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WILLERSLEY: AN ADAM CASTLE IN DERBYSHIRE

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Richard Arkwright, the cotton pioneer, first came to Derbyshire in 1771, when he set up a cotton spinning mill at Cromford, on a somewhat restricted site, over which his operations expanded for a decade. His investment repaid the risk handsomely, and from the 1780s he began to relish his success and started to adapt to his upwardly mobile situation. One aspect of this was dynastic, which saw his only daughter Susannah marry Charles Hurt of Wirksworth Hall, a member of an old gentry family and a partner, with his elder brother Francis, in a major ironworks nearby at Alderwasley.¹

Another aspect was architectural. At first, Arkwright had been obliged to reside in Wirksworth, four miles away and, apart from the leased land on which his mills stood, he did not at first own any land at Cromford, although he later built up a landholding piecemeal over the ensuing years. Indeed, the manor and much of the land had originally been owned by a lead merchant, Adam Soresby, from whose childless son it had come to his two sons-in-law, of whom one was William Milnes of Aldercar Hall. He, in turn, bought out the other son-in-law, a parson, in 1765. It would seem that by 1768



Fig. 1: William Day (1764–1807) 'A View of the mills at Cromford', 1789 (*Derby Museums Trust*)

Milnes had been living in a house on The Rock, a bluff overlooking the Derwent at Cromford, which had previously been the Soresbys'.² In 1775 an agreement was signed between Milnes and Arkwright that the latter should acquire the manor and estate of Cromford by 5 April 1776 for a consideration of £20,000.³ The transaction included a house of no great age called Rock House, which still stands on the bluff and which, due to its elevation, is largely invisible from the mills complex below.

Arkwright spent most of the remainder of his life turning Rock House into a gentleman's residence, probably using the services of the Derby architect George Rawlinson (1734–1823), later of Matlock Bath. I have argued elsewhere that he was Arkwright's builder of choice from quite early on in his time in Derbyshire, and that well known Arkwright buildings such as the facade of Masson Mill (1783) and The Greyhound Hotel, Cromford (1778), both architectonic and idiosyncratically Palladian, are attributable to him.⁴ But despite all the work Arkwright put in to make Rock House a comfortable and suitable home for an upwardly mobile businessman, things took on a new gloss once he had purchased the manorial estate of Willersley, on the opposite side of the Derwent from Cromford, from Thomas Hallett Hodges in 1782.⁵ In 1786, with a knighthood in prospect, he began work to create a spectacular semi-public Elysium, using the Derwent as centrepiece and Wild Cat Tor to the north as backdrop for a new, much more imposing house, more suited to a knight and a high sheriff, honours to which Arkwright took with some relish.⁶ Here a major seat was about to be created, to sit in a landscape traversed by a major river, two roads and containing a working community, maintained by its creator's mills, themselves offering a startling counterpoint on the opposite side of the valley.

In this there was no work for Rawlinson. This was either because he was still fully occupied, either at Rock House or quite possibly at Mellor Mill, completed in 1790. Alternatively, he might have fallen



Fig. 2: Willersley Castle, photographed by Richard Keene c.1865 (Author)

out with the demanding entrepreneur and been given his marching orders, as had happened to others, including his original partners. Just as likely is the possibility that Arkwright knew what he wanted and had come to realise that Rawlinson was not the man to provide it. The person Sir Richard engaged instead to design this new house was William Thomas (1739–1800), who in many ways might seem an odd choice. Born at Stackpole, Pembrokeshire, in 1739, he would have been qualified as an architect in 1760 or 1761, but he only comes to notice working in London in 1780, when he exhibited designs at the Royal Academy. Four years later he exhibited a large folio book of Neoclassical designs, *Original Designs in Architecture*. The buildings depicted here were very much in the manner of Robert Adam, who indeed was one of those listed as subscribers to the publication. There are a substantial number of designs known to have been made by Thomas for schemes that were never carried out, and only five substantial executed commissions are known. He died in London in 1800.⁷

Bearing in mind that the house Thomas



Fig. 3: Print after William Thomas's perspective view of Willersley published in 1792 (*James Richardson*)

designed for Arkwright was as close to resembling a Robert Adam original as could be, it is possible that Sir Richard had approached Adam in 1786, but that the architect had turned out to be either too busy or too expensive, bearing in mind that Arkwright himself was notably parsimonious. If Arkwright's previous architectural dealings had indeed been with George Rawlinson, as suggested, then the sort of money being asked by a London man like Adam must have been something of a shock to the mill-owner. Furthermore, in that year Adam had several commissions running, although by this time his popularity in England had begun to be eclipsed to some extent by that of James Wyatt, and his commissions were by then increasingly confined to his native Scotland.⁸ Thus Sir Richard, perhaps faced by an impossibly high quotation from Adam for coming back south again, was probably recommended to Thomas instead as able to design in the same style and as almost certainly likely to be considerably less expensive.

