



# THE GEORGIAN GROUP

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# ‘FIT TO HONOUR THE FIRST ORDERS OF NOBILITY’: ST HELEN’S HOUSE, DERBY

MAXWELL CRAVEN

St Helen’s House (Fig. 1) is the largest and most important surviving domestic building in Derby: a magnificent Palladian mansion with a monumental ashlar façade of faultless proportions. Unfortunately, it is not on the itinerary of the average tourist, nor has it ever been promoted by its successive local authority owners, for over a century the Corporation of Derby and, for 23 disastrous years, the Derbyshire County Council. Indeed, this superb and rare survival, one of only seven Grade I listed buildings in the city, has been grievously neglected for many years and has been on English Heritage’s Buildings at risk register for a decade. It is a particularly precious survival because it is one of the few surviving purpose-built Georgian gentleman’s town houses of this size and quality outside London. Bigger and more impressive than Fairfax House at York, there are few to compare with it today.<sup>1</sup>

A town house may be defined as a residence purpose-built by a country landowner for occasional use when visiting the capital or his local town or city. The reasons why an eighteenth-century gentleman or nobleman needed to stay in town are numerous, chief amongst them business, for those who were brought up to believe that the British upper classes never soiled their hands with trade are largely mistaken. Beyond that, there were periodical race-meetings, assemblies (the two often went together in the eighteenth century), duty on the bench or as High Sheriff, other legal duties, banking, social and church affairs.<sup>2</sup> Such houses were stayed in, therefore, only from time to time and most of the staff required came with the family from their house in the country,

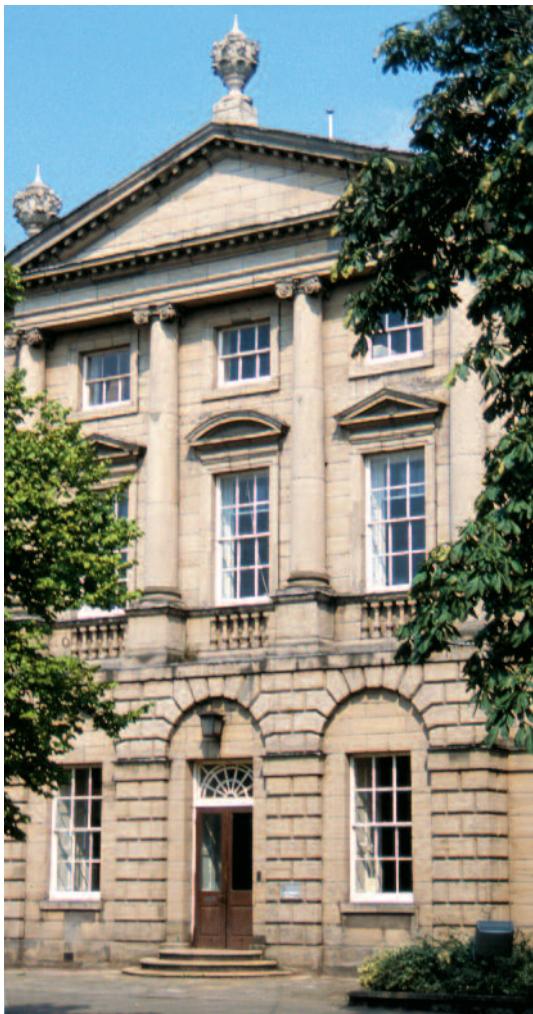


Fig. 1. St Helen’s House, exterior in 1990.  
*Maxwell Craven.*

often with additional pieces of furniture, plate and linen; usually there was only a couple permanently in residence at the town house. Therefore, the service quarters were modest. The principal rooms were also adapted to public display, usually with a saloon – a large room for parties, routs and *conversazioni* – and other rooms, usually close by and easily accessible by staff and guests alike. Upstairs, there was often a private parlour (as at St Helen's), family bedrooms (but rarely guest bedrooms), only occasionally with dressing rooms or sitting rooms, and some limited staff accommodation.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE ARCHITECT AND HIS CLIENT

St Helen's House was built in 1766–67 for the powerful Derby Alderman John Gisborne (1716–1779), previously of No. 11, Bridge Gate, closely adjacent.<sup>4</sup> By this date, Palladian architecture was becoming rather old hat. Yet Gisborne himself was the local 'fixer' for the Duke of Devonshire, the County's leading Whig patron, and had served as High Sheriff as early as 1742; Georgiana, the Duchess, revealed the true role of the house when she wrote to her mother on 8 October 1774: 'I din'd and set out for Derby. I went to Mrs Gisburne's to dress [for a ball held that evening at Derby Assembly Rooms]'.<sup>5</sup> Gisborne was elected MP for one of the two Derby seats in 1774 but was unseated on petition, due to electioneering irregularities.<sup>6</sup> He wanted a Palladian, rather than a Neo-Classical, house, but his recently completed country house in Staffordshire, Yoxall Lodge, was a little rustic in its classicism, and so he turned to the accomplished local man Joseph Pickford (1734–1782) for his town house.<sup>7</sup>

Pickford's credentials were just what he wanted. Although Warwickshire born, he had been trained in London and had worked as a young man under William Kent at Holkham Hall, under John Vardy at the Horse Guards, and on Cambridge University Library – all Palladian buildings *par excellence* and

for all of which his homonymous uncle and legal guardian had been the main contractor.<sup>8</sup> We only know that Pickford actually designed St Helen's from the journal of the Italian architect Antonio Selva, who visited England in 1781. He came to Derby and wrote:

'Here are some buildings of substantial architecture, in particular at the entrance to the city [*sic*] coming from Chesterfield there is a house near the New Inn, with a circular courtyard, of much merit. The architect of it was Mr Pickford and although he was never in Italy, he is one of the best of my acquaintance.'<sup>9</sup>

Clearly Pickford had been his host in Derby and had personally taken him to see the house. It might be added that Selva was very sparing with his praise and had even forgotten the name of the only other British architect to whom he had been introduced.

