

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

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### South Stoneham House, a relic of Stuart Southampton

In a quiet suburb of Southampton stands a 300 year old house, the grounds of which were designed by Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown. Built in the reign of Queen Anne, the house was almost certainly the work of Nicholas Hawksmoor (1661-1736), assistant to Sir Christopher Wren and contemporary of Sir John Vanbrugh. Final proof of Hawksmoor’s involvement is tantalisingly just beyond reach, however, with the principal clue being an auction catalogue from 1726 that details a sale of his drawings and refers to “Twelve designs for Mr Dummer’s house”. The interior of the house includes an early eighteenth century staircase with elaborate balusters and moulded handrail. The ceiling of the hall is contemporary with the staircase and is painted with pelicans, trumpets and swags, while the music room has a marble fireplace with cupids, urns and swags. The building is protected by English Heritage with Grade II\* listing.<sup>i</sup>



Figure 1. South Stoneham House from the south, including the tower block

Near to the house stands the ancient church of St Mary’s, parts of which date back to the twelfth century, and which enjoys Grade 1 listing.<sup>ii</sup> The Domesday Book records that Bishops Stanam (as South Stoneham was then known) belonged to the See of Winchester, and its revenues clothed the monks of St Swithun’s. At one time South Stoneham parish extended right up to the walls of medieval Southampton and included the outlying villages of Eastleigh, West End, Portswood, St Denys, and Bitterne, but as these settlements increased in population with the passage of the centuries so they became separate parishes. There is said to be a secret tunnel connecting South Stoneham House with St Mary’s Church. Within the former grounds of the



Figure 2. South Stoneham House, garden entrance (south)

house is a salmon pool, also mentioned in the Domesday Book, and beyond is Monks Brook which flows into the River Itchen just above Woodmill.<sup>iii</sup>

In the seventeenth century the Dummer family were yeoman farmers in Durley and supporters of the Royalist cause. A branch of the family later settled in Chickenhall in the parish of North Stoneham and prospered to the point where they dispensed with the title 'yeoman' and adopted that of 'gentleman' instead. They invested in land and bought not only the Manor of Mansbridge, but also the Manors of North Baddesley and Woolston.<sup>iv</sup>

Who actually built South Stoneham House is a matter of dispute. Jessica Vale, a volunteer Researcher at Southampton City Museums in the 1970s, wrote in *The Lost Houses of Southampton* that Thomas Dummer (1626-1710) bought the land in 1705 and that the house was completed in

1708. She went on to say that Thomas then 'entrusted the property to his son, Edmund, a commissioner for the Admiralty'.<sup>v</sup>

Howard Colvin in his *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* reckoned that Edmund Dummer (c 1651-1713), Surveyor to the Navy, probably commissioned the house since he would have known Nicholas Hawksmoor 'as a fellow member of the fabric committee of Greenwich Hospital'.<sup>vi</sup>

The third candidate was Edmund



Figure 3. South Stoneham House, drainpipe on south front

Dummer, a barrister at Lincoln's Inn (1663-1724), and nephew to Thomas. Recent scholarship has tended to favour the latter as the builder of South Stoneham House, for example the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry written by Philip MacDougall.<sup>vii</sup> In addition to practising law, he was favoured at Court, being appointed Clerk to the Great Wardrobe in about 1706. He acted for the Dukes of Montagu, Keepers of the Great Wardrobe, and was Steward of Beaulieu Manor from 1700. He married Leonora Sophia, daughter of Sir William Dutton Colt, at one time Ambassador to Hanover. He and his wife had five children, only three of whom survived into adulthood. Edmund's career flourished and over the years he was able to add to his

property portfolio by acquiring estates in London, Middlesex and beyond. He died while taking the waters at Bath in 1724 and his body was brought back to South Stoneham to be interred in the crypt of St Mary's Church alongside those of his parents.<sup>viii</sup> Provision was made for a considerable baroque monument to be constructed over the crypt, and Nikolaus Pevsner, the architectural historian, thought this might also be by Hawksmoor.<sup>ix</sup>



Figure 4. South Stoneham House from the north (driveway entrance)



