

## FINE BUSH: 'A genteel dwelling-house' 1776

by Eileen M. Bowlt

Fine Bush Lane leads diagonally from Breakspear Road to Breakspear Road North, cutting off the Breakspear Arms corner if you are travelling from Ruislip to Harefield. It lies in the part of Ruislip called St Catherine's Manor or Katherine End. The lane was laid out under the St Catherine's enclosure of 1769<sup>i</sup>. Faden's map of 'London' 1790 (Fig. 1 – after Andrew Macnair's digitally redrawn map) shows a formal, possibly tree lined track continuing Ladygate Lane across the unenclosed common to a house at the north end of a longish enclosure about 12 acres in size<sup>ii</sup>, fronting an alignment of what is now Breakspear Road North (then more sensibly called Harefield Lane). The area is named as Fine Bush in the 1769 Enclosure Award.

The house appears again on the 1806 Enclosure Map that accompanied the enclosure of the common fields and waste of the parish of Ruislip, situated in Old Enclosure 246. (Fig. 2) The new lane has cut off the house from the rest of its enclosure. Thereafter the building is recorded on the first Ordnance Survey map for Middlesex (1821) but not on any later map and very little is known about it. Anyone visiting the site today finds a field, perhaps with a couple of horses grazing in it and would never guess that a substantial gentleman's residence and landscaped gardens once occupied it.

### London Evening Post Thursday 20 June 1776

Therefore it is pleasing to come across a description of the house and estate in a sale advertisement in the London Evening Post, of the 10 June 1776. Daniel Bott Esq. was putting 'THE VALUABLE FREEHOLD VILLA, beautifully situated at Fine Bush, in the parish of Ruislip.' up for auction on Wednesday 3 July. There was to be a sale of the 'NEAT and GENUINE HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE' at 11 o'clock in the morning followed by the auctioning of the house at 12 o'clock on the premises.

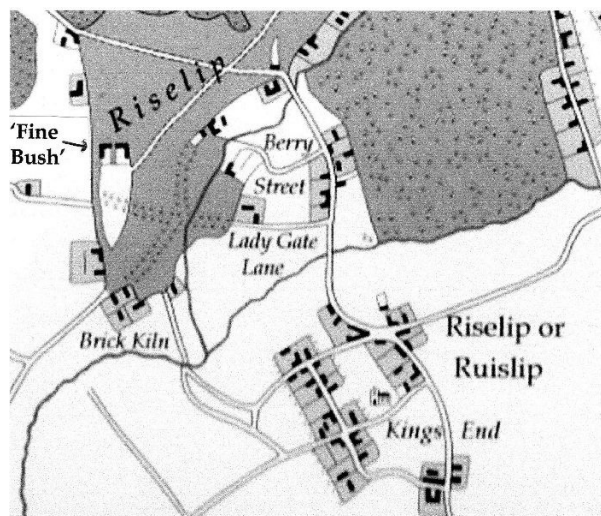


Fig. 1

**Section of Faden's Map showing the St Catherine's portion of Ruislip, when most of the area was unenclosed common and wood common.**

**Ladygate Lane is named and runs through enclosed fields surrounding the moated Southcote Manor to the stream.**

**It continues on the other side as a tree lined track leading to Fine Bush and its enclosures, running along the edge of Harefield Lane.**

As described the house was rather splendid.

*'The premises consist of a genteel dwelling- house, containing eight bed-chambers, a drawing room, a dinner hall, parlour, kitchen, and a pleasure and kitchen garden of about two acres, disposed in a pleasing manner in lawns, serpentine walks, etc, refreshed with fish ponds, and enclosed with a brick wall on the North and South sides, and Chinese gates and pallisadoes on the West. The gardens are beautifully cropped and planted, and the walls cloathed with the choicest fruit-trees'.*

Mr Bott also had a lease with 16 years 'yet unexpired' on two fields of rich land at what sounds like a high rent of £10 13s per annum.

