

## Newsletter 2 – September 2022



Photo: collection of the family of Peter Field Phillips, image © English Heritage.

Seely and Paget were closely involved with the building of the King George VI chapel at Windsor, where H.M. The Queen will be buried alongside her parents and the Duke of Edinburgh.

A fuller article will appear in the March 2023 Newsletter.

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The architectural partnership of John Seely and Paul Paget, from the 1920s to 1960s, was one of the more notable of its time, blending 'an appreciation of the past' with 'an enthusiasm for the present', as they put it. Their most noted building is Eltham Palace (1936), now English Heritage. Many of their commissions were for churches, including St. George's, Stevenage (1960), the largest Church of England parish church built since 1945. Its concrete catenary arches typified much of their work.

They were perhaps at their best as conservation architects, restoring bomb-damaged buildings in London, such as All Hallows-by-the-Tower. As 'Surveyors to the Fabric' for St. Paul's Cathedral, they undertook the first cleaning in the early 1960s.

They were also personal partners: a 'marriage of two minds', as Paul Paget put it. Meeting as undergraduates at Cambridge in 1919 they became inseparable, in business and home. From wealthy and well-connected backgrounds (John Seely became 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Mottistone), many of their commissions came through social or family contacts. The home they shared was also their office and they lived in style: 'we always had a good cook and a good servant'.

The centenary of the 1926 inception of their partnership presents the opportunity to raise awareness and appreciation of them and their buildings.



**‘The Sailor’s Homecoming’**

The artist Brian Thomas (1912-1989) worked with Seely and Paget on a number their projects including the ceiling of St. Nicholas, Poplar (originally in Lambeth Palace chapel); altarpiece at All Hallows-by-the-Tower, windows at Westminster Abbey and St. Andrew & St. George, Stevenage. He also painted the allegorical ceiling mural at Templewood (see *Newsletter 1*).

A side window of 43 Cloth Fair (which they owned) overlooked Seely and Paget’s dining room, so it was bricked up and Brian Thomas painted ‘The Sailor’s Homecoming’ (on a zinc panel) for the space.

Recently The Landmark Trust, which now owns the building, had it taken down, cleaned, and replaced behind new glazing.

*‘The Caretaker’*

After new glazing, ready for re-mounting.

Condition before restoration

New framework in the window space.



*Stay at 43 or 45 Cloth Fair with The Landmark Trust*  
[www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)

*These plain Georgian houses over shops are opposite the churchyard of St. Bartholomew the Great. They were sold to us by the late Paul Paget, who had rescued them many years before with No. 41, the only remaining house in the City built before the Great Fire of 1666.*

## Artists' impressions and photos come to light.

Peter Field Phillips was one of Seely and Paget's senior architects, who became a partner in the practice following the death of John Seely, Lord Mottistone, in January 1963. After Paul Paget retired to Norfolk in 1970, he set up an office in Cromer.

When the offices in Cloth Fair were vacated, Paul Paget took much of what had accumulated over the years with him to 'Templewood'. However, not everything could be cleared and numbers of pictures and photographs were left. Peter Field Phillips took many of these, which were eventually distributed among his family after his death in 2019. He also passed on to his family many of the plans, photographs and ephemera associated with the Cromer office.

Following a chance reading of a letter about the cost of building Eltham Palace in the English Heritage members' magazine, one of Peter Field Phillips's daughters contacted English Heritage, writing:

I do remember clearly visiting Cloth Fair in the 60's and going with my father on site visits which were always fun and usually accompanied by a stern warning "Don't tell your Mother"... my Father was always very proud of the work he did whilst with the partnership. He worked with them from around 1955 until they disbanded sometime in the early 70's.

The collection kept by his family includes at least seven watercolour artist's impressions of projects, some by Lawrence Wright and others by John Stammers. There are some plans and elevation drawings, mostly of projects from the 1960s and 70s [the official repository for Seely and Paget's drawings is the R.I.B.A. Archive] and a large collection of photographs of completed projects, and projects in progress. This includes a book of photographs showing restoration work at Windsor Castle (St Georges Chapel and houses in the Cloisters).



*All Hallows by the Tower, ruined and restored. H.M. Queen Mary was shown the ruined north aisle in 1946 by the vicar, Rev. 'Tubby' Clayton.*

Collection of the family of Peter Field Phillips, images © English Heritage.

