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# PICKFORD'S HOUSE, DERBY: A GEORGIAN ARCHITECT'S HOUSE

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Joseph Pickford's sudden death at the age of forty-seven took place on 13 July 1782 at his house, 41 Friar Gate, a thoroughfare then called Nuns' Green and since 1988 Pickford's House Museum. The architect's life, his works and his close connection with a number of locally-based figures who drove the Midlands Enlightenment, have been most ably recorded by the late Edward Saunders, but the evolution and detailed history of the house itself was only fully understood some time after the publication of his monograph (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Whilst St Helen's House in Derby is Pickford's finest surviving major work,

he was only 32 when it was designed.<sup>2</sup> Yet, a century after his death, the Rev. Thomas Mozley, who had known the architect's enigmatic son Joseph at Oriel College, Oxford, could claim that Pickford's own house was his *chef d'oeuvre*, clearly implying that by that time nobody could recall what other major buildings he had designed.<sup>3</sup> Edward Saunders, who served his articles as an architect in Pickford's House, recalled being told by local savants that the best of the elegant Georgian houses in the street were all the work of Robert Adam, dashed off, as it were, when passing, *en route* to Kedleston.



Fig. 1. Pickford's House, street front, 19 November 2013. (M. Craven)

## BEGINNINGS

The site was once part of the Convent of St Mary de Pratis, dissolved in 1536 but given to the Borough of Derby by Queen Mary in 1555, its use constrained by covenants largely preventing what today we would call re-development.<sup>4</sup> The land extended to 48 acres and was called Nuns' Green. A watercourse called Markeaton Brook (more river than brook) ran through the land, and the southern boundary of this extensive tract was marked by a road running from The Wardwick westwards to join Ashbourne Road at its junction with Uttoxeter Old Road, the latter marking the alignment of Roman Rykniel Street. This was then also called Nuns' Green, but was re-named Friar Gate before the end of the eighteenth century. Whilst the land was essentially a public open space, occupied only by an extensive brick pit and the kennels of the Corporation's hounds, the land to the south of the road had largely pertained to another dissolved monastic house, the (Dominican) Friary, converted into an opulent residence at the Dissolution by the Bainbrige family; its replacement was the Mozley town residence. Later other high-status dwellings were built on its former land.<sup>5</sup>

The Corporation of Derby in the eighteenth

century was always short of funds for the improvement of infrastructure. It therefore decided that, if it could waive the covenants imposed by the deed of gift on the former monastic land, plots could be sold for building and income devoted to generally tidying up the area, which had become a focus of various types of anti-social activities. Thus in 1768 an Act of Parliament was obtained to free land along the street which could then be sold for this purpose.<sup>6</sup> The legislation permitted the Corporation to sell plots from the corner of Ford Street to the site of the present Brick Street, a distance of nearly half a mile. Each plot was 45 yards (41m) deep and 16 yards, 2 feet 9 inches (15.3m) wide, with a further 10 yards (9.1m) available to extend the curtilage behind if required.<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 2) A street called Agard Street was subsequently created parallel to Friar Gate, forming a northern boundary. The only anomalies affecting the designated land were the presence of the County Gaol, built to the designs of William Hiorne of Warwick in 1754–55 and occupying a large plot less than two hundred yards along the street and, just beyond, the St Werburgh's parish workhouse.<sup>8</sup> Apparently the construction of a public facility was permitted under the original donation; the building of



Fig. 2. Friar Gate: the 1768 Nuns' Green Act area, as mapped in 1819 by J.T. Swanwick. (Derby Local Studies Library)

the kennels nearby was perhaps stretching a point, but seems to have gone unchallenged, much to the relief no doubt of the heartier members of the Corporation.

The Act – the first of Derby's five Improvement Acts obtained before the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 – obtained royal assent in spring 1768. Under its terms, a board of no less than 54 commissioners was set up and, on 9 May, bids were invited for the sale of each plot.<sup>9</sup> Pickford's tender for his own plot has not survived, for reasons that will become clear, but he also bid for the sites of the future Nos. 27, 42, 44 & 45, securing No. 27 for £148, 15s; Nos. 42 & 44 both cost him £153, 8s, 6d. He subsequently built a house on each of the sites, save for No. 42. Each bid had to involve the assent of nine or more of the commissioners, and came with a number of covenants concerning the use of the site; each set of deeds was worded in the same way.<sup>10</sup> These included a proviso that the purchaser '... should agree to erect and build a dwelling house or other building ... within the space of five years ... according to such plan and form as should be settled by the ... trustees.' The owners should also

'... build or cause to be built ... one or more dwelling houses handsome in front towards the publick street leading between Derby and Ashbourne not less than three stories [*sic*] high decently sash'd and shall and will convey the water from the top of such dwelling house by pipes brought down the house side and not by spouts hanging over the road... and that as soon as the sough [*local vernacular for drain or underground drain*] intended to be made on the said [Nuns'] Green at the bottom of the ground hereby ... sold shall be made [the purchaser] will connect their sough thereto ... and for ever thereafter as occasion shall require repair and maintain the same and lastly that the said [purchaser] ... will not ... erect any building or buildings for the purpose of a silk mill or any cottage upon the said premises faring to the north or north east end of the said Green ...'<sup>11</sup>

In the event, many of these stipulations were in one way or another ignored or circumvented in the execution. No. 27, for instance, was not even started

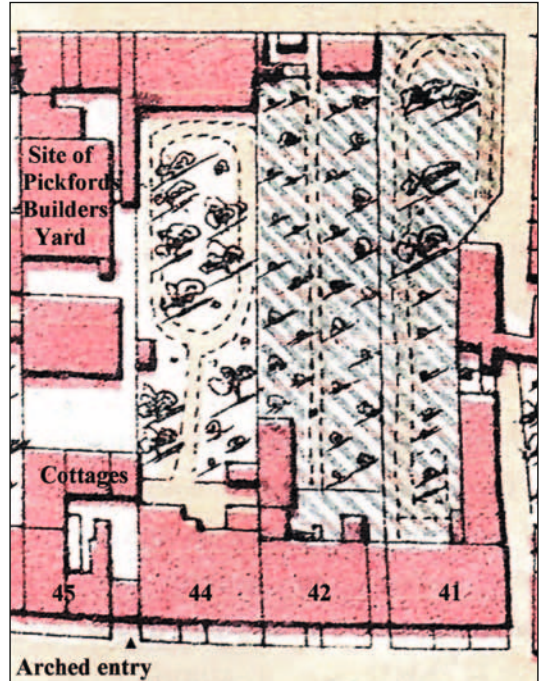


Fig. 3. Location of Pickford's Houses from the Board of Health map of 1852. (*M. Craven*)

until 1778; Nos. 53 & 54 were two storey houses crammed onto one plot with their exterior walls right on the footpath, and No. 45 was built as a silk mill but disguised by the street front being façaded as a house.<sup>12</sup> The land behind became Pickford's builder's yard and he erected a miniscule terrace of three cottages for his workmen in contravention of yet another stipulation. He reserved a right of way through a carriage arch from Friar Gate as well (Figs. 3 & 4). Essentially, the entire elite of the borough were commissioners, and lack of effective legal oversight (several were leading attorneys in any case) allowed infinite flexibility.

