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# JOHN FOULON, MARQUESS DE FOULON, ARCHITECT<sup>1</sup>

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This article derives from research being done for the prospective South Hampshire volume of the Pevsner *Buildings of England* series. It began with the discovery at Bisterne Manor, near Ringwood, of architectural designs dated 1856 signed by John Foulon, 470 Oxford Street<sup>2</sup>. The designs are in an elaborate Tudor Gothic mode and although they were not executed, Bisterne Manor was given a mild Tudor Gothic rendered façade

about this time. Foulon does not have an entry in Colvin's *Dictionary* or any other obvious source. So who was John Foulon? This began a genealogical trail which, as well as the usual genealogical sources, included material from the Survey of London, the Soane Museum and even the Royal Archives. The result is a fascinating story<sup>3</sup>.

It begins in France with the fall of the Bastille in 1789. During this event one of Louis XVI's ministers,



Bisterne Manor. One of a series of variant designs for the Entrance Front of Bisterne Manor 1856, signed by John Foulon. (*Bisterne Manor Archive*)

hated by the populace, Jean Francois-Foulon de Droué, was captured by the mob, humiliated and eventually beheaded, his head being paraded around Paris on a pike. The relationship of John Foulon to this person cannot be proved, but a John or James Foulon, who professed to be Marquess de Foulon, like so many of those with aristocratic connections, left France almost immediately and came to England. It is not clear whether he came with his wife but he almost certainly came with his sister, Madalena. We next find him around 1791 in Carmarthen, South Wales. How he arrived there is unclear but, by coincidence, another French émigré, Auguste Charles Pugin, father of A.W.N. Pugin, who also professed aristocratic connections, was also there. They had both arrived in Carmarthen since the aspiring architect, John Nash, having established a successful practice there, was seeking assistants. Nash had been working in Carmarthen for some years and built gaols at Carmarthen, Cardigan and Hereford as well as restoring St David's Cathedral and building several residences. Pugin recalls that he 'hastened to Mr Nash's residence and when shown into the waiting room, was astonished to find a French nobleman whom he had known in Paris, a candidate for the same appointment'<sup>4</sup>. This was, of course, Foulon. Both were taken on by Nash, Pugin becoming one of his chief draughtsmen. Foulon's position is unclear but it must have been one of close association since, in 1794, the birth of James, son of James Foulon, is recorded, with Nash standing as godfather. The boy's name was probably James John, and ensuing records use both names rather indiscriminately. Unfortunately the Carmarthen records are silent as to his mother's identity and it has not so far been possible to establish exactly who his father was<sup>5</sup>.

Nash returned to London in 1796 and both Pugin and Foulon came with him, the Foulons settling in Kensington. London already had a thriving French émigré population and Brompton was a favoured settlement area. The next event recorded

is in 1800 when Madalena Foulon married Paolo Diana Spagnoletti. Spagnoletti was a musician who had come from Cremona to England in the 1790s. He was a noted violinist and organised concerts in London and became leader of the orchestra at the King's Theatre. At some time around 1810 young John Foulon joined his father in Nash's office. We then find, in 1819, John Foulon, 'widower', marrying Martha Harrison at St James's Piccadilly. It has not been possible to explain why he is described as widower. Martha's origin is given as Birmingham and the witness to the wedding was Ernesto Spagnoletti, son of Paolo and Madalena. In the years following several more children are born: Caroline Matilda in 1822 (baptised at St Martins in the Fields), John Alexander 1824, Charlotte Angelina 1825, Leonora Mary 1827 and Jessie Matilda 1828.

We then come to one of the most puzzling facts. In the *Morning Advertiser* 22nd December 1830, under those attending the Court Relief of Insolvent Debtors, is listed John Foulon of 32 Thistle Grove, Kensington, described as 'clerk to an architect'. Is this Foulon senior or junior? Whichever it was, he was committed to the Marshalsea Prison, but was quickly bailed out on 12 January 1831 by one of Nash's principal assistants, James Pennethorne. After Nash's death in 1835 it was Pennethorne who took over Nash's role with the Commission of Woods in laying out the northern area of Regents Park and the extension of Oxford Street. With the raising of the various children in the 1820s, it is perhaps more likely that this was the father rather than the son. It is then recorded that by 1834, due to ill health, John and his family had moved to St Leonards, Hastings. St Leonards was a fashionable resort having only recently been laid out due to the enterprise of the builder James Burton (1761-1836), father of the architect Decimus Burton. It was a place which had already been discovered by the Duchess of Kent and her daughter Princess Victoria, and in November 1834 they took the lease of Crown House, staying until January 1835. St

Leonards naturally feted the visitors and a number of dinners were arranged for local dignitaries. These included of course James Burton and also Charles Southall, who had established a library and reading room there. To celebrate their Royal visitors Charles Southall commissioned John Foulon to draw a set of views of St Leonards, which were then published as lithographs in 1835, with a copy being presented to the Princess and her mother. As is well known Princess Victoria was fond of drawing and painting and it must have been Southall who recommended John Foulon to the Princess to help her with perspective<sup>6</sup>. His visits to the Princess on three occasions are recorded in her journals. It was while the Foulons were in St Leonards in 1834 that a further daughter, Susan Nina, was born.

