

# SEELY and PAGET *Architects*

## Newsletter 1 – March 2022



John Seely and Paul Paget at work in their offices, 41 Cloth Fair.  
© The Templewood archive, digitally recoloured.

### **‘The Partners’**

Seely and Paget’s melding of traditional and new styles and materials was already becoming unfashionable at the time but was eclipsed by the modernity of the 1960s onwards. Their work is now being re-evaluated, including viewing them as early practitioners of conservation architecture.

From being close friends at Cambridge University around 1920, they lived and worked together until John Seely’s early death in 1963. Paul Paget later said ‘it was the marriage of two minds ... we became virtually one person.’

The partnership of John Seely (later 2nd Baron Mottistone) and Paul Paget, from the 1920s to the 1960s, was notable for their close personal relationship as well as for their buildings.

2026 will mark the centenary of their registered architectural partnership. English Heritage, Oxford Brookes University and other partners are working together to develop better awareness and appreciation of them and their work. This Newsletter aims to inform and interest more people about ‘The Partners’.

## The story so far...

In February 2020 a number of people met at the English Heritage offices in London who for various reasons were interested in the architectural partnership of John Seely and Paul Paget; the buildings they designed or altered and in them as people. This included members of their families and owners of 'their' buildings - English Heritage; Oxford Brookes University (who had together instigated the meeting); the National Trust, St. Paul's Cathedral; The Charterhouse, London. As well there were those from interested organisations: Historic England; The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Society; the Art Workers Guild and the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain. A number sent apologies including the Landmark Trust and the College of St. John, Windsor Castle.

All were agreed that interest in Seely and Paget was growing and their significance was increasingly recognised. The forthcoming centenary of the registration of their partnership in 1926 gave a target date to foster this interest, both at academic and general heritage levels. Various plans were made and people went away with tasks and ideas.

A month later came the pandemic....

In October 2021, Eddie Anderson kindly hosted another meeting at 'Templewood', Norfolk, one of Seely and Paget's most eclectic buildings. By then other things were moving: two postgraduate students, separately, were working on Seely and Paget's buildings, one being Esmé who has contributed to this Newsletter. A number of the practice's former staff were in touch, including Tony New who has shared pages from his personal memoirs. A collection of pictures and photographs has come to light in the family of the late Peter Field Phillips (one is included below).

This Newsletter aims to keep people in touch who, for whatever reason, have an interest in Seely and Paget. Those who own or use buildings they designed or altered - as early proponents of conservation architecture they were sometimes unkindly known as 'Seal it and patch it'. Family members, as Eddie Anderson reflects in this Newsletter, or their wide circle of friends. Or those who just find them interesting. It is planned to develop a website which can be a focus for the many facets of their lives and work.

'Eltham Hall'  
Watercolour  
[family of Peter  
Field Phillips]  
© English Heritage

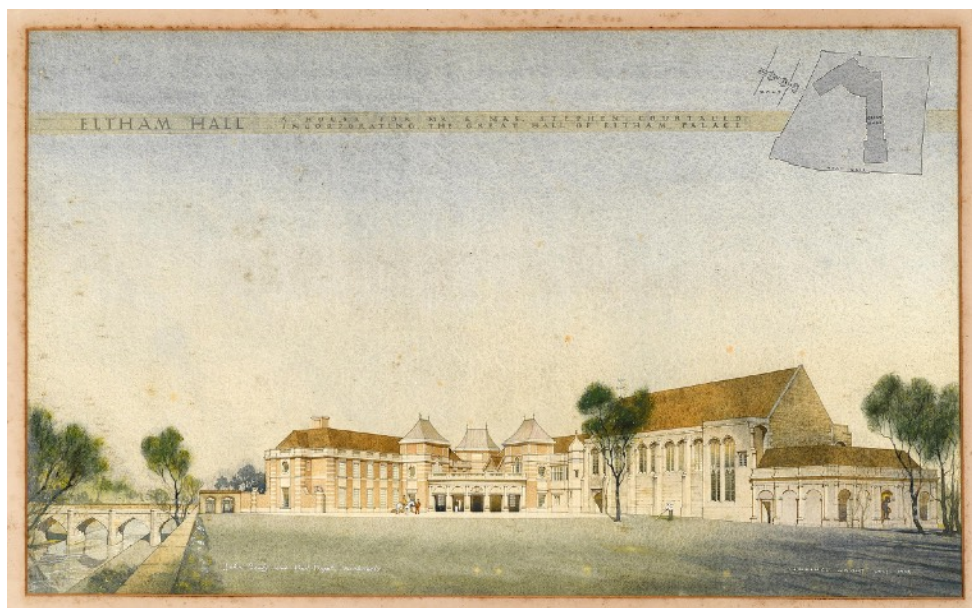






Photo © Esmé Coppock



41-42 Cloth Fair was the office of Seely & Paget from 1930. The 'oldest house in London' (c.1590), it survived the Great Fire of 1666. Threatened with demolition in 1930, it was bought and restored by 'the partners' as their home and office.

