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Specialists in the Conservation of Historic
Buildings and Historic Building Research

**The Smirke Facade, "Parkers" Roman Cement and a Reappraisal of
The Early History of "The Grange"**

Prepared by Martin Smith

Introduction

R.J Smith & Co, as well as specialising in conservation work to Historic Buildings and Churches, we also carry out historic building research for Clients and Architects where such research is required by local authorities under PPG15 and other statutory requirements. We also each year undertake a non-commercial research project. We offer below to recent articles prepared by us.

Martin Smith

The Smirke Façade and "Parkers" Roman Cement

When Sir Robert Smirke extended William Wilkins' Grecian revival masterpiece for the first Earl of Ashburton, in 1817, he faced the brick structure of the newly extended house with the same stucco render material as Wilkins had originally used on his original conversion of The Grange for Henry Drummond. This was confirmed when we excavated the new stage undercroft and found samples of the original stucco render still in situ just below ground level on some of the old foundations.

The samples found were a slightly lighter brown than those areas of existing render on the Wilkins façades of the main house.

This light brown render, that both Wilkins and Smirke had used to stucco render their building, was at the time a great new innovation in building technology. Indeed, it could be said that neither men could have produced their Architectural masterpiece without its invention. This was because until the very end of the eighteenth century neither builders nor architects had durable or "hard cements" to mix with sands to make an external stucco render mix that would be both durable and weatherproof on large edifices and buildings.

It is true to say that more vernacular buildings, including cottages and small parish churches, had been rendered with lime putty based renders and wattle and daub for centuries but these required continuous yearly maintenance and was not durable on large structures.

By the end of the eighteenth century many inventors and technologists had started to experiment to produce limes or "cements" that would be durable, quick setting, and hydraulic (set underwater). John Smeaton had some success and invented and used a hydraulic cement in the construction of the Eddystone Lighthouse, although his mix mainly used a naturally occurring hydraulic lime found at Watchett in Somerset. Nearer to home, Charles Vancouver in his "General View of the Agriculture of Hampshire" published in 1810, describes a "Mr Roberts of Abbotstone" who had invented a cement "which seems to acquire additional hardness by continece underwater and is much used in the neighbourhood of Alresford and other parts of the county".

But it was in 1796 when the first commercially produced hydraulic cement was patented by James Parker of Northfleet, Kent which he called "Roman Cement". He described it in his patent as "A certain cement or terras to be used on aquatic and other buildings and stucco work".

Parker's Roman cement, by 1810, had become a recognised method of successfully rendering large buildings and Charles Wyatt of the Wyatt architectural dynasty had purchased the patent from Parker and the Wyatt architects used the material on many of their buildings including Hackwood House near Basingstoke.

With such a prestigious reputation for its use on fine buildings, William Wilkinson must have decided to use Parker's Roman Cement as the main material for his stucco rendering at the Grange for the transformation of the Georgian Henley House into a Grecian temple with Robert Smirke using it for the façades of his additions to the building in 1817.

Parker's Roman cement was made by burning septaria nodules of the London clay formation, in kilns. They were predominantly found on the Isle of Sheppey although it was also found in Weymouth Bay and various other places around the coast. The light brown colour of the Roman Cement at the Grange indicates that it probably came from the Isle of Wight and was called "Medina Roman Cement".

Parker's Roman Cement was mixed with coarse sharp sand in the proportions of one of part of sand to one part of cement. The biggest problem with its use was that after mixing it set hard within 15 minutes. Hence, the skilled plasterer had to work very quickly and skilfully when applying the stucco render. This may be reflected in the extreme thinness of the final coat of render applied at the Grange which, from the samples found, is only three or four millimetres thick.

Unfortunately Parker's Roman cement has not been produced since before the Second World War. Even by the mid-nineteenth century it had largely been superseded by the invention and development of "Portland Cement" by James Aspdin in 1824.

It was therefore necessary, at The Grange, to emulate the colour, texture and strength of the original pieces of Parker's Roman Cement found on the old foundations of the Smirke wall. Fortunately, we had some years ago carried out render repairs to Marwell Hall within the grounds of Marwell Zoological Park, which also had been stucco rendered in Roman Cement in the Gothic revival style circa 1820. We therefore decided to experiment using a similar mix. To emulate the strength of Parker's Roman Cement which is not as strong as Portland Cement, we used a hydraulic lime which also allows the render to breathe. To copy the texture of the original render we used a washed gritty sand and mixed this in proportion with a naturally occurring red sand from Exeter in Devon and other washed sands blended to give the render its traditional light brown, almost pink, colour.

