

Samuel Lipscomb Seckham

By PETER HOWELL

UNTIL recently the name of Samuel Lipscomb Seckham was fairly widely known in Oxford as that of the architect of Park Town. A few other facts, such as that he was City Surveyor, were known to the cognoscenti. No-one, however, had been able to discover anything significant about his background, let alone what happened to him after he built the Oxford Corn Exchange in 1861-2. In 1970 a fortunate chance led to the establishment of contact with Dr. Ann Silver, a great-granddaughter of Seckham, and as a result it has been possible to piece together the outline of his varied career.¹

He was born on 25 October 1827.² He took his names from his grandparents, Samuel Seckham (1761-1820) and Susan Lipscomb (d. 1815 aged 48).³ His father, William (1797-1859), kept livery stables at 20 Magdalen Street, Oxford,⁴ and prospered sufficiently to retire and farm at Kidlington.⁵ The family came from Devon, where it is said that Seccombes have occupied Seccombe Farm at Germansweek, near Okehampton, since Saxon times. Seccombes are still living there, farming. It is thought that Seckham is the earlier spelling, but tombstones at Germansweek show several different versions.⁶ It is not known how the family reached Oxford, but Samuel Lipscomb Seckham's great-grandmother Elizabeth was buried at St. Mary Magdalen in 1805.⁷ His mother was Harriett Wickens (1800-1859). Her grandfather and father were both called James, which makes it difficult to sort out which is which among the various James Wickens' recorded in

¹ The fortunate chance occurred when Mrs. H. Simon of Park Town noticed the will of Major Lionel Bassett Lipscomb Seckham published in the *Times*. I am most grateful to Mrs. Simon for passing on the information, and for subsequent assistance from her own researches. Without the enthusiastic help and interest of Dr. Ann Silver, this article would not have been possible. She has kindly passed on information from other members of the family, as well as details from the Seckham Family Bible (now in the possession of Mr. J. S. Russell of Croyand House, Beaulieu, Inverness-shire). Unless indicated otherwise, the Bible is the source of family information. Others whose assistance in the preparation of the article have been generous and substantial include Mrs. Christina Colvin, Mr. Malcolm Graham, and Mr. Andrew Saint.

² Date of birth as inscribed on his coffin (obituary in *Lichfield Mercury*, 15 February 1901).

³ They are commemorated on a tablet near the font in St. Mary Magdalen's Church, Oxford. Susan Lipscomb came from Binfield.

⁴ *Pigot's Directory* 1830; *Lascelles' Directory* 1853. An 1847 Directory gives his address as 19 Magdalen St.

⁵ Obituary in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (hereafter *JOJ*) 30 July 1859, 3. He appears in *Lascelles' Directory* for 1853 as a farmer at Kidlington, where he was already established in 1851 (*JOJ*, 17 May 1851—report of Friendly Society Annual Meeting with Seckham in the chair).

⁶ Information from Dr. Silver.

⁷ She died aged 75 and was buried on 24 October 1805 (Parish Registers, in the Bodleian Library). She seems to have had a skeleton in the cupboard. In the Family Bible she appears as 'Elizabeth Seccombe or Seckham [Gays Place, Walcott, Som.] Widow 1735—Oct. 1805'. Nothing is said about her husband (although he may have been called Richard), and it seems likely that she had illegally married her deceased husband's brother. She had two sons, John Ford Seckham (1759-1799) and Samuel.

directories from 1790 onwards, one as a confectioner, one as a wine-merchant.⁸

Samuel Lipscomb Seckham (PL. IX, A) was the eldest survivor to adulthood of twelve children. His training is known only from an obituary in the *Northampton Herald* (8 February 1901): 'He was articled to Messrs. Locke and Nesham, builders, of London, and for a certain period worked at the bench in the carpenter's shop.⁹ He learned the duties of a bricklayer, and also practised successfully as a stonemason. He mastered the difficulties of surveying, and at the expiration of his articles accepted an appointment from Messrs. Lucas Brothers, cement contractors.¹⁰ On leaving that firm he commenced to practise as an architect, and was most successful in his profession'.

He returned to Oxford, where the 1851 Census records him at his father's house in Kidlington, and an 1853 Directory records him at 20 Magdalen Street, also his father's address. In the same year he was appointed City Surveyor, and moved into the office at 6 and 7 St. Aldate's.¹¹ And it was also in 1853 that the opportunity occurred which brought him, if not wealth, then at least his most substantial fame with posterity. The Oxford Board of Guardians had in 1849-50 bought some land in North Oxford ('St Giles' Fields') from New College, for £2,680, intending to build a new workhouse there.¹² Before long, however, the project ran into difficulties. The Guardians were badly in debt after building the Industrial School at Cowley, and there were complaints that the site was not sufficiently central. There may also have been objections from influential local residents such as George Hester, the Town Clerk, who had built himself a villa called *The Mount* c. 1840 (demolished to make way for St. Hugh's), John Parsons, a woollen draper, who had built *The Lawn* (now 89 Banbury Road) soon after, and Thomas Mallam, auctioneer and former Mayor, who had built *The Shrubbery* (now 72 Woodstock Road) also c. 1840. Such men were unlikely to want a workhouse on their doorstep. As a result, the Guardians set up an Estates Committee in November 1852 to decide how best to dispose of the land.¹³

⁸ The *Universal British Directory* (1790) has a James Wickens, Confectioner. *Pigot's* (1823-4) has Wickens and Bristow, Confectioners and Fruiterers, Corn Market; also James Wickens, High St., Wine and Spirit Merchant. *Pigot's* (1830) has only William Bristow as a Confectioner in Cornmarket, but also in that street James Wickens senior, Wine and Spirit Merchant. The latter appears also in *Pigot's* (1844—at 63 Cornmarket), *Hunt's* (1846), and *Gardner's* (1852). There is a reference in the Family Bible, in SLS's hand, to 'Barton and Co. Oxon. and Corn Market Street Properties'. The 'Testator' seems to have been Harriett Wickens's grandfather, James, and Dr. Silver suggests that SLS may have come into some of his property. The elder James married Harriett Sims, and among other children had James, who married Etty Blay. It was their daughter Harriett who married William Seckham. For the younger James's involvement in Park Town, see below. A 'Mary Wickens, Widow' was living in Park Town in 1861 (1861 Census).