From this firm identification, we can infer much more, for we know that Pickford had built up a team of craftsmen who worked on most of his houses and who appear repeatedly in the relevant surviving accounts.<sup>10</sup> It is possible to date the completion of the house, too, thanks to the potter and Lunar Society sage Josiah Wedgwood, who wrote to his partner Thomas Bentley in December 1767: 'I was only one night at Derby, and lay at Mr Gisborne's, whose new house pleases me much, but not entirely'.<sup>11</sup> It might not have pleased Wedgwood *entirely*, but within eighteen months he had engaged Pickford to build his own house at Etruria, his new works, a Gothick house for Bentley and three streets of workers' cottages.<sup>12</sup> The completion date for St Helen's is re-inforced by an advertisement of a lease of Gisborne's previous house, the almost adjacent No. 11 Bridge Gate, of 29 May the same year, which suggests that he probably took St Helen's over from the builder on 1 May.<sup>13</sup>

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF ST HELEN'S

Strange as it may seem for a man commissioned to build a Palladian house, Pickford appears to have turned to the Neo-Classical Robert Adam for his inspiration, although the Derby man's Hams Hall, Lea Marston, Warwickshire of 1764 for Charles Bowyer Adderley was a less felicitously proportioned prototype.<sup>14</sup> An investigation by Edward Saunders has established that the measurements of the façade precisely match those of the town house built by Adam in 1762–3 for Prime Minister John Stuart, third Earl of Bute in Berkeley Square, London.<sup>15</sup> (Fig. 2) Not only do the measurements match, but this congruence also extends to the attached giant Ionic order supporting the pediment (but at St Helen's, as one might expect, in Roman, rather than Greek Ionic), the number of floors and bays, the blind arcading, rustication and even to some extent the layout and detail of the interior, especially the entrance hall and its relationship with the staircase hall and the rooms off it. This, however, has all been subsequently somewhat simplified at St Helen's.

But the most important difference is that the detail of Lansdowne House, as Lord Bute's house was later called<sup>16</sup>, is Neo-Classical whilst that of St Helen's – as befitted the Whig Gisborne – is largely Palladian. This has produced the one major external difference in proportion: the omission of Adam's elaborate anthemion frieze and deep cornice on the façade.

Inside, both buildings display a Doric frieze at cornice level in the hall (which space seems to have been built to the identical dimensions both in plan and elevation), and there can be little doubt that the Doric screen in the London house was originally echoed by one at St Helen's, subsequently done away with. Even the hall chimneypiece at Lansdowne House reappears in the saloon at St Helen's. Beyond the screen, however, the staircase in the Derby house begins of the left hand wall of the well, rather than the right, a change probably dictated by the available space, for the east elevation of St Helen's originally broke forward in two stages, moving north to accommodate an existing boundary.

Because Adam's elevations of Lansdowne House

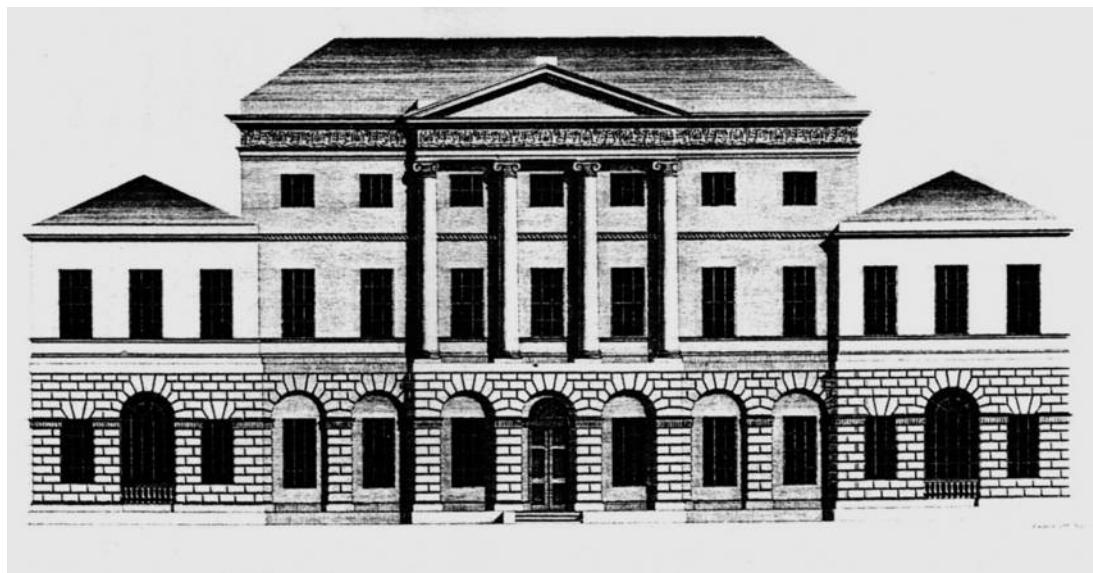


Fig. 2. Lansdowne House, London, elevation by Robert Adam.

R. & J. Adam, *Works in Architecture*, II.



Fig. 3. Castle Ward, Co. Down, painting of the classical façade. *Private Collection.*

were only published in 1779, it is at once clear that Pickford must have seen the London house in the flesh.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, we know that the two men were in contact as early as 1763 over the building of the Derby Assembly Rooms, and Pickford's appointment a decade later as Adam's clerk of works at Kedleston confirms their relationship.<sup>18</sup> The likelihood is that Adam showed Pickford Lansdowne House before St Helen's was designed and that Pickford measured it and made notes. What he produced was a pared down Palladian interpretation of Lansdowne House, standing alone, bereft of attached wings, with the town to its south and a landscaped park to the north. In the saga of St Helen's House, too, Kedleston Hall recurs like a *leitmotif*; a remarkable number of craftsmen employed at the latter turn out to have had an input at the former.

Another strange echo of Pickford's inspired borrowing from Adam is worth examining. In Ireland – by Strangford, Co. Down – stands Castle

Ward, completed in 1773 for Bernard Ward, later first Viscount Bangor, and probably designed by a London architect.<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 3) Castle Ward is famous for having both a Palladian façade and a Gothick one, but the former not only echoes that of St Helen's House in almost every respect but, again, is dimensionally remarkably similar too, minus the Derby house's Ionic pilasters at the angles (which were not part of Adam's scheme for Lansdowne House either). The differences lie in minor variations in the window pediments of the *piano nobile* and slight alterations in the rustic. Castle Ward is less Palladian than St Helen's but is by no means as purely Neo-classical as Lansdowne House. Either Castle Ward is yet another house using Adam's Lansdowne House as a prototype or it has been borrowed direct from St Helen's and made only marginally more Neo-Classical.