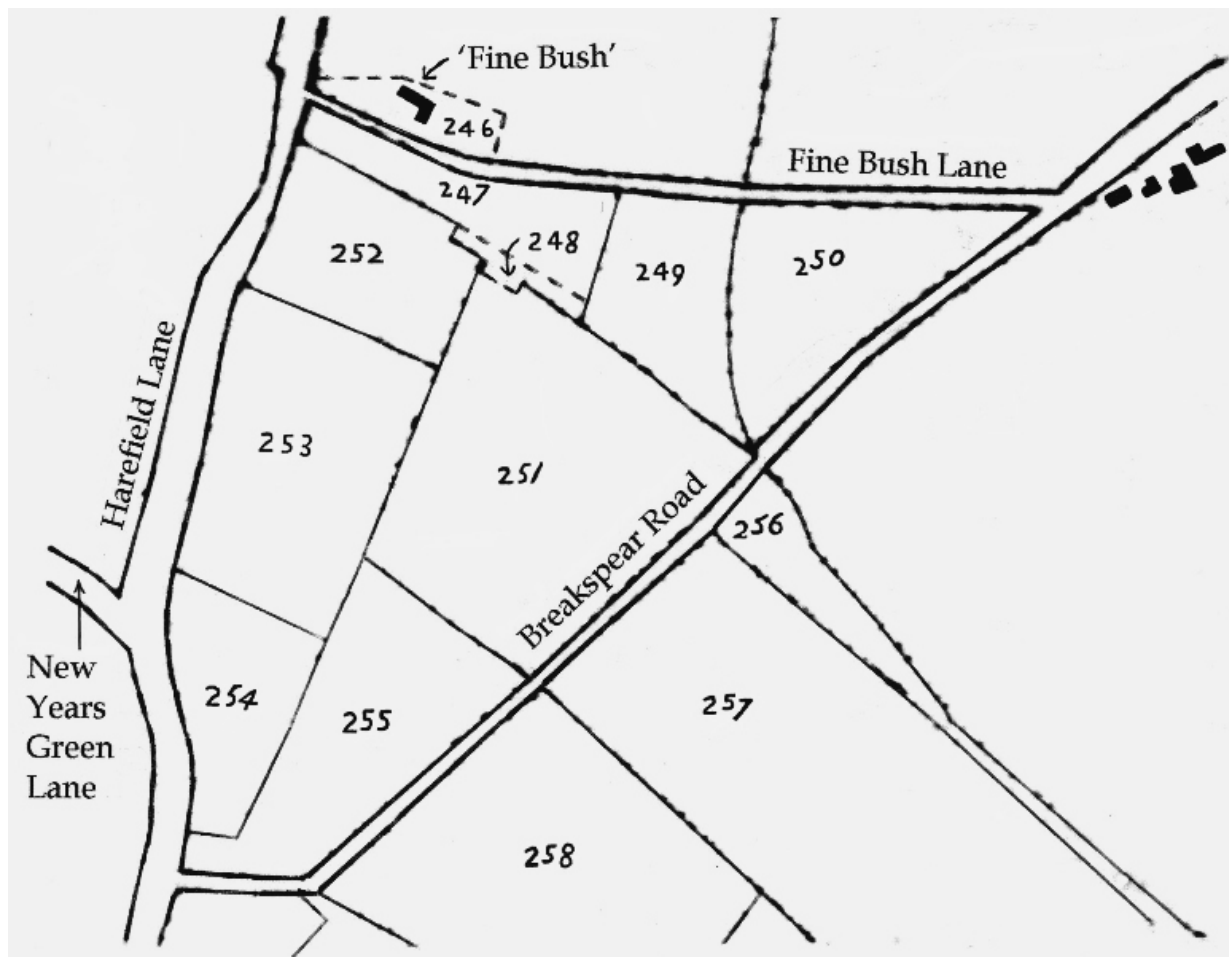


Fig. 2

Part of the Ruislip Enclosure Map 1806, with names added, showing the land beyond the stream enclosed.

Breakspear Road has been laid out, leading from Cannons Bridge to Hare field Lane.

