

CAKE AND COCKHORSE



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BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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**Details of the Society's activities and
publications will be found on the back cover.**

Cake and Cockhorse

The magazine of the Banbury Historical Society, issued three times a year.

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What a 'Fiftieth Anniversary' year it has been: publication of *two* 'records' volumes, and a wonderful day that over sixty members spent at Wroxton Abbey on Saturday 20th October. See Brian's report overleaf, and for the very readable 'Risley Diary', Pamela Horn's review. *Banbury Past through Artists' Eyes*, specially published to mark this anniversary, is a book much more ambitious than any we have attempted before. Simon's initial suggestion of publishing the Museum's picture collection has resulted in a book whose immediate appearance stimulates interest and praise whether or not the viewer has any Banbury connections. The colourful contents well maintain that initial reaction. As we go to press we have hopes of it being *the* Christmas present to give to Banburians past *and* present.

But read the dismal news from 'Clio Loci' on page 148. All is far from well for the study of Oxfordshire's past. How hypocritical of our elected masters to celebrate the county millennium as they appear to be determined to inhibit further research into the county's history. Our Society, by their standards, will be blamed rather than praised: fifty years of publications now take more than two yards (two metres in OCC-speak) of shelving - think what that must cost the taxpayers in library space! To emphasise their priority in 'savings', we understand that OCC support for the *Victoria County History* (the best county series in the country) is likely to be withdrawn, effectively terminating its continued research and publication. What a legacy to inflict on the county!

Cover: Sanderson Miller's great pendant in the hall at Wroxton Abbey (p.133).

OUR FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the foundation of the Banbury Historical Society was celebrated in some style at Wroxton Abbey on Saturday, 20th October 2007. The high points were of course provided by our two outstanding speakers, Nicholas Cooper on Wroxton Abbey itself (much expanded in this issue) and Professor Jeremy Black of Exeter University, with his magisterial exposition on King George III and Lord North (whose home Wroxton Abbey had been). However, the day was also notable for the sense of occasion evident amongst those attending, sixty-three members and our guests, including Mr Hugo Brunner, the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Professor John Beckett of the *Victoria County History*, and Dr Alan Crosby (himself with Banbury ancestry), editor of *The Local Historian*. All this was greatly enhanced by the setting of the Abbey, looking its best in the sunshine surrounded by grounds resplendent in autumn colours.

Lectures were in the elegant Regency Room. It was here also that the most fitting moment was observed, when Lord Saye and Sale reminded his audience of the huge debt of gratitude owed to Jeremy Gibson as co-founder of the Society and tireless worker on its behalf.



Lord Saye and Sale presents Jeremy Gibson with a card and a 'crystal book', from himself and the committee, to mark fifty years of 'Inspiration' of the Society.

This speech preceded the presentation from the Society's committee of a card specially painted by Nick Allen and a block of crystal in the shape of a closed book. On this was engraved an appreciation of the "Founder and Inspiration" of the Society over fifty years. Jeremy for once was almost lost for words, but was heard afterwards to mutter "At least this is one book I won't have to find time to read."

The celebration was also a time to look back over the years by means of an excellent display of photographs and press cuttings in the Carriage House tracing the Society's growth and its contribution to the study of local history. One long-term member wrote afterwards "I was particularly glad to see Barrie Trinder [our Vice-president, who did so much to establish the reputation of our magazine]. I could not help remembering Ted and Gwladys Brinkworth, George Gardam, Jack Fearon, Alan Pain and others from the early days no longer with us – I feel their spirits would be looking on the day's events with approval."

A buffet lunch enabled members to catch up with old friends. Letters received afterwards all commented on the excellent fare. Tours of the house, now a home of the Fairleigh Dickinson University, imparted a sense of completeness to a day that will live long in the memory.

There can be no more fitting tribute than the observation by Professor Black that ours was "a scholarly and most powerful intellectual history society". This was praise indeed from an author whose writings are themselves a remarkable achievement for a busy academic.

Brian Little

Our Society makes History

Our fiftieth anniversary, its events and its publications, have led to a gratifying amount of coverage in print. Locally, the *Banbury Guardian*, especially through 'Look back with Little', has had lengthy features on both books, the fact of our special anniversary, and the day at Wroxton.

Almost unnoticed was a page devoted to our Society, as 'Local history society of the month' in the new BBC magazine *Who Do You Think You Are?*, spawned by the popular TV series (and note our forthcoming March lecture). Imminent are issues of *The Genealogists' Magazine* and *The Local Historian*, both of which will have long articles on resources for research into Banbury and its neighbourhood, and our part in providing them.

So keep your eyes open!

WROXTON ABBEY: A HOUSE AND ITS BUILDERS

Nicholas Cooper

There are some houses whose beginnings are the most interesting thing about them: where one hopes to recover the building's original form, to understand the intentions of its designer, and to discover why it was built and what its owner wanted from it. But all buildings have a history after they were first built, and in some the most interesting thing is how they have been used and altered over the years to meet changing needs and changing tastes. While there is much that is uncertain about the origins of Wroxton Abbey, the way in which the house has been altered, improved, redecorated and enlarged by successive owners says a good deal not only about changing ways of life but also about changing attitudes to the past. The earliest alterations, less than a century after it was built, were carried out by an owner and his brother who found the house old fashioned and inconvenient. Later alterations were done by owners who also wanted to make it convenient for modern living, but who wanted to recover, or even to improve, its air of antiquity.

A second, central, factor in the Abbey's history is that it remained unfinished for two hundred and fifty years. However, the reasons have nothing to do with fashion or attitudes to the past, and everything to do with the vicissitudes of the family's history, and these too are worth describing.

At first glance, Wroxton Abbey is a text-book Elizabethan house. The plan looks like the standard 'E' of so very many late sixteenth and early seventeenth century houses. Its only departure from symmetry appears to be the tall window that lights the hall. The highly decorated porch is a fine example of the inventive play with renaissance forms that characterised the decoration of the period. But in fact the house has a complicated growth. Successive owners have altered and replaced much that was done by their predecessors, and a great deal in its history is obscure.

There are virtually no documents surviving from the likely period of its building. In the seventeenth century, much was done to sweep away what was by then the unfashionable decoration carried out for its builders.

By contrast, work was done in the eighteenth centuries in what was believed to be the authentic style of earlier periods. In the nineteenth, owners with antiquarian tastes tried to improve it further by bringing in a huge amount of antique decorative work which, though mainly genuine, had nothing whatever to do with the original house. Although as a result the house is full of dated ornament, one cannot believe in any of these dates. But though any account of the house is bound to be incomplete, and in some respects may be wrong, Wroxton is the closest country house to Banbury, and the family has often been involved with the town. It is worth an attempt to describe its history.

1 The Building of the House

The house was built on the site of an Augustinian Priory, dissolved in 1536. Following the Dissolution, the terms of its first lease, to William Reynesford, called for the Priory's demolition,¹ but when in the following year the lease was transferred to Thomas Pope, Pope noted the surviving buildings as being

First, the wall of the church on the south side next the cloyster from the foote of the great wyndowes downwards.

It[em]. the south ile joyning to the dorter wyth the little iles north est from that joyning to the same.

It. the dorter, with the rooffe thereof.

It. the four lodgings on both sides of the great buttery.

It. the frater howse on both sides.²

A few other buildings are also recorded, notably a conduit and a guesthouse,³ a tithe barn and a dovecot.⁴ Virtually nothing else is known of the buildings of the Priory. In the early nineteenth century these were thought to lie to the east of the existing house,⁵ but although excavations in 1956 apparently found wall footings and a well, it does not seem to have been established which – if any – of the Priory buildings these may

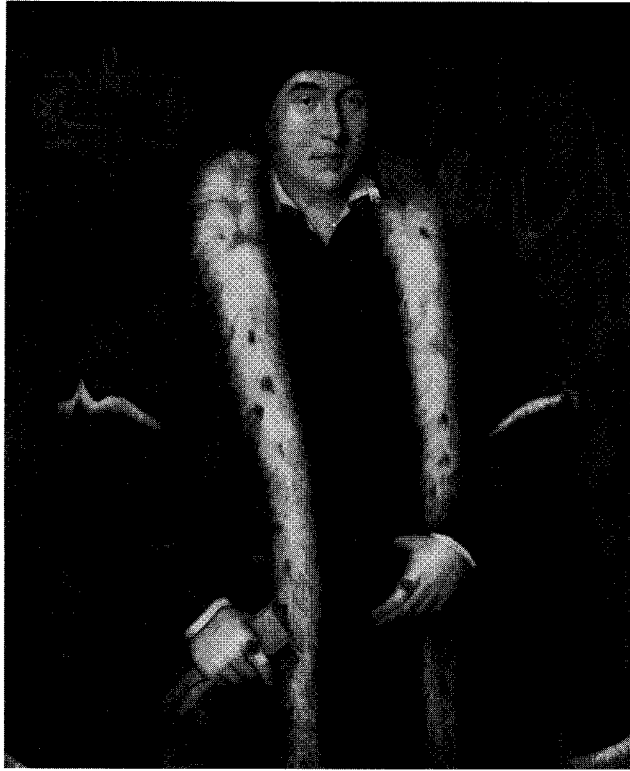
¹ Oxford, Trinity College archives (hereafter TC), misc. IB/1.32; 172.

² TC, Wroxton & Balscott misc., f.2. Thomas Pope's hand is not easy to read, and the transcript offered here differs both from that in Thomas Warton's *Life of Sir Thomas Pope*, 1772, and in *VCH Oxon IX*.

