

Broadlands Archive

Whenever Southampton university is in vacation and I can park there, I make a dash or two to look at the Broadlands archives. It is like being a child in a sweet shop – I hardly know where to start

Recently, I have been looking at architects who worked on Broadlands in the mid to late nineteenth century. The most notable was William Eden Nesfield (1835-1888). He is one of the architects closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement and the sunflower motif that can be found on many of his buildings is representative of this style. His relatively early death has undoubtedly meant that he has been eclipsed in public regard by his one-time partner, Norman Shaw. But his local work is well regarded and includes some at Melchet Court.

In 1873, after the boys' school was completed, Eden Nesfield wrote to Cowper-Temple condemning the arrangements in the stables and laundry at Broadlands as very unsatisfactory.

On going over stables I noticed the iron pipe flue from stove in Harness room is brought thro the floor, between old wooden and very rotten joists (as combustible as touch wood) and in a dangerous manner. No insurance office would take a policy if they knew it. The flue is of thinnest metal, very thin sheet iron and this should be altered and seen to.

There is also another similar pipe. The floor of Helpers' bedrooms is in a very rotten state and dangerous. ... The Laundry is badly ventilated and the ironing stove on wrong and dangerous principle. The floor is also in a bad state and very shaky – in fact, I think the ends of beams are rotten. I should advise one of Watson's diaphragm ventilators fixed on Laundry roof and shift the stove to fireplace on new principle of ironing stoves. The present one is simply a dangerous stove in middle of floor.

Recently, I have copied correspondence sent by him to William Cowper-Temple, Lord Palmerston's heir. Cowper-Temple commissioned Nesfield to design the Boys National School in Station Road (now the library); lodges at the gates of Broadlands; a water system for a fountain on the south side of

the house; and a number of other works. I have written a short piece about them for the Romsey & District Society, but it is quite apparent that some of his letters are scattered about elsewhere in the collection.

Looking at other correspondence, notably files of letters that had been sent to Lord Palmerston, I have identified two other architects - C.O. Parnell and T.L. Donaldson - but there are others, as is apparent from their drawings in the collection.

Charles Octavius Parnell (d.1865) was working for Palmerston by 1852, having previously (c.1850) been the co-architect of the old Army and Navy Club that no longer exists. Parnell is also known for the design of Westminster Bank in Lombard Street and the Whitehall Club in Parliament Street, both buildings being built towards the end of his life. It is not clear why Palmerston chose him, as he does not seem to have been notable for work on country houses, and he seems to have undertaken mainly maintenance work at Broadlands.

In 1855 Parnell sent a respectful note to Palmerston asking if his bill could be paid for work carried out in 1852. He included a detailed schedule of the work, which related to repainting the outside of the house. A specification then listed the places where further work was to be carried out. On the mansion itself work was required on the roof where woodwork on the skylights and both sides of the door were to be painted. More work was to be undertaken at the carriage entrance, the terrace front, the river front, the rear front, the large back yard by the steward's room, the Orange house in the Pleasure Grounds, the visitors' servants' building, stables, coach houses and coachman's house, the laundry, the dairy, and the tea room on the river front.

The carriage entrance was to have the following work done:

Paint the sash squares and frames to Attics, second floor and ground floor the architraves, trusses, etc, to doors, the ventilators etc paint, grain Wainscot and twice varnish the folding doors paint in three coats green 6 seats and a pair of Garden steps.

The painting etc. cost £85 plus expenses for travelling, lodgings for workmen, carriage of materials, and hire of ladders.

In addition, there were hopeful estimates for certain other

works should his Lordship wish them to be done. For example, there would be a charge of £12 for three coats of green paint to the wooden screen and railing that separated the Park from the Pleasure grounds, together with the posts, chains and rails by the Carriage Entrance. And a higher charge of £30 4s 0d would cover the costs of repainting the Gardener's house, and the doors and frames to the drying houses, tool house, bars, frames and doors to the hothouses, peach house to be prepared and painted in six coats.

These specifications reveal what was expected of painters, and shed light on the layout of a great house.

Thomas Leverton Donaldson (1795-1885) was a Professor of Architecture at University College, London and a founder member of the Royal Institute of British Architecture. He worked on a small number of other country houses, and was undertaking work for Palmerston in the 1850s. In 1855, he submitted an estimate of £1500 re 6d per cubic foot for additions to Broadlands. This may have been for the wing that used to stand on the north side of house until it was pulled down in the 1950s. Then, during 1859 and 1860 he designed a Steward's House for the estate and the chapel that was built at Lee. Several of his drawings for these buildings have survived and we now have copies provided by Southampton University.

Large country houses such as Broadlands clearly always needed much attention.

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