

The Building of Old Campden House

A speculative article

The building of a country house must have acted as a considerable stimulus to the local economy during the period that it was under construction.

The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History
Malcolm Airs, Sutton publishing, p. 130

This must have been very true for the economy of Chipping Campden when Sir Baptist Hicks, the new lord of the manor, began his programme of building projects. Antony Smythe, the previous lord of the manor had been a spendthrift, eager to extract the maximum amount from dues payable by his tenants and others. He has even been implicated in the attempted theft of bell-metal from the church and it is certain that Hicks acquired the manor by buying up his debts and mortgages, through agents. These debts were quite extensive and at high rates of interest. A list in 1604 totalled £7,500 and other debts and probable mortgages continued to come to light over the next decades culminating in the lengthy case brought by Sir Paul Banning against Sir Baptist Hicks in the 1620s. One is tempted to assume that over a very few years Smythe mortgaged the manor to more than one London group of moneylenders – in those days such loans could be kept secret.

Thus it appears highly likely that Campden was stagnating when in about 1610 or so the intention to build a new manor house became public. However, without any surviving accounts or records, can anything be deduced? The surviving ruins, the Banqueting Houses and the ‘Almonry’ can provide some clues – as indeed can Hicks’ other constructions, the Almshouses and the Market Hall. Further information can be gained from the pulpit, one of his gifts to the church and from Campden House in London, which only burned down in 1862.

In addition much is known about the building of Tudor and Jacobean country houses which enables us to follow the steps involved in designing, planning and carrying out major building works. First must have come the decision to make Campden the seat of his family in perpetuity. No doubt this was linked to the choice of location for his title when he was created Viscount Campden in 16xx. It may well be that the proximity of a source of fine building stone at Westington quarry played its part too. Thus his acquisition of the manor was not just as an investment; as seems likely to have been the intention of Lionel Cranfield judging by the latter’s detailed survey.

Sir Baptist Hicks was a very rich man and could easily have afforded a ‘prodigy house’ such as Hatfield House, completed in 1611 by Sir Robert Cecil. He was well aware that his position in society was not such as to require this of him. Nevertheless his new manor house was intended to show his status and display his good taste and wealth.

At that time there were no architects as today, but skilled master masons would build in accordance with the general design specified by the client. Plans were made by interchanges between the two. Since Sir Michael Hicks, his brother, was confidential secretary to Sir Robert Cecil, Sir Baptist Hicks would clearly have access to much information about current fashions and ideas. Similarly his position as a senior member of the Mercers’ Company in London and his connections with the royal court

meant that he was in a position to visit and observe other new buildings. Thus he may well have spent some considerable time working out precisely what he wanted.

When it came to choosing a master builder and to getting his ideas into shape he had the advantage of being involved in two London buildings that opened in 1612. He would have, of necessity, been close to the design, planning and building of both, one being his own house in Kensington (later to be named Campden House). He, being a Clerkenwell magistrate, built the other at his expense, Hicks' Hall, which was the first ever purpose-built Middlesex Court House. This was only replaced in 1779.

The source of materials would need to be considered before work could begin. Stone, as has been mentioned already, was available locally at Westington Quarry. This was important as its costly transport by horse-drawn cart would not have to travel far. Stone tiles for the roof would have had to be brought from further afield. Fissile limestone was used in the Cotswolds for roofing until the coming of the railway made Welsh slate accessible and there were several quarries not too far away; notably at Hyatt Pits, near Snowhill, at Kyneton Thorn, between Condicote and Naunton, and perhaps others. It seems likely that at that time excellent 'Blue Lias' flag-stones could be obtained from quarries in both Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

Suitable timber for rafters, flooring and panelling would probably also have to be brought from further afield but this expense would still not be too great. Timber-framed houses of this date are still to be found not too far away in the Vale of Evesham. Many houses in Campden High Street are still half-timber-framed behind the more recent stone façades so there must have been a sturdy local trade. Glass for the windows, however, might well have to be brought from London although there was a possible closer source in Warwick. Sir Baptist would choose the best and most fashionable, of course so a London maker seems more likely.

For a London merchant the supply of good clean water would have been important. In 1609 work had begun to bring water to London by a 39 mile long canal which opened in 1613. He would have been well aware of all the complications and difficulties met by the goldsmith, Sir Hugh Myddelton in organising this work. He would also have known of other methods of supplying water to large houses. His choice of providing water for his own house followed the latter. A number of springs on Westington Hill were to be capped and the water brought to a basin in a small stone building. Thence the water would be brought in pipes down across the fields to supply his house. Since the piping began much higher than his roof, running water could be provided to every floor and the surplus used for fountains in the garden.

Work seems to have begun on Campden House in about 1612. There was certainly an earlier manor house but its precise location is uncertain except that it was somewhere near the church. The new manor house was planned to sit on a terrace overlooking a garden on more than one level below. Archaeological surveys have not as yet shown evidence of earlier buildings on or around the new building's site – but of course these might have been swept away by the remodelling of the landscape to form the garden. On the other hand it has been suggested that it is highly likely that Hicks would have kept the earlier house, if it were not where his house would be, so that he would have somewhere to stay while visiting to assess progress. One possible location for the previous house is the building now known as 'The Court', said to have been partly stables and later altered to provide a residence for Lady Juliana after the end of

the Civil War. The stone façade in Calf's Lane certainly now appears to be in part hiding a timber-frame building.