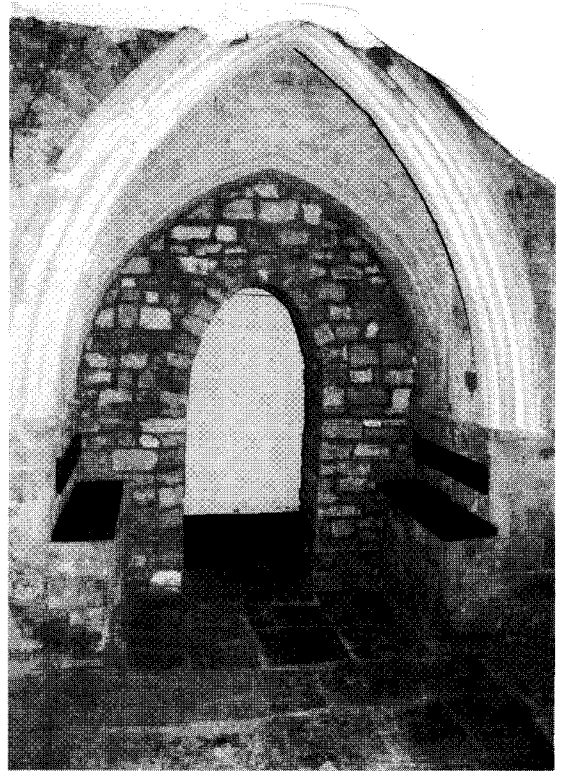
³ *Ib.*

⁴ TC, misc. I B/1.32.

⁵ John Skelton, *Antiquities of Oxfordshire*, 1823, Bloxham Hundred p.10.



Sir Thomas Pope



Medieval arch in cellar at Wroxton Abbey

have related to.⁶ However, in the basement of the present house there are still two surviving medieval doorways, and at least one stretch of wall. Elsewhere, early occupants of former monastic buildings often lived in the prior's or abbot's lodging – the only buildings whose form resembled a normal house or which provided conventional domestic accommodation – and it may be that at Wroxton the prior's lodging continued to be occupied as a dwelling until the building of the existing house.

Thomas Pope, who was born around 1508 in Deddington, trained as a lawyer, entered royal service and rose very rapidly. In 1536 he was appointed Treasurer of the newly-created Court of Augmentations, the body set up to administer the dissolution of monasteries. Wroxton was one of many properties he had acquired and with which he endowed Trinity College in Oxford in 1555. However, before Thomas Pope's gift of the freehold to Trinity College he had given a 99-year lease to his brother John, and the gift to the College was on the understanding that John Pope's descendants should always live there and that the College should always renew the lease to them.⁷ It was an odd thing to do, particularly since he had already made out a deed whereby his very extensive Oxfordshire estates should pass directly to John if he should die childless,⁸ and it created what was described by the *Victoria County History* as 'the remarkable situation had arisen of a great English land-owner whose main residence was held on lease.'⁹ For the moment the arrangement presumably satisfied both brothers, but it bore the seed of future difficulties.

Margaret Pope, mother of the two brothers, was living at Wroxton by 1550¹⁰ and was buried there in 1555; John Pope was presumably living at Wroxton by that time, and in 1573 William, his son and heir, was baptised in the parish church. There is no evidence of a mid-Tudor house, and it is likely that not all of the Priory buildings had been demolished and that John Pope had adapted some of them to live in. John Pope died in 1583, when William was a child of ten. A variety of dates between 1580 and 1618 have been advanced for the new house, and although the latter is almost certainly too late, there is no firm evidence on which to attribute the house either to John Pope or to his

⁶ *Oxford Times*, 17 August 1956. No other record of these excavations seems to exist.

⁷ For £80 and 6 capons and 6 good hens at Christmas. TC, B/1.32.

⁸ National Archives WARD7/85/184.

⁹ *VCH Oxon* IX 176.

¹⁰ *ib.*



The entrance to Wroxton Abbey.

son. It is unlikely that any building would have been carried out during William's minority, and while the house may have been begun shortly before John Pope's death, it may also have been built soon after 1594 when William Pope came into control of his own money. In the absence of documentation or of reliable inscriptions, the only sources of information are two: one is the architectural style of the house, and the other is to consider what occasions in the history of the family made building either more or less likely.

However, neither source is particularly helpful. The principal architectural feature is the very elaborate frontispiece to the porch, which in general character is typical of the late sixteenth century and in its overall design has many parallels. Many of the details of the front are standard renaissance motifs. The theme of a doorway opening flanked by pilasters that frame shell niches ultimately derives from the model of a triumphal arch, and can be paralleled closely in the superimposed motifs of the courtyard frontispiece of Burghley, of 1585. But the form is so widespread that it is not very helpful in providing a closely dated match for Wroxton. On the other hand, the gable over the porch can be seen as suggesting a later date. Gables of this shape go back at least to the 1570s, but the way in which the uppermost window is stepped up within it is exactly the same as the treatment of gable windows at Rushton in Northamptonshire, dated 1626.

So is it more likely on other grounds that John Pope was the builder, or his son William? Under the Tudors, land owning was the surest basis for power, wealth and prestige, and most newly wealthy men were keen to set themselves up with an estate which they could pass on to their descendants. If John Pope had been living in buildings of the old Priory, with the birth of an heir he would at last have had a motive to rebuild them, securing his descendants on the estate that he had acquired. By the time William was born, John Pope was probably quite old – his first wife was already dead by 1556, and his brother Thomas had been born in 1507 or 1508 – but there are other cases known of people starting building late in life, with just such a motive. On the other hand, the fact that John Pope had an incentive for building does not prove that he actually did so. William Pope will also have needed to build if no modern house already existed. Reaching his majority in 1594, he married in 1595, was High Sheriff of the county in 1600, and made a Knight of the Bath in 1603, and perhaps William more than his father would have felt the need for a house that matched his dignity and aspirations.

Nor can any certain conclusion be drawn from the fact that the house was left unfinished.¹¹ Even though it was partly modernised in the late seventeenth century, until the middle of the nineteenth it remained unbalanced and asymmetrical. The porch was not in the middle of the façade, and it lacked a south wing to match that on the north. Furthermore there were always, as now, two large flights of stairs, and the slightly odd location of the service stair may plausibly be explained as relating to a range of building that has since been demolished or rebuilt. The usual reasons why a building is left unfinished are either because its builder has run out of money, or because he has died. If John Pope began to build after the birth of William in 1573 – and the architectural evidence indicates a date no earlier than the late 1570s – his death would have caused building to have been suspended.

It was said after his death that William Pope had spent £6000 on the house – even though such a claim may have been no more than a lawyer’s fiction.¹² He was clearly keen to enhance his status. He was made a baronet in 1611 and in 1628 he was ennobled as Earl of Downe. But leading the aristocratic life in the reign of King James I was an expensive business, and it is likely that William Pope was spending to the limit of his income – and perhaps something beyond. He would have had to pay over £1000 for the baronetcy, and for the earldom – a title that he had done nothing to earn – he paid £2500.¹³ The terms of his grandfather, Thomas Pope’s, family settlements had been strict, with no scope for the sale of lands that were entailed on his descendants. As far back as 1597 he had a special Act of Parliament passed to allow him to sell entailed property to raise a jointure for his wife and to pay debts,¹⁴ and although he left plate valued at £1500, he owed over £4000 when he died.¹⁵ Although he left £250 to pay for a handsome monument to himself in the church, this will have been a charge on his heirs’ inheritance. Nothing is known about the Earl’s career which would have

¹¹ It has been suggested that the reason why the house was not finished is that the Popes did not want to spend a lot of money on building a house on which they only held a lease. This is implausible. If they had wanted to economise, they would have built a small house, not the fragment of a large one.

¹² *VCH Oxon IX*, 176. The document in which this was claimed cannot now be traced.

¹³ *Philobiblion Society*, IX, 1865-6, 3-18.

¹⁴ London, Parliamentary Archives, 39 Eliz.I c.15.

¹⁵ National Archives PROB 11/160.

made him stop building once he had begun, but it may simply be that once he had provided himself with a house with a full set of state rooms, he was prepared to defer indefinitely its completion. Status in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England was largely cemented by entertaining, by hospitality (he was visited King James I)¹⁶ and a show of wealth, and for the moment part of the Priory buildings – perhaps the old kitchens and service rooms of the Prior’s Lodging – might continue to serve those functions that were not required for the purposes of keeping up a show. It is possible, of course, that John Pope began the house and that his son, after an interval, went on with it. But unless and until further evidence turns up, perhaps the most likely conclusion is that William Pope started to build the house in the 1590s and may have spent some years on it, on and off, before leaving it still incomplete on his death.

Although with the exception of the hall, the Popes’ house has been almost entirely redecorated, parts of the original plan are still reasonably clear. Three inventories, made in 1634 after the 1st Earl’s death, in 1668 and 1680,¹⁷ list the rooms and their furnishings, and a plan made for alterations in the 1680s¹⁸ (p.120) also helps to locate a few of these rooms.

The Earl’s house was laid out on largely standard lines. One entered, as one still does, in the traditional way, through the porch at one end of the great hall. Also traditional was the arrangement whereby the best rooms and the best stair led off the hall at the opposite end from the entrance – the ‘high’ end, with buttery, pantry and the service rooms leading off the hall’s opposite end, the ‘low’ end. To the north of the hall, at the ‘high’ end of the house, there were three parlours. These comprised the Great Parlour, the present reading room; the Little Parlour, probably the room to its west; and the Little Low Parlour, which from the use of the word ‘low’ probably gave off the opposite end of the hall where in the 1680s plan there is a room called ‘parlour for ordinary use.’ The Great and Little Parlours would have been mainly for entertaining visitors, the low parlour a combined eating room and sitting room for the family. The pantry was also on the ground floor, close to

¹⁶ Alfred Beesley, *The History of Banbury*, 1842, 262, fn.48.

¹⁷ Oxford Bodleian Library, MS North c.47/5, William Pope, 1st Earl of Downe; MS North b.12 ff.399-406, Thomas, 3rd Earl of Downe, 1668; MS North b.12 ff.421-8, Beata, Countess of Downe, 1678. Her inventory, dated 1680, is to be the subject of a separate article in a future issue.

¹⁸ Reproduced in Howard Colvin and John Newman, eds., *Of Building: Roger North’s Writings on Architecture*, 1981, pl.5, lower.

the hall, and in the 1680s probably still in the same location as it had been in 1634. The pantry was where one kept dishes, cups, knives and other things needed for eating and drinking in the hall and parlours; in 1634 the pantry contained 42 candlesticks. Probably on the ground floor also was William Pope's study, with books valued at £50 and where he will have kept his papers: it is here, in the inventory, that the total appears of the large amount of his debts.

