

THE SITE OF SOUTHWICK PRIORY

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THE PRIORY BEFORE THE DISSOLUTION

THE Augustinian Priory of St. Mary was established at Southwick between 1145 and 1153.¹ The priory had previously been established in 1133 at Portchester, where the priory church remains substantially in its original form, but was transferred to Southwick after about a decade. It became the dominant religious house in South East Hampshire, and helped to found and administer in Portsmouth the church of St. Thomas, now the Cathedral, as well as the hospital, otherwise known as the Domus Dei, later transformed into the Garrison Church.

The history of the priory has never been written. *The Victoria County History of Hampshire*² has a brief account, containing useful items of historical information collected from various sources. But the information is so scanty and so disparate that no idea emerges of the political, social and economic importance of the priory. The writing of such a history awaits the analysis and interpretation of the vast collection of priory documents now housed in the County Record Office at Winchester and fully catalogued. Additional documents exist at the British Museum and in the library at Winchester College.

Topographical and architectural information relating to the priory before its dissolution in 1538 is also very scarce. The priory church contained a shrine dedicated to 'Our Lady of Southwick' which is mentioned by Leland³ as the venue of an important pilgrimage, and was destroyed shortly before the dissolution.⁴ A number of chantries were endowed in the church, notably by William of Wykeham, c. 1380, who asks in the relevant statute for masses to be said at the Altars of St. Andrew and St. Katherine (presumably in the chancel) and at altars in the nave, to the memory of his parents who were buried there (see below). Other chantries were endowed in 1350 by Sir Roger Husee, 'at the Altar of the Holy Cross in the nave of the Priory Church', and in 1385 by Sir Bernard Brocas, of Roche Court near Fareham, who enjoined that 'one mass be said daily at the Altar of Saints Katherine and Mary Magdalene on the north side of the chancel of the Priory Church'.⁵ A possible source of architectural guidance results from the survival of the priory seal, now in the possession of Lady Lubbock.⁶ The seal, dated late 13th century, shows a building of the first half of the 13th century, possibly the priory. However, the elevations shown are insufficient to give much idea of the building as a whole. No other topographical or architectural details seem to have survived, unless they are contained in the documents at the County Record Office.

The priory was surrendered by the Prior and twelve canons on 7th April, 1538. According to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1536, it had a gross annual income of £324 17s. 10d. and a net income of £257 4s. 4d. It was therefore an establishment of

¹ *VCH Hants*, vol. iii, 159, for summary of the evidence.

² *VCH Hants*, vol. ii, 164-8.

³ Leland, *Itinerary*, iii, 8.

⁴ *VCH*, loc. cit.

⁵ *Wykeham's Register*, vol. ii, 364.

⁶ For a drawing see *PHFC*, vii, xxxvii sqq.

some wealth, deriving its income from manors, lands and rectories mainly in south-east Hampshire.⁷ The site, buildings and demesnes of the Priory were granted on 15th March, 1539, to John White, a dependant of Sir Thomas Wriothesley, later Earl of Southampton. The letters patent making the grant are extant and in the County Record Office. Wriothesley was himself granted the abbeys of Beaulieu and Titchfield and no doubt rewarded White for his services by arranging that the latter should obtain possession of Southwick.

THE EXISTING REMAINS AND DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The remains lie in a field at the south-east corner of the village of Southwick and about a quarter of a mile to the south-west of Southwick House. They consist of the north wall of a building orientated east-west. The wall stands mainly to its full height and is approximately 125 feet long. The slight remains of the south wall of the building show that its width was approximately 27 feet.

Lloyd⁸ describes the structure as follows: 'What survives is a section of wall, much patched in post-medieval times, with the remains of eight semicircular wall shafts surmounted, at no very great height, by round capitals. The easternmost of these (a quarter capital, formerly at the corner of a room) is little damaged and has simple scalloped decoration. These date from the establishment of the priory or soon after, and must have been vaulting-shafts in the undercroft of a relatively long building, possibly the refectory. Between two of the shafts are the remains of a fireplace, probably early 14th century, with a moulded octagonal capital supporting one end of the mantelpiece; this must have been a tight fit upwards into one of the bays of the vaulted space. There is also a re-set 14th century chamfered doorway, in a part of the walling tampered with since the Reformation. . . . ' To this may be added the following. The east end of the wall (to the east of the quarter capital mentioned by Lloyd) is constructed of re-used material, indicating the adding of a room at a date probably much later than the rest of the structure. Clearance of the site in July 1967 revealed the bases of two columns midway between the north and south walls. One of the columns is at the extreme west end of the building, and the other is in line with the quarter column mentioned above. The existence of these columns indicates the division of the building into two vaulted aisles. There is another doorway in the centre of the wall, but now blocked in. At the west end of the wall are the remains of a buttress, apparently original, and indicated by the fact that the slight remains of the west wall lie a little to the east of the end of the north wall. At the east end of the north wall there are some slight indications of a wall projecting northwards. Directly north of the re-set doorway mentioned by Lloyd, and below the level of the doorway, is a short brick tunnel leading southwards into the building and northwards into a rectangular hollow, apparently the remains of a cellar. The tunnel and cellar may be post-medieval. The top of the wall is crenellated in part.

