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THORNCROFT MANOR, LEATHERHEAD

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Thorncroft Manor (Fig. 1), in the parish of Leatherhead, Surrey, has always been treated as something of a Cinderella within the *oeuvre* of Sir Robert Taylor, mentioned by some commentators only in passing, or denigrated as unworthy of a great architect and so posing a question as to Taylor's true ability. Yet, once many of its *gaucheries* are seen to be the result of later alterations, Thorncroft has claims to demonstrate and reinforce Taylor's previously-perceived quest to achieve an architectural synthesis outside the straightjacket of Neo-Palladian orthodoxy. This article aims to elucidate that theme and in the process to demonstrate the singularity, at that date, of

the Early Renaissance source for its façade. On the strength of newly discovered letters which finally document its designer and precisely fix its date, it also corrects the traditionally accepted date for its building of 1772–76.¹ From the newly-established dating of the house to 1762–63 it will be shown how Thorncroft was designed precisely at the major stylistic turning point in Taylor's career. That leads to a correction of the house's received assessment, a judgement due in part to the misunderstanding about the date, and in part to a lack of awareness of the alterations to the façades.

The previously accepted, but second-hand,



Fig. 1 Thorncroft Manor, east (entrance) elevation redrawn as originally built.
Richard Garnier.

authority for the house's authorship and dating rested on the testimony of Brayley's *Topographical History of Surrey*, published in 1841. Brayley was writing nearly seventy years after the supposed event, and he had the date wrong by some nine or ten years. It will be shown here that the design was being worked up during 1762–63 with the aim of starting building by Michaelmas 1763.

PREVIOUS HISTORY

The manor of Thorncroft was one of two feudal manors comprising the parish of Leatherhead from at least Norman times, and the freehold was owned by Merton College, Oxford, from 1266 to 1904.² In 1497 Richard Fitzjames, Bishop of Rochester and Warden of Merton College, as landlord, spent £37 'upon the new building of the Manor of Thorncroft', evidently a complete reconstruction.³ It was his late-mediaeval, early-Tudor house which survived down to the Georgian period.

By then it had become customary for the successive tenants to be London-based. As a tenanted property with a relatively small manor to provide an agricultural income, its upkeep was dependant upon external sources of finance. London tenants begin at least with Robert Gardiner, tenant from 1545 to 1571, who was Sergeant of the Wine Cellar to Elizabeth I (see Appendix). Richard Dalton, a later Sergeant of the Wine Cellar and an associate of Samuel Pepys, had come into the tenancy in 1660. Dalton's family remained the tenants until the early 1760s.⁴ A later Richard Dalton last renewed the lease from Merton College in December 1757 and he must still have been in occupation on 7 February 1758, when the actual indenture of his lease was routinely cross-checked with the transcribed copy in the Merton College lease register.⁵

Within three or four years of that Henry Crabb Boulton had come into possession of the manor, although the precise date at which he purchased the

unexpired portion of Dalton's lease remains undiscovered.⁶ Merton College leases ostensibly ran for twenty-one years but were subject to a renewal fine every seven years,⁷ and it can be calculated from the surviving papers at Merton College that Dalton's lease must have had a good two to three years more to run when Crabb Boulton acquired it, before the need to pay the renewal fine in 1764.⁸ Although Boulton first signed a lease directly from the College in December 1764, he had written on 20 November 1762 to Dr Barton, Master of Merton College, that

The permission given to me by your Society for Timber for rebuilding the Bridge and other necessary repairs at Thorncroft shall be punctually complied with.... [and] I propose soon to have a Survey of the necessary Repairs to make the House comfortable for some years and will take the liberty of advising you.⁹

That gives the impression of a brand new tenant assessing his recently acquired property,¹⁰ but it also demonstrates that a total rebuild was not Crabb Boulton's original intention.

TAYLOR'S PATRON

London-based like his predecessors, Crabb Boulton was a merchant, an East India Company director and MP for Worcester.¹¹ Thus he fits with the profile of Taylor's typical clientele as previously summarised by me in this journal—City men, particularly bankers and directors of the East India Company, men with interests in the West Indies and India, government financiers and army contractors, lawyers, and political clients of the Duke of Newcastle and the third Duke of Grafton.¹² Furthermore, Henry Crabb Boulton was an associate of Sir George Colebrooke, one of a trio of brothers who were repeated patrons of Taylor's.¹³ Besides Colebrooke, at least thirteen of Crabb Boulton's fellow East India directors or their wives and children were Taylor's patrons or lived in London houses attributed as designed by him for speculating

developers, besides others in the Company's direct employ who lived in houses designed by Taylor.¹⁴

Henry Crabb Boulton (c.1709–73), born Henry Crabb, was a thorough City man; his mother was living in Tower Hill in 1746. He owed his initial fortune to a cousin of his mother's, Richard Boulton. This Richard Boulton was a rich sometime director of the East India Company (1718–36), who had retired to Worcestershire, whence the family apparently originated, after 'some 20 years in the ... Company's marine service and 18 in its direction'. He had died in 1746 and left his estates to Henry Crabb, who thereupon assumed the additional name of Boulton. No doubt introduced by his benefactor, young Crabb (as he then was) had entered the East India Company's London head-office in 1727 and proceeded to advance rapidly within its administration. He rose in 1729 to clerk in the pay office; the following year was made assistant to the paymaster; he was joint paymaster in 1731, and finally, from 1737 to 1752, he combined the jobs of paymaster and clerk to the committee of shipping. On retiring from direct employment in the Company in 1752, Henry Crabb Boulton joined forces with his brother, who had already, on resignation from 20 years' service in the Company's marine, gone on to become 'one of the most prominent managing owners or ship's husbands of Indiamen' (privately-owned ships plying the India trade on contracted Company business), who at this time dominated the Company's monopoly in the East India trade. From 1755 the brothers are listed in the London trade directories as merchants of Crosby Square, Bishopsgate, in the City. No doubt with the aim of furthering their shipping interests, Crabb Boulton was in 1753 elected to the Company's rotating directorate, initially serving until 1756. He was thereafter periodically re-elected to the board for the years 1758–61, 1763–65, 1767–70, and 1772 to his death in 1773, was deputy chairman 1764–65, and chairman 1765–66, 1768–69 and from 1773 to his death later that year.

It was presumably on account of his family's Worcestershire links that Henry Crabb Boulton stood and was elected MP for Worcester in the general election of 1754, holding the seat until his death in 1773. Throughout his parliamentary career he was an adherent of the Whig party, initially under the political leadership of the Duke of Newcastle (died 1768). The affairs of the East India Company (many of whose directors were MPs) during this period were a constant government preoccupation and the company directorate was accordingly divided into two factions, headed by Laurence Sullivan and Robert Clive (Clive of India), although their adherents did not necessarily divide on purely parliamentary-political lines. Within the world of Company politics Crabb Boulton was at first a follower of Sullivan, but in 1764 had gone over to Clive.

An uncritical recital of Crabb Boulton's career does not, however, take into account the worsening financial circumstances he must have found himself sliding into at the very date at which it has previously been assumed he was embarking on building a new house at Thorncroft. Throughout the 1760s and early '70s Crabb Boulton was playing

a considerable, though not a leading, part in the affairs of the East India Company in association with Lord Clive, George Wombwell, and Sir George Colebrooke, with the last of whom he engaged in speculative dealings in East India stock in 1771, which received adverse comment in the report of the committee of secrecy 1773.

That enquiry had been set up following the financial difficulties which the Company, then largely under the control of Sullivan and Colebrooke, had run into in 1772, incidentally a year in which there was a general financial crisis leading to the failure of a number of banks the following year. Today we have perhaps forgotten that bankruptcy among the commercial classes was a constant threat before the nineteenth-century introduction under law of limited liability companies. Indeed Sir George Colebrooke, the East India Company associate of Thorncroft's

builder, was from 1772 in steadily worsening financial difficulties. Colebrooke's Dublin bank had failed in 1773 and while his creditors initially permitted him to continue operating under trustees, he was nonetheless eventually forced into bankruptcy in 1777.¹⁵ It must be remembered that Henry Crabb Boulton had joined Colebrooke in the speculation in East India Company stock that had gone so disastrously wrong, and it cannot have been only Colebrooke who got his fingers burnt in the process. Colebrooke

was at the helm when the Company ran into financial difficulties ... he was accused, with some justification, of jobbing stock when in office; and suffered severe financial loss over arrangements for procuring votes in the Company's elections ... He was left a creditor of Lauchlin Maclean¹⁶ and heavily in debt ... He did not seek re-election to the direction in 1773, and ceased to be concerned in the Company's affairs.¹⁷

The financial mess which the East India Company had got into had prompted an Act of Parliament to regulate its affairs, and, even though it was Henry Crabb Boulton who was, with Government support, levered into the chairmanship following the 1772–3 debacle, his general financial position, possibly having to stand creditor to Colebrooke, cannot have been improving. It would thus make it an unlikely time to have considered the additional commitment of building a new house on what was only a leasehold property.

AGREEMENT TO REBUILD

Soon after acquiring Thorncroft, Boulton had discovered the early-Tudor house's true condition and a College memorandum recorded on 2 May 1763 that

Mr Boulton proposes with the leave of the Society of Merton College to pull down the Manor House and other Buildings at Thorncroft and to erect a substantial Brick House and Offices on some other part of the Estate the materials of the said House &c. to be used in the New Buildings the said Society

allowing Mr Boulton rough Timber for the Buildings from the Estate on the exchange of Timber if what is now growing may not answer the purpose.