Although there is no record of Pickford's bidding or paying for a plot surviving amongst the deeds, a later abstract of title confirms that he





Fig. 4. No. 44 (right) and the arch through to the rear of No. 45 (left), 2013. (*M. Craven*)

did pay for one, probably *post facto*.<sup>13</sup> How the perpetually impecunious builder and architect was able to fund the purchase of the other plots is quite unclear, for he would have needed something in the order of £750 to pay for them all.<sup>14</sup> An answer may lie amongst the roll-call of commissioners, for the name John Heath stands out. Heath, with his brothers Isaac and Christopher were *arriviste* entrepreneurs and bankers, having underwritten the Cockpit Hill pot works and the Derby porcelain factory amongst other enterprises in the previous decade. They were specialists in what a few decades ago would have been called asset stripping too, but they over-reached themselves and abruptly became insolvent in March 1779. Interested purchasers of plots and premises on Nuns' Green processed by the Heaths were, from the outset, invited to 'apply to Mr. Pickford, Nuns' Green' for particulars. The implication is that Pickford was fronting for the

Heaths (debarred from acquiring plots themselves as commissioners), gaining his own plot as a *quid pro quo*.

#### BUILDING THE HOUSE

There is, however, a fly in the ointment amongst these neat arrangements. An advertisement was placed in the local paper in May 1767 on the completion of St Helen's House, advertising to let the occupant's previous house nearby: 'To be let, A large convenient House with Gardens, Stables, Outhouses ... in Bridge Gate in the Borough of Derby now in the possession of John Gisborne, Esq. For further Particulars enquire of Mr. Joseph Pickford on Nuns' Green.'<sup>15</sup> This clearly places Pickford as living on a street upon which there were theoretically no houses prior to the first Derby

Improvement Act receiving royal assent. The implication is that the use of an Act of Parliament to free up the land for building was well anticipated and that it was to some extent retrospective, in that building had already started along the edge of the Green. Furthermore, by that date, Pickford had completed his house – presumably begun before the winter of 1766–1767 at the latest – and was clearly living in it.<sup>16</sup> It may be, too, that the two houses not conforming to the stipulations of the Act, Nos. 53 and 54, were also built before the legislation permitting building with its caveats had finished its passage through Parliament.

Not that Pickford was ever going to skimp on the house in which he intended to live. Built of bricks of excellent quality, probably from the brickworks on the corner of Brick Street and Friar Gate, and laid to a variant of Flemish bond, the dressings are of Keuper sandstone, probably from the quarry on landscaper William Emes's land at Bowbridge, Mackworth, four miles north-west.<sup>17</sup> The house is five bays wide and two and a half storeys high and two piles deep. It is also contiguous to No. 42 next door to the west, which was built some four years later. Pickford chose to throw as much detail onto the façade as possible, most of it good old-fashioned Palladianism, of the type to which the Whiggish ascendancy of Derby were used. The partial exception to this was the stone entrance surround, a tripartite composition modelled as a horizontally compressed version of the Arch of Hadrian at Athens, boasting fluted Neoclassical attached columns of enriched Doric after Isaac Ware and supporting a frieze of Masonic and/or architectural implements.<sup>18</sup> Although hardly canonical in Freemasonic terms, the elements are disposed to fit the space and for decorative effect, but they quite possibly echo Pickford's membership of a London lodge of Freemasons.<sup>19</sup> The frieze is terminated at each end by a pair of elongated, swagged and gadrooned urns taken from Inigo Jones<sup>20</sup> (Figs. 5 & 6). Yet Pickford adroitly avoided the *cliché* of



Fig 5. The entrance aedicule of Pickford's House, August 2008. (*M. Craven*)



Fig. 6. Hadrian's Arch at Athens, from Stuart & Revett. (*the late Edward Saunders*)

the superimposition of a Serliana below a thermal window above, filling the space over the entrance aedicule by clever use of a further recession framing single windows with but a glyphic frieze and an entablature over the larger.

As the façade of a modestly-sized house of five bays and two-and-a-half storeys it is a triumph of movement without crowding. The three central bays break forward, only for the middle bay to break back again within a giant blind arch under a pediment, the tympanum of which is enriched with brick voussours of a type pioneered by Sir John Vanburgh at the Board Room of the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich nearly forty years before; Pickford himself had already employed them on the re-façaded Mansion at Ashbourne in Derbyshire.<sup>21</sup> The fenestration is set within moulded stone surrounds, some with curt entablatures; the central ones on the first floor have blind balustrades between the banding, whilst those above sit on the extended impost bands of the blind arch. The dwarf parapet rests on a distinctive cornice and is embellished with equated stone globe finials flanking the pediment and at the angles. The proportions are impeccable and the result, which could so easily have appeared chaotic or fussy, is superb, and compares most favourably to the similarly scaled efforts by William Henderson of Loughborough – an exact contemporary and acquaintance of Pickford – in designing the façade of the former Vicarage at Mountsorrell in Leicestershire.<sup>22</sup> It was clearly an attempt to impress prospective clients and it remains an asset to the street scene.

#### THE INTERIOR: THE FORMAL ROOMS

Pickford's house was by no means a standard town residence. The fall of the ground away from the street allowed a lower ground floor, commencing beneath the rear pile of the building: a phenomenon not really taken advantage of elsewhere in the street.

Furthermore, it is the only house amongst those built on the Friar Gate plots to boast a saloon. To accommodate this, the standard layout of a central hall with a main staircase beyond had to be discarded, and the stairs moved one bay east so that this ambitious room could be fitted in. To disguise this awkwardness, Pickford chose to insert a wall at the far end of the hall instead of an arch, screen or similar, closing the staircase hall off with a door. Thus, to preserve symmetry, there are two doors in the wall opposite the front door: one giving access to the saloon, the other to the staircase, set out in the reconstructed plan (Fig. 7).