It may be too that Thomas had to convince Arkwright that his interpretation of what the mill

owner wanted was indeed what was required, for he made a perspective view of the proposed building in its setting. Thomas later had his effort engraved in 1792 (by which time he was no longer responsible for the work at Cromford), probably in an effort to revive his career (Fig. 3). He had clearly never actually been to Cromford when he made the original drawing, for the spectacular hill behind the house, Wild Cat Tor, is nowhere visible, and the remainder of the setting bears little resemblance to the actuality of the site. Quite why he never remedied this before he had the engraving made is unclear, for a realistic account of the true setting could only have enhanced the impact of the view.⁹

The house Thomas designed was built of finely ashlarred Chatsworth Grit – a type of millstone grit sandstone from Oakes Quarry, Tansley¹⁰ – and firmly in Adam's 'Castle' style, by which is meant a Classical house tricked out with battlements, machicolations, towers and other accoutrements of the medieval stronghold (Fig. 2). Yet underneath, as with an Adam 'castle', it is a Neoclassical house of two and a half storeys and seven bays. The

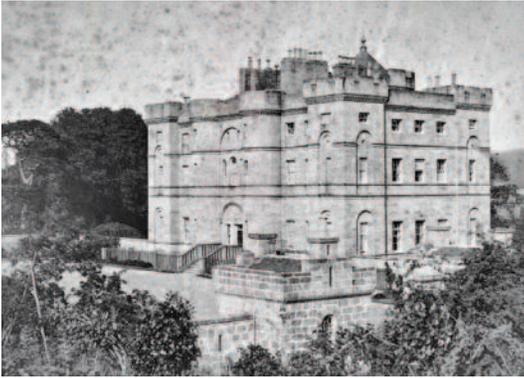


Fig. 4: Dalquharran from the SE, c.1870. Its façade was later extended by the addition of full height extensions in matching style (*Private collection*)

fenestration is of strictly conventional sashes and the façade perfectly symmetrical. The romantic elements – for the style was clearly chosen to accord with the breathtakingly romantic setting – consist of a raised centrepiece, wherein the middle bay is enhanced, set within a blind arch and flanked by slim turrets, lit by slit windows, with a further raised drum-like embattled projection lighting the stairwell behind, along with further wide and low crenellations along the parapet. The lower wings also sport round tower-like end bays – but not, strictly speaking, bartizans as they have often been described – and the façade is further enlivened by sill bands and plat bands paired on each storey. The sides are of four bays, unlike Thomas’s engraving, which shows a complex return of seven bays, that nearest the façade in each case being wider, lit by tripartite windows and projecting slightly.

The interior is relatively conventional, but was originally intended to be lavish, even though the waspishly snobbish Hon. John Byng described it as ‘an effort of inconvenient ill-taste . . . the ceilings are of gew-gaw fretwork’.¹¹ Nevertheless, the staircase was intended as a *tour-de-force* of Adam-style architectural theatre, rising through the centre of the house in a continuous cantilevered oval, dramatically

top-lit; had it survived it would have been without doubt the finest staircase in Derbyshire.

Willersley was probably Thomas’s most prestigious commission, and he was clearly very pleased with it for in his portrait by the American artist Mather Brown he is shown holding a copy of the plans. This portrait is of significance to the project, for his client, too, was painted by Brown, and it may be that they were done more or less simultaneously, which itself implies a fairly close and friendly working relationship, at least initially, between client and architect.¹² Whether anyone warned Thomas that Sir Richard was a particularly demanding client, a hard taskmaster and exceedingly careful with his money, is not known, but the honeymoon was not to endure. The drawings that Thomas made – more than thirty sheets – survived and are now in the Bodleian along with the pen and wash architect’s perspective and the engraving mentioned above.

There is no precedent for the design of Willersley amongst the surviving drawings and other works of William Thomas, and most commentators like to dismiss the overall design of the façade as deriving from Robert Adam’s Culzean Castle, Ayrshire, designed for the tenth Earl of Cassilis in 1772 and still being finished when Thomas was designing the Cromford house. Whilst this spectacular cliff-girt house was indeed a possible inspiration, the façade of Willersley in fact owes its inspiration to the same architect’s Dalquharran Castle, further up the coast of Ayrshire, built for Thomas Kennedy of Dunure at almost exactly the same time that Willersley was being built (Fig. 4). Dalquharran was also built on a bluff overlooking an impressive landscape and was first commissioned in 1782, although the definite design was not finalised until 1785, a year before Thomas began work on Willersley.¹³ The carcass of Dalquharran was not finished until 1790, in which year John Byng reported of Willersley in June that, ‘The inside is now finishing’.¹⁴

Clearly the two were almost exactly contemporary – which may indeed explain Adam’s inability to take Arkwright’s commission – and it seems inescapable that the Scots house directly inspired the Derbyshire one. Even the staircases were similar, Dalquharran having exactly the same arrangement as that intended for Willersley but of circular rather than oval plan (Figs. 5 & 6). This

does rather suggest a closer link between Thomas and Adam than has previously been supposed; the impression is that Thomas must have at least visited and probably also measured Dalquharran, which would clearly imply the active co-operation of Adam as well as that of Thomas Kennedy, the owner.