The said Society will also give leave to said Mr Boulton to dig earth on Thornton Common for making bricks for the aforesaid Buildings.¹⁸

But this decision was not formally confirmed with Crabb Boulton until the following October while the full details of the agreement between the parties were hammered out. As a comparatively rare survival the (unfortunately one-sided) correspondence from Boulton preserved at Merton is worth quoting at length, as it details a good deal of the jockeying then undergone to protect the interests of Georgian landlords when allowing development by a tenant, and it illuminates Taylor's role in that respect. The correspondence is especially concerned with the quality of the replacement buildings and the maintenance of standing timber on the estate.

Negotiations had clearly started following Boulton's first intimation of the house's true state in a letter to Dr Barton of 27 November 1762, wherein he stated

... I have since been at Thorncroft was present at marking the timber for rebuilding the Bridge and the other repairs...

I have had a Survey of the House and Out Offices and find a large sum must be expended to put them in good repair most of the floors of the House must be [made] new and sundry other works that would take too much of your time to mention in a letter. I am therefore advised and greatly inclined to Build a good Brick and Flint House and Offices not inferior to the present, but as nothing can be done therein without the consent of the College I shall esteem it a favour to be informed from you if a proper application is made to the Society whether I may expect to succeed. The materials of the present House and Offices are proposed to be used in the new Edifice and I shall devise to have rough Timber to compleat the whole provided there is sufficient on the Estate without cutting down young or improper Trees. Now good Sir if such a Scheme can be executed the New Building shall be so substantial that no repairs will be wanting a great number of years and

give time for the young [trees] to grow and in the opinion of a good Surveyor will consequently improve the Estate. I shall leave the whole to your mature consideration and to have your thoughts on such an important subject will greatly oblige. . .

A week later, on 3 December, while Crabb Boulton was writing further, presumably having heard favourably from Dr Barton,

I intend soon to fix on a Plan for Building a New House and Offices at Thorncroft and shall consult the Surveyor in regard to New Timbers besides what Timber may be in the present House fit for the New Building,

there was still no clue to the surveyor's identity. It remained so until after Boulton's letter of 16 April 1763, wherein he wrote very briefly

At present can only acknowledge the rect. of your favour of the 13 Instant I am next week to meet my Surveyor in order to get the Plan of the intended Buildings and when I expect to reply to your said favour. . . .

Only in Boulton's letter of 20 April was it revealed whom he was consulting, as:

I did myself the pleasure of advising you the 16 Instant this Day I had a Consultation with Mr Taylor my Surveyor on a plan &c. for a New House to be built at Thorncroft and if you and the other gentlemen of Merton College have no objection We intend waiting on you at Oxford on Saturday or Monday seven-night in order to lay before you a Plan and to settle everything relative to pulling down the old Manor House which Mr Taylor thinks will expedite the affair better than any other method.

By 6 May it is clear that Robert Taylor was not only designing the new house but now also supervising the drafting of the agreement, on occasion directly with the College authorities:

I am favoured with your letter of 4th Instant with the Draught of an Instrument, which I immediately sent to Mr Taylor who proposes next week to give you his thoughts thereon, being at present engaged to go into Hertfordshire for a few days. I believe it will be

necessary to make some alterations in the said Instrument as I can't at present determine what other Buildings to pull down but the Mansion House and the Offices adjoining. . .

The main point at issue, while the exact plan of the house remained unresolved, was the value of timber from the estate to be allowed Boulton, either for the construction of the new house or, if not suitable, then for sale to raise funds for buying in the necessary timber; it was touched on by Boulton on 21 May, along with a request to be allowed also to fell walnut trees for sale:

As I cannot at present fix on any Plan I hope it will be satisfactory to specify a particular Sum you'll fix in the Instrument to be Fifteen Hundred Pounds as is much less than I intend I shall lay out in the intended Buildings.

By the start of June the substantive details were fixed between the parties, as set out in Crabb Boulton's letter of 2 June, clearly on Taylor's prompting:

. . . . I came from Thorncroft this morning and acquainted Mr Taylor with the contents of your said favour to which I shall now reply.

First, the substantial part of the Manor House and the other Edifices to be finished in Five Years from the execution of the Agreement.

Secondly, when the substantial parts of each Building shall be completed the College shall be at Liberty to examine the solidity of the Buildings and if they object to any part thereof the same to be referred to two independently capable persons.

Thirdly, that what is meant by rough timber is not to [be] annexed to Wainscoting or any other Ornaments, but that Floors, Doors and Window Shutters are always deem'd necessary and substantial parts of all Buildings and it is intended to be part of the Agreement.

Fourthly, the Sum of fifteen hundred pounds is intended so to be laid out in erecting and finishing the said Buildings and not in any internal Ornaments.

As there may not be sufficiency of Oak Ash or Elm on the premises liberty should be given to supply the deficiency with Walnut Tree.

I have now replied to every part of your favour and am highly obliged to your Society for the good opinion they entertain of my intentions.

If you and the Gentlemen approve ... you will do me the favour in sending an answer ... my intention is to lay the foundations of the Manor before Mich^s. next.

There merely remained the questions of whether the drawn up plans should be annexed to the agreement, a stipulation which Crabb Boulton sidestepped the following week, in his letter of 8th June:

I am glad your favour of the 4th Instant that your Society approve of the Limitation mentioned in my letter of the 2nd for the Completion of the substantial parts of the Manor and Out Houses at Thorncroft and hope that nothing will prevent my intention therein.

In reply to that part of your said favour relating to the annexing to the Instrument of the Agreement the Plan with a Description of the Scandlings of the Walls &c of the said intended Mansion &c Mr Taylor my Surveyor assures me that it is not usual to annex the Plan but the covenants are to lay out a precise sum in substantial Improvements and he desires to refer himself to Gentlemen conversant in Letting of Ground to Build on, and as you may depend for my own sake the Mansion &c shall be Built in a substantial manner suppose you will be satisfied without my sending you a Plan &c for although I shall if possible lay the foundation before Mich^s. I may make some alterations in the superstructure.

As the Walnut Trees are of annual value to me you may trust I shall not be lavish in cutting down more than absolutely necessary nor will I cut down any that are ornamental to the lands. The materials of the old Manor shall be used in the New Buildings and for the rest I believe they will serve for fire wood and save me the expense of cutting wood for that purpose if contrary to my expectation any of the old materials not wanted for any part of the above uses or in the Farm I shall certainly give you the amount thereof when sold. I intend the workmanship of all kinds should be at my charge.

I cannot conclude without again repeating that your Society having had a confidence in me that may be assured I will most justly execute the Manor house and all other intended Buildings upon a strong Foundation and hope the whole will when completed

meet with the approbation of all the Gentlemen of your College who will honour Thorncroft with their Company.

From the good relations between the parties we can perhaps presume a start was made on the new house by Michaelmas 1763 as planned. This is despite that only on the day after Michaelmas, 30 September, did Crabb Boulton advise that he 'at last had Mr Taylor and my attorney to settle the draft of the Agreement' and not until 9 November that the signed document, dated 11 October, was sent to the College for countersignature. The agreement granted

full liberty to take down and rebuild the said Manor House ... or any part thereof and sell and dispose of all the old materials thereof except such timber and materials as shall be fit to be employed in and about the messuage or tenement and such barns stables outhouses and offices as shall be built and set up by the said Henry Crabb Boulton or shall otherwise be made be made use of by the said Henry Crabb Boulton upon any part of the demised premises.¹⁹

A NEW SITE

While no details are known of the plan of the mediaeval house repaired by Isabel Wymeldon in 1443, the subsequent early-Tudor house of 1497 was scheduled in a 1629 survey of the manor by Elias Allen (Fig. 2) as

The Capitall Messuage on Court plan with Barns, Stables.... and other offices all built with timber but old, and also one Dovehouse of flint stone, the first two tiled, the rest with tiles and thatch, two gardens, one outhand, two small courts and one backe yard with hourse Homestalls.²⁰

Furthermore, by the time of its first and only reasonably accurate record in Rocque's 1767 *Map of Surrey* the early-Tudor house is there shown as a U-plan house with cross-wings extending forward from an elongated hall range, its forecourt facing east towards the bridge over the River Mole (Fig. 3).

Fig. 2. Elias Allen, manuscript *Plott and Description of the Sight of ye Manor of Thonecroft...*, 1629, detail. *The Warden and Fellows of Merton College, Oxford; Richard Garnier.*



Fig. 3. John Rocque, *Map of Surrey*, 1767, detail with block plan of Thorncroft adjacent to lower right serif of the large capital letter H. *Richard Garnier.*

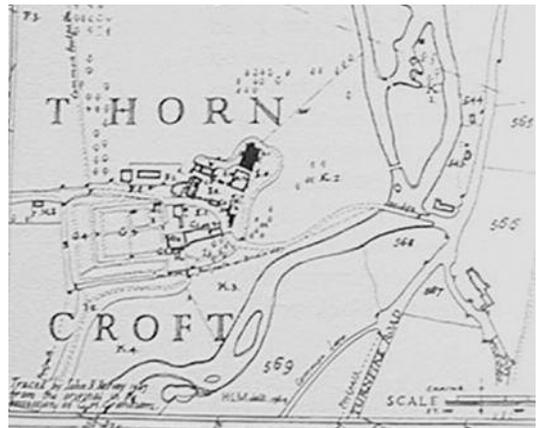


Fig. 4. George Gwilt, manuscript *Map of the Parish and Manor of Leatherhead*, 1782/3, detail with block plan of Thorncroft as originally built by (Sir) Robert Taylor.



