

A rather special window.

The contrast between two very significant windows in The Manor House could not be greater. While one is subterranean, humble and worn the other is imposing, strident and nearly ecclesiastic as it arches above the grand staircase and floods light into the reception hall of this original mansion house. It is arguably the dominant feature of the building and is geometrically and aesthetically comfortable in its setting. Yet it wasn't original to the house.

The window in the cellars has revealed secrets that it held for nearly four centuries about the history of the house and the secret that the other window had been later-installed was shared by Martin Roberts of Pevsner Guides in 2016 who pointed out that it had to have been installed post 1740 whilst The Manor House itself was completed in 1707. Naturally this led to the question 'why?'. The other piece of tantalising information provided by the man from Pevsner was that an identical window exists in the dining hall of Hatfield College of Durham University.

The features of the window show it to be of Palladian Venetian design – or to put it another way, a Venetian Window after the style of Palladio. Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) was an Italian Renaissance architect in the Venetian Republic in the sixteenth century and was influenced by Roman and Greek architecture. This type of window was favoured by the English architect James Paine (1717-1789) who was influential in the design of many important buildings in Great Britain and with his own practice, enjoyed commissions locally at Raby Castle (1753-1760), Coxhoe Hall (1754), Gibside (1753-1767) and Hardwick Hall (1754-1757) among others.

The front façade of The Manor House faces east to the rising sun and on to St. Edmunds church which of course means that the rear faces into the setting sun, and by good fortune towards Hardwick Park or, when The Manor House was built in 1707, Hardwick Estate. As a result, in spring and autumn the interior of The Manor House is blessed with glorious light often tinged with orange, gold and red hues which lift the heart. It is hard to believe that any of this was just a happy accident. The ridge on which The Manor House was built provided the owner with a religious vista which was important at the end of the turbulent seventeenth century while the rear view provided the hunting man with a view of prime hunting parkland.

John Burdon of Hardwick Estate had already owned Coxhoe Hall where he had commissioned James Paine to design improvements. Like other wealthy beneficiaries of the bounty of the industrial revolution in the North East he was keen to add fashionable classicism to his grand estates. In 1756 he added the mansion house in Sedgfield, which is now known as The Manor House, to his impressive property portfolio just at the time that he had engaged the practice of James Paine to create the follies of his pleasure grounds on Hardwick Estate. With such an alignment of happenings it is a very short leap to understanding that there is a very good chance that James Paine would have the opportunity of making some alterations in John Burdon's latest acquisition. Given the facts of a James Paine trademark Venetian window and that he was concurrently building follies for John Burdon on Hardwick Estate at the time John Burdon bought The Manor House, you would think that a gaming man would place a stake on it being more than a coincidence. So, taking Martin Roberts' lead, it is likely that the window was installed at around the same time as the follies at Hardwick Estate. The brickwork surrounding the window as viewed from the car park is a give-away to the alteration.

The view west from the window may not be so idyllic now as it once was, there is twentieth century development along West Park Lane, some of it on land that was once part of the gardens of The Manor House. If the view could be momentarily cleared it is likely that we'd find that the Venetian

window would look directly to one of James Paine's impressive follies - the tower which itself stood close to where the intended main gates of Hardwick Estate would have been had they been built (and shown in the painting of John Burdon by Martin Ferdinand Quadal now hanging in Hardwick Hall Hotel). Incidentally, records show that after buying The Manor House John Burdon installed his sister Isobel and her husband James Muncaster as residents from 1757.

The installation of the window in around 1756 perhaps at the same time as its sister in Hatfield College gives us a sense of the continuing importance of The Manor House in the late eighteenth century.

We are fortunate indeed that the window in The Manor House has survived the centuries to bequeath the legacy of the light that it shines on us.