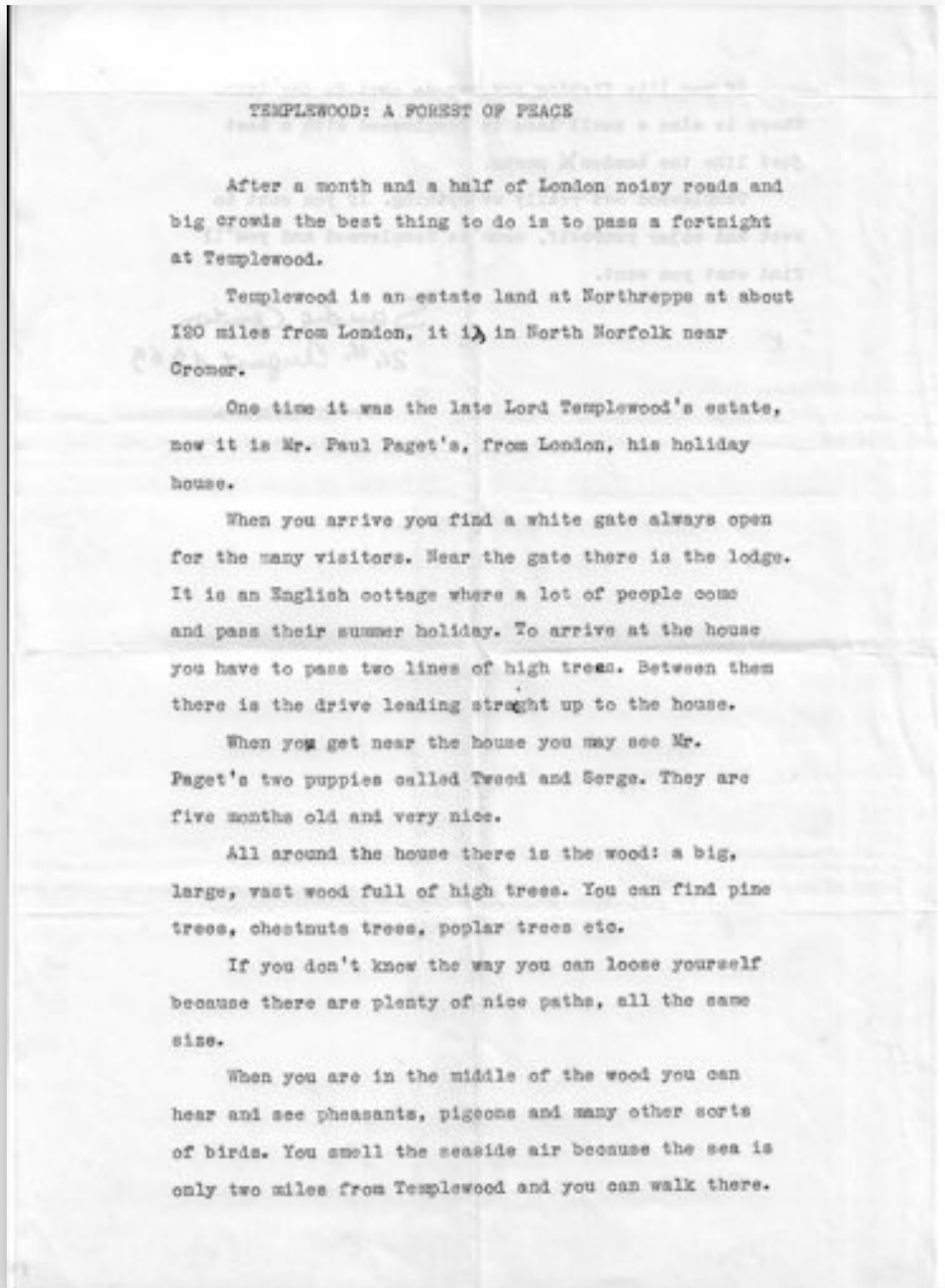


### ... the summer of '69...

Sandra Cendon's parents, Irene and Giovanni, left Italy to find work in England in 1949. Between 1955-1960 they worked at 41 Cloth Fair, as cook and general handyman. For health reasons they returned to Italy in 1960. Sandra remembers growing up at Cloth Fair, and the kindness of 'the partners', who remembered her birthdays and always remained in touch. She writes:

Both Lord Mottistone and Mr. Paget were great people, hearty, kind, friendly, openhanded and unselfish.

In 1969 Paul Paget invited them back to England: they stayed for 3 months in Cloth Fair, and then went to stay at Templewood, where she wrote this:



If you like fishing you can do that in the lake.  
There is also a small lake in Templewood with a boat  
just like the London X parks.  
Templewood has really everything. If you want to  
rest and enjoy yourself, come to Templewood and you'll  
find what you want.

Sandra Gordon  
24<sup>th</sup> August 1963



Templewood - the garden front

Faint, illegible text from the reverse side of the letter.

Sandra's memories of her time at Cloth Fair will follow in a future Newsletter.

## ACADEMIC NEWS

Two students have recently completed dissertations on Seely and Paget.

One, by Esmé Coppock, for an M.A. (Hons) in Architectural History and Heritage, at The University of Edinburgh is titled 'A Marriage of Two Minds: An Introduction to the Architecture and Lives of Seely and Paget.' This dissertation (which was awarded a First) sought to introduce the architecture of Seely and Paget in response to the lack of academic research to date, with the hope that it could act as a springboard for future research.

The other, by Joel Iseli, for an M.St. in Building History at the University of Cambridge, will be summarised in the March 2023 Newsletter.