It is worth bearing in mind that Pickford is known to have worked in Gothick, for instance in

ST HELEN'S HOUSE, DERBY

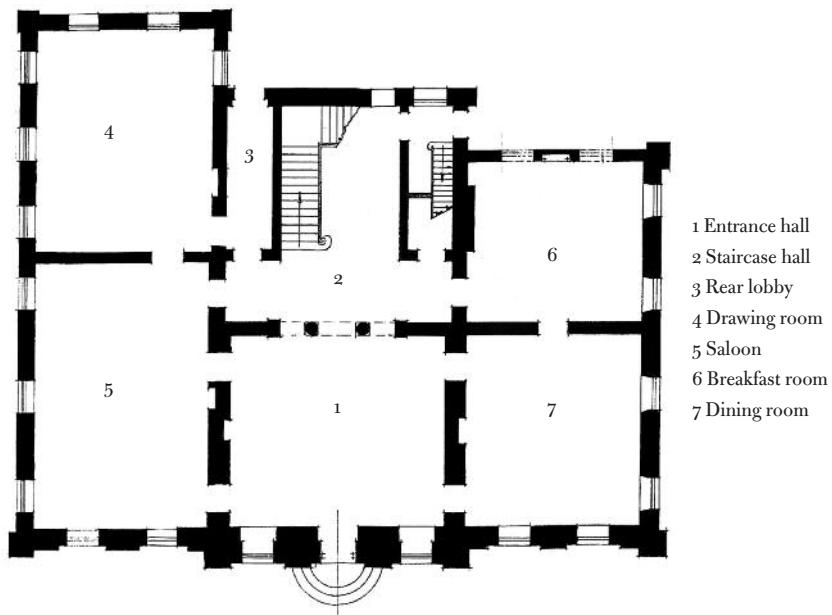


Fig. 4. St Helen's House, reconstructed plans of the ground floor as in 1767. *Maxwell Craven.*



Fig. 5. St Helen's House, Hall showing fireplace and site of screen c.1900.  
*Maxwell Craven.*

Burdett's House, Full Street, Derby, and Bank House, Newcastle-under-Lyme (Staffs.). Lord Bangor's grandmother was related to the Wards of Newcastle, who moved in the same circle as Josiah Wedgwood, and the second wife of Thomas Bentley, owner of Bank House, was a Ward.<sup>20</sup> Pickford's links with the Derby clockmaker, scientist and Lunar Society co-founder John Whitehurst, FRS, have also suggested him as the architect of a major rebuilding of Edgeworthstown, Richard Lovell Edgeworth's seat in Co. Longford in 1771, of which only the central three bays of the façade survive.<sup>21</sup> And Edgeworth's second wife was a Sneyd, for which North Staffordshire family Pickford had designed an unbuilt house in 1763.<sup>22</sup>

To return to St Helen's, the Keuper Sandstone applied to the façade was all for show and effect, for the remainder of the building is brick. That it stood alone with its courtyard is an imperative of the architecture, despite its depiction, on P. P. Burdett's not altogether reliable 1767 map, as in some unlikely way connected to No. 11 Bridge Gate. Burdett, a friend of Pickford's, surveyed Derby itself before the building of St Helen's and probably had to insert the house hurriedly, just as the map was being prepared for the engraver.<sup>23</sup>

Inside St Helen's, the main reception rooms – saloon/dining room, ante-room/drawing room, breakfast/dining room and parlour (room roles seem to have changed when entertaining beyond the family circle) – are enfiladed around the spacious hall with the staircase hall off to the rear, through the postulated Doric screen. (Figs. 4, 5) Each room has two immaculately carved mahogany doors: in each case one for the passage of family and guests and one for staff bearing trays, exactly as at Lansdowne House. On the first floor there was a private parlour, which occupied the three central bays of the façade, although none of the bedrooms seems to have had either dressing or sitting rooms and the staff accommodation in the attic storey centered on what was in effect a dormitory. St Helen's is thus a true



Fig. 6. St Helen's House, the Staircase in 1990.  
*Maxwell Craven.*

town house; built for occasional use and for entertaining. When it became a permanent residence from 1807, it consequently required a certain amount of alteration. The stable block was built round a courtyard slightly to the north but no view of it, nor any description, survives.

#### THE CRAFTSMEN

Pickford, even in the 1760s, had gathered around him a team of talented craftsmen, and though the building records for the house are lost we may be sure that they were active here as at other, better recorded, examples of his work. The cantilevered staircase is of locally quarried Hoptonwood stone with richly carved tread ends. Furthermore, it boasts

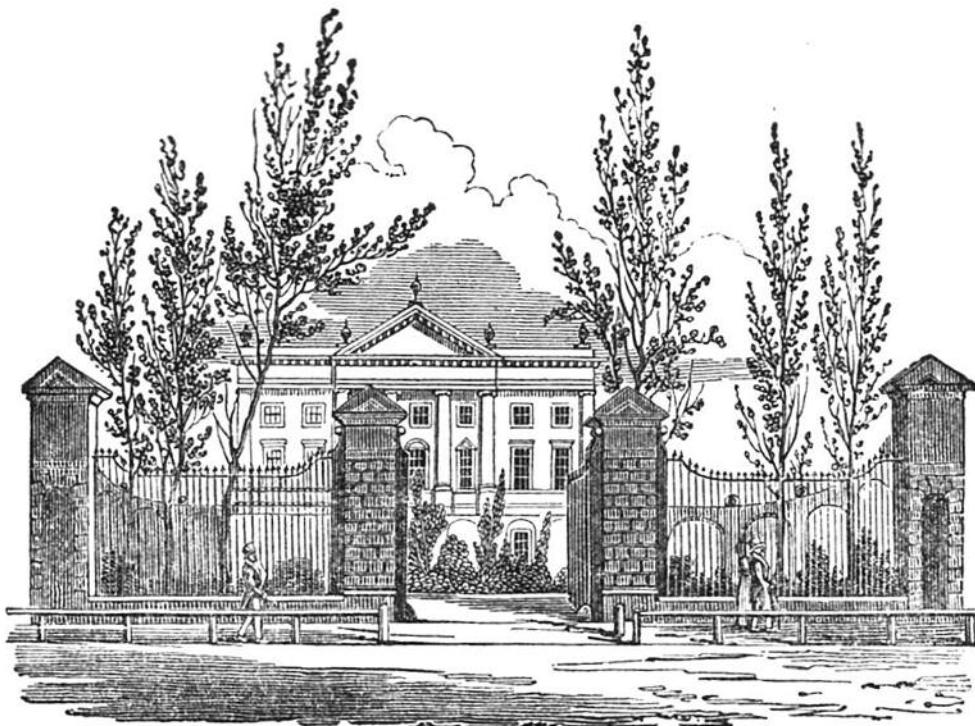


Fig. 7. St Helen's House and screen from King Street, drawn by Orlando Jewitt for Simpson's *History of Derby* (1826). *Maxwell Craven*.