Whilst the interior plan of Dalquharran was classically Adam ‘castle’ with a central core of

Fig. 5: Remains of staircase, Dalquharran 2009 (*John Maxwell*)



Fig. 6: Position of original staircase, Willersley (*Author*)



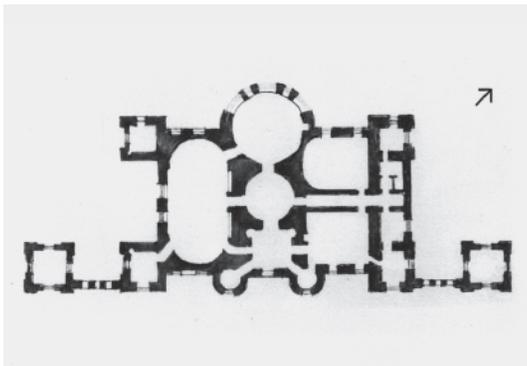


Fig. 7: Robert Adam, plan of the ground floor of Dalquharran Castle, Ayrshire redrawn from an anonymous 18th-century plan in the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments Scotland, AYD 70/37.

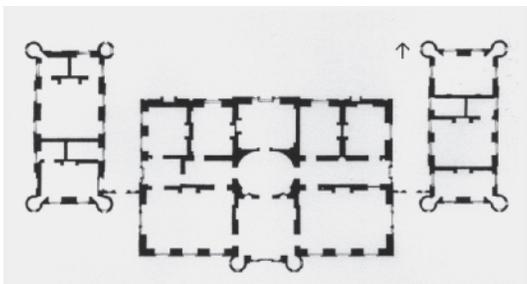


Fig. 8: William Thomas, plan of the ground floor of Willersley Castle redrawn from an undated original in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Gough Maps, 41a, f.74)

entrance and staircase hall with south facing drawing room behind (Fig. 7), Willersley effectively had only one south facing front, due to the fact that it was built on a vast excavated platform on the flank of Wild Cat Tor; its north side faced a vertiginous cliff of rock. Thus, whereas the central core contained entrance hall and planned staircase hall, the drawing room and dining rooms had to be offset on either side of the entrance. Furthermore, whilst the plan of Dalquharran is internally irregular, despite the exterior being entirely symmetrical thanks to the use

of blind windows here and there, the layout at Willersley is on the whole much more conventional and symmetrical (Fig. 8).

The workaday north front of Willersley also contrasts unfavourably with the magnificent garden front of Dalquharran, with its central full height bow. Nevertheless, the main (entrance) front of Willersley does bear direct comparison with the entrance front of Dalquharran, with the broad central bay similarly recessed between a pair of full height semi-circular towers (Figs. 7 & 8). The difference is that at the Derbyshire house the detailing is less exuberant, the semi-circular towers more slender, the handling of the elements slightly less deft and the overall impression decidedly less muscular. At Willersley, Thomas replaced Adam's massive-looking square corner towers at Dalquharran with plain angles, short links and lower pavilions with crenellated corner turrets, containing the offices. These rather lack the impact on the façade that the Scottish house achieves.

Something of the chronology of the building sequence can be reconstructed. In March 1788 the hillside where the house was to stand was being hacked out, and the resulting rock and spoil built up in from to form a house platform. Progress must have been fairly rapid, however, for in June 1789 John Byng wrote that he had been 'to where Sr. R:A is building himself a grand house (Wensley Castle [*sic*]) in the same castellated style as one sees at Clapham; and *really* he has made a *happy* choice of ground. For by sticking it up on an unsafe bank, he contrives to overlook, not see, the beauties of the river, and the surrounding scenery.'¹⁵ Almost exactly a year later, the cynical diarist was back, on this occasion noting that the inside was being finished off and complaining of the 'inconvenient ill taste' the house displayed. It was nevertheless another year before any furniture appears to have been put in, so the finishing seems to have taken an unconscionably long time. Indeed, Willersley was due to be completed in the autumn of 1791 But on the night of 8 August 1791, as Willersley was nearing completion,

‘it was set on fire by a stove that was over-heated, and all that was combustible was consumed.’¹⁶ The interior must have been reasonably well advanced, though, as the *Derby Mercury* reported that ‘most of the elegant furniture was preserv’d’.¹⁷

This was a massive set-back for Sir Richard, for work had to begin all over again, only the shell of the house being spared the conflagration. Worse, William Thomas no longer had anything to do with the project for, like so many other of the great entrepreneur’s associates, he had fallen victim to Arkwright’s capricious and demanding nature. Indeed, it would seem that he had been sent packing even before the fire had broken out. Needless to say, Arkwright had disputed Thomas’s costs with him to such an extent that the hapless architect was forced to resort to legal action to get his money. In the event, the parties resorted to arbitration with Thomas being awarded what seems like a paltry £90 plus costs, although what proportion this was of the sum he had originally put in for is unclear. In any case, the matter was hardly likely to incline Arkwright to re-engage him for the rebuilding.