Sir Baptist Hicks was intent on ensuring that he and his family would be welcome in Campden and thus at the same time that his house was being built he carried out a number of other works. The present Almshouses replaced earlier ones. Again it is thought unlikely that the older building would have been removed until the new one was completed but no evidence of an earlier site is known as yet. The quality of the stonework indicates that the same quarry and stonemasons built it. (One wonders, were the very best stones reserved for his house and others, only very slightly less superb, used for this building?) The shape of the building is capital letter 'I' – as at that date it was used for the letter 'J'. This was intended as a subtle compliment to King James I, who, it was hoped, might be one day be a visitor to the new manor house. Another edifice that would have pleased the local burgesses and other townsfolk was the new Market Hall. This too replaced an earlier one that was probably timber-framed and in need of repair.

Both these buildings bear the arms and motto of Baptist Hicks, first Viscount Campden, so no one can be in any doubt as to the public-spirited donor. Similarly, still within the church is the lectern he provided, already an antique then, and the fine wooden pulpit. This was carved by a master craftsman and is no doubt indicative of the quality of the panelling and furnishings of the new house.

Without any contemporary records it is not possible to say who amongst the many inhabitants of Campden worked on Sir Baptist Hicks's various building projects. A survey, *Men & Armour*, of able-bodied men was carried out in Gloucestershire in 1608 in case of the need to conscript men to serve as soldiers. Thus their height was noted, which indicated the type of weapon that could be carried and their approximate age, together with their status, trade or occupation. Amongst the residents of the town, Berrington, Westington and Broad Campden were many who might well have been employed for the many years the work continued. These included 3 masons, 5 slatters, 2 carpenters, a glazier and a plasterer. The 3 smiths, the single gardener and the 16 labourers might also have enjoyed employment.

In addition carters and hauliers would have had regular work. The payments to the workers would have enabled them to buy goods, food and so on – and no doubt frequent the local taverns. It is recorded that his manor house cost £29,000, its furnishings £1500, the Almshouses £1000, the pulpit with cushion and cloth £22, though not all of these amounts would have gone to local people. So the coming of Hicks and his entourage is likely to have stimulated the local economy. No wonder that in 1629 the local worthies were prepared to hand him the south chapel forever.

When all was complete a visitor from London would be able to ride down Westington Hill, the quarry being very obvious at the turn. After a curve or so the town could be seen spread out with a startling whitish building by the church. A curve would hide this view, but not before a curiously elegant, but smaller, building of the same light coloured limestone was noted on the right hand side of the road. At the foot of the hill the visitor would turn along a road, only too obviously trodden by sheep and cattle going to and from the market. Then a turn right into a wider street with an old medieval building in the open market space and beyond a new conveniently situated

market hall in the most up-to-date design. Next a right turn swiftly followed by a left. All this time there was no sign of the destination but now on the left a large majestic building. But this is still not where the visitor is to be. Ahead to the right of the church tower is a delightful gatehouse, the gate opened invitingly. The visitor goes through – and at last is overwhelmed by the superb jewel of a newly built manor house. Two remarkable Banqueting Houses stand to either side and it is not long before the visitor can view a spectacular garden spread out below a wide terrace, parterres immediately below and beyond water parterres.

APPENDIX

Many inhabitants of Campden are likely to have been involved in some way in the building of Campden House and the setting out of its garden. The names of those in certain trades and occupations can be found in *Men & Armour for Gloucestershire in 1608*, compiled by John Smith, Alan Sutton (1980) and in some cases additional information can be found in the survey by Lionel Cranfield 1607-1609, transcribed by Allan Warmington. The former gave estimated ages and approximate heights together with the type of arms the person would be capable of carrying. All are listed as from Of Chipping Campden & 'Barrington' except where stated. The following list has been built up from these two sources. As sons frequently followed in their father's occupation at this time, they have been included under the same heading if no other trade is indicated.

Masons

Ruell, Edward a short man, age about 40.
Taylor, John a tall man, age about 40.
Taylor, Robert of medium height, age 50 to 60.

Slatters (Slaters)

Assone, George a short man, age about 40.
Jones, William a short man, age about 40.
Leaper, John a short man, age 50 to 60.
Padicke, John a tall man, age about 40
Padicke, William, son of John, a short man, age about 20.

Carpenter

Shurley, Philip a short man, age about 40.
Warter, Thomas a short man, age 50 to 60.

Glaziers

Lane, William of Westington, a short man, age about 20.

Pargeter (plasterer)

Haynes, William a short man, age about 40.

Smith

Kyte, Thomas of Broad Campden, a short man, age about 40.
Niblet, George a short man, age about 20.

Whitfield, Edward short man, age about 40

Gardener

Pretty, John a short man, age about 40.

Labourers

Addams, Richard of medium height, age about 40.

Compton, Peter a tall man, age about 40.

Davys, Thomas of Broad Campden, a short man, age about 40.

Eyres, John a short man, age about 40

Heynes, ffrancis (no information listed).

Hitchman, Robert (no information given).

Hobbes, John of Broad Campden, a short man, age about 40.

Huthman, John a short man, age about 40.

Longshore, Richard a short man, age about 40.

Mayo, William short man, age about 40.

Perkins, Daniell a short man, age 50 to 60.

Rawlins, Roger of medium height, age about 40.

Stanford, Robert a short man, age about 40.

Wells, John a very short man, age about 40.

Wiggen, John (no information given).

Wyttone, Henry a very short man, age 50 to 60.