a wonderful looped wrought iron balustrade exactly matching two made earlier by Robert Bakewell<sup>24</sup>, England's greatest native-born ironsmith. (Fig. 6) As Bakewell had been dead fourteen years by 1766, the clear implication is that here the same design was made by his whilom foreman and equally accomplished successor, Benjamin Yates.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, he too had previously supplied an identical pattern for the stair balustrade at Staunton Harold (Leics.) and for the gallery at Nuthall Temple (Notts.).<sup>26</sup> Without doubt, he also made the fine but very plain screen and gates fronting King Street, the ironwork having much in common in its Neo-classical simplicity with Yates's screen fronting the family wing at Kedleston. At St Helen's, this screen protected the circular courtyard which Selva so admired and framed the house from King Street. It is visible in a

woodcut included in Simpson's *History of Derby* of 1826.<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 7) An engraving after a lost painting by James Stephen Gresley also shows it, including a second entrance to the 'circular' courtyard at the front of the house, giving access to Bridge Gate; this, too, seems to have had a wrought iron gate.<sup>28</sup>

Hoptonwood is a grey limestone peculiar to a single Derbyshire quarry, which takes a fine polish with wear and was widely used, especially in the East Midlands, to pave hall floors and make stairs. At St Helen's, apart from the hall floor and the stairs themselves, even the hall chimneypiece (a subversively Neo-Classical Doric affair with *paterae* alternating with triglyphs on a frieze supported by attached columns) is – unusually – of Hoptonwood. The carver of this simple but handsome chimneypiece, still with its original cast

iron grate, was quite possibly George Moneypenny (d.1807), whom Pickford encountered at Kedleston, whence he had been brought from London by Adam. Moneypenny it was who carved the decoration on the fishing temple there. Unfortunately we do not know quite when the architect managed to lure Adam's carver away from Lord Scarsdale's pressing works but, as one of Moneypenny's offspring was christened at St Werburgh's, Derby in 1766 and the rest thereafter, the attribution to him of the carving at St Helen's seems perfectly plausible.

To Moneypenny too can be attributed much of the exterior carving, although recent emergency survey work has revealed that the powerfully modelled parapet urns are actually of cast iron. In 1766, there was no foundry in Derby, and the likelihood is that the urns were cast by the Hurt family's Alderwasley foundry, some twelve miles north up the Derwent Valley, which also supplied the

cast iron grates and the bridge balusters for Kedleston Hall, where Pickford was clerk of works from 1772. If Adam was prepared to let Pickford draw Lansdowne House, one feels that he would have been just as happy to have recommended a good foundry. Thus the surviving fire grates probably can be attributed to the same source. Pickford's Kedleston connections were plainly beginning to pay off.

Moneypenny worked with Pickford until the latter's death in 1782, after which he supervised the sale of the architect's stock-in-trade, thereafter remaining in Derby as a carver of some note. He engraved the map of the town, an east prospect and the seventeen other plates for William Hutton's *History of Derby* (1791), although these leave much to be desired when compared with his church monuments.<sup>29</sup> The accounts relating to the Edensor Inn at Chatsworth and other surviving papers suggest that he was carving chimneypieces to order



Fig. 8. St Helen's House, the Saloon chimneypiece. *Maxwell Craven.*

at Pickford's yard in Friar Gate, Derby and assembling them on site. Indeed, the advertisement for the sale of Pickford's stock in trade in July 1782 clearly implies that he was also carving aedicules, architraves, balustrades and other items in Keuper Sandstone even for buildings by Pickford in the Millstone Grit areas of the county.<sup>30</sup>

Moneypenny's finest chimneypiece at St Helen's is that in the saloon (Fig. 8), of Siena marble set against Carrara, essentially Neo-Classical and closely following in design that in the hall at Lansdowne House; one suspects that it once boasted a matching overmantel. Yet the stucco is entirely Rococo, as is the frieze – seemingly more or less implying a Roman Ionic order, matching pilasters subtly omitted – and the splendid ceiling above, (Fig. 9) with its musical instruments vying for attention with trailing vines, reflects the room's dual uses as a saloon for routs and *conversazioni* as well as a dining room for formal suppers. Strangely, the much more sparse decoration in the ante-room beyond – once connected via a depressed arch, later filled with a folding screen and subsequently blocked in a century and a half ago – is, like the hall and saloon chimneypieces, of a restrained Neo-Classical fan design.

Only a very few other chimneypieces survive un-boxed in at St Helen's, and that in the otherwise rather grand room in the south-west angle has been replaced with a late nineteenth-century slate one of extreme banality. The best is probably one on the first floor carved from brown-streaked local alabaster – a surprisingly rare material for chimneypieces at any age, due to its friability when exposed to the sulphur produced by coal burning.

With the exterior of so ambitious a building to carve, some of the interior carving was probably sub-contracted to the spar manufacturer and carver Richard Brown, whose exemplary chimneypieces, made from a variety of local stones as well as continental marbles, were supplied from his works (later situated almost opposite St Helen's) to great houses far and wide well into the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 9. St Helen's House, Saloon ceiling.  
Maxwell Craven.

Likewise, we may confidently assume that the plasterwork was by Abraham Denstone the younger of Derby, whose equally accomplished father had executed the ‘stuke work’ (stucco) to Richard Jackson’s design for the Derby Guildhall in 1731.<sup>32</sup> The most exuberant manifestation of his talents at St Helen’s is the Rococo ceiling of the saloon and it has much in common stylistically with the ceiling of the music room at nearby Markeaton Hall of 1755 (since destroyed). This was surely also his work, especially as the architect was his brother James, Pickford’s predecessor as clerk of works at Kedleston, where Denstone was working under Joseph Rose.<sup>33</sup>

Yet the house was built in a very busy part of Derby. William Hutton for one thought so for, in his 1791 *History of Derby* he wrote of it that ‘would honour the first orders of nobility, but in a situation

which does not merit a dwelling of £500'.<sup>34</sup> This is still one of the problems affecting St Helen's. A generation before, when Gisborne commissioned the house, the location may have appeared more salubrious. The house stood in a park of eighty acres, (Fig. 10) descending sharply east to the Derwent and extending north to march with that of now-vanished Darley Hall.<sup>35</sup> All the maps up to and including that of Rogerson (1819) show an oblong of parkland on the west side of King Street, opposite the St Helen's House stables and bounded by St Helen's Walk to the south and Lodge Lane to the north. It is possible that this was also part of the parkland from an early date. Certainly it was by 1819, for Rogerson's map shows this piece bisected by a ride running west-south-west from King Street, opposite the stable courtyard entrance and flanked by an avenue.<sup>36</sup>

The parkland was almost certainly landscaped by William Emes (1729–1803), who also worked on many of the same commissions as Pickford during the two decades after he left Lord Scarsdale's employ at Kedleston in 1760.<sup>37</sup> Emes, who from 1760 lived on the Markeaton Hall estate at Bowbridge,<sup>38</sup> had been head-hunted by Lord Scarsdale and, even after his resignation, had continued to work freelance at Kedleston, realising the grand vision of the absentee Adam.<sup>39</sup> He met Pickford whilst both were on their first independent commissions, at Foremark Hall for the Burdettts in 1760. The existence of a pub called the Park Fountain close to St Helen's in Henry Street, pitched in the later 1830s on what had once been the house's pleasure grounds, and obliterated by the building of the Great Northern Railway in 1876–78, may well mark the former use of a similar device here, just by Emes's lake, which once lay to the north



Fig. 10. Moses Webster, St Helen's House from the park in 1838, sepia.  
*Maxwell Craven.*

of the house and east of the stables and well above the level of the river, where Edward Street is today.<sup>40</sup> (Fig. 11) After Pickford's death, Emes seems to have hitched his star to the Wyatts and Anthony Keck.

