

Nor can any certain conclusion be drawn from the fact that the house was left unfinished.¹¹ Even though it was partly modernised in the late seventeenth century, until the middle of the nineteenth it remained unbalanced and asymmetrical. The porch was not in the middle of the façade, and it lacked a south wing to match that on the north. Furthermore there were always, as now, two large flights of stairs, and the slightly odd location of the service stair may plausibly be explained as relating to a range of building that has since been demolished or rebuilt. The usual reasons why a building is left unfinished are either because its builder has run out of money, or because he has died. If John Pope began to build after the birth of William in 1573 – and the architectural evidence indicates a date no earlier than the late 1570s – his death would have caused building to have been suspended.

It was said after his death that William Pope had spent £6000 on the house – even though such a claim may have been no more than a lawyer’s fiction.¹² He was clearly keen to enhance his status. He was made a baronet in 1611 and in 1628 he was ennobled as Earl of Downe. But leading the aristocratic life in the reign of King James I was an expensive business, and it is likely that William Pope was spending to the limit of his income – and perhaps something beyond. He would have had to pay over £1000 for the baronetcy, and for the earldom – a title that he had done nothing to earn – he paid £2500.¹³ The terms of his grandfather, Thomas Pope’s, family settlements had been strict, with no scope for the sale of lands that were entailed on his descendants. As far back as 1597 he had a special Act of Parliament passed to allow him to sell entailed property to raise a jointure for his wife and to pay debts,¹⁴ and although he left plate valued at £1500, he owed over £4000 when he died.¹⁵ Although he left £250 to pay for a handsome monument to himself in the church, this will have been a charge on his heirs’ inheritance. Nothing is known about the Earl’s career which would have

¹¹ It has been suggested that the reason why the house was not finished is that the Popes did not want to spend a lot of money on building a house on which they only held a lease. This is implausible. If they had wanted to economise, they would have built a small house, not the fragment of a large one.

¹² *VCH Oxon IX*, 176. The document in which this was claimed cannot now be traced.

¹³ *Philobiblion Society*, IX, 1865-6, 3-18.

¹⁴ London, Parliamentary Archives, 39 Eliz.I c.15.

¹⁵ National Archives PROB 11/160.