For the restoration and finishing of the fire-blackened shell of Willersley, Arkwright also demurred from calling on the services of George Rawlinson, who was still alive and flourishing in the area, choosing instead another reasonably local architect, Thomas Gardner of Uttoxeter, formerly assistant to Joseph Pickford of Derby.¹⁸ At the time he received this commission, sometime in 1792, Gardner was building Strelley Hall, just north of Nottingham, for Thomas Webb Edge, whose wife was a daughter of Francis Hurt of Alderwasley and therefore a cousin by marriage of Arkwright’s daughter Susannah.¹⁹ It is thus clear how Gardner had come into the Arkwright ambit, although whether Sir Richard engaged him, or his son, Richard, junior, is unclear, for Sir Richard died on 2 August that same year. It was therefore inevitable that work on restoring the house would be delayed.

Gardner resumed work on the house in April

1794, but with modifications. The elliptical staircase was not replaced. The drawing for it as intended by Thomas shows that it would have been really quite steep, and that the door to the study, set beneath the first pitch, was of necessity somewhat shorter than those that flanked it. It is not even wholly clear if it was actually built before the fire, but if it was it must have largely been destroyed in the conflagration, for no doubt the top-lit well would have acted as a giant chimney during the fire, drawing the blaze, fanned by the prevailing wind, upwards. Either way, the result was that it was elided completely, leaving only the landings, the retention of which was essential to upper floor circulation. Thus we find Gardner submitting accounts for ‘Geometry Hopton Stone Steps, Quarter Spans, Landings, Rebates and Toggle Joints.’²⁰ The iron balustrades on the landings differ substantially from the design shown in Thomas’s original drawing and Gardner had to submit bills for making holes for the balustrade to be mounted, suggesting that its supports were spaced differently. As finished, the galleries themselves appear to be more or less the same as Thomas had envisaged, if lacking much of the stucco work originally proposed.²¹ The staircase was replaced by a much less vertiginous, remorselessly plain one with straight pitches, put in a gloomy adjoining space and looking for all the world like a servants’ stair. Thus what had originally been the staircase hall thereafter became a top lit full-height space with galleried landings running around it on the two floors above; the effect is unexpectedly arresting. Gardner also put in two service ranges to the rear, hard up against the steep limestone cliff that had been hacked away at great expense by Sir Richard to create the platform on which his new house stood. The fire seems to have calcified all the original marble fireplaces too, and new ones had to be provided.

These changes were probably made in consultation with Arkwright’s son, Richard, junior, a much more unassuming man than his father. The decorative stucco throughout was greatly simplified,

and Gardner even drew up a scheme which would have elided the flanking pavilions, although in the end these were kept. Replacement furnishings were delivered before 28 December 1792 and further pieces came in June 1794, so just how accurate the *Derby Mercury* report of the fire's aftermath is unclear.²² Perhaps the paper was right and the furniture was saved; Richard may have thought it too pretentious, he and his wife perhaps preferring a fresh scheme.

The new architect was also given the task of building the stable block, situated above the main house to the north-east, the lodges, gates and the chapel, which was situated across the river on the Cromford side. Work on these elements was only restarted two years after Sir Richard's death. His



Fig. 9: Façade of Dalquharran as extended, during unroofing, 1960s (*John Maxwell*)

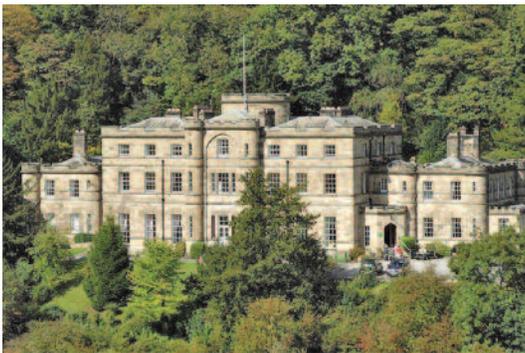


Fig.10. Willersley Castle, 1990 (*Author*)

‘express Will and Direction’ had been that his only son and heir should ‘with all convenient speed . . . complete in a proper manner the Mansion house I have lately erected’.²³