Emes is also attested as working with the eminent Derby clockmaker and scientist John Whitehurst, FRS, in applying the latter's invention, the modern hydraulic ram, to manipulate the flow and fall of water. Whitehurst published the details of one as installed by him in an Emes park at Oulton (Cheshire) in the *Transactions of the Royal Society* in 1775.<sup>41</sup> He also wrote a treatise on 'stoves' or, in today's terminology, hot houses or conservatories, and pioneered a system of opening glass panels in the roofs linked with under-floor heating with ducts in the walls bringing up extra warmth. The orangery at Markeaton Hall, built by Pickford for Gisborne's fellow Whig, F.N.C. Mundy, in 1772, seems to have started out with these refinements, although it subsequently suffered a drastic rebuild.<sup>42</sup> The conservatory at St Helen's cannot have been much different, for Stephen Glover wrote of it in 1829:

'The hot house in the grounds...is esteemed one of the most curious and complete buildings of this description in England. The flues for the admission of hot and cold air and those for distributing steam as a moist vapour for the nutriment of the plants are admirably arranged'.<sup>43</sup>

This does not preclude its being an addition by the next owner, William Strutt – he was a great adaptor of Lunar Society ideas – but, as it escapes comment by any of his numerous literary visitors, it may very well go back to the house's inception. Its precise location remains unclear, but as at Markeaton, it was probably part of the stable court.

Only a little is known about the furniture supplied for the house. A few pieces of Gisborne provenance are still with descendants, but whether these were once at St Helen's, Yoxall Lodge or any of the other Gisborne seats is unclear. Probably when St Helen's was sold, or when it was re-furnished, most of the original furniture was taken by the

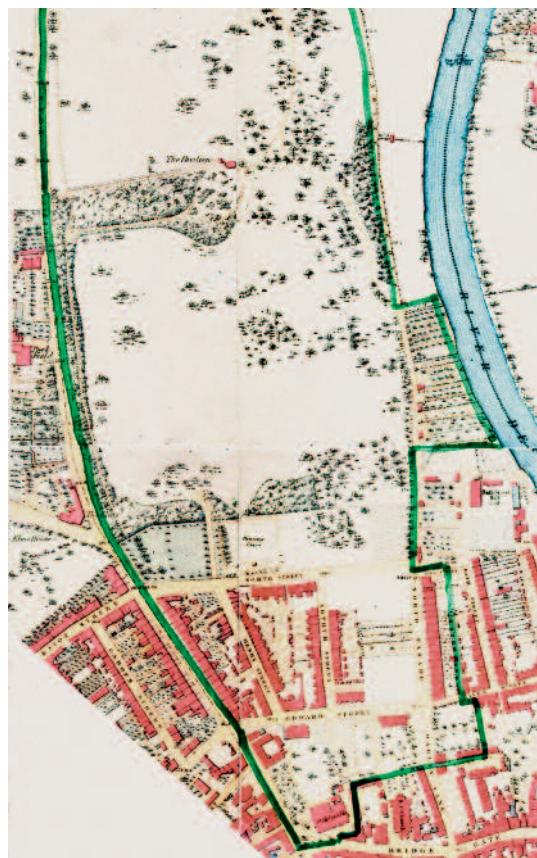


Fig. 11. St Helen's House and the remaining part of the park in 1852. Streets have been built to the north of the house obliterating the lake. (Derby Board of Health map). Maxwell Craven.

Gisbornes to Yoxall Lodge (which incidentally is also believed to have had a park by William Emes) and much would have been dispersed when that house was sold up in 1926. We can also identify five, perhaps seven, Joseph Wright paintings which were acquired from the artist by John Gisborne or by his son, Thomas, a close friend of Wright who taught him drawing for many years. Of this number, some at least probably hung at St Helen's during the Gisborne period, whilst others again were doubtless at Yoxall. It is also likely that on occasion paintings moved between the two.<sup>44</sup>

## LATER OWNERS

Gisborne (Fig. 12) died in 1779, leaving, by his wife Anne, daughter of William Bateman of Hartington Hall, two surviving sons and two daughters who were largely brought up at St Helen's House.<sup>45</sup> The eldest son was Thomas, who had been a pupil of Revd. John Pickering, incumbent of Mackworth and a sage of astonishing versatility. A friend of the painter Joseph Wright of Derby, and an accomplished flautist, Thomas Gisburne shared his father's Whig politics, befriended William Wilberforce, became a clergyman and wrote the seminal *Remarks Respecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* in 1792. He was also an accomplished poet and moral philosopher.<sup>46</sup> After the death of his friend Joseph Wright he withdrew from Derby life altogether, preferring the sequestered calm of the Forest of Needwood around Yoxall, where his friend had already painted him and his wife, Mary Babington, seated at ease beneath a tree in the park in 1786.<sup>47</sup> His mother seems to have lived at St Helen's in the earlier 1790s, but the house was leased from 1796 to 1805 to his banker friend John Crompton,<sup>48</sup> and then let and later sold to another radical Whig, William Strutt, FRS (1756–1830) (Fig. 13).

Strutt was an extraordinary man. The eldest son of cotton pioneer Jedediah, he was prodigiously well off, a director of the family cotton spinning and silk throwing enterprises, but also an architect, engineer, mechanician, town planner, home-improvement pioneer and organiser supreme.<sup>49</sup> Amongst his achievements he counted the invention of the noctuary or watchman's clock, the sanitary, heating and ventilation innovations incorporated into his Derbyshire General Infirmary (1806–1810), an improved water closet, an improved kitchen range with back boiler and an epicyclic skeleton clock derived from the 'sun-and-planet' gearing of Boulton and Watt's steam engine.<sup>50</sup> He was also chairman of the Derby Improvement Commissions from 1788 until he retired in 1829, presiding over a physical transformation of Derby that it is still possible to appreciate today.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 12. Thomas Gisborne of Yoxall Lodge, from an engraving from the *Memoir of Thomas Gisborne* (1852) after a portrait by R. R. Reinagle. Maxwell Craven.

