

GREAT SAXHAM HALL, THE SAXHAMS, SUFFOLK THE 'UMBRELLO'

RECORDING & ANALYSIS

Pete Smith



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SUMMARY

This report was commissioned by Clare Campbell, Historic Buildings Inspector, Cambridge, to re-examine the architectural and historical evidence which survives concerning the manufacture and siting of this unusual garden structure, known as the 'Umbrello'. It also places the building in its historical context as an example of the garden architecture often found within the many landscape gardens which surround English country houses.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. The 'Umbrello'

The 'Umbrello' is a Gothick-style garden building which was situated within the original landscape gardens at Great Saxham Hall in Suffolk (figs 1 and 4). It is sited well to the east of the house, outside the present park, within a small copse of trees close to a road. It has been neglected for many years and it is now included on the English Heritage 'Heritage at Risk Register'. This building is listed at grade II* as 'The Garden House', Great Saxham Hall, The Saxhams, Suffolk, item 5/123. This report attempts to clarify its history and to assess its rarity and importance in the history of the English landscape garden.

A full set of 27 colour photographs recording this structure have been deposited in the National Monuments Record, Negative Nos. DPI41277 to DPI41303.

1.2 Great Saxham Hall and its Estate

Originally part of the estates of Bury St Edmunds Abbey, the estate of Great Saxham in Suffolk was acquired by Sir Richard Long after the Dissolution of the Monasteries and subsequently sold to John Eldred, a Levant merchant, for £3,000. The house that he built was known appropriately as 'Nutmeg Hall'. The Eldreds sold the property to Hutchinson Mure, whose wealth was derived from his West Indian sugar plantations, in 1754.¹ Mure commissioned Robert Adam to design a new Palladian-style house in 1762, though nothing was built. In 1774 the old house was demolished and a new D-plan house in an Adamesque castle-style was begun. Between 1774 and 1776 Adam produced designs for certain interior features, ceilings etc., though he may not have been responsible for the design of the whole building. This fantasy castle was destroyed by fire in 1779. Adam provided designs for a new classical-style house in 1780, but these were rejected in favour of Mure's own designs for converting the stables into a new house. Work progressed slowly. Mure was declared bankrupt in 1793 and died the following year.² The unfinished house and its estate were purchased for £32,000 by Thomas Mills, who employed the architect Joseph Patience to redesign and complete the house between 1797 and 1806.³ This classical-style house included a number of Coade stone plaques and roundels on its entrance facade. Further alterations were undertaken for William Mills in the early Victorian period including an extensive new service wing. The house and estate are now the property of Colonel Gordon Lennox.



*Figure 1. The 'Umbrello' has been neglected for many years and is now in imminent danger of collapse.
Pat Payne DPI41279.jpg*

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

2.1. The Gardens at Great Saxham Hall

According to a survey of 1729, 'the house stood within a complex of enclosures (including a large and partly moated orchard) close to the village street. But a web of avenues – five in all – extended out across the fields to the south and east',⁴ an arrangement typical of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. The gardens at Great Saxham Hall were landscaped for Hutchinson Mure sometime between 1765 and 1784. In 1818, William Mills recorded in his diary that Mure had spent 'considerable sums in embellishing the grounds under the great 'Capability' Brown', though no corroborative evidence for this claim has been forthcoming.⁵ De La Rochefoucauld who visited in 1784 recorded that, 'The garden is agreeable enough, without being very well kept; there is a lake and a river which create a good effect'.⁶ By the time Thomas Mills purchased the property in the 1796 the house stood within a fine landscaped park. A detailed survey of the estate dated 1801 by Isaac Johnson, a surveyor from Woodbridge, clearly shows this landscape garden and its garden buildings.⁷ Set slightly away from the main house to the south-east 'the pleasure garden' was laid out around a lake and a serpentine river which now flows through a heavily wooded valley. Dotted around this garden at various strategic points were a number of garden buildings, all of which are included as 'elevations' on the 1801 survey.

