

Sampson Frisby (13h1): rediscovering the career and milieu of a 17th-century freemason

by

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Sampson Frisby (1597-1656) was a prolific stonemason, active in Northamptonshire and surrounding counties in the first half of the 17th century. His distinctive personal mason's mark has been identified in the accounts of Clare College, Cambridge, and discovered on the ashlar of several significant country houses and churches. This allows his career to be reconstructed, beginning in the important workshop of the master mason Thomas Thorpe (c.1565-1626) in Kings Cliffe around 1618. This study reveals how masons' marks can illuminate the process of building in the early modern period, developing a methodological approach first published by the authors in 2007.¹ It additionally stimulates speculation about the career of Sampson's father, the equally prolific Humphrey Frisby (d.1624/25), and highlights two factors that had a profound effect on the Frisby family and their contemporaries: the supplanting of Kings Cliffe by Ketton as a regional quarrying centre, and the subsequent disruption of the Civil War.

BACKGROUND

In 2006, working from scaffolding, the authors collated masons' marks visible on the ashlar stonework of 1622-24 at Apethorpe Hall (now known as Apethorpe Palace), near Kings Cliffe in Northamptonshire.² For analysis, these marks were encoded using a formula based on the number of strokes involved, a system originally developed for the study of phasing in ecclesiastical buildings.³ Comparison with sets of marks found on securely attributed buildings of similar date, notably two well-documented Norfolk houses, Blickling Hall (1618-23) and Hunstanton Hall (1616-24), made it possible to identify the Apethorpe master mason as Thomas Thorpe (c.1565-1626). Since Thorpe belonged to a family of quarrymen, masons and land surveyors based in Kings Cliffe, this was not a particularly surprising revelation. The analytical method, however, was set out in an article published in 2007, offering an approach – unfamiliar to many architectural historians – which has the potential to advance the study of buildings and craftsmanship in the early modern period.⁴

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More recently a document has come to light which identifies the mark of the mason Sampson Frisby (1597-1656). Spellings of Frisby's name are many and various, but the form adopted here is taken from his last will and testament. Frisby's distinctive and complex mark has been recorded at Apethorpe and several other buildings. Combining the evidence of this mark with that gleaned from documentary sources allows Frisby's life and career to be broadly reconstructed, from *c.*1618 to 1656. It also triggers some speculation about the career of Sampson's father, Humphrey Frisby (d.1624/5). This exercise augments the methodology published by the authors in 2007, illustrating further ways in which the recording and analysis of masons' marks can enhance our understanding of 17th-century buildings and their builders.

IDENTIFYING 13h1

In 2011 one of the most prolific masons' marks occurring at Apethorpe (coded as 13h1) was recognised in the bursar's accounts of building work undertaken in 1637 and 1638 at Clare College (known until 1856 as Clare Hall), Cambridge.⁵ This complicated mark looks like a capital letter 'H', with forked terminals to the uprights, and with a triangle which is attached to the bar but does not extend along its full length (Figs 1 and 9). It was created with no fewer than 13 separate strokes of the chisel (or, indeed, pen).

Prior to its discovery at Clare College, 13h1 had already been recorded on some of the finest ashlar masonry at Apethorpe, notably on the chimneypieces and doorways, and also on the arcade of the Mildmay Chapel which was added to Apethorpe church in 1621, a year before work on the house began.⁶ It had also been noted on ashlar dressings at Blickling Hall – such as friezes, doorways and windows – where the triangle occasionally had drilled points, and on one of two forecourt arches at Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire, which have been variously dated to the late 16th or 17th centuries.⁷ In addition, the mark 13h1 was carefully positioned on the spandrels of a first-floor chimneypiece at Lilford Hall, Northamptonshire, where two chimney stacks display the dates 1635 and 1656. Finally, several instances of 13h1 were noted at Quenby Hall in Leicestershire, which is generally dated rather broadly to *c.*1620-36. Like Blickling, Quenby is a red brick house with ashlar dressings; in contrast, Apethorpe and Lilford – both lying closer to the source of the stone (in all cases an oolitic limestone, known geologically as Lower Lincolnshire Limestone) – are faced entirely in ashlar.

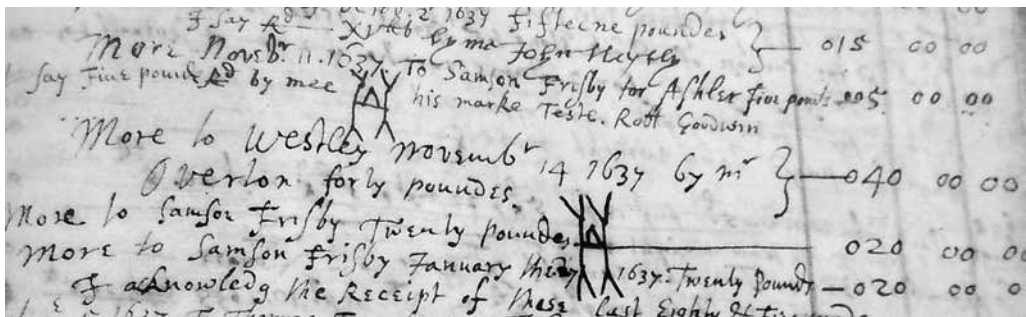


Fig. 1

The mark of Sampson Frisby in the building accounts of Clare College (formerly Clare Hall) Cambridge, 11 November 1637. (Clare College Cambridge, AD/7/1/1/1, f.18)

By courtesy of The Master and Fellows of Clare College Cambridge

The 13hl mark is sufficiently unusual to be associated with an individual freestone mason, unlike many other masons' marks (an 'X' or a crossed 'W', for example), which are simple and ubiquitous, and recur over centuries in far-flung places. Furthermore, the occurrence of 13hl – as observed to the present date – is very limited, both geographically and temporally. It seems relatively safe to hypothesise, therefore, that the sites where 13hl has been found represent projects in the working life of a single mason. Until recently, it was assumed that this mason was destined to remain anonymous. At Clare College, however, 13hl was used in place of a signature to collect payments on four occasions in 1637-38 by a mason named in the accounts as 'Samson Frisby' or 'Frysby' (Fig. 1). Work to rebuild the College had commenced with fundraising and the purchase of materials in 1635.⁸ The east range, bridge and south range were erected under the supervision of John Westley, fulfilling the role of clerk-of-works or master-builder, between 1637 and 1642. The project was then disrupted by the Civil War.