Strutt took over as lessee of St Helen's House in 1805 and bought it, for £21,350, in 1807.<sup>52</sup> Here he entertained such luminaries as Robert Owen – who bored his host – the novelist Maria Edgeworth (and her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, a former member of the Lunar Society), the poet Tom Moore (actually the guest of his brother, Joseph Strutt), the American entrepreneur Kirk Boott and numerous political friends.<sup>53</sup> Moore described a *soirée* at St Helen's on 31 January 1828, where he found 'duets on the harp and pianoforte going on and, in spite of my dozen and one speeches [given at a literary feast the same night], was obliged to muster up voice enough for the same number of songs'.<sup>54</sup> Strutt used St Helen's as his principal residence, and as a

consequence made alterations, no doubt to his own design. These included the removal of the screen between the hall and staircase hall, fragments of which may still be traceable beneath the present mahogany casing, and its replacement by a wide opening supported (without doubt) by a cast iron beam and framed in the finest mahogany, detailed to match the original doors. Thus up-to-the-minute technology was used to afford a spectacular view up the stairs to Pickford's impressively generous Serliana, which Strutt duly embellished with Gothick astragals and filled with coloured glass, the latter put in to disguise the main extension to the house, which must have been plainly visible through it. The present borrowed light into the first floor sitting room must have been inserted at this time, too, with the stairs' east light much reduced by the extension.<sup>55</sup>

By 1819 Strutt had also added a new kitchen wing and servants' hall, with both staff and guest accommodation above, to the east side of the house, largely separated from the original house by a narrowish courtyard opening to the north.<sup>56</sup> (Fig. 14) He presumably bought the land from the Beaumonts of Barrow Hall, whose adjacent town house, No. 11 Bridge Gate (once John Gisborne's), and two cottages on the street, must have formed a courtyard with the new east wall of St Helens's. The addition was plainly built in a style matching that of the brick portions of Pickford's house. The fenestration was similar, and the angles may have had matching stone pilasters topped with finials, but these were removed, unrecorded, in 1874, when the building was drastically truncated. It originally rose to two slightly lower storeys than the main house, as exemplified by the surviving fragment at the south-east angle, and had four very tall brick stacks. All these alterations were doubtless to Strutt's own design, although he may have used the Derby architect Samuel Brown to assist him, as at the Derbyshire General Infirmary in 1806.<sup>57</sup> A rate book of 1808–9 shows Strutt to have been assessed at £150



Fig. 13. R.R. Reinagle, 'William Strutt, FRS', 1815.  
*Derby City Council.*

for St Helen's, the highest for a single building in the Borough, outstripping even St Mary's Gate House (£90), The Friary (£100) and Exeter House (£130).<sup>58</sup> This suggests that the extension was already in being by this time and, bearing in mind that Strutt's lease had only been converted into a freehold in or shortly before 1807, suggests that it was probably built 1807–1808.

Maria Edgeworth wrote in 1813 that 'This house is indeed ... a palace and it is plain that the convenience of the inhabitants has everywhere been consulted, the ostentation of wealth nowhere appears'.<sup>59</sup> It is clear from the four surviving pieces of furniture that remained in the house until 2003 that Strutt opulently re-furnished it. All the pieces –



Fig. 14. St Helen's House, south-east angle, showing William Strutt's alterations.  
Maxwell Craven.

including a superb galleried mahogany serving table with *en suite* sarcophagus-shaped cellaret after designs by George Smith, (Fig. 15) and a George Bullock style ormolu-mounted pier table – are in high Regency style and of exceptional quality, so were probably specially commissioned.<sup>60</sup> The one clue to all this that we have is that Strutt's Snetzler

organ ‘was first set up...by Holland’ at St Helen’s on 24 March 1813.<sup>61</sup> If this installation was part of a re-furnishing, as it might very well have been, then the Strutts may have taken Gisborne’s existing furniture on loan until something more permanent could be arranged.

Strutt also packed the house with innovations,

most of which seem to have been concentrated in his new extension. They were described by Sir Richard Phillips in 1828:

'The house of Mr William Strutt... is a school of experiment, and a triumph of science over the stubborn-ness of nature. The first thing that strikes a visitor, is the uniform temperature of such a mansion for, by the skill of Mr Strutt, it is never below fifty five degrees, and this is effected by the ingenious distribution of hot air. The kitchen is a triumph of art.... There is also a steam engine, of one horsepower, for washing, mangling, pressing, drying etc., all conducted with unparalleled ingenuity.... A small steam boiler places hot water over cold, and there is always hot water for culinary purposes while the same boiler heats a noble bath, which is the frequent source of enjoyment to Mr Strutt. Thus steam, gas, heat, hot air, philosophy and mechanics, are all brought to bear on these premises, on every branch of domestic economy.'<sup>62</sup>

It is highly likely that much of this 'domestic economy' harks back to the work of John Whitehurst. Strutt, as a *protégé* of Erasmus Darwin, must have become acquainted with his orangery at Markeaton Hall, with its two patent boilers, and doubtless went

on to refine them when designing the Derbyshire General Infirmary in 1806 with the help of Samuel Brown and Charles Sylvester.<sup>63</sup> Strutt's refinements of the various kitchen apparatuses were later adapted and mass produced by the Derby iron founder John Harrison, who installed them at Snelston Hall in 1824, at Catton Hall for the Wilmot-Hortons in 1831 and by the following year in Pickford's former residence at No. 41 Friar Gate.<sup>64</sup>

On Strutt's death, the house passed to his son, Edward (1801–1880)<sup>65</sup>, who moved in 1846 to Kingston Hall (Notts.), newly-built to the designs of the Derby-born Edward Blore.<sup>66</sup> St Helen's then became a school, but was re-occupied from 1857–61 by Strutt, who in 1856 was ennobled as Lord Belper. It then became a school again, and was purchased outright by Derby Grammar School in 1863.<sup>67</sup> Lord Belper retained what was left of the parkland, but this later fell victim to the growth of the town and the coming of the Great Northern Railway, which caused the demolition of the orangery and stable block.<sup>68</sup> A sizeable chunk of William Strutt's service wing was sacrificed to a Corporation street improvement in 1877,<sup>69</sup> but the compensation paid by the railway



Fig. 15. Mahogany serving table after a design by George Smith, c.1815.  
Mellors & Kirk.

and the Council, enabled the school to build a large ashlar wing on the north side of the house in a sort of hideous parody of Pickford's dignified façade. All this necessitated some alterations to the interior, notably the curtailment of the ante-room in the north-eastern angle to create a passage giving access to the new block. Further, relatively minor, alterations followed in 1877.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile a street widening of c.1872–73 led to the demolition of the Palladian screen with its two pedestrian entrances in pedimented aedicules, gate piers and wrought ironwork. Also lost was the southern segment of the circular courtyard. It may have been at this time too, that the northern segment was also taken down and rebuilt on the same foundations.<sup>71</sup>

