

The Canterbury Diocese and Queen Anne's Bounty

Timothy Brittain-Catlin

This is a talk about a chapter in architectural history in general in which diocesan archives play the major role, because it is about the great treasure-house of information about early nineteenth-century domestic architecture which only they contain. This came about because of the fact that the Church of England decided around 1811 – for no documented reason – to activate a law of 1777 which enabled parsons to apply on favourable terms for mortgages from a fund called the Queen Anne's Bounty. These applications required a process of submission of plans and specifications to the Bounty – a committee of the bishops – and that is the overall explanation for the Canterbury examples which I'm going to show you.

The other speakers today will be either astonished or appalled to hear that architectural historians often refer to the early nineteenth century as our 'early modern' period. The reason is that at that time ideas about buildings, ways of practising as an architect and ways of designing and drawing all changed dramatically. And the exceptionally complete sets of Queen Anne's Bounty mortgage application drawings in diocesan archives which have been preserved from this period testify to the process in astonishing detail, room by room and wall by wall. When I was working on this subject a few years back I found an exemplary set of nine application drawings which I hope will serve to illustrate to you the many ways in which these collections are so helpful.

Little Mongeham, William Edmonds, 1836, DCb/DC/M20/1

The first thing to say is that non-design processes at work across many professions had a demonstrable impact on the way in which houses were presented and recorded. In fact, the primary motivation for building so many houses at this period was the fact that legislation

increasingly reduced the holding of more than one benefice, and required parsons to live in their parishes. So that in itself explains why thousands of new houses are funded and built in the first half of the century.

But here are other specific period factors too. The first of these is the introduction of technical innovations and appliances. This meant for example organised and modern drainage in a new house, which would also from around this period be connected to water closets – we can see from the examples that houses of this character and size would normally have one at this period, and you can see it here upstairs on the plan it. Edmunds was primarily a civil engineer, and he completed the harbour arm in Margate which the much more famous engineer John Rennie had attempted to start. So in this drawing you can see the highest level of professional expertise applied to a small house. And another thing that you can see is the high level of draughting quality and drawing presentation: twenty years beforehand, many designs for houses were sketches irregularly drawn on different pieces of paper.

As you would expect in this period, a second non-architectural design element is an increasing insistence by Christopher Hodgson, the long-serving secretary of the governors of the Bounty, on supplying more and more accurate building information in advance of any approval being given. This mirrors the decision of the British parliament only to approve public building works where there was a detailed, costed specification agreed in advance. This filters down to documentation – specifications, and technical information, as in this case, become more accurate from the 1830s onwards.

Warehorne rectory on Romney Marsh, by John Whichcord, 1839, DCb/DC/W24/1

You can also see drawings becoming more detailed as architects are more aware of the specific components of, for example window. This is quite a crude elevation by John Whichcord, who did quite a few parsonage houses in the period I'm describing. You can compare it with this one:

Stalisfield vicarage, by F. Brown of Torrington Square, London, 1841, DCb/DC/S28/1

This is by a London architect – he was working in an area in Bloomsbury that housed a lot of architects at that time, another fact we can discover from the application documents which included addresses – and the standard is already a great deal higher. This architect has had to think about for example the section of the window frames and the projection of the eaves, so he draws them accurately. In fact in general, you can see from drawings like this that not only do the elevations and so on include more information, they are better drawn, and one reason for that might be increasing impact of the publication of affordable and accurate topographical drawings, especially those of John Britton which were the first to record historic buildings in what he called a ‘scientific’ way.

Kennington parsonage, by John Apsley, 1840, DCb/DC/K3/2

Now what you can also see on a more exclusively architectural front is the way in which architects are struggling to resolve the problems that arise as buildings become more complicated because the kitchen and other service areas proliferate and start to have specific functional requirements. We’ll come back to the subject of backstairs office areas later, because more striking than those are the ways in which the typical late Georgian house type changes stylistically in order accommodate them. We all know about the Gothic Revival – which starts here explosively with A.W.N Pugin’s radical Grange in Ramsgate in 1843 – and it is possible to interpret that as the designers’ collective attempt to throw off the straightjacket of symmetrical plans and fronts.

But most people are not Pugin and don’t have that kind of creative dynamism, so they try shifting the elements of Georgian architecture around to meet practical requirements. I think that Kennington is a particularly interesting drawing because it illustrates the unexpected phenomenon of precisely its period. What you can see here is that John Apsley

has decided for functional reasons to put his windows around the side, but he doesn't yet know how to design the kind of front elevation that doesn't need symmetry. So he puts in these blank ones. I was very struck when researching the subject how the 1830s and 1840s produces houses with blank elevations, or irregular ones of other kinds, to make houses that were completely styleless in an unprecedented way for polite architecture.

