



HERITAGE

Introduction

Perrott's Folly occupies an unusual position in Birmingham's topography. Built in 1758, the folly once stood dominant on Edgbaston's skyline, overlooking a vast park owned by the wealthy landowner John Perrott. Acting as a status symbol and place of escape, the folly would have been a source of fascination and intrigue for local inhabitants. However, as the parkland was increasingly consumed in the height of the industrial revolution the folly became dislocated from its original purpose; as a tower for seeing.

Now finding itself amongst Birmingham's sprawling urbanisation, the folly stands as an isolated relic of the 18th century in a city strewn with the architectural revisions gone by from Chamberlain to Madin.

Perrott's Folly is a shell - no interior objects remain in the building that indicate its various uses across its lifetime. However, this loss is bouyed by the comprehensive oral history that remains around the building and the spectacular views afforded across the city from its height.

A key aspect of the Folly's heritage is its relationship to prominent and important heritage figures that are important not only for how they used the building, but for the wider impact they had on both Birmingham and internationally.

John Perrott

(1702(?) - 1776)

Perrott's Folly was commissioned by the wealthy landowner John Perrott and was used as a viewing tower within his country estate; the old manorial Rotton Park. The Park was sold to Humphrey Perrott by

the Marrow family in 1628 had been used as a deer hunting park in the medieval period by the de Birmingham family. The boundaries of the park were likely to be Hagley Road, Ladywood Middleway, Dudley Road, Sandon Road, and Shireland Brook.¹ John Perrott inherited the land in 1737.²

Entertaining friends and peers from the tower, Perrott would have been able to show the extent of his wealth in an immediate way. Rising 30 meters high, the tower was not only used to see, but could also be seen widely. It is for this reason the tower is also referred to as the Monument.

There are a number of Romantic Stories as to why Perrott built the Tower:

1. To view his wife's grave in Belbroughton. Unfortunately Belbroughton is not visible from the tower as the Clent Hills block the sight line.
2. Perrott was very fond of a mistress, who had liaisons with other men in the village. Some believe Perrott used the tower to spy on her whereabouts.³
3. The third idea is that Perrott built the Tower for his young daughters to watch him hunt with his friends or to see the meet of the hounds at Smethwick.⁴

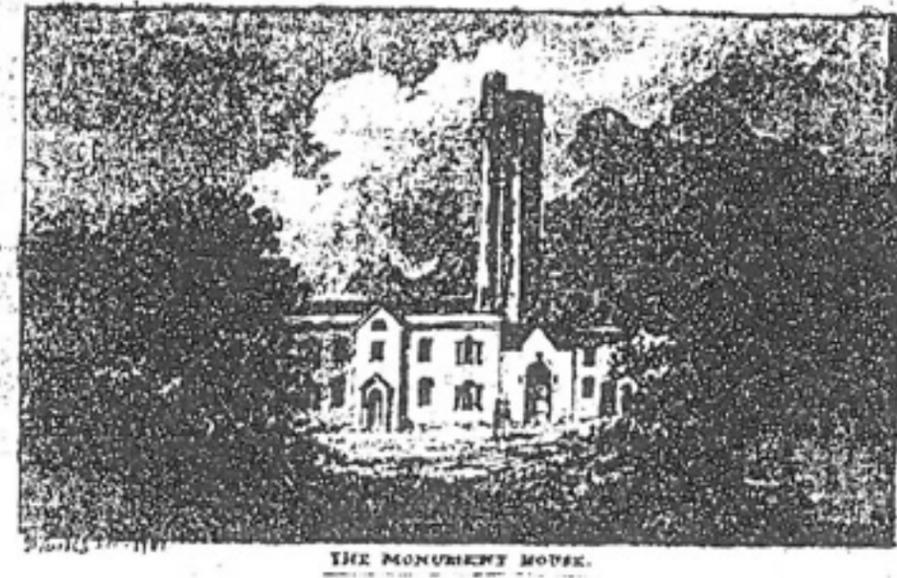
Whatever the premise, the Tower would have been a prominent status symbol, showing peers the extent of his wealth and tenants that he was always watching.

¹ Dargue, William. 2008.

² Chapwin, Philip. 1945-6. P127

³ I just wanted to drop you a quick line, my family history tells us that the tower was built by John Perrott to keep an eye on his daughter who would meet her lover (a local gypsy) in the woodland nearby. I'm not sure about the truth of this but it has been handed down for a few generations now, my grandfather told me that he was told by his grandfather. Perrott, Ronald. October 2014.

⁴ Chapwin, Philip. 1945-6. P128



The above House, and Observatory, commonly termed the Monument, is about two miles from Birmingham, on the right hand of the road leading to Hales Owen. It was built by John Perrott Esq^r of Bell Hall, co. Worcester, as an occasional residence: he died at this place 7th April 1776 aged 74, and was buried at Bellbroughton. It then came into the possession of his son-in-law, Walter Noel, Esq^r & at his death in 1794, to his son, Perrott Noel, Esq^r. The house has been considerably altered from the original appearance, represented above, and has been used some years as a Boarding School for young ladies. An apartment in the Observatory is neatly fitted up, & from the top is a most extensive panoramic view of the surrounding scenery.