Frisby 'signed' his mark to acknowledge receipt of £5 for ashlar on 11 November 1637, £20 for the same on 17 December 1637, £20 on 27 January 1637/8, £30 on 26 April 1638 (jointly with his associate Thomas Cumbrey or Combrey who was initially summoned by the college in February 1635/6) and £11 10s. on 11 September 1638.⁹ Many other entries in the accounts documented payments to Frisby, made either directly or through intermediaries, without being endorsed by his mark. The college continued to purchase stone from Frisby and Cumbrey until November 1642,¹⁰ and some of it – if not all – was evidently sized and shaped prior to delivery. For example, in April 1638 they were paid for windows and a water table; in June 1638 they contracted for battlements; in January 1639/40 for quoins, and in July 1640 for the plinth of the south range.¹¹ Additionally, on 12 September 1639 Frisby was paid 14s. for two new stone saws.¹²

Neither Frisby nor Cumbrey was employed as a mason on the building site in Cambridge. Masons who worked stone on site as part of the construction process included Thomas and William Grumbold, and their associate George Tomson or Thompson: these men were generally paid by the day for their labour, or for piece work.¹³ Most of the men whose involvement is documented at Clare College – whether suppliers of materials or workmen – were able to sign their names. Frisby's apparent illiteracy seems to have been relatively unusual for a man entering into expensive contracts with a client.¹⁴ This disadvantage might explain his partnership with Cumbrey, who always signed his name. Others who signed with a mark rather than a signature were the brickmaker William King, the smith James King, and the carpenter John Dunbar. Thomas Grumbold – who is likely to have been literate since he supplied a design ('draught') for the bridge at Clare College¹⁵ – signed with a 'TG' monogram which has never (or rather, not yet) been found in the form of a mason's mark on a building.¹⁶ Sampson Frisby's mark, perhaps significantly, was not a monogram of his own name. For historians, Frisby's illiteracy was fortuitous: had he signed or initialled his name, it is unlikely that he would ever have been identified with the mark 13hl.

Sampson's way of making his mark with a pen is identical to the way in which he cut it with a mason's tool, with the lines laid down in the same sequence. In each case he drew the two vertical lines of the side of the mark before he added the angled lines of the four 'V' shapes at the terminals. The inverted 'V' on the cross bar is uneven in

the pen version, and it exaggerates the greater thickness of one side of the ‘V’ seen also on the stone version. Drawing straight lines with a pen proved difficult for him, the thickness of the lines varies, as well as the pressure he exerted with the pen, and in one case Sampson had several tries before he got the line down.¹⁷ It is clear that he found holding the narrow pen less familiar than a mallet and chisel and the precision of the stone mark is lacking in the pen version.

The Clare accounts do not identify the quarry or quarries where Frisby and Cumbrey sourced their ashlar. When the pair could not receive their payments in person in Cambridge, bills were settled through intermediaries such as Captain Thomas Hatcher (c.1589-1677) of Careby in Lincolnshire, or taken out of the rent of men like Mr Mason of Collyweston, who may have been a college tenant.¹⁸ It has been assumed, logically, that Frisby and Cumbrey were sourcing stone from these areas.¹⁹ However, it would have been convenient to make payments through these men, especially Mr Mason of Collyweston, since Cumbrey lived in the adjacent village of Easton-on-the-Hill. By 1656 – and possibly as early as 1637 – Frisby was settled in nearby Wittering, just south of Easton-on-the-Hill on the Great North Road: Thomas Hatcher could have called to make payments *en route* to and from his home at Careby.

In fact it is very likely that Cumbrey and Frisby were quarrying in Ketton, just north of Collyweston, for in March 1637/8 Cumbrey entered into a contract to supply 200 tons of Ketton stone to the wardens of London Bridge at Bridge House, London, and made nine separate deliveries there between June 1638 and February 1638/9.²⁰ This was exactly contemporaneous with Cumbrey’s and Frisby’s deliveries of ashlar to Clare College, Cambridge. Strangely, the Clare accounts specify that relatively small quantities of freestone supplied by two other men, Richard Chamberlain and Thomas Frank, originated from Ketton.²¹ Unfortunately, the accounts are not entered systematically and the cost of the stone supplied by these men cannot be compared with that of stone supplied by Frisby and Cumbrey – on balance, they all appear to have been paid between 14s and 17s per ton. However, lack of consistency and specificity in the accounts does not rule out the possibility that Frisby and Cumbrey were also dealing in Ketton stone. The matter is of some interest because the very fine-grained oolitic limestone quarried in and around Ketton – despite being used at Jesus College in the late 15th century²² – was entering widespread use at this time, just as the use of shellier Kings Cliffe stone was in decline.²³ Indeed, Clare was one of the first Cambridge colleges to make extensive use of Ketton.

THE FAMILY BACKGROUND OF SAMPSON FRISBY

Although he was born in Weldon, Northamptonshire, in 1597, Sampson Frisby’s family roots can be traced to Kings Cliffe, seven miles to the north-east, where he appears to have begun his career in the workshop of his cousin, Thomas Thorpe. Once fully trained he joined a core group of between five and eight skilled freemasons, hereafter referred to as ‘Thorpe’s men’. Invariably connected by blood ties or marriage, these men worked together alongside a larger (fluctuating and less skilled) workforce.²⁴ Frisby probably remained in Kings Cliffe, as part of this workshop, until the late 1620s or early 1630s.