⁹ Locke and Nesham are recorded in *Post Office Directories* at 68 Theobalds Rd and 9 Portpool Lane, Gray's Inn, between 1841 and 1856 (information from Andrew Saint).

¹⁰ This must be the great building firm of Charles and Thomas Lucas, who took over Samuel Morton Peto's building business in 1847 (J. Summerson, *The London Building World of the 1860s* (1973), 14-15).

¹¹ He was appointed on 27 January 1853 at a salary of £52.10s. He was 'required to attend to all Architectural and Surveying Matters, also to survey and make Specifications for repairs of City Estates' (*Council Book* 1849-56 (Oxfordshire County Library B5.8), 292). There were three candidates—John Fisher, E. G. Bruton, and Seckham (*ibid.* 297). One of the councillors voting for Seckham was a Mr. Wickens (*JOJ*, 29 Jan. 1853, 3). 1866 is the last year when his entry in the *Post Office London Directory* records him also at the City Surveyor's Office, Oxford.

¹² In *JOJ* 19 May 1849, 3, a meeting of the Guardians is reported at which they agreed unanimously to buy 9 acres from New College for £2,680. The figure £2,800 is referred to at *Oxford University and City Herald* (hereafter *OUH*) 6 Aug. 1864, 9. For information on the activities of the Board of Guardians, including most of the newspaper references, I am indebted to Mrs. Christina Colvin.

¹³ Report of the meeting of the Board of Guardians in *OUH* 19 March 1853, 10.

It was agreed that Oxford had a great shortage of houses with rents of about £35 to £50 per annum, suitable for families with an income of between £500 and £1,000. Every estate agent was besieged with enquiries for such properties, and 'it was a source of regret to many of them that Oxford should be excluded from the advantages possessed by Cheltenham, Leamington, and many other places, where provision was made for parties of limited income'. It was a serious loss to tradesmen, and one member pointed out that a member of the University had been reduced to taking a house with a shop attached. The Committee was especially anxious not to 'plant in that field a second St. Ebbes, New Hinksey, or Botley description of property'. Uniformity was desirable. The Committee called in two architects, Seckham and E. G. Bruton.¹⁴ Each produced drawings of appropriate houses, but Seckham's were unanimously preferred, even Bruton conceding their superiority.¹⁵ Drainage was a problem, but it could be solved by taking it into the Cherwell.¹⁶

The next question was how the land should be sold. An offer of £2,000 for about a quarter of the site, not on the Banbury Road frontage, but in the middle, had already been made, the intention being to erect 22 uniform houses, in two crescents, which would cost 450 gns. each. Plans for these were set before the meeting. The buyer was ready to pay a proportion of the costs of roads and drainage and 'to palisade the centre gardens, or ornamental grass plats', and look after their subsequent maintenance. It was pointed out that the value of the rest of the land would increase, and they might get £8,000 to £10,000 for the whole. The proposal was agreed to. The buyer was none other than Seckham himself.¹⁷

By 16 July another lot had been sold, for £1,200, and this was the site of the 'back crescent' (The Terrace).¹⁸ The purchaser was again Seckham. By October 1854 'the new buildings called Park Town' were in course of erection.¹⁹ The remaining land was being sold at auction in lots: nine had already been sold at a total price of £1,220, and the sale of a tenth, for a 'villa-residence', had been agreed. By now it had been settled that the Guardians should lay out the ornamental ground in the Crescent, but the purchasers would pay a proportion of the cost (as with roads and drains). £352 had been received so far towards this. 'Mr Seckham, who purchased two large lots, had, in consideration of the extent of his purchase, and the fact that something would be due to him for work done, been allowed to retain £150 in hand'. The payment of this sum is recorded in the Guardians' Financial Statement of July 1855.²⁰ By then eleven or twelve houses were in occupation.²¹

Clearly then Seckham was architect and speculator for both the Crescent and the Terrace (which is dated 1855). It remains unclear where his financial backing

¹⁴ Bruton's name is given in *JOJ* 19 March 1853, 3.

¹⁵ Bruton, however competent and prolific, was a poor architect from the artistic point of view. His appreciation of Park Town is shown by his having moved to 1 The Crescent by 1876. He was still there in 1895 (information from Directories).

¹⁶ It went into the river at the point where the Ladies' Bathing Place was later situated (note by G. W. Norton in Minn Collection, MS. Top. Oxon. d. 501, f. 80).

¹⁷ *JOJ* 19 March 1853, 3.

¹⁸ *OUH* 16 July 1853, 10; 21 Oct. 1854, 12.

¹⁹ *OUH* 21 Oct. 1854, 12.

²⁰ *OUH* 7 July 1855, 9.

²¹ *OUH* 7 July 1855, 10.

came from, although his father and his mother's family probably provided a good deal of the capital. The Crescent houses have fronts of Bath stone, while the sixteen in the Terrace are of Portland cement and white brick—no doubt a deliberate economy. The 'ornamental gardens and shrubberies' in the Crescent were 'planned with great taste by Mr W. Baxter of the University Botanic Gardens'.²² Seckham was presumably also employed as architect by some of the purchasers of other plots. The uniform design of the eight semi-detached 'Clarendon Villas', the link between Crescent and Terrace, shows his hand, as does that of Clarendon Cottage (No. 43) and the mews block which balances it. In the section between the Crescent and Banbury Road, some of the twelve houses are built to a similar Italianate design, and are obviously his, while three others are presumably not.²³ Two plots were never built on, giving the neighbouring houses the benefit of extra large gardens (PL. X).²⁴

The lay-out of Park Town is remarkably old-fashioned, closer to 18th-century ideas of town-planning than to the more picturesque type of lay-out which originates in Nash's Park Villages in London, and which was to be exemplified in Oxford only a few years later in Norham Manor. The reasons are presumably partly to be found in the site, a long narrow strip with only a limited frontage to the main road, and partly in Seckham's background in the London building world of the 1840s: lay-out, style, and materials are clearly derived from speculative developments such as those carried out by the Cubitts, or in areas like Holland Park,²⁵ or St. John's Wood (where Seckham himself was later to live). Especially characteristic is the use of cement and stucco over brick, moulded to provide Italianate architectural detail of the kind popularized by Charles Parker in his *Villa Rustica* (1832), and by J. B. Papworth in his work at Cheltenham.

