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A remnant of Georgian whimsy amidst Southampton's suburbia

Hemmed in by modern buildings, 324 Portswood Road stands as an architectural oddity, a stuccoed castle in the style of Strawberry Hill gothick. It is the last remnant of a property built by Lt General Giles Stibbert in the late 1770s at the height of Southampton's popularity as a spa town. Castle Lodge, as it is now known, guarded the northern entrance to the grounds of Portswood House. Now itself protected by Grade II listing, the building is described as a:

Fortress' lodge on square plan with corner towers. Two storeys stuccoed. Front to road with blocked central pointed door. Upper floor with quatrefoil window, upper floor of towers with small pointed windows, the right-hand one replaced by a sash. The corner towers which project slightly have a band which is continued across the centre. Battlemented parapet to centre. Sham top floor to towers with small round window and battlements. Chimney stack rises above pediment on front wall. South front similar, but with central pointed door with hood mould. Ground floor of towers with pointed window each. Upper floor of towers with quatrefoil windows. Central window with three pointed lights.¹

The land on which Portswood House once stood extended from the River Itchen to what is now Portswood Road, and from Bevois Mount in the south to Castle Lodge in the north. The land had originally belonged to St Denys Priory and was sold off at the dissolution of the monasteries, passing through various hands until it was bought, together with the title Lord of the



Castle Lodge, 324 Portswood Road, Southampton.

Manor of Portswood, by Lt General Stibbert.² Stibbert, a career officer in the Army, was ultimately appointed Commander-in-Chief, Bengal, by the East India Company, first in 1777-79, and again in 1783-85.³ Perhaps it was on the strength of his enhanced status and salary that he decided to buy the Manor of Portswood in 1778 and build himself a seat near to the fashionable spa and bathing resort of

² *The Suburbs of Southampton, Book II, Portswood. A series of extracts, notes and personal reminiscences with an historical survey*, Local Studies Group, Southampton, 1982. Chapter on 'St Denys' by Joyce Deeley, p 9

³ 'Commander-in-Chief, India', Wikipedia. Commanders in Chief given in temporal order, with Lt Gen Giles Stibbert featuring at 17 (officiating) from 16 October 1777 and again at 19 (reappointed) from 27 April 1783.

¹

http://www.southampton.gov.uk/Images/Listed%20Building%20Descriptions_tcm46-161809.pdf page 90 of 129, Portswood Road, 324

Southampton with its favourable climate. Other retired East India men, who had made considerable fortunes, also built themselves properties on elevated sites around Southampton at that time.⁴ The architect engaged by Stibbert to build Portswood House was a certain Mr Crunden,⁵ possibly the same John Crunden who made his name in the large-scale development of the West End of London around Oxford Street. Portswood House itself stood roughly on the site of the present day Spring Crescent and Lawn Road. The area further down the slope, now reclaimed land and occupied by the Dukes Road and Empress Road industrial estate, was river bed in the late eighteenth century.⁶ Stibbert's name appears briefly in the annals of



⁴ Patterson, A Temple, *History of Southampton, 1700-1914, An Oligarchy in Decline, 1700-1835*, Vol 1, Southampton University Press, 1975, p 44. 'Among the newcomers were a number of retired naval and military officers, who established themselves in town houses, especially those newly built Above Bar, or in the case of a few of the wealthier such as Mordaunt or Stibbert, in the immediate neighbourhood of the town. These tended to associate together and to look down upon the merchants and tradesmen among the previous inhabitants, so that there came into existence what was resentfully called a "gentleman's party", taking as yet no part in municipal government and indeed rather contemptuous of it, but asserting its control over the fashionable social life of the place.'

⁵ Jessica Vale and Adrian Rance, *The Lost Houses of Southampton*, Exhibition catalogue, Tudor House Museum, Southampton, 1980. Entry for 'Portswood House'

⁶ *Occasional Notes by Townsman* (E A Mitchell) features appeared regularly in the *Echo* newspaper during the 1930s, published as a book in 1938. 'Story of two

history with the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India, the East India Company's most senior representative in that country, on the grounds of cruelty and corruption.⁷ Edmund Burke, MP, in his speech for the prosecution in 1788, said:

That the disobedience and breach of trust of which the said Warren Hastings was guilty in this transaction is highly aggravated by the following circumstances connected with it. That from the death of Sir John Clavering to the arrival of Sir Eyre Coote in Bengal the provisional command of the army had devolved to and been vested in Brigadier General Giles Stibbert, the eldest officer on that establishment. That in this capacity, and, as the said Warren Hastings has declared, 'standing no way distinguished from the other officers in the army, but by his accidental succession to the first place on the list', he, the said Giles Stibbert, had, by the recommendation and procurement of the said Warren Hastings, received and enjoyed a salary and other allowances, to the amount of £13,854 12s per annum. That Sir Eyre Coote, soon after his arrival, represented to the board [of the East India Company] that a considerable part of those allowances, amounting to £8,220 10s per annum, ought to devolve to himself, as commander-in-chief of the Company's forces in India, and, stating that the said Giles Stibbert could no longer be considered as commander-in-chief under the Presidency of Fort William, made a formal demand of the same. That the said Warren Hastings, instead of reducing the allowances of the said Giles Stibbert to the establishment at which they stood during General Clavering's command, and for the continuance of which after Sir Eyre Coote's arrival there could be no pretence, continued the allowances of £13,854 12s per annum to the said Giles Stibbert⁸

Portswood Houses ... Problem of a Site ... Links with Local Personages', p 52

⁷ *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Edited by Margaret Drabble, Oxford, 1984. Entry for Warren Hastings on p 440

⁸ The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Works of The Right Honourable Edmund Burke, Vol IX (of XII), by Edmund Burke, at www.gutenberg.net.

No sooner was Portswood House built than duties in India necessitated Stibbert's return. Baker's Southampton Guide of 1781 records:

At the back of Bevois Mount is a most elegant house built by Colonel [sic] Stibbert, now rented and occupied by Sir Thomas Rumbold. Everything is entirely new and highly finished, in the most refined taste. The shrubberies through which serpentine walks lead you all around a beautiful lawn are perhaps superior in variety, in choice, and fine growth, to any in the county. At the bottom of the river Itching [sic] forms a kind of bay, skirted on almost all sides with verdant fields, and hanging woods, in which river are kept many yachts, and pleasuring boats: you also have a view of the dock at Chapel and Northam, where men of war are built: it is upon the whole a delightful place.⁹

Skelton's Southampton Guide 1802 refers again to the property:

About two miles from Southampton on the Portsmouth road, a superb and elegant building was erected by general Stibbert in 1776, now enlarged and much improved. The general has a good collection of paintings by the old as well as modern masters. As the house stands on an eminence, it is one of the most healthy and agreeable situations we know, and commands the most excellent prospects the imagination can conceive There are excellent gardens and the most extensive shrubberies in England, well stocked with the greatest variety of exotics.¹⁰

More is learned about the grounds of Portswood House through a 'Draft of Deputation for killing Game on the Manor of Portswood', dated 29 August 1787 and witnessed by Jonathan

Wilkinson of Portswood, Yeoman, now in the possession of Southampton City Archives.¹¹

Know all men by these present that I Giles Stibbert of within the Liberties of the Town and Co of Southton Esq. Lord of the Manor of Portswood in the Parish of South Stoneham with the Liberties of the Town and Co aforesaid do hereby nominate authorize and appoint Daniel Taylor of the Town and Co of Southton aforesaid Bricklayer to be my Gamekeeper of and within my Manor of Portswood aforesaid with full power licence and Authority to kill any Hare Pheasant Partridge or any other Game whatsoever in and upon my aforesaid Manor for my sole and immediate Benefit and also to take and seize all such Gunn Bars Greyhounds selling Dogs Lurcher or other Dogs to kill Hares or Conies Ferrets & Trammels Lowbells Hayes or other nets Hare pipes snares or other Engines for the taking and killing of Conies Hares Pheasants Partridges or other Game or within the Precints of my aforesaid Manor of Portswood shall be used by any person or Persons whomsoever who by law are prohibited to have the same.

Sir Thomas Rumbold (1742-1811), mentioned in Baker's Guide of 1781, became his first recorded tenant.¹² Rumbold himself finds a niche in history in as much that he too had held high office in the service of the East India Company from 1778-80 as Governor of Madras.¹³ The National Portrait Gallery has a satirical portrait of him by James Gillray, dated January 1783, entitled 'The nabob rumbled or a Lord Advocates amusement'.¹⁴ A Parliamentary prosecution was brought against Rumbold in

¹¹ Southampton City Archives, Record Number D/PM Box1/46/4

¹² Baker's Southampton Guide, 1781, p 30

¹³ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography – www.oxforddnb.com. Entry for Sir Thomas Rumbold.