Fine Bush Lane has also been laid out and the house/villa called Fine Bush is in the enclosure numbered 246.

The enclosures belonging to it that are shown on Faden's Map are still there, marked 247, 248, 252, 253 and 254. They are cut off from the house by the new lane and were now in different ownership.

The situation enhanced the attractions of the villa, being *'truly pleasing; the prospects are rich and luxurious; the air salutary; the neighbourhood social and polite'*.

This Jane Austenish phrase presumably means that any gentleman who might purchase the house need not fear social isolation from his peers, with Southcote Manor, Swakeleys, Breakspears, Harefield House, Harefield Park and Eastcote House all within dining distance.

A note at the end of the advertisement carried the interesting information that :

*'Upwards of £3000 have been expended within six years in improving the premises, which are now compleat, and fit for the immediate reception of a genteel family'.*

What were the vastly expensive improvements made by Daniel Bott? £3000 in 1776 equals £342,000, calculated on the retail price index for 2008. Probably a new garden layout and almost certainly the Chinese gates set in a palisade fence along Harefield Lane. A vogue for Chinese forms came into London after 1740, adding an exotic touch to the more common Palladian styles.<sup>iii</sup>

## Background

Six years takes us back to 1770, the year following the St Catherine's Enclosure Act, which had caused something of an upheaval. The Act had been brought about at the instigation of John Lewin of Basinghall Street, who owned most of the land in St Catherine's. His wife, Sarah Mico, had inherited a fourth part of the estate from her uncle, Christopher Child, and John Lewin bought out the other three co-owners in 1768<sup>iv</sup>. Unfortunately he did not enjoy his new possessions for long, as he died, aged 37, in 1770. There is a mural monument to him and Sarah, who followed him to the grave two years later, above the north nave arcade in St Martin's. Their daughters, Susannah who married William Shepherd, and Sarah who never married, inherited the estate. However, John Lewin had not owned quite the whole of St Catherine's Manor.

There were 17 landowners in 1769, mostly in possession of a cottage and fairly small amounts of land that would have entitled them to very small allotments of the newly enclosed waste, hardly worth the trouble and expense of hedging. Most of them sold their commoners' rights to John Lewin<sup>v</sup>, but Elizabeth Rogers of Eastcote House who owned St Catherine's Farm (now in Howletts Lane) and Thomas Banister who it turns out had Fine Bush, held out and were allocated land in lieu of their rights of common. Thomas Banister's messuage (Fine Bush) was 3 roods 27 perches in extent and his allotment was 2 roods 13 perches – a total of one and a half acres.

## Daniel Bott's involvement

From various memorials in the Middlesex Deeds Registry<sup>vi</sup> it emerges that James Banister of Knightsbridge in the parish of St Mary, Kensington, gentleman, had erected two tenements '*some time since*' with a meadow, orchard and garden, amounting to 3r 14p. The property had been occupied by Joan Vincent, widow, and adjoined Little Ridings on the south, land dividing the parishes of Harefield and Ruislip on the west (i.e. Harefield Lane), the common called Westwood Common on the east and

Westwood to the north (now generally known as Mad Bess Wood). There was also a meadow, 10 perches in size, parcel of Little Ridings (the name signifies former woodland that had been ridded of trees). James's son, Thomas Banister, a Tallow Chandler from the parish of St Paul Shadwell, was in possession by 1769, but by 1770 was dead and his son, Thomas Banister of Cripplegate, (grandson of James) had succeeded him. Daniel Bott was a timber merchant, also from St Paul's Shadwell, married to Frances Margareta, niece and heir-at-law of John Irish of Kingsland in the parish of St Mary Islington, Gentleman.

