

THE DE CARLE FAMILY: STONEMASONS OF BURY ST EDMUNDS

by SYLVIA COLMAN

THE FOLLOWING TWO important notices appeared in the *Bury and Norwich Post* for 4 July 1792:

Bury, July 2nd. Thomas Singleton mason and carver begs leave to return his sincere thanks to all his friends for the long-continued favours he has received, and having disposed of his stock and premises to Messrs John and Robert de Carle of Norwich, humbly solicits his friends and customers to continue to them their favours and patronage

and

Norwich, July 2nd. John and Robert de Carle masons and carvers, having taken the stock and premises of Mr Thomas Singleton of Bury take this opportunity to express their most grateful thanks to their friends and the public for the liberal favours they have experienced, and hope, by an unremitting attention to the various branches of the business, both at Norwich and Bury to merit the future favours of the public in general. Chimney pieces, monuments, grave stones, etc., executed with neatness, accuracy and dispatch.

Thomas Singleton, who died in October 1792, less than four months after selling up his business to the de Carles, was the son of Robert Singleton, who had been highly regarded as a monumental mason. Thomas's monumental work was considered less fine than his father's, but he was closely involved in work on important buildings in Bury St Edmunds during the 1770s and 1780s, supervising Robert Adam's reconstruction of the Market Cross between 1774 and 1780, for which he carved the attractive exterior reliefs and panels (Figs 132–133), and producing decorative details for John Soane's extensions to the house in Guildhall Street belonging to James Oakes the banker. Both he and his son Charles, also a stonemason, were active in the affairs of the town and burgesses of the Common Council there. Charles died in 1791, and it was doubtless the absence of an heir to whom the business could be passed which led to the sale to the de Carles. Thomas's obituary notice, in the *Bury and Norwich Post* for 24 October 1792, ends with the charming tribute, 'Few men have passed through a long life of active business more distinguished for ingenuity and integrity'.

No account books or details of the Singleton business exist, but the de Carles, already well-established in Norwich, were clearly extending their scope by buying a proven going concern. During the next seventy years their own activities covered a wide range, from high-quality monumental and architectural work to the provision of gravestones, paving, troughs, doorsteps, sinks and grindstones. All transactions, however humble, were meticulously recorded, and those account books and wage books which survive help to build up a detailed picture of the time when the de Carle family were the dominant stonemasons both in Bury St Edmunds and in the region generally.

They had come to Bury, doubtless deliberately, at a propitious time. The growing emphasis on classical architecture and the accompanying changes in preferred building



FIGS. 132 and 133 – Masks of the tragic (*left*) and comic (*right*) Muses by Thomas Singleton, on the façade of the Market Cross at Bury St Edmunds.

materials had brought stone into greater prominence in East Anglia than at any time since the Middle Ages. The local aristocracy and gentry were deeply involved in the process, going on nationally, of modernising, enlarging or completely rebuilding their houses. The demand for stone doorcases, porticoes, cornices and columns, marble fireplace surrounds and flooring was unprecedented. At the same time, the trend towards the general improvement of town environments led to the introduction of street paving, for which tons of stone were required. But alongside the more prestigious aspects of their work was the perennial demand for more modest household requirements, and the secret of the de Carles' success lay, not only in their proven ability to execute the most demanding of specialist work, but also in their equal willingness to deal efficiently and promptly with all orders, however modest. Their initial undertaking to give 'unremitting attention to the various branches of the business' was admirably fulfilled.

Although the names of both John and Robert de Carle occur as purchasers from Thomas Singleton, it was John de Carle, assisted by several of his sons, who was from the outset responsible for the business in Bury St Edmunds. It is not even entirely clear who Robert was, for while it has been assumed that he was John's brother, he might equally well have been his father, who died in 1796. Whichever Robert it was, it seems that he remained in Norwich, to look after the business there, when John, with his numerous family, moved to Bury St Edmunds. Once established, they began to take on local workmen, though there were exchanges of skilled workers between Bury and Norwich in the early days. On 26 June 1799 they advertised in the *Bury and Norwich Post* for six masons: 'experienced workmen will meet with encouragement equal to their merit'. They also wanted an apprentice, and candidates were required to apply by post-paid letter.