There were Frisbys in Kings Cliffe from the mid-16th century, if not earlier. A Thomas Frisby of Kings Cliffe drafted his will in 1532,²⁵ and in 1535/6 ‘William Frysbe’

– perhaps Thomas’s son – supplied Kings Cliffe stone for Hengrave Hall in Suffolk.²⁶ This was probably the same ‘William ffrysbie’ of Kings Cliffe who drew up his will on 23 July 1558: surprisingly, on the very same day that Thomas Thorpe, another local freemason, drafted his will.²⁷ These two men must have been colleagues, and were connected by marriage. Frisby’s daughter Elizabeth had married Thorpe’s son Thomas (ie: the man referred to on the Thorpe family monument in Kings Cliffe church as Thomas Thorpe *pater*, who inherited his father’s tools and, following his mother’s death, his house). In his will, Frisby made Thomas Thorpe *pater* – his son-in-law – responsible for disbursements to his younger sons and issued bequests to his grandchildren Joan Thorpe (a ewe and a lamb) and Agnes Thorpe (fittingly, a lamb). Their brother Henry and half-brothers John and Thomas had not yet been born, or they would surely also have received bequests.

Like Thorpe, William Frisby owned property in Kings Cliffe. He seems to have been a man of substance, leaving two houses, with land and meadows attached, to his wife, Joan, for life, and thereafter to his son, another William. Just as Thomas Thorpe *pater* followed the same career as his father, Thomas, so William Frisby followed the footsteps of his own father, William. Just two years after his father’s death, in 1560-61, ‘William Frisbie’ was paid for supplying thirty-two tons of Weldon freestone for Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge.²⁸ Despite William’s developing an interest in Weldon quarries, and possibly moving his family to Weldon around this time, he continued to work with the Thorpes. In 1593/4, William Frisby supplied Robert Grumbold with one ton of Kings Cliffe stone for the steeple of Great St Mary’s in Cambridge, sending it ‘by his kinsman Thomas Thorpe quarry man’, and additionally, worked as a mason on the site during the summer of 1594.²⁹ William Frisby was buried in Weldon in 1599, but his son Humphrey evidently returned to Kings Cliffe in the early years of the 17th century to work with the Thorpes.³⁰

Humphrey Frisby, then described as ‘of Kings Cliffe’, was buried on 20 January 1624/5. He had three (surviving) sons: Humphrey, Sampson and John, and one daughter, Bridgit.³¹ The eldest son, Humphrey (deceased by 1648), is the best-known member of the Frisby clan. Like Sampson, he was a mason, but unlike Sampson he returned to Weldon. He married Elizabeth Grumbold in 1619 and built his own small but idiosyncratic house (now known as Haunt Hill House) close to the Weldon quarries. This was the subject of an article by Howard Colvin in 1961.³² The house displays the coat of arms of the Masons’ Company with the initials ‘HF’ and date 1643. In addition, a mark in the form of an ‘HF’ monogram (mark 9hf1) has been found in several places on the masonry. Humphrey also had a son named Humphrey (b.1624) – the third in line with that name to become a freemason. This Humphrey was documented as ‘of Great Weldon, freemason’ when he sold Haunt Hill House (‘new erected ... att the towne’s end by the quarries’) to William Jones of Gretton in 1657, and he seems to have been involved in 1664 with a dispute over the construction of the steeple of Ramsey (ie. St Thomas of Canterbury, west tower).³³ He in turn had a son Humphrey (b.1661).

THE WORKING LIFE OF SAMPSON FRISBY

The knowledge that the mark 13h1 was used by Sampson Frisby allows us to reconstruct the broad lines of his working life, spanning the years from c.1618 to 1656. Around 1618,

Humphrey Frisby and his sons Sampson and Humphrey appear to have been working alongside one another for their kinsman Thomas Thorpe in Kings Cliffe. It is thought that Thorpe's main quarry was on the southern edge of Kings Cliffe, on land held by the Mildmays, and subsequently the Fanes, of Apethorpe.³⁴ In fact he and his associates may have worked more than one quarry in and around Kings Cliffe. Maps and field-walking reveal the existence of several large workings on the Apethorpe road to the south-west, others close to the mill (owned by Thorpe's brother Henry) on the south side of the village, and a less obvious area to the west which is thought to have been the location of a quarry on the edge of Cliffe Park, opened for Sir William Cecil during the construction of Burghley House in the second half of the 16th century.³⁵ Thorpe's principal quarry was situated on land owned by Sir Francis Fane, from 1624 the 1st Earl of Westmorland. It had been operated by Thorpe's father, Thomas Thorpe *pater*, in the time of Sir Francis's father-in-law, Sir Anthony Mildmay, and this arrangement seems to have been perpetuated by the subsequent generation.³⁶ For a period of around seventy years, if not more, this quarry produced ashlar for numerous high-status architectural projects, not just locally, but as far afield as London and Norfolk.³⁷ Many of Thorpe's clients were closely connected to the Mildmay and Fane families.

Thomas Thorpe was at least thirty years older than Sampson Frisby and would have been in his early fifties around 1618. At this stage of his life, he probably invested more effort in the management of his thriving business than in cutting stone. This involved entering into discussions with customers or their representatives, arranging the transportation of stone by land, river and sea, and organising the collection of payments. Some of these tasks were assigned, at times, to dependable employees. Thorpe's men may also have been expected to supervise the quarrying and stone-cutting operations when Thorpe was absent. Occasionally, one of them was required to undertake the assemblage of particular architectural features on site, often assisted by his own 'man'. Over and above this activity, several early 17th-century estate maps in the region are signed 'Thomas Thorpe' (though they bear three distinct styles of signature, no doubt representing three different generations) and so some of Thorpe's men may have been skilled land surveyors as well as freemasons.

Thorpe died in 1626,³⁸ and so the 'younge Thorpe' or 'Mr Thorpe' who supplied stone for the 'Crosse' (ie: market house or guildhall) in Peterborough in 1627 must have been a son who had taken over the family business. Thorpe had four sons, Thomas, John, William and Henry, yet no further documentation associates them with the running of the quarry and masons' yard at Kings Cliffe after 1627. The business appears to have passed out of the hands of the Thorpe family, but the team of freemasons remained substantially intact under new leadership for a few more years.³⁹

The earliest work that can be attributed to Frisby is stonework for Sir Henry Hobart's house at Blickling (Fig. 2).⁴⁰ This included complex blocks of ashlar for friezes, doorways, windows and other features, showing that Frisby was already highly skilled and versatile. Given the distance of Blickling from the quarry, it is quite likely that Frisby never saw the building, just the component parts as they left the workshop in Kings Cliffe. When work on the Blickling project began, around 1618, Frisby would have been twenty-one years of age and may have recently completed a seven-year apprenticeship, probably with



Fig. 2

Frisby's mark (enhanced) on the stonework of Blickling Hall in Norfolk. He probably worked on this project for several years from c.1618

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Fig. 3

One of the two undated forecourt arches of Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire. Although the surface of the stone is eroded, this arch still displays a single clear instance of Frisby's mark, suggesting a date after c.1618, perhaps c.1630

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Thorpe. It is impossible to know when Frisby adopted 13h1 as his mark, but its absence on pre-1618 works by Thorpe (such as the porch of Hunstanton Hall, built in 1616), or indeed by any other known master mason in the area, suggests that it was awarded only once he was fully qualified. 13h1 may have been adopted as a variation on his father's mark; something considered below.