¹⁴ National Portrait Gallery – www.npg.org.uk, Record Number NPG D12317. The full title of the work is 'The nabob rumbled or a Lord Advocates amusement' (Captain Rumbold; Sir Thomas Rumbold; Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville)

⁹ Baker's Southampton Guide, 1781, pp 30-31

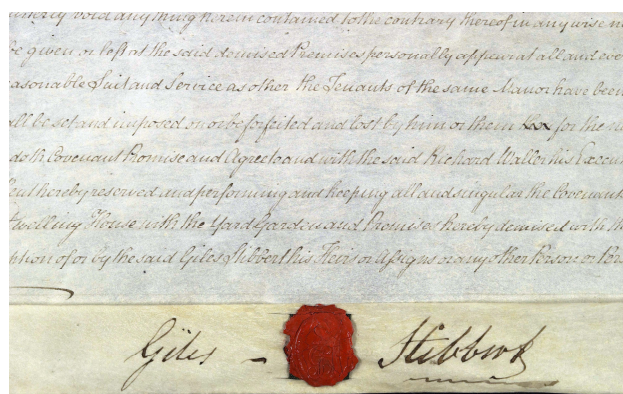
¹⁰ Skelton's Southampton Guide, 1802, p 49

1783 because it was widely reported that he had made £750,000 in his two years as Governor of Madras, and furthermore soon after he resigned from office the province dissolved into a war thought to have been provoked by his policies. The prosecution, however, failed due to legal technicalities.¹⁵

It would seem that General Stibbert cannot long have enjoyed his new property at Portswood House, for he subsequently drew up two 99 year leases. The first was to Henry Caiger, Tanner of the Parish of South Stoneham, with a rent of £1 5s per annum and dated 1 May 1789.¹⁶ The second was to Richard Waller Esq of Bevis Hill at an annual rent of £6 16s 6d and dated 9 December 1796.¹⁷ This second lease, in contrast to the first, included a clause stating that all the timber from the estate remained the property of General Stibbert. France had, of course, declared war on Britain in 1793¹⁸ and with this in mind Stibbert must have recognised the value of the timber on his land for use in building warships.

In 1809 Stibbert died¹⁹ and the estate passed to his son, Colonel Thomas Stibbert.²⁰ The property was briefly let to a Mr Tompkins

before it was sold to W S Wakeford, who in turn sold it to William Baring in 1813. In 1834 George Jones, a builder and developer, bought the estate and began parcelling up the land for building plots.²¹ The coup de grace came in 1839 when the railway line was built through the grounds, and by 1851 the property was in the care of only a gardener, his wife and a 13 year old girl servant.²² Portswood House was demolished in 1852.²³



Lease for 99 years by Giles Stibbert esq of Portswood House, Lord of the manor of Portswood to Richard Waller esq of Bevis Hill (Hampshire Record Office, N^o 47M48/42)

¹⁵ Dictionary of National Biography – www.oxforddnb.com. Entry for Sir Thomas Rumbold, pp 5 and 6 of 7. ‘Parliamentary prosecution had failed to be successful against Clive a decade earlier, failed against Sir Thomas Rumbold in 1783, and would eventually also fail in the case of Warren Hastings’s impeachment a decade later. Many reasons can be assigned for this failure, of which the difficulty of producing evidence, as was the case with the parliamentary proceedings against Clive and Hastings, was that the publicity they generated raised a public and political consciousness about the need for reforms in India.’

¹⁶ Hampshire County Record Office, Record Number 47M48/42

¹⁷ Hampshire County Record Office, Record Number 5M54/93

¹⁸ David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Pelican, 1957, Paperback reprint 1973, p 37

¹⁹ Jessica Vale and Adrian Rance, *op cit*. His will resides in the Public Records Office, prob 11/1493

²⁰ ‘Frederick Stibbert and his Armoury’, www.picture.Lu-tokyo.ac.jp/arc/stibbert/content/marco_e.html. This on-line article by Simona Di Marco of the Stibbert Museum describes the three generations of the family from General Giles Stibbert, his son Colonel Thomas Stibbert to his son Frederick Stibbert, the bachelor heir of the family fortune.

There is a postscript to this story. Thomas Stibbert (1770-1846), who like his father was a career officer in the Army, rose to the rank of Colonel in the Coldstream Guards. While living in Malta he married Maria Rachele Candia Cafaggi, a native of Florence.²⁴ Thomas lies buried in the English cemetery at Florence, together with his elder daughter, Hermione.²⁵

²¹ Jessica Vale and Adrian Rance, *op cit*.