2.2. The Garden Buildings at Great Saxham Hall

All the garden buildings shown on Johnson's survey of 1801 were classical in style. The most prominent of these buildings was the 'Temple in the Shrubbery', which survives today as the 'Tea House'. This building was converted, probably for William Mills in the 1840s, to judge from its round-headed windows with margin-light sashes.⁸ The 'Temple of Dido', another octagonal building, has also been converted, this time into a house.⁹ Two other buildings shown on Johnson's survey have been lost; 'The Dairy' and the 'Temple on the Bridge'. The 'Umbrello' does not appear on this detailed survey of 1801 and it cannot have been at Great Saxham at this date.¹⁰ The gardens were developed and extended in the early 19th century for Thomas Mills. The earliest known view of



Figure 2. The 'Umbrello' seen across the lake in the 1920s.

these gardens is an engraved sketch of the house by J. Grieg of 1819, from *Excursions*.¹¹ This shows the porticoed main entrance to the house, seen through a maturing parkland, though unfortunately none of the garden structures are visible.

2.3. The 'Umbrello'

The 'Umbrello' is sited so that it was originally seen from across the lake (fig. 2), it is now situated outside the present reduced park that survives around Great Saxham Hall. It stands to the west of the road from Little Saxham to Hargrave on a wooded spur. The surrounding former parkland is now under cultivation. The 'Umbrello' is made of Coade stone, an artificial stoneware, developed by Mrs Eleanor Coade. It stands on an octagonal stone base. A number of the bases of the eight clustered columns which support the superstructure are embossed with a manufacturers stamp (fig. 3):-

COADE
& SEALY
LAMBETH

indicating that this structure was made between 1789 and 1813.¹² John Sealy, Eleanor Coade's cousin, was a partner from May 1789 until his death in October 1813, and the firm was known as Coade & Sealy between these dates. The Umbrello 'does not appear



Figure 3. The 'Umbrello'.
The base of one of the
columns embossed
'COADE
& SEALY
LAMBETH.'

Clare Campbell



Figure 4. The 'Umbrello' photographed in the 1960s and showing the original domed roof.