The Saloon (Fig. 8) extends across three bays of the garden front and is one of the few rooms in the house to be endowed with any embellishment: with Pickford, one always gets the impression that money was tight. That said, there are two clear implications to be drawn from this room. Firstly, as with the ornamented façade and relatively lavish use of ornamental stucco in the hall of his new house (see below), Pickford must have had access to funds in excess of the amount one might normally have applied to building a modest villa in Derby. Secondly, the inclusion of so spacious and unusual (in a local context) a room clearly implies an intention to entertain, and again presupposes that Pickford must either have been already comfortably off, or had strong expectations. Unfortunately, no evidence has yet emerged of the source of this finance bar a legacy from his uncle Thomas of £143 inherited in 1748; certainly attested work from 1759 to 1766 would seem unlikely to have earned him much above the average, and his other uncle, Joseph, left his business (and presumably wealth) to his widow's family, the Atkinsons. Yet there were several other uncles, mainly in the building trade, one of whom, unbeknown to us, may have favoured Joseph even more generously.

The Saloon boasts a good plaster modillion cornice with intervening rosettes. The thought that there also was once decorative stucco on



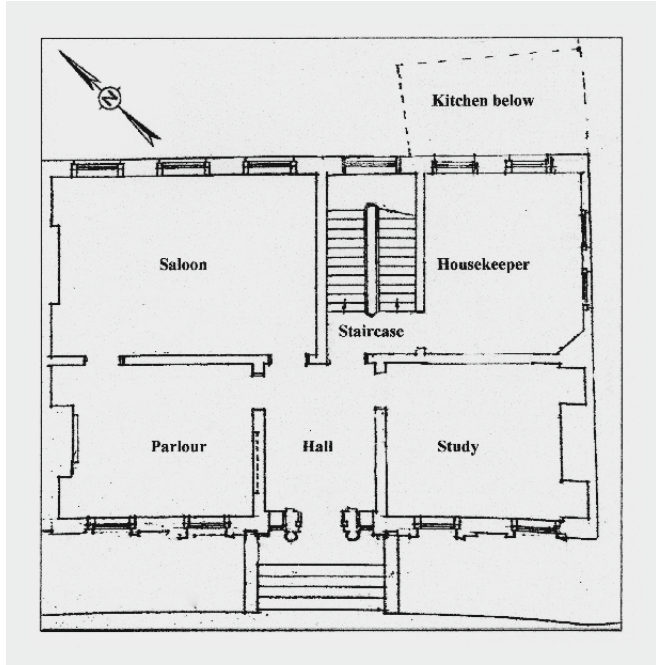


Fig. 7. Ground floor plan as built. (M. Craven)



Fig. 8. The saloon, as currently displayed with a formal meal just ended. (M. Craven)





Fig. 9. The Saloon: Carrara and Siena marble chimneypiece with Blue John inlay, attributable to Richard Brown & Co., Derby, October 2016. (*M. Craven*)



Fig. 10. Joseph Pickford's bookplate & signature.

the ceiling, lost through poor maintenance and a desire to simplify, has always obtruded, but there is no evidence on which to base this assumption apart from the scale and ambition of the space. The window architraves and plain dado seem to be original, but the spaces below were formerly wainscotted with raised fielded panels, which have been lost. Interestingly, there was once a doorcase to match that from the hall in a corresponding position

on the same wall, discovered in 1984 when repairing the plaster; it was elided at an unknown date, but was typical of the eighteenth-century desire for symmetry. On entering the saloon, the thing that immediately catches the eye is the chimneypiece (Fig. 9), upon which, clearly, no expense had been spared. It is notably Neoclassical, of Carrara with inset panels of Siena marble. The frieze, inset with Blue John glyphs, is supported by tapering pilasters rising to bas-relief urns with Blue John cabouchons (gemstones) below; it is one of only five Blue John inlaid chimneypieces known within the county.<sup>23</sup> Whilst its design may reasonably be attributed to Pickford himself, its maker can be adduced from one of the architect's known associates at other sites, Pickford's friend and contemporary Richard Brown of Derby (1736–1816), proprietor of the Derby Spar Manufactory.<sup>24</sup>

It might be asked why Pickford required such a grand room, but it is clear that he had pretensions to gentility, for he used a coat-of-arms (Fig. 10), got himself elected a brother of the Corporation, and his widow entertained lavishly at the house, undoubtedly continuing a tradition established in the architect's lifetime.<sup>25</sup> William Bagshaw Stevens, then head usher at Repton School, wrote in his diary of attending the Derby Rout there, writing of 'Beau wits and giggling belles ... with noise and nonsense clattering round the board.'<sup>26</sup> Pickford was on friendly terms with the painter Joseph Wright (who painted his portrait without charge), with the landscape gardener William Emes, the cartographer Peter Burdett and with John Whitehurst FRS, so was well acquainted with the elite of the Midlands Enlightenment, and he also entertained the Italian connoisseur Gianantonio Selva in 1781.<sup>27</sup>

The Neoclassicism of the chimneypiece is reflected elsewhere, highlighting Pickford's natural instincts coming into play in contrast to the known preferences of the Whiggish Derby elite, to catch whose eyes, he had crafted the house's loosely Palladian façade. The hall, too, was clearly intended

to make an impression. The timberwork is Baltic pine, so was always intended to be painted, and a trapdoor in the left window ledge gives access to a storage facility. The decoration betrays further Neoclassical influences, which were undoubtedly the result of Pickford's work as a subcontracting party at Kedleston Hall and his acquaintance with Robert Adam from 1763.<sup>28</sup> The width of the space exceeds that of any other hallway on the developed part of the street, and decoration is Neoclassical in inspiration, especially in the treatment of the timber inside face of the entrance with pilasters with Tower of the Winds capitals. In contrast, the hall is exuberantly lavished with stucco decoration, probably again with the intention of impressing clients (Figs. 11 & 12).

