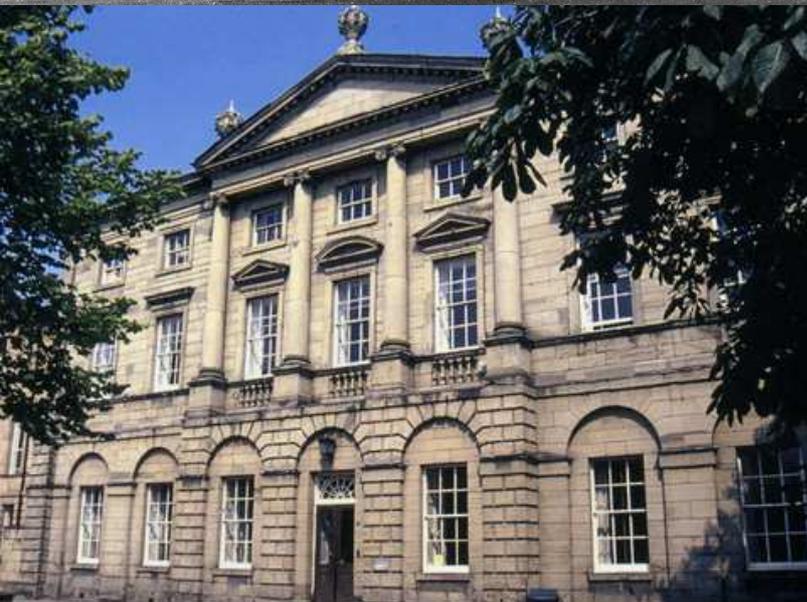
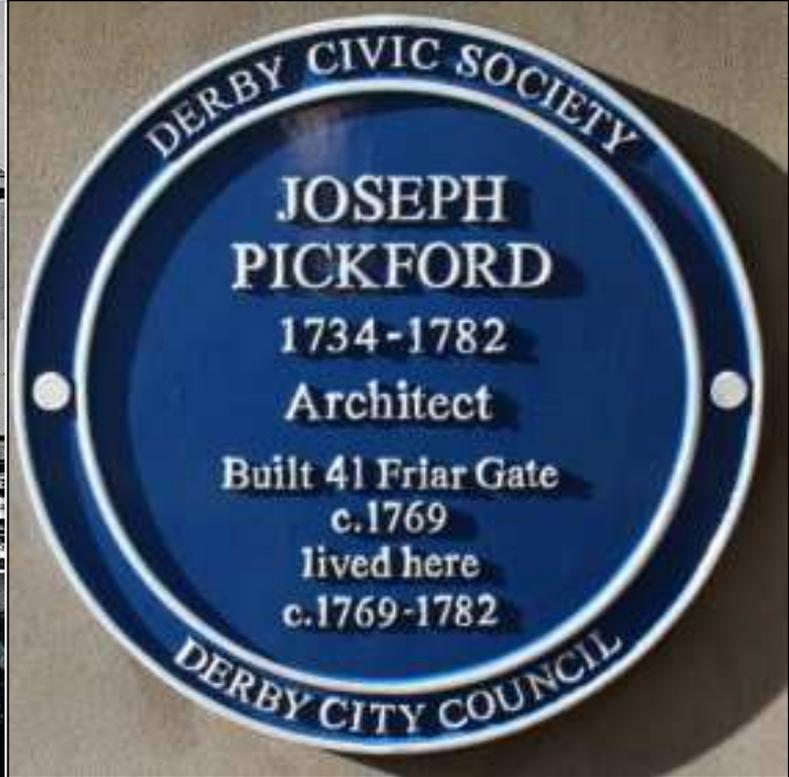




A LECTURE
TO BE DELIVERED
IN DERBY CATHEDRAL
ON
TUESDAY 8TH APRIL 2014

ABOUT
JOSEPH PICKFORD
OF DERBY
(1734-1782)

BY



MAXWELL
CRAVEN

THE 'CELEBRATED AND INGENIOUS MR JOSEPH PICKFORD'

This is the first of a series of talks which constitute the Civic Society's justification of the choice of Blue Plaques which, with the help of the City Council, have been erected on various buildings throughout Derby. One of these, unveiled last year, is affixed to Pickford's House, Friar Gate. My job today is to try and justify it. I would also like to pay a tribute to my late friend Edward Saunders, Pickford's biographer. Without having had the opportunity to act as his amanuensis in that book's creation, I would be entirely unqualified to tell you about Pickford.