Fig. 5. Thorncroft Manor, from east, in its current state. *Richard Garnier*.

As the successor of two previous houses, it has until now been difficult to establish whether Taylor's house occupies a new site or is on the site of and even incorporates part of the fabric of the preceding building. Most authors have assumed the latter,²¹ a supposition seemingly backed up by the curious position of the canted bay to one end of the original extent of Taylor's north façade, and the curiously cranked and very thick wall running along the back of Taylor's build. Both these could arguably have been explained if Taylor had built directly off, or even incorporated part of the north cross-wing of the U-plan early-Tudor house. That could have meant that the bay was central to an elevation partly composed of pre-standing fabric, and the cranked, over-thick wall was a survival of the earlier building that had otherwise since been demolished.²² The correspondence now unearthed at Merton, however, makes it abundantly clear that Boulton's house as designed by Taylor was for a new site, if one adjacent to the old manor house. The matter of a new site is

settled by reference to the rebuilding licence of 11 October 1763, wherein Boulton is described as

inclined to take down the said Manor House, Barns, Stables and other buildings or some part thereof and to rebuild the same in a different manner form *size and situation*²³ [my italics].

THE CHARACTER AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TAYLOR'S HOUSE

Until now the received assessment of Thorncroft is typified by the way Marcus Binney's standard monograph on the architect mentions the house only as an exemplar of his patronage by the mercantile class. Likewise the gazetteer description of the house in Nairn and Pevsner has it as

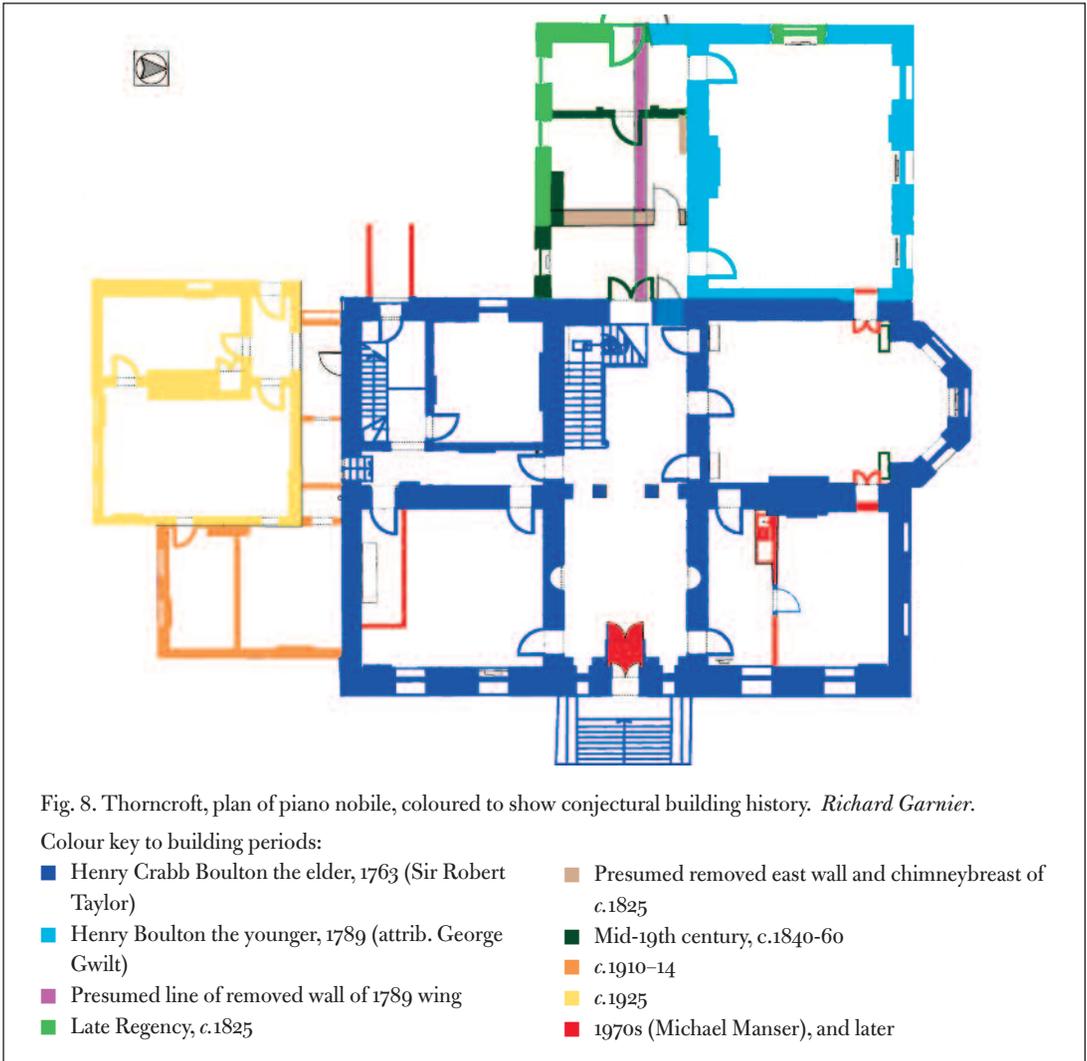
A small stock-brick house by Sir Robert Taylor, 1772, enlarged c.1800. Five-by-two bays, the main front plain except for a heavy porch and flight of steps. Nowhere near the standard of his best work²⁴

Fig. 6. Thorncroft, entrance hall, towards stairs.
Richard Garnier.



Fig. 7. Thorncroft, stairs with triumphal-arch motif to upper back wall.
DLG Architects.





Their judgement of the house in their book's introduction is 'negligible'. They even suggest that one of Taylor's assistants was better than him, as

The best mid-C18 house in Surrey ... *Sir Robert Taylor's* Asgill house at Richmond of 1760 is basically a Late Palladian villa, superbly executed.... Either Taylor or one of his assistants* [**footnote*: perhaps the latter, because Taylor's other house in Surrey – Thorncroft, at Leatherhead – is negligible] deserves to be better known as a first-rate artist as well as a successful business man.²⁵

However, it is argued here that Thorncroft's previous architectural-historical assessment is both uninformed and ill-judged. This is not only because its position within the sequence of his villas, both in date and siting, was misunderstood; but also because its architectural source has now been identified.

The earliest record of the newly rebuilt mid-Georgian house designed by Taylor is Gwilt's 1782/3 *Map ... of Leatherhead*, wherein it is shown as a rectangular block with an axial perron front and back

and a canted bay to the north front hard by its north-west corner (Fig. 4). Meanwhile, the elevations are of one and a half storeys over a slobbered flint plinth with arched windows to the half-sunken basement. The flat entrance façade is devoid of any break forward to give central emphasis, being instead articulated with an applied tetrastyle Tuscan portico *in antis* contained within the height of the *piano nobile* and approached by an axial perron (Fig. 5). This portico is the ‘heavy porch’²⁶ of Nairn and Pevsner’s description and it should be also noted that the façades are of seven bays by four on the south and three (allowing for the canted bay) on the north, rather than of five by two as given by them. The roof rests directly on an eaves cornice. The tripartite rhythm of the portico continues inside with a tetrastyle Ionic screen (Fig. 6) dividing front from back hall, which contains the scroll-undercut cantilevered stairs (Fig. 7). These are constructed in wood and rise in three flights to the first floor only, below a Venetian window in the back wall, now partly blinded. While the library and saloon to the north (right) of the central hall originally interconnected, the dining room and business room to the south of the hall are interposed by a corridor leading to the secondary stairs in the south-west angle rising right through the house from basement to attics (Fig. 8). In the great majority of Taylor’s villas the main and secondary stairs are adjacent. Their separation here is noteworthy, and will be returned to below.

The surviving decoration by Taylor makes greater sense in the light of the house’s revised dating, as much of it is late Neo-Palladian in style combined with light Rococo touches. But at Thorncroft there are also Early Renaissance influences that have not been appreciated within Taylor’s *oeuvre* before, besides characteristics that are more typical of his later works. This evident stylistic dichotomy at Thorncroft stems directly from the way the date of the house straddles the stylistic shift in Taylor’s career, from Neo-Palladian *cum* Rococo to Neo-Classical.

Accordingly, the Neo-Palladian and Rococo elements, although late manifestations, conform better to the 1763 date of the house and were not credible for the formerly accepted date of 1772. Thus in the lower hall and over the stairs there is a pair of lightly Rococo small ceiling roses, along with a repeated actual or implied Palladian triumphal arch motif. Besides the Venetian window over the stairs, with roundels above its side-lights (Fig. 7), on the flank walls of the entrance hall these implied motifs take the form of aedicule niches flanked by doors with recessed roundels over for busts (Fig. 9). Again, the former library to the right of the entrance hall and the canted bay have window linings whose front arrises are richly carved with a bold spiral ribbon and flower raffle that would have been out of date by 1772 (Fig. 11). Meanwhile the hall has a plain dado rail with equally projecting mouldings top and bottom (rather than receding from the top downwards and as though to take a band of Vitruvian scroll – Fig. 9), a Neo-Palladian motif which Taylor had used previously at his 1750s town houses in Lincoln’s Inn Fields and Artillery Lane, but which does not occur in any of his houses later than Thorncroft.²⁷ Likewise, Thorncroft appears to be the last instance within his *oeuvre* both of an asymmetrical plan and a cantilevered stair constructed in wood. As the current balustrade is a later alteration the stairs may well originally have had a Chinese-Chippendale banister, as employed by Taylor on this type of stairs in the 1750s. An eaved roof as at Thorncroft, rather than one concealed behind a parapet, and arched basement windows to the rustic, by contrast, are features more typical of his later works and are here early manifestations. Similarly, even though the aedicule niches in the hall form part of a Palladian motif, their Ionic impost mouldings at the springing point are paralleled at Danson Hill (1762–65) (Fig. 10) and Sharpham (1770), as well as elsewhere among his later works.

