

son. It is unlikely that any building would have been carried out during William's minority, and while the house may have been begun shortly before John Pope's death, it may also have been built soon after 1594 when William Pope came into control of his own money. In the absence of documentation or of reliable inscriptions, the only sources of information are two: one is the architectural style of the house, and the other is to consider what occasions in the history of the family made building either more or less likely.

However, neither source is particularly helpful. The principal architectural feature is the very elaborate frontispiece to the porch, which in general character is typical of the late sixteenth century and in its overall design has many parallels. Many of the details of the front are standard renaissance motifs. The theme of a doorway opening flanked by pilasters that frame shell niches ultimately derives from the model of a triumphal arch, and can be paralleled closely in the superimposed motifs of the courtyard frontispiece of Burghley, of 1585. But the form is so widespread that it is not very helpful in providing a closely dated match for Wroxton. On the other hand, the gable over the porch can be seen as suggesting a later date. Gables of this shape go back at least to the 1570s, but the way in which the uppermost window is stepped up within it is exactly the same as the treatment of gable windows at Rushton in Northamptonshire, dated 1626.

So is it more likely on other grounds that John Pope was the builder, or his son William? Under the Tudors, land owning was the surest basis for power, wealth and prestige, and most newly wealthy men were keen to set themselves up with an estate which they could pass on to their descendants. If John Pope had been living in buildings of the old Priory, with the birth of an heir he would at last have had a motive to rebuild them, securing his descendants on the estate that he had acquired. By the time William was born, John Pope was probably quite old – his first wife was already dead by 1556, and his brother Thomas had been born in 1507 or 1508 – but there are other cases known of people starting building late in life, with just such a motive. On the other hand, the fact that John Pope had an incentive for building does not prove that he actually did so. William Pope will also have needed to build if no modern house already existed. Reaching his majority in 1594, he married in 1595, was High Sheriff of the county in 1600, and made a Knight of the Bath in 1603, and perhaps William more than his father would have felt the need for a house that matched his dignity and aspirations.