Fortunately this mix does not start to harden for an hour or two which allows more workability than the original Roman cement.

The mouldings that are attached to the wall are made of the same stucco render material. They are not cast "off-site" and then stuck on the wall, but have been traditionally run as they would have been in Robert Smirke's time using a "horsed" running mould.

This consists of a timber and zinc template which is cut and accurately filed to the shape of the mould to be copied. A temporary timber batten is screwed to the wall to form a "runner" for the "horse". Wet render is applied to the proposed new moulding and the horse is run along the batten so that the wet render forms the mould shape of the "horse". The running of such moulds is one of the most skilful arts of the plasterer and the technique is now almost lost.

The Portland stone moulds, cills and copings have been faithfully copied by using a mix of Portland stone dust and hydraulic lime. Some of the moulds have been "run" similar to the stucco render moulds described above. The high-level copings were cast in concrete in a mould which had been lined with the stone dust mixture.

When the cast mould had set hard then the timber mould was removed to give a "stone" finished coping stone.

The capital and bases of the columns are so delicate that it was decided to form them in actual Portland stone. The mouldings on these pieces being copied using fragments found by the archaeologist during site excavation and from the extant photographs of the Smirke façade prior to its demolition.

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Current Academic Research

As mentioned in the introduction, we also undertake non-commercial research projects and last year our retained historian, Dr Alison Deveson, commenced research on the Re-appraisal of the early history of "The Grange" and we are pleased to offer below our abbreviated "work in progress" with some notes on our proposed research this year.

The Early History of The Grange, Northington: The Documentary Evidence.

It is common knowledge that the first expansion of The Grange as we now know it was due to Sir Robert Henley. He was assessed for tax on 13 hearths in 1665, and on 30 hearths in 1673 - indication of a major rebuilding. Up till now there has been no physical evidence for the smaller house. Writers on the architectural history of The Grange have, understandably, relied on the account of the early history given in the 'Northington' section of the Victoria County History. VCH drew on the usual national records available at the time, as well as on the work of the Rev. William Eyre, who was rector of the combined parishes of Northington and Swarraton in the late-nineteenth century. Between them, VCH and Eyre confused a good deal of the evidence for the early history of the estate, and have consequently misled later writers. Their references, however, have provided useful pointers, and I have re-examined nearly all of them, as well as evidence which either was not known to the earlier writers or has come to light since their work. I'm now in a position to present a more accurate account of the estate history, which may not in itself add much to our knowledge of the earliest house on the site but may clear up some of the existing misconceptions and suggest a way forward.

The biggest clue was an almost throwaway reference in VCH - 'Northington Grange was evidently purchased by Sir Robert Henley before 1665 and added to his estate in Swarraton, which was also known as the Grange'. Two Granges so close together? Where was Swarraton Grange? Clearly they both needed investigation.

Here I have to tell you a little bit about parishes and churches. The parish boundary between Swarraton and Northington is the Candover Brook; here we're in Northington, on the other side we can see Swarraton.

Current Academic Research

Northington was never a parish in its own right. The present church, which serves the combined parishes, was opened in 1889. Its immediate predecessor stood slightly further north, on the site of a chapel which had served Northington in place of a church for many centuries. The chapel was annexed to the parish church of Micheldever. Micheldever church and its chapels were appropriated to Hyde Abbey in 1308 and the Abbey received their tithes until the Dissolution. When the Abbey's property was redistributed, Northington chapel and its tithes were granted to a succession of lay people and then Richard Thekeston and Henry Best jointly in 1590.

The Latin wording of this grant has been the cause of most of the confusion over the identity of 'Northington grange'. The grangia and capella of Northington were recorded as part of a single transaction by which Thekeston and Best bought around twenty groups of former monastic properties, for a lump sum of just under £2000. The properties were widely spread between Devon, London and the Midlands, and ranged in size and status from a mansion in Wiltshire to a dovecot in Lincolnshire. The Latin usages in the document are clear. Mansio and messuagium are the terms for houses large and small, grangiae are outbuildings, and should be translated as 'barns' or, more specifically in this instance, 'tithe barn'. Northington capella (chapel) with its tithes and tithe barn was one of the smaller properties in which Thekeston and Best were speculating, and which they quickly sold on, in this case to James Hunt of Popham, who in turn sold them among other property in Northington to Sir Benjamin Tichborne. The chapel, barn and tithes were valued at an annual rent of £8 10s., and this figure goes right through a range of documentary sources from 1519 to 1590, covering the Dissolution period and proving that Hyde Abbey's only income in Northington was derived from the chapel.