The Earl's house had two large staircases, one off the high end of the hall and the other at the low end. The principal stair has been rebuilt, though it is still in its original location, and this rose to the best chambers of the house. The low end stair, which is essentially unaltered, is described on the 1680s plan as 'stairs to the common apartments,' in other words the stair to the chambers used by family and servants. In Elizabethan and Jacobean houses, the best entertaining rooms were on the first floor, and the grandest room in the house was what is now known as the Regency Room. Other first floor rooms that can probably be identified are what was called the gallery over the hall – that is to say, the gallery over the hall screen – and a bed chamber next to it described as 'over the pantry and little withdrawing chamber'. In working out where the rooms in the house were, this description is useful: the 'little withdrawing chamber' is probably the same room as the room called the little low parlour on the ground floor, and since the contents of this bed chamber over it were valued quite highly – £25 – and since it was common for the head of the household to sleep in the best of the bed chambers at the low end of the house, it is probably here – immediately beyond the hall gallery, in a room that has been altered but is now partly occupied by the Director's secretary's office – that William Pope himself slept.

Besides the gallery over the hall, two other galleries are named in 1634: the Upper Gallery and the Long Upper Gallery. Galleries, in the parlance of the time, were often no more than broad passage rooms, and there still exist on the second and third floors of the house just such spaces, linking the stairs and giving access to the chambers on each floor. On the top floor, some of these chambers retain their original door surrounds. There is no mention of a chapel in 1634, though one is mentioned in the inventories of 1668 and 1680. The kitchen and other of the service accommodation cannot be located but must have been mainly in the basement or in old buildings to the south of the new house.

Roger North, who was responsible for modernising the house for his brother in the 1680s, described how the rooms had been 'like bird cages

all window' and how he had reduced them in size (since then they were altered again more than once).¹⁹ Unusually for the period, this was done in a conscious imitation of the earlier style, but nevertheless the change must have had a profound effect on the appearance of the house both outside and inside. Virtually nothing remains of the decoration of the Popes' house, save for the hall screen and a doorway at the hall's high end, and a narrow cornice in one of the chambers over the hall. However, North noted that in what he called the 'parade rooms' – probably the great chamber on the ground floor – there had been 'a Gothick border of plaster of a yard deep, being barbarous representations of horses bucks and does and I know not what.'²⁰ When the house was modernised at that date the frieze was done away with, but perhaps one might imagine a cruder and much simpler version of the famous plaster frieze in the High great Chamber at Hardwick Hall. Other room names occasionally suggest decoration: the red and the green 'wrought chambers' will have had hangings of those colours on the walls; the matted chamber, obviously, matting on the floor.

The two later inventories are a good deal fuller than that of 1634, that of 1680 running to over a hundred rooms. However, in the seventeenth century there were certainly many fewer rooms in the house than that, and the lists include very many outbuildings. Some of the principal rooms of the house can be located as with those listed in 1634, but the greatest value of these later inventories is the fuller listing they provide, and thus the picture they give of the complexities and scale of the domestic economy of an aristocratic house of the age. The 1680 inventory is the more detailed, and is to be published separately.

By then there had already been a few changes in the house. The little parlour had been re-named the smoking room. The principal first floor room was now called the dining room; when built, it would have been known as the Great Chamber, the principal entertaining room of the house, used on the grandest occasions. The two later inventories also mention a chapel, apparently lying – from its place in the sequence of rooms – close to the hall. The existing chapel, remodelled in the eighteenth century, lies to the rear of the hall in a space occupied in the 1680s plan by the 'gentleman parlour' – a dining room for upper servants, formed by the enclosure of the space between the two stairs.

¹⁹ British Library Add MS 32510 f136r.

²⁰ *ib.*

The plan proposes a chapel in a new range to the south. However, this proposed new range was not built, and it is possible that the chapel has always been in its present location (though later enlarged) where it would have been easily accessible both to the family and to the servants. The glass in the chapel windows is of various dates and was reset and probably added to in the eighteenth century, but it includes a fine suite of panels by one of the van Linge brothers who made windows for several Oxford colleges in the 1620s and 30s. In 1741 the connoisseur George Vertue recorded seeing the glass in the house, and noted a date of 1632.²¹ The date can no longer be seen, but if it right, then it must have been put in by the 1st Earl's son Thomas.

2 Troubles: the second and third Earls of Downe

William Pope, 1st Earl of Downe, died in 1631 with the house unfinished. His eldest son might well have finished it had he lived, but he had died in 1624, and the 1st Earl left as his heir and the inheritor of his title his grandson Thomas, a child of eight. In his will, the 1st Earl bequeathed everything to his second, and surviving son, also named Thomas. No mention is made of his eldest son's child as he presumably had family lands settled on him already. But under the terms of the 1st Earl's will, the lease of Wroxton Abbey itself, together with other land that he still retained, had been bequeathed to his son Thomas.

The young Earl would inherit extensive estates in north Oxfordshire but would never live at Wroxton Abbey. He led an unhappy life, first as ward of an unscrupulous guardian and then in a forced marriage. He died in 1660 aged only 38, leaving his affairs in considerable confusion.²² Lacking a direct male heir, his uncle succeeded as 3rd Earl of Downe.

Sir Thomas (he had become a baronet), who occupied Wroxton Abbey all this time, was a royalist, acting as receiver of local taxes for the King in 1642, and actual host to his sovereign on 13th July 1643.²³

3 Two brothers

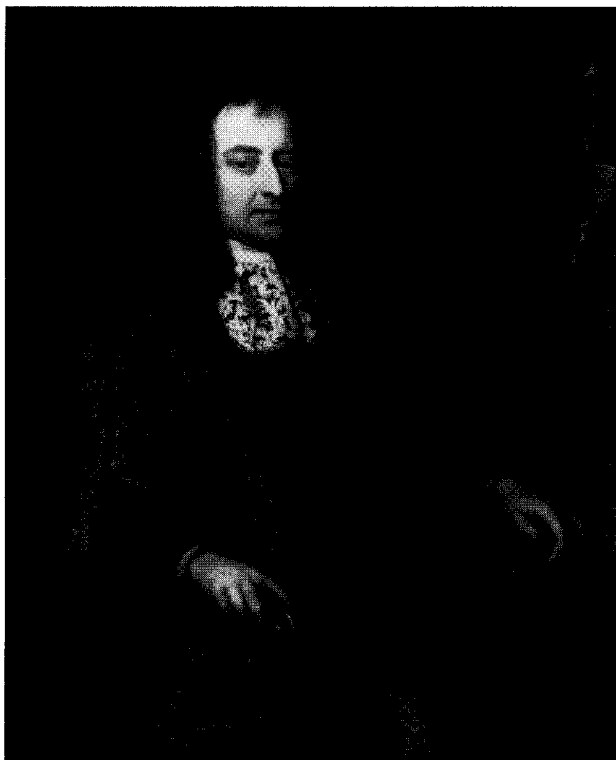
Thomas, the 3rd Earl, died in 1665, and his son, the 4th Earl, survived him by only a few months, leaving the Wroxton estates – the lease of the house and his freehold lands – to be divided between the 3rd Earl's three

²¹ *Walpole Society*, XXIV, 1935-6, 192.

²² The 2nd Earl's sad life and attempted divorce are to form a separate article.

His uncle spent £7500 on settling his debts. National Archives C22/623/58.

²³ Alfred Beesley, *op.cit.*, 348; *Cake & Cockhorse*, XV.7, 2002, 237.



Francis North, 1st Baron Guilford, attr. to John Riley.
(National Portrait Gallery 4708. Detail. Reproduced by kind permission)



Roger North, after Sir Peter Lely.
(National Portrait Gallery 766. Detail. Reproduced by kind permission)

daughters. The 2nd Earl's only daughter Elizabeth would ultimately bring such of his estates that remained to her husband, Sir Francis Henry Lee of Ditchley. By then, lawyers had found such difficulties, arising from the terms of old Thomas Pope's original grants, from later wills and from the private Acts that had already been passed allowing sales of family lands, that only a further Act of Parliament would resolve them.²⁴ But these problems need not concern us, and ultimately the third of the 3rd Earl's daughters, Frances, married a rising lawyer, Francis North, who would buy out her sisters' interests and acquire the lease of Wroxton. North had a very successful career, rising to Chief Justice and Lord Keeper [of the Great Seal] and ennobled as Baron Guilford in 1683. Just as significantly for the history of the house, a younger brother, Roger North, besides being a lawyer himself was also an amateur architect, wrote extensive notes on architecture (all unpublished until 1981, and some remaining so)²⁵ and the biographies of himself and of three of his brothers, also unpublished in his lifetime.²⁶ These and his architectural writings tell us a great deal about Wroxton and what the Norths did to it.

Faced with a house that was both unfinished and old fashioned, Francis North might well have rebuilt it from scratch. However, Roger North's architectural writings include his views on the alternatives of building a new house or of altering and modernising an old one, in which he drew on his experience both at his own house at Rougham in Norfolk and at his brother's house at Wroxton. To build anew was best, but there was much to be said in favour of modernising an old one. One argument in favour of altering an old house was:

the diversion it affords, and that is not to be slighted... Action and business [are] best employed to gain, but where men are not so much prest, how can [they] be better directed than in contriving and executing benefits or improvements of living, in which all a family, friends, and strangers participate, and the poor are relieved? And this is done, by employing our spare time and money, in mending and adding to our habitation...²⁷

²⁴ National Archives C89/15/23.

²⁵ An edition of much of Roger North's theoretical writings on architecture was published in Howard Colvin and John Newman, eds., *Of Building*, Oxford, 1981.

²⁶ First published in 1742 and 1744, the edition used here is that by Augustus Jessopp, *The Lives of the Right Hon. Francis North ...* by the Hon. Roger North, 3 vv, 1890. More than one draft exists in manuscript; relevant extracts from these are in the Appendix. These are fuller than the published versions.

²⁷ *Of Building*, 29.