The space, paved with Hopton Wood slabs, now worn and polished to a splendid degree of patination, boasts a cornice of implied Doric with rose *paterae* between the triglyphs expressed as *guttae*, and a simple band below implying a frieze, the intervening space originally (known from scraps) painted in maroon as background



Fig. 12. The hall, north wall with its two doors, that on the left leading to the saloon and on the right to the staircase and the rest of the house. (M. Craven)



Fig. 11. The hall: scheme of stucco decoration attributable to the younger Abraham Denstone. (Derby Museums Trust)

to a paler anthemion frieze. Below that level, the long walls have roundels containing busts of the Muses, separated by swags of husks hanging from trophies of musical instruments: on the east a flute with two hautboys in saltire and on the west a lyre and two trumpets with blind *paterae* above each swag. The north wall, with its two doors, boasts a pair of swags pending from a *bucranium* with further blind *paterae* above. The ceiling picks up the enrichment of the vertical spaces, with a central portrait medallion within a monstrance. The subject of the bust on the medallion is not clear, but could conceivably be a portrait of Pickford himself. This is enclosed by an oval garland of entwined roses, more Rococo than Neoclassical and, towards the angles, there are another four relief busts in *paterae*, like those on the walls, depicting the Muses with their emblems. Originally the Muses were named on each *patera* but the inscriptions on some are lost through repeated distemperring and general wear and tear.

The disposition is as below:

Those marked with an asterisk (\*) are those whose names survive in the stucco. This is the work of the Derby *stuccadore* Abraham Denstone the younger (1723–1779), who worked elsewhere extensively with Pickford, starting at the Derby Assembly Rooms a few years before.<sup>29</sup> It will be noted that the Muses' attributes have been massaged a little: Euterpe is more usually shown clutching a flute, Terpsichore usually has a lyre to go with her plectrum, Urania more often has a staff to go with her globe and Calliope's tablet has become a second scroll, and she appears to have dropped her stylus. All this might incline us to assume that the central medallion must contain an image of Polyhymnia, seeing we are, overall, a muse short. Yet the central relief bust seems undeniably male, in eighteenth-century dress and holding a scroll: this is surely an image of Pickford himself.<sup>30</sup>

The two rooms opening off the hall at the front are the Parlour to the west and what was probably Pickford's office to the east, now called the Breakfast Room (Fig. 13). The office use was adduced because

WALL		MUSE	EMBLEM	ATTRIBUTE
West wall	left	Clio*	scroll	history
	right	Euterpe	trumpet	lyric poetry
East wall	left	Terpsichore*	plectrum	choral dance & song
	right	Erato*	lyre	erotic poetry & mime
Ceiling angles	SW	Thalia*	comedy mask	comedy & idyllic poetry
	NW	Urania	globe	astronomy
	NE	Calliope	scroll	epic
	SE	Melpomene	sword	tragedy



the niches either side of the chimneypiece are deep, and when the paint was removed revealed the marks left by fitted flat trays or shelves. That Pickford had such an office at his house emerges from the correspondence of Josiah Wedgwood, for whom he did much work in the period 1769 to 1771.<sup>31</sup> The shelves appear to have been removed and the niches altered and re-plastered probably in 1812 when other changes were made. Otherwise it is a relatively plain room and the present Regency crinoidal marble chimneypiece is a replacement, also of 1812; the insertion of a door in the north wall into the corridor behind is also an alteration of this period. The windows here and in the breakfast room are equipped with pull-up sashes, the lower leaf of which disappears into a space below the window

sill, and were a manifestation of John Whitehurst's ideas for the more efficient heating and ventilation of rooms. This would have included underfloor ducting and a grille in front of the hearth to improve the way the fire drew, although the replacement of the chimneypiece and other alterations of the early nineteenth century may have caused the vestiges of these to have been lost; certainly none were discovered during the restoration.<sup>32</sup>

The Parlour (Fig. 14) is also relatively plain and probably acted as a withdrawing room or ante room when the Saloon was in formal use, but a recess set within a depressed arch (now incorrectly re-instated by Derby City council in 1986 with a low segmental arc) in the east wall suggests that this was intended to receive a modest serving table



Fig. 13. Sitting room/study, as adapted in 1812 with a copy of Wright's *The Pickford Children* over the chimneypiece.



Fig. 14. The parlour, with chimneypiece from Mundy House, Wardwick; Wright's *Lake Nemi at Sunset* of c.1790 hanging above it. (*M. Craven*)

and that the room may more ordinarily have been used for family suppers and breakfasts, facilitated by the use of a tip-up breakfast table. Again, there is the suspicion that there may have been decorative stucco on the ceiling and quite possibly another striking chimneypiece. However, the latter has been lost and that now in position, installed in 1988, is in pencil-vein Sicilian marble and in Edward Saunders's opinion undoubtedly the work of Money Penny but dating from c.1790.<sup>33</sup> The present high skirting looks Edwardian. There is no cellarage under the rooms of the southern pile of the house, only a void of 1ft. 8in (50cm) to the south and 2ft. 4in (69cm) to the north.

Because the stairs are divided from the Hall, the expenditure on the house generally seems to have tailed off north of the hall door. The dog-leg staircase is of cantilevered Hopton Wood stone with a plain iron balustrade with only a wiggly bar at the turns as ornament, which is with little doubt the work of Benjamin Yates, another of Pickford's favoured craftsmen.<sup>34</sup> A catch and pinion for a dog gate survives at ground floor level and at the foot of the pitch to the lower ground floor, confirming the existence of the domestic hound which appears (looking a trifle apprehensive) in Joseph Wright's 1779 painting of Pickford's two sons.<sup>35</sup> To the east of the staircase was a housekeeper's room (since divided) with a somewhat old-fashioned arrangement in the shape of a corner chimneypiece and, on the first floor, there are three bedrooms and dressing rooms, with six further rooms in the attic. The main stair continues throughout the house to the attic in the same wide and relatively shallow standard.

