

made him stop building once he had begun, but it may simply be that once he had provided himself with a house with a full set of state rooms, he was prepared to defer indefinitely its completion. Status in late Elizabethan and Jacobean England was largely cemented by entertaining, by hospitality (he was visited King James I)¹⁶ and a show of wealth, and for the moment part of the Priory buildings – perhaps the old kitchens and service rooms of the Prior’s Lodging – might continue to serve those functions that were not required for the purposes of keeping up a show. It is possible, of course, that John Pope began the house and that his son, after an interval, went on with it. But unless and until further evidence turns up, perhaps the most likely conclusion is that William Pope started to build the house in the 1590s and may have spent some years on it, on and off, before leaving it still incomplete on his death.

Although with the exception of the hall, the Popes’ house has been almost entirely redecorated, parts of the original plan are still reasonably clear. Three inventories, made in 1634 after the 1st Earl’s death, in 1668 and 1680,¹⁷ list the rooms and their furnishings, and a plan made for alterations in the 1680s¹⁸ (p.120) also helps to locate a few of these rooms.

The Earl’s house was laid out on largely standard lines. One entered, as one still does, in the traditional way, through the porch at one end of the great hall. Also traditional was the arrangement whereby the best rooms and the best stair led off the hall at the opposite end from the entrance – the ‘high’ end, with buttery, pantry and the service rooms leading off the hall’s opposite end, the ‘low’ end. To the north of the hall, at the ‘high’ end of the house, there were three parlours. These comprised the Great Parlour, the present reading room; the Little Parlour, probably the room to its west; and the Little Low Parlour, which from the use of the word ‘low’ probably gave off the opposite end of the hall where in the 1680s plan there is a room called ‘parlour for ordinary use.’ The Great and Little Parlours would have been mainly for entertaining visitors, the low parlour a combined eating room and sitting room for the family. The pantry was also on the ground floor, close to

¹⁶ Alfred Beesley, *The History of Banbury*, 1842, 262, fn.48.

¹⁷ Oxford Bodleian Library, MS North c.47/5, William Pope, 1st Earl of Downe; MS North b.12 ff.399-406, Thomas, 3rd Earl of Downe, 1668; MS North b.12 ff.421-8, Beata, Countess of Downe, 1678. Her inventory, dated 1680, is to be the subject of a separate article in a future issue.

¹⁸ Reproduced in Howard Colvin and John Newman, eds., *Of Building: Roger North’s Writings on Architecture*, 1981, pl.5, lower.