The area to the south of the wall is open pasture sloping downwards towards a lake which is crossed by a small bridge due south of the wall. The area to the north of the wall is wooded, though not thickly. Eighty yards to the west stands a house orien-

⁷ A list of the possessions is given in *VCH*, ii, 168.

⁸ N. Pevsner and D. Lloyd, *The Buildings of England. Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, 607.

tated north-south with gables at both ends facing east. The house is 18th century externally, but on the west side the lower courses of the walls are formed of apparently medieval stone blocks. The area to the east of the wall, known as 'The Slopes', is terraced, the height of each succeeding flat terrace falling with each of the five slopes down towards the lake.

Most interpretations of the site assert or suggest that the remains represent the monastic refectory.⁹ This is supported by the orientation of the building and by the fact that many Augustinian monasteries set their refectories on an undercroft. Moreover (see below), one of the priory buildings which survived until the early 19th century was by tradition regarded as the monastic refectory.

Nothing else of the priory survives above the ground. The records of the Defence Land Agent in Fareham, however, show that in 1956 a workman discovered a hole approximately 4 feet by 5 feet some 55 to 60 feet south of the east end of the wall. The edges of the hole were in the form of 12-inch stone slab. It was possible to see under these slabs for a distance of four feet on one side and three feet on the other. On the three feet side there appeared to be an angle which could have been an entry to a circular staircase which had been partly filled in. The exact significance of this is unclear until the hole has been investigated. The hole was later filled in but a map exists, showing its location. It may indicate monastic buildings to the south of the wall, or may conceal remains of the post-reformation mansion (see below).

Apart from the above, there are almost certainly some remains of the priory in the parish church of Southwick, known as the Church of St. James without the Priory Gate. The church was remodelled or rebuilt by John White in 1555 and contains windows and other fragments probably taken from the priory. The tomb of John White, which stands in the north chapel arch, is thought by some to have come from the priory, but John White refers specifically in his will 'to the marble tomb that I have made', and this is consistent with Lloyd's suggestion that the tomb 'may have been conservatively wrought in 1548'.¹⁰

THE HISTORY OF THE SITE AFTER THE DISSOLUTION

It is not clear what demolitions John White carried out after 1539. The *VCH Hampshire* says that White 'pulled down the conventual church, establishing himself and his household in the prior's lodging and adjacent parts of the buildings'.¹¹ However, in an article by C. H. Green¹² we find the following: 'White's first act was to imitate his master (Wriothesley - GM) who at Titchfield had promptly converted the Priory Church into a dwelling house. Subsequently the property passed from the Whites to the Nortons. The priory church was pulled down and its materials used in the construction of a family mansion.' Neither authority gives any source for the information, but the existence in the parish church of a pair of capitals, according to Lloyd 'obviously from Southwick Priory' and 'of the size to fit on to large shafts', may mean that they came from the priory church and that they were fitted into the parish church on its rebuilding in 1555. It is also recorded that John Freeman, an agent of

⁹ Pevsner and Lloyd, *loc. cit.*, and Roberts, *Medieval Monasteries and Minsters of England and Wales*, 147.

¹⁰ Pevsner and Lloyd, *op. cit.*, 604-6.

¹¹ *VCH Hants*, vol. ii, 168.

¹² *PHFC*, v, 325.

the Court of Augmentations, was commissioned by the Crown to take down and melt the lead and bells of the priory church.¹³ This, however, may not mean that the entire church was pulled down, and relevant here might be an estimate given by a builder to Richard Norton in 1705. The estimate is for the 'pulling down of the great old house' and refers to east and west ends and 'the two towers'. This may refer to a mansion built after the dissolution rather than to the priory church (*v. Daly Mss.* 5m80/978).

