

# 1827-55 - Working With Thomas Smith

## Introduction

This Section takes up the story soon after William Lockwood 3 visited Tempsford Hall with his father in 1826, and was so impressed with the stone modelling work being done by Obadiah Pulham, as noted in Section 1. Those facts were recorded in Lockwood's *Reminiscences*, and also noted in Chapter 1 of my *Rock Landscapes: The Pulham Legacy*.

Fig 1.6 in my book is a reproduction of the Summary of Expenses sheet for that project, which is signed off by Thomas Smith – later to become the County Architect and Surveyor of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire - who was in charge of the project. The information upon which most of this Section is based comes from a study of the life and work of Thomas Smith that was been researched and published by John Corfield.<sup>1</sup> It fits perfectly into my own story about the Pulhams, because it provides an invaluable link between what happened to them after William Lockwood 3 returned from London to manage his father's cement business in Woodbridge – leaving James 1 to take over the old Lockwood business in London – up to the time when James 2 started his garden landscaping projects from his new base in Hoddesdon and Broxbourne.

There was insufficient space in my book to include details of all the projects on which they collaborated, and I have only recently got round to filling in some of the gaps for myself, so this Section gives me the ideal opportunity to share the results of my latest researches, and include some notes and pictures that have come my way since the book was published in 2012.

It appears that Thomas Smith (1798-1875) was very interested in churches and the Gothic style of architecture, so he would have had a lot of interests in common with James 1 and Obadiah. It is therefore hardly surprising that, when the economic depression of 1826-27 resulted in a severe shortage of stone modelling work around London, Obadiah decided to leave his brother, James 1, and seek another position.

He was lucky, because, as explained in my next note about St James' Church, Silsoe, Thomas Smith happened to be in urgent need of a Clerk of Works, and Obadiah was an ideal candidate for the position, and both he and James 1 were already experts in building and stone modelling. Obadiah consequently moved to Hertford to take up his new job, and James 1 became involved in several of his church building projects around Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

## 1828-31 - St James' Church, Silsoe

While the work at Tempsford Hall was under way, Smith was also working on a project for Thomas Philip de Gray - also known as Lord Grantham, owner of Wrest Park - in Silsoe, Bedfordshire. He decided to restore the old Church of St James, which stood on the main approach drive to Wrest Park, and commissioned Smith to survey it. The resulting report was devastating - Smith considered that the bell turret and its supporting walls were unsafe; that some of the structural timbers in the roof were decayed, and that the north and south external walls were inches out of the vertical.

He recommended that the tower be taken down and part of the west wall rebuilt. The work was put in hand, but the tower collapsed during its construction due to stones not having been properly bonded together, and the local paper – the *Hertfordshire Mercury* - reported that this was due to the fact that a Clerk of Works had not been employed, and the architect only visited occasionally.