THE SETTING

Anyone familiar with the Derwent valley immediately south of Matlock might wonder why on earth the environs of the Arkwrights' new house should need the attentions of a professional landscaper. Yet that is what was required: a setting to allow the spectacular new house to sit within a landscape which would complement the architecture, in itself new to Derbyshire. To achieve this task the family called in John Webb (1754–1828), a pupil and later assistant of the Derby-based follower of Lancelot Brown, William Emes.²⁴ Webb had been working as Emes's assistant when Gardner was working with Joseph Pickford of Derby in the extensive works undertaken for Josiah Wedgwood at Etruria in 1769–1772, so they must have known each other well.²⁵ Gardner may indeed have recommended Webb to Arkwright, unless Webb had already started on the landscaping before the fire. Unfortunately, the chronology of this element of the project is not at all clear. Prior to the building of Willersley Castle, the area by the bridge at Cromford had become crowded with buildings: a smelting mill, the new house of Edmund Hodgkinson (thought to have been the father of the elder Arkwright's mistress) and a cluster of farm buildings of various vintages, amongst which were the vestiges, long adapted to agricultural purposes, of the former chapel at Cromford. Except for Hodgkinson's Derwent House which stood just beside the entrance lodge, these were cleared away, the remains of the ancient chapel exposed and a fishing house built.

Webb's scheme was no doubt worked out in some detail with the younger Arkwright. Although in practice contrived, it was intended to appear as an



Fig. 11: Joseph Wright of Derby: 'Sir Richard Arkwright'
(*Derby Museums Trust*)

ideal, romantic, landscape of the kind that was intensely admired by the connoisseurs of the day. Some such concept must have been uppermost in Sir Richard's mind too, when he originally commissioned the house; its design and the landscape in which it was to sit were clearly such as to demand a dramatic setting suitably enhanced by an artful re-ordering of nature. These often highly contrived landscapes represented a move away from the pastoral set-pieces of Brown and Emes towards the wild, rugged and awe-inspiring impelled by the creations and writings of Richard Payne Knight, Uvedale Price and William Gilpin. Of course, the Derwent Valley in the environs of Cromford had

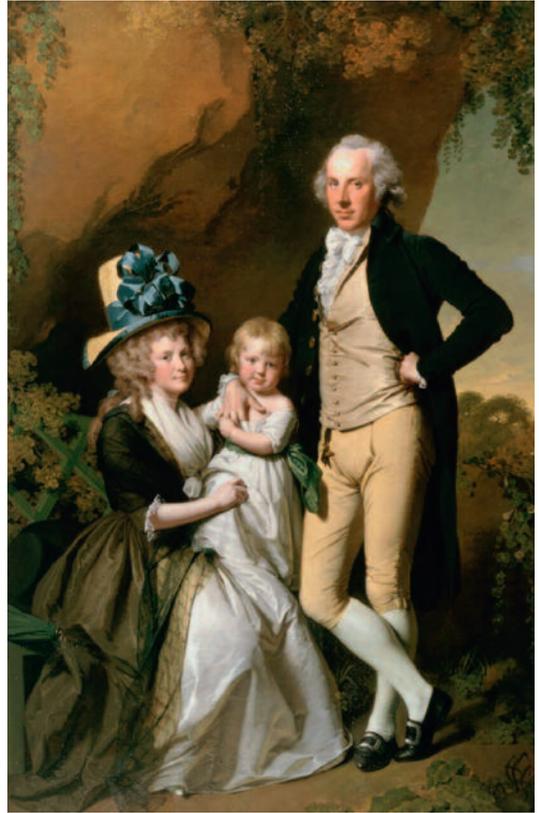


Fig. 12: Joseph Wright of Derby,
'Richard Arkwright junior, his wife and child both',
1789–90 (*Derby Museums Trust*)

done pretty well in this line before Milnes, Hurt, Nightingale and indeed Arkwright himself had come along and sullied it with the untidy agglomerations of industry. This was Sir Richard's opportunity to turn back the tide of progress and create his own Elysium, but one on such a scale and in such a place that all who passed by could also enjoy it. The parkland appears to have been finally complete by 1802 by which time it is said that 350,000 trees had been planted over the estate and through the gorge to Matlock Bath.

Part of this effort to create a sublime landscape was to incorporate buildings, but again in a carefully planned way. Arkwright's intended replacement



Fig. 13: The first floor landing (*Author*)

chapel of St Mary was to be placed in a very specific position on the south bank of the Derwent, hence the necessity of clearing the clutter of buildings by the bridge at Cromford. In the event, some newly built but existing buildings were suffered to remain, but in the case of a warehouse built at the termination point of the Cromford canal in 1794, sited just below the bluff on which Rock House stands and to its east, the end wall facing the Castle was raised and crenellated as an eye-catcher.