Badlesmere rectory, by George Russell French, 1836, DCb/DC/B1/1

So the drawings also tell us how styles develop in an unfamiliar period. The 1830s tend to get overlooked in architectural history because they come after nearly all the well known late Georgian buildings, and before the gothic ones. Traditionally there is a great difference in style and approach between those who write about neo-classical buildings and those who write about gothic revival or Victorian ones, and thus this period is seen for the former as a regrettable tail end, and by the latter as the last and regrettable gasp of the ancien regime. This one here is definitely ancient regime – you can tell that by the fact that the perspective, although charming, doesn't correspond with the proportions of the elevation. But it confirmed for me is that the reign of King William IV was the period of the English Tudor Gothick style which like the king himself was quite charming in a bluff and genial sort of way but not especially disciplined. If you see a house like this – with these ornamental bargeboards, which would have been glued on to the gothic revivalists' horror, Tudor chimneys and lots of plasterwork inside and out – you can be fairly certain that you're looking at a house designed between 1830-1837!

Barham rectory, by the Whichcords, 1847, DCb/DC/B13/1

You can also see not particularly inspired provincial architects trying to catch up on the latest fashions, but usually not being brave enough to sign up to the whole reform movement. This house at Barham might slightly resemble Pugin's Grange on the outside, but the plan drawings tell us that the interior arrangement was more conventional. I found that until Pugin there was almost no variation in interior layouts in late Georgian houses –

nearly all had a pair of rooms either side of a stair hall along the main front. There is some attempt to break away from this conventional layout in the Barham house, but there is none of that emphasis of the different masses of the building that characterise a 'true' gothic revival one. So the interior of this one is slightly militating against the public part. Another frequent compromise with modernity made at this period was that Pugin's houses had demonstratively vertical proportions – which were thought un-English – and so the compromised versions of it tend to be more horizontal. Many architects were influenced by the staircase hall at the Grange and the diocesan collections have plenty of examples of people installing them, somewhat forcefully, into the middle of eighteenth-century houses.

This plan also shows you how the parishioners' room was invariably at the far end of the house from the residential and formal areas: this changes, too, as parsons, like George Eliot's Adam Bede, start to put their parishioners at the centre of their lives instead of at the periphery.

Milton parsonage, near Sittingbourne, by William White, 1855, DCb/DC/M15/1

As it happens, relatively few houses by the famous gothic revival architects appear in the diocesan collections, although there are exceptions – there are wonderful examples by G.E. Street for houses at Wantage in Berkshire and Melksham in Dorset, and Pugin's wonderful rectory at Rampisham in Dorset is in the Wiltshire & Swindon Salisbury diocesan collection. One of the reasons for that is that these were often expensive houses and they were sometime funded beyond the Bounty system. The one at Kilndown, by R.C. Carpenter, for example, came with private funding from the Beresford-Hope family via the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who from their foundation in 1836 did fund houses in certain circumstances which included the establishment of new perpetual curacies. The commissioners' files are in the Church of England record centre, which meant that when I was doing my research, they were uncatalogued and largely inaccessible. So this is a rarity – it is a house by William White, who was a distinguished gothic revival architect, famous mostly for the parish church in Lyndhurst and also for a very ornate gothic courtyard house in St Colomb Major in

Cornwall, the scene of a great deal of anti-tractarian demonstrations. This house combines a new wing on the right hand-side with an old building in a sensitive way that is unusual and prophetic for its period.

The mortgage application process required a description of any existing parsonage house. Usually all that has survived in the diocesan collections is a written statement, but some files include beautifully drawn, accurate survey drawings of mediaeval houses. These are a real treasure when they are discovered. What I found interesting about this is that at the same time even very reliable architectural historians, such as John Britton, were claiming that there were no medieval houses at all in existence. There were – it was just that a different class of person was surveying them.

Stockbury parsonage, by R.C. Hussey, 1834, DCb/DC/S35/1

This house is by an architect who later became a distinguished gothic revival architect, so I found it interesting because of the way in which he designed a house using Georgian components but in a very unGeorgian way before his conversion. You can see that he is unhappy about it, can't you? The missing windows have, incidentally, been added in the meantime. But it does provide further unexpected evidence for architectural experiment as architects became restless and yet so far had no new model to follow.

Broughton under Blean vicarage, by the Whichcords, 1854, DCb/DC/B17/1

Finally, a drawing that tells us a lot about two interesting subjects. Many large old houses have, of course, been the subject of continuous or continual change and it can be hard to work out what was built when. The surviving visible core of this house is early eighteenth century. So what we can see here is how mid-Victorian life demanded a whole extra set of service and office areas, and that the house had to be adapted and modernised to accept them.