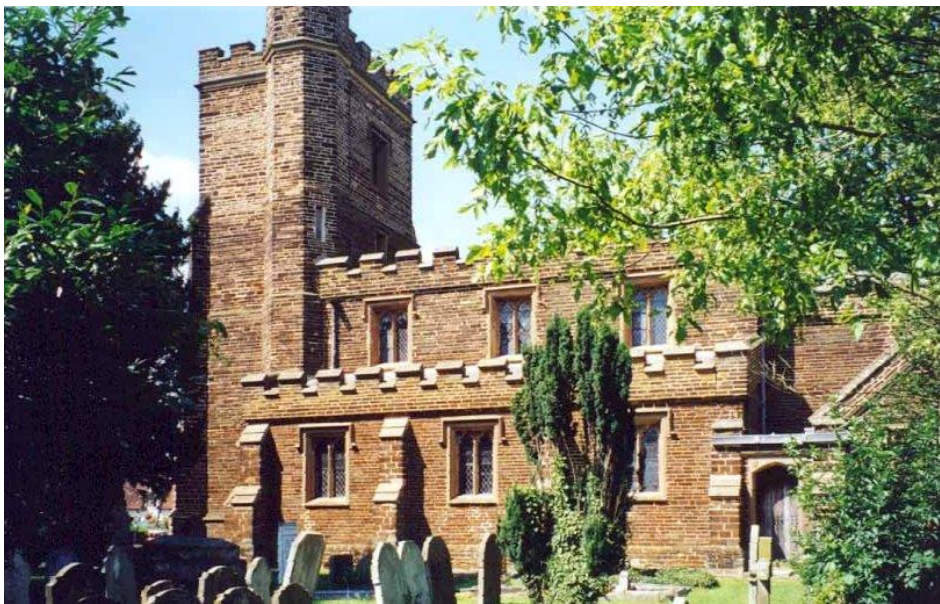


Fig 1 - St James' Church at Silsoe, Bedfordshire

Smith consequently had no option but to appoint a Clerk of Works, and he immediately thought of Obadiah, whose work at Tempsford Hall had impressed him so much a few months before. He therefore offered him the job, based in his Hertford office.

Meanwhile, at Silsoe, it had been decided that, rather than rebuild the old church from scratch, a new church should be built on a fresh site, and Nicholas Pevsner (1903-83) - the German art historian who moved to England and became a renowned authority on English architecture – refers to the new church in a series of articles under the title of '*Buildings of England*' as being:

‘. . . an amazingly early case of archaeologically knowledgeable imitation by T. Smith of Hertford.’



*Fig 2 - The beams and brackets in St James' Church, Silsoe*

The work was completed in 1831, and Obadiah's influence can be seen in the terracotta hood-moulds around the windows - which can just be seen in Fig 1 – and in the head-like corbels supporting the beams inside the chancel, shown in Fig 2. It is not known who was contracted to build the church, so it would be irresponsible to claim that William Lockwood or James 1 were definitely involved, but it may well be a possibility.

## **1832-47 – Thomas Smith Expands his Business**

Thomas Smith opened a London office in Bloomsbury Square c1832, and later moved again to Hart Street, in the City of London. It seems that Obadiah must have spent some time here – he may even have moved back to London to be near Smith's London office - because he married Elizabeth Sellwood at St Mary's church, Whitechapel, in March 1832, and they are known to have lived in nearby John Street during the late 1830s. <sup>2</sup>

Smith designed and built Hertford County Hospital in 1832-33, and also built a Norman Folly in the garden of his home in North Road, Hertford c1834. As noted in Chapter 1 of *Rock Landscapes*, it is almost certain that James 1 worked with Obadiah on those projects. Smith was appointed County Architect and Surveyor of Hertfordshire in 1837, and also of Bedfordshire in 1847.

### **1835-38 – Benington Lordship, Near Stevenage**

Thomas Smith designed the huge Norman Folly at Benington Lordship, and it is known for sure that James 1 worked with Obadiah on building it between 1835-38. This is discussed fully in the book, which also refers to the untimely death of James 1 in 1838, soon after the death of his baby twins.

### **1838-42 – James 2 Takes Over his Father's Business**

One can hardly imagine the trauma felt by a young man of eighteen at the news of his father's sudden death in very unfortunate circumstances, but that is what James 2 had to endure in March 1838. He obviously got through it very well, however, because he took over his father's business, and continued to live at the family home in Moselle Place, Tottenham, with his mother and three brothers and sisters. They were still there at the time of the 1841 Census.

He inherited his father's artistic abilities and practical skills, and we know - thanks to the research already done by John Corfield - that Thomas Smith employed him on a number of projects over the next several years. For instance, . . .

### **1839-41 – The Rectory, Wallington, Hertfordshire**

I have just discovered – in 2018, and thanks to James Bettley – that Thomas Smith was commissioned to build The Rectory, at Wallington, and that he employed James 2 to do the plastering work. It was a major construction, that took a long time to complete, so he is unlikely to have travelled the 30 miles each way from Tottenham to Wallington every day, and would have lodged in Wallington while he was working there.

As I have noted in my book, my great-grandfather, William Hitching, stayed with his aunt, Charlotte Frost, in Wallington during the early 1860s, so she may well have been the lady who accommodated James 2 twenty years earlier. William's father, John Hitching – who was a carpenter who lived in Great Bardfield, also about 30 miles away – may also have worked at The Rectory and stayed with his sister while he was there, although there are no records to support this theory.