In 1781, the Venetian architect Gianantonio Selva was making a tour of Great Britain looking specifically at recent buildings. He wrote his experiences up in a diary which was rediscovered in an Italian library in the 1980s. Of Derby he wrote:

"Here are some buildings of substantial architecture, in particular at the entrance to the city [*sic*] coming from Chesterfield there is a house near the New Inn, with a circular courtyard, of much merit. The architect of it was Mr. Pickford and although he was never in Italy, he is one of the best of my acquaintance."

This was a ringing endorsement for Mr. Pickford who, of course, was Joseph Pickford, arguably still the most distinguished Derby architect.

Pickford is important because he was London trained and had burnished his art with the leading professionals of the day and, settling in Derby, by example, significantly raised the standards of other builder/architects practising in the area. I use the expression 'builder/architects' because in the 18th century, as earlier, an architect was usually an experienced building contractor as well. If you engaged an architect to design your house, you would expect him also to build it.

Only the very top flight of architects merely designed, an early example being James Gibbs, who designed this church. He worked with one or two builder/architects on most of his commissions, as here, where he engaged as contractor Francis Smith of Warwick (a prolific country house architect, mainly in the Midlands, who had worked with him before). In the event, Smith was over-committed and he in his turn hired local man William Trimmer to undertake day-to-day supervision. Smith got 'a shilling a day and a nag' for his pains, on top of the cost of building, which was rather like having a company car: he could call, check progress and ride off to supervise another job all at no additional cost to himself. Not only did Joseph Pickford operate in just the same way, but he also belonged in the same West Midlands tradition.

This tradition went back well into the 17th century. The Pickfords themselves were a family of builders ultimately from Shropshire, who had forged close links with Smiths of Warwick. William and Francis Smith, were sons of a skilled mason and made their name and fortune rebuilding Warwick after most of the town was destroyed in a fire of 1694.

Joseph was born in 1734, the son of 61-year old William Pickford, mason, then of Ashow, Warwickshire, and his second wife Mary. William was working as a mason on Stoneleigh for Francis Smith and indeed Lord Leigh's hunting kennels there are known to be his work, as was a now-vanished castellated gatehouse at Melbourne Hall.

Orphaned at seven, Joseph went to London to live, serving his apprenticeship and then acting as assistant to his uncle, Joseph Pickford of Hyde Park Corner, one of the leading builders of

his day. Young Joseph worked with him at Horse Guards, Cambridge University Library and at Holkham, Norfolk, bringing him into direct contact with the first generation Palladians, notably John Vardy, Stephen Wright, Thomas Robinson and William Kent.

Classical architecture in England went through several phases, from its introduction by Inigo Jones under James I (as derived from the Italian master Andrea Palladio), through a Baroque phase with Wren, Vanburgh and Gibbs, to a reversion to the purer forms of Jones, by now called Palladianism. These styles also became enmeshed in politics, along the lines of the allegiances of their chief patrons. Hence Baroque became closely associated with the Tories, discredited for three generations from 1714, when the reversion to Roman forms as refined by Palladio was taken up with gusto by the Whigs under the leadership of Lord Burlington under George I & II. This was the era of Pickford's training. Yet by the time Pickford was striking out on his own, Robert Adam was beginning to champion a return to ancient Greek and Roman forms through direct reference to the originals, and this found many patrons amongst the Tory nobility, resurgent following the death of George II in 1760.

Pickford came to Derby as Clerk of Works and later executant architect at the Burdett's house Foremarke Hall in 1759. The architect, David Hiorn who died that year, was Francis Smith's successor. Here the young architect met the garden designer William Emes, fresh from realising Adam's landscape at Keldeston, and they worked together frequently over the following two decades. He also came into contact through Sir Robert Burdett, with the men who were to form the nucleus of the Lunar Society. This led to his quoting Matthew Boulton for materials for a new house at Soho near Birmingham, in 1760. He probably got the commission, too, but the house was subsequently heavily rebuilt by James and Samuel Wyatt, 1796-98.