The property descended eventually to John White's grandson who died in 1607, leaving it to his daughter Honora and her husband Daniel Norton. The latter built on the site a large mansion, for the existence and date of which there is conclusive evidence. Prosser, 1833, and Moule, 1837¹⁴ both state that the mansion was built in the reign of James I. But the most convincing evidence of this is the engraving executed by Kip in the early 18th century. Described as 'The Seat of Richard Norton Esq.' (the grandson of Daniel Norton – died 1732 – GM) this engraving merits detailed discussion. In the following it will be assumed that the engraving is orientated east-west. In the middle ground, somewhat to the west and orientated east-west, is a large Jacobean house with two gabled wings facing south. Behind the house is another building of which only the roof and the east end are visible. It is also orientated east-west, and is approximately the same length as the main mansion. (On this see below.) In the foreground to the south of the house and directly in line with its main entrance is a bridge over a stream flowing approximately east-west. To the east of the mansion and extending northwards and southwards as far as the stream are extensive ornamental gardens surmounted to the north by a large building, evidently an orangery. However, the significant fact about the gardens is that they are terraced downwards towards the stream, as evidenced by a series of steps at different levels, the whole corresponding almost exactly to the existing terraces and slopes mentioned above. The existence of a stream rather than a lake can be explained by the fact that the lake is artificial, and was created later by flooding the field shown in the engraving to the south of the gardens. The latter field has in the engraving exactly the same shape as the present lake. It can therefore be assumed with reasonable confidence that the view shown on the engraving represents the present site of the ruins, as described above. This is confirmed to some extent by Russell, 1769, where describing Southwick Park he writes that 'The house, which is very large, is part of a monastery built by Henry I. The situation is very low and wet, having a great deal of marshy ground about it'. Behind the mansion to the north-west is a paddock and what are apparently stables. Adjoining the stables and running north-south is a building with double gables which could be represented today by the double-gabled house mentioned above in the description of the site.

There remain two problems. The mansion survived until the early 19th century. A number of authorities also assert the survival until that time of the monastic refectory and of a chantry chapel erected by William of Wykeham.

The only reference to the refectory while it was still standing is by Pennant, 1801,¹⁵

¹³ J. Kennedy, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, London University M.A. thesis 1953 (unpublished).

¹⁴ G. Prosser, *Select Illustrations of Hampshire* supple-

ment (1833), and T. Moule, *The English Counties Delineated*, vol. 7 (1837).

¹⁵ T. Pennant, *Journey from London to Land's End*, vol. ii (1801), 121.

where he speaks of 'a great room of very ancient date' which 'seems well fitted to receive a monarch. It is called the "Old Playhouse" . . . The great room . . . possibly had been the monkish refectory.' The expression 'The Old Playhouse' is explained by the tradition¹⁶ that in Richard Norton's time Dryden's play *The Spanish Friar* was performed in the refectory.¹⁷

There seems therefore to be a strong tradition that the refectory survived until the beginning of the 19th century. It remains to be asked firstly, which of the buildings in the Kip engraving corresponds to the so-called refectory, and secondly, whether the location of the latter building could correspond to the existing wall. Both these questions can be answered on certain assumptions. It was mentioned above that behind the mansion in the engraving can be seen the roof of a long building orientated east-west. The rear (north) wall of the building is approximately on a level with the northernmost of the escalated slopes forming part of the ornamental gardens. On the existing site, the northernmost of the slopes is approximately in line with the remaining wall. On the assumption therefore that the Kip engraving represents the existing site, it seems reasonable to conclude that the wall is the remnant of the 'Old Playhouse', held by tradition to be the monastic refectory.

The second problem concerns the alleged survival to the early 19th century of Wykeham chantry chapel. The contemporary evidence is that William of Wykeham's parents were buried in the priory church, not in a separate chapel. A receipt dated 8th April, 1406, records the delivery to the Prior of £50 'in part payment for the works of the church of Southwick, and especially for the roof over the vault under which the Bishop's father, mother, and sister are interred'.¹⁸ However, the *Victoria County History* asserts¹⁹ that until the demolition of the mansion in the early 19th century, 'a great chapel with fourteen windows on each side, attributed to William of Wykeham, is said to have remained standing'. Godwin also states²⁰ that 'the magnificent priory chapel, with its fourteen noble windows on each side, the work of William of Wykeham, and the last resting place of his father and mother, was pulled down by the late Thomas Thistlethwayte'.