There were two suites of bedrooms with dressing rooms on the first floor, plus a third bedroom and a nursery. From the landing three arched openings lead to vestibules to the left, right and ahead. That to the right as one reaches the top of the stairs requires a step up, for it is over the Saloon, the ceiling of which is so much higher than those of the other ground floor rooms. The chimneypiece is elegant but plain (Fig. 15). This bedroom was the second



Fig. 15. First floor: chimneypiece in the north bedroom.  
(M. Craven)

bedroom and one of the three bays of windows lights its dressing room, whilst the room at the front on the west side of the house is larger, with the dressing room opening from it and occupying the central bay of the façade. The central vestibule thus leads to this master bedroom (to the right), to another bedroom to the left and a central door giving access to the (unheated) dressing room between them which in fact pertains to the master bedroom. The master bedroom has a decorative chimneypiece, similar to that in Fig. 15 but with a Sicilian marble roll-moulded slip and filled glyphs. Until 1985 this room also had a good plaster cornice, but which seriously damaged when the lime-ash floor of the room above was replaced in cement by the City Council's works department. The room entered left from the vestibule was undoubtedly the bedroom of the Pickford's two sons (born 1767 and



Fig. 16. Lower ground floor: the kitchen as rebuilt in 1812 and as displayed in 1988; the cooking grate is anachronistically early in style. (*M. Craven*)

1772 respectively), for there was originally a door through to the room to the left of the stairs (now converted into a display case) which is also entered via another small arched lobby from the stairs, and had corner chimneypieces in the NE and SE angles (since removed). Today it has been divided, but was undoubtedly the nursery when built. There is also a door into the dressing room corresponding to that from the master bedroom.

The attic rooms are disposed as four heated rooms, the two facing the street having a dressing room between, accessed only from the westernmost room, all being served by a vestibule rather like that on the floor below, but somewhat smaller and less ornamental in scale. The north-east room is spacious and has a corner fireplace. It was certainly intended for the accommodation of servants or a servant, and the adjacent room may have been so used as well,

though documentation for this part of Derby is missing for the period so we do not know how many servants the Pickfords employed. The large rear room is heated and has three windows. It may well have been the room in which Pickford's made his drawings, being north-lit. The existence of another room with a dressing room at the front, notably plain like all the rooms on this floor, would explain why the main stair rises right through the house with no diminution of quality or size. Indeed, originally there was no secondary stair.

The fenestration of the north front is entirely plain with gauged brick lintels only, diminishing with each storey upwards from the ground floor, the increased ceiling height of the saloon requiring that the rear first floor bedrooms have less height. The lower ground floor has a triple-arcaded loggia, stone-dressed only from the impost band, beneath the



saloon's north front, turning the ground floor into a quasi-*piano nobile*. There is cellarage behind and to the east of the stairs, which debouch onto a Hopton Wood flagged vestibule leading into the kitchen, at which point the domestic element of original build seems to have ended. The kitchen (Fig. 16) was probably fitted with an up-to-date range and back boiler for heating water, an arrangement pioneered by John Whitehurst and embraced with enthusiasm by his Lunar Society friends and others in his circle.<sup>36</sup> By the early nineteenth century, though, it was fitted with a Harrison's cooking apparatus, an up-dated version of this pioneering work 'improved' by William Strutt and made by John Harrison & Co. of Little Chester, Derby, the back-boiler of which heated water for the adjoining laundry.<sup>37</sup> From the kitchen, an arch connected with a line of service buildings, now almost entirely lost or replaced, stretching along the east edge of the curtilage almost to the street to the north.<sup>38</sup> We know from a later advertisement that these buildings included a three-stall stable, gig house and back kitchen.<sup>39</sup> Finally, Pickford applied to the Sun Assurance Company on 28 July 1770 for a fire policy for the house, which was issued for £1,000, with the value of the house itself being estimated at £670.<sup>40</sup>

#### GARDEN

A garden (Fig. 17) faced the loggia and bordered the path to the coach house running via the arch to Friar Gate. The extra ten yards of land to the north was bought by Pickford from the commissioners to enlarge the garden. Its layout can be partially understood from maps: that of 1819 by J.T. Swanwick, of 1852 for the Board of Health and of 1883 from the Ordnance Survey 10ft:1mile map, which shows a typical Victorian layout with a serpentine path leading away from the house. Without doubt the original layout would have been more classically formal, as restored by

the Museum in the space remaining. It would be amusing to imagine it being laid out by ironsmith Benjamin Yates's younger son Joseph (1735–1786), who was indeed a gardener at that time, whilst the elder son, William, worked with his father. Wright's *The Pickford Children* – which Thomas Mozley recorded as hanging in the younger Pickford's parlour (and a reproduction of which hangs there today (Fig. 13) – although depicting a *capriccio* landscape, does include a small circular *tempietto*, peeping coyly through the bocage (Fig. 18) and indeed, the earliest map does show what could have been such a building, albeit with an octagonal footprint. Thus prompted, the present author undertook an archaeological investigation of part of the garden in July 1991 when the car park was being extended, which revealed three sides of this structure. That it was probably not substantial was emphasised by the scarpiness of the footings, despite the use of some ashlar blocks. It had been hoped that something more substantial might have emerged, perhaps from the hand of the architect, but the evidence was too thin to be of much use.

The small plot immediately to the east of the house was purchased of the Commissioners in 1793 by Pickford's widow with a view to extending the house: work which in the event, was never carried through, although a wider entrance from the street was made to enable a wheeled vehicle to access the rear via an arch in the stable block as in Fig. 2.<sup>41</sup> This later became the site of a detached surgery of c.1908 and has now been made into a garden. Pickford himself also acquired the northernmost ten yards of the plots behind Nos. 42 and 44 which he turned into an access to his builder's yard behind No. 45, also reserving to himself a right of way between the two latter houses through a carriage arch, having sold the main plots and having had himself appointed architect for the buildings that were to grace them.<sup>42</sup>

At the front of the house, there was little more than a four-foot gap between the façade of the house and the street. A wartime photograph, taken less



Fig. 17. The restored portion of the garden, looking towards the rear elevation. Note the loggia, centre, post 1850 water closet tower, left of centre, and the 1812-13 rebuilt kitchen, left, 2016. (Derby Museums Trust)

Fig. 18. Detail of 'The Pickford Children' showing the tempietto which seems to have been a Chimaera. (Derby Museums Trust)

than twelve months before they were taken away to aid the war effort, shows that the railings there were relatively plain, of wrought iron with *repoussé* spear heads and openwork piers for the gates. As with the balustrade of the internal staircase, they were probably by Benjamin Yates or from his workshop. Unfortunately, the Museum director in 1987 decided that replacements should be copied by a firm quite lacking in heritage restoration experience and, worse still, in mild steel bar with ugly cast spear heads. Furthermore, despite advice from Edward Saunders (also the biographer of Benjamin Yates) they were painted not midnight blue (almost blue-black), as is attested for eighteenth-century Derby, but mid-blue; they have since faded to powder blue. They are not an ornament to either building or street.



## LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Joseph Pickford died at home, unexpectedly, in July 1782. The *Derby Mercury's* notice read: 'On Saturday died aged 45 after a short illness, at his house on Nuns' Green, Mr. Joseph Pickford, an eminent builder, and one of the brethren of this Corporation – He was a tender husband, a kind father and much respected by all his friends and acquaintances.'<sup>43</sup> Leaving children under age (thirteen and ten), his business was wound up by his wife as executrix, his former assistants, Thomas Gardner, George Moneypenny, Robert Fletcher and Thomas Freeman undertaking unfinished business. A month after his death, therefore, a sale was announced, to be held on 2 September at his yard behind No. 44 Friar Gate, of:

'All the stock of the late Mr. Pickford architect deceased, consisting of a large quantity of oak timber in scantling, planks, boards, laths, sashes, shutters, locks, hinges, large brass pulleys; and building materials, likewise on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, will be sold...several grand marble chimney pieces and an assortment of statuary, Sinnah, Dove and white and vein marble...'<sup>44</sup>

Having examined the stone on many of Pickford's more local buildings, Michael Stanley is of the opinion that almost all their stone dressings, all of Keuper sandstone – even those used as far away as Edensor (where millstone grit sandstone was to be had in abundance) – were carved in the yard at Derby by Moneypenny and his assistants and shipped out to site for erection. There is, indeed, a reference to just that happening in the case of the entrance aedicule of the Edensor Inn (1776) with its carved heraldic frieze.<sup>45</sup> This is also true of a handful of local buildings erected within a few years of Pickford's sale including high quality moulded Keuper sandstone features like Serlianas, thermal windows and characteristic chimneypieces, nearly all of high quality and fitted into relatively unpretentious buildings.

Mary Pickford continued to live in the house and in some comfort, for her business activities

included part-ownership of the Markeaton fabric mill, interests in four other neighbouring houses and other enterprises, no doubt built up by Joseph and a means of investing his profits. She shared the house with her sons, although Thomas, the elder, died in summer 1790 aged twenty. The younger was Joseph, junior, later a graduate and fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and a parson. He was granted the living of Cholderton in Wiltshire and served as perpetual curate of Quarndon and Little Easton, chapels-of-ease of St Alkmund, Derby. When she died in 1812, in Thomas Mozley's words, 'The son divided (the Derby house). He occupied the smaller portion, entered by a side door, much as it had come from the builders' hands ... the larger part ... and the front door he let ... to Miss Knightley.'<sup>46</sup>

This adaptation involved adding a second storey to the service wing, reached by a stone staircase from the north-east angle of the house, access to which was through the former housekeeper's room, which now acquired a further wall to form an access corridor with borrowed light. He opened a door from this into his father's former office, replacing the chimneypiece and returning the niches to decorative use. The room above the main kitchen appears to have become a study. His front entrance was a door made where there had previously been a window of the housekeeper's room in the east elevation, approached by a flight of steps and a rail, replaced in 1987 by a ramp from the street. The housekeeper's room then became Pickford's kitchen, with scullery and back-kitchen below the additional stair on the lower ground floor. The new staircase, a remarkably unpretentious affair, was also extended to the first floor where the large room on the east side was sub-divided to form an extra bedroom, bathroom and water closet, and to the corresponding room on the attic storey. Original doors leading to the hall on the ground floor and landing on the first floor were accordingly sealed off. This separate dwelling duly became No. 40, Friar Gate, and so remained until the house was brought together again in 1850.<sup>47</sup>



Here parson Pickford lived until his death in 1844, whilst the remainder of the house was let, first to Mrs. Knightley and, from 1815, to J. Henry Smith. In 1827 it was re-let to Miss Mary Meynell who turned her part of the house into a well-regarded school for young ladies (as the directories coyly put it).<sup>48</sup> Mary Meynell (1781–1858) was a daughter of Dr John Meynell, a Derby apothecary, who in the first years of the nineteenth century inherited a substantial part of the family's historic estate at Meynell Langley. In running her academy, it is presumed that Mary had a perfectly amicable relationship with her landlord, Rev. Joseph Pickford, despite his having been described by Rev. Thomas Mozley (who had known him) to have been '... a pathetic creature, defective in character and countenance ... as long as I remember, Pickford had an angry eye and carbunculous complexion.' To be fair to the parson, none of this is apparent from the reminiscences of Rev. William Bagshaw Stevens, the fun-loving and socially ambitious headmaster of Repton, calling him 'lucky Pickford' for having been elected to a fellowship at Oriol at the age of twenty-one.<sup>49</sup> Mary and the Rev. Joseph thus indeed existed cheek by jowl.<sup>50</sup>

When Pickford died in 1844, he left the house to 'William Pickford of Trafalgar Road, Greenwich, yeoman', a cousin and heir at law. He was born in 1773, the son of James Pickford, and had a son, also William. The latter was clearly in Derby in the 1830s, and was almost certainly living with his relation at the house. He married a farmer's daughter, Catherine Cokayne from Quarndon, just outside Derby. Their first two children were baptised at St Werburgh's church, in which parish Pickford's House lies, and the newly married couple seem to have moved in with parson Joseph for two or three years. The next children, though, were baptised at St Peter's church, at the other end of the town, and in 1842 William was listed as a 'gentleman' and freeholder in Park Street, in a newly built area of terraced housing.<sup>51</sup> The family later moved to Greenwich, where Pickford

was listed as a lodging house keeper in the rather grand Romney Terrace, presumably in a house bought with the proceeds of selling the Park Street house and the mortgage raised on the house in Friar Gate, where Mary Meynell continued to run her school until her death in August 1858, after which the house was occupied by a sequence of surgeons.<sup>52</sup> This phase is marked by the insertion of a closet tower at the rear of the house, serving the ground, first and second floors; the lower ground floor beneath it was rebuilt to take the load and the lobby leading to the kitchen extended.

The freehold descended to Derby Alderman Sir Thomas William Evans of Allestree Hall, 1st Bt., MP, who sold it in July 1879 to Frederick Ward; he re-sold it four months later to a Cornish surgeon, William Grafton Curgenvin, after which it remained the home of various medical grandees, with the Rev. Joseph Pickford's flat adapted as the 'professional' side of the house, supplemented from 1908 by a small additional free-standing single-storey building immediately to the east.<sup>53</sup> In 1948 the heir of the last of this sequence of medical consultants, Frederick Schofield, sold the property to Ernest William Pedley and George Ismay Larkin, architects, their practice having been founded by James Wright in the 1880s and re-branded as T. H. Thorpe and Partners by his successor. It was here that the late Edward Saunders was articled, and developed the strong feeling that the house had a lot less to do with Robert Adam than had been supposed.