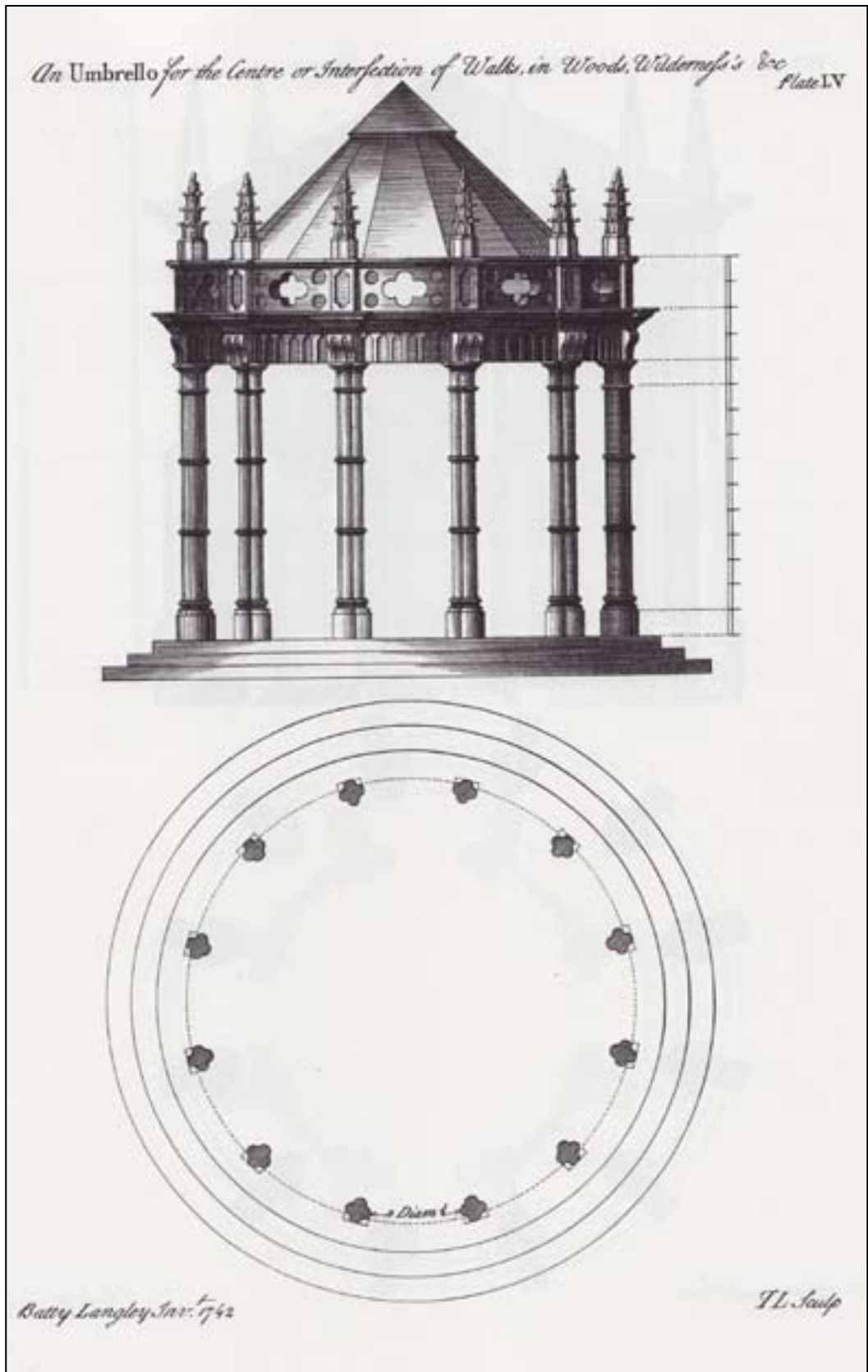


Figure 5. Batty Langley and Thomase Langley, 'An UMBRELLO for the Centre or Interfection of Walks, in Woods, Wilderness's Etc' Plate LV from *Gothic Architecture, Improved by Rules and Proportions* 1742.

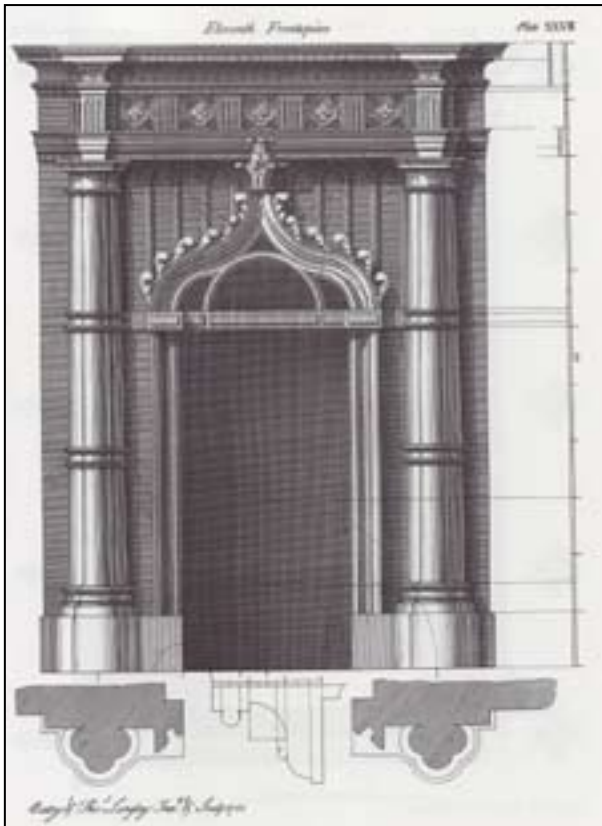


Figure 6. Batty Langley and Thomase Langley, 'Eleventh Frontispiece' Plate XXVII from *Gothic Architecture, Improved by Rules and Proportions* 1742.

on the Great Saxham Tithe Award map of 1840, although this shows the other garden buildings,¹³ indicating that the 'Umbrello' was 'brought from elsewhere and erected on the site in the middle decades of the [19th] century'.¹⁴ This was most likely carried out for William Mills in the 1840s when the Tea House was converted and the house altered. The fact that this structure was made in London in sections so that it could be easily transported to its original site meant that it could just as easily have been deconstructed and moved to its new position here at Great Saxham.