In 1761 he was employed by the Cokes at Longford. He had met this family whilst helping his uncle build their magnificent seat at Holkham in Norfolk. They owned a quarry in Derbyshire, to which Pickford had been sent a few years earlier by his uncle to select alabaster for the stunning entrance, chapel and other rooms at Holkham. He had then met Mary Wilkins, daughter of the Cokes' Derbyshire agent, and in 1762 he married her. He Georgianised Longford Hall for Wenman Coke and built a large, very fine hunting stables (now regrettably derelict and at risk), where he encountered Matthew Boulton's friend, the Derby Clockmaker, John Whitehurst, who made the clock.

Coke then recommended him as contractor to his friend Washington Shirley 5th Earl Ferrers, who had designed the new Assembly Rooms for Derby, the subscription list for which was to become a happy hunting ground for future commissions. During this time he made the acquaintance of Robert Adam, who was to decorate the interior and whose Neo-Classical *tour-de-force* at Kedleston enthused him. Through Ferrers he met his protégé Peter Burdett, then making a 1in: 1mile map of Derbyshire. Pickford thereupon set up in Derby where he worked with great success for the remainder of his life.

Pickford worked extensively for the members of the Lunar Society, just coalescing in 1764-65, and for those associated with it. We are told he was a personal friend of Whitehurst and also of his exact contemporary Joseph Wright, who painted his family and probably him, too. Such connections brought him work, too for he built a house directly behind this church for Peter Burdett, in Rococo Gothick and one in Queen Street for John Whitehurst, in sober Palladian.

For Lunar Society recruit Josiah Wedgwood, Pickford designed and built an entire settlement at Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent in 1767-70, including the Palladian hall for Wedgwood, Bank House (in Gothick) for his partner Thomas Bentley, and applied the Palladian style to the revolutionary pottery works, which set the standard for similar factories well into the 19th century; in Edward Saunders' words, it "offered the mill owner the possibility of dignity without undue expense". Added to this, he built an inn, three streets of workers' housing and a London showroom. The lake at Etruria (with a boathouse by Pickford) and grounds (incorporating the new Grand Trunk Canal), was by Emes. There is also stylistic evidence to suggest that Pickford, and not the bodger Timothy Lightoler, designed Matthew Boulton's remarkably similar, if much larger, works at Soho, a few years before; both have the same eclectic superimpositions of Palladian motifs forming their entrance.

Other Lunar Society commissions followed: for Erasmus Darwin he not only designed a structure to contain his revolutionary horizontal windmill (later erected at Etruria), made alterations at Radburne Hall, where the good doctor lived from 1780-1783, but also rebuilt his house in Full Street in 1782. Furthermore, he almost certainly enlarged Richard Lovell Edgeworth's house, Edgeworthstown, in Co. Longford.

During his first years in Derby - exactly where he lived at first is not known - he designed an ambitious new Neo-Classical country house at Calke for Tory baronet Sir Henry Harpur, but regrettably this was never built. He did build another at Lea Marston, Warwickshire called Hams Hall. This was the precursor of Derby's St. Helen's House, generally recognised as his finest surviving work and the finest Palladian town house north of London. Richard Blunt has just finished a superb six-year restoration of this impressive town house (it was only intended for occasional use by its super-rich owner John Gisborne). Its inspiration was Robert Adam's Neo-Classical Lansdowne House, Berkeley Square in London, built for Tory prime minister Lord Bute and completed for his successor the Marquess of Lansdowne. St. Helens has an identical façade built to the same proportions and with a remarkably similar interior, but with detailing in Palladian style instead of Adam's Neo-Classical, as the Gisbornes were the Duke of Devonshire's local fixers and strong Whigs. We know too that Adam must have let Pickford measure and draw Lansdowne House as the design was not published until 5 years after St. Helen's was completed in 1767.

This commission got Pickford into the circle of the 5th Duke of Devonshire, and he did much work at Chatsworth. He rebuilt the weir by the mill, built a new vicarage for John Wood, the rector, at Edensor (this also led to his building Swanwick Hall for Wood's brother Hugh), a new house for the agent, Mr. Barker (Ashford Hall), new Devonshire almshouses in Full Street, Derby, the north gatehouse at Chatsworth and one of his most attractive and ingenious buildings, the *Edensor Inn*. He also began an ambitious octagonal stable block at Edensor, but this never got beyond the first three sides. Had it been finished it would have been most impressive. He was unlucky to have lost the commission to design the Buxton Crescent to John Carr.