The school passed under direct local authority control in 1905. It moved out in 1966, and the house, by now listed Grade I, was later transferred to Derbyshire County Council. In 1995 Derby Civic Society managed to draw the attention of the Georgian Group and SAVE Britain's Heritage to its parlous state, which led to its being very quickly added to English Heritage's Buildings at Risk Register, and leading to howls of outrage from certain sectors of the County Council. It was finally returned to the control of Derby City Council in April 1997, but it took a change in political control in May 2003 for this to be acknowledged and acted upon. The furniture, consigned for auction under the previous regime by an over-zealous official, had to be rescued at the eleventh hour and is now stored in Derby Council House, albeit un-restored, despite offers from a local firm. A huge portrait of William Strutt, by R. R. Reinagle, also saved from the house and a quick sale, is also currently in store.

In 2006, at about the time a party from the Georgian Group were able to visit it, a long lease was negotiated with Richard Blunt, selected by the Council as the successful bidder. By now the grade I listing had been extended to include the remaining portions of the original courtyard wall and the Victorian extension. Problems still, however, remain.

Any idea Mr Blunt may have to turn St Helen's into an up-market hotel has been compromised by the City Council's decision, in January 2007, to grant consent for a hideous nine-storey three star hotel, to include apartments, casino and office block almost alongside, and perilously close to Pugin's St Mary's Catholic church (1839–1844). The co-promoter of this scheme was none other than the failed contender for the lease of St Helen's House, Chek Whyte. Despite this, we must hope that Richard Blunt can turn St Helen's into the success story and national showplace it deserves to be.

## NOTES

- 1 M. Craven, *The Derby Town House* (Derby, 1987), pp. 90–95. The largest such house in the town was Exeter House, a U-plan Carolean mansion demolished in 1854 (MS Journal of Samuel Harpur, Derby's first Borough Surveyor, entry for 16 March 1854; courtesy the late Clifford Harpur) – but see below regarding the rateable value, where an expanded St Helen's exceeded that of Exeter house.
- 2 Craven, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–12.
- 3 *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.
- 4 W. Hutton, *History of Derby* (Derby, 1791), pp. 29–30; S. Glover, *History and Gazetteer of the County of Derby*, II (Derby, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1833) p. 590. Gisborne's acquisition of the land upon which it stands is documented in Nottinghamshire Archives DD/BK/1/284, 285, 299–300, 302, 304–8.
- 5 Chatsworth archives, courtesy of the Trustees of the Chatsworth settlement.
- 6 Glover, *Derby*, II, p. 247; Hutton, *Derby*, pp. 29–30; A. W. Davison, *Derby: Its Rise and Progress* (Derby, 1906), pp. 256–257.
- 7 For Yoxall, S. Shaw, *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, I (1801) pp. 99–100. It had two Neo-Classical rooms which could have been done by Pickford a decade or so later, when in the hands of Gisborne's son Thomas, a friend of Joseph Wright ARA, himself a known friend of Pickford's. It was demolished in 1927.
- 8 E.J. Saunders, *Joseph Pickford of Derby* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 8–15.

- 9 P. de la R. du Prey, 'Gianantonio Selva in England', *Architectural History* XXV (1982), pp. 27–28. The New Inn, a brand new coaching house (reb. 1890s, dem. 1967), was also a building attributable to Pickford.
- 10 Saunders, *Pickford*, pp. 87–88.
- 11 Barlaston, Wedgwood MSS, letter from Wedgwood to Bentley, Dec 1767.
- 12 Saunders, *Pickford*, pp. 89–100.
- 13 *Derby Mercury*, 29 May 1767. Gisborne kept Pickford on to rebuild his previous house in Bridge Gate, after which it was let (by autumn 1767) and later sold to Lord Scarsdale.
- 14 Hams was demolished in the 1920s, although much of it was re-used to build Bledisloe Lodge at Coates in Gloucestershire: Saunders (1993), pp. 87–88.
- 15 C. S. Sykes, *Private Palaces* (London, 1985), pp. 201–207; D. Pearce, *London's Mansions* (London, 1986), pp. 87–93. For Bute, see G.E.C., *Complete Peerage*, II (London, 1911), pp. 443–4.
- 16 After its second owner, the first Marquess of Lansdowne, formerly second Earl of Shelburne, for whom Adam completed it.
- 17 R. & J. Adam, *The Works in Architecture of R. & J. Adam* (ed. R. Oresko, London, 1975), p. 125. The house appeared in the second volume (1779); the original elevations are in Sir John Soane's Museum.
- 18 Derbyshire Record Office, D239/098. For Kedleston Hall, see Saunders (1993), p. 32.
- 19 M. Bence-Jones, *Burke's Guide to Country Houses: Ireland* (London, 1978) pp. 78–79, and personal communication.
- 20 For the marriage of Lord Bangor's grandfather Bernard Ward to Anne, daughter of Richard Ward of Newcastle-under-Lyme, see *Burke's Peerage* I (2003), p. 241; on the Wards of Newcastle see *Burke's Landed Gentry* III (London, 1971), p. 930, and on the Wedgwood connection: B. & H. Wedgwood, *The Wedgwood Circle* (London, 1980), p. 54. Wedgwood's Bath warehouse manager William Ward was married to the sister of Thomas Bentley's second wife, both women being daughters of the Derby hosier and engineer Alderman Thomas Stamford, a member of the first Derby Improvement Commission (1768), which made Pickford rich.
- 21 M. Craven, *John Whitehurst of Derby, Scientist and Clockmaker* (Mayfield, 1996), p. 67 (Edgeworthstown), and pp. 23, 213 (Irish connections). Whitehurst had important, if obscure, links with Ireland, mainly in Ulster and Dublin.
- 22 Saunders, *Pickford*, pp. 42, 51, 174.
- 23 Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, pp. 59–63 consolidates the link between Wright, Burdett and Pickford. The mistake was repeated in George Moneypenny's map of 1791, and in all subsequent maps of Derby down to Rogerson's and Swanwick's of 1819.
- 24 At the Maister's House, Hull, and Okeover Hall, Staffs: E. J. Saunders, *English Wrought Iron Work in the Eighteenth Century*, Walpole Society, LXVII (2005), p. 263.
- 25 Bakewell died at Derby Oct. 1752: burials register, St Peter, Derby, 31 Oct, 1752.
- 26 *Country Life* LIII (1923) pp. 570, 606; Staunton Harold, *Ibid.*, CVII (1950), p. 516; Saunders, *English Wrought Iron Work in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 377.
- 27 Simpson, *Hist. Derby*, I, facing p. 174.
- 28 Author's collection. The engraving was made for Lord Belper's stationery; the original is lost.
- 29 Saunders, *Pickford*, pp. 151–159. Moneypenny was not much of a draughtsman; not one of the buildings he drew for Hutton's *History of Derby* are accurate to the originals.
- 30 *Derby Mercury*, 21 August 1782; I am indebted to Michael Stanley, FGS, for information about the building stones.
- 31 Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, pp. 74, 89–91, 97–98, 219–223. Brown's works in 1767 was at the Old Shop at the Silk Mill; he moved in 1802.
- 32 A. Gomme, *Smith of Warwick* (Stamford, 2000) 525; M. Craven, 'Derby's Eighteenth-Century Guildhall' *Georgian Group Journal* XII (2002), p. 108; Craven, *Derby Town House*, pp. 132–134.
- 33 H. M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 309; Saunders, *Pickford*, p. 32. For Markeaton, see M. A. Craven and M. Stanley, *The Derbyshire Country House*, I (2001) pp. 147–149.
- 34 Hutton, *Derby*, pp. 29–30.
- 35 R. Phillips, *A Personal Tour Through the United Kingdom* II (London 1828), p. 109; Craven and Stanley, *Derbyshire Country House*, I (2001), pp. 77–79.
- 36 Rogerson's map was the first entirely re-surveyed map of Derby since Burdett's of 1767.
- 37 Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, pp. 78–79.
- 38 Derby Local Studies Library, Mundy MSS, parcel 228.
- 39 W. Wilde in *Country Life* 15 August 1987, p. 152.
- 40 The inn first occurs in Pigot's *Directory of Derbyshire* for 1835.