From the catalogue above it can be seen how the house exhibits some features originating from the



Fig. 9. Thorncroft, entrance hall south wall; the right-hand doorcase and roundel over it is repeated to left, out of photograph. *Richard Garnier.*

earlier half of Taylor's career and others pointing towards later in his life. This idea is readily appreciated from a study of the following table (Fig. 12) which demonstrates how Thorncroft straddles the divide between Taylor's early works of the 1750s, often with Rococo interiors, and the more mature works from the mid-1760s onwards, when he had converted from Neo-Palladian to Neo-Classical.

Reference must also be made here to Taylor's rather un-Palladian receptiveness to Early Renaissance influences, a previously unremarked facet of his style that is particularly evident at Thorncroft, as elsewhere in his earlier works. These

Early Renaissance characteristics include corridors with groin-vaulting springing from Tuscan block imposts (Fig. 13), as also found at Braxted Lodge, 35 Lincoln's Inn Fields, Harleyford Manor, 56–58 Artillery Lane, Twickenham House, Barlaston Hall, Asgill House, and probably Coptfold Hall. But, as the subsequent dropping by an additional pane of the upper windows at Thorncroft has blurred the original cast of Taylor's front elevation, its perhaps unexpected source is also pre-Palladian. This is the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano, near Florence, dating from c.1485 and designed by the early-Renaissance architect Giuliano da Sangallo in



Fig. 10. Danson Hill (1763–65), by (Sir) Robert Taylor, entrance hall, end wall treatment.
Richard Garnier.

concert with Lorenzo de' Medici (Fig. 14). Poggio a Caiano has a broad, somewhat ill-proportioned hexastyle colonnade with a pediment above squeezed in below the windows of the upper floor, forming a single-storey portico front to a recessed porch. It was one of the first non-fortified villas of the Renaissance, and so the progenitor of the simpler farmhouse-inspired villa that became the ideal type, its applied portico and symmetrical plan leading directly to the perfected models of Palladio's that were so influential on Inigo Jones and then in turn on the Neo-Palladians of eighteenth-century Britain. Despite its pivotal role within the development of the

Italian Renaissance villa, the villa at Poggio a Caiano is nonetheless a highly unusual source for a British Neo-Palladian architect to have adopted for direct quotation. This is no doubt partly because it is an Early Renaissance building, so considered gauche and unschooled in comparison with Palladio. Nonetheless it is curious that Poggio was not studied by Palladian theorists, as it is in all probability the earliest application in the Renaissance of a portico, or classical temple front, to a secular building. It had probably come about because of Lorenzo's keen interest in the writings of Alberti, the Renaissance's first published architectural theorist,

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	Documented or accepted date	Roof: Parapet or eaves	Asymmetric plan outline	Basement / surbase window heads	Tuscan block arch/ vault impost	Parallel moulded dado rail	Undercut cantilevered stairs
Braxted Lodge, Essex	1752–56	parapet		?	yes		?
43/44 Parliament St	1753–58	parapet	n/a	square			wood, not undercut
35 Lincoln's Inn Fields (dem.)	1755	parapet	n/a	square	yes	yes	?
Harleyford Manor, Bucks.	1755–57	parapet	yes	square	yes		wood
Comarques, Thorpe le Soken	c.1755–60	parapet	yes	?			wood
Watlington Park, Oxon.	c.1755–57	parapet	yes	square			not cantilevered
56–58 Artillery Lane	1756–57	parapet	n/a	square	yes	yes	no
Twickenham House, Abingdon	1756–57	parapet	n/a	square	yes		wood
Coptfold Hall, Essex (dem.)	1756–58	parapet	no	?square	probably		?
Barlaston Hall, Staffs.	1756–58	parapet	no	square	yes		wood
Bayfordbury, Herts. (remodelled)	1758–62	parapet	no	square			wood
Broom House, Fulham (dem.)	c.1760–63	parapet/ eaves	yes	?square			?
The Oaks, Carshalton (dem.)	c.1760–62	eaves	no	square			?
Beaver Hall, Southgate (dem.)	c.1760–62	parapet	no	arched			?
Asgill House, Richmond	1761–63	eaves	no	arched	yes		stone
Ottershaw Park, Surrey (dem.)	1761–63	eaves	no	arched			?
Thorncroft Manor, now dated	1762–65	eaves	yes	arched	yes	yes	wood
Danson Hill, Bexleyheath	1762–65	eaves	no	square			stone
Chute Lodge, nr. Andover	c.1768–70	eaves	no	square			stone
Purbrook House, Hants. (dem.)	c.1770–73	eaves/ parapet	no	arched			?
Sharpham House, Devon	c.1770–73	eaved	no	square			stone
Mount Clare, Roehampton	1771–73	eaved	no	arched			stone

 Fig. 12. Table of comparative constructional or stylistic characteristics within Taylor's *oeuvre*



Fig. 11. Thorncroft, former saloon, richly carved window lining and skirting of 1760s campaign, the later lowered dado rail inserted in 1789 campaign.
Richard Garnier.

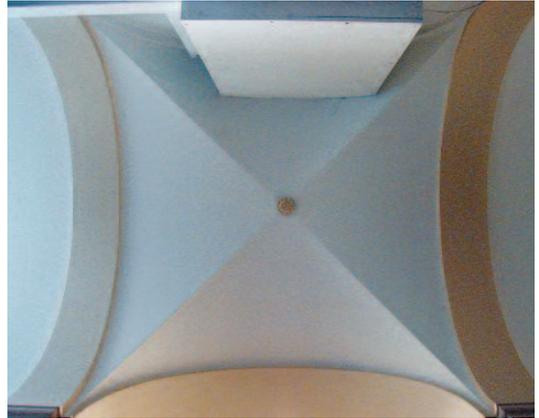


Fig. 13. Thorncroft, piano nobile service corridor with (top) groin-vaulting and (bottom) detail of Tuscan block-imposts.
Richard Garnier.

whose *De re aedificatoria* Lorenzo insisted was sent him chapter-by-chapter as it came off the printing presses. As pointed out by Professor Ackerman, ‘Alberti intended to give the dwellings of important citizens a solemnity and magnificence previously reserved for sacred edifices’²⁸ by stating in *De re aedificatoria*,

The tympanum [pediment] in private buildings should not be made so as to approach in any respect the majesty of a temple. But the vestibule may be improved by a slightly elevated porch and even improved by the dignity of a tympanum²⁹

The crucial word of Ackerman’s gloss on Alberti is *citizens*, rather than *princes*, showing how the villa at Poggio a Caiano, as a trailblazing villa with a portico front, and built for the head of one of Florence’s leading mercantile families that only later advanced to be titular rulers of their city-state,³⁰ was so apposite a model for a London merchant’s villa not far from the metropolis. The analogy here is that Taylor, on behalf of his mercantile patron, and in conformity with the precepts of the Ancient Roman architectural theorist Vitruvius,³¹ was making a pertinent connection with the most famous commercial family of Renaissance



Fig. 14. Guisto Utens, *Villa Medici, Poggio a Caiano*, painting, 1598/9, detail of entrance front with probably the earliest application in the Renaissance of an entrance portico to a secular dwelling. *Museo di Firenze com'era*.

Italy, bearing in mind the way the East India Company was by then well on the way to carving out a principality of its own in India. It was not for nothing that the sobriquet 'nabob' with its overtones of administrative power³² had been applied in Georgian Britain to the British moguls who earned their fortunes from the sub-continent, as the Crabb Boulton brothers had done. It must here be remembered that Henry Crabb Boulton was not only an East India director but was elected deputy chairman of the Company in 1764, while Thorncroft was building, and chairman in 1765 (the first of three times), arguably before the house was finished.

There can be no doubt that, as a leasehold property, a new house or villa at Thorncroft could only be supported on the injection of external funds by a moneyed City man such as Crabb Boulton.

Indeed, Professor Ackerman, when the 1985 A. C. Mellon lecturer at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, USA, defined the villa type as

a building in the country designed for its owner's enjoyment and relaxation. Though it may also be the center of an agricultural enterprise, the pleasure factor is what essentially distinguishes the villa residence from the farmhouse and the villa estate from the farm. The farmhouse tends to be simple in structure and to conserve ancient forms that do not require the intervention of a designer. The villa is typically the product of an architect's imagination and asserts its modernity....