North recounts elsewhere how he spent his time at Wroxton in measuring the house, designing improvements, and discussing these with his brother and his friends. This seems to have led to a good deal of rather heavy-handed badinage, described in a rather fuller version of Roger North's *Life* of Francis North than the published text and which survives in manuscript.²⁸ (Another of the North brothers, Dudley, shared Roger's passion for architecture. 'He drew, and I drew, and much altercation we had,' Roger North recalled.²⁹)

A more powerful argument for rebuilding a house was an economic one – one could continue to live in the house while the work was going on:

Many must have some habitation, which an old house will afford even while it is altering, the family removing before the workmen, and at length fixing in their destined apartments. And so the master is ever at hand to conduct and order what is fitt, which will be daily and hourly needfull. And he may proceed, or stop, and whenever he leaves [i.e. stops work], the house is bettered so much, or he may move slow, and work out of the growing profits of his estate, and not sink his capital.³⁰

It is clear that both of these considerations weighed powerfully with Francis North. In addition, besides having an innate aversion to unnecessary display, he was concerned that by improving the house and thus its value, his descendants would be liable in due course to a larger entry fine – the recurrent charge for renewing the lease from Trinity College. Consequently, despite the urgings of his brother Roger, Francis North did little more than the minimum that was needed to bring the principal rooms up to date and fit for an occupant of his standing, and to improve the accommodation for his family and household.

In general terms, what Francis North undertook can be learnt from Roger North's summary description of the work and from the surviving plan in his hand. This – which is clearly a plan for proposals, rather than of the work actually carried out – does not show precisely what was done, but apart from the unexecuted south wing (on the right hand side, on the plan) it is reasonably accurate save in some details. The best

²⁸ London, British Library. The passages relating to Wroxton (though omitting those referring to schemes for the garden, which were not carried out) are reprinted at Appendix I, below.

²⁹ London, British Library Add. MS 32513 ff.153v-154r. See also Richard Grassby, *The English Gentleman in Trade: The Life and Works of Sir Dudley North, 1641-1691*, 1994.

³⁰ *Of Building*, 27.

rooms of the house retained their general form, but he added a small withdrawing room at the north-east corner and a service stair to enable servants to reach the entertaining rooms from the basement without having to use the best staircase. This small stair survives, and retains its original door cases at landings and balusters on the upper floor. The principal stair was entirely renewed and (except for the finials on the newels, added in the nineteenth century in a bizarre attempt to make it look older than it is) remains intact from the 1680s.³¹ Door-cases and wainscot in the lobby between the stair and the principal drawing room on the first floor also survive from Francis North's time. The space between projecting window bays on the north side was filled in to provide closets on each floor. However, the southern of the new ranges shown in North's plan remained unbuilt. This proposed a chapel in its eastern end, arranged (in a manner long established for private chapels) on two levels: the lower level with altar, reading desks and seating for servants, and an upper gallery for the family.

The principal rooms were themselves redecorated, and so that the rooms should no longer look like 'bird cages' by virtue of their huge expanse of Elizabethan glazing, the window openings were greatly reduced in size although made to conform still to the general style of the sixteenth century building.³² The original decoration of what the Norths called the 'parade rooms', the principal rooms of the Popes' house, was replaced with modern wainscot and cornices. The best bed chamber, the dining room (the present Regency Room) and a chamber called the green chamber were newly fitted up by John Bernard, a furnisher, perhaps a London man. For the Dining Room Bernard provided sixteen 'back stools' [i.e. chairs without arms], two 'great chairs', and 223 yards of bullrush matting for the floor. For the best bed chamber, he provided a bed and other furniture, with 71 yards of blue and white brocade for bed hangings, lined with 47 yards of sky colour Persian taffeta, and tenterhooks for hanging tapestry on the walls. Painting was done by a James Radcliffe, for whom Francis North paid £4.18s.2d. for his materials.³³

³¹ Equally bizarre is its present name 'The Regency Stair.'

³² *Of Building*, 56n. 'make all of a piece, as much as possible. This course I took in perfecting so much as was done of the Lord Keeper's house at Wroxton, where in the new I proposed the same sort of windows as in the old, tho' not the mode, and his lordship like't it well, and persued it.' Elsewhere Roger North writes that he reduced the windows of the principal rooms by two thirds: Appendix I, below.

³³ Oxford, Bodleian Library MS North b.8 f.183; f.112r.



At the opposite end of the house, to the south of the hall, Roger North's plan shows two east-west ranges of building, one containing a kitchen; however, Roger North recorded that although the old kitchen was in a bad condition, his brother resisted rebuilding 'the old low building then shifted with'. The earliest view of the principal front does not show the second of the two southern ranges on the plan, nor is it shown in a 1786 view of the garden front drawn by Samuel Grimm.³⁴ On the other hand, Grimm's view does show in this location a low building with a deep roof, with some kind of timbered louvre on the ridge, and with what is probably a large chimney on the east side. This might still have been the old kitchen of the Popes' house, possibly having its origin in the buildings of the Priory. Yet even here the evidence is conflicting. Celia Fiennes, probably visiting the house in the late 1690s, described how on coming to the house 'you enter a large hall, on the left hand leads to a little parlour down to the kitchins,'³⁵ perhaps implying that by then the kitchen was within the house. It is possible that after the death of Francis North, first Lord Guilford, his heir (who came of age in 1694) carried out the proposal shown in Roger North's plan, to construct a two storeyed kitchen in the basement, close to the hall.

Although Roger North considered himself to be 'prime architect' for the work that was done, execution was in the hands of 'one Watson, very fitt for the buissness' who also provided chimneypieces to replace the Elizabethan ones.³⁶ Other people named in the accounts include Richard Box, supplier of stone (presumably a local quarry owner); Eglinton, Sheasby and William Matthews, masons; John Bloxham and William Edwards, joiners, who were paid for floors and wainscot; Richard Haynes, carpenter; John Sheswell, smith; John West, glazier; Robert Wild, slater; Richard Worth, plumber; Edward Holloway, thatcher of outbuildings and barns; and Hetty Carter who was paid for 'rubbing' and 'washing' the rooms when the work was done.³⁷ It is

³⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library Gough Maps 26 f.69. A different version, British Library Add.MSS 15546, X, f.76, is reproduced opposite, by kind permission.

³⁵ Christopher Morris, ed., *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, 1947, 26. She describes new work as 'design'd for the present Lord Gilford and Lady,' i.e. after the death of the first Lord Guilford in 1685 and the marriage of the second Lord in 1696.

³⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library MS North b.8 f.13v.

³⁷ ib. f.6 ff.

likely that most of these people came from the neighbourhood, if not from Wroxton itself. And when the work was finished, there was a small amount of money for the careful Francis North to recoup by the sale of old materials: an old beam and a window casement to Will Matthews, and two old doors to Edward Carson.

Francis North had no more completed the house than John or William Pope had done, but when Celia Fiennes visited it she described it as having ‘many good pictures in most roomes, there was a part new built all the new fashion way, which was design’d for the present Lord Guilford and Lady.’ He was the son of Francis North, 1st Lord Guilford, and did not come of age until 1694. It is therefore possible that some of the work attributed to the period of the 1st Lord Guilford was actually carried out for the 2nd. But in any event, Roger North must have been responsible for it; the Norths were an exceptionally close-knit family, and Roger charmingly describes how he and his brother Dudley, trustees for the young heir after the death of his father, spent much time at Wroxton where they spent their time in carpentry and blacksmith’s work to the horror of Dudley North’s wife and the bewilderment of the villagers.³⁸

4 *The Eighteenth Century*

Although the house remained incomplete, little more was probably done until the 1730s and ’40s, when the Francis North’s grandson, the 3rd Baron Guilford, undertook further work inside the house and outside. In 1734 he succeeded his cousin as Baron North, and thereby bore both titles, but when in 1752 he was created Earl of Guilford the title of Lord North was

³⁸ Jessopp, III, 243. ‘Our way of living there being somewhat extraordinary, I think it reasonable to give an account of it. In the first place, the lady had a standing quarrel with us; for we had such a constant employ that she could have none of her husband’s company; and when she came to call him to dinner she found him as black as a tinker ... We followed the trade so constantly and close, and he coming out sometimes with a red short waistcoat, red cap, and black face, the country people began to talk as if we used some unlawful trades there at least, clipping at least; and it might be coining [i.e. forging] money. Upon this we were forced to call in the blacksmith and some of the neighbours, that it might be known there was neither damage nor danger to the state by our operations. This was morning’s work before dressing; to which duty we were usually summoned by the lady full of admiration that creatures she had in her family. In the afternoons too we had employment which was somewhat more refined; and that was turning and planing ...’

assumed by his son – First Lord of the Treasury from 1770 to 1782, the prime minister under whom the American colonies were lost. The Earl's third wife, whom he married in 1752, brought him Waldershare in Kent, and thereafter he seems to have devoted less time to Wroxton. Nevertheless, what he did at Wroxton before that date involved both the house and the grounds.³⁹ Because of work done by his successors, it is not clear how much he did inside the house, but broadly he seems to have done away with much that Francis and Roger North had done in the 1680s, and used such knowledge of Elizabethan and Jacobean architecture as was then available to recover the character of the original building.