Swarraton Church and Grange.

In contrast to Northington, Swarraton had its own parish church from at least the 13th century and perhaps earlier. It stood inside the present eastern entrance to the park, on the east bank of the Candover brook, and was demolished in 1849 when Northington and Swarraton were united.

Swarraton was granted to Waverley Abbey (in Surrey) shortly after its foundation in 1128. The property was called a grangia at the start, but this was more than a mere barn. 'Grange' is the distinctive term for a Cistercian farm, and Waverley Abbey was a Cistercian house. By 1536, when the Abbey surrendered, its Swarraton property was called 'the manor of Swarraton'. It was granted, along with the rest of the Abbey's lands, to Sir William Fitzwilliam, the Lord Admiral, who died without a direct heir. The manor passed to Anthony Browne, who was created Viscount Montague in 1554. Neither Fitzwilliam nor Browne had any intention of living at Swarraton, their seat being at Cowdray in Surrey. Swarraton manor was let to tenants, a cause of some litigation in the mid-16th century. The dispute was resolved in favour of the sitting tenant Thomas Cobbe, who was confirmed in possession of the manor in 1568, and thenceforward owned it. In 1598 it passed from his son Michael to his grandson, another Thomas, who died in 1638. Their post mortem inquisitions confirmed that their property was 'The Grange Manor and lordship of Swarraton'. Thomas's sons Michael and Richard sold it in 1639 to Lord Henry Paulet, brother of the fifth Marquis of Winchester, and he in turn sold it to Robert Henley in 1662. The property was then identified by its full title 'The Grange manor and lordship of Swarraton', together with the capital messuage, farm and demesne called The Grange in the parish of Micheldever.

There were numerous Cobbes in the area from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and several of them were called Thomas, but the Thomas who inherited in 1598 was additionally surnamed 'of The Grange'. His 'Grange' was the

'capital message' for which there is a continuous list of owners from Waverley Abbey to Robert Henley. This was not a property worth £8 10s a year (rent of Northington chapel and barn). Swarraton Grange changed hands for more than £6000. The clerks who drew up Henley's title deeds could not have named the parish wrongly in a legal transaction of such magnitude, particularly when Swarraton would have been the more obvious parish. The location in the parish of Micheldever accords with Saxton's county map of 1575, which marks 'The Grange' clearly on the west, that is, the Northington, side of the Candover brook. There was only one house sufficiently prominent at that time in the two parishes to feature on the map, and that was Thomas Cobbe's Grange.

There is not a single extant document to support VCH's assertion that Hyde Abbey had a demesne manor in Northington continuously until the Dissolution. All the references, on examination, relate either to the submanor of Totford (in the north of the manor) or to the chapel and barn. It is true that the Abbey probably held Northington at the time of the Domesday survey, but alienated it permanently to the Byflete family at some time around the turn of the 13th-14th centuries (evidence in article). This was the manor of Northington which was finally bought by Anthony Henley in 1707, and the house name 'The Grange, Northington' has been strictly accurate only since then. William Eyre must have realised that The Grange and Swarraton Grange were one and the same, since he discussed the Swarraton evidence under the heading 'Northington' and listed the grantees of 'Northington grange and chapel' as 'minor landowners'. But he did not clarify the full implication of the documents he had consulted. VCH failed to pick up his clues and made the estate history seem much more complicated than it actually was.

The Grange: The Earliest House(s).

If we accept that Waverley Abbey rather than Hyde was the owner of the medieval estate, we may consider the nature of the house at its centre. Cistercian granges at a distance from the mother house consisted originally of little more than a barn and a modest dwelling to house the relays of lay brothers who were sent from the abbey to work the estate in collaboration with a hired work-force recruited from the local peasantry. But in the 13th century, many granges grew in size and complexity, particularly if the abbot visited occasionally and required accommodation. There is no way of telling if this happened at Swarraton. The only clue is its use as a landmark in a mid-13th century charter. It's a little difficult to visualise this without a map, so I'll summarise by saying that it is clear that the grange lay towards the southern end of Swarraton parish. The description in the charter might be thought to imply that the farm complex was on the Swarraton, eastern side of the brook but there can be no certainty without some kind of archaeological survey, or aerial photographs at the very least. A taxation document of 1341 records that Waverley Abbey was liable for payment on land in the parish of Micheldever, which implies that the grange had migrated across the brook by then.