However, I have a feeling that this job probably provides the link between the Pulhams and the Hitching family. I think that, when James 2 was looking for craftsmen with whom to expand his business in 1865, he might well have contacted Charlotte Frost or John Hitching again, who would have had no hesitation in recommending John's sons, William and George, for jobs as builder and carpenter. That would explain how William moved down to join James 2 in Hoddesdon in 1865, and took his wife and George



with him. I shall never be able to prove or disprove this, but I don't mind that – it seems quite logical, and makes a good story.

The Rectory is now a private property under another name, so I sadly have no pictures to show details of the work done there by James 2.

### **1839-40 - St John's Church, Old Harlow, Essex**



*Fig 3 - St John's Church, Old Harlow, as it stands today, having been deconsecrated and converted into an Arts and Recreation Centre*

In May 1839, the Marquess of Bute laid the foundation stone of St John's Church, in Old Harlow, Essex, which, according to a newspaper report, Thomas Smith designed and built in 'the Early English manner'.

This was a very 'high church', situated in a secluded corner of Old Harlow, in the Diocese of Chelmsford, but it eventually ran into a state of serious disrepair, and was deconsecrated in 1979. The proposed use of the building as a community centre was agreed, and, after the necessary renovations, St John's Arts and Recreational Centre opened officially in 1986. Over the intervening years the centre has provided a haven for the arts, and now hosts in excess of 60 events a year, offering a varied programme of activities and events for all ages. These include exhibitions and workshops, but its excellent acoustics make it particularly suitable and successful for musical events.

I have to say that, although John Corfield lists this church as having been designed by Thomas Smith, there are no obvious 'Pulham signatures' on the building, such as their 'Pulham faces' etc. It may therefore have been that, although Obadiah Pulham was almost certainly in charge of the

project, it is very doubtful that that his young nephew, James 2, was also involved unless he divided his time between here and Wallington.



*Fig 4 - The chancel of St John's Church / Arts and Recreation Centre, Harlow, as it is today*

## **1840 - Church of The Holy Trinity, Weston, Hertfordshire**



*Fig 5 - The Church of the Holy Trinity, Weston, Hertfordshire (1840)*

John Corfield records that, while the work on St John's, Harlow, was under way, Smith was also commissioned to build a new vicarage for the Church of The Holy Trinity at Weston, North Hertfordshire - a charming little church (shown in Fig 5) that is believed to date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Whilst there, he was asked to submit a report and estimate for repairing the church roof, which is hardly surprising, since several repairs and 'modernisations' would presumably have taken place throughout its long lifetime.



*Fig 6 - Some of the corbels in The Church of the Holy Trinity, Weston*

The church's 'Visitors' Guide' reveals that:

'The 15<sup>th</sup> century roof beams of the nave rest on grotesque corbels, and the two lower ones in the centre are said to represent Henry IV and his Queen. The small corbels in the south aisle denote evil spirits crushed by the power of the church. The one nearest the organ fell off and smashed shortly after a funeral service a few years ago, and had to be repaired.'

This implies that Thomas Smith's report was accepted, and that he was responsible for the repairs that were needed at that time, which would have provided a perfect opportunity for Obadiah to bring in James 2 to help restore or replace some of the corbels. I first visited the church before I read the Visitors' Guide, and, for anyone like myself who might have been looking out for this sort of ornamentation, it was like prize day all over



again. There are nearly twenty corbels in the nave and transept, but it was fairly evident that they were not all by the Pulhams – and the note in the Visitors' Guide explains why. Some were very crude and basic – as can be seen from the images in the middle row of Fig 6 – whilst those shown in the bottom row are far more likely to have been modelled by the Pulham hand. The one on the left of that row is presumably Henry IV, whilst those in the top row represent some of the evil spirits being crushed by the power of the church – most of which also look as if they are probably Pulham restorations.