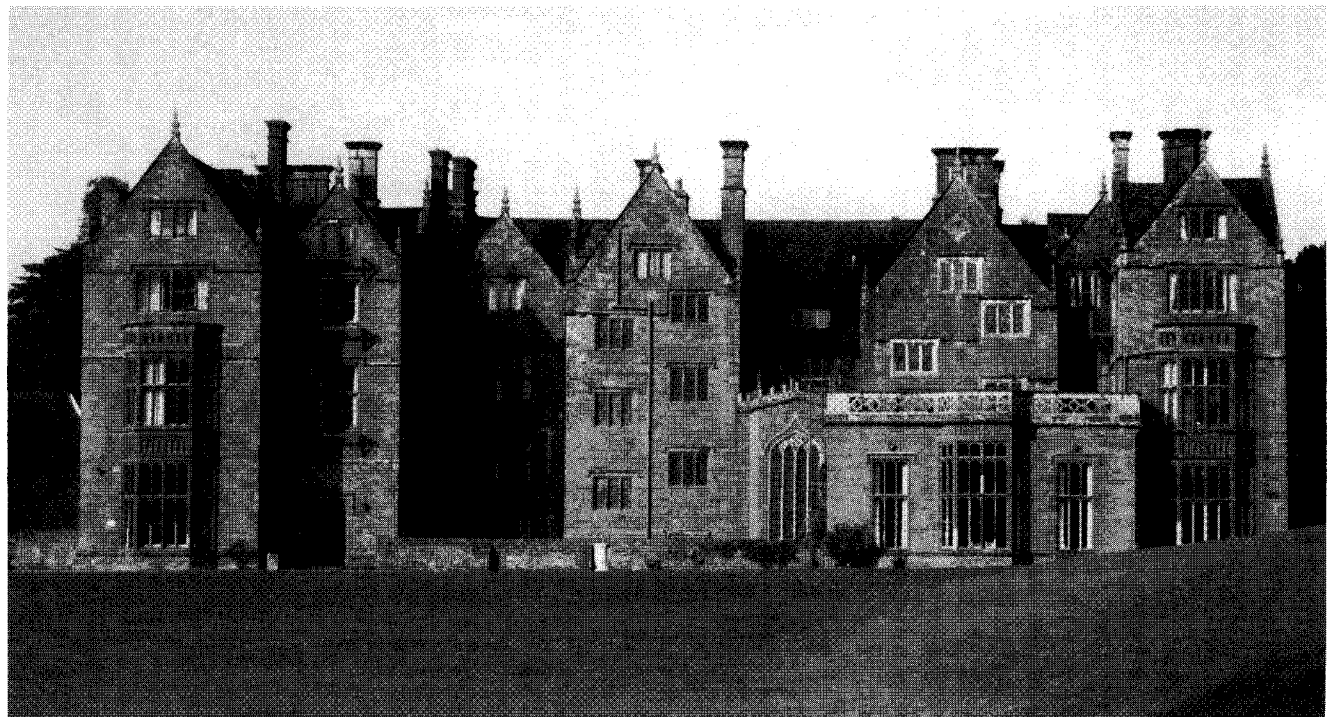
There are three Jacobean style ceilings in the house, and the overall character of these, as well as certain details, make it clear that none of these are actually from the original house, but that all were probably put in in the mid-eighteenth century. Some of their details give them away, and a further give-away is that they are not made of plaster but of papier-maché, a material never used at the earlier period. But they are surprisingly authentic-looking, and it is a pity that we do not know who designed them, nor the fireplace in the Regency Room which, while obviously not Jacobean, was believed by the late John Cornforth to be eighteenth century.⁴⁰ There are in addition a number of plainer chimneypieces in a gothick style which are more obviously eighteenth century; these, presumably, were put in by Lord Guilford to replace late seventeenth century ones with which the Norths had already replaced the originals. In the nineteenth century these gothick revival chimneypieces were largely embellished by the addition of bits of old carving, but several of them remain. Unlike the ceilings, the gothick chimneypieces could have been produced by any competent mason with access to one of the architectural pattern books, with gothick designs, that were beginning to circulate at around this time.

Other work of Lord Guilford's has probably gone. This probably includes the library which Horace Walpole said had been added by him and which Walpole described as 'a pleasant chamber.' In 1823, this library was described as 'an elegant room fitted up in the Gothic style,'⁴¹ but there is now no room in the house that can confidently be identified

³⁹ For work in the grounds, see Jennifer Meir, *Sanderson Miller and his Landscapes*, 2006, 93-105.

⁴⁰ See John Cornforth, 'Wroxton Abbey, Oxfordshire', *Country Life*, CLXX, 1981, 770-3, 854-7, 1010-13.

⁴¹ Skelton, *op. cit.* (as fn. 5), Bloxham Hundred, p.11.



as the one of which Walpole approved. It may have been one of the rooms subsequently redecorated in a Jacobean style in the nineteenth century, although it may have been an extension that seems to be shown on the garden side of the house in Samuel Grimm's view of the 1780s and which was replaced in the nineteenth century by the existing block.

However, other work, in the house as well as in the park, was designed in part, at least, by Sanderson Miller, squire of Radway, who besides being an inventive amateur architect was a personal friend of Lord Guilford's.⁴² Work in the house that Miller is known for certain to have provided is the great pendant in the hall, from which a chandelier was intended to hang. Though if one looks at this carefully it is obviously not Elizabethan or Jacobean, at first glance it is a surprisingly effective and convincing essay in the taste of a hundred and fifty years before. It is well reproduced in Skelton's engraving (p.136 and cover).

But most prominent of Miller's known, surviving work at the house is the chapel. It was probably already in the present location, set between the two great staircases, but it seems that in 1747 Lord Guilford had already begun to extend it to the east to the designs of his mason, Robin Cheyne, and that for some reason Guilford was not happy with what Cheyne proposed. It is possible that, knowing what Miller had done in the gothick style at his own house and at Edge Hill, North wished for a more suitably ecclesiastical feel for the chapel than Cheyne was able to provide. Miller's contribution was the design of the new, gothick window, and of the plasterwork and woodwork. Horace Walpole, visiting in 1753 soon after the chapel was finished, approved of it, described the window as 'very tolerable' and continued that 'the frieze is pendant, just in the manner I propose for Strawberry Hill.'⁴³

But like nearly everything else about Wroxton there are questions about it.⁴⁴ The glass, fairly obviously, is not all of a piece, and has been rearranged. It is likely that at the heart of the collection is glass which was already in the chapel window, but probably because the earlier window was smaller than the present, it was necessary to piece this out with additional glass from elsewhere. The present collection is a mixture

⁴² Miller's work at Wroxton is described by William Hawkes, 'The Architectural Work of Sanderson Miller', *Cake and Cockhorse*, IV,6, 1969, 99-108.

⁴³ W.S.Lewis, ed., *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 35, 1973, 73.

⁴⁴ H.T. Kirby, 'The Van Linge Window at Wroxton Abbey, Oxfordshire', *Journal of the British Society of Master Glass Painters*, XIV(2), 1965, 117-21.

of subjects, styles and dates, and it is not at all clear where it all came from. The most interesting glass is a series of scenes of the Passion. When the connoisseur George Vertue visited Wroxton before Miller had enlarged the chapel, he noted that he had seen glass in the chapel with the date 1632 and the name of the Flemish glass painter Bernard van Linge, who also made windows at several Oxford colleges. However, neither the signature nor the date can now be seen, and the Passion scenes are rather more in the style of van Linge's brother Abraham.⁴⁵ Furthermore, although the glass contains the coat of arms of Sir William Pope and his wife who died in 1625, Vertue does not mention these and there is no mention of the chapel in the inventory made when Pope, as Earl of Downe, died in 1628.

The present window contains glass from a number of different sequences, by a number of different hands. Besides van Linge's passion scenes, there are Apostles, Sybils, and a good many fragments that can no longer be identified and from sources that we do not know. In a surviving letter Sanderson Miller refers to other glass that Lord Guilford had and which evidently had to be used to make up the area of the new window.⁴⁶ All one can say is that none of these sequences is quite in the right order, that we do not know where much if it came from, and so it is better just to enjoy it for what it is: a fine collection of mainly seventeenth century glass in a number of different styles by several different painters.

5 *The Victorian House*

The first Earl of Guilford died in 1790, the second Earl his son (the former Lord North, the Prime Minister) in 1792, the third Earl in 1802. The third Earl had no sons, and the Earldom descended in succession to his two childless brothers. The fourth Earl claimed to have carried out some repairs, writing in 1813 that 'I found the place not habitable, in a most forlorn, and wretched condition, I have made it not only comfortable but handsome'⁴⁷ but it is not known what he may have done. On the death of the fifth Earl in 1827, the title passed to a descendant of the first Earl, but the North Barony had fallen into abeyance among the third Earl's three daughters. The third of these,

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Michael Archer for his views on this glass.

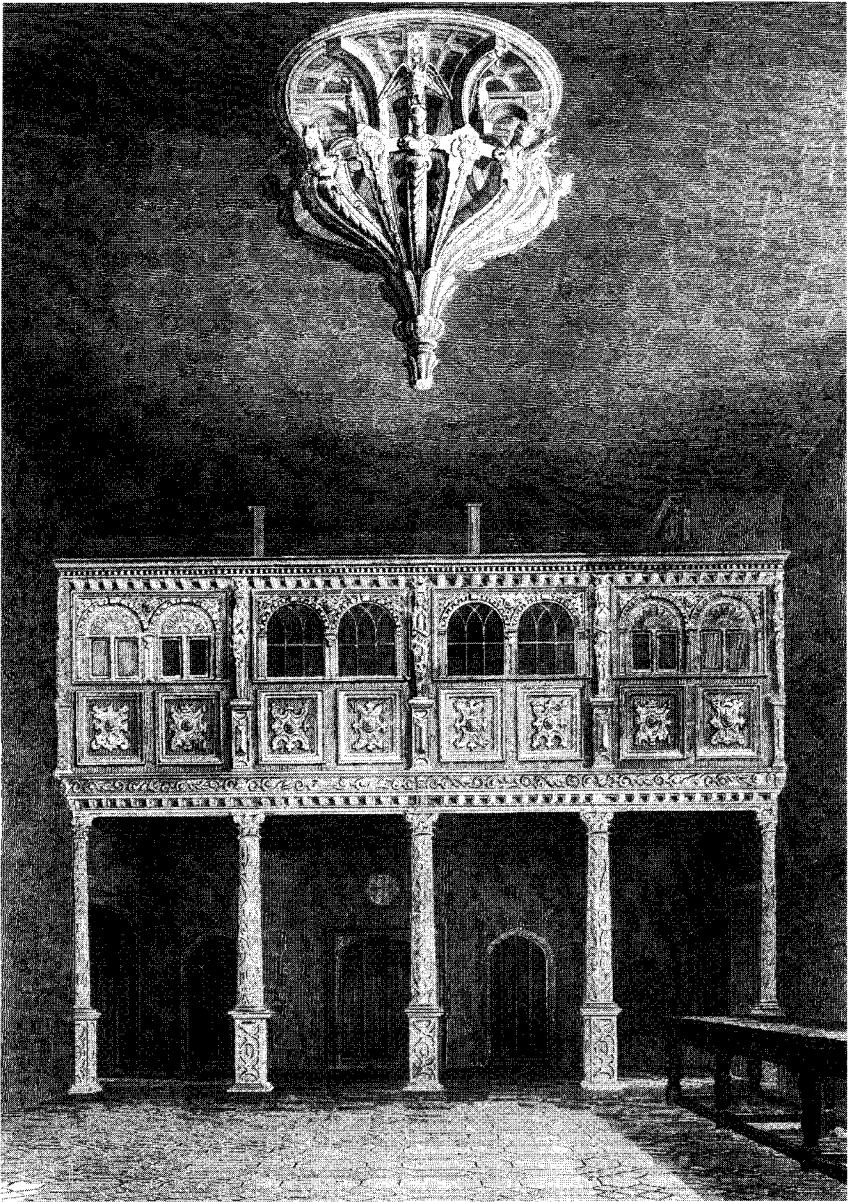
⁴⁶ William Hawkes 'The Architectural Work of Sanderson Miller', *Cake and Cockhorse*, IV.6, 1969, 99.