The villa cannot be understood apart from the city ... and its economic situation is that of a satellite.... The villa can be built and supported either by monetary surpluses generated by urban commerce and industry or, when it is sustained by agriculture, by the need of

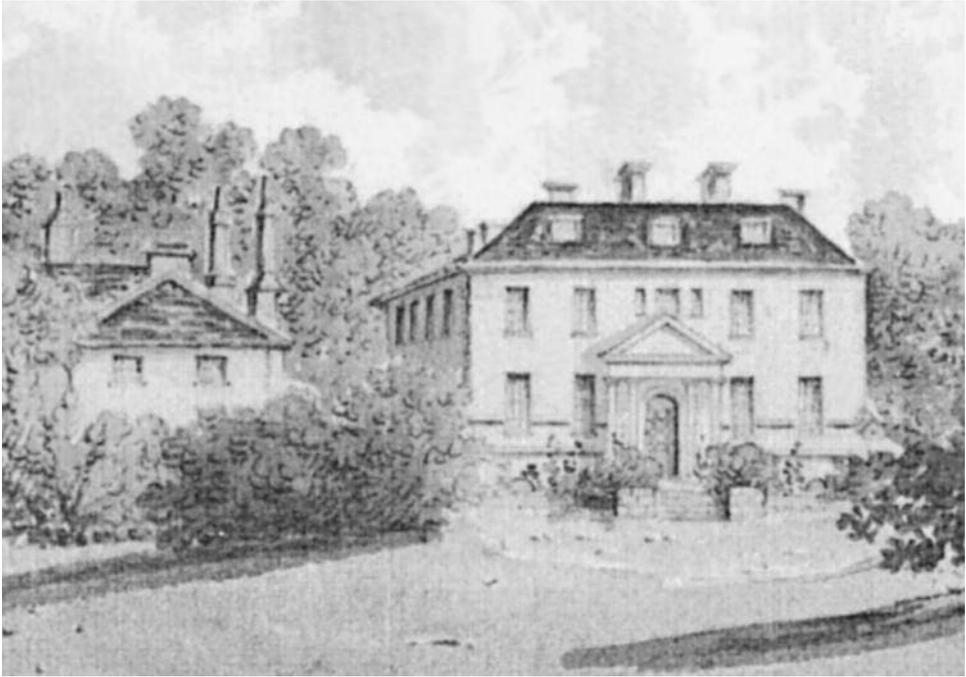


Fig. 15. J. Hassell, *Thorncroft Manor*, 1829, topographical watercolour drawing, detail showing the then recently dropped windows and added dormers.

urban centres for the surpluses it produces beyond its own requirements ... Consequently the fate of the villa has been intimately tied to that of the city....

While the acquisition of a villa has generally been possible only for persons of wealth and power ..., it is nevertheless a bourgeois concept in the strict sense of the word, responding to the needs of the city dweller....

The villa is ... a paradigm not only of architecture but of ideology; it is a myth or fantasy through which over the course of millennia persons whose position of privilege is rooted in urban commerce and industry have been able to expropriate rural land, often requiring, for the realisation of the myth, the care of a labouring class or of slaves.³³

Two centuries earlier, Charles Middleton, writing in 1793, similarly set out the definition of the villa:

Villas may be considered under three different descriptions: first, as the occasional and temporary

retreats of the nobility and persons of fortune from their town residence and must of course be in the vicinity of the metropolis; secondly, as country houses of wealthy citizens and persons in official stations which also cannot be far removed from the capital ... thirdly, the smaller kind of provincial edifices considered either as hunting seats or the habitations of country gentlemen of moderate fortune. Elegance, compactness and convenience are the characteristics of such buildings in contradistinction to the magnificent and extensive range of country seats of our nobility and gentry.³⁴

Taylor is generally categorised as a second-generation Neo-Palladian architect and his contribution to the development of the villa is very distinctive. First, his villas were nearly all

astylar: classical in proportion but without an order, that is without columns or pilasters and with a simple cornice.³⁵

Secondly,

Taylor's planning breaks radically from Palladian prototypes, ... [which] are on a noughts-and-crosses grid around a central domed hall or saloon, with small spiral staircases in the corners, following Palladio's view that staircases should be small and not upset the symmetry of the plan. Taylor, by contrast placed his staircases in the centre of the house where no direct light was available except from above.³⁶

Thirdly, those villas he designed in the 1750s were often of asymmetrical outline on plan. Fourth, while other neo-Palladian architects' villas extend via wings to subsidiary or service accommodation, most of Taylor's villas had no such dependencies in sight, being

set apart in the landscape, often in exposed positions, with commanding views to and from the house. This was the exact antithesis of the traditional site of a country house.... For convenience of water and shelter, in a hole, so it neither sees nor is seen.³⁷

So with very few exceptions Taylor's villas were commissioned for virgin sites, standing high up or prominently on a river bend, to see and be seen. That visual isolation was additionally emphasised by a complete lack of compromising ancillary or service buildings diffusing the well-defined outline of the house itself. Thorncroft, on the other hand, was a rebuild of an ancient, adjacent Tudor manor house, standing low in an occasionally-flooding river plain, bowered in wooded plantings. There was a functioning farm close by (the contemporary leases refer to the farmer as a sub-tenant in the farmhouse³⁸) with all the requisite buildings that go with that. Perhaps because of the lack of space, the kitchen block was built adjacent to the replacement manor house, almost adjoining the south front. The house itself additionally seems to depart from Taylor's ideal villa models by having a main stair that is admittedly central but lit from a window in the back wall rather than from above, and furthermore the secondary stair is again not top-lit nor adjacent, but tucked away in the

south-west corner of the plan where it communicated conveniently with the adjacent kitchen block. Finally, the applied portico *in antis* means the house departs from Taylor's astylar norm.

It was therefore difficult to see Thorncroft as fitting into Marcus Binney's identification of 'Taylor's major contribution to English architecture ... his ingenious and original development of the Palladian villa'.³⁹ Thorncroft has also been denigrated on stylistic grounds, because its assumed date of 1772 or even 1776, well after Taylor's mid-1760s shift from Neo-Palladianism to Neo-Classicism, made it seem gauche and old fashioned, especially when considered beside its supposedly contemporary mature masterworks such as Sharpham and Mount Clare. However, although the house can hardly be described as Neo-Classical, it does show Taylor questioning the received sources of Neo-Palladianism and feeling back to the Early Renaissance for inspiration. The result here may not be as felicitous as his more assured works either earlier or later in his career, but that is the consequence of both the very early stage in his conversion away from Palladianism and the use of the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano as a model, itself always regarded as exhibiting *gaucheries*.⁴⁰ Such reactions, however, are aesthetic value judgements, whereas in historical terms the house should be seen as socially and academically innovatory, raising the question of how easily the educated elite in 1763 would have recognised an allusion to Medicean polity. It is the innovatory aspect of Thorncroft that has never been realised: it perhaps deserves to be considered Neo-Albertian in style. This strengthens Sir Howard Colvin's assessment of Taylor as 'an architect ... who was by no means content to follow established Palladian prototypes'.⁴¹ Additionally the house should be appreciated as an early exemplar of motifs which Taylor used in his later career, including an eaved roof, arched basement windows, and (as will be discussed below) fully-glazed astylar Venetian windows.

THE OFFICE BUILDINGS

Gwilt's map of 1783 shows both the new manor house (as a blacked-in block plan) and (in outline) the service buildings that had been added to it by then (Fig. 4). These service buildings comprised the kitchen immediately south of the house, the stables across the yard to the west, the gardener's cottage and the entrance lodge across the bridge at the gate by the public road. With the exception of the kitchen block these all remain today, albeit altered.

The appearance of Taylor's kitchen block can be gleaned from two early- to mid-nineteenth century topographical views of the house, one by Hassell of 1829 (Fig. 15) and the other a lithograph of 1842 (Fig. 16). Although neither of these in its own right is particularly well defined or even accurate, the latter

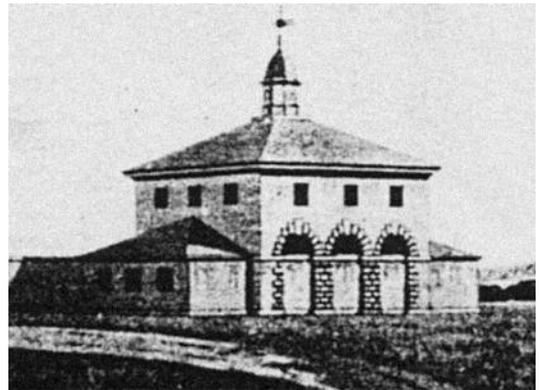
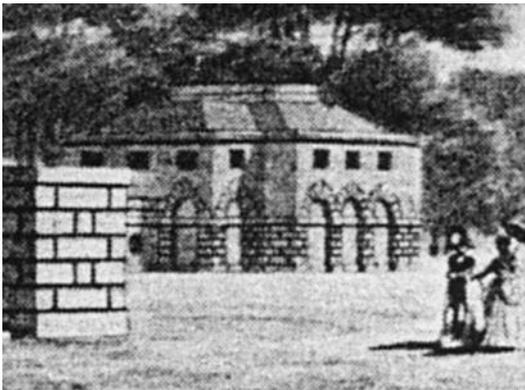
is of adequate help, showing the kitchen to have been of a recognisable Taylor service-building formula, and related to that by him at Gorhambury, Hertfordshire, of 1777 (Fig. 17), but even more similar to one at Purbrook, Hampshire, of c.1770 (Fig. 18), although considerably earlier than either. The Thorncroft kitchen would have been a tripartite building, the square, three-bay, central section standing one and a half storeys under a pyramidal hipped roof. Flanking this were hipped-roof single-storey side-pieces with, facing east, a large Venetian window in each. Between them, the ground floor of the central section had a triple arcade, probably of rusticated brickwork and blind except for the arched tops which were glazed to light the domestic offices inside.



Fig. 16. Anon., *Thorncroft Manor*, lithograph, 1842.

Below left: Fig. 17. Thomas Malton, *Gorhambury, Herts.*, 1792, aquatint, detail of service block.

Below right: Fig. 18. Thomas Malton, *Purbrook Manor, Hants.*, 1792, aquatint, detail (enlarged) of service block.