Corfield records that Smith was engaged to construct a new chancel for the Church of the Holy Trinity in 1840 - the outside of which can be seen on the right of Fig 5 – and the Visitors' Guide provides some fascinating additional details:

'The chancel was rebuilt in red brick coated with stucco in 1840, in the Norman style with walls only 14in thick. The bosses of the roof principals were modelled in cement, and coloured to imitate oak. . . .'



Fig 7 - The chancel at The Church of the Holy Trinity, Weston

Two pictures of the chancel are shown in Fig 7. The left-hand one is an overall view taken from the nave, and shows a striking resemblance to the one at St John's (Fig 4), and the right-hand picture shows the roof beams inside the chancel. At first sight, there is nothing to indicate that these are not made of oak, but the news that they are actually modelled in cement is not really surprising, because this is exactly what James 2 did with the hall and staircase at Rawdon House, in Hoddesdon, in 1842-43, as discussed in Chapter 2 - and pictured in Figs 2.2 and 2.3 - of *Rock Landscapes*.

The outside of the chancel provides further convincing proof, because the door hood and window hoods are adorned with unmistakable 'Pulham faces'. Three of these are shown in the left-hand picture of Fig 8, while



the ones on the windows at the end are of 'rosette' patterns. Other examples of all these adornments can be seen on several other buildings known to have been constructed by the Pulhams.



*Fig 8 - 'Pulham Faces' around the outside of the chancel at The Church of the Holy Trinity, Weston*

## 1841 - Church of St Nicholas, Stevenage



*Fig 9 - The 'embattlemented' south transept of the Church of St Nicholas, Stevenage*

Their next church building assignment for Smith came a few months later, in 1841, when they added an 'embattlemented' south transept to the Church of St Nicholas, in Stevenage, just a few miles south of Weston.



*Fig 10 - 'Pulham faces' and rosette decorations on the window hoods*

Fig 9 shows this church as it is today, and one can see from this that the intention was to match the general architecture of the main church, which had itself been restored and partly re-built since the original Saxon building was replaced by the present Norman one in about 1100 AD. I was unable to look inside the church during my recent visit, but I couldn't help seeing the Pulham faces and rosettes decorating the window hoods – just like those at Weston and several other Smith churches with which the Pulhams were involved. Some of these are pictured in Fig 10.

### **1841-45 - Significant Changes in the Lives of the Pulhams**

Obadiah and Elizabeth had four children – William, Elizabeth, Mary and Lucy. William and Elizabeth were twins, and all four children were born between 1834 and 1836. Elizabeth, his wife, sadly died in 1841, and his housekeeper, Sophia Martin, cared for the children while he was away at work, which was obviously on a very regular basis. For example, at the time of the 1841 Census, when – as described in Chapter 1 of the book - he was lodging in Crib Street, Ware, during the building of nearby Thunder Hall.

He married Sophia in April 1845 - also at St Mary's, Whitechapel - but there were no children from that marriage. The 1851 Census showed them as still living in the Mile End district of London – presumably in the same house in John Street in which he had lived with Elizabeth.

As mentioned above, the 1841 Census showed that James 2 still lived in his family home in Moselle Place, Tottenham, but, due to his stone modelling skills, Thomas Smith obviously regarded him as his 'builder of choice'. The travelling and time involved whilst working for Smith at The Rectory in Wallington probably persuaded him to move up to Hoddesdon, in Hertfordshire, in 1842 and took up residence at the premises that are now The Sun Inn, in Amwell Street.

## 1841-42 - Church of The Holy Trinity, Wareside

1841 was also the year in which Smith designed the new Church of the Holy Trinity, Wareside, which was intended as a chapel-of-ease for the large parish of Ware.

Holy Trinity was built in cream brick with stone facings, and its unusual appearance – which includes a brightly painted apse – is entirely due to the influence of the then vicar, the Rev H Coddington. He had a passionate interest in ecclesiastical architecture and its relevance to ritual, and wanted the new chapel to echo the design of the early Roman churches – inspired by Roman basilicas, or town halls – which had also been greatly admired by the Normans. The church was consecrated by the Bishop of London before a congregation of over six hundred people in 1842.<sup>3</sup> and *The Hertford and Bedford Reformer* reported:



*Fig 11 - The exterior of the Church of The Holy Trinity, with detail of the mouldings around the door and window*

‘The Architect Thomas Smith Esq of Hertford has displayed in the design a correctness of taste which has already ensured him a very high reputation in his profession, and which has elicited him the approbation of some of the best judges of architecture in this country. We understand that Professor Whewell pronounced the Chapel the most perfect specimen of pure Norman style in this country.’