He designed several other houses in Derby, including his own (1769), with its exquisitely proportioned and enriched façade, two in Wirksworth, one in Nottingham and three in Ashbourne, including rebuilding The Mansion, for Dr. Johnson's friend Dr. John Taylor. He also designed a number of public buildings, including the Wirksworth Moot Hall, built the Trinity Hospital in Leicester, extended the Derby Shire Hall (adding the grand jury room) and built the Nottingham one. He rebuilt several grand medieval churches, including St. Alphege, Solihull, Holy Trinity, Coventry and St. Mary, Nottingham. His only known new church was

St. Mary, Whittall Street, Birmingham, which was octagonal. This caused the *Birmingham Gazette* in 1774 to label its architect as “That most celebrated and ingenious architect, Mr. Joseph Pickford of Derby.” He may have well worked further in Leicestershire, but the buildings of his contemporary, William Henderson of Loughborough, are so similar in detail and proportion that un-documented candidates like Belgrave House and Wanlip Hall are difficult to attribute.

He never lived to design a really major country house, but rebuilt and extended Melbourne, Tissington, Shardlow and Darley Halls. He also built Doveridge Hall, and designed Draycott House, Ogston and Wirksworth Halls, Park Hall, Mansfield and Sandon Hall, Staffs., working with William Emes on several commissions, including the castellated Knowle Hill near Ticknall, set in an early romantic landscape. He designed the Riding School at Calke, and like his father, he was not beyond building dog-kennels either, providing some at Bradley for the father of fox-hunting, Hugo Meynell, so ambitious that they were later easily adapted to form the present hall. He also designed lodges for Locko Park, Trentham, Staffs., and Brocket Hall, Herts.

He was appointed clerk of works at Kedleston in 1775 on the recommendation of Adam in succession to James Denston, whom the Tory grandee Lord Scarsdale sacked ‘for aireing his Whiggish views’. Here he seems to have designed the octagonal garden temple and the ornate Gothick lodge at Cumberhills. All this establishes him a serious neo-classicist, but more often than not the Whiggish tastes of most of his clients led to his having to cloak his buildings in Palladian garb, any Neo-Classicism being relegated more to the detail, as in his own house.

He was, like most of his friends and clients, a London Freemason and, in 1781 was made a member of the Corporation of Derby at the instigation of his patron the Duke of Devonshire, then the High Steward of the Borough. At his unexpected death 13th July 1782 he left two sons, Thomas, who died young and Joseph (who died in 1844) a graduate of Oriel, Oxford and long the incumbent of Little Eaton and Quarndon.

As a man he appears to have been immensely likeable but, like many builders and architects today was inclined to under-quote to get the work with the consequent risk of having a falling-out with his clients over the final cost. He had a particularly bitter parting of the ways with Josiah Wedgwood who, apart from labelling him a ‘bashaw’ (by which he meant ‘pasha’) for his tough attitude to his men, kept changing his mind and adding to the original specification. He paid up eventually though.

As an architect, his strength was in proportion; he never designed a façade which did not look exactly right. Furthermore, as his career unfolded, he used increasingly less detail on his elevations to increasing advantageous effect. His influence locally was to encourage stylistic emulation and to raise the standards of architecture considerably. His Lunar Society connections and pioneering work at Etruria and Soho mark him out as nationally important, and I had the pleasure of contributing his entry to the new DNB a few years ago. His only certain pupil was Thomas Gardner of Uttoxeter, although George, son of his carver, George Moneypenny may well have been another. Moneypenny was a man who practised in Derby but went on to specialise in designing galls, being briefly imprisoned in his own creation at Leicester after a dispute over the costs. Two contemporary Derby amateurs Richard Leaper and William Strutt too, may have acquired their considerable architectural skills with Pickford.

There are missing pieces to Pickford's career. I am certain he did other work in Ireland - the classical façade of Castle Ward, for instance, is a ringer for that of St. Helen's - and I also suspect that, encouraged by either Edgeworth or Whitehurst's friend Benjamin Franklin, he may have spent two or three years in America - perhaps at Boston or Philadelphia - in the early 1770s.

Perhaps one day, from some dusty attic, the evidence will emerge. In the meantime, I feel that the celebrated and ingenious Mr. Joseph Pickford of Derby' richly deserves his blue plaque.

Maxwell Craven

4th April 2014.

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