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Glen Island House

## II

Listed 10/11/2006

Gentleman's residence of 1869 and 1884; no known architect.

**MATERIALS:** Buff brick, stone detailing, red tile roofs.

**EXTERIOR:** Glen Island House was built in 1869 and extended in an identical style in 1884 when a wing to the east with billiard room and bedrooms over was added. Facing south, with views west across the Thames to Maidenhead, it is a two-storey buff brick and stone house which uses an irregular plan and composition together with features like full-heighted canted bays, mullion and transom windows, turrets, fretted bargeboards, half-dormers, and tall brick ridge and lateral chimneys to create a picturesque effect. Independent access to the two parts of the house was facilitated in the later C20 by the construction of a short single-storey entrance or link on the south front. The original entrance front to the north is plainer than the other elevations, with a large, two-storey porch to the right of centre and a polygonal stair turret to the left whose conical roof rises above the general roof line. An iron dial indicates the water level in the house's tanks. The main elevations are to the west and the long garden front to the south. These have identical two-storey canted bays under projecting barge-boarded gables, one to the west and three to the south (two to the 1869 house, linked by an open veranda, and one to the 1884 part). The bays display monograms and the house's dates of construction. The west end also has a single-storey, straight-sided bay window almost wholly taken up with a mullion and transom window. This window is echoed by the annex to the billiard room which projects from the east side of the house, which is otherwise dominated visually by a row of four half-dormer windows and by the full gable at its right end. Attached to this corner of the house is a short single-storey range, part of the house's former service rooms.

**INTERIOR:** The west (1869) half of the house contains a large, double-height, staircase hall with panelling to picture rail level, a C17-style fireplace, and foliate plaster frieze; off this the two main living rooms open to the west, overlooking the river. Both these rooms have heavily carved C17-style fireplaces and like the other rooms retain their original woodwork including doors, skirting boards and window shutters. In the C20 these living rooms have been partly knocked through. Also opening off the hall is a south-facing reception room with heavy fireplace and decorative plaster cornice, and the south-facing former dining room, which also has a heavily carved fireplace, built-in sideboard, and ornate plaster cornice to its ceiling. The billiard room which occupies the south part of the east wing has dado panelling and in its east, or end, bay there is a fireplace with coloured tiles depicting Mother Hubbard and Taffy the Welshman. Above the fireplace is a window with stained glass depictions of the Palmer arms and the monograms of Sir Henry and Lady Palmer. Opening eastward off the billiard room is a small panelled annex, perhaps a smoking room. Behind the billiard room is a secondary staircase with stone cantilever stair with cast-iron balustrade and ramped oak stair rail. The main staircase has spiral-twist balusters and panelled newel posts with finials. Upstairs although the rooms have been converted to offices the general plan form survives along with most woodwork (doors, skirting boards) and plaster cornices.

**HISTORY:** Glen Island House stands on the east bank of the River Thames, opposite Maidenhead. It was built in 1869 for a local worthy, Lt. Gen. Sir Roger William Henry Palmer, Bart. (d.1910), a major Irish landowner, who had fought in several of the major battles of the Crimean War (participating in the Charge of the Light Brigade), and who later in life when resident at Glen Island was active in many Thames-side activities. In 1884 he had Glen Island House extended to the east in an identical style, doubling its size to create something akin to a small country house. The house stood north of Taplow paper mill, which in the mid C20 was greatly enlarged. The house has been used for many years as offices for the paper mill company.

**SUMMARY OF IMPORTANCE:** Glen Island House, a Thames-side gentleman's residence, was built in 1869 and extended in a similar style in 1884 when a wing to the east with billiard room and bedrooms over was added. Although gentlemen's residences were a common type of building, Glen Island House stands out as a very good example of the genre—especially on the Thames—through the overall attention to detail both externally and internally, where the quality and decoration of some of the fittings verges on the opulent. It survives in a good and

little-altered condition. The 40-year residence of its original owner, Lt. Gen. Sir W.H. Palmer—  
at the time a man of considerable renown—adds to its interest.

SOURCES: Who Was Who, sv Palmer, Sir R.W.H.