John de Carle was born in Norwich in 1750 and trained as a monumental mason.¹ The quality of work of which he was capable is indicated by his entering into partnership in 1776 with the highly-talented monumental mason John Ivory, a member of the well-known Norwich family of builders and architects.² The partnership was created initially to run from 1 April 1776 to 31 December 1787, although in the event it continued for at least a further two years. For the payment of £50 John de Carle was deemed to own a half-share in the business. The precise keeping of accounts may well date from this time, for the signing of the agreement was followed by the making of a detailed inventory, headed in John de Carle's sprawling 18th-century hand: 'The following valuation is the stock of Mr Jno Ivory taken by himself and me Jno de Carle from March the 13th 1776 to March ye 20th 1776'. It is not surprising that it took them a week, for in this list every block of stone is measured and valued and the precise charges made for different types of work are set out. As monuments and ornamental work formed such a large part of John Ivory's business there was a great deal of marble, as well as a number of veneers for the more exotic marbling effects: statuary marble, vein marble slab and cubed, Dove marble, Sianna [*sic*] and Jasper marble, Jasper veneer, Brocato veneer, Antique veneer, Egyptian marble, Dark Vein French and Red French marble, black and yellow marble, black and white Cumberland marble, Derbyshire marble, Turkey veneer and black marble used for gravestones.

Since stone of all kinds was valuable and expensive to transport, there is evidence in this valuation for a great deal of re-use; gravestones in particular were recut and newly lettered after each subsequent death. Unfinished orders were also detailed, and the list of incidentals included 'Gibbs Large Folio Book of Architecture in the Counting Room', a glue pot and a 'piss pott'. The total value of John Ivory's stock, 'including utensils', was £343 18s. 2d. Interestingly, Gibbs's book passed to the de Carle family, with whom it remained for nearly ninety years, appearing in the list of effects sold up after Benjamin's death in 1864. The uttermost farthing was thereafter never omitted in the de Carle accounts. For the period of their partnership the proceeds of the work were scrupulously

13. 11th March 6 Days for including travelling - 1897. also went on with 500 Horses paid July 10th

L. Majestic Coy. (has the Heddingham)

Mr. Schlar engraving (243 letters) a Latin inscription for late Rev. C. Langton upon an old black Marble Grave stone in the middle aisle - Castle Heddingham Church. P.D. 1/2

Rev. Mr. Rainford, Middleton

Four Portland channelled air Stone
9" x 5 1/2" x 4" thick with six holes - each 6" outside

Mason & Labor fixing 2° in the basement of Dining Room 3/4 day -

Sixteen Chimney pieces, Portland masonry
Joints - Marble - Gray stone Plinths Caps & Shells

exclusive of fixing (agreed)
ft. 6 in Mason Labor fixing 2° - 3/4
7 - 0 of Suppl. top head to Portland steps back

Four entrance - 2 1/2" thick
8 - 4 Suppl. in two loads 1 1/2" thick

14 - 9 - Turn of Moulded Projects 6" x 6"
7 - 6 Suppl. plain with under edge of 2°
14 - 6 Turn of Ties of 1 1/2" - 6" x 3 1/2" including
Cramp holes - 1/2"

No. 11. Cramps & 2° of chimney piece -
Mason & Labor 1 day to 2° and
touch work -

allowance -
Scholar's Horse & Cart conveyed
them - for which I settled -

6.4
4" 6
4
3.7
3-10
7-
3-10
1-10
1-10
0-14

See measuring
chart

2 0 6
1 8
3 3
3 -

FIG. 134 - Part of a page from the de Carle order book for 1819, with sketches by Charles William de Carle (by permission of the Suffolk Record Office).

divided between Ivory and de Carle and they both signed some of the monuments produced after 1776, such as that of 1780 to Cyril Wyche in the church at Hockwold in Norfolk.