It is not known who actually designed the 'Umbrello' at Great Saxham, but its design is clearly based on one of the plates included in Batty Langley and Thomas Langley's treatise *Gothic Architecture, Improved by Rules and Proportions* published in 1742.¹⁵ This influential pattern book included eight designs for umbrellos, of various shapes and sizes, though it is plate LV which was used as a model for this example (fig. 5). The model was larger, with twelve rather than eight supporting clustered columns, and a pyramidal rather than an octagonal domed roof, as originally constructed here at Great Saxham (fig. 4). The most significant difference in the design is the ogee-headed arches added to each of the eight openings. These ogee-headed arches with their flaming crockets were copied from the many examples found in the pages of this same pattern book (fig. 6). The design of the 'Umbrello' at Great Saxham was therefore based on a model which was designed at least 45 years earlier, and it was probably one of the last examples of the use of Batty Langley's book as a direct model for such garden buildings.

FABRIC ANALYSIS

3.1. The Structure

The 'Umbrello' is now in very poor condition. All the roof and roof structure has collapsed and been removed (fig. 4). Many of the clustered columns have cracks and evidence of cement repairs. These columns are hollow and the action of ice appears to have broken some of them open (figs 7 and 8). The building is in need of urgent attention if it is to survive.

3.2. Coade Stone

The making of the 'Umbrello' is not mentioned in any of the sporadic surviving order books for the Coade factory.¹⁶ Two Gothick-style gateways, one made for Strawberry Hill in 1772 and another made for Battle Abbey in 1814-15, were produced by the Coade factory, and an elaborate Gothick-style screen was made for St George's Chapel, Windsor 1790-99, but apart from this and a number of Gothick-style windows, tombs, fonts and candelabras, almost all their output was in the classical style. Complete garden buildings like the 'Umbrello' are very rare amongst the Coade factory's enormous output, though the lost 'Hindoo Temple' at Melchett Park in Hampshire, erected for



Figure 7. The 'Umbrello' showing one of the damaged clustered columns.

Pat Payne DPI41297.JPG



Figure 8 The 'Umbrello' showing the damaged foliate capitals and one of the broken hollow column shafts.
Pat Payne DPI41292.JPG

Major Osborne, may have be another.¹⁷ Hundreds of garden ornaments such as individual vases, urns, animal figures and statues were designed and produced by Coad and a large number of ornamental features were produced to decorate garden buildings, fountains and gates, but no other complete garden building that was produced by this factory has survived.¹⁸ This structure is therefore a very rare and important example of the work of this enormously important factory, which, through its development of a long-lasting artificial stone, added so much to the decorative detailing of the architecture of the 18th-century country house and its gardens.

COMPARATIVE IMPORTANCE

4.1. Umbrellos

Umbrellos were one of a number of vaguely defined garden ornaments found amongst the landscape gardens of 18th century country houses. They fulfilled at least two basic functions. They were designed primarily, like all garden buildings, as 'eye-catchers', to form a point of interest within a landscape garden (fig. 2), and secondly to provide shade for those visiting such gardens. An umbrella could be a completely open structure, supported on columns, like this example at Great Saxham, or it could be backed by a wall if it was to be viewed from only one side - its form being dependant on the openness of its setting. In its open form the umbrella was the Gothick style equivalent of the classical rotunda, and the walled umbrella was the equivalent of the classical portico. Umbrellos were usually designed in the Gothick style, though more exotic styles like the Chinese or Indian were also used on occasion. The style was a matter of appropriateness and taste.

The slender nature of Gothick clustered columns and the delicate detailing of the Gothick decoration meant that most umbrellos were constructed of wood and consequently few have survived the combined rigours of neglect and the English climate. One example of a



Figure 9 Robin Hood's Hut , Halswell Hall Park in Somerset, built for Charles Keymes Tyntes in 1767.
Pete Smith P8252159.JPG