There is a long gap in the published records for Swarraton grange, from the mid-14th to the mid-16th centuries, and there do not seem to be any unpublished sources. In the case of Benedictine properties, much of this period would have seen the transition from demesne farming to leasing. As a consequence of this, many farmhouses were either rebuilt or refashioned for gentry owners by the time that the monasteries were dissolved. Cistercian farms were also leased, perhaps somewhat later than Benedictine, but if Swarraton was upgraded and leased before the dissolution of Waverley Abbey, there are no recorded tenants.

Sir William Fitzwilliam and Viscount Montague, the first post-dissolution owners, are unlikely to have invested in the house on their own account. The Cobbes, however, and particularly the second Thomas, had a certain amount of social status to keep up. He styled himself 'esquire', was a captain of the muster in 1625 and of sufficient wealth to provide four sets of armour and two muskets for his men. In an age when houses were used as symbols for the display of wealth and status, the Cobbes are unlikely to have retained an old and unfashionable house, and they may have re-sited it on the western side of the brook if this had not already been done. The location shown by Saxton and other early map-makers appears to be the site of the present house, but the scale of the maps is not large enough to determine the exact position.

The next owner, Lord Henry Paulet, also required a grand house, and he must have been acquainted with the Candover valley before The Grange became available. He was the brother of the fifth Marquis of Winchester, whose ancestors had owned the adjoining estate and house at Abbotstone for several centuries. However, Lord Henry bought The Grange on the eve of the Civil War, in which his brother was actively involved on the Royalist side. But if Lord Henry played any part in the war, it was not prominent enough to merit a reference in the standard work on the subject. He must have been resident at The Grange for a time, since his son Francis was baptised in Northington chapel in 1640. Lord Henry sold The Grange to Robert Henley in 1662, almost immediately after the restoration of Charles II. Even if he was not actively engaged in the war, it seems unlikely that he would have had much opportunity for alteration at The Grange.

I have now brought the story of The Grange forward to the late-17th century, and at this point it is appropriate to hand it over to yourselves as architectural historians. I know that Horace Walpole once ascribed the house to Inigo Jones, and that the attribution has been discredited in favour of William Samwell, largely on the basis of a reference by John Aubrey. I have looked at Aubrey's correspondence in some detail, and believe that the attribution can stand although I don't think it's as completely unequivocal as is sometimes assumed. However, that is a matter which I will leave until I publish my article on the early history.

It is undeniable that The Grange was completely rebuilt and that this happened (on the evidence of the hearth taxes) in the late-1660s. The plan is consistent with a single, new design, and not with the extension of an existing building. Nevertheless, since the Saxton map appears to show it on

the present site, it would be worth looking for signs of earlier brickwork incorporated into the foundations. The Grange of the Cobbes' period (mid-16th to mid-17th centuries) would most probably have been brick-built. The only possible surviving features from this period seem to be the three brick-lined pits discovered during a watching brief on the excavations west of the house. Apart from the site itself, there are many unanswered questions. 13 hearths indicate a large house, but there are no written descriptions and I haven't yet discovered any wills with inventories which might have helped. Which way did the house face, and where was the entrance? On the analogy of Abbotstone, it might have faced east, with an entrance through a courtyard on that side. It needed access to Northington chapel. There is no path shown on the tithe map (1850) between the house and the chapel, but access may have been re-routed when the park was laid out in accordance with 18th-century ideas. The kitchen garden of the later mansion was on the eastern side of the brook, reached by a path across an island in the lake. The lake itself was presumably formed by damming the brook at one or more points - another 18th-century idea. Do aerial photographs show any traces either of the Cobbes' house or the Cistercian grange and their necessary outbuildings? Archaeology seems to be the best way forward, and I leave it to an archaeologist to consider.

Alison M Deveson

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Proposed Research For 2005/2006

An analysis of aerial photographs of "The Grange" in the "National Monuments Record" indicate, from visible crop marks, the remains of a substantial building to the South of "The Grange". This may possibly be the "pre-Samwell" Cobbe house. These photographs also indicate lost garden features to the East in the field between "The Grange" and the lake. It is proposed, in the autumn, to carry out an archaeological resistivity survey of these two areas for analysis and comparison with the documentary evidence. Also further "Cobbe" family papers have very recently been discovered which may give new information about the pre Samwell House and the early history of the "The Grange".

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