²² AGK Leonard, *Stories of Southampton Streets*, Paul Cave Publications, 1984, p 42

²³ Jessica Vale and Adrian Rance, *op cit*.

²⁴ www.lineone.net/~aldosliema/rs.htm, p 39 of 46, ‘Thomas Stibbert, 21+, bachelor, resident in Malta, late of the Coldstream Guards, married 15th October 1842 to Maria Rachele Candia Cafaggi, 21+, spinster, from Florence, Italy’. There is a problem with the year of marriage in as much that Stibbert’s eldest son, Frederick, was born in 1838, and Stibbert himself is styled bachelor.

²⁵ The Protestant Cemetery of Florence: called the English Cemetery, www.Florin.ms/cemetery4.html, pages 25 and

His son, Frederick (1838-1906), was heir to both his estate and that of his uncle, making him a very wealthy man indeed. He never married but devoted himself to collecting antiquities, and on his death he bequeathed to Florence what was then, and still remains, the world's largest museum of antique armour.²⁶ In the latter half of the nineteenth century Villa Stibbert was even on the itinerary of Grand Tourists on account of its extraordinary collection.²⁷

Finally, to return to Castle Lodge, it is once again a private dwelling, but during its lifetime it has seen service as a blacksmith's forge, a car sales business, an interiors and storage business, and offices.²⁸ In the late 1980s the building

26 of 67. 'Erminia Stibbert/ England 31 Marzo 1859/ Anni 16/ 669/ fille du Colonel Thos Stibbert. Inscription Below/ Burial 02/04, Rev O'Neill; Baptism G23774 N° 28 Erminia 02/05/42 father Col Thomas Coldstream Guards and painter, mother Rachel Cafaggi, Rev Tennant / siblings Frederick and Sophronia/ F8GH/ exhumed to Cimitero agli Allori.

Thomas Stibbert/ England/ 31 Maggio 1847/ Anni 77/ 362/ GL 23774 N° 110: of Portswood Southampton, born London. Burial 03/06, Rev Robbins/ exhumed to Cimitero agli Allori.

²⁶ www.Florin.ms/cemetery4.html, page 26 of 67.

Following the entries for Hermione and Thomas Stibbert detailed above, there is a short biographical paragraph about Thomas and Frederick Stibbert: 'A colonel in the British army, he [Thomas] was staying in Florence when his son Frederick (1838-1906), who would make Florence his second home, was born. At Villa Davanzati, in Montughi, Frederick was to invest his learning and his wealth to bring to life the largest museum of antique arms in the world, and then to donate it to the city.' 'Frederick Stibbert and his Armoury', www.picture.Lu-tokyo.ac.jp/arc/stibbert/content/marco_e.html gives biographical details Frederick's life.