Park Town seems to have been a success with the clients. A guidebook of c. 1860 commented: 'Nothing can more clearly show the want of such an addition to Oxford, than the speed with which each house has met with occupants, it being within a few minutes' walk from the centre of Oxford, the Parks, and the University Museum'.²⁶ But it was not a success from the financial point of view. The Park Town Estate Company was incorporated on 10 December 1857. On 11 December 1858 the Company arranged to raise money from the Solicitors' and General Life Assurance Society, against securities on the property. They borrowed £6,700 at first, but by 1861 the total had risen to £12,600. In 1860 they also borrowed £2,000 from Seckham's uncle, James Wickens, who had been involved in the affair since

²² *Oxford University and City Guide*, published by Slatter and Rose, c. 1860, 230. Baxter is mentioned in the Park Town Accounts for 26 Oct. 1855 (information from Mrs. Simon).

²³ These are No. 7, in a yellow brick and stone Rundbogenstil; No. 8, a Tudor house in red brick and stone; and No. 10, also red brick with an octagonal belvedere. The architects are unknown, but plans were submitted to the Park Town Trustees as follows; No. 7 by Thomas Jones, builder, on 26 Feb. 1856; No. 8 by Mr. Hatch, presumably the client; No. 10 by 'Mr. Gardener' (probably James Gardiner, builder), on 15 May 1855. The Minutes of the Trustees record that Seckham was offered the job of architect to the Trustees in October 1856 (if he declined, it was to be offered to Bruton); and that on 30 June 1857 he submitted plans for building on the remaining lots. (Information from Mrs. Simon.)

²⁴ The houses which benefit are Nos. 1 and 8.

²⁵ See e.g. *Survey of London*, XXXVII, 20 f., and *passim*.

²⁶ *Op. cit.* note 22. The numbers of voters recorded in the lists are as follows: 1855—4; 1856—13; 1857—16; 1859—19; 1860—23; 1861—34 (information from Mrs. Simon).

at least 1858.²⁷ On 24 July 1861 it was decided that the Company should go into voluntary liquidation, and H. Strong, banker, and Seckham were appointed liquidators. This was confirmed at a special meeting on 9 September 1861. There seem to have been no victims except Seckham and his colleagues, and it is not known what they lost. The houses began to be sold off by auction, the Assurance Society taking the proceeds. They were sold fairly cheaply—no doubt at a loss.²⁸ At a meeting of the Board of Guardians in 1864, the Mayor (Alderman Carr) recalled that the land had been bought by the Board for £2,800, and sold for £4,685. 'The purchasers of the land had been without exception losers by the transactions', so that only the Board had profited.²⁹ Allegations had been made that 'individuals' (meaning particularly Carr himself) had done well out of the sale, but the truth was that he and the other Guardians deserved no small credit for the close control they kept over the project: they could, after all, have simply sold the site as a whole to the highest bidder.

Seckham's other known architectural work does not add up to much. As far as North Oxford was concerned, he was architect and surveyor to another speculative project, the Tontine, set up in 1855, which built Summer Villa on Banbury Road.³⁰ About 35 acres of land at Summertown were to be bought from Mr. Mark Horn (a Summertown shopkeeper and bacon curer).³¹ The land was subject to a charge of £10 a year to New College, and was within a mile of the City centre, with a 668 ft. frontage to Banbury Road. The intention was to erect a 'family residence' with drawing room, dining room, library, six principal bedrooms, offices, and also coach-house, stabling, farm buildings, and entrance lodge. A contract had been made with Messrs. Robert Castle and Co., builders, to complete the buildings by Midsummer 1856. They were then to be leased for seven years to the highest bidder. The house was rather curiously built right in the north-west corner of its very extensive site, presumably so that it would have the widest possible view over its wooded grounds. Italianate in style, and stuccoed, its principal feature was a semi-circular bow. It later became Greycotes School, and was demolished c. 1970, except for the lodge and some of the offices.³²

It is hardly surprising that Seckham should have been the first architect employed by St. John's College to develop their extensive land in North Oxford.³³ It was in 1855 that the College obtained an Act of Parliament authorizing it to sell 99-year building leases over 455 acres of St. Giles' parish. Seckham makes his first appearance in connection with St. John's acting for his old London firm, Lucas

²⁷ Wickens died in the same year, and left his son (who also soon died), Seckham, and Thomas Witherington, chemist, of Worcester, as his executors.

²⁸ I am indebted for the account of the Park Town Estate Co. to Dame Lucy Sutherland.

²⁹ *OUH* 6 Aug. 1864, 9. The debate concerned the sale of the site of the old Workhouse (where Wellington Square now is), now that a new one had at last been built on Cowley Rd.

³⁰ Advertisement in *OUH* 10 Nov. 1855, 3, repeated on 17 and 24 Nov.; see also 1 Dec. The Trustees were Neate, F. J. Morrell and Thomas Combe, the Secretary was Robert Pike, and the Committee of Management were H. Strong, F. Symonds, R. J. Spiers, and G. Hewett. Confusion with this Tontine presumably explains the common assertion that Park Town was built by a Tontine.