⁴⁷ TC, Old Bursary Cupboard Drawers, Wroxton, Earl of Guilford to the Master, 3.12.1813.

Susan North who inherited Wroxton, was able to get the Barony revived in her name, and in 1835 married John Doyle who changed his name to North in 1841. John North lived at Wroxton until his death in 1894, and he and Lady Susan effectively gave it its present appearance. In essentials, although one thinks of Wroxton as a house of around 1600, what we see today is perhaps best understood as the house of a romantically-minded Victorian landowner, conscious of his family background, and conscientiously believing that in improving his house he was doing what his ancestors would have done if they had been fortunate enough to live in the nineteenth century.

The gothic revival had been in its infancy in the eighteenth century, at the time of the 1st Earl's work, and Sanderson Miller, who designed some of the revival's earliest works at Wroxton, Stowe, Hagley and elsewhere, had been among its earliest practitioners. Horace Walpole, whose gothick house at Strawberry Hill did more than any other single building to popularise the style, has been quoted already as approving of the chapel at Wroxton. But by the early nineteenth century, far more was known about the authentic styles of earlier centuries than had been the case a century before, and while there were by then numbers of erudite architects ready to design revivalist buildings with a high degree of stylistic accuracy, another way of recreating the past was to make use of genuine antique pieces. Such pieces were to be had from old buildings that were being demolished; they were also to be had in considerable quantities from abroad, where great numbers of ancient buildings had suffered during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

By the 1830s there was a large trade in such relics. In their original settings, which had often been ecclesiastical, these fragments had usually served quite different purposes from those that were needed to embellish the houses of the early Victorian rich. But choir stalls could be adapted for chairs or library book-cases, fragments of ancient beds rearranged as chimneypieces, panels from pulpits could be made into doors, and wall panelling could be moved to new settings and enhanced with other ancient mouldings if it was not decorative enough. In spite of the fact that so much of this ancient woodwork came from abroad, the intention was none the less to give an impression of English antiquity: to evoke Old England. And having come into possession both of the family's ancient title and of the old house which Lady Susan's ancestors had already occupied for well over two hundred years, the Norths had a strong incentive to try and restore its ancient glories.



“Hall of Wroxton Abbey, Oxon.” Drawn by F. Mackenzie and J. Willis, engraved by J. Skelton and H. Winkles. Detail from Joseph Skelton’s *Antiquities of Oxfordshire*, 1823, Bloxham Hundred, Plate 9.

The present appearance of the house, with old woodwork everywhere, is very largely due to them. They probably preserved most, if not all, of the work done for the 1st Earl of Guilford in the 1740s, although this was enhanced with further decoration where, presumably, it was felt to be insufficiently ancient in feeling. Thus most of the eighteenth century fireplaces in a gothic style were given new chimneypieces constructed from pieces of old woodcarving. To judge by the very small amount left of the work that was done by Roger North for his brother Francis in the 1680s, the Norths must have swept away almost all of what remained.

The extent of the Norths' work can be shown most clearly in the Great Hall, since this is the only room of the house of which there exist illustrations before he began. Here there was less for him to do, since the screen and the gallery at the southern end survived from the original period of building, and the central ceiling pendant, designed by Sanderson Miller in the 1740s, was sufficiently authentic in feeling to be allowed to remain. Already Skelton had described in 1823 how 'the spacious fireplace, and the surrounding objects, bring to the imagination an idea of the noble hospitality which here reigned in former years.'⁴⁸ But what existed did not evoke the past powerfully enough for the house's new owners. The chimneypiece was changed, the walls were lined with early-seventeenth century wainscot, and a ribbed plaster ceiling was installed. The ceiling, it has to be said, is not very convincing, and interestingly it closely resembles one installed at much the same time in the dining room at Chastleton. But the success of the work can be judged by the fact that most visitors to the room believe that everything they are looking at is original to the house, even though in fact it is not.

In addition, John North and Lady Susan altered the windows. These had been largely modernised in the seventeenth century, when Roger North had reduced them in size from their original 'bird-cage'-like character and removed stone mullions; he or his successors had introduced sashes and glazing bars. Without detailed evidence for their original appearance, all that could be done was to remodel them in a style that was felt to be correct for the period of building. But the most substantial of the North's work was the completion of the house.

⁴⁸ Skelton, *op. cit.* as fn. 5.

In a letter to the Master of Trinity John North outlined what he wanted to do.

Dear Sir -

When I called some time ago and unfortunately found you engaged I was anxious to mention that as my son had just married and that the accommodation at the Abbey was so limited and the Kitchen and the Offices and Servants Rooms are so very bad Lady North & I are anxious to add a wing to the house which will contain Rooms for Mr & Mrs. North, a new Kitchen, Offices and Servants' Rooms and some additional accommodation for friends.

As altho' we have much restored and embellished the old part of the Abbey we have hitherto never added to it and as we now propose so to do I think it right to inform you of our intentions of making the addition ...⁴⁹

Left unfinished by John or William Pope, Francis North in the late seventeenth century had baulked at completing the house, and the 1st Earl had preferred to spend his money on redecoration and on improving the grounds. In 1858, probably after they had completed most of the redecoration of the principal rooms, the Norths employed the architect John Gibson to bring the house up to date and – effectively – to complete it by building the long missing south range. Gibson was not the most distinguished of Victorian country-house architects. Other work of his has been described as ‘remarkably unappetising’ and as ‘big and charmless’.⁵⁰ It is not known why the Norths employed him, although it may be because he had worked at Charlecote in Warwickshire for the Lucys some five or six years before where, similarly, an Elizabethan house was in need of enlargement and modernisation. But in any case, what was done at Wroxton, although substantial in terms of its effect on the appearance of the house, was not architecturally demanding. Gibson designed the new southern range to match the northern and to provide up-date kitchen and other service rooms and further bedrooms, and by so doing completed the symmetry of the house which had been left awkward and lop-sided two hundred and fifty years before.

⁴⁹ TC, Old Bursary cupboard drawers, Wroxton, John North, 7 April 1858.

⁵⁰ Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House*, 2nd edn., 1979, 404, 415.



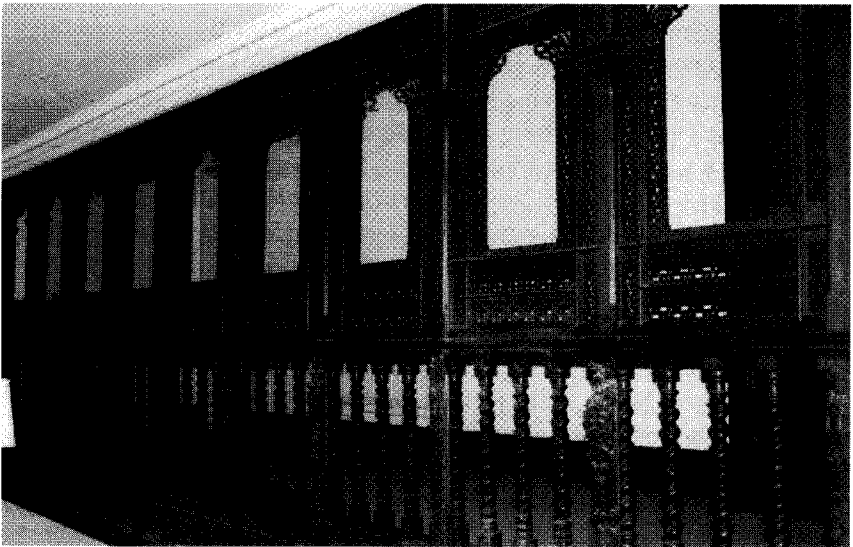
Wroxton Abbey as 'completed'. An early 20th century Warwick Hunt meet.
(courtesy of the Oxfordshire Museum Service, TP 367).

Gibson's work left the house looking complete. We have no direct knowledge of whether the Norths approved of it or not, but there is still one more piece of unexplained business, so to speak. On the garden side of the house is a single-storeyed block, certainly built in the nineteenth century. A few years after the building of the south range, the Reverend Francis Morris published *County Seats of Great Britain and Ireland*, in six volumes. Volume III contains a view of Wroxton, showing John Gibson's newly completed south wing, and with a page of description of the house and its owners. Morris, who would have relied on North for his information, says nothing of Gibson, yet he does say that 'a library has lately been added after a plan by Mr. Smirke.' This must be the single storeyed block in question, and Mr. Smirke must be Sydney Smirke, brother of the more famous Sir Robert Smirke who designed the British Museum (and who had designed Putney Hill House for the dowager Countess of Guilford in 1828).⁵¹ But why did Francis Morris, who must have got his information from North, say nothing about the work recently done at Wroxton by John Gibson? Was his information out of date (even though the picture must have been drawn since

⁵¹ F.O. Morris, *A Series of Picturesque Views of the Seats ... of Great Britain and Ireland*, n.d. (c.1870), III, 43.

Gibson's work was done)? Or is it possible that North was dissatisfied with Gibson, and did he deliberately tell Morris nothing about it? At present there seems – as with so much about Wroxton – no way of knowing.

Thereafter, the house has been little changed, although there is one intriguing detail that it is tempting to link to work done in the eighteenth century. In Gibson's new range of 1858 there is a gallery originally with a balustrade. However, above this balustrade there seems to have been added a pierced screen of obviously Chinese character. In the eighteenth century, there had been a number of little buildings in a Chinese style in the grounds. These were probably built in the 1740s; Horace Walpole commented on them in 1753, describing them as among the first examples of a style that had by then become widely fashionable. None now remain, but one at least survived until the late 19th century, and it is possible that this screen came from one of these Chinese summer-houses.