John de Carle married Alice Parkerson in the church of St Peter Parmentergate in Norwich in April 1773. They had one daughter, Ann Alice, and six sons, and the whole family, some of them still children, moved with their parents to Bury St Edmunds in 1792. Four of the sons, John Parkerson (the eldest), James, Charles William and Benjamin (the youngest), were trained as stonemasons and participated in the business centred on Bury St Edmunds. Thomas de Carle became a successful coach-builder, operating from premises at 8, 9 and 10 Sparhawk Street, Bury St Edmunds, just around the corner from his father. A stone block in the high brick wall in the yard of what is now the Priory Hotel still proclaims it the property of T. de Carle. It was he who was appointed his father's executor. Lancelot de Carle was also a coach-builder, at first in Norwich and later with premises in St Matthew's Street, Ipswich. John de Carle lived into his late seventies and died in 1828, being predeceased by his wife, his daughter and two sons, James and Charles William. John Parkerson died in 1829, a year after his father, and the business then devolved fully on Benjamin, who latterly had been signing receipts 'for Father and Self', as, at an earlier stage, Charles William had done also. Benjamin continued to run the business, taking William Plowman into partnership at a later stage, until just before his own death in 1864, at the age of seventy-six. Prior to this partnership there is no indication from the documents that anybody else was involved in the management of the business, which was tightly controlled by John de Carle up to the end of his life as essentially a family concern.

With the exception of John de Carle himself, who emerges as an autocratic and not entirely pleasant man, very sharp in his dealings, and to a lesser extent Benjamin, when he had taken charge of the business, it is not easy to form much idea of the character of the various other members of the family. Most of the information about them comes from the entries for baptisms, marriages and burials in the parish registers for St Mary's, Bury St Edmunds or from the records of inscriptions in the Abbey Burial Ground compiled by the Revd Francis Haslewood.³ Occasionally they appeared in the local press, and in this context we learn most about John Parkerson, who left the business early, perhaps after the end of the Haileybury College contract in 1809 (see below), and became a tenant farmer, first at Rushbrooke, where on 27 August 1813 he was named in the *Bury and Norwich Post* as a seller of 'lambs in very high condition'. He was selling lambs again on 28 August 1816, by which time he had moved to Beyton Green Farm, where he remained until his death. Entries in the same newspaper in 1811 and 1812 show that during the later years of the Napoleonic Wars he acted as Quartermaster to the Fourth Corps of the Loyal Suffolk Yeomanry. Less meritoriously, Benjamin in his bachelor youth was accused by a young lady of being the father of her illegitimate child.⁴ It is not clear whether he married her, although he married three times, and at least four of his young children were buried in the Great Churchyard. In November 1829 he made a rueful entry in the account book: 'Brother J.P. de Carle agrees to take my old Gig for £5. Brother T. de Carle valued it at £6 or £7'.⁵ This bargain was in preparation for John Parkerson's remarriage, in the same month, after being a widower for some years. The excitement proved too much for him, however, and he died several weeks later. In December 1829 his widow was charged 18s. 6d. for 'engraving inscription on ridge stone (48 letters) to his memory'. His son is mentioned by Benjamin as 'my nephew at Beyton'. There are references in the Beyton Vestry book (1834–94) to Joseph de Carle, a farmer and occupier of a house 'and above 100 acres of land' on Beyton Green.⁶

Charles William, who died in 1822 at the early age of thirty-nine, seems to have been, intellectually, the best endowed of the family. He was elected a member of the Common Council in 1820, and James Oakes recorded in his diary for 28 September 1824, 'Attended

a Corporation meeting called...to fill up the vacancies in the Common Council vacated by the deaths of Geo. Hubbard, Matt Otley and Chas. Wm. de Carle...'. It was Charles William who kept some of the later order books, entering each order in great detail in a very neat hand, often accompanied by tiny sketches, complete with measurements, of such items as fireplace surrounds and doorsteps (Fig. 134). He also signed the receipt for payment for the obelisk erected in 1817 to the memory of the Earl of Bristol in Ickworth Park, a significant commission.⁷ It seems certain that there was specialisation within the family, for John Parkerson and James are the only ones appearing as working masons. Benjamin specifically said, in a letter written just after his father's death, that he had been employed 'as a stone and *marble* mason for several years', engaged, like his father, in the production of mural monuments.⁸