THE CHAPEL

Also conceived as an important element of the landscape as well as an intended eye-catcher was the chapel that Arkwright had planned to build back when he bought the manor of Cromford. The old chapel at there had been a chapel-of-ease of Wirksworth church, which was in existence by the mid fifteenth century, was out of repair by 1524 and which seems to have fallen into desuetude by the time of the Civil War. Its situation by the west approach to the bridge over the Derwent has led to its being described as a bridge chapel, but the eminent Victorian ecclesiologist, J. C. Cox did not share that view, undoubtedly correctly. By 1753, its shell, much rebuilt, had been turned into two small artisans' cottages. These were cleared away by Webb in 1796, leaving only a late Gothic arch and a few other fragments near the bridge, no doubt allowed to remain also in the interests of the enhancement of the landscape.²⁶ Its replacement was originally conceived by Sir Richard Arkwright as a private chapel on Smelting House Green and as an adjunct to Rock House, and a start had been made in building it. His will refers to it in a contradictory way, Sir Richard directing that his son should 'with all convenient speed after my decease . . . compleat and finish the chapel I have lately built.' Fitton pointed out that it was not in fact built, and it seems probably that in 1780 he selected the site and perhaps got as far as putting in footings, but that the project was postponed, perhaps because he turned his attention to the house.²⁷ After a break of some three years following Sir Richard's death (not much evidence of 'all convenient speed!') work on the chapel was resumed, henceforth intended as a place of worship for the whole Cromford community and not just the family. It was not finished until summer 1797, being opened on 4 June that year and dedicated on 20 September.²⁸

In design it was a typical Georgian 'preaching box' but in deference to the requirements of the landscape, its sturdy tower was embattled and the

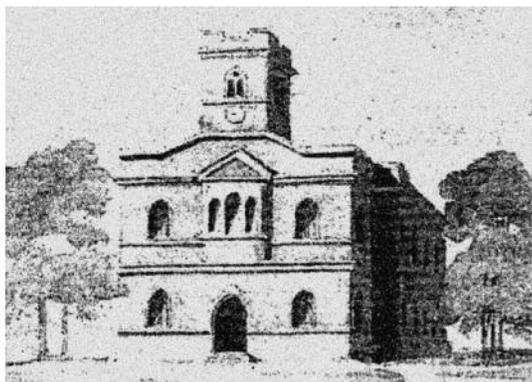


Fig. 14: The Chapel (Later Comford parish church) at Willersley, as built, c.1819. (Derbyshire County Council)

angles were also marked by raised portions of parapet to imply fortification. Otherwise it boasted sides of six bays, the windows sitting on a sill band with another below, approximately as in the façade of the Castle on the hill above. The west front was of three bays with Gothic fenestration and entrance, over which was a triple oriel window almost in the form of a Serliana, under a triangular pediment, the tower rising from a ramped parapet above.

The question arises as to who might have designed the chapel. It appears externally complete in a sequence of three images created in the 1790s. If it was built before the fire at the Castle, it is presumably the work of Thomas, or even Rawlinson, if it was really begun soon after Arkwright's purchase of the manor. If, as seems most likely, it was a post-fire development, the author would have been Gardner rather than Webb who, although a designer of occasional buildings, has nothing in his *oeuvre* to justify attributing the chapel to him. It is also important to bear in mind that the chapel was not completed until spring 1797. The key to dating the work lies in three surviving images of the area painted in the 1790s. The most important of these is a gloriously pellucid landscape by Joseph Wright of Derby entitled a *View of Cromford Bridge*, which

shows the Castle and the chapel all complete and the landscape looking settled, but by no means fully realised, as a later engraving after J. P. Neale, which could hardly have been done before c.1798–1800, shows a large bank of earth by the house, created by the re-aligning of the land in front of it, an operation clearly not begun when Wright visited.

Wright's picture was illustrated in 1968 by Benedict Nicolson, who assumed it was painted before the fire in 1790/91 on the basis that it must have been done at the same time as the artist was executing the famous portrait of Sir Richard seated with a model of his water frame (1789). On the same basis, it has been generally accepted that this is also the date of 'Arkwright's Cotton Mills by Day' (Fig. 1, above), the companion piece to 'Cromford Bridge'.²⁹ Yet there is evidence in the view that it was painted much later for, in the distance, beyond the bridge, can be seen a reasonably substantial house. This is Woodend, a house built for himself by Sir Richard's former associate, the lead trader Peter Nightingale, because he felt that his previous house, Lea Hall, was too exposed and uncomfortable in inclement weather.³⁰ A letter of March 1796 informs us that this house was just being completed and that Nightingale intended to move in during the spring. As the house is shown clearly complete, we are enabled to pinpoint Wright's painting as having been executed – in the studio from an on-site sketch – in summer 1796 or 1797. As the painter died in the August of the latter year, and was previously unwell, it is probable that the painting dates from the former. We know that he was still painting then, for two scenes in the Lake District were executed in that same year, despite his asthma and other health problems.³¹ Nor was the picture a commission from either Richard Arkwright or anyone else; it was painted speculatively, and was later sold to the radical Tory MP Daniel Parker Coke, of The College, Derby, so there was no incentive to show uncompleted buildings as complete just to flatter either the Arkwrights or Nightingale; he painted exactly what he saw.