Frisby evidently engaged, at some point, in two projects involving additions to Northamptonshire houses which had been built originally in the late 16th century. One of these concerned the provision of forecourt arches at Kirby Hall (Fig. 3). Given the well-documented involvement of Thorpe *pater* at Kirby from *c.*1570 (for Sir Humphrey Stafford and, later, for Sir Christopher Hatton),⁴¹ it seems likely that his successors would have been awarded further contracts relating to the site. Rather than being part of the primary phase at Kirby, these arches are probably contemporary with alterations made in the 1630s to the north (entrance) front of the house, although historians often compare them with the monumental arches that flank the outer court of Holdenby, Northamptonshire, which are dated 1583.⁴² The occurrence of Frisby's mark strongly suggests a date after *c.*1618. Frisby's mark is also found on the window of the Oak Stairs passage at Deene Park. This feature is part of an addition, broadly dated to the first half of the 17th century by Heward and Taylor.⁴³ It might now be more precisely dated to after *c.*1618.

Frisby continued to work for Thorpe through the early-to-mid 1620s, cutting high quality stonework for the Mildmay Chapel in Apethorpe church (1621) (Fig. 4), for Sir Francis Fane's house at Apethorpe (1622-24) (Fig. 5), and also for Quenby Hall.⁴⁴ At Quenby, a clock on the porch turret on the west front is dated 1620 and two rainwater



Fig. 4

The arcade of the Mildmay Chapel in St Leonard's church, Apethorpe (1621)

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Fig. 5

The east range of Apethorpe Hall (now Apethorpe Palace), where architectural elements of 1622-24 were marked by Frisby

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heads bear the date 1621, but the house is often considered to be slightly later because the porch is inscribed '6 Charles I' (clearly retrospective, if accurately reported), ie. 1630-31, and because the historian Nichols, in a text published in 1800, stated that it was built in 1636.⁴⁵ It can therefore be broadly dated *c.*1620-36. Lilford Hall more clearly demonstrates that the Kings Cliffe workshop – regardless of who was now in charge – was still operative in the 1630s. Rebuilding is unlikely to have started before William Elmes inherited Lilford in 1632. The bulk of the stone was probably cut *c.*1632-35, and the design of the house displays several hallmarks of Thorpe's workshop. The doorways, for example, are very like those of Apethorpe, which bear Frisby's mark. While Lilford has very few visible marks, Frisby's mark can be clearly seen in the spandrels of a first-floor fire surround.

Sampson worked on at least one other church in the period of 1620-30, at St John the Baptist, Upton, near Peterborough, where he was one of a team of four masons engaged to rebuild the side aisle of the church as a mausoleum for Sir William Dove (d.1635) (Fig. 6). The north aisle was raised over a burial vault with access from the exterior, and the nave walls rebuilt to create a new double-gabled west façade, with a small gablet between to house the bells. On the interior the Romanesque chancel arch and two-bay arcade were given new arches and a balustrade was created to accommodate the steps into the raised aisle. The window tracery design is a form of simplified Gothic with round-headed lights under square heads and lacks the arched heads and cusping of Apethorpe's chapel of 1621. The date of the work is not recorded but the large monument to Sir William Dove that occupies most of the space of the aisle has been dated to *c.*1650-60 and it is assumed



Fig. 6

St John the Baptist, Upton, viewed from the south-west

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that the vault, and therefore rebuilding, was for him.⁴⁶ Sampson's mark is found on all the new stonework of the aisle, on the exterior arch into the burial vault, and on the interior on the voussoirs of arches and on the balustrade. He was very careful in the placing of his mark on the blocks of stone and centred it on the large panels of the balustrade corner posts and on their bases. His mark is on the window reveals and on the sill of the balustrade where again he placed it in clear view, choosing the chamfer rather than the top of the moulding where the mark might have been obscured by the placing of the balusters (Fig. 7).

A further building in the Northamptonshire area, Milton Hall, has two examples of Sampson's mark on the exterior stonework on the main north range that underwent a building campaign in 1628-33 in which the earlier façade was re-encased in ashlar. A number of different building stones were used including one type that closely resembles Kings Cliffe.⁴⁷



Fig. 7
Frisby's mark at St John the Baptist,
Upton
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Fig. 8
Clare College, Cambridge, for which Frisby supplied stone
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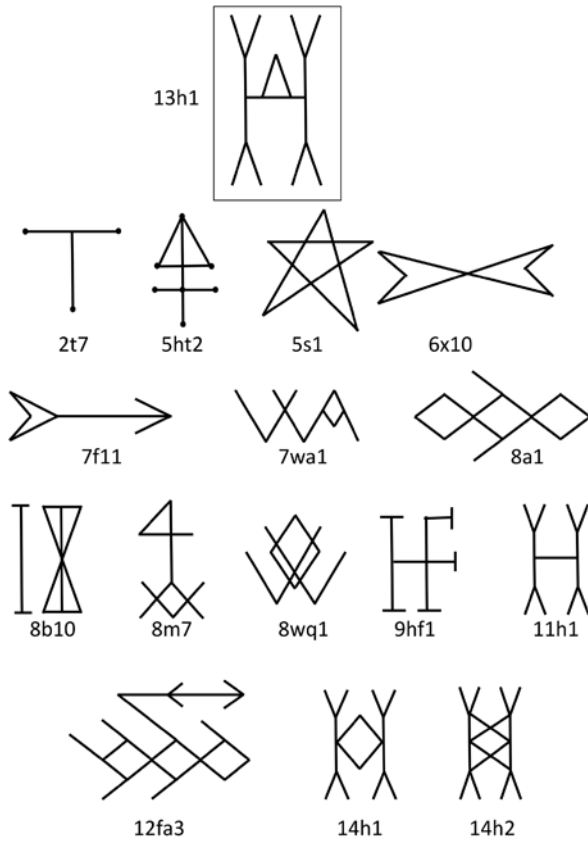