- 41 Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, pp. 79–80.
- 42 J. Whitehurst (ed. R. Willam), *Observations on the Ventilation of Rooms, on Chimneys and Garden Stoves* (London 1794). Traces of these arrangements, along with two of Whitehurst's patent ranges heating back boilers, were found when the City Council rebuilt the orangery in 1985–86.
- 43 Glover, *Hist. Derby* (1831/1833) I, p. 193.
- 44 Nicholson, B., *Joseph Wright, Painter of Light*, I (London, 1968), pp. 134 (n. 3), 178, 198–199, 202, 265, 281–2.
- 45 Monumental inscription at All Saints', Derby: R. Simpson, *Notes towards a History of the Borough of Derby*, II (1826), pp. 321–322; E. N., *A Brief Memoir of the Life of John Gisborne* (London, 1852), p. 15.
- 46 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 47 Nicholson Wright, I (1968), pp. 134–137 and n. 67. Gisborne was described as 'of Derby' to 1786, and then increasingly 'of Yoxall': Nottinghamshire Archives DD/BK/1/358/1-1 7 359.
- 48 E. N., *Memoir of Gisborne* (1852), p. 100.
- 49 Obituary in *Derby Mercury*, 12 January 1831; C.L. Hacker, in *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* LXXX (1960), p. 59, considers the obituary to have written been by son, Edward.
- 50 On the infirmary, see Glover *Hist. Derby*, II, pp. 529–37, C. Sylvester, *Domestic Economy* (Nottingham, 1819) *passim*, and V. M. Leveaux, *A History of the Derbyshire General Infirmary* (Cromford, 1999), pp. 7–20. On the skeleton clock, etc., Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, p. 232.
- 51 Sylvester, *Domestic Economy*, pp. 4–7; Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, pp. 203–209.
- 52 Nottinghamshire Archives, DD/BK/1/361, 369 (abstract of title), 372.
- 53 R. S. Fitton & A. F. Wadsworth, *The Strutts and the Arkwrights* (Manchester, 1958), pp. 176 (n.2), 181; B. Parker, *Kirk Boott, Master Spirit of Early Lowell* (Lowell, 1985), pp. 34, 40.
- 54 Lord John Russell, *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Tom Moore* V (London, 1853), p. 256.
- 55 The extent of Strutt's additions, perhaps adding almost a third extra ground floor area, can be best gauged from the 1852 Board of Health Map.
- 56 By 1819, when it appears on Rogerson's Map of that year.
- 57 For No. 11, Bridge Gate, see Derby Civic Society, *Newsletter* LXIV (May 1994), pp. 18–19, and B. Jeffrey, *Sisters of Mercy, Derby* (Derby, 1999), p. 9. For Brown, Colvin, *Dictionary* (2008), p. 170.
- 58 Private collection, un-paginated; dated by the known dates of those named within it.
- 59 A. J. C. Hare, *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth* I (London, 1894), p. 197.
- 60 Mellors & Kirk Ltd., Nottingham, sale catalogue, 4–5 December 2003, p. 101, lots. 1141–1144. The items were withdrawn from the sale by Derby Council after a public outcry.
- 61 A. Buckingham, *Notebook*, entry for 1 December 1824. The organ has recently reappeared in Hastings.
- 62 Phillips, *Tour* II (1828), pp. 111–117.
- 63 Whitehurst, *Observations* (1794), *passim*. See also note 57 *supra*. On Markeaton orangery, see Craven and Stanley, *Derbyshire Country House*, I, pp. 148–149; Craven, *Whitehurst of Derby*, 203–209. Sylvester's *Domestic Economy* devoted space to many of Strutt's gadgets including his watchman's clock, which also has Darwin-esque and Whitehurstian origins.
- 64 For Snelston, personal communication, the late Col. J. R. G. Stanton of Snelston: cf. M. Craven *Georgian Group Journal* XV (2005), pp. 215–228. For Catton, Glover, *Hist. Derby*, II, p. 235–6. For No. 41, Friar Gate, *Derby Mercury* 11 April 1832.
- 65 Burke's *Peerage* I (London, 2003), pp. 340–341; Burke's *Landed Gentry* (London, 1952), pp. 2441–2442.
- 66 Colvin, *Dictionary* (2008), p. 133.
- 67 *Derby Mercury*, 14 May 1862.
- 68 M. Higginson, *The Friar Gate Line* (Derby, 1989), pp. 17, 28.
- 69 Wilkins' & Ellis's *Directory of Derby* (1878).
- 70 Derby Local Studies Library, by-law applications, No. 1953 of 1877.
- 71 The widening is recorded by a map dated 1871 in the collections of Derby Local Studies Library. The fate of the ironwork is not known, but the rusticated gate aedicules seem to have been acquired by Derby School governor Charles Arkwright and, shorn of the large tablets which separated the pediments from the cornices, were re-erected on the drive (now Park Road) to his then home, Field House, Spondon where they have (unlike the house) survived.