Fig. 15: Joseph Wright of Derby, ARA: 'A View of Cromford Bridge' here dated to summer 1796. Woodend is visible just above and left of the church (*Christies*)

Another picture, this time by the Derby china painter George Robertson, also shows exactly the same scene, albeit from a slightly different angle, with the chapel and Woodend both complete. John Haslem, a very reliable chronicler of the doings of the china factory, wrote of Robertson that he 'started painting water colours in different parts of Derbyshire, chiefly about Derby, Matlock, Cromford and Castleton; they were taken between 1796 and 1810.'³² Robertson's view could not have been taken before 1796, and Wright's hardly after that year, which allows us to confirm the date of the latter's painting to 1796, with the chapel's carcass complete but, presumably, the interior yet to be fitted out. 1796 was also the year in which the Arkwrights finally moved into Willersley Castle.

All this strongly suggests that the design of the chapel was completely re-thought after the departure of William Thomas and the death of Sir Richard. That the architect was Thomas Gardner there can be

no doubt, for we have documentary evidence that he designed the lodge house by the gate on the north side of the bridge, and the detailing is very similar, especially the use of wide, low crenellations on the parapet of both buildings. It also has echoes in the church Gardner designed in 1777 at Wigginton, Staffordshire, which although smaller and simpler, has marked similarities to that at Cromford.³³

Richard Arkwright junior endowed the new chapel with £50 per annum, which he later increased to £250, once he had decided to make it a church for the whole community and not just a family chapel. Thereafter, by other grants, this was further increased to a total of £1,250. To accommodate the villagers, a gallery was accordingly put in. An extremely fine monument to Richard Arkwright's wife Mary was carved for the church in 1820 by Derbyshire-born Sir Francis Chantrey. However, in 1858–59 it was completely rebuilt, receiving a complete Gothic makeover and acquiring a chancel,

rebuilt tower, and west portico. At the same time its gallery was removed, all at a cost of £3,000, and in the process took on the form it retains to this day. This work was done to the designs and under the direction of Henry Isaac Stevens of Derby (1806–1873), the most prolific and competent local architect of his day. It became a parish church in 1869. The present lavish interior decoration was added by Alfred Octavius Hemmings of London to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. It was thoroughly restored in 1996–2001.³⁴

EPILOGUE

The Arkwright family continued to live in Willersley Castle, Sir Richard's grandson Peter commissioning Derby-born Edward Blore to enlarge the house slightly, to provide a new entrance on the SE angle between the main house and its eastern pavilion, and to re-arrange its interior.³⁵ The house became an auxiliary hospital during the Great War but with the death of Frederic Arkwright, Sir Richard's great-grandson, in 1923 family occupation ceased. Thereafter the Castle remained unoccupied and in 1927 Frederic's son Richard Alleyne Arkwright sold the contents and then the house and estate to the

maverick Nottingham property developer Sir Albert Ball.³⁶ He split the estate up by sale disposing of the house and grounds to a group of Nonconformist businessmen who converted it into a holiday centre run by the Wesley Guild which opened its doors in 1936. During the Second World War the Salvation Army Clapton (Middlesex) maternity home re-located to the house in 1940, not vacating it until 1946. In the late twentieth century it was acquired by a related organisation, Christian Guild Holidays, and is currently run as an hotel. With the work of the Arkwright Society over the last forty years in saving and re-habilitating Arkwright's mill complex and the designation of the area as part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage site, Sir Richard's private Elysium has been opened to the public with much hope for its continuance into the foreseeable future. In this, the centrepiece of the surviving landscape, Willersley Castle has been much more fortunate than its Robert Adam designed precursor at Dalquharran, which was unroofed in 1967 and survives today only as a ruined shell in a landscape long gone wild.

NOTES

- 1 The standard work on the life of Arkwright is R.S. Fitton, *The Arkwrights, Spinners of Fortune* (Manchester, 1989).
- 2 He probably moved there in 1760 on inheriting his portion of the manor.
- 3 Arkwright MSS, Willersley Castle.
- 4 M. Craven, *Pirates, Parsons and Patricians* (Derby, 2014), pp. 246–50. He was probably also responsible for the seats of Francis Hurt at Alderwasley Hall and of Adam Simpson, Arkwright's son-in-law, The Study, Bonsall.
- 5 Mainly Willersley Farm and its land. Arkwright's estate at Cromford was thereafter 2,447 acres.
- 6 Fitton, *op. cit.*, p. 185. He was knighted in December 1786 and served as High Sheriff of Derbyshire in 1787.
- 7 H.M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (4th edn., New Haven and London, 2008), p. 1035.