Figure 5. The Dummer monument, St Mary's Church, South Stoneham

Of the three possible candidates Michael Dummer, who has extensively researched the Dummer family history, favours Edmund, Surveyor to the Navy, as the builder of the house.<sup>x</sup> This Edmund served in the Navy for 30 years and in 1692 was appointed Surveyor under William III.<sup>xi</sup> It was he who recommended Plymouth as a suitable place to establish an additional south coast naval dockyard. He had the foresight to insist that the dockyard be built in stone and brick, instead of timber, in order to reduce fire risk and ensure lower maintenance costs. In later years he was involved in several speculative ventures in merchant shipping, with mixed success, and died a bankrupt in the Fleet Prison in 1713.<sup>xii</sup>

Edmund, the barrister, left a singularly complicated will and his properties passed through the ownership of several members of the Dummer family, with tales of seizure and

counter-challenges in Chancery.<sup>xiii</sup> In 1740 William Sloane bought South Stoneham House. He was the brother of Sir Hans Sloane, famous for endowing both the British Museum and the Natural History Museum with his collections. William's son, Hans Sloane (1739-1827), inherited the estate in 1767 and it was he who commissioned 'Capability' Brown to landscape the grounds at a total cost of £1,050.<sup>xiv</sup> Hans was a former Sheriff of Hampshire and for many years served as an MP variously for Newport (IoW), Southampton, Christchurch and Lostwithiel.<sup>xv</sup>



Figure 6. The gardens at South Stoneham House (flowerbed)

In June 1804 South Stoneham House was advertised in the *Hampshire Chronicle* for sale by auction, "the whole containing 177 Acres or thereabouts".<sup>xvi</sup> Hans Sloane was on the move, having inherited Paultons House at Ower from his cousin, Hans Stanley.<sup>xvii</sup>

A few years later, in 1819, South Stoneham House was sold once again, this time to John Fleming, the owner of North Stoneham House. The Fleming family lived there periodically, but otherwise rented it out. They sold it in 1878 and ten years later it was on the market once more.<sup>xviii</sup>

It was then bought by Sir Samuel Montagu, the London banker and MP for Whitechapel. He was created Baronet in 1894 and was elevated to the House of Lords in 1907, taking the name of Baron Swaythling.<sup>xix</sup> He was a local philanthropist, holding charity events in the grounds of the house and contributing money to Hartley University College (as the University of Southampton was then known). He was also the anonymous donor of a water fountain in Bitterne Park to commemorate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee.<sup>xx</sup> Lord Swaythling invested in property, too, and bought other nearby estates, including The Grange and Townhill Park House. In 1907 he

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commissioned the 'Arts and Crafts' architect Leonard Rome Guthrie to draw up plans for his gardens at South Stoneham House. Guthrie was one of several architects who



Figure 7. The Gardens South Stoneham House (Lawn)



Figure 8. St Mary's Church, South Stoneham (from the north).  
The image appears with the permission of David Hales.



His heir, the second Lord Swaythling together with his wife and family, lived at the nearby Townhill Park House (now The Gregg School). South Stoneham House was put on the market and bought by Hartley University College in 1920/21.<sup>xxi</sup> They had ambitious plans to establish a University of Wessex and intended to use South Stoneham House as student accommodation.<sup>xxii</sup> Throughout the Second World War cadets from the School of Navigation were based in the house. The cadets, keen to make a contribution to the war effort, formed the No 5 (Merchant Navy) Platoon of the Highfield Company of the Home Guard, and they and their lecturers also helped the Civil Defence authorities in dealing with air raid damage and fires. South Stoneham House suffered slight damage during one air raid, and the lawns were given over to growing vegetables as part of the Dig for Victory campaign.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Figure 9. Jubilee water fountain anonymously donated by Sir Samuel Montagu in 1897



Figure 10. St Mary's Church, South Stoneham (from the south). The image appears with the permission of David Hales.

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At the end of the War the School of Navigation moved to *HMS Tormentor*, at the confluence of the River Hamble with Southampton Water, and is still there today where it is known instead as Warsash Maritime Academy, part of Southampton Solent University.<sup>xxiv</sup> Hartley University College, which was to become the University of Southampton in 1952, continued to use South Stoneham House as a hall of residence. In the 1960s a 17-storey tower block was added to the site in order to meet increased demand for student accommodation. Over the years the house, though, has slowly fallen into a state of disrepair but it is shortly to be renovated as part of a multi-million pound redevelopment scheme to convert it into a conference centre. English Heritage has been closely involved in the preparation of the plans. As part of the redevelopment the tower block is to be demolished, with alternative student accommodation being built on a nearby site.<sup>xxv</sup>

South Stoneham House is fortunate to have survived at all because its neighbouring large houses have long since been swept away as part of Southampton's urban spread. It is to the University of Southampton's credit that it recognises its architectural and historical importance and has found a use for it as a conference centre. While the house and grounds remain private property, visitors are most welcome to visit St Mary's Church, either at Sunday worship or simply to look around the church and churchyard on a Tuesday morning when a small team of volunteer gardeners is at work. Among many interesting tombstones is one to Captain Bullen, who was Captain of HMS *Britannia* at the Battle of Trafalgar. The church and churchyard are a haven of peace, and have a sense of timelessness about them, so often a feature of ancient habitation.