³¹ *Lascelles' Directory* 1853. It has proved impossible to identify the site with absolute certainty, but Mrs. Ruth Fasnacht agrees that no other site seems to fit the description.

³² Its site is occupied by Cunliffe Close.

³³ This account is based on Andrew Saint, 'Three Oxford Architects', *Oxoniensia*, xxxv (1970), 53-102, and on his unpublished lecture *North Oxford in its National Context*.

Bros., when in 1855 they leased a site for a brickfield between Woodstock Road and the Canal. He also negotiated on their behalf when they gave up the lease in 1859.³⁴ In about 1855 he produced for the College a scheme for Walton Manor, with detached Italianate houses grouped around a Gothic church. The scheme is known only from an undated lithograph at St. John's (PL. XI). However, the date can be calculated from the facts that it was in 1854 that the College was approached about a new church in St. Giles' Parish to accommodate the growing population, and that it was in 1856 that the present site of St. Philip and St. James', on the east side of Woodstock Road, was settled. Planning here is more spacious than at Park Town, and houses are graded on the principle of first class houses along the frontage, second class houses further in, and third class terraces for artisans and labourers at the back. The roads which penetrate the estate are on the lines of what are now Leckford and Farndon Roads.

Seckham's scheme for Walton Manor does not seem to have prospered at first, either because prices were too high, or more probably because St. John's were only prepared to let directly to potential residents or to builders or agents who had clients ready, to discourage speculators. In fact only one plot was let, in 1856, to the Wandsworth builder John Dyne.³⁵ The pair of houses he built in the same year (now 121-3 Woodstock Road), to a plain Italianate design, cement-rendered and with columned porches, are the only Victorian houses left between Leckford and St. Margaret's Roads.

In 1860 Seckham produced a revised scheme on a much reduced scale. A lithograph at St. John's shows nine houses (in addition to Dyne's pair), including three pairs of semi-detached residences, on either side of a new road (now Leckford Road), which was aligned on St. Philip and St. James'. Some are Italianate, some elaborately Gothic, with steeply pointed barge-boarded gables. Clearly Seckham was changing his style to suit High Victorian trends. The lithograph accompanied the catalogue for the auction of lots, to be held at the Lamb Inn, St. Giles', in June 1860. Although only two lots seem to have been sold at the auction (Nos. 113 and 119), the rest were filled during the 1860s, but Seckham, although all plans had, according to the conditions of sale, to be approved by him, did not design any of the houses which occupied them.³⁶ One at least was by William Wilkinson, who was now superseding Seckham as superintending architect for the St. John's estates.

It was Wilkinson who produced the plan for Norham Manor, which accompanied the auction of lots in July 1860.³⁷ The reason why Seckham lost favour with St. John's is unknown. One suspects that the College authorities must have preferred Wilkinson's sober but up-to-date Gothic, in good honest brick and stone, to Seckham's cement and stucco, now discredited by fashion. His only connection with the Norham Manor estate seems to have been in connection with an abortive

³⁴ Correspondence in St. John's College Muniments: letters of 12 and 25 June 1855 (VB. 119); also copies of letters from the Bursar to Seckham in Letter Book I (12 Jan, 25 Apr., 10 May 1859). The Bursar's Letter Books do not go back before 1859, and the Estates Committee Minutes begin only in 1863. I am grateful for help with the Muniments to Mr. H. M. Colvin and Mr. C. Morgenstern.

³⁵ Lease of 25 Oct. 1856.

³⁶ He remained supervising architect for this area until at least 1863: see Letter Book II, 12 Nov. 1860; Letter Book III, 22 Feb., 7 Mar. 3 June 1861; Estates Committee Minutes 28 Apr. 1863.

³⁷ Also no doubt the bird's-eye perspective reproduced in A. Saint, *op. cit.* note 22, Plate XIII.

scheme for an unidentified house.³⁸ It is also likely that he designed the attractively varied group of cement-rendered Italianate houses known as Park Villas (7-9, 11-13, 15-19 Banbury Road). They were probably built c. 1855.³⁹

It remains to consider his work outside North Oxford. In 1853 he built a new Parsonage for Charlbury. It is a handsome and substantial Tudor house, splendidly sited, and built of stone, with mullioned windows and a stepped gable.⁴⁰ In 1859 he designed a drinking-fountain—the first set up in Oxford—for the Free Public Library and Reading Room.⁴¹ In 1860 he restored Church Hanborough church, giving his services free. The job seems to have been done on typical ecclesiastical lines.⁴²

In 1861 he designed what must have been his most important public building, the new Corn Exchange for Oxford (PL. XII).⁴³ It stood behind the Town Hall, on a site almost completely hemmed in by other buildings. It had a narrow frontage onto Town Hall Yard, and ran back eastwards, parallel to the High. It could also be reached from the High, by Carter's Passage, and from Blue Boar Lane. The Council advertised for designs, and Seckham sent in at least three. Of these two were approved, and the more ornamental one was finally chosen after a tender for £2,179 had been received. The foundation stone was laid on 30 October 1861, with full Masonic ritual, and a 'déjeuner' put on by the Sheriff. Seckham (who was also a Freemason) presented the elaborate silver and ivory trowel with which Captain H. A. Bowyer, Provincial Grand Master, laid the stone.

The building was almost complete by October 1862. It measured about 100 ft. by 50 ft. The internal walls were of polychrome brickwork, and the open roof of wood and glass. Iron columns were also used. It seems that Seckham had been looking at the new University Museum, and a link between the two buildings is

³⁸ In a letter of 12 Feb. 1862 the Bursar reports that plans submitted have been approved, subject to conditions which include the requirements that the boundary wall 'be in accordance with one or other of the plans prepared by the Architect for use on the Estate', and that the exterior be of brick or stone without stucco. The site may have been the land referred to in a letter to Wilkinson of 18 Dec. 1862, on which Seckham's rights had lapsed. Letters of 1859 from the Bursar to Seckham refer to proposals for leases, one between 'the footpath' and Banbury Rd. (possibly on the Keble Triangle), one on part of the Shrubby alongside Banbury Rd. (possibly further north). There is also a reference to a claim for compensation on behalf of his father for buildings erected on land leased to W. E. Burrows in St. Giles' Rd., which the College disallowed on the grounds that the buildings were erected for trade purposes. Seckham also seems to have been involved over the curate's house at Fyfield (letter of 30 Nov. 1863). In the absence of fuller information none of these references can be properly elucidated.