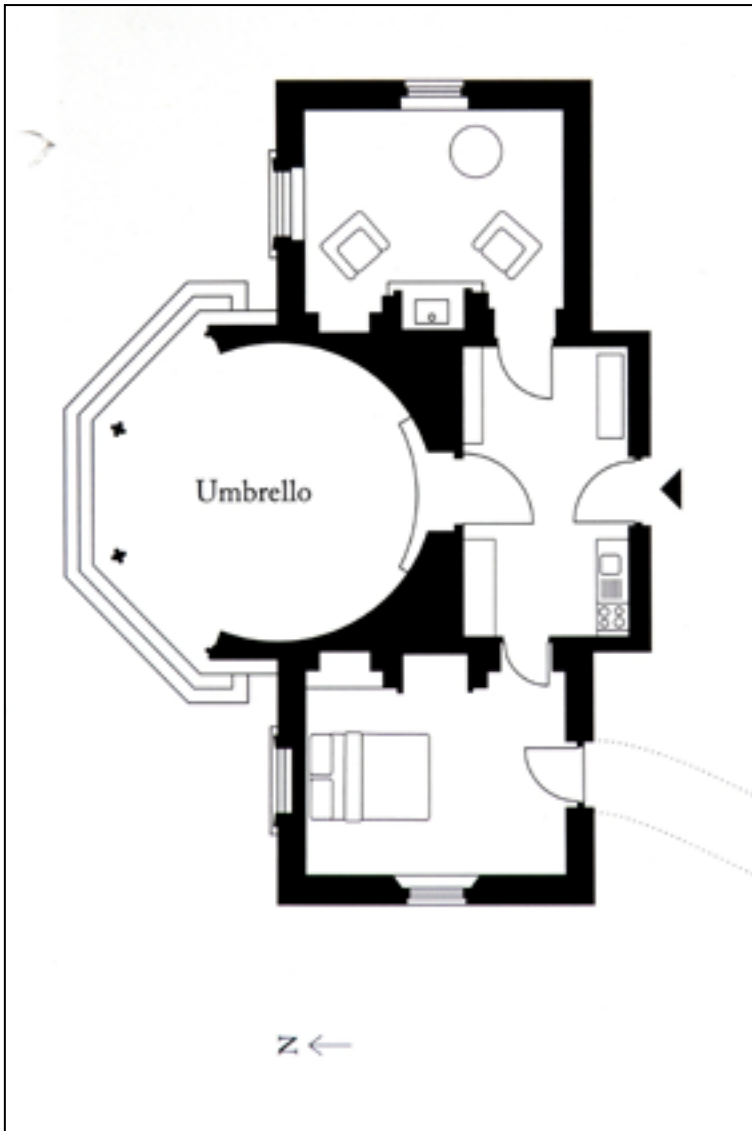


Figure 10 A ground plan of Robin Hood's Hut, Halswell Hall Park, Somerset..

The Landmark Trust

wooden umbrello does survive at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire. Though known as the 'Chinese Temple' this wooden structure situated on an island on Lower Drakelow Pond has Gothick-style ogee-headed arches and a complex Chinese roof.¹⁹ A more completely Gothick style example, built of stone, survives within the park at Halswell House in Somerset, known as 'Robin Hood's Hut' (figs 9 and 10).²⁰ This building which was built for Charles Kemeys Tynte in 1767 is rather more than just an umbrello with a back wall, for it has rooms attached to the sides and at the rear with ogee-headed windows and a thatched roof. Obviously its far more substantial structure has been one of the main reasons for its survival.²¹ A further example of a Gothick-style umbrello, made of stone, was constructed at Wardour Castle in Wiltshire by Richard Woods, landscape designer and architect, for the 8th Baron Arundell. This was an octagonal umbrello with three open arches whose design was clearly also based on the designs of Battey Langley. The 'Gothick temple' in Lady Grove, as it was known, was built in 1766, but allowed to fall into disrepair in the late 20th century. It was eventually reerected (with some alteration) in the grounds of Hatfield Peveril Priory.²²



*Figure 11. The Temple of Liberty, now known as the Gothick Temple, at Stowe, Buckinghamshire designed by James Gibbs 1741-47
The Landmark Trust*

Perhaps the closest comparable example of a Gothick-style umbrella survives in the grounds of Ascot Place, Winkfield in Berkshire. The Gothick Seat, as it is known, may at least in part be made of artificial stone. This closed umbrella has three open arches at the front topped with battlements and prominent pinnacles and rendered brick walls to the rear. It was designed by C C Ferard in the early 19th century. The surviving sharp Gothick detailing does suggest that the decorative details are made from an artificial stone, possibly Coade, but there are no marks embossed on the structure to give a clue to the maker's name, so it might have been manufactured by one of the other firms producing these types of wares such as Blashfield's Terracotta or Pulham's Artificial Stone.²³

These once relatively common but ephemeral garden buildings, umbrellas, have very rarely survived the neglect suffered by most garden structures through changes in

gardening fashion. Their more robust stone counterparts (mostly classical in style) have, on the other hand, often managed to survive rather better.