Fig 11 shows the outside of the church, with a close-up of the stone facing around the door and window, which is almost as crisp and detailed today as it must have been more than 170 years ago. The inside of the church, with the large apse at the eastern end, is shown in Fig 12.





*Fig 12 - Interior of the apse in The Church of The Holy Trinity, Wareside*

## **1844-45 - St Thomas' Church, West Hyde**

John Corfield's story of the life and work of Thomas Smith records that:



*Fig 13 - The knapped flintwork, stone modelling and Pulham faces on the outside of the Church of St Thomas of Canterbury, West Hyde*

'Thomas Smith prepared a design for the new church at West Hyde, near Rickmansworth, and the original set of ten numbered and approved drawings prepared are at the County Record Office, Hertford. This was towards the end of 1843.'



This is a delightful little church – described in some detail in the book – but Fig 13 illustrates some of the incredibly skilled and detailed work on the outside. The knapped flintwork on the external walls is considered to be the best example of its kind in Hertfordshire, if not the whole country, and the modelling around the doors and windows is almost identical to that at Wareside. There are also sixteen Pulham faces beneath the roof of the bell tower, and each of the hammer beams inside the church is adorned with a stone angel figure – these are also described, and pictured in Figs 2.12 and 2.13 of the book.

### 1842 - *Ye Jolly Gardeners* Inn Sign

Just half a mile or so from the church at West Hyde is a house that, some years ago, was converted from an old public house called *Ye Jolly Gardeners*, and it does not stretch the imagination too far to suggest that the men working on the church would sometimes visit the hostelry for refreshment. The interesting thing about this is that the sign above the door – shown in Fig 14 – is in bas-relief, and I have a very strong feeling that it could well be a unique example of the Pulhams' modelling skills.



Fig 14 - 'Ye Jolly Gardeners' inn sign at West Hyde

### 1848 - Kilnwick Percy, Pocklington, Yorkshire

Thomas Smith designed the Vicarage at Kilnwick Percy, in Pocklington, Yorkshire, in 1848, and it is almost certain that James 2 undertook most of the building, because he certainly did a lot of interior decorative work in the main house, as described in Chapter 2 of the book. Pocklington may seem a long way from Hertford and Broxbourne, but it could be explained by the fact that the Kilnwick Percy estate was owned by Capt Arthur

Duncombe, a cousin of Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, M.P. for Hertford from 1826-32.

### 1849 - St Mary's Church, Clophill, Bedfordshire

On now to Clophill, a charming little village in Bedfordshire. As was noted earlier in this Section, the Earl de Grey, of Wrest Park – in the nearby village of Silsoe - engaged Thomas Smith to design St Thomas's Church there in 1831. He was presumably satisfied with the result, because he engaged him to design and build another church in Clophill some years later. The Church of St Mary was completed in 1849, and, as can be seen from Fig 15, it has a number of close similarities to St James'. It is a compact-looking church, with the same unusually shaped tower as St Thomas's, and terracotta copings and figures around the doors and windows. Nicholas Pevsner described it as:

'... an archeologically convincing job in the Tudor perpendicular style ... a very neat edifice ... comfortable to worship in. The terracotta copings used at the church were those by James Pulham – he was much admired by Thomas Smith.'