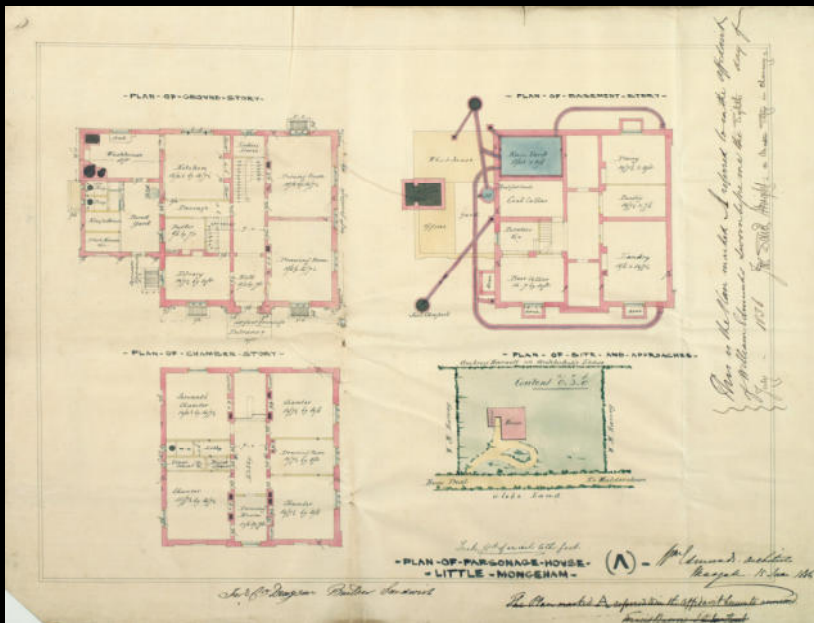
This raises a second point, which had accompanied these applications right from the start. The correspondence in the Bounty files shows that the bishops took an interest into what could be appropriately paid for by a mortgage. Stables and coach houses, for example, had to be paid for privately, on separate building contracts. Bishops also sometimes thought that a parson was getting above himself in the size of his proposed drawing room or even of their kitchen. I can think of one case in the Salisbury diocese where the bishop wrote reduced room sizes directly onto the plan. During the course of an altercation over a disastrous project in Mathon, Herefordshire, in Mathon, the parson Mr Smelgar insisted that his house should include a beer or cider cellar in addition to the wine one he saw in the plan, and the bishops agreed with him. These collections are full of wonderful details about life and the interest in them extends to the very widest sense of the word architectural.



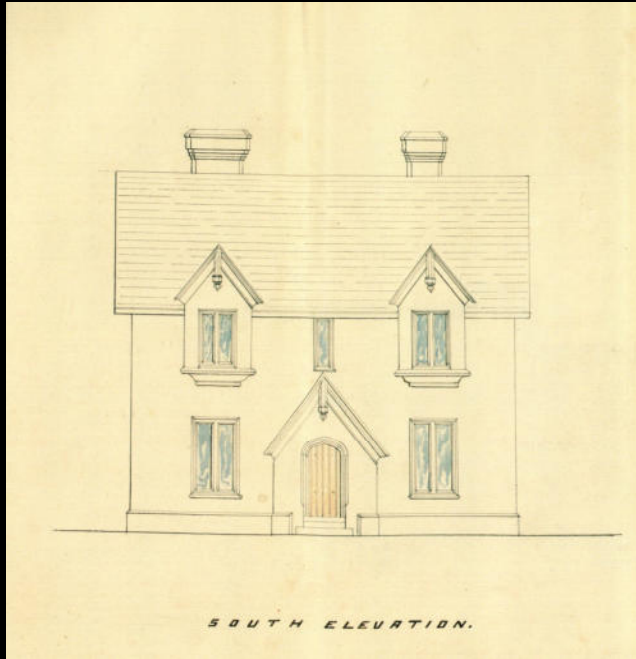
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Stourmouth rectory, by Robert Wallace, 1840
 Photographed in 2007 by Martin Charles



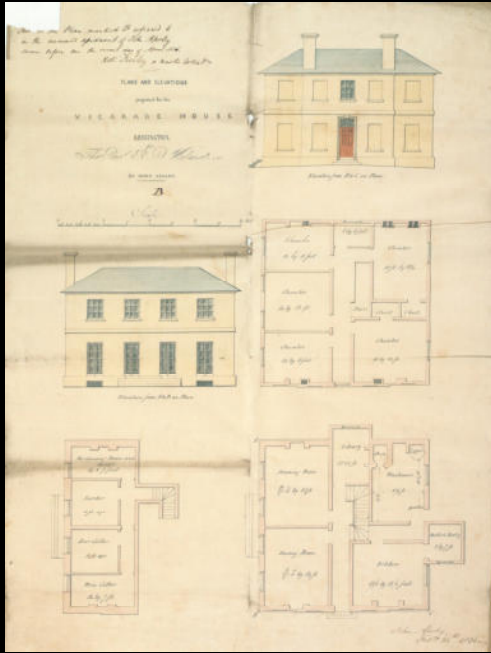
Little Mongeham,
 by William Edmunds, 1836