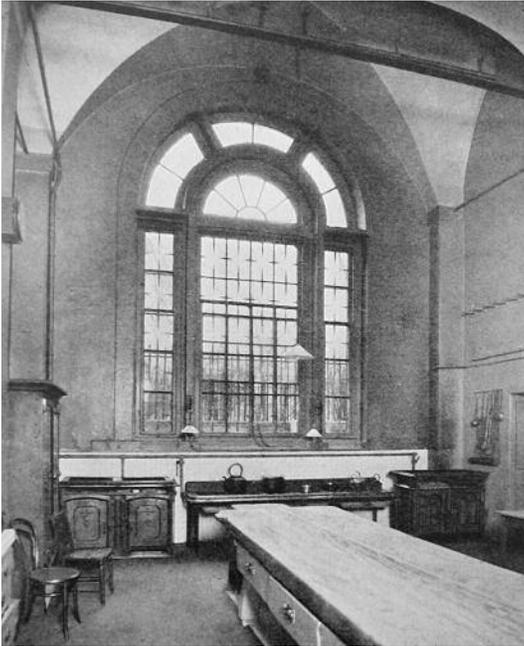


Fig. 19. No. 10 Downing Street, London, fully-glazed astylar Venetian window of 1781-83 in kitchen, by Sir Robert Taylor. Rephotographed from *Survey of London*, XVI, pl. 118. *Richard Garnier*.

The Venetian windows of the Thorncroft kitchen were of Taylor's characteristic developed form with the oversailing arch fully glazed, a form which was supposedly first used at the Bank of England in 1765. However, the windows at the Bank are Corinthian, in contrast to those at Thorncroft which were astylar. They therefore now emerge as the first examples of Taylor's astylar version of his fully-glazed Venetian window model, preceding their only previously-known use at the 10 Downing Street kitchen added by Taylor in 1781-83 (Fig. 19), nearly 20 years later than at Thorncroft. Nor must the possibility be overlooked of their just preceding their stylar brethren at the Bank.

The Gwilt map establishes that the current footprint of the stables is as originally built and that the single-storey outshot at the back is not a subsequent extension as might otherwise be supposed (Fig. 20). The east, entrance, façade of this building

has been so radically altered, first to convert it to a garage for cars, and then in the Manser campaign of the 1970s (see below) converting it to offices, that it is difficult to be sure about its exact original disposition. It may well have related to the cast of Thorncroft Cottage (Fig. 21), the former gardener's house, diagonally across Thorncroft Lane to the south, with square first-floor windows (some possibly blind) sitting directly on an implied plinth composed of two parallel stone band courses, echoing the parapet of the outshot on the opposite (west) side of the stables.

While an entrance lodge is shown on Gwilt's 1782/3 map in the location of the present lodge, Brayley declares that the one then standing (1841) had been designed by Col. Bethune, the then tenant. The building in its present form (Fig. 22) has clearly not changed since the time of the 1842 print of Thorncroft (Fig. 16), but it may be a Grecian updating of the original lodge by Taylor, as it still relates closely to a lodge of the 1760s attributable to Taylor at Chipstead, near Sevenoaks, Kent (Fig. 23).⁴²

THE TAYLOR VILLA ENLARGED

By the time of F. T. Young's 1822 survey map of Thorncroft (Fig. 26), the mid-Georgian house had received an additional back wing (Fig. 24) running westwards from the saloon (the canted-bay room). The previous authority for the extension of the original Taylor house, and the period in which it took place, is Brayley's:

Henry Crabb Boulton, a more recent lessee, erected a handsome house on the site of the old mansion, from a design of Sir Robert Taylor, in 1772; and having no issue, devised it to his brother Richard. His son Henry considerably enlarged the mansion; but after he had purchased the manor of Leatherhead, he removed to Givons Grove, where he died in 1828.⁴³

While this chronology could be reduced, because Gwilt's 1782/3 map of Leatherhead shows the footprint of the house unchanged since it was first



Fig. 20. Thorncroft, former stables, west (rear) elevation. *Richard Garnier*.



Fig. 21. Thorncroft, former gardener's cottage, the far right bay originally blind to ground floor. *Richard Garnier*.



Fig. 22. Thorncroft, entrance lodge, originally by (Sir) Robert Taylor, but remodelled with Grecian detailing for Col. Drinkwater Bethune, c.1840. The remaining arched windows consort uneasily with the Grecian recasting. *Richard Garnier.*



Fig. 23. Chipstead Place, Chevening, Kent, entrance lodge of early 1760s, here attributed to (Sir) Robert Taylor. *Richard Garnier.*

built, and Henry Boulton re-assigned the lease to a replacement tenant in 1814, it can now be revealed that the extension dates from 1789. This is on the basis of a newly discovered but undated and anonymous manuscript estate survey of Thorncroft in the Merton College Records. On internal evidence (in association with the correspondence cited above

revealing the start date of the Taylor campaign) this survey must have been done in 1789; it refers to the building work then 'going forward', providing a new large drawing room, water closet and salon with bed chambers over, and to the new house having been started about 26 years earlier.⁴⁴ As the house was started in 1763, the date of the survey made 26 years



Fig. 24. Thorncroft, north elevation with 1789 addition, here attributed to George Gwilt, to right of canted bay. *DLG Architects*.

later must be 1789, when the back wing was described as being built. As Taylor had died the previous year he cannot have been involved, but George Gwilt emerges instead as the likely designer. For not only was he the County Surveyor for Surrey from 1771 and the builder of nearby Leatherhead Bridge in 1782,⁴⁵ but Henry Boulton the younger had already employed him to survey and draw up the 1782/3 map of the parish encountered above.⁴⁶

Sir Howard Colvin's *Dictionary* classes Gwilt as 'a hardworking surveyor rather than an architectural artist',⁴⁷ and while the list of his executed commissions indicates he was well capable of designing buildings, the utilitarian character of the majority of them perhaps shows how the architectural infelicities of the addition at Thorncroft may well be due to him, for its attempt to conform to the existing building is only partly successful. First, although it proves an erroneous impression, the addition makes the north front appear symmetrical at first glance, but it is in

fact of three bays, not two bays like Taylor's elevation on the further side of the canted bay. Secondly, the proportions of the windows differ from Taylor's and the separation between them varies. Thirdly, the horizontal stratification of Taylor's elevations is respected but the flint-facing of the plinth is not followed through and was left plain. Despite its current *ad-hoc*-seeming appearance there are signs that the west, return elevation of Gwilt's addition has been radically altered by the irregular insertion of windows and was originally blank (Fig. 27). That would have been a not inappropriate treatment considering that, when first built, this façade abutted the yard, hardly an appropriate outlook for a 'polite' room, as the room in question was the new drawing room mentioned in the 1789 survey which detailed the works then in progress.

At the same time as the west wing was added, Henry Boulton must have undertaken a certain amount of stylistic updating of the original rooms in



Fig. 25. Thorncroft, former saloon, marble chimneypiece probably inserted in the 1789 campaign, which is here attributed to George Gwilt. *Richard Garnier*.

Taylor's mid-Georgian house. By the later 1780s their Neo-Palladian character would have seemed outmoded, and details such as door cases in the library were substituted with laterally-fluted architraves typical of the so-called 'Adam' Neo-Classical style then prevailing. There is also a statuary marble chimneypiece in the canted-bayed saloon, stylistically dateable to c.1790, which was doubtless introduced in the same campaign of modernisation (Fig. 25).

SUBSEQUENT ALTERATIONS

Young's 1822 survey map of Thorncroft (Fig. 26), carried out for Merton College, is so accurate that the still extant field and other enclosure boundaries that he shows compare very exactly with subsequent OS maps. This accuracy makes one confident that his footprint of the house can be relied on. It shows the

back north-west wing as narrower than today, its south wall aligned on a point just north of the centre axis-line running through the central entrance-cum-stair hall of the Taylor house. There must therefore have been a subsequent widening of this wing to its present dimensions, as appears to be borne out by an examination of its structure and the detailing of its fittings. Otherwise, the alterations to the elevations included the dropping of window cills in places on both floors and the insertion of dormer windows in the roof. On the entrance front the upper floor windows, except over the portico, were lengthened by one pane (so lessening the similarity with Poggio a Caiano) and the ground-floor windows were dropped through the sill-course into the plinth band of the *piano nobile* (Fig. 28) (as distinct from the flint-faced supporting plinth on which this floor stands). The windows of the 1789 wing must have been similarly altered. The original disposition of the first floor windows can still be seen in the unaltered blind window recesses to the first floor of the south front. A date of c.1825 for the work can be suggested as the alterations are visible in Hassell's 1829 (Fig. 15) watercolour of the house, but the wing is shown by Young's 1822 survey in its original, narrower form.

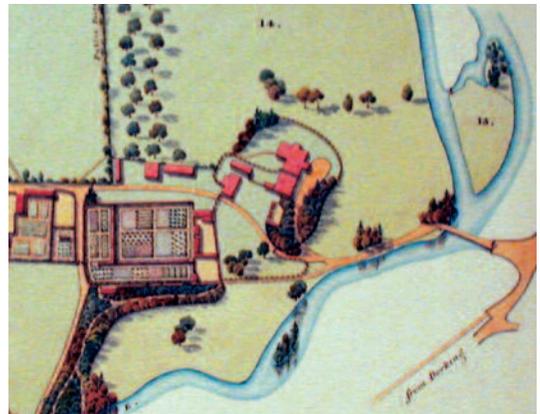


Fig. 26. F. T. Young, *Map of Thorncroft Estate*, 1822, watercolour, detail showing 1789 wing added to Taylor's villa. *The Warden and Fellows of Merton College, Oxford*; *Richard Garnier*.



