Drebbel came to England in c. 1604 and was patronized by James I. In 1607 he presented the King with the famous *perpetuum mobile* machine (6). Drebbel was invited to Prague by Rudolf II, just as Kepler was later invited to England (7). In Prague he was tutor to the son of Ferdinand II². Captured at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War, Drebbel had returned to London by late 1624 having been released after royal intercession. In 1626 he was employed 'by the office of ordnance to construct water engines (8). Drebbel fits into the circle of sixteenth and seventeenth-century philosophers and scientists such as Fludd, Dee, Mersenne (9) and, most importantly, Salomon and Isaac de Caus.

Drebbel was in England before 12 October 1624 when Crowe's accounts reveal the first of the four payments to him: 'Given Mr Cornelius for his paines in contriving of some works at Newhall ... £20 (10). At an unspecified date soon afterwards 'Cornelius' received another £20 at New Hall 'for his paines about the waterworks (11).' These waterworks were probably in 'the privy garden to the west of the house. In the '4 Angles' of the garden were 'terrets' and at its southern edge was an octagonal banqueting house, elaborately paved (12). Evelyn, himself a designer of gardens, thought it 'a faire plot (13).

Drebbel was not alone in the Duke's gardens. In 1624 John Tradescant had entered Buckingham's service to superintend both his gardens and his collections of curiosities and rarities. Like Drebbel, Tradescant went on the La Rochelle expedition where his skill in directing men and constructing earthworks was desperately needed (14). Tradescant had worked previously for the Earl of Salisbury at Hatfield: he travelled widely abroad and exchanged plants with the Robin family, gardeners to the French Royal Family (15). The accounts of Richard Graham, Buckingham's Gentleman of the Horse, for the period 1 February 1625 to 31 July 1626 record the payment of forty shillings to 'a French gardener that was sent to Newhall but for what reason we do not know (16). Between them Drebbel and Tradescant must have been responsible for the design and layout of Buckingham's gardens, the Duke retaining the final word. The Duke took an active interest in his parks and gardens, not least for the hunting they provided him and Kings James I and Charles I. New Hall was something of a showpiece for the Duke. Immediately after buying the house in the Summer of 1622 the Duke employed Inigo Jones to renovate and modernize the house 'according to the modern fashion (17) and over the next three years Sir George Goring (18) and Balthasar Gerbier (19) were also directing work there.

In Spain in 1623 the Duke examined the gardens at the Prado as keenly as the Hapsburg art collection, for he gave the 'Garden-Keep' there £3-13s-4d and presumably did not leave empty-handed (20).

The third payment to Drebbel was made in July 1626 when he delivered to the Duke at New Hall 'divers modells', receiving £30 for his 'paines and charges (21). Given Drebbel's scientific interests these models were probably experimental and mechanical rather than, say, architectural. One of Drebbel's contemporaries in Prague was Erasmus Habermel who 'seems to have constructed artificial fountains (22) although the skill in physics and hydraulics needed to operate fountains would have been common to men such as Drebbel. Drebbel's work for the Duke, of which, unfortunately, no visual record exists, was probably in the manner of things established a few years before by foreign engineers imported to design gardens and waterworks. These were men such as Salomon de Caus and Constantine de Servi who were employed at the shortlived court of Henry, Prince of Wales, and de Caus' brother Isaac who, in the early 1620s, was working on a grotto beneath the Whitehall Banqueting House and at Woburn (23). Giambologna's *Samsom and the Philistine* (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum) was presented to Charles in Spain in 1623 by Philip IV, who passed it on to his friend Buckingham,

¹ Drebbel died November 8 1633

² Drebbel and family went back to England in 1612. Notes by Hubert van Onna, Drebbologist in Bergen Netherlands www.drebbel.net:

the latter spending more than £40 to ship it back to England (24). The statue was designed as the centrepiece of a fountain and seems to have been set up in a fountain in the Italianate garden at Buckingham's London home, York House on the Strand (25). It is possible that Drebbel had a hand in this arrangement: it is known that York House was replumbed with lead pipes costing £400 in 1624-1625 (26) and garden waterworks may have been installed there at that time, *Barnstable, Devon*

1. BritishLibrary (BL) Add. MSS12528, f. 38.
2. Historical Manuscript Commission Twelfth Report; Appendix, Part I, p. 310
3. Dictionary of National Biography (DNB).
4. The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens, ed. R. Magurn (Cambridge, MA; Harvard UP, 1955 no. 196.
5. Le Livre des Peintres de Carel van Mander, ed. H. Hymans (Paris 1885) 11 pp 267; 270.
6. R Evans, Rudolph II and his World (Oxford: OUP, 1973), p. 81.
7. Ibid.; The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton, ed. L. P. Smith (Oxford, 1907), I pp 171-72; II pp 205-6
8. DNB
9. J. F. M. Jaeger, *Comelis Drebbel en zijne Tijdgenooten* (Groningen, 1922). This is the only biography of Drebbel, but misses his employment by Buckingham.
10. BL .Add. MSS 12528, f. 16v.
11. Ibid., f. 17.
12. Essex Records Office D/DAC 41 f. 1; History of the Kings Works IV, Part II (1982), figure 17.
13. John Evelyn, *Diary*, ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford, 1955), III, pp 179-180 (10 July 1656).
14. Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham, the Life and Political Career of George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham* (Harlow Longmans 1981) p 388
15. P. Leith-Ross, *the John Tradescants* (London: Peter Owen, 1984), passim.
16. Information kindly given by Roger Lockyer, to whom I am much indebted.
17. The letters of John Chamberlain, ed. N.E. McLure (Philadelphia, 1939) II p 452
18. BL. .Harl MSS 1580, f. 438.
19. Godfrey Goodman, *the Court of King James the First*, ed. J. S. Brewer (London, 1839), II, pp'. 360; 374-75.
20. BL Add MSS12528, f. 9.
21. Ibid., f. 30. For a full account of New Hall and Buckingham 's other properties see my MA report 'The Houses of the Duke of Buckingham', Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1985I
22. Evans, Rudolf II, p. 189.
23. R. Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (London; Thames & Hudson, 1979), passim, Because he was unaware of Drebbel's employment by Buckingham, Strong dismisses Drebbel perfunctorily (p. 112) as a magical technologist'.
24. BL Add. MSS12528, f. 10.
25. Walpole Society XXXV (1956), Plate 28, Cat. 34
26. Goodman: *Court of James I, II*, pp 375-76