The architectural practice moved out in 1982, and, at the urging of the present author and others, Derby City Council purchased it for conversion into a museum to reflect life amongst the elite of Derby during the heady years of the Midlands Enlightenment and as a costume museum. The City Architects' department had never had to deal with a historic building before and, ignoring its listing (Grade I, promoted at Derby's last re-listing in 1977 from Grade II) and entirely without consent of the Secretary of State, they proceeded to replace all

the lime-ash floors in the attic storey with concrete and to rebuild the chimneys in engineering brick, amongst other solecisms. The Museum's director also demanded that the principal rooms be divided from the public by full-height anti-shatter glass screens, for the installation of which corncicing in the Saloon was unforgivably damaged.<sup>54</sup> Objections to English Heritage (as it then was) by staff members brought threats of dismissal, whilst an appeal to the late Gavin Stamp led to a coruscating critique in *Private Eye's* 'Nooks and Corners' column. Nevertheless, it proved too expensive to reverse the work, and eventually the Secretary of State felt obliged to wave it all through as a retrospective application. Meanwhile the staff and Friends of the Museum, voluntarily and mainly in the evenings, removed office partitions and carried out other repairs, the Council having refused to fund any professional specialist help. Fortunately in 1988 a change of political control enabled the incoming Council to out-source the outstanding work and to open the house as the second outstation of the original Museum at Derby.<sup>55</sup> Exactly twenty five years later, on 17 September 2013, Derby Civic Society, in co-operation with the City Council, erected a cast iron blue plaque on the east wall of the house to commemorate its creator and first occupier: Joseph Pickford.

Despite these vicissitudes, Pickford's House is one of only a handful of purpose-built and reasonably sophisticated architects' homes from the period outside London to have survived, and it stands as a fitting tribute to a little-known but highly competent architect. It is now, with the two other elements of the City's museums, vested in an independent trust, long pressed for by the writer and some colleagues, accepted as an element in the Conservative Party's local election manifesto in 2009, and finally adopted in October 2012, following further changes of political control. The Trust has survived every budget round, under the constant threat of having all or part of its already severely curtailed funding removed,

but the executive director and trustees remain optimistic. Indeed, the board is currently running a comprehensive campaign to raise an endowment fund of at least a million pounds, which the National Lottery Heritage Fund has pledged to double, with each additional contribution. Essentially, there are firm grounds for continuing optimism and abundant grounds for pride in an excellent building and enjoyable museum.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 E.J. Saunders, *Joseph Pickford of Derby: A Georgian Architect* (Stroud 1993).
- 2 M. Craven, 'Fit to Honour the First Orders of Nobility': *St Helen's House, Derby* in *Georgian Group Journal*, 17 (2009) pp. 77–94.
- 3 T. Mozley, *Reminiscences, Chiefly of Towns, Villages and Schools*, 2 vols. (Derby & London 1885), i, p. 65. Mozley and his brother J. B. Mozley, were supporters of the Oxford Movement; Thomas was a pupil and friend of Cardinal Newman, canonized in 2019, and married his sister.
- 4 *Victoria County History Derbyshire*, ed. J. C. Cox, vol. 2 (London, 1905), pp. 43–44.
- 5 *VCH Derbyshire*, vol. 2, pp. 78–80; The replacement, the present building, was built in 1730. M. A. J. B. Craven, *The Derby Town House* (Derby, 1987), p. 52
- 6 R. Simpson, *History of Derby* 3 vols in 2 (Derby, 1826) i. p 273
- 7 Linear extent of the land: '...from Mr. Chesshyre's House to the inn called the White Lion': *ibid.* Plot dimensions as set out in the deeds of each plot: Derby City Council, Deeds to 40–41, Friar Gate; Peak Trust Ltd.: Deeds to 44–45 Friar Gate; T. Lloyd Davies Esq., via Mrs Jane Steer: Deeds to 27, Friar Gate.
- 8 Workhouse (by William Trimmer, 1732): Simpson (1826), ii, p. 457; Gaol: S. Glover, *History and Gazetteer of Derby*, 2nd edn. (Derby, 1831/1833), ii. p. 470; hounds: Woolley, W., *History of Derbyshire* n.d. [1713], ed. C. Glover & P. Riden, P. (Derbyshire Record Society, 1981), vol.6, p. 30