Fig. 27. Thorncroft, from west, the return façade of 1789 wing here attributed to George Gwilt but with later-inserted windows, to left, the 1970s reflective-glazed office addition by Michael Manser, to right. *Richard Garnier.*

Accordingly the campaign of building and alteration must have occurred between 1822 and 1829, and been for either J. W. Bristow or James Tower, the next two tenants after Mr Stirling, who succeeded Henry Boulton the younger (see Appendix).

On the evidence of the successive OS maps from the mid-nineteenth century there was then very little change at Thorncroft until sometime shortly before the 1914 OS map, which shows the Taylor kitchen block replaced by a new, smaller and lower building (as partly still exists) and the new secondary lodge that had been built at the point where the drive up to the front door divides off from Thorncroft Lane. This campaign was probably for Edith Belle Drummond, the owner of the property from 1911 to 1918; indeed a planning application was lodged with the local authority in March 1911.⁴⁸ The new kitchen was later enlarged, probably in the inter-war years, for Mence Wilkinson (owner 1924–39). During the Second World War hutting was put up in the meadow between the house and the river. Finally, these last were cleared away at the time of the construction of

the large reflective-glazed office block designed by Michael Manser in the 1970s. The local planners were fearful of the latter's effect on the Georgian house, but on completion it received quite some critical acclaim as a remarkably self-effacing structure, despite its considerable bulk (Fig. 27).



Fig. 28. Thorncroft, SE angle, showing original first-floor window proportions in blind windows to south elevation, left. *Richard Garnier.*

APPENDIX

Successive owners (*in italics*) and tenants of Thorncroft Manor

Merton College, freeholders, 1266–1904, their founder Dom. Walter de Merton, having been endowed with it by Philip Lord Basset and his wife Ela, Countess of Warwick ‘for the said term of his life and after his death to the House of Scholars of Merton founded by him at Mauden in Surrey’. In 1267 there was ‘confirmation by Gilbert of Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hereford, at the instance of Prince Edward, of the grant of made to Walter de Merton’.⁴⁹

1443: Isabel Wymeldon, who was responsible for ‘major improvements to the old manor including division of the great hall from the chamber, daubing the wattle walls of the rooms, thatching and tiling, putting windows and doors in the barn, the digging of a well, the building of a bridge, hooks [hinges] for the great gate and other attendant expenses’, totalling £4 7s. 1d.⁵⁰

1497: Richard Fitzjames, Bishop of Rochester and Warden of Merton College, responsible for ‘the new building of the Manor of Thorncroft’.⁵¹

1545–71: Robert Gardiner, Sergeant of the Wine Cellar to Elizabeth I, the tenancy remaining in his family until 1640.⁵²

1649: Walter Rogers of Leatherhead, followed by his son-in-law, Sir Thomas Bludworth (subsequently the blustering Lord Mayor of London at the time of the Great Fire, 1666).⁵³

1660: Richard Dalton, Sergeant of the Wine Cellar to Charles II, in whose family the tenancy continued until the 1750s.⁵⁴ A later Richard Dalton last renewed the lease from Merton College in December 1757.⁵⁵

Circa 1761–62: Henry Crabb Boulton was assigned the lease.

1773: house bequeathed⁵⁶ to Henry Crabb Boulton the elder’s brother, Richard Crabb Boulton,⁵⁷ who died in 1777, when the lease passed to his son Henry

Crabb Boulton the younger, Norway merchant.⁵⁸ He remained in possession of the lease until ~

1814: when leave was given to assign to ‘Ja^s. Stirling of Warnford Court, Throgmorton Street, London, Esq.’.⁵⁹

1821: ‘Lt. Gen. Archibald Brown, Esq., of Sackville Street, Piccadilly’, in East India Company’s military service.⁶⁰

1824: lease assigned to J. W. Bristow,⁶¹ followed later by James Tower, Esq., Master in Chancery, who died in 1836.⁶²

1836/7: Colonel Drinkwater Bethune, Commissary General, died 16 January 1844 and buried in Leatherhead churchyard.⁶³ He had been at Gibraltar during its long siege in 1782–83 and his published account of it became a military classic. He is described by Brayley as having designed the entrance lodge guarding the bridge on the east bank of the river,⁶⁴ although this was probably a remodelling of a pre-existing lodge originally designed by Sir Robert Taylor.⁶⁵

1890s: private school, Walter Lawrence, proprietor.⁶⁶

1904: *Arthur Tritton, J.P.*, who bought freehold from Merton College.⁶⁷

1911: sold to *Edith Belle Drummond*,⁶⁸ probably the owner who rebuilt the kitchen block and carried out various internal modernisations to the house.

1924: bought by *Mence Wilkinson*,⁶⁹ who presumably enlarged the new kitchen block and carried out other improvements to the house.

1939: sold to *Edmund Howard*, the last private occupier.⁷⁰

World War II: requisitioned for Canadian Army.⁷¹

Post-war: alternately used as offices and secretarial college.⁷²

1971, April 6: purchased at auction by *Howard Humphries & Sons* for their head office as they were on point of being displaced from their previous HQ under the Epsom Town Council Relief Road

proposals.⁷³ This firm, which in 1973–75 employed Michael Manser to add a large cuboid reflective-glass clad office block to the rear of the Georgian house,⁷⁴ was later acquired by *Kellogg Brown & Root Ltd.*, who have recently sold and leased back the premises. A planning application was lodged last year for further office accommodation on the site, designed by DLG Architects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am duly grateful to Mr Julian Reid, Archivist, Merton College, Oxford, who (initially at my request) searched for and found the correspondence and indentures cited in this article, which had not previously been known. I should like to thank the The Warden and Fellows of Merton College, Oxford, for permission to quote from documents in their archives and reproduce two of them.

NOTES

- 1 The currently accepted (but confused) outline chronology of the building by Taylor is as follows: built 1766 or 1772; completed 1776; extended c.1800. This is on the varied authority of, or followed by (in order of publication): J. Brayley, *Topographical History of Surrey*, 1841 (but 1850 edition here consulted), IV, 431, citing 1772. Ministry of Housing and Local Government, *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historical Interest*, giving the statutory listing description of 7 July 1951, which variously cites 1772 and 1776. Ian Nairn and Nikolaus Pevsner, revised by Bridget Cherry, *The Buildings of England, Surrey*, Harmondsworth, 1971, 341, citing 1772, *enlarged c.1800*. Peter Brandon, *A History of Surrey*, Chichester, 1977, 87, citing 1766. J. W. Lovatt, *The Manor of Thorncroft, a Short History*, privately published for Howard Humphries & Sons, Leatherhead, 1977, 11, who cites *completed 1776*. Marcus Binney, *Sir Robert Taylor, From Rococo to Neo-Classicism*, London, 1984, 96, citing 1772. Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840*, New Haven and London, 1995, 965, citing 1772. An unsourced photocopy, in the possession of the present owners of Givons Grove, Mickleham, near Leatherhead, of an undated article by S E D Fortescue, ‘Givons Grove’, citing 1772–76.
- 2 Lovatt, *op. cit.*, 4, 6 and 16.
- 3 *Idem.*
- 4 *Ibid.*, 10, and as confirmed in Oxford, Merton College, Records [hereafter ‘Merton, Records’], successive Lease Registers for mid-eighteenth century.
- 5 Merton, Records, Lease Register 6.7, fol. 229, 231 and 232.
- 6 As is stated in the 1763 rebuilding agreement, the previous lease to Richard Dalton dating from 26 December 1757 had ‘since come into the possession of the said Henry Crabb Boulton for the remainder of the said term’ [Merton, Records, Lease Register 6.7, fol. 333–35.].
- 7 Merton, Records, *loc. cit.*, 6.7, fol. 333, etc.; and uncalendared indentures relating to Thorncroft.
- 8 Merton, Records, Thorncroft archive [hereafter ‘Thorncroft’], uncalendared correspondence from Henry Crabb Boulton to Dr Barton, Master, and an associated College memorandum.