The Chinese screen in the gallery.

APPENDIX

Roger North's unpublished memoirs include further references to Wroxton:

[Dudley North] had a great inclination to build a house for himself and to accommodate his designing capacity he bought a plain table and a set of mathematical instruments, and however he might miss his aimes, the charge was not lost for he left posterity behind him who have made better use of these than ever he would have done. But he drew, and I drew, and much altercation we had ...

At Wroxton our time was spent much on the same trak [?] mapping the gardens, and projecting amendments and structures, and by the same token a country gentlemen told us thru the nose, aye, sayd he, you may measure and measure as long as ye will, but my lord is not such a fool as to be ruled by you.

BL Add MS 32513 ff.153v-154r

After [Francis North's] lady was dead and he had putt out his children to their respective educations, he left his seat at Hammersmith; and then Wroxton falling to his share, he he made that his retirement recreation. The place afforded him very much pleasure, he took his nearest relations and friends downe with him, and ever kept his family [i.e. his household] full, for he had his desired entertainment by walking in the garden with a friend to hear him discours, he loved not promiscuous company but allwais a select, and his relations were allwais so to him.

It is rarely found that a man of fortune becomes owner of a seat, but he builds; the masters [?] have a saying, that mony will squeak. So his lordship ... being to be owner of this noble seat, desired to make it useful and according to the model of it perfect, for there was wanting not only finishing and for order to the furnishing of the rooms of parade, but also an integral part of the house, being one wing where the family is to dwell and be accomodated, and thus the shift was made with an old ruinous fabrick, that doe [*illeg.*] the rest. His lordship loved workmen well enough, if he were satisfied it were a reasonable purpose, but he would not bear the thought of profusion such as some are guilty of in building ...

As he was desiring to make his seat perfect so he had a shrewd pull back, by the consideration his house was but a renewable lease, and all his improvements might be turned upon him to inhance the fines, but yet something he would try, as long as he had health and spirits. And he considered what was more needful, and that he did first, he had a plain man to put out his work, and see to the executory part, one Watson, very fitt for the buissness, and orderly wher he lived, but I took upon me the honour of being prime architect, and his lordship encouraged my industry that way. I am sure I

have sat at a table from 4 in the morning till 9 at night, only taking the meal times between, making draughts and designs. And these he would please himself with, and particularly in mortifying the artist, showing gross failings, and when I went about to opinionate and maintaine them, he would laugh heartily and call the company a judg and so wee went to [de]fending & proving against them, but I allwais came off by the worst and those who knew little of the matter, would then take his part as was fitt, and then I must as was fitt knuckle, and goe to the work again...

The onely building he raised after this [i.e. the stables] was a with drawing room and a back stairs to the largest rooms. This was made after the order of the old house, without appealing to the present mode, and that being an order very great, succeeded better than the other would have done; the baulking of mode pleased him well, for he had in some measure the humour of an old man, a pique of new fashions. He raised also a sumer house and designed another but life gave him no time. He wainscoted his parade rooms, about which we had much [*illeg.*], for there was a Gothick border of plaister a yard deep, being barbarous representations of horses, bucks and does and I know not what, with a diminutive litle cornice aloft, he was loath to part with this ornament, and besides the rooms were like bird cages all window. I designed the wainscote to the top, with a cornish answerable to the height which was 18 feet, and put out 2.3ds of the windo, making a competent shew of a peer between 2 lights when it might be done. And for this model I fought in dispute with that vehemence and opinionate, that I carried my point, & so it stands most ready to justify itself...

When he would have the wing of his house built, and in order to it I had made an exact mapp of the front in orthography, and disposed the wing conformable to the rest, but being for family use, it was broken into more storys; but yet, as the front was agreed well enough, & he would most earnestly study these models but the lease still kept him under. Once the steward came and told him his kitchen (the old low building then shifted with) was falling downe, this was a great shok to him, but upon inspection and consideration, he found it was but one part of the harmonious endeavours, of all about him, he drew him in to new build it, and he never was absolutely determined, tho' he was very well inclined to doe it. Thus were his amusements carried on, which were very pleasant while he was Chief Justice...

BL AddMS 32510 ff.136r ff.

LODGING THE MEN, STABLING THE HORSES in 1686

Jeremy Gibson

On 11th June 1685, early in the reign of James II, in England's last seaborne invasion, the Duke of Monmouth landed at Lyme Regis. The Battle of Sedgemoor, the Duke's execution in July and the aftermath of the 'bloody assizes' followed.

Such an invasion gave the authorities cause for planning measures to counteract any future such crisis. In military affairs it is the battles which get the publicity, but these depend upon the unsung background work, the logistics of getting men and transport, in this case horses, in place.

Thus it was that a government survey was undertaken in 1686 to discover the extent of guest beds and stabling 'which ye publique Houses & Inns in ye several Cities Market Towns & Most considerable Villages' in each county 'can & usually do accommodate Guests withal.'

This shows that the three principal places in Oxfordshire were, not surprisingly, Oxford, with 804 beds and stabling for 504 horses, Banbury, 131 beds and stabling for 307, and Henley with 229 beds but no less than 659 stables. Frustratingly only totals for each place are given, with no indication of which or how many inns there were.

This immediately highlights Oxford's importance as a place to visit and Henley's as a route town, with Banbury of much less relevance in either category. Nevertheless Banbury supplied far more than any other north Oxfordshire town: Bicester, 47 and 14; Chipping Norton, 37 and 40; Witney, 33 and 62; and Woodstock, 43 and 109.

Of places in Banbury's Oxfordshire hinterland, generally single inns, Adderbury had 8 beds, 7 stables; Bloxham, 8 and 4; Broughton, 2 and 2; Cropredy, 2 and 6; 'Hugnorton', 3 and 3; Mollington, 1 and 4; Shutford, 1 and 4; Warmington (actually Warwickshire), 3 and 6; Wroxton 1 and 2. The only other place of any size was Deddington, with 18 beds and 14 stables; presumably in more than one inn.

In the latest issue of *Oxfordshire Local History* (see page 148) I have listed all places in Oxfordshire and Berkshire, and also the findings in a subsequent survey (undated) and a much less informative one of 1756.¹

¹ National Archives: WO.30/48 for 1696; WO.30/50 and 49 (undated, 1756).

Lecture Reports

Brian Little

Thursday 13th September 2007

Houses and History: Reading Buildings for clues to the past – David Clark

This was essentially an illustrated talk, comparing architectural styles throughout the county. Interesting and enjoyable, but unsuitable for report here. **J.G.**

Thursday 14th October 2007

High Society at Astrop: The History of Astrop Spa – Deborah Hayter

This was a lecture full of interest and not only because Astrop Spa had a period of renown but also because it is surrounded by elements of mystery.

Our speaker took her audience back to the glorious heyday of spas and spa towns – the eighteenth century. As much as anything this was to reveal the earlier prominence of Astrop, which flourished in the second half of the seventeenth century but only for the first half of the eighteenth century.

It was during this time that this phenomenal location was regarded locally as a good place with the added value of the link with St Rumbold. In a pamphlet of 1668, over 70 ailments were said to respond in some way to the water from the well. Eyes, head and teeth were also mentioned as specific body areas expected to benefit. Given this measure of popularity linked to a society whose upper classes were seeking a resourceful use of leisure time, it is especially sad that the only known picture by the artist Rowlandson depicts the spa in operation way past its glory days (see *C&CH.5.7* (Autumn 1973), p.134).

Within the appropriate Northamptonshire circles and possibly encouraged by reminders of the so-called season in county newspapers, a trip to Astrop in the right company was a must. Lesser mortals may well have based themselves in Kings Sutton lodging houses. Even Celia Fiennes (1694) included the spa on one of her journeys. We may never know whether or not she had access to descriptive poems about Astrop. One of these suggested that you not only took the waters but also consumed buttered rolls and tea. For those well placed in society the level of participation was higher and was linked to a subscription ball, the grandly named Astrop Assembly.

By the late Victorian and Edwardian times, spa-related activities in Britain began to be subsumed by the flight to the seaside. Hardly surprising was the observation by an amateur archaeologist Peter Thompson, writing in 1913, that he could only see foundations of the buildings that comprised the Assembly Rooms.

One of the many unanswered questions is how the spa related to the House and Park. Was there a money link? One thing is certain, as the Spa shrank so the Park gained in size. It was at this point that Deborah's audience realised just how much remained to be discovered about this fascinating corner of Northamptonshire.

Thursday 8th November 2007

***Twenty-four Square Miles* – Graham Nottingham**

This film, made in 1946, is about the parishes between Banbury and Chipping Norton. It was intended to mirror rural life in Britain generally during the early forties. The necessary survey work was carried out by the Agricultural Economic Unit of Oxford University and was also recorded in a substantial book entitled *Country Planning*.

‘Twenty-four Square Miles’ reveals a way of life that has vanished from our land due especially to the almost total mechanisation of farm labour symbolised here by the replacement of the horse by the tractor and the huge growth of car ownership.

Apart from the film’s commentary, delivered by a young John Arlott, Graham Nottingham added his own observations based especially on an upbringing in the rural environs of the Welsh Border country. Perhaps his most telling remark was that community spirit was so much stronger in villages of the 1940s than it is today. In his view it did not help that so many larger villages have taken on marked urban characteristics. During the course of the film presentation he was able to identify various locations. One of these was South Newington and it is good to record that in the audience was Janet Thomas, who appears briefly as a little girl at the local school accompanied by her teacher Miss Upton. Another point of contact was provided by Prudence Cooper whose letter was read out and whose moment in the film was when she dashed across North Newington school playground to reach outside toilets.

The film has so many nostalgic moments, especially a short clip of people dancing to the popular Sid Austin Band, some reflections on farming problems by John Woolgrove of Barford, and a sequence inside a cottage that revealed all the problems associated with very basic activities when you have no running water, a range for cooking and rely on oil lamps and candles for illumination.