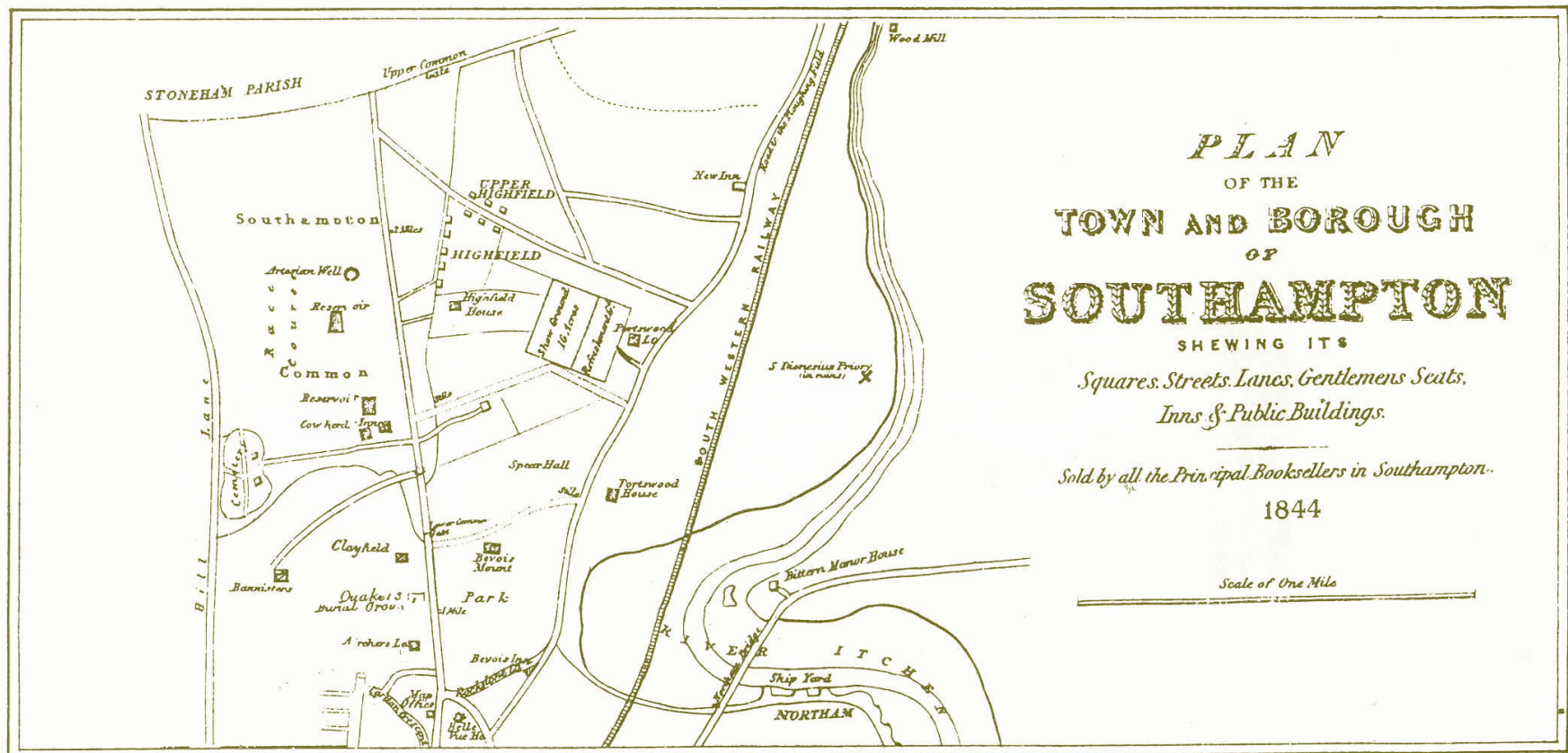
²⁷ An account of Susan and Joanna Horner's visit to the property in 1873 can be read in *A Traveller's Companion to Florence*, Introduced by Harold Acton and Edited by Edward Chaney, Constable & Robinson Ltd, 1986, 2002.

²⁸ Various newspaper reports: 'The Lodge, the House – but not the Hall', *Southern Evening Echo*, 23 November 1979; Lee Desty, 'Castle under threat', *Southern Evening Echo*, 14 July 1984; 'Demolition bid fails', *Southern Evening Echo*, 13 January 1986; 'Protection plan for Gothic lodge', *Southern Evening Echo*, October 1988; 'Landmark is safe', *Southern Evening Echo*, 7 July 1989; 'Mayflower moves to Castle Lodge', *Southern Evening Echo*, 23 May 1991; and an unheaded article in the *Southern Evening Echo* dated 25 September 2001 in which the estate agents Austin Adams were handling the disposal of the property as commercial premises.

structure was said to have been in danger of collapse and the City Council, with the support of Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust, successfully applied for Grade II listing and then threatened to buy the property compulsorily in order to ensure its future. The owner, a car salesman, refused to sell but agreed to carry out the repairs in return for permission to rent out the building. Ironically, the City Council itself had once mooted the destruction of the building at the time that the route of the 'Portswood Link' road (now Thomas Lewis Way) was under consideration.²⁹ Thus, a whimsical architectural oddity on the side of a busy suburban road and hemmed in by modern buildings, has somehow survived nearly 230 years. It is the unexpected witness to both an early phase of the expanding British Empire, and to the decline of Southampton as a spa resort before the advent of the railway brought about the development of the town as a major port.³⁰

My thanks go to the staff at Cobbett Road Library, the Local Studies Collection at the Central Library, the Museums Collections Centre and the Hampshire Record Office for their assistance in researching and illustrating this article.

²⁹ Lee Desty, 'Castle under threat', *Southern Evening Echo*, 14 July 1984.



The Manor of Portswood in 1844 from 'The Suburbs of Southampton, Book II, Portswood. A series of extracts, notes and personal reminiscences with an historical survey', Local Studies Group, Southampton, 1982

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D/PM Box 1/46/4

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garden and orchard at Portswood', Hampshire
County Record Office, Record Number
47M48/42

'Lease for 99 years by Giles Stibbert esq of
Portswood House, Lord of the manor of
Portswood to Richard Waller esq of Bevis Hill
of a messuage and dwelling house within the
manor of Portswood, Hampshire County Record
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