4.2. Gothick Garden Buildings

The 'Umbrello' is certainly not amongst the earliest or the most important Gothick-style buildings to be found ornamenting English country house gardens. This fashion was introduced in the early years of the 18th century. Probably the very earliest example survives as the 'Gothic Temple' at Shotover Park in Oxfordshire, built by William Townsend for the medieval historian James Tyrell in 1716-17.²³ A small but consistent number of Gothick-style garden buildings continued to be designed and built throughout the 18th century, including such famous and iconic examples as the 'Temple of Liberty' (now known as the Gothic Temple) at Stowe, Buckinghamshire designed by James Gibbs 1741-47 (fig. 11), The 'Gothic Temple' at Bramham Park in Yorkshire designed by James Paine in 1750, the 'Museum' at Enville in Staffordshire designed by Sanderson Miller in the same year, the 'Gothic Temple' at Painshill in Surrey built for Charles Hamilton in the 1750s or the Gothic Seat at Prior Park erected in around 1754 for Ralph Allen. The fashion for Gothick style garden buildings reached its peak in the 1750s though examples continued to be built throughout the century. One of the most magnificent, 'Brizes Tower' at Alnwick, in Northumberland was designed by Robert Adam in 1783.²⁴ The style continued to be fashionable, especially for ephemeral structures, into the early years of the 19th century, with examples like the 'Garden Seat' designed by Jeffrey Wyatt at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, in 1811.²⁵ The style's popularity began to wane in the mid-19th century. The 'Umbrello' at Great Saxham, made between 1789 and 1813, is therefore a relatively late example of a Gothick-style garden building.

CONCLUSION

As a large scale and complete building made of Coade stone the 'Umbrello' at Great Saxham is probably a unique structure. Its design may have been relatively old-fashioned when it was made, sometime between 1789 and 1813, but this cannot detract from its importance as an example of this once fashionable artificial stone. Mrs Eleanor Coade's formula allowed architects like Robert Adam and Sir John Soane to embellish their buildings with statues, plaques, capitals and all manner of architectural features. The Coade factory made a major contribution to the look of all types of buildings in the later 18th and early 19th centuries, especially garden and estate buildings. Just as John Patience did when he included Coade stone plaques and roundels on the front of the new house he completed here at Great Saxham in 1806. The mere fact that the 'Umbrello' was made of Coade stone, rather than wood and plaster like most umbrellas, has meant that it has been able, so far, largely to withstand the neglect it has suffered. Its present condition is exacerbated by its position outside the reduced garden. This neglect has already resulted in the loss of its roof, presumably made of wood with a lead covering, and its plaster ceiling; all that survives today is the Coade stone structure (figs 1 and 12).

Though it might have seemed most likely that this Gothick-style garden building would have been commissioned for Hutchinson Mure to accompany the castle-style house that was burnt down in 1779, the evidence of the 'Sealy & Coade' stamp proves that



Figure 12. The 'Umbrello' showing the now exposed hollow internal structure of this Coade stone building.
Pat Payne DPI41286.JPG

this was not the case. In the same way, it might have seemed likely that the 'Umbrello' was erected for Thomas Mills, since his architect, John Patience, included Coade stone plaques and roundels on the front of the new house he built at Great Saxham. But the recently discovered Tithe Awards Map of 1840, which fails to show the 'Umbrello', appears to be conclusive proof that the structure was not erected here at Great Saxham until after this date. This in turn suggests that the 'Umbrello' was originally commissioned for another site sometime between 1789 and 1813.

Since few Gothick designs, and no other complete garden buildings, appear in any of the surviving Coade stone catalogues it seems unlikely that this was an 'off the peg' design. Instead it would seem to have been an individual commission for a specific client and a specific site, though the evidence compiled in this report clearly suggests that its original site was not here at Great Saxham.