- 9 *Derby Mercury* 22/4/1768 p. 1, c. 2. The following Acts were 1788, 1791, 1828 and 1832; the resultant commissions were all but one chaired by William Strutt, FRS.
- 10 Deeds, *ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Today it sports a jokey little brick portico added by a later resident, the prolific Victorian architect Isaac Henry Stevens (1806–1873): Peak Trust deeds, *loc.cit.*
- 13 Abstract dated 17 September 1844: house deeds, Derby City Council.
- 14 On Pickford's occasional cash-flow problems, see Saunders (1993) pp. 98–100. He sold No. 44 to William FitzHerbert of Tissington, Recorder of Derby, in 1772 with a proviso that he build the house: deeds, Peak Trust.
- 15 *Derby Mercury* 29 May 1767, p. 4, c. 1. Emes held a lease on a house and 60 acres at Bowbridge from F.N.C. Mundy of Markeaton Hall from 1763: Derby Local Studies Library, Mundy MSS, Parcel 225.
- 16 It is quite unclear from surviving documents where Pickford was living previously, but that he had been living in the Borough since 1762/63 is clear from his attested *oeuvre*.
- 17 Pickford had a financial interest in the brick pit, made clear in the deeds to No. 45, Friar Gate, courtesy Peak Trust Ltd. I am grateful to Michael Stanley FGS for the identification of the stone. Emes and Pickford appear to have been well acquainted: M. A. J. B. Craven, *John Whitehurst of Derby* (Stroud, 2015), p. 86
- 18 As tried, less felicitously, at The Mansion, Ashbourne in 1763; the arch was illustrated in J. Stuart & N. Revett, *Antiquities of Athens* (London, 1762), vol.3, ch.III plate IV, to which Pickford had access: Saunders (1993), p. 149. Pickford repeated this conceit at Sandon Hall, Staffs. (demolished & replaced) and Long Eaton Hall, Derbyshire: Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture* (London, 1756), pp. 6–7
- 19 Saunders (1993), pp. 32–33. He was a member of the 'Three Compasses' lodge, Silver Street, Golden Square, London. Frieze probably carved by George Moneypenny of Derby: Saunders (1993), pp. 147f.
- 20 That is, from John Vardy's *Some Designs of Mr. Inigo Jones and Mr. William Kent* (London, 1744). Vardy was an associate of Pickford's homonymous uncle and mentor. Pickford apparently frequently had recourse to this source: Saunders (1993), p. 104
- 21 Saunders (1993), p. 72, cf. G. Beard, *The Work of John Vanburgh* (London, 1986), p. 165.
- 22 E. J Saunders, 'A Midlands Architect Re-discovered', *Country Life* 10 May 1979.
- 23 Others are in The Friary, Derby, c.1764; Long Eaton Hall, 1778, Egginton Hall 1780 (lost), Erasmus Darwin's House, Derby 1782, later at Sydnoppe Hall, since removed and sold, Birchfield Lodge 1875, also (just in Leicestershire), Staunton Harold. The first three can be associated with Pickford: Craven (2015), p. 83. Today it is flanked by two giltwood mirrors from Derby Assembly Rooms of 1763, dem. 1964.
- 24 Craven (2015), pp. 78–80.
- 25 The author discovered a bookplate still in situ in a topographical work with his signature beneath which is now in the house.
- 26 Entertaining: G. Galbraith (ed.), *The Diary of William Bagshaw Stevens* (Oxford, 1965), p. 158, describing an event on 21 May 1794.
- 27 Friends: Mozley, (1882) i., p. 65; Emes: Craven (2015), 86; Selva: Saunders (1993), p. 82.
- 28 Pickford had purchased timber from the roof of Smith of Warwick's Kedleston Hall, then but recently demolished, direct from Adam in 1763, to be re-used for the roof of the Derby Assembly Rooms: account book, Derbyshire RO D239/098. In 1766 he clearly had personal access to Adam through access to his designs for Lansdown House, Berkeley Square: Craven (2009), p. 79 & (2015), p. 84.
- 29 Saunders (1993), pp. 66–67.
- 30 As believed by the late Mrs J. B. Schofield, pers. comm to the author, 3 June 1989 and as relayed to her father-in-law F. W. Schofield by his predecessor in the house, Dr Southern.
- 31 E. Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood* (1866), pp. 89, 94.
- 32 J. Whitehurst, *Observations on the Ventilation of Rooms; on Chimneys and Garden Stoves*, edited from posthumous papers by Robert Willan (London, 1794), *passim*.
- 33 It was sourced through a covert trade-off by the City's conservation officer, the late George Rennie, managed on the Museum's behalf as part of a listed building application, having been previously and originally in the former town



- house in The Wardwick of Edward Miller Mundy of Shipley Hall, MP, rebuilt some time after he became MP for Derbyshire in 1783.
- 34 E. J. Saunders, *English Wrought Iron Work in the Eighteenth Century*, (Walpole Society, 2005), p. 263. The rail itself is mahogany.
- 35 B. Nicholson, *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*, 2 vols. (London, 1968) I. 36. The younger son died young; on the elder, see below.
- 36 Craven (2015), pp. 135–136.
- 37 Advertisement of the house to let, *Derby Mercury* 8 June 1831 p. 4, c. 3
- 38 Maps: 1791 (by George Money Penny) from W. Hutton, *History and Antiquities of Derby* (Derby, 1791), p. 25; 1817 (by H. Mutlow) in Lysons, S & D, *Magna Britannia V: Derbyshire* (London, 1817), p. 100
- 39 *Derby Mercury* 8/6/1831, p. 4, c. 2.
- 40 Reference courtesy of Derby Museum Trust, which has erected a replica fire-mark supplied by Ironbridge Gorge Museum's foundry.
- 41 As is clear from George Money Penny's map (1791) and that of G. Cole (1806).
- 42 Deeds, Derby City Council: indenture of 17 Sept. 1844, pp. 3–6, and Deeds to No 45 Friar Gate, private collection, Peak Trust Ltd., courtesy Mr John Thorpe. No. 44 was built for the FitzHerberts of Tissington.
- 43 *Derby Mercury* 11–18 July 1782, p. 4, c. 2.
- 44 *Ibid.* 22–29 August 1782 p. 4, c. 3. By 'sinnah' Siena marble is meant; 'Dove' refers to grey Derbyshire crinoidal polished limestone, 'white' to Carrara and 'vein' to pencil vein Sicilian marble.
- 45 Michael Stanley FGS, pers. comm. Edensor: Chatsworth archive, uncatalogued vouchers for payment referring to this doorcase and several chimney pieces.
- 46 Business interests: Land tax records Derby Local Studies Library and ex. inf. Dr Peter Collinge, who has researched Mrs Pickford's enterprises closely; Mozley (1882) i. p. 65.
- 47 First recorded as No. 40 in *Pigot's Derbyshire Directory* (London, 1828), p. 35.
- 48 Deeds, Derby City Council.; school: *Freebody's Directory of Derby* (Derby, 1852), p. 55; S. Glover, *Directory and Gazetteer of Derby* (Derby, 1842), p. 54; *Pigott's Derbyshire Directory* (London, 1835), p. 40 & F. White, F. *Directory of Derbyshire* (Sheffield, 1857), p. 135.
- 49 Mozley *loc.cit.*; Galbraith (1965), p. 267
- 50 Derby City Council, deeds. In the 1841 (Census) she had living with her two young women, both in their late teens who were doubtless her assistants, and may account for Mozley's comment that Joseph's only friends were 'two respectable young women from Nottingham who visited him from time to time': Mozley, *Reminiscences*.
- 51 S. Glover, *Directory and Gazetteer of Derby* (Derby, 1843) 48.
- 52 Saunders (1993), p. 39, cf. house deeds, *loc. cit.* The process of alienation was a mite more complicated in practice: W. Pickford mortgaged the property for £1,200 to John Scarborough of Tokenhouse Yard, London, who sold the reversion in 1846 to Evans, who foreclosed in 1850.
- 53 Deeds to No. 40: Derby City Council. The building was removed in 1949.
- 54 Since the foundation of the Trust, and under the present director, Tony Butler, these were, happily, removed in 2017.
- 55 The other outstation, opened in 1974 as an industrial museum was the Derby Silk Mill of 1717. It is to re-open in autumn 2020 as the Museum of Making after a £16m NHLF grant.