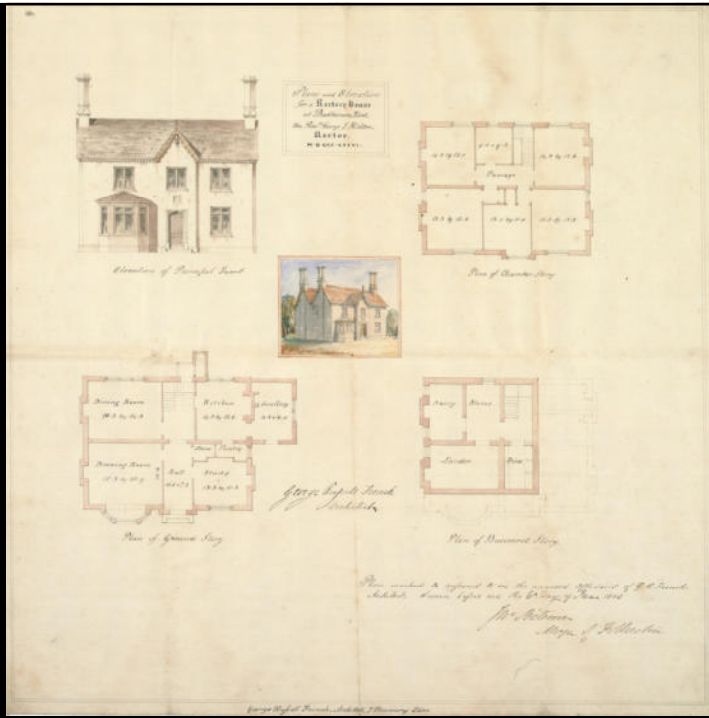
Warehorne rectory
by John Whichcord snr, 1839



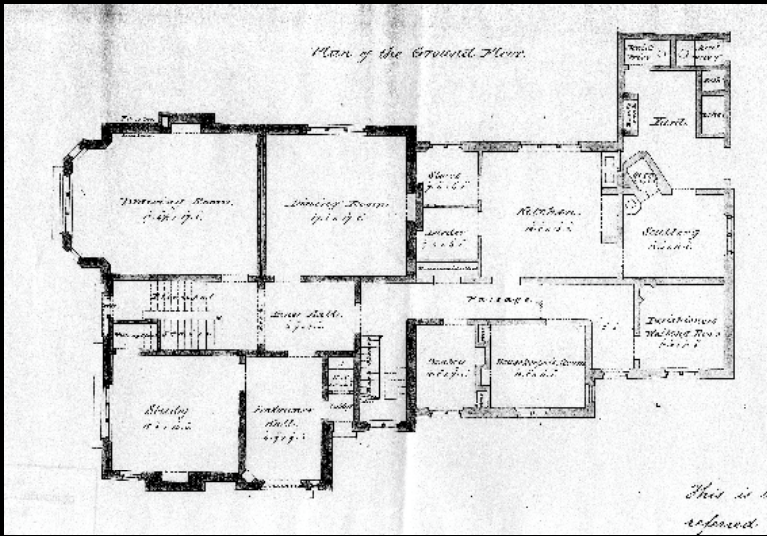
Stalisfield vicarage
by F. Brown, 1841



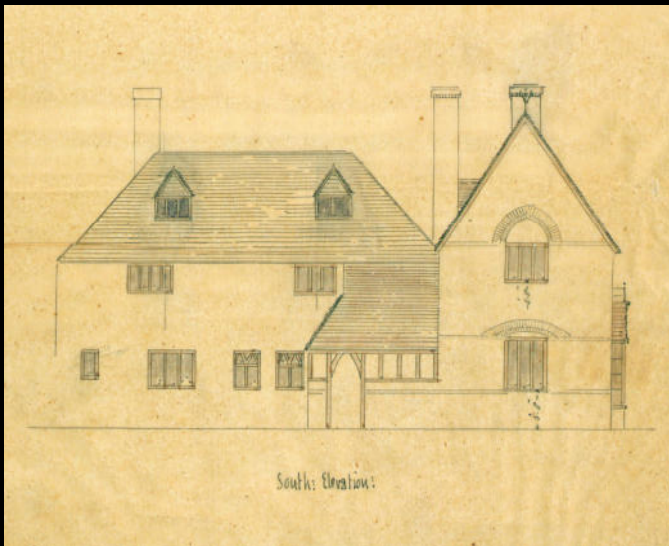
Kennington parsonage by John Apsley, 1840



Badlesmere rectory by George Russell French, 1836



Barham rectory
by John Whichcord snr & jnr,
1847



Milton parsonage
By William White, 1855



Stockbury parsonage
by R.C. Hussey, 1834



Boughton under Blean
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