ENDNOTES

1. Julia Abel-Smith, 'The Umbrello at Great Saxham, Suffolk', *The Georgian Group Journal*, 1987, 77-87. Julia Abel Smith, 'Great Saxham Hall', *Country Life*, November 27, 1986, 1698-1702. Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd (gen. ed.), *Burke's & Savills Guide to Country Houses, Vol. III, East Anglia*, 1981, 260-61. Eric Sandon, *Suffolk Houses, A Study of Domestic Architecture*, 1977, 232-34. Nikolaus Pevsner, revised by Edith Radcliffe, *The Buildings of England, Suffolk*, 1974, 238.
2. David King, *The Complete Works of Robert and James Adam*, London, 1991, 387-89.
3. Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840*, 4th edition, 2008, 788.
4. Tom Williamson, *Suffolk's Gardens & Parks*, UEA, 2000, 35. Survey of the Manor of Great Saxham, 1729, ESRO T4/33/1.24.
5. Great Saxham is not included in Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown*, London, 1984.
6. Williamson, *op. cit.*, 77.
7. Abel Smith, 1986, *op. cit.*, 1702, Fig. 14. Williamson, *op. cit.*, 77 and 187 n. 92. Field Book of the Estates of Thomas Mills in Great Saxham. ESRO HD 11/475.
8. Abel Smith, 1986, *op. cit.*, 1698, Fig. 3. Listed as Tea House, 5/102, Grade II, Listing NGR 7925062709.
9. Abel Smith, 1986, *op. cit.*, 1702, Fig. 13. Listed as The Dog Kennel or Grandfather's, Grade II, Listing NGR TL7880462438.
10. Williamson, *op. cit.*, 187, n. 95.
11. (Thomas Kitson Cromwell), *Excursions through the County of Suffolk, Vol. I*, London, 1818, 97.
12. Alison Kelly, *Mrs Coade's Stone*, 1990.
13. Julia Abel-Smith was unaware of this 1840 map evidence and she assumed that the 'Umbrello' was erected for Thomas Mills between 1794 and 1813. Abel-Smith, 1987, *op. cit.*, 84. Williamson, *op. cit.*, 187, WSRO, T51/2.
14. Williamson, *op. cit.*, 187, n. 93.
15. Originally entitled *Ancient Architecture Restored*. Batty and Thomas Langley, *Gothic Architecture, A Reprint of the Original 1742 Treatise*, Dover, New York, 2003, plate LV. There are 8 umbrellas illustrated, plates XXXI, XLIX, L, LI, LII, LIII, LIV, LV.
16. Coade factory catalogues and gazetteers exist for the period 1769-99 and detailed record books survive from 1813 onwards. Kelly, *op. cit.*, 107-27; Julia Abel-Smith, *op. cit.*, 84.
17. Unfortunately the appearance of this structure was not recorded, though it was described by Britten in his *Beauties of Wiltshire*; 'The design of this temple was furnished....after the choicest models of Hindoo architecture, and was executed in artificial stone by Mr Rossi.' Kelly, *op. cit.*, 211.
18. Alison Kelly, 'Coade Stone in Gardens', *The Journal of the Garden History Society*, Vol. 16, 1988, 109-33.
19. Clive Aslet, 'Park and Garden Buildings at Woburn – II', *Country Life*, April 7, 1983, 860, pl. 2.
20. 'The Gardens at Halswell House, Somerset', *Country Life*, CLXXXIII, 6, 82. This building now belongs to the Landmark Trust. *The Landmark Trust Handbook*, 23rd ed. 2008, 159.
21. 'Robin Hood's Hut' was allowed to fall into a state of such neglect in the 1960s that the stone umbrella feature was temporarily removed for safe keeping. The umbrella was returned and the building restored by the Landmark Trust in the 1990s.
22. Fiona Cowell, *Richard Woods (1715-1793), Master of the Pleasure Garden*, 2009, 80, fig. 27.
23. Abel-Smith, 1987, *op. cit.*, 84, fig. 8.
24. Christopher Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, 1999, 51, pl. 28.
25. Brooks, *op. cit.*, 66, pl. 38.
26. Clive Aslet, 'Park and Garden Buildings at Woburn – I', *Country Life*, March 31, 1983, 773, pl. 3.



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