Fig. 9
Masons' marks of Sampson Frisby (13h1) and those of the masons with whom he worked in the 17th century, not to scale. The Apethorpe team not engaged with Frisby at the sites listed in Fig. 10 are omitted but may be found in Alexander and Morrison (2007)

Fig. 10
Masons' marks of the team that worked with Sampson Frisby by site, see also Fig. 9

Mark	Apethorpe Hall	Apethorpe Church	Blickling Hall	Quenby Hall	Thorpe Hall	Upton Church
13h1	√	√	√	√	√	√
2t7	√	√				
5ht2						√
5s1	√			√		
6x10		√			√	√
7f11			√			
7wa1		√	√			
8a1	√		√			√
8b10			√			
8m7			√			
8wq1			√			
9hf1			√			
11h1	√	√	√	√		
12fa3			√			
14h1		√				
14h2			√	√		

By 1637 – when he was first documented at Clare College, Cambridge (Fig. 8), and aged forty-one – Frisby must have parted company with the Kings Cliffe workshop and formed a new partnership with Thomas Cumbrey of Easton-on-the-Hill. Just as Thorpe had done in the 1610s and 1620s, these two men now entered into contracts with clients and took responsibility for delivering stone to sites. They would have employed their own small workforce of masons, possibly not on a permanent basis, but as required from job to job. They may even have taken their own apprentices, but these are unlikely to have included Frisby's sons, who were, as yet, probably, too young.

Up until this point, Sampson had worked with a number of associates as part of a flexible team of masons which varied in size according to the amount of work needed for the site. At Apethorpe, where the project involved cutting large amounts of walling stone and carved and moulded work for door and window frames, as well as the more complex work of the fireplaces, he was part of a large team of between eighty and ninety men. By contrast, the work at Blickling required a much smaller group of stonecutters since the mass walling material was brick, and he was among about twenty-five other masons, with many of them being Apethorpe men. As another brick building, Quenby did not need a large team cutting the stone for the window frames and other decorative elements, and Sampson was again one of about twenty-five men at work. In this case, the majority of the Quenby marks have not yet been recognised elsewhere and the masons may have been based at a quarry closer to the house, with Sampson, and the masons whose marks are 11h1 and 14h2, and who had also worked on preparing the stone for Blickling, being loaned to the project.⁴⁸ (Figs 9 and 10)

As mentioned above, Sampson Frisby's family home at the time of his death in 1656 was Wittering, a parish in the north-west corner of Northamptonshire. Initially from Weldon, although he later worked principally in Kings Cliffe, he probably settled in Wittering in the 1630s, perhaps as a result of his marriage. Wittering lay just five miles from Ketton in Rutland, where Frisby and Cumbrey seem to have sourced their stone in 1637-38 (see above). Whatever quarry he was working at this time, Frisby's business would have been disrupted by the Civil War, which certainly brought the work at Clare College, Cambridge, to a close in winter 1642/3. No evidence has come to light of work carried out by Frisby between 1642 and 1654, and he may have resorted primarily to farming due to a dearth of building commissions in this decade.

The Clare account book is not the only historical document to name Sampson Frisby, though it is the only document known to include his mark. In February 1653/4 'John Ashley and Sampson Frisbey of Ketton' were contracted to supply windows and an 'architrave moulding' for the construction of Thorpe Hall, at Longthorpe to the west of Peterborough (Fig. 11).⁴⁹ Thorpe Hall was designed by the London surveyor Peter Mills for Oliver St John, Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. Not all of the materials were new: St John is known to have obtained stone from the demolished Lady Chapel of Peterborough Cathedral, though the outer facings of the house and arched gateways are of well-cut fine-grain Ketton limestone.⁵⁰ The contract of 1654 concerned thirty-eight windows of Ketton stone, nineteen for the south front and nineteen for the north, made to the size and moulding specified by Mills.⁵¹ The number and approximate size of the small jamb blocks ('ppoint [sic] stones') on each floor were stipulated. The contract included



Fig. 11

Thorpe Hall, Peterborough. Sampson Frisby and John Ashley were contracted to supply windows and 'architrave moulding' for this house in 1653/4

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Fig. 12
One of two
rusticated arched
gateways at
Thorpe Hall
marked with
13h1: hunting for
masons' marks

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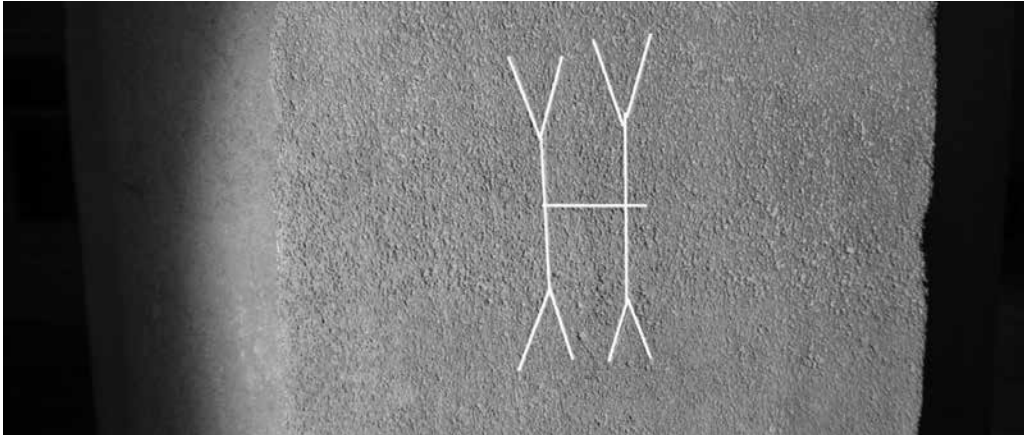


Fig. 13

The mason's mark 11h1, identified speculatively here as belonging to Humphrey Frisby (d.1624/5).