**41-42 Cloth Fair** is currently undergoing some considerable work in order to bring it in to the 21st century. The basement, all of which was constructed in the past thirty years, has been gutted and a new entrance put in, which has happily uncovered an original opening with wooden beam, complete with old nails: that has been oiled and is healthily holding up a considerable amount of wall.

Manholes have been uncovered and similarly left with covers exposed. Wherever possible, bits of masonry as well as sixties concrete supports have been left exposed. Our thinking is that given its history, there is no time when the interest stops. Of course, the original bits of house and first two hundred years are all protected and wanted to be seen but so too, I feel, is the work that has been done up to the modern time (unless it is thirty-year-old plasterboard).

The ground floor is being returned to something more like the original layout as is the master bedroom which was opened up into one room rather than the two rooms of Seely and Pagets' time and before. This house, though big, did not suit such a room that was long and thin and rather pointless. The floor was stripped of its carpet and boarding, back to the wooden floorboards, of which we were able to keep about half of the total space (the rest had been taken up before). We uncovered some wallpaper and have framed a small window on to this - we have been told that it probably does not go back much further than the Sixties but, still...)

Though this is taking considerable time to do given the small team that we have wanted to work on it as we still live here, the house feels as if it has settled somewhat. I have used as a metaphor the idea of a game of Tetris with many shapes not having fitted together rendering the whole game patchy. It now feels as if the house is fitting together well and is able to be a house and not a museum but at the same time able to be enjoyed in its historical context.

'The Caretaker'

## ‘EDDIE AND PAUL’

When John Seely died on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1963, six weeks after a cancer diagnosis, Paul Paget, his business partner and beloved life partner for 40 years, was deeply shocked. Even so he continued running the thriving architectural business, closely supported by devoted company staff.

But other events affected his life. His aunt Lady Maud Hoare had died three weeks earlier, leaving Paul the entire Templewood Estate in North Norfolk. Templewood house was one of the last of Seely and Paget’s pre-war contracts, completed in 1938 for Paul’s uncle, the prominent diplomat and Conservative politician Sir Samuel Hoare.

Paul also had to complete the handover to the National Trust of the Seely family estate on the Isle of Wight, which had been hurriedly agreed shortly before John Seely’s death.



It was during one of Paul’s frequent trips to Templewood around 1967 that he met his neighbour, my mother the author Verily Anderson, a widow since 1957 with five adult children and already several grandchildren. They very quickly “hit it off” (his words) and over the next couple of years he became a regular and supportive “stepfather in waiting” until on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1971 Paul and Verily married in St Bart’s church opposite 41/42 Cloth Fair. He was 70 years old and she 56.

In 1973 he arranged to sell the Cloth Fair property to the Landmark Trust, and wound up many responsibilities he had established during forty years in the City. Leaving London was a huge shift in his life, which he managed with great enthusiasm and jollity. The best part - for him and us - was his joyful position as step grandfather to his new family including 16 step grandchildren.

Paul showed a kind-hearted willingness to share his highly privileged lifestyle with our boisterous creative bunch.



During this period I got to know Paul very well as a stepfather. It was probably at this time he hoped that I would eventually take care of Templewood, though I did not then know this. He told me many stories of his earlier family life, his friends and career and frequently talked of his special relationship with John Seely. They met at Cambridge, finding much in common, not least that both had elder brothers killed in the Great War. Paul maintained a close connection with the Seely family for the rest of his life.

On 13<sup>th</sup> August 1985, Paul died in his bed at Templewood. He was 84 years old. My youngest sister and I were at his side, as our family had been throughout his happy and jolly marriage to Verily.

My family now live at Templewood where we are surrounded by many reminders of his personal life, his early photograph albums recording life as the son of an Anglican Bishop, school at Winchester College, boxes of papers from the Seely & Paget business, diaries, and his attempt to write an autobiography.

All of this, including a short film I made of him describing the ceiling fresco of his “imagined life”, painted by Brian Thomas, reveals that from an early age he was an outgoing, fun-loving man with endless charm and generosity.