The property was conveyed to Daniel Bott and Frances Margareta by indentures of lease and release dated 14 and 15 December 1770.<sup>vii</sup> John Irish had been involved in the negotiations and he may have been helping to establish his niece's husband to raise his social status. A mortgage of £315 had been advanced by John Irish, so one wonders where Daniel Bott got the £3000 from to refurbish the estate. However John Irish was certainly dead by March 1777<sup>viii</sup> and may have died some years earlier, in which case Frances Margareta would have come into her inheritance, making the impressive expenditure possible. The two tenements were converted into one, a new coach house and stable were built and the site of the old one was made into a garden. Daniel Bott had also bought a cottage standing to the east in 1771, demolished it and included the site in the gardens.<sup>ix</sup>

Just what happened at the auction in 1776 is not known. What is certain is that Daniel Bott was party to an indenture dated 25 March 1777, 'purporting to be a lease for a year to vest the possession in John Bland of Lombard Street, Banker, Thomas Bolas of Fenchurch Buildings, Cornfactor and Robert Lloyd of Haverstock Hill, Gentleman, both nephews of John Irish deceased, and Robert Dykes of St Paul Shadwell', all executors of John Irish's will. It was probably the preliminary to a conveyance by lease and release to a third party. Who that party was is not yet clear, but information from the Ruislip Enclosure Award shows that Fine Bush was owned by

Shepherd & Lewin, John Lewin's successors, in 1814, so did they buy it at the 1776 sale?

All these negotiations illustrate how London merchants dabbled in property in rural Middlesex, perhaps to have a country house, but as much as anything as a temporary investment. Some settled and played a part in local affairs, like The Rev Thomas Clarke who became rector of St Giles, Ickenham in 1747, purchased Swakeleys at the time of his marriage in 1750 and began building up the estate which his descendants improved and kept until 1922. We do not know what John Lewin would have done had he lived, but he was buried in Ruislip.

### Why did this prestigious house disappear?

By 1837<sup>x</sup> the house site had become part of Little Manor Farm and is described as arable. So we know that the house must have been demolished some time between the 1821 OS map and 1837. Why? Well that is just another Ruislip puzzle waiting to be solved. However, Southcote Manor, the main house in St Catherine's Manor, standing within a moat on the north side of Ladygate Lane, also disappeared. It is last recorded in the Ruislip Enclosure Award. Maybe the non-resident owners of St Catherine's simply allowed both these properties to fall into decay. What a pity that we have no drawing or other record of Fine Bush.

### Acknowledgement

The Faden map was originally described as '*The country twenty-five miles around London by W. Faden, geographer to the King, 1790*'.

The map was digitally transcribed by Andrew Macnair and reproduced in colour in four segments, the north-west portion of which has been purchased by the Society and stored in their Manor Farm House archive.

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<sup>i</sup> Court of Common Pleas Recovery Roll (CP43), No 747 mm 99-104.

Copy in RNELHS Local History Room, Manor Farm.

<sup>ii</sup> Extent calculated from sizes given in the Ruislip Enclosure Award 1814.

<sup>iii</sup> Cruikshank, Daniel & Burton, Neil: *Life in the Georgian City* (1990) p167

<sup>iv</sup> Bowl, Eileen M. *The Goodliest Place in Middlesex*, p79.

<sup>v</sup> London Metropolitan Archives: MDR 1770 1 166. This memorial in the Middlesex Deeds Registry gives the names of the freeholders of the manor: Henry Arnall yeoman, William Crosier Esq, Peter Style Gentleman, Joseph Moores yeoman, Elizabeth Rogers spinster, Rachel Fearn widow, Samuel Weedon labourer, Matthew Saech yeoman, William Bishop yeoman; and the customary or copyhold tenants, Samuel Jacques apothecary, Hannah Ewer spinster, Rebecca Blount widow, James Gladman yeoman, James Ewer and Mary his wife late Anderson, William Blackstaff, who all renounced their several and respective rights of common, wood close, commons and waste ground whether inclosed or not inclosed and released the rights to Midford Young of Doctors' Commons, Gentleman, trustee for John Lewin of Southcote.

<sup>vi</sup> LMA: MDR 1770 2 28-29 and MDR 1770 6 539-40

<sup>vii</sup> LMA: MDR 1770 6 539-40

<sup>viii</sup> LMA: MDR 1777 2 451-3

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid

<sup>x</sup> LMA: DRO 19 E3/2, Terrier dated 1837