D.P. A.R. 1811

Fig 1

Upon his death, the building passed down to his daughter Catherine into the Noel family via her husband Walter Noel, after whom Noel Road behind the Folly is named. The building and land continued to be past down through the Perrott-Noel Family until it was sold to the pen manufacturer Joseph Gillet for nearly £100,000 'an amount which caused a considerable sensation at the time'.⁵

Abraham Follett Osler (1808 - 1903)

In 1880 the Building was rented by Abraham Follet Osler to be used as a meteorological observatory in conjunction with the Birmingham and Midland Institute. The BMI brought the building outright in 1913.⁶ Abraham Follett Osler was a key, yet little-known Victorian Industrial figure who initiated significant developments in Birmingham in the fields of Glass and Meteorology; he embodied the city's motto of 'Forward'.

Osler was the son of the glass manufacturer Thomas Osler, who founded the family glass firm in 1807. Along with his brother Clarkson, Abraham Follett Osler built up the firm's portfolio from the Glass Toy Trade to Chandeliers and more complex glasswork that would be known as 'Brilliant Cut Glass'.⁷



Fig 2

A commission by the ruler of Egypt (Ibrahim Pacha) for a

5 Chapwin, Philip. 1945-6. P130
 6 Chapwin, Philip. 1945-6. P130
 7 It is believed his original foundry may have been on Oozles Square next to the Ikon Gallery, with Oozles being a mispronunciation of the word Osler. As relayed by Jonathan Watkins of the Ikon Gallery.

large-scale candelabrum to be placed at the tomb of Mohammed at Mecca attracted much publicity, including that of HRH Prince Albert. A second, larger candelabrum was exhibited at the Exhibition of Industrial Arts in Birmingham; the exhibition was opened by Prince Albert and a precursor to the Great Exhibition in London.⁸

Osler designed an intricate and large crystal fountain that stood in the centre of the exhibition space. The Fountain was said to be the most striking and admired by visitors, 'it is perhaps the most striking object in the exhibition; the lightness and beauty as well as the perfect novelty

of its design, have rendered it the theme of admiration with all visitors.⁹



Fig 3
 pressure-plate anemometer was almost immediately installed at Greenwich Observatory (1841), the Royal Exchange in London, Plymouth, Inverness and Liverpool, demonstrating the importance of

8 Fritz Fryer. 2013
 9 Fritz Fryer. 2013.

Osler also had a keen interest in meteorology and was a member of the Birmingham and Midland Institute (BMI). Osler designed the first self-recording pressure-plate anemometer and rain gauge in anticipation of the requirement of continuous records of atmospheric changes. Osler's



THE CRYSTAL PALACE - IV
 COLLECTORCARD
 Croydon C80 THW
 Osler's Crystal Fountain & Statuary
 (By permission of The Wheatland Safety Trust) C1199

his invention.

Osler's interests expanded beyond meteorology; he delivered lectures on chronometry at the Birmingham Philosophical Institution (1842), installed a standard clock and adjusted to Greenwich Mean Time after which other public clocks were adjusted similarly. He presented to the city of Birmingham a clock and bells to be placed in the clock tower of the newly built municipal buildings this is known as 'Big Brum'. Through the BMI Osler was linked with notable people such as Edward Elgar, Charles Dickens and influential Birmingham families such as Tangye, Kenrick, Martineau, Nettlefold, Chance and Cadbury.



In 1884 Osler came to Perrott's Folly and transformed it into a weather recording station for the Birmingham and Midland Institute. This use continued until the late 1970's.

Fig 5



Fig 6

J.R.R.Tolkien

(1892 - 1973)

There is much folklore that promotes Perrott's Folly and Edgbaston Waterworks as inspiration for places within the works of author J.R.R.Tolkien. Although there is not extant documents that confirm a relationship that we are aware of, it is known that Tolkien lived just round the corner from Perrott's Folly at 25 Stirling Road in his childhood with his aunt and younger brother and he was educated at Edgbaston Oratory up to the age of 18. It is reasonable to assume that Tolkien would have been familiar with the Folly as a prominent, working, building in his immediate vicinity. The presence of unusual scientific instruments on the roof is likely to have peaked his interests.



Fig 7

The Building Today

Between the building closing as a weather station and the building's present state, the building was run by a series of volunteers from within the local area and opened as a tourist attraction. A number of high events were held at the building, with a focus on J. R. R. Tolkien. In 2007/ 2008 the Ikon Gallery used the building as an off-site exhibition space. Artists of international standing including Jürgen Partenheimer, Sofia Hultén and Yukio Fujimoto produced a series of site-specific works. However, the Ikon was unable to sustain the funding required for the project and the building fell dormant.

A series of low-key arts-related events happened at the building until 2014, when the Arts and Architecture Collective Re.Future Collective secured funding to run Waterworks C.A.N. (Community Action Network). Waterworks C.A.N. was a Big Lottery Funded health and well-being programme based in and around the Waterworks Estate in Edgbaston. The aim of the project was to open up and connect underused resources for the local community, which included the Edgbaston Reservoir, the Edgbaston Park Rangers Lodge and Perrott's Folly. The community was asked for their 'workshop wishes', activities they would like to see run, attend or design on the afore-mentioned sites, so that these resources can be co-designed and better used.

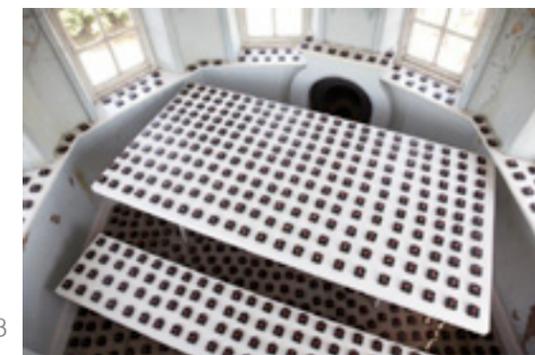


Fig 8