This example (enhanced) is from St Leonard's, Apethorpe

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the 'architrave moulding' running above the uppermost windows (actually between the window heads). £5 had been paid in advance of the contract; over and above this, the ground-floor and first-floor windows were to cost 40s. each, and those on the upper floor 35s. The architrave was costed by the foot, not consistently, but proportionately according to the 'rate and quality' of the windows. An advance of £30 was paid.

So, by 1654 Frisby was working with John Ashley – another mason who can be traced back to the Apethorpe workshop of the early 1620s⁵² – rather than Thomas Cumbrey, and was certainly supplying Ketton stone. This increases the likelihood that he and Cumbrey had delivered Ketton to Clare College in the 1630s. Ashley, like Cumbrey, may have become Frisby's partner partly due to his literacy.⁵³ Following the discovery of Frisby's mark in the Clare accounts, the ashlar facings of both Clare College and Thorpe Hall were examined, in the hope of finding 13h1.⁵⁴ Without scaffolding, only the lower part of the walls, and areas accessible from a limited number of window openings, could be studied at each site, using powerful torches, and so the results are not conclusive. The mark was not found at Clare College. At Thorpe Hall, however, several examples were found on two rusticated arched gateways set into the north perimeter wall flanking the entrance court (Fig. 12).

Sampson Frisby died shortly after Thorpe Hall was completed. His will, dated 13 August 1656, describes him as a freemason of Wittering in Northamptonshire, but makes it clear that Sampson was also a livestock farmer.⁵⁵ In this he followed in the footsteps of his great-grandfather William Frisby (see above): perhaps it was common for masons, or at least masons in the Frisby family, to combine masonry with livestock farming. This would certainly have given him something to fall back on when there was a dearth of new building work during the Civil War.

Frisby's bequests included ten ewes to his eldest son, Nicholas; a grey mare, a foal, twenty sheep and five cows to his son Thomas; a sorrel mare and ten sheep to his son

Humphrey, then aged under twenty-one. In addition, his daughter Alice was left ten sheep and five cows, while three other unmarried daughters, Mary, Rebecca and Sarah (the latter two then under eighteen) were each to receive ten sheep and one cow. A fifth daughter, Margaret, received 1s., and his widow Alice was left all remaining goods and chattels. Frisby was owed £11 by John Ashley, 20s. by Humphrey Frisby, and ‘due from the worke at Longthorp tenne pounds’. As was the case with the Clare accounts, the will was signed by Sampson’s mark. On 26 May 1658 probate was granted to Thomas Frisby, clarifying that Sampson’s wife (and executrix) Alice had also died. In her own will of 25 August 1657 she left an annuity to her eldest son, William Bickman, suggesting that Sampson had not been her first husband. Thomas – rather than the elder Nicholas – was named his mother’s executor, perhaps due to literacy or favouritism. Like Sampson, Alice signed her will with her mark.

SPECULATION ON THE IDENTITY OF 11h1

Finally, this study of Sampson Frisby and his mark, 13h1, has prompted speculation about another mark, 11h1 (Figs 9 and 13), which may have been used by Humphrey Frisby (d.1624/5). 11h1 assumes the form of a letter ‘H’ with forked terminals and a plain bar, but no triangle. It has been recorded on buildings spanning a long period – from Kirby Hall (1570 onwards) via Rothwell Market House, Drayton, Burghley (Roman Stairs), Blickling, Apethorpe and Quenby to Hunstanton – at least fifty-four years (c.1570-1624), which must have been about the maximum working life of any mason assuming the completion of an apprenticeship around the age of eighteen, and assistance in old age.

Rothwell excepted, this mark occurs on buildings associated with the Thorpe family – either Thomas Thorpe *pater* or his son, Thomas Thorpe – and it is tempting to attribute it to Sampson’s father, Humphrey Frisby senior, who died in Kings Cliffe in January 1625, signing his will on the day before his death with a shaky ‘H’ mark.⁵⁶ This interpretation certainly fits his age and lifespan, and makes sense of his son Sampson’s subsequent career with Thorpe. The anomaly of Rothwell can be explained by Frisby’s connections in Weldon – his father had moved there, and his own children, Sampson and Bridget, were born in Weldon – and so he may well have worked periodically for William Grumbold, Sir Thomas Tresham’s master mason at Rothwell. Furthermore, in the 1570s and 1580s Thorpe *pater* was working with Weldon stone at Kirby Hall.

In November 1623, ‘Old Frizbey’ (undoubtedly Humphrey, a year before his death) was paid 2s. a day, for eleven days (ie. £1 2s) cutting freestone at Hunstanton Hall.⁵⁷ ‘Frizbey’s man’ was paid 1s. 8d. (or 20d.) per day for 11 days (ie. 18s. 4d.). The preceding entry in Lady Alice Le Strange’s accounts details the purchase of freestone from Thomas Thorpe, probably the very stone carved on site by Frisby and his man – surely Sampson – who had presumably accompanied it in transit.

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Our principal acknowledgement is to Christopher Sealey, who first drew our attention to the occurrence of the mason’s mark 13h1 in the accounts of Clare College Cambridge. He made this discovery while researching for his MA thesis, ‘Sixteenth and Seventeenth

Century Stonemasons: a study of the Grumbolds and Frisbys', University of Warwick, March 2013. We are also grateful to Nick Hill, who examined Thorpe Hall with us following the discovery of the mark. Philip Ball at Thorpe Hall and the master of Clare College Cambridge kindly provided access to these sites.