### *Esmé summarises her dissertation:*

The first chapter introduced Seely and Paget as people, their acquaintance at the University of Cambridge, and an overview of their working lives. The second chapter identified a design philosophy for their work, in order to understand how they thought about architecture. In this, their work was summarised as, uniting an 'appreciation of the past' with an 'enthusiasm for the present'. They demonstrated a profound interest in both modern architecture and historical precedent, mingling of these spheres of influence in their work. They also took a pragmatic approach to architecture, prioritising planning and good quality construction, and tailored each project to its specific context, creating a visual medley of architectural designs. The third chapter considered some of their original creations and their approach to 'Modern' architecture. This chapter looked at buildings such as St Faith's, Lee-on-the-Solent (1933) which boldly used concrete parabolic arches for the interior design, a highly unusual design choice at the time. The final chapter looked at their work as architectural conservationists, an unpopular field when they started in the interwar years. However, their work on historic buildings, such as Mottistone Manor, Eltham Palace, and 41 Cloth Fair in the 1920s and 1930s, made them well-placed to take on the many of London's church restorations after 1945.



Both of the final chapters revealed how Seely and Paget situated themselves as leaders in their field, becoming early adopters of concrete construction in Britain and taking on the mantle of architectural conservation at a time when historical preservation remained unpopular. Their work can be described as a 'discourse on Modernity', a phrase borrowed from the architectural historian Sarah Williams Goldhagan, as their architecture reveals a close engagement with the developments within modern architecture, construction and societal culture during their lives.

In his obituary for Seely, Betjeman cited the Vitruvian principles – 'firmness, commodity and delight', and commented that the last of these qualities is too often sidelined but Seely had it in 'abundance'. From his joyful design for Templewood to the soaring elegance of the concrete arches at St George's, Stevenage, and from the twin baths at 41 Cloth Fair to the white stone facade of St Paul's Cathedral, Seely and Paget's designs bring a delight to those who know them. With hope, their legacy and role in the history of architecture will be more properly recognised and enjoyed.

*Congratulations to Esmé and best wishes for the future!*

*Peter Forsaith writes...*

With internal grant funding from Oxford Brookes University, I have been able to visit a number of Seely and Paget buildings. More importantly, I have made two trips to Norfolk to list the Seely and Paget records at Templewood and scan items, including typescripts of the autobiography which Paul Paget started to write and some of the partners' diaries.

Paul's autobiography really starts when he was aged 8 and, from rural Suffolk, his father moved to London to become Bishop of Stepney. Paul joined the Boy Scouts (then a very new movement), also went with his mother around junk shops looking for antique items. After school at Winchester College he went to Cambridge, where he gave more attention to the amateur dramatics than his studies, but through that met fellow student John Seely. Following chapters describe the few years after leaving Cambridge, to the early period of the Partnership and the move to Cloth Fair.

The diaries are informative of how 'the partners' lived, mingling social and business lives, lunching or dining with clients, often at clubs such as the Atheneum, or at Cloth Fair. On 2 June 1953 (Coronation Day) John Seely - by then Lord Mottistone - had to be at Tower Steps for 6.30am. The previous day is marked 'Go to bed at 9 p.m.! On Wednesday 3 June (following a 9.30am meeting) 'keep free to recover from Coronation'.

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Pictures of some locations visited: (clockwise from top)

- St. Faith's, Lee-on-the-Solent (1933)
  - St. George, Six Mile Bottom (1933)
  - Petersfield Festival Hall (1935)
  - St. John's, Tottenham (1939)
  - All Hallows by the Tower (1957)
  - St Nicholas and All Hallows, Poplar (1954)
  - St. Andrew and St. George, Stevenage (1960)
- (Photographs - © the author)*



## BULLETIN BOARD

9-18 September

Check what Seely and Paget buildings are open.

[www.heritageopendays.org.uk](http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk)



Also Open House, London 8-21 September

### News of Seely and Paget buildings

#### St. John's Tottenham (1939)

Great Cambridge Road, London N17 8LP



Significant extension and remodelling to provide housing and other facilities.

Architects - Molyneaux

<http://www.molyarch.co.uk/>

Contractors - Jerram Falkus Construction

[www.jerramfalkus.co.uk](http://www.jerramfalkus.co.uk)

#### St. Nicholas and All Hallows (1958)

Aberfeldy Street, Poplar, London E14 0PT

*This church has had an interesting history: built in 1955, it was closed in 1969 and became a vinyl record store. It reopened in 1998 and re-dedicated in 2000. The painted ceiling panels, originally in Lambeth Palace chapel, are by Brian Thomas.*

The Aberfeldy Street redevelopment plan may affect the church adversely, in preference for increased retail and residential facilities.



#### Petersfield Festival Hall (1934)

Heath Road, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU31 4EA

Proposed extensive renovation and remodelling.

[www.petersfield-tc.gov.uk/the-festival-hall-2/](http://www.petersfield-tc.gov.uk/the-festival-hall-2/)



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