### Notes

<sup>i</sup> English Heritage (<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/>) for South Stoneham House

<sup>ii</sup> English Heritage (<http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/>) for St Mary's Church

<sup>iii</sup> Page, W. (Ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, Vol III, University of London, 1973 (reprinted from the original edition of 1908), pp 481-484

<sup>iv</sup> Dummer, M., *The Family of Dummer*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005, published on CD, Chapter 4, 'Strife amongst the Pyldren Dummers'

<sup>v</sup> Vale, J., Rance, A., *The Lost Houses of Southampton*, Exhibition catalogue, Tudor House Museum, Southampton, 1980. Article on South Stoneham House

<sup>vi</sup> Colvin, H., *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840*. Third Edition, New Haven and London, 1995, p 499

<sup>vii</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography ([www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)). Article on Edmund Dummer

<sup>viii</sup> Dummer, M., *The Family of Dummer*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005, published on CD, Chapter 4, 'Strife amongst the Pyldren Dummers'

<sup>ix</sup> Pevsner, N., & Lloyd, D., *The Buildings of England, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, Penguin Books, London, 1967, p 574

<sup>x</sup> Personal correspondence by e-mail with Michael Dummer on 17 June 2009

<sup>xi</sup> For a full account of Edmund Dummer's achievements see 'The Ingenious Mr Dummer: Rationalizing the Royal Navy in Late Seventeenth-Century England', eBLJ, Article 10, 2007

<sup>xii</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography ([www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)). Article on Edmund Dummer. Also 'The unfortunate Mr. Dummer' by A.W. Dickinson, *Hampshire Magazine*, October 1979, pp 66-68

<sup>xiii</sup> Dummer, M., *The Family of Dummer*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2005, published on CD, Chapter 4, 'Strife amongst the Pyldren Dummers'

<sup>xiv</sup> Southampton City Libraries Clippings File for South Stoneham House, text accompanying an image entitled 'A view of South Stoneham House on the bank of the River Itchen, near Southampton' and painted by Dominic Serrries, R.A., 1722-1793

<sup>xv</sup> Namier, L., & Brooke, J., *The History of Parliament, The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1964, p 444

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- <sup>xvi</sup> Southampton City Libraries Clippings File for South Stoneham House, 'Hampshire, to be sold by auction', Hampshire Chronicle, 25 June 1804
- <sup>xvii</sup> Southampton City Libraries Clippings File for South Stoneham House, text accompanying an image entitled 'A view of South Stoneham House on the bank of the River Itchen, near Southampton' and painted by Dominic Serries, R.A., 1722-1793
- <sup>xviii</sup> Vale, J., Rance, A., *The Lost Houses of Southampton*, Exhibition catalogue, Tudor House Museum, Southampton, 1980. Article on South Stoneham House
- <sup>xix</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, entry for Samuel Montagu, first Baron Swaythling
- <sup>xx</sup> Mann, J.E., *The Story of Bitterne Park*, Ensign Publications, Southampton, 1992, p 61
- <sup>xxi</sup> Wilkinson, R., *Townhill Park – The Life and Times of a Gertrude Jekyll Garden*, Rosaleen Wilkinson, 2004, pp 23-24
- <sup>xxii</sup> Temple Patterson, A, *The University of Southampton: a centenary history of the evolution and history of the University of Southampton*, Southampton, 1962 (amended edition), p 158
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Aldridge, M.H, *A history of the Southampton School of Navigation*. Southampton Institute, 1996
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Aldridge, M.H, *A history of the Southampton School of Navigation*. Southampton Institute, 1996
- <sup>xxv</sup> Southampton City Libraries Clippings File for South Stoneham House. Southern Daily Echo, 'University challenge to restore stately pile', 6 July 2004, p 3