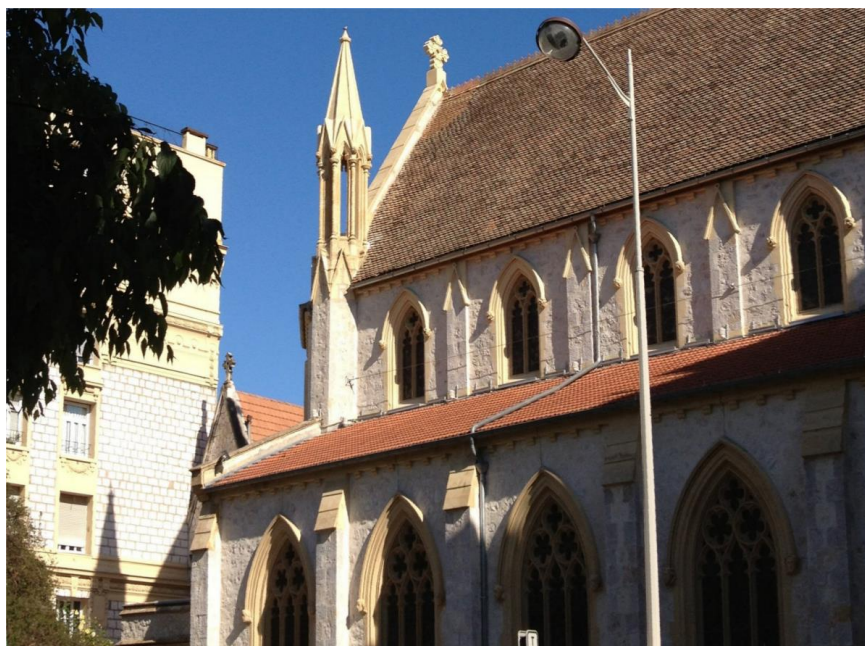
*Fig 15 - A lithographed 'artist's impression,' of St Mary's Church, Clophill, just before it was built. (Reproduced by kind permission of the Church Council)*

Fig 15 is a reproduction of an old lithograph that hangs inside the church, and was probably an 'artist's impression' – or a copy of Smith's original proposal - made before the church was built. The background context has now changed, because the roof has recently been replaced, and lost its battlemented upper section. However, the mouldings and Pulham faces around the doors and windows are still incredibly crisp, as can be seen in Fig 16 – and also discussed and pictured in the book.



*Fig 16 - The terracotta hood-mould round the door*

## 1852-70 - The Travels of Obadiah



*Fig 17 - Pulham faces and rosettes on the door hoods and window hoods of the Church of The Holy Trinity, Nice, following restoration in 2012 (Photo by Judit Kiraly)*

The Church of The Holy Trinity in Nice (1859-62) is of particular interest here, because there are Pulham faces and rosettes around all the doors, windows and bell tower – just like the ones at West Hyde. The church underwent a comprehensive cleaning and restoration in 2012, and these ‘brought back to life’ decorations – too late for inclusion in the book -are pictured in Figs 3.17 and 3.18.





*Fig 18 - Details of the Pulham faces and rosettes on the door and window hoods, and around the bell tower of the Church of The Holy Trinity, Nice, following restoration in 2012  
(Photos by Charles Boot)*

## 1855 – Ware Cemetery Chapel



*Figure 18 - Ware Cemetery Chapel*

The Ware Cemetery Chapel is also discussed and illustrated in Chapter 2 of **Rock Landscapes**. This was designed by Thomas Smith in 1855 - while Obadiah was supervising the construction of the Villa Ste Ursule in Cannes, France - but he was obviously sufficiently confident of James 2's



ability, because he insisted that he should be the person to build it. The chapel has now been converted into a pair of flats – as shown in Fig 18 - although the 'Pulham faces' around the doorways and windows are still in excellent condition, as are also the angel heads that support the internal hammer beams – just like they do in West Hyde. A close-up picture of one of these restored figures is shown in Fig 19.



*Fig 19 - Angel head in the Ware Cemetery Chapel*

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- <sup>1</sup> All the Notes relating to the work of Thomas Smith in this Chapter are based on *Thomas Smith, 1798-1875 – Architect and Surveyor of Hertford and London* by John Corfield A.R.I.B.A. Published by the Hertford and Ware Local History Society 1998
- <sup>2</sup> Based on family research undertaken by Chris Pulham, a direct descendant of Obadiah
- <sup>3</sup> '*Wareside – A Miscellany of Histories*,' by Jane Webb, published by The Rockingham Press in association with the Ware Museum