Thistlethwayte's demolition of the mansion and the other buildings was in the early 19th century, as will be seen below. The problem is that none of the buildings shown in the Kip engraving is obviously a large chapel with fourteen windows on each side, and the problem is not made easier by the statement²¹ referring to Southwick Park, that 'Here stands what is left of the priory, a desolate grey wall, kindly mantled by clinging vegetation, being all that remains of the splendid chapel built by William of Wykeham'. It seems however unlikely that the existing wall was part of the chapel, if only because the building of a chantry chapel on a low undercroft containing a fireplace and of such a length seems improbable. Moreover, as has been seen, Lloyd dates the undercroft to the 12th century, and it again seems unlikely that William of Wykeham would have sited his chapel on an already existing building. It seems pos-

¹⁶ *VCH Hants*, vol. iii, 161.

¹⁷ This statement is repeated by Rev. G. N. Godwin, *Hants Notes and Queries*, vi (1892), 27.

¹⁸ Hampshire Record Office. *Catalogue of Southwick Records* by W. T. Alchin (1841), 363. (Translation

of the Letters Patent granting the site etc., to John White in 1539.)

¹⁹ *VCH Hants*, vol. iii, 161.

²⁰ Godwin, *loc. cit.*

²¹ *Hants Notes and Queries*, vi (1892), 23.

sible that what is now regarded as the refectory was also regarded by some as the Wykeham chantry chapel, but the matter remains uncertain for the moment. The location of the chapel therefore remains uncertain.

It remains to assess approximately the date of the demolition of the mansion and other buildings and of the rebuilding of the Southwick House on another site. Richard Norton died in 1732, without male heir. The property passed through his daughter and granddaughter to Francis Thistlethwayte, and remained in the hands of the Thistlethwayte family until the 20th century. The Jacobean mansion duly appears on Isaac Taylor's map of Hampshire in 1759. Prosser, 1833, gives the date of the erection of a new mansion on a different site as *c.* 1812. The demolition of the previous mansion must have taken place rather before that date. It was still standing in 1801.²² At the County Record Office in Winchester there is a catalogue of furniture to be sold at an auction sale at 'Southwick Place House' on 2nd June, 1803. The catalogue gives a list of rooms in the main building, and mentions east and west wings. The house must be the Jacobean mansion and the auction sale probably indicates the intention to demolish. Brayley and Britton²³ state that 'Southwick Park . . . includes the site of the priory, only a small part of which now remains. The Manor House is a large building of some antiquity, having two wings terminating in gable ends and embattled.' Finally, an entry in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1807²⁴ refers to 'Southwick, heretofore a venerable mansion, but, if I am rightly informed, now converted into a modern dwelling'.

The date of the demolition therefore appears to be some time between 1803 and 1807. The new mansion built on higher ground to the north-east²⁵ was burnt down at a date variously given as 1838 (*Victoria County History*, vol. ii) and 1840 (*Murray's Handbook*, 1865). The present Southwick House was then built on the same site.²⁶

CONCLUSIONS

The weight of evidence and tradition suggest that the existing wall is part of the refectory. If this is provisionally accepted, the foundations of the cloister and other main priory buildings should exist either to the north or to the south. As the ground slopes downwards towards the lake, formerly the stream, it seems likely that for drainage reasons the cloister was situated to the north, and the dormer and reredorter to the east and south-east of the present wall. An excavation was carried out in July-August 1967, in the area immediately to the north of the existing wall in order to test this hypothesis. The supervisor of the excavation, David Baker, reports that 'Nothing was seen that could be interpreted as the north wall of the south cloister walk. It is possible that the footings of such a wall were planted upon the subsoil like those of the upstanding wall, and totally removed when the priory was demolished, leaving no discernible trace that survived later disturbances. Alternatively, the cloisters may have existed to the south of the presumed refectory, or the presumption of a refectory at this spot may be faulty; it should however be emphasised that the present evidence points to the claustral complex being sited to the north of the refectory. There is also a further alternative,

²² V. Pennant, *loc. cit.*

²³ *The Beauties of England and Wales, Hampshire* (1805), 288.

²⁴ *Gentl. Mag.* 1807, 325.

²⁵ V. Prosser, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Pevsner and Lloyd, *op. cit.*, 607-8.

that the Southwick ground plan lacked a south cloister walk, for reasons which excavation would have to determine.'

It seems also clear that overlaying and abutting the foundations of the priory will be found the foundations of extensive post-Reformation buildings, particularly of the Jacobean mansion, which probably lay just to the south of the existing remains. The hole mentioned above may very well reveal such foundations, although it may perhaps reveal the foundations of medieval buildings south of the refectory.