The house which the de Carle family occupied as successors to Thomas Singleton was No. 5 Honey Hill, now known as 'St Denys', a timber-framed building whose complex medieval origins, exposed during extensive repairs in recent years, have been meticulously investigated by Philip Aitkens. From our point of view, however, its most interesting feature is its unique stone front: for while many houses had embellishments and details in stone at this period, no other house in the town was completely faced in stone (Fig. 135). The details, in particular the door surround (Fig. 136), are unusual, and it seems more likely to have been the work of the de Carles than of their predecessor Thomas Singleton, intended as a particularly visible indication of the quality of work they could produce. The working yards were to the back of the house and extended into Sparhawk Street, where a large



FIG. 135 – The stone-faced front of No. 5 Honey Hill, Bury St Edmunds, home of the de Carle family.

outbuilding behind No. 1 still bears evidence of its use as a stonemason's store. The high boundary walls on the east incorporate quantities of various stone off-cuts, and a small building on the corner of Honey Hill and Sparhawk Street, erected in the early 19th century on a previously empty site, has brick walling with the same admixture of random stone blocks.

Work was undertaken over a wide area and the more distant and important jobs usually required members of the family or their employees to stay away from home; for this, lodging allowances were paid, sometimes in advance, and transport provided. In 1798, when work was going on as part of the rebuilding of Chippenham Park in Cambridgeshire for John Tharp, there are entries for various payments to 'son James at Chippenham', while in 1799 he was working in Cambridge. During the building of Haileybury College for the East India Company between 1806 and 1809, John de Carle himself spent a good deal of time on site there. Within a few years of their arrival in Bury a yard was set up in Ipswich, with James de Carle in charge of it, and by 1814 at the latest there was also a yard at Ballingdon, just south of Sudbury, which made it easier to extend activities into the extreme south of Suffolk and into Essex. But an account book for the Ballingdon yard during the decade 1814–24 makes it clear that only quite small commissions, rarely costing more than £5, were undertaken there.⁹ Both it and the Ipswich yard took in stone in transit for Bury St Edmunds.

In 1792, when the Bury business was first set up, work organised from Norwich was going on at Culford Hall, near Bury, on behalf of 'the Noble Marquis Cornwallis', who was



FIG. 136 – No. 5 Honey Hill, Bury St Edmunds: detail of door surround.

making large-scale renovations to the old Tudor mansion; this was subsequently managed more conveniently from Bury. The final account, submitted in March 1794, was for just over £2,014. This was the first of a number of occasions when the de Carles were extensively employed on alterations to Culford Hall. They were there again in the autumn of 1807, constructing a new semi-circular portico (Fig. 137) to the plans of James Wyatt, the architect who designed two phases of improvements, and they were once more involved in 1824 when further alterations were undertaken by the new owner, Richard Benyon de Beauvoir.

The overall cost of this extended operation is typical of the sort of major work which the de Carles undertook during at least the next twenty years, when local landowners seemed to turn unquestioningly to them for high-quality embellishments or improvements to their properties. Their regular clients included the Herveys at Ickworth, where they were involved not only in the initial building of the Rotunda between 1797 and 1802, but also in the final completion of the house in 1829; the Duke of Norfolk, a sporadic resident at Fornham Park, built by James Wyatt in 1785, sold in 1845, and demolished a century later; Nathaniel Lee Acton, busy with his new great house in Livermere Park; and the Gages, at Hengrave Hall and at Coldham Hall, Stanningfield.¹⁰

It is illustrative also of the extent of successive building changes to great houses during the course of the 19th century that, if the house has not disappeared altogether, much of the work which the de Carles undertook has been lost in further alterations. This was certainly the case at Culford, to name only one. Monuments and gravestones were more likely to survive. As one example, the 'stone altar tomb similar to Mr Rackham's' ordered by the executors of Mr Thomas Cooke, still stands in good condition in the churchyard at Ixworth Thorpe,¹¹ and there are many others in churchyards throughout East Anglia. Interior monuments were even more likely to remain intact, while internal fittings such as fireplace surrounds often survived many changes: a search, aided by the information in the