Fig. 16: Thomas Gardner, Willersley Castle lodge and gates (*Author*)

- 8 *Ibid.* pp. 46, 53.
- 9 The original drawing is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the engraving of the latter, by J. Cartwright, is entitled *Perspective View of Sir Richard Arkwright's House, at Cromford in Derbyshire. Designed by Wm. Thomas, Architect & Executed in the Years 1789 & 1790. Published as the Act directs, 1792*, and is very rare
- 10 I am grateful to Michael Stanley FGS for the identification of the stone. That from the excavation of the house platform went to form the platform on which the house sat.
- 11 Hon. John Byng (Viscount Torrington,) *The Torrington Diaries 1781–1794* ed. C.B. Andrews, vol. II (London, 1935–1938), pp. 194–195 (19 June 1790). Thomas's drawings in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Gough Maps, 41A) suggest fairly lavish Adamesque stucco work was planned for the three main reception rooms. 'Gew-gaw fretwork' reappears in the same county at Newton Park, Newton Solney: Georgian Group *Journal* 28 (2010), pp. 161–3.
- 12 It is one of two in the collections of the RIBA.
- 13 Dalquharran is described in *Country Life*, 22 August 1974, pp. 494–5. Thomas Kennedy was unrelated to Lord Cassilis. The building records are in the Scottish National Archives, GD/28/7; the clerk of works, whose co-operation Thomas would have sought, was Hugh Cairncross.
- 14 *Ibid.* J. Britton & E. W. Brayley, *The Beauties of England and Wales* vol. III (London, 1802), p. 518 erroneously states that the carcass was covered (i.e. roofed) in 1788.
- 15 Torrington (1935–1938) II, pp 194–195 (14th June).
- 16 Britton & Brayley (1802), *loc.cit.*
- 17 *Derby Mercury*, 11 August 1791. It had been supplied by Messrs. Edward Wilson of The Strand, London, at a cost of £415, 18s, 9d: Fitton, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
- 18 Derbyshire RO, 978/E8 and account book, private collection; for their relationship see E. J. Saunders, *Joseph Pickford of Derby* (Stroud, 1993), pp. 62, 93, 96, 112 & 156.
- 19 Colvin, *Dictionary*, p. 409; Rebuilding did not begin until April 1794 and finished at the end of 1795: Fitton, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
- 20 Derbyshire RO, 978/E8.
- 21 Bodleian Library, Gough Maps, 41A f. 74.
- 22 Derbyshire RO, 978/M3–7 & 10–11 (bills from Messrs. Wilson of 376, The Strand, London).
- 23 Dated 29th July 1792 (PRO).
- 24 Fitton *loc.cit.*; Colvin, *Dictionary*, pp. 1098–9.
- 25 M. Craven, *John Whitehurst FRS Scientist and Clockmaker* (Mayfield, 1996) 78–82; Saunders, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–4. Emes had laid out the Lovers' Walks alongside the Derwent just west of Willersley some years before.
- 26 J.C. Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. II (Derby 1877), p. 571.
- 27 Fitton, *op. cit.*, p. 218.
- 28 S. Glover, *History and Gazetteer of Derbyshire* 2nd edn., vol. II. (Derby, 1833), p. 358. Work seems to have resumed on the chapel in August 1795: Fitton, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
- 29 B. Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light*, vols I (London, 1968), pp. 90–91, 125, 165–7 & II, p. 265, No. 311; J. Egerton (ed.) *Wright of Derby: Catalogue of an Exhibition at the Tate Gallery* (London, 1990), pp. 199–200. *Cromford Bridge* only came onto the Market in late 2003 at Christie's but failed to sell.
- 30 Although modest in size, it faces north: M. Craven & M. Stanley, *The Derbyshire Country House* (3rd edn., vol II (Ashbourne, 2001), pp. 285–6.
- 31 Egerton, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- 32 J. Haslem, *The Old Derby China Factory* (Derby, 1876) p. 102. It postdates a painting by J.P. Neale also showing the earthworks for the park still in progress.
- 33 Wigginton was drawn to my attention in this connection by the late Edward Saunders, who recognised Gardner's handwriting on the faculty plans deposited in the Lichfield Joint Record Office.
- 34 I.H. Combes, *The Churches of Derbyshire* (Ashbourne, 2004), p. 63; cf. N. Pevsner & E. Williamson, *The Buildings of England: Derbyshire* 2nd ed., (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 159.
- 35 In 1843–44.
- 36 Contents sale: *Times*, 20 March 1927. Ball was father of the homonymous RFC hero and posthumous Great War VC.