NOTES

- 1 J.S.Alexander and K.A.Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall and the workshop of Thomas Thorpe, mason of King's Cliffe: A Study in Masons' Marks', *Architectural History*, 50, (2007), 59-94.
- 2 Ibid. The village name is variously spelled 'Kings Cliffe' and 'King's Cliffe'.
- 3 J.S.Alexander, 'Apethorpe Hall, the Evidence of the Masons' Marks', Report for English Heritage, (March 2006) (reprinted in: J.Cattell et al, 'Apethorpe Hill, Apethorpe, Northamptonshire: Survey, Research and Analysis', English Heritage Research Department Report Series, no. 86/2006, vol. 2 [of 2], Appendix 4); J.S.Alexander, 'Apethorpe Hall, Northamptonshire, Report on the Second Phase of Masons' Marks Recording', Report for English Heritage, (May 2007). These reports can be consulted in the Historic England Archive, Swindon.
- 4 Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall', 59-94.
- 5 Clare College, Cambridge, CCAD/7/1/1/1. This discovery was made by Christopher Sealey (see Acknowledgements).
- 6 For more about sites where Thorpe's workshop was (or may have been) active, see Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall'. For the Thorpe family see: J.Summers, 'John Thorpe and the Thorpes of Kingscliffe', *Architectural Review*, 106, (1949), 291-300 (revised and republished in J.Summers, *The Unromantic Castle and Other Essays*, (London,1990), 17-40.
- 7 For the evidence of the Kirby Hall masons' marks see: J.S.Alexander, 'Kirby Hall, Northants. The Evidence of the Masons' Marks', Report for English Heritage, (2012), 13-14. Sampson's mark is also found on a second site at Kirby Hall, on the lesser stair of the State Apartments from c.1580-1620. It seems likely, in view of the date, that this was a later repair to the doorframe on which it appears.
- 8 RCHME, *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Cambridge*, 2nd edn, (London,1988), 37-48. R.Willis and J.Willis Clark, *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge*, (Cambridge, 1988), (first pub.1886) (3 vols), 1, 76-120.
- 9 Clare College, Cambridge, ms. CCAD/7/1/1/1, fols 18-19.
- 10 The last payment is found in *ibid.* fol. 88.
- 11 *Ibid.* fols 19 and 75.
- 12 *Ibid.* fol. 26.
- 13 George Thompson, freemason, was contracted to replace a timber bridge at King's College with a masonry one in 1627, and was the mason in charge of building the new chapel at Peterhouse between 1628-32, Willis and Clark, I, 41 and 568-69. The Grumbold family of masons was engaged in building works at Clare and Trinity colleges during the seventeenth century.
- 14 On the question of literacy in early-modern England, see D.Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, (Cambridge, 1980). Mark Girouard draws attention to the evidence of masons owning books from their inclusion in wills, which argues for a growing access to literacy among some, at least of the wealthier, masons, M.Girouard, *Elizabethan Architecture: Its Rise and Fall, 1540-1640*, (New Haven and London, 2009), 46-47.
- 15 Clare College ms. op.cit, fol. 62.
- 16 *Ibid.* but note, George Thompson, mason, was sufficiently literate to write 'by me George Thompson' on a receipt of £23. The initials TG, joined by a bar, within the same line, for Thomas Grumbold with whom he had made the bargain, are most probably his cipher, fol.58. For a structural analysis of the Clare bridge, see J.Heyman and C.J.Padfield, 'Two Masonry Bridges: I. Clare College Bridge', *ICE Proceedings*, 52/3, (1972), 305-18.
- 17 Clare College ms. op.cit, fol. 19.
- 18 Collyweston slate was supplied to the college by Thomas Darby of Collyweston, Clare College ms. op.cit, fol.19. Others who gave payments to Frisby and Cumbrey included John Wright, Mr Godwin,

- Mr Langhan, (all fol.19), Mr Lord Secretary to the Earl of Exeter, (fol.75), and the mason Aristotle Drue (fols 75-76). Payments were also made from the rent of a Mr Traughton (fol.76, fol. 88).
- 19 Christopher Sealey, 'Sixteenth and Seventeenth century stonemasons; a study of the Grumbolds and Frisbys', unpublished MA thesis, Warwick University, 2013. Sampson's mark was recorded on a gate pier to Collyweston Manor in the 1960s, pers.comm. Alan McCormack.
 - 20 London Metropolitan Archives CLA/007/FN/04/028 (former reference Misc MSS/119/9).
 - 21 Clare College ms. op.cit, fols 36 and 18 respectively. The mason Thomas Frank died in Weldon in 1669 (Weldon parish register, burials, Northamptonshire Record Office).
 - 22 According to D.Purcell, *Cambridge Stone*, (London, 1967), 50.
 - 23 It is possible that Thorpe's quarry in Kings Cliffe was worked out in the mid-1630s, or ceased operations at the time of the Civil War, though Morton reported a quarry in Kings Cliffe still working in 1703: J.Morton, *The Natural History of Northampton*, (London, 1712), 124. This was probably a different quarry, on Cecil's land.
 - 24 At different times this group included members of the Ashley, Percival and Taylor families, as well as the Frisbys and Thorpes. This will be the subject of further study by the authors.
 - 25 According to 'Find My Past' catalogue, viewed in Northamptonshire Record Office. The relevant will required conservation and could not be produced. A poor microfilm copy appears to read 'Thomas Frisby of Raunds'.
 - 26 Transcription of building accounts of 1535/6 in J.Gage, *The History and Antiquities of Hengrave in Suffolk*, (London, 1822), 51-52, notably: 'Itm, pd to Wm. Frysbe for xl tonne of stonne at ijs the tonne, pd by Robert Watson iiii*li*'. Further entries reveal that the stone was sent from Kings Cliffe via 'Gowarde', presumably Gunwade Ferry outside Peterborough, then by land and water to either Brandon or Worlington, and on to the site.Purcell, *Stone*, 41.
 - 27 William Frisby's will: Northamptonshire Wills, 1st series, Q, fol.26. Thomas Thorpe's will: Northamptonshire Wills, 1st series, Q, fol.48. Another apparent coincidence concerns the probate dates: probate was granted for William Frisby's will on 26 October 1559, and for Thomas Thorpe's on 26 October 1558. Possibly one is an error and both were granted on the same day. The fact that the wills were written on the same day, but with different witnesses, suggests that they may have suffered an accident in the course of their work, or both become infected during an epidemic.
 - 28 Willis and Clark, 2, 566-67.
 - 29 British Library Cotton MS Faustina C.III, ff. 512-13; J.E.Foster, *Churchwardens' Accounts of St Mary the Great, Cambridge, from 1504 to 1635*, (Cambridge, 1905), 253-59, 263.
 - 30 Weldon parish registers, burials, Northamptonshire Record Office.
 - 31 Peterborough Liber D f.149 (Northamptonshire Record Office). Strangely, he left just 12d to each of his sons, suggesting estrangement, and all of his other goods to his wife Katherine (d.1630) and daughter Bridgit, who were his executors. His will was witnessed by his fellow mason William Ashley among others.
 - 32 H.M.Colvin, 'Haunt Hill House, Weldon', *Studies in Building History. Essays in Recognition of the Work of B.H. St. J. O'Neil*, (London, 1961), 223-28. See also N.Hill, 'Haunt Hill House, Weldon, Northamptonshire', Historic Building Report, March 2009: to be deposited in Northamptonshire Record Office.
 - 33 Northamptonshire Record Office FF2218. For Ramsey see TNA C 6/22/46. Pevsner dates the tower to 1672, from a date inscribed on the bell-frame, C.O'Brien and N.Pevsner, *Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough* (New Haven and London: 2014), 662-63.
 - 34 For Thorpe's workshop, see Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall', 63-64.
 - 35 Documentation relating to the building of Burghley begins in 1555 (E.Till, 'Facts and Conjecture – the Building of Burghley House: 1555-1587', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 4, (1997-98), 323-32). In that year Nicholas Smythe of Kings Cliffe received payments from the steward at Burghley to pay the workmen at 'Clyffe Pits'. In 1556 three men (John Uffington, William Butt and Thomas Stenysinge, possibly men more used to working in pits at Barnack) were loaned tools to undertake the quarrying at Clyffe Park. There is no indication of the location of this quarry on the Shute map of Cliffe Park of c.1592 (NB: Burghley had been completed by 1587). The quarry may have been the 20-acre stone pit close to the present-day sewage works on the west side of Kings Cliffe, surveyed in