By 1839 the Foulons had returned to London and were living in Victoria Grove, Kensington. In that year, for reasons unclear, a collective baptism was conducted at St Mary Abbott, Kensington for their children, John, Charlotte, Leonora and Jesse. John had not returned to architecture but had secured a post as a clerk at the General Register Office, Somerset House. He was still a clerk at Somerset House in 1843 but curiously the family does not appear in the 1841 Census, which seems extraordinary since it is the Register Office which was compiling the census. By 1851 he had resumed a position as clerk to an architect, and is so listed in the Census of that year, his residence being Edith Cottages, North End Road, Fulham. Alas, the architect is not named but it may well have been Pennethorne. Also about this time, John gained a position as surveyor to the Horseshoe Brewery in Tottenham Court Road, owned by Sir Henry Meux. Meux had succeeded to a considerable fortune and had bought Theobalds Park, near Cheshunt, Herts, and John Foulon later records that he added a conservatory to the house and designed some estate buildings. He was also involved in building a house for Meux's brother-in-law, Richard Arabin, at High Beech, Essex. This is recorded as being the work of

the architect Francis Octavius Bedford and it seems likely that Foulon's role was simply to produce the working drawings. Bedford's connection with Foulon doubtless arose via his brother who had been working in Carmarthen. Shortly afterwards John set up an office at 470 Oxford Street, in part of that extended street which had been laid out under the direction of Pennethorne, and it was from here that he produced the drawings for Bisterne Manor, referred to at the beginning of this article. Bisterne was owned by William Mills, who had served as director of the East India Company. The Mills family were one of the most successful banking families, being concerned with the Glyn Mills bank, and it was William's brother Charles who was director of the bank. Foulon also states that he built a house for the Mills family in Delahay Street, Westminster, but that no longer exists. In 1857 a sad report was received about John and Martha's son John Alexander. He had joined the army and had been sent to serve in India accompanied by his wife and children, but they were caught up in the disastrous siege at Lucknow in 1857 and were all massacred.

It seems that John Foulon's attempt to set up an individual practice was unsuccessful, and within a few years he was applying for assistance from various charities. These included that set up by Queen Victoria and also the Distressed Architects Fund which had been established by Sir John Soane. The Foulons were now living in Waterford Road, Fulham, with their five unmarried daughters. John records on his application to the Soane fund that they could not support him, being only able to support themselves by doing needlework, although one daughter was a teacher of music. He also relied upon various friends and relations for help, one of the chief undoubtedly being Ernesto Spagnoletti's son Charles, who had become a chief electrical engineer for the Great Western Railway and invented the block system of signalling used on most railway systems<sup>7</sup>. John Foulon survived to the age of 92 and when he died in January 1887, his wife having

predeceased him, the following obituary notice appeared in a number of newspapers including the *London Evening Standard* on 31st January:

‘The Marquess de Foulon died on the 22d inst. at his domicile, in the Fulham-road, where he had for many years resided. James, Marquess de Foulon was born in England in 1795, being at the time of decease 92 years of age. He was educated as an architect and many years ago, while residing at Hastings on account of ill-health, he was appointed instructor in perspective drawing to her Majesty, then Princess Victoria. He was for ten years architect to Sir Henry Meux, of the Brewery, in Oxford-street, but on Sir Henry’s death the appointment terminated, and subsequently in his old age he was in a large degree supported by the kindness of the queen and other friends. His remains were buried on Saturday last in Brompton Cemetery, his funeral being attended by his family and his nephew, Mr Charles Spagnoletti, the electrician of the Great Western Railway. The Marquess’s only son, who was in the army, was killed with his wife and children at Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny’.

In conclusion it would seem that, while he had aspirations as an independent architect, having had early architectural training with his father and in John Nash’s office, John Foulon spent much of his life preparing drawings for others. Apart from the Bisterne drawings nothing seems to survive to illustrate his talents other than the series of lithographic views of St Leonards and a few watercolours in the Hastings Museum collection. However it is the interleaving of his life with various architects and several notable celebrities of the time which makes his story so fascinating.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 This article supersedes and corrects a short note in *The Architectural Historian*, Issue 2, December 2015 and includes further evidence collected since writing that note.
- 2 I am grateful to Hallam Mills for permission to reproduce this drawing and for his and Mrs Mills encouragement.
- 3 I am grateful for help from various sources and would like to thank especially Judy Perkins, Aileen Reid, Susan Palmer (Soane Museum), Pamela Clark (The Royal Archives) and Jonathan Marsden (The Royal Collection). Only unusual genealogical sources are noted.
- 4 Recorded in Benjamin Ferrey, *The recollections of A.N. Welby Pugin and his father Auguste Pugin*, 1861.
- 5 The baptism is recorded as an index entry in *Registers of St Peters Carmarthen, 1671-1799, Excerpts from the Welsh Historical Records*, vol. II, 1917-18.
- 6 The discovery of references in Princess Victoria’s Journals makes it clear that this event did take place in Hastings and not at Kensington, which was suggested in my previous note in *The Architectural Historian*.
- 7 He is accorded an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.