*Eddie Anderson*  
*Templewood 02/02/2022*



The saloon ceiling  
Templewood

## Mottistone and the Seelys

John Seely's father, General Jack Seely, was a soldier who served with distinction in the Boer War and World War 1. He was also a politician and had inherited a substantial family estate in the Isle of Wight. In the early 1920s, like many landed families, he had to make economies, so sold the large house at Brooke, on the island's south-west coast, and moved to a smaller property nearby, Mottistone Manor. In 1933 he was created Baron Mottistone: which John Seely inherited, with the house and lands, on his father's death in 1947.



John Seely, 2nd Baron Mottistone, and Paul Paget, in coronation robes, June 1953.

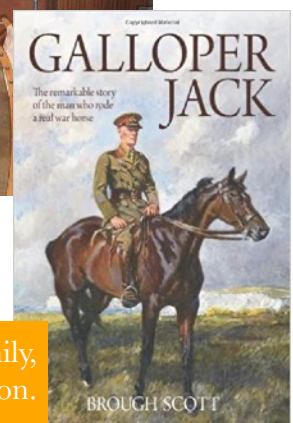
Photo

©Templewood Archive

Mottistone Manor had been devastated by a landslip in the 'Great Storm' of 1703, and been used as farm buildings for 200 years. John Seely had recently graduated from Cambridge as an architect, so General Jack asked his son to restore it. This was 'the partners' first project. On John Seely's death in 1963, the Manor and estate was gifted to the National Trust.



*In the 1930s 'the partners' wanted a retreat they could escape to together, so designed and had built 'the shack', a small cabin equipped with bunks and desks.. This is now located in the grounds of Mottistone Manor*



Read more about General Jack Seely, his life and family, written by Brough Scott, 'Galloper Jack's' grandson.



**Hello!** to fellow Seely and Paget enthusiasts (and those who soon will be).

My name is Esmé, I'm currently an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh, reading Architectural History and Heritage. For my fourth year dissertation I set myself the challenge of writing about the work of Seely and Paget, after discovering the apparent lack of literature on them. I heard about their work during the church re-ordering of St Mary's, Maidenhead and came across them again in my third year when their church, St George & St. Andrew, Stevenage (the largest Church of England parish church built since World War 2), made a brief appearance in a lecture. Since then my research has taken me to Templewood, Norfolk; where Eddie Anderson very kindly hosted myself and others for a day; to the London Metropolitan Archives, which has various project files, and to the RIBA archives at Portland Street and the V&A; which alongside the project photographs are a couple of voluminous scrapbooks like those at Templewood.

I set out, initially, to write a dissertation on their post-1945 work focusing on their church architecture, as this was the area I was most familiar with. Over the course of

my research gathering however, I am now looking to take on a broader view of their work, looking thematically at several projects focusing particularly on their conservation work and use of modern materials, aiming to understand what their concept of modernity was. I want to better understand their approach to architecture (their design philosophy if you will) in order to approach the variety of aesthetics within their back catalogue with more discernment. I also, somewhat ambitiously, hope to provide a rudimentary introduction to them as people and as a practice, which others can improve upon.

I shall leave you with this extract which I found. It was written by Seely and Paget as part of an article on 'Good Taste' for The Charrilock Magazine in 1927, I feel it can also be applied to their approach to architecture and design philosophy:

'A recipe for good taste, to borrow a metaphor from the kitchen, might read as follows: "one part natural artistic sense add three parts of education in art, flavour with appreciation of the past and spice with enthusiasm for the present." The mixture will depend for its quality and richness on the first two ingredients - the other two will supply a flavour to suit the individual palate.'



St Mary's Maidenhead  
Reordering by Communion Architects,  
Hereford  
Photo © Communion Architects

**NEXT ISSUE...**

In the September 2022 Newsletter we plan to bring:

- A collection of paintings and photographs of Seely and Paget projects which has recently come to light.
- More on Brian Thomas - the architects' artist

All contributions to this Newsletter will be very welcome!



Oxford Brookes University's Harcourt Hill campus was formerly Westminster College; designed by Seely & Paget 1955-60. It was one of their last, and largest, projects. A Methodist teacher training college, it moved from London in 1959.



Commemorative T-square presented to Paul Paget with the names of current and former staff, 1969.

*For further information or to get involved contact*

Dr. Andrew Hann, Properties Historians' Team Leader

English Heritage, 100 Wood Street, London EC2V 7AN

Tel - +44 (0)20 7973 3560, email – [Andrew.Hann@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:Andrew.Hann@english-heritage.org.uk)

Dr. Peter Forsaith/Tom Dobson

Oxford Brookes University, Harcourt Hill, Oxford OX2 9AT

Tel - +44 (0)1865 488319, email – [admin.ocmch@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:admin.ocmch@brookes.ac.uk)