The evening ended with three short films made as sequels to ‘Twenty-four Square Miles’. Enjoyment of the whole visual presentation owed much to the technical skill of Colin Cohen and the enthusiastic comments of Graham Nottingham, both of which ensured that this was an evening to remember.

Early Work Experience

Early work experience from school is nothing new. From the Log Book of the British School in Crouch Street, Banbury, comes the following:

1875 June 11th.

Mr Hardy of the Firm of Samuelson & Co. called, requesting us to send them an Advanced pupil to assist for Six Weeks in their office.

The log book of the Banbury British School(s), Boys, 1862-1889, is at the Oxfordshire Record Office, ref. BB/XI/viii/2. It is not very long, and its analysis could make an excellent subject for a short project or article.

Book Review

Early Victorian Squarson: The Diaries of William Cotton Risley [Part One], **Vicar of Deddington 1835-1848**, extracts selected by Geoffrey Smedley-Stevenson, 42 + 276pp., 2 maps of Deddington and environs, 5 illustrations, indexes, A5, hard-bound and jacketed. Banbury Historical Society vol. 29 [ISBN 978 0 900129 27 8] in association with Robert Boyd Publications [ISBN 978 1 899536 84 9], 2007. £15.00 + £3.00 p&p from B.H.S., c/o Banbury Museum. Free to subscribers.

These meticulously edited extracts from the diaries of William Cotton Risley provide fascinating insights into life in early Victorian England. They are a welcome addition to the published diaries of other Anglican clergymen, stretching from James Woodforde in the eighteenth century to Francis Kilvert in the 1870s. The present work represents only the first section of the diaries to be transcribed; a second volume, covering the period to 1869, is to follow.

The Introduction provides a useful and interesting outline of the major events in Risley's own life as well as in the lives of his immediate family and some of his wider social circle. His activities ranged from his clerical duties as vicar of Deddington to his role as a well-to-do landowner, a magistrate, a dispenser of charity to his poorer parishioners, and a committed supporter of the Conservative party. Also covered are his domestic concerns, particularly his relations with his servants. Diary entries show that these were sometimes fraught, as on 10 February 1843: "Our footman gave me notice to quit, not liking the confinement of his place. I had spoken to him however about the quantity of Beer that had been drank since he had been here". Of an earlier holder of the post, Risley noted when the man departed on 25 July 1839, after about five months service: "a good riddance [in] every way".

The Introduction is followed by an extensive *Dramatis Personae* to remind the reader of the identity of the leading characters mentioned in the diaries, and by pedigrees of the families of Risley himself and of his wife, Susan. A very detailed index adds to the value of the book.

Perhaps due to careful editing, Risley's diary entries are usually succinct and to the point. They sometimes indicate his prickly personality and his readiness to take offence. This was true of his relations with one of

his curates, a Mr Spurrell, who came in the late summer of 1844 and with whom he was soon quarrelling. Spurrell nonetheless remained until July 1846.

Risley was clearly devoted to his family, particularly his wife, Susan, whose difficult labour with her fifth child in 1836 was followed by years of poor health. In all, Mrs Risley bore five children between 1830 and 1836. The illness and ultimately the death of his only daughter, Bessy, from tuberculosis at the age of eighteen, is touchingly described and overshadows the diary entries for 1848. It was in October 1847, during the final stages of her illness, that Risley surrendered his living, having relinquished the office of rural dean about three months earlier.

The family were early rail travellers, particularly to London but also to Bristol, when Risley inherited an estate in Monmouthshire in 1844. There were regular visits to Brighton, where Bessy was at school in the early 1840s.

Risley was a generous distributor of charity to the poor of Deddington. This included support for a clothing fund, the provision of coal during the winter, and the periodic provision of meat and soup. He was critical of the unsympathetic attitude of the poor law relieving officer towards some of the older people. However, as a committed Conservative he was opposed to the radical political demands of the Chartist movement and this influenced his willingness to give help, as on 10 February 1845, when he noted "A man named Blackwell from Adderbury came begging - I gave him nothing, he being one of the disaffected there, & inclined to Chartist views, as I had been informed - I had relieved him aforetime".

Overall this volume can be recommended for its illuminating insights into Victorian country life and community relationships, as well as for its recounting of the joys and sorrows of the Risley family. With its breadth of coverage it will be of interest not only to local historians but also to those interested in the broader spectrum of nineteenth century social history.

Pamela Horn

Banbury Past through Artists' Eyes, by Simon Townsend and Jeremy Gibson. Over 200 illustrations: paintings, drawings, engravings, mainly in colour, only *one* photograph! Text mainly quoting from contemporary sources. 128 pages. 10 x 7½ ins., hard-bound and jacketed. Banbury Historical Society, vol. 30 (Fiftieth Anniversary) [ISBN 978 0 900129 28 5] in association with Robert Boyd Publications [ISBN 978 1 89953686 6], 2007.

£15.00 + £2.00 p&p from B.H.S., c/o Banbury Museum. Free to subscribers.

Most members will have received this. It will be reviewed in our next issue.

‘HISTORY IS MORE OR LESS BUNK’

(Reprinted, by kind permission, from *Oxfordshire Local History*, Autumn 2007)

That, according to the best authorities, is what Henry Ford said. And that is how Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) regards the historical services it runs or supports.

Those services are now being squeezed to the bone and in one case perhaps to extinction. At the end of last year we learned that Oxfordshire Studies (OxS) would lose about half its space in the refurbished Westgate library. At the same time it appeared that the fashionable style of librarianship ruling in the Westgate required that the specialist staff in OxS should be diluted – and doubly so. First they would deal with general library material as well as local studies; second the local studies desk would be manned jointly with non-specialists.

The news came through nods, winks and shuffled papers, for the council said we must wait until their plans ‘crystallised’ before being consulted – too late to influence anything by then. Keith Mitchell, the council’s leader, an accountant, says on the council’s web-site that services should be run for the benefit of users, but has shown absolutely no concern for the views of users of OxS in the last nine months. Beans are being counted and history weighs little against them.

Within a few weeks of writing this (4 November) there will be – hallelujah! – a sort of consultation meeting. It is stressed that it is to be informal and that it is held on a ‘what if?’ basis, a phrase which we interpret to mean that the officials present cannot be held to anything they say. But, at this meeting we shall welcome the return from sabbatical of Martyn Brown, County Heritage Officer, a known friend of the history services.

It looks now (more nods and winks) as if OxS and the Record Office (about whose limited opening and other deficiencies the National Archives is already officially concerned) will be permanently brigaded together at St Luke’s – to the inevitable detriment of both. A modish high-tech ‘information’ operation, with little or no space for reading, researching or consulting big maps, is all that is likely to remain of OxS at the Westgate.

It costs OCC little to promote the county’s millennium, but real history? That’s bunk.

‘Clio loci’

BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Banbury Historical Society was founded in 1957 to encourage interest in the history of the town of Banbury and neighbouring parts of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire.

The magazine *Cake and Cockhorse* is issued to members three times a year. This includes illustrated articles based on original local historical research, as well as recording the Society's activities. Approaching one hundred and fifty issues and five hundred articles have been published. All but the most recent issues have been digitised and are available on the Society's website (see inside front cover). Most back issues are also still available in their original form.

There are now thirty volumes in the records series. Those still in print include:

Banbury Wills and Inventories 1591-1650, 2 parts (vols. 13, 14).

Banbury Gaol Records, ed. Penelope Renold (vol. 21).

Banbury Baptism and Burial Registers, 1813-1838 (vol. 22).

The earlier registers, *Marriages 1558-1837, Baptisms and Burials 1558-1812*, are now out-of-print, but are available on fiche and CD from Oxfordshire Family History Society, website at: www.ofhs.org.uk

Oxfordshire and North Berkshire Protestation Returns and Tax Assessments 1641-1642 (vol. 24, with Oxfordshire Record Society).

The 'Bawdy Court' of Banbury: *The Act Book of the Peculiar Court of Banbury and Cropredy 1625-1638*, ed. R.K. Giles (vol. 26).

King's Sutton Churchwardens' Accounts 1636-1700, ed. Paul Hayter (vol. 27).

The Banbury Chapbooks, by Dr Leo John De Frietas (vol. 28).

Early Victorian Squarson: The Diaries of William Cotton Risley, Vicar of Deddington, Part One, 1835-1848, ed. Geoffrey Smedley-Stevenson (vol. 29).

Banbury Past through Artists' Eyes, compiled by Simon Townsend and Jeremy Gibson (vol. 30).

Current prices and availability of other back volumes, and of *Cake and Cockhorse*, from the Hon. Editor (Harts Cottage, Church Hanborough, Witney OX29 8AB).

In preparation:

Turnpike Roads to Banbury, by Alan Rosevear.

Selections from the Diaries of William Cotton Risley, ed. G.W. Smedley-Stevenson:
Part 2. *Mid-Victorian Squarson, 1849-1869*.

The Society is always interested to receive suggestions of records suitable for publication, backed by offers of help with transcription, editing and indexing.

Meetings are held during the autumn and winter, normally at 7.30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month, at Banbury Museum, Spiceball Park Road, Banbury. Talks are given by invited lecturers on general and local historical, archaeological and architectural subjects. Excursions are arranged in the spring and summer, and the A.G.M. is usually held at a local country house.

Membership of the Society is open to all. The annual subscription is **£10.00** which includes any records volumes published. Overseas membership, **£12.00**.

All members' names and addresses are held on the Society's computer database for subscription and mailing purposes only. Please advise if you object to this practice.

BANBURY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Winter 2007/2008 Programme

*Meetings are normally held at 7.30pm at Banbury Museum;
entrance from Spiceball Park Road.*

Thursday 13th December 2007

Going to Town in the 2000s: Banbury's Typicality as a Market Town.

Professor Brian Goodey

Thursday 10th January 2008

'Six silver spoons and the second best bed':

Life in Chipping Norton 1500-1700.

Dr Adrienne Rosen

Thursday 14th February 2008

**'No little scandal to God and Man': the extraordinary story of town-gown
relations in Oxford.**

Chris Day

Thursday 13th March 2008

(probable change of venue - information later)

Behind the scenes of 'Who do you think you are?'

Nick Barratt