- 1711 and mapped in 1806 (Till, 'Facts', 325). It might be concluded that the quarry was open for a short time during the building of Burghley House and that the quarrymen employed by Cecil were not involved with, or related to, Thorpe's or Frisby's teams of quarrymen and masons. This supports the theory that the interests of Thorpe and Frisby were focussed on the quarries to the south and south-west of the town, on Mildmay rather than Cecil land.
- 36 BL Cotton MS Faustina CIII, f.512, with respect to the stone supplied by Thorpe *pater* for the steeple of Great St Mary's, Cambridge, in 1593-94: 'quarrie at kings Cliffe afors belongeth to Mr milemaye Sonne & heire to Sir Walter milemay diseased'.
- 37 Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall', *passim*.
- 38 Summerson, *Unromantic Castle*, 27, citing: 'Admon. Thomas Thorpe sen., late of Kingscliffe, 6 April 1626'. DPR Peterborough Northants Admons 1595-1639, 163.
- 39 This is the subject of a forthcoming article by the authors.
- 40 For the Blickling building project see C.Stanley-Millson and J.Newman, 'Blickling Hall: The Building of a Jacobean Mansion', *Architectural History*, 29, (1986), 1-42. For the Blickling masons' marks see Alexander and Morrison 'Apethorpe Hall', 74-79.
- 41 Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall', 80. Recent dendrochronology has identified timbers felled in 1584 on the Great Stair at Kirby Hall. The Long Gallery to its north was roofed in c.1636 (ex inf. Cathy Tyres, Historic England).
- 42 J.Heward and R.T.Schadla-Hall, *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire*, (Swindon,1996), 253, and Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall', 93, n.75 (which dated the arches – probably wrongly – c.1590). Summerson, *Unromantic Castle*, associated Holdenby with Thomas Thorpe, (p.26), but the masons' marks on the arches do not match the profile of his workshop.
- 43 Heward and Taylor, *Northamptonshire*, 153-58.
- 44 For the masons' marks at Apethorpe Hall see Alexander and Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall', 64-71; for the Mildmay Chapel see 'Apethorpe Hall', 83-84.
- 45 A.Green and R.T.Schadla-Hall, 'The Building of Quenby Hall, Leicestershire – A Reassessment', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 74, (2000), 21-36; J.Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Leicestershire*, (np.1800), 1971, 294. It has been claimed that the masons' marks at Quenby relate to Hardwick Hall, Chastleton and Burghley (Green and Schadla-Hall 'Quenby', 26, citing Durant 'Quenby Hall', nd), but these relationships could not be identified by the present authors. Architecturally, Quenby is usually compared with Doddington, Lincolnshire, which unfortunately displays few marks.
- 46 N.Llewellyn, *Church Monuments in Post-Reformation England*, (Cambridge, 2000), 206. Sir William's father, Thomas, Bishop of Peterborough, had died in 1630 and his monument in the cathedral, which was destroyed in 1643, recorded that William had arranged for it to be built. S.Gunton, *The History of the Church of Peterburgh*, (London, 1686), 81-3. The siting of the monument at Upton is very close to the outside wall and it seems likely further monuments were intended to be added at a later date.
- 47 F(M) Misc Vol 163, nf (Northamptonshire Record Office).
- 48 Further research, beyond the scope of this study, is needed on buildings in the Leicestershire area to establish the extent of work by this group of masons.
- 49 BL Add MSS 25302, fol. 153, published with a commentary in: L.Gaches, 'Longthorpe Hall', *Fenland Notes and Queries*, 4, (1898), 270-73. See also H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 4th edn, (New Haven and London, 2008), 695-97, and H.M.Colvin, 'Thorpe Hall and its Architect', *Essays in English Architectural History*, (New Haven and London,1999), 158-78.
- 50 Gaches, 'Longthorpe', 272.
- 51 There are actually 20 windows per façade, nineteen with straightforward frames and a larger one within an aedicule on each façade; these two must have been the subject of a separate contract.
- 52 William and John Ashley will be the subjects of a forthcoming study by the authors.
- 53 John Ashley signed the parish registers of Kings Cliffe as churchwarden in 1637.
- 54 Christopher Sealey and Nick Hill helped the authors with these investigations.
- 55 TNA PROB/11/276.
- 56 Peterborough Liber D fol. 149 (Northamptonshire Record Office).
- 57 Norfolk Record Office LEST P7, fol. 115v.