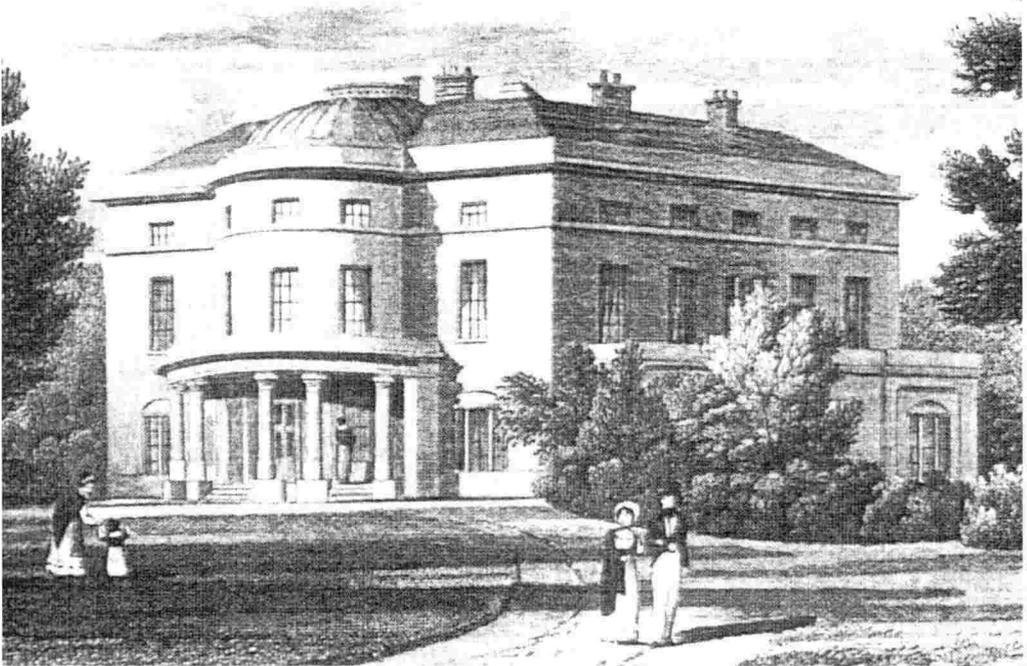


FIG. 137 – Culford Hall in 1823: the semi-circular portico built by the de Carles to the design of James Wyatt.

order books, might identify a number of them in Suffolk.

Commissions undertaken for illustrious clients were not always on a large scale. There are numerous entries for minor work also, such as repairs to paving and steps and the provision of small household items. 'His Royal Highness The Duke of York' was charged £1 16s. for a marble mortar in 1792, but this particular order, written with a flourish, did not lead on to greater things for a long time, and it is not even certain that the account was actually settled. When bills were paid the item was usually ticked off in the order book, but there is no tick against the Duke's marble mortar. Nor is there a tick against the bill for £4 13s. 8d. sent to the Earl of Bristol in the following year. In the main, however, accounts for large and small amounts were usually settled satisfactorily, at least until the difficult times of the 1830s.

A cash and wages book covering, with gaps, the period from 1776, when John de Carle was in partnership with John Ivory, to 1816,¹² is the principal source of information on the building work undertaken by the de Carles at Haileybury College for the East India Company, the largest single commission which they undertook. Haileybury College was intended by the East India Company to be a training-ground for future employees: a school where they would be taught oriental languages and other unusual subjects in preparation for careers in India. The architect chosen was the twenty-three-year-old William Wilkins, whose design in the Greek Revival style was described as 'a landmark in the history of English taste', marking the end of the Roman classicism of Robert Adam (Thomas 1987, 1–2). The whole concept was prestigious: landscaping by Humphry Repton, which included the planting of 320 young trees, was priced at £1,350.

The main emphasis of the plan was on buildings ranged around a quadrangle which would be 