³⁹ Until 1968 a similar house (jazzed up with ornamental details c. 1900) stood on the north corner of Banbury Rd. and Keble Rd. (at the south end of a terrace known as Park Place). There is a photograph of it in the Minn Collection (MS. Top. Oxon. d. 501, f. 84).

⁴⁰ MS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers c. 1760 (papers concerning the mortgage from Queen Anne's Bounty—I owe this reference to Miss K. Fitzgerald). The house cost £1,200. Among the papers are two sheets of drawings by Seckham, one showing the front elevation and ground plan, the other the entrance elevation and chamber plan. The house was not built exactly in accordance with these designs.

⁴¹ *Builder*, 17 (1859), 497. It was manufactured by Mr. Clifford—'of soft stone ornamentally chiselled, while the basin is of marble. The *Herald* thinks, however, that it has perhaps too much the appearance of a fancy wash-hand stand'.

⁴² Hanborough was a St. John's living. For details of the restoration see *Oxford Diocesan Calendar* (1861), 130. A new east window replaced the old 'debased and unsightly' one, the altar-floor was tiled, new altar-rails were put in, the west gallery was removed, and the organ placed in the north chancel aisle, to reveal the west window. The roof was stained, stonework made good, and walls stuccoed. A new window was put in the south aisle, and the seats were painted and grained.

⁴³ *Builder*, 19 (1861), 540, 620, 722, 753, 775, 848; *JOJ* 19 Oct. 1861, 5; 26 Oct. 1861, 5; 2 Nov. 1861, 5; 18 Oct. 1862, 5.

provided by the famous O'Shea,⁴⁴ who carved the corbels supporting the arches which bore the galleries from which the windows along the upper part of the walls could be adjusted for ventilation. Most of the light came from the roof-glazing. It was intended that the Exchange should also be used for 'concerts, entertainments, and public dinners'. It was demolished in 1893 to make way for the new Town Hall.⁴⁵ In 1862 Seckham participated unsuccessfully in two competitions—the first competition for the new Oxford Workhouse,⁴⁶ and one for the Birmingham Exchange Buildings.⁴⁷ He also produced unexecuted plans for the reconstruction of the Oxford City Gaol, and for 'the Eynsham Estate' (City Farm).⁴⁸

As far as his private life was concerned, in about 1857 he married Kinbarra Swene Bassett Smith, of Erdington, Warwickshire.⁴⁹ They seem to have lived at Kidlington at first. Seckham's parents both died in 1859, and lie buried beneath an elaborately Gothic stone tomb (designed by their son?) in the graveyard of Kidlington Parish Church. It was probably after this that Samuel and Kinbarra moved to Carlton Lodge (now No. 5), Park Town.⁵⁰ Their first child, Kinbarra, was born in 1861, and they were to have a further eleven children.⁵¹

Soon, however, Seckham's professional life took an important turn. According to the *Northampton Herald* obituary, 'In 1864 Mr Seckham determined to seek a wider field for his ambition and energy, and, leaving Oxford for London, was so successful in his undertakings that in a short time he amassed a fortune which he considered justified him in retiring from business at the early age of 41'. It seems that 1864 is too late a date for the move to London, since the *Post Office Directory* for 1863 records him as architect, surveyor, and auctioneer of 2 Verulam Buildings, Gray's Inn, and of the City Surveyor's Office, Oxford. Interestingly, however, it also records him as Secretary to the Bank of Queensland (limited) at 26 Lombard St.⁵² The 1864 *Post Office Directory* gives a different Secretary, so that Seckham's tenure of the job must have been brief. His address is given as 1 Westminster

⁴⁴ *Builder*, 21 (1863), 283. The corbels represented agricultural products.

⁴⁵ The photograph illustrated as PL. XII is in the Oxfordshire County Library (OCL 75/2935).

⁴⁶ *Builder*, 20 (1862), 259, 555; see also *OUH* 9 Nov. 1861; 1, 15 Mar., 5, 12 Apr., 5, 19 July, 23, 30 Aug. 1862; 11 Apr. 1863 (references supplied by Mrs. C. Colvin). The competitors were Fisher, Seckham, and J. Castle. The Board of Guardians got themselves 'in a muddle', and Seckham complained both individually and in a letter written jointly with Bramwell, Bruton, Buckeridge, Castle, and Shirley, all of Oxford (*OUH* 19 July 1862). The competition was reopened, and was won for the second time by Fisher.

⁴⁷ *Builder*, 20 (1862), 475. Seckham appears last in the list of competitors. The premiated architects (Holmes, Cranston, and Thomason) were all of Birmingham.

⁴⁸ *OUH* 18 June 1864, 9. Seckham had sent in a bill for preparing these plans, and those for the Corn Exchange. The total, including expenses, came to £316 18s 6d. Alderman Grubb complained that as Seckham was City Surveyor he ought not to charge for plans, but the Town Clerk explained that it was neither specified nor expected that he should perform these extra duties. Seckham had in any case charged 2½% instead of 5% on the estimated cost of the Gaol reconstruction, and made no charge for the Eynsham work, and his claim had in addition been reduced by £100 in Committee. The bill was then ordered to be paid.

⁴⁹ Information from Dr. Silver; see also *Northampton Herald* 8 Feb. 1901. The date 4 March 1857 on a claret jug is thought to be that of the wedding. According to the 1861 Census, Kinbarra had been born in Walsall, and was then aged 25.