- 9 *Idem.*
- 10 The fact that the table of MPs in the 1762 *Court and City Kalendar* lists his country residence merely under the generic location of ‘Surrey’, rather than at Bedington (near Croydon) as in previous years, conforms with the suggestion here that he had acquired Thorncroft by early in that year. [*Court and City Kalendar*, London, 1762 and preceding years; copies at London, Guildhall Library].
- 11 Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The History of Parliament, The House of Commons 1754–1790*, II, Oxford, 1964, 267–68. The details of Crabb Boulton’s career and quotations thereon hereafter in my text are also taken from this source.
- 12 Richard Garnier, ‘The Grange and May’s Buildings, Croom’s Hill, Greenwich’, *Georgian Group Journal*, XIV, 2004, 273.
- 13 Richard Garnier, ‘Gatton Town Hall’, and ‘Arno’s Grove’, *Georgian Group Journal*, VIII, 1998, 72–75 and 122–134; Colvin, *op. cit.*, 965–67.
- 14 The list comprises: directors and their families: Sir George Amyand, Sir William Baker, Jacob Bosanquet, Sir John Boyd, Peter du Cane, Peregrine Cust, Edward Holden Cruttenden, Thomas Dethick, Joseph Hurlock, Thomas Phipps, John Purling, Joshua Smith, Thomas Walpole, the daughter of Richard Chauncy and the widow of Henry Vansittart; and at least two in East India service: William Sumner, and the brother of Robert Pigot [see successive writings of Richard Garnier, in *Georgian Group Journal*, VIII–XIV, 1998–2004].
- 15 All the information in these four paragraphs, including the quotation, is from Namier and Brooke, *op. cit.*, II, 236.
- 16 Maclean had been one of the prime movers in the Sullivan camp, working towards its restoration to power at East India House. ‘Though success crowned the party’s efforts in the election of directors of April 1769, a collapse in the price of East India stock in May–June 1769 led to widespread panic, in which Maclean himself, Shelburne, Verney, the Burkes, Henry Vansittart, Sullivan, Colebrooke and others suffered heavy losses. Maclean failed to meet commitments amounting to more than £90,000 and was totally ruined’ [Namier and Brooke, *op. cit.*, III, 93].
- 17 Namier and Brooke, *op. cit.*, II, 236.
- 18 Merton, Records, Thorncroft. The succeeding quotations in the text above concerning the negotiations over the agreement to rebuild are taken from the same source.
- 19 Merton, Records, Lease Registers, *loc. cit.* .
- 20 Merton College, Records, Thorncroft, bound MS. survey of Thorncroft, illustrated with plans, by Elias Allen, 1629.
- 21 And especially Lovatt, *op. cit.*, 11.
- 22 The principal reason for the extraordinary thickness of the internal wall in question is that the new wing was not keyed into the existing structure, but built as a complete envelope, having a vertical butt-joint with the pre-existing fabric, which on the north elevation now shows signs of differential subsidence. In other words, the now internal wall, as originally built for the elder Henry Crabb Boulton, was a freestanding wall of half its present thickness.
- 23 Merton, Records, Lease Registers, *loc. cit.* .
- 24 Nairn and Pevsner, *op. cit.*, 341.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 341.
- 27 See Binney, *op. cit.*, pl. 67; Richard Garnier, ‘Speculative Housing in 1750s London’, *Georgian Group Journal*, XII, 2002, 194, fig. 25.
- 28 James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses*, London, 1990, 79.
- 29 Quoted from Alberti by Ackerman, *loc. cit.* .
- 30 It was not until the next century that the Medici rose to be Dukes of Florence, in the person of Alessandro de’ Medici in 1532.
- 31 Vitruvius was at pains to emphasize that the style of a building should accord with its owner’s status.
- 32 *OED: Mohammedan official or governor under Mogul empire; (arch.) wealthy luxurious person, esp. one returned from India with fortune.*
- 33 Ackerman, *op. cit.*, 9.
- 34 Charles Middleton, *Picturesque and Architectural Views for Cottages, Farm Houses, and Country Villas*, 1793, 3.
- 35 Binney, *op. cit.*, 39.
- 36 *Idem.*
- 37 *Idem.*
- 38 ‘George Gillet farmer’ was in the 1764 lease [*loc. cit.*] described as ‘now or late in the farmhouse’.
- 39 Binney, *op. cit.*, 39.
- 40 Philip Ellis Foster, *A study of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s Villa at Poggio a Caiano*, Yale University 1974 doctoral dissertation, New York and London, 1978, I, Chapter 6, ‘Previous Accounts of Poggio a Caiano’, B: Foreign Visitors and Baroque Views, 245–55, and C: The Enlightenment, 256ff., makes the point that

‘Since Poggio a Caiano was not on a major road, it was not visited by foreigners very frequently’. Visitors ‘commented on the contents of the villa, observed the productivity of the estate, and after 1650 occasionally criticized the architecture which offered little to the tastes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ [p.245–46]. Indeed, ‘Lack of interest in, or disapproval of the architecture, an appreciation of the view and surrounding landscape, and an admiration of the picture collections may be said to characterize the attitudes and interests of foreign visitors to Poggio a Caiano in the Baroque period’ [p.252], and so it remained a building of which no frontal views had been published before Thorncroft was designed. The only view published by then, by G. Zocchi in 1744, showed the villa from the side and ignored the portico. Taylor must therefore have viewed the Villa Medici at Poggio a Caiano himself when in Italy in the late 1730s to early 1740s, ostensibly studying as a sculptor rather than an architect. Even at that early stage in his career, he must nonetheless have been considering architecture, a profession which he is generally reckoned not to have turned to until about 1750. I am grateful to Richard Hewlings for bringing this book to my attention.

41 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 963.

42 Chipstead Place, in the parish of Chevening, Kent, was in the eighteenth century the seat of the Polhill family. The house (demolished in 1931/2) must have been remodelled in the early 1760s for Charles Polhill (1725–1805), who succeeded his father in 1754 [see Ian Watson (ed.), *A History of the Parish of Chevening*, Sevenoaks, 1999, Chap. 6: ‘The large estates, their development and demise’, pt. II, Chipstead Place, Morants Court and Montreal.]. My attribution herewith of the work to Taylor rests on its stylistic nature, the employment of Sir Henry Cheere for the patron’s father and uncle’s monuments and his double connection to the Duke of Newcastle. The father, David Polhill, is commemorated at nearby Otford church in a monument signed by Cheere, Taylor’s former master, as is his father’s Turkey-merchant brother of Smyrna who was later commissioner of excise in London, besides which the father had first been married to a sister of the Duke of Newcastle, as is all set out in the inscriptions. Charles Polhill was thus a step-nephew of the duke and his own first wife, Typhenia Shelley, was a niece of the duke, and so her husband’s step first-cousin [see Nicholas Thompson, ‘The Pelhams: Political

and Architectural patronage’, in Peter Campbell (ed.), *A House in Town*, London, 1984, 68, genealogical table setting out the marriages of Charles Polhill and Typhenia Shelley’s respective parents; for their own marriage see L. G. Pine, *Burke’s Peerage*, London, 101st. ed., 1956, 1982–83, *sv.* Shelley, Bt.; the same information is given in less detail in Watson, *op. cit.*]. Watson, *op. cit.*, reproduces photographs which show externally that the Charles II house was given parapets with sections of balustrading over each window bay, a three-bay Ionic *porte-côchère* to the entrance front and a Tuscan colonnade between the wings on the garden front. Additionally the 1931 auction sale catalogue of the architectural fittings prior to the break up of the house gives views of the interiors with chimneypieces and other fittings attributable to Taylor and some plasterwork likewise [Norbury-Smith & Co., Chipstead Place, Sevenoaks, Kent, sale on the premises, 20–12 Oct. 1931; copy in Sevenoaks, Heritage Centre.]. Two new lodges were built for Charles Polhill and still survive: one has Tuscan eaves, typical of Taylor at this date; the other (illustrated here) is remarkably similar in form if not in Grecian detail to that at Thorncroft.

43 Brayley, *loc. cit.*

44 Merton, Records, Thorncroft: anonymous MS. survey, dateable by internal evidence to 1789.

45 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 437.

46 Brandon, *op. cit.*, 122: ‘He [Henry Boulton the younger] commissioned George Gwilt to make the large scale map of Leatherhead in 1782–3’.

47 *Idem.*

48 Dorking, Mole District Council, Planning Dept., index card for Thorncroft, L414, of 2 Mar. 1911 (the details or plans no longer extant).

49 Lovatt, *op. cit.*, 6.

50 *Ibid.*, 7.

51 *Idem.*

52 *Ibid.*, 8.

53 *Ibid.*, 10.

54 *Idem.*

55 Oxford, Merton, Records, Lease Register 6.7, fol. 229, 231 and 232.

56 London, National Archives, PROB 11/991, will proved 29 Oct. 1773; *Gentleman’s Magazine*, London, XLIII, 1773, 526, obituaries: ‘2 Sept., Henry Crabb Boulton esquire, Member for Worcester & Chairman of East India Company’.

57 London, National Archives, PROB 11/1033, will

- proved 1 July 1777; *Gentleman's Magazine*, London, XLVII, 295, obituaries: '16 June, Richard Boulton esquire, in Crosby Square, Bishopsgate Street'.
- 58 So described in S. E. D. Fortescue, *Givons Grove*, as seen in an unprovenanced photocopy in possession of the current owners of Givons Grove.
- 59 Merton College, Records, Lease Register 6.8, fol. 523.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 6.9, fol. 250.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 6.9, fol. 260.
- 62 Brayley, *op. cit.*, IV, 431.
- 63 *Idem.*
- 64 *Idem.*
- 65 See main text, above.
- 66 Edwina Vardey, *Leatherhead, A History*, Chichester, 2001, 73.
- 67 Lovatt, *op. cit.*, 16.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 69 *Idem.*
- 70 *Idem.*, and 16.
- 71 *Idem.*
- 72 Dorking, Mole Valley District Council, planning department records, index card for Thorncroft.
- 73 *Ibid.*, LBC.LO4.2.71: planning application papers covering internal alterations and conversion to offices, including report of a District Council sub-committee 'appointed to discuss these applications and the implications of the Division Planning Officer's reports with the County planning Officer and the County Architect', 1971: 'It was considered as a result of the discussions that in order to ensure the future preservation of this fine listed building, there was merit in granting permission to the applicant for its use for offices as an exception to Metropolitan Green Belt policy, bearing in mind that the applicants, who have purchased the property, are a local professional firm who are likely to be displaced from their present accommodation in Epsom by the Town Council Relief Road proposals. On the other hand, it was felt that the proposed office extension was far too large tending to dominate the listed building as well as conflicting with Green Belt policy. However, it was considered that a smaller linked extension of some ten to twelve thousand square feet at the rear to replace the existing unsightly outbuildings of similar floor area around the grounds coupled with the making of a Section 37 Agreement, might prove to be an acceptable solution in the circumstances.'
- 74 *Ibid.*, planning application L25457, of 26 Jan. 1973.