⁵⁰ The Voters' List of 1859/60 records them there.

⁵¹ The first child was baptized at St. Giles' Church on 22 Aug. 1861 (MS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers d. 374). The next three were baptized at St. Philip and St. James'—Bassett Thorne on 26 Dec. 1863, Violet Thorne on 17 July 1865, and Guy Lipscomb on 6 Aug. 1866 (information from Andrew Saint). Violet Thorne Seckham died in 1966 aged 101. She was a painter, with a studio in London, and specialized in animal portraits (information from Dr. Silver).

⁵² An advertisement on p. 2338 gives the address as 26 Old Broad St. It states that the capital was £1 million.

Chambers, Victoria St., S.W., between 1866 and 1870, when he ceases to figure in the Commercial Directory. From 1867 he ceases to appear also as an auctioneer.

The fact that his address is still given as Park Town at the time of his fourth child's baptism in August 1866 shows that he had left his family in Oxford. That is, however, the last year in which Voters' Lists record him there, and he appears in London *Post Office Directories* from 1867 to 1870 as living at 7 Marlborough Road (now Marlborough Place), off Finchley Road. The next three children (up to 1870) were baptized at All Saints' Church, St. John's Wood.⁵³

It is not at all clear what Seckham was doing in London. No architectural works there are known to be his.⁵⁴ Perhaps he was making successful investments. One that we know of involved Messrs. Phillips' Brewery in Northampton. The same obituary states that in 1868, 'as a mere matter of investment of capital, he became a sleeping partner in Messrs. Phillips' Brewery in Northampton, and five years afterwards, . . . on the dissolution of the partnership he purchased the property', becoming sole proprietor. It was then renamed the Northampton Brewery, and became a Company in 1887, with Seckham as Chairman and Managing Director, offices which he retained until his death. The obituary praises his 'energy and perseverance' and his 'great determination'. Apparently he pulled the Company through a period of great depression at the end of the century, and was rewarded with presentations from both employees and shareholders.⁵⁵ He was also a founder (in 1889) and first Chairman of the Northampton Electric Light and Power Co., and remained on the Board until 1900.⁵⁶

Seckham did not make his home in Northampton, although the same obituary states that 'some years ago he occupied Wootton Park and Hall, and afterwards Bletchley Park, now the residence of Mr H. S. Leon'. Wootton is only a few miles from Northampton, but Bletchley is about twenty miles away. It was Staffordshire that Seckham chose for his home. From about 1873 he rented Hanch Hall, near Longdon,⁵⁷ a remarkable house with a 'splendid Queen Anne front . . . set in a Victorian ensemble',⁵⁸ complete with a loggia and a tower, from the Forsters.⁵⁹ In the 1880s he moved to Beacon Place, just outside Lichfield. This was a moderate-sized Grecian villa, plain and stuccoed, by Sydney Smirke.⁶⁰ Here he became a pillar of Christ Church, Leomansley. When transepts and aisles were added in

⁵³ A child born in 1871 was baptized 'privately'. Seckham was still a member of the Oxford Architectural Society in 1870.

⁵⁴ Andrew Saint has kindly checked the files of the *Survey of London* office.

⁵⁵ The shareholders gave him a portrait by H. Harris Brown (of Northampton—see Graves' *Dictionary of R.A. Exhibitors* and Thieme-Becker, s.v.). It included the silver bowl presented by the employees. The brewery was later taken over by Phipps, and later still by Watneys. Violet Seckham recalled that her father attributed his financial success to treading in a horse-shoe at Northampton.

⁵⁶ All this information comes from the *Northampton Herald* 8 Feb. 1901.

⁵⁷ Information from Dr. Silver. A child born in 1873 was baptized at Longdon, as also was one born in 1879. Two intermediate children were baptized privately in 1874 and 1875 by the Rector of Hardingstone, Northampton (very close to Wootton).

⁵⁸ N. Pevsner, *Buildings of England: Staffordshire*, 197. The front seems to be by Richard Trubshaw, 1739 (H. M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects* (1954), 627.

⁵⁹ Hanch was rented while Beacon Place was being prepared. As a result Seckham's sister May (widow of James Mason) married Frank Villiers Forster (information from Dr. Silver).

⁶⁰ Alfred Williams and W. H. Mallett, *Mansions and Country Seats of Staffordshire and Warwickshire* (1899), 12. The 'well-wooded' grounds covered ten acres, and included a lake and an Italian garden. Smirke rebuilt the house for the Hinckleys at the time when he was working on the Cathedral (between 1842 and 1855).

1887, the cost of the north transept and chapel was borne jointly by him and A. O. Worthington, and in the same year his wife presented a wrought iron screen.⁶¹ The architect for the additions was Matthew Henry Holding of Northampton.⁶² The choice of architect was surely Seckham's.

However, he provided Holding with a much more interesting commission when he bought Whittington Old Hall, about three miles east of Lichfield, in 1889. Said to go back to the 16th or even 15th century,⁶³ the house still retains 17th-century features, including a two-storey porch, a gateway, and gate-piers dated 1673.⁶⁴ Seckham set himself to restore and enlarge it (PL. IX, C). He seems to have taken some part in the project himself, for the *Builder* states that 'Mr. Seckham has been assisted in this work, which has been some years in progress, by Mr. M. H. Holding, ARIBA, of Northampton, and the work has been carried out by the estate workmen, with independent contractors for different portions of the undertaking'.⁶⁵

The resulting mansion, with its Great Hall, Drawing Room, Music Room, and so on, its substantial service wing, and stout tower, must have set the seal on Seckham's ambitions as a country gentleman. Its warm red brick, enlivened by a little half-timbering, its careful detailing, its oak panelling, its stained glass windows and suits of armour, made it a most attractive house. Its owner's arms appeared over the main door, and inside were numerous mottoes, one of which read 'Nothing can match, where'er we roam, An English mother in an English home'.⁶⁶ Its sizeable estate included the park of Fisherwick (but the house by Capability Brown had already been demolished c. 1810).⁶⁷ Apparently Seckham kept Beacon Place: in *Burke's Landed Gentry* for 1894, Beacon Place is given as his seat, and Whittington as his residence.⁶⁸

By the time of his death on 4 February 1901, at the age of 73, he had become a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant, and represented Lichfield on the Staffordshire County Council (PL. IX, B).⁶⁹ His obituary records that he was 'a Conservative in politics, and a strong Churchman'.⁷⁰ His funeral, at Leomansley, was a grand affair: 'the cortege was certainly the longest and most imposing of the kind which has been seen in Lichfield for a great number of years'.⁷¹ His tomb is recessed beneath an arch in the outer east wall of the north transept of Christ Church, and he and his wife (who died in 1900) are commemorated in a

⁶¹ Information in the church.

⁶² Information from Edward Hubbard. M. H. Holding (1846-1910) was a pupil of the Oxford architect Charles Buckeridge, and later his chief assistant. This may explain how Seckham knew him. Holding was afterwards assistant to J. L. Pearson, and together they completed the works which Buckeridge had in hand at the time of his premature death in 1873 (A. Saint, 'Charles Buckeridge and his Family', *Oxoniensia*, xxxviii (1973), 363). Holding was best known as a church architect, his finest work being St. Matthew's Northampton. He attended Seckham's funeral.

⁶³ *Builder*, 61 (1891), 466-7, reproducing a perspective of the house by Holding which was exhibited at the R.A. in 1891 (also illustrated in *Academy Architecture*). The date 1891 appears on the house.

⁶⁴ *Buildings of England: Staffordshire*, 309.

⁶⁵ *Builder* loc. cit. note 63. The house has now been divided into flats.

⁶⁶ Williams and Mallett, *op. cit.* note 60, 83.

⁶⁷ Colvin, *op. cit.* note 58, 102.

⁶⁸ This was still the case in 1899 (Williams and Mallett, *loc. cit.* note 66).

⁶⁹ For his benefactions to Lichfield, see the report of the meeting of the City Council following his death in *Lichfield Mercury* 15 Feb. 1901. He presented a chain to be worn by the Sheriff in 1895, and gave £500 towards the Nursing Home.

⁷⁰ *Northampton Herald* 8 Feb. 1901.

⁷¹ *Lichfield Mercury* 15 Feb. 1901; see also *Northampton Daily Chronicle and Reporter* 12 Feb. 1901.

window in the north chapel. Of his seven sons and five daughters, four sons and five daughters survived him. Three of his sons were commissioned in the Army, and the fourth was a barrister.⁷²

Many of the questions about Seckham's architectural activities to which one would like to know the answers would no doubt be less puzzling if he had not, once established as a country gentleman, chosen to forget about his earlier career, so that his great-granddaughter, although aware that he had been an architect, and knowing Park Town well, had no idea that he was its chief begetter.

⁷² *Northampton Herald* 8 Feb. 1901.

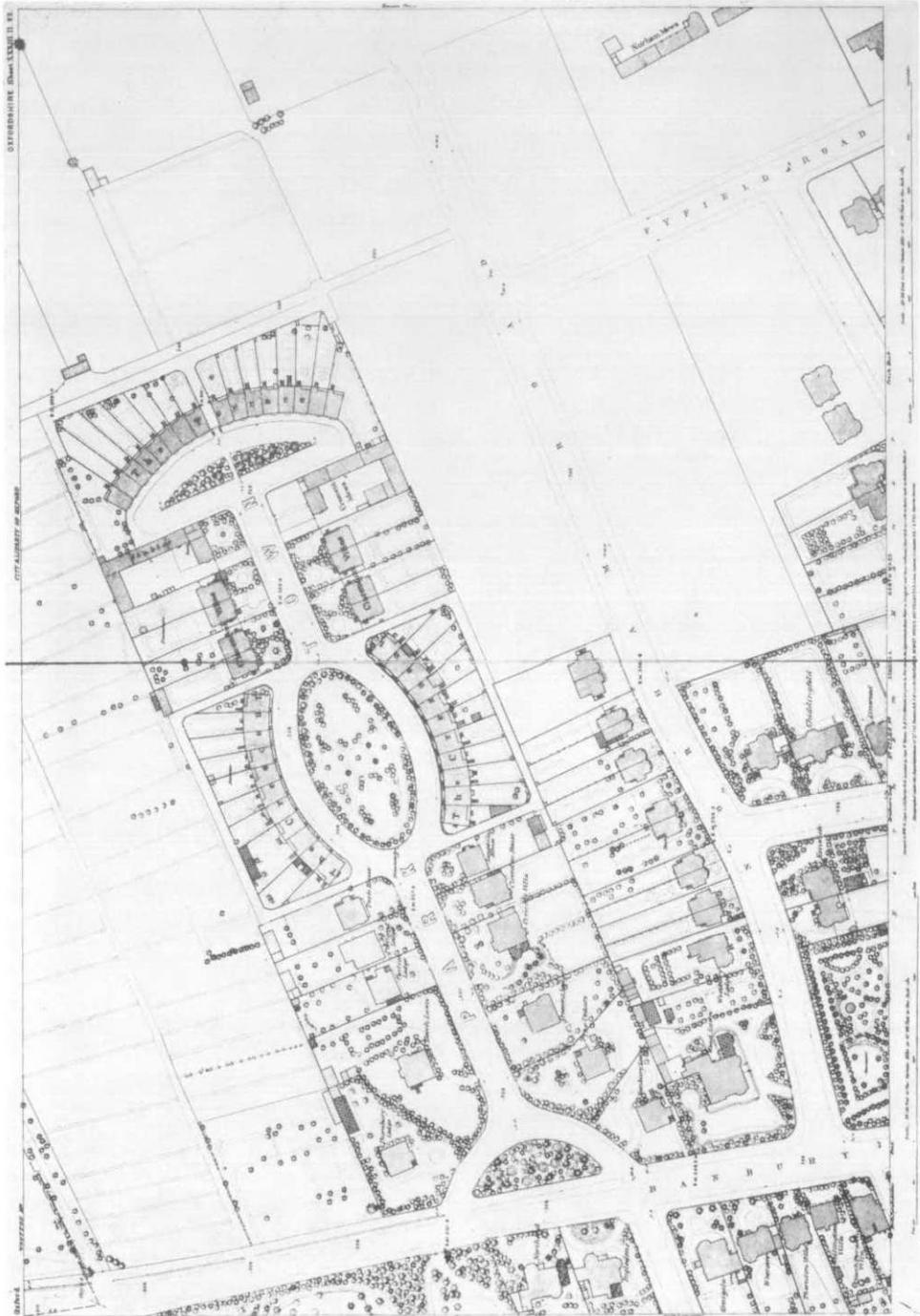


WHITTINGTON OLD HALL, LICHFIELD.



- A. A silhouette of S. L. Seckham in middle age (in the possession of Dr. Ann Silver).
B. Samuel Lipscomb Seckham, Esq., J.P., D.L., C.C. (from Alfred Williams and W. H. Mallett, *Mansions and Country Seats of Staffordshire and Warwickshire* (1899)).
C. Whittington Old Hall, Staffordshire, rebuilt after 1889 by M. H. Holding (from Alfred Williams and W. H. Mallett, *Mansions and Country Seats of Staffordshire and Warwickshire* (1899)).

PLATE X



Plan of Park Town, Oxford (from the Ordnance Survey 1 : 500 Map, 1876).

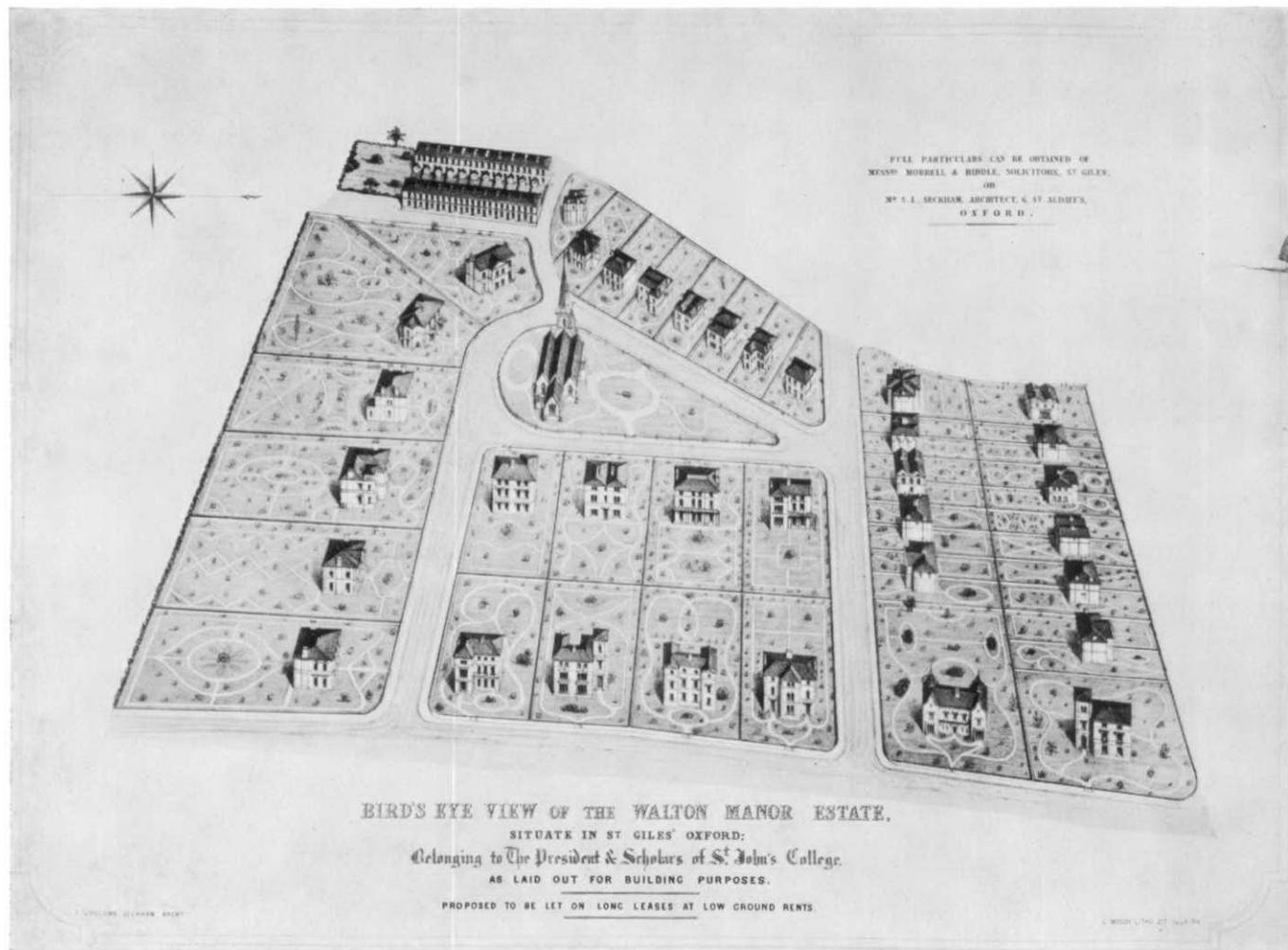


PLATE XI

Seckham's first scheme for Walton Manor, c. 1855 (from an undated lithograph in the St. John's College Muniments).

Ph: St. John's College
S. L. SECKHAM



PLATE XII

The interior of the Corn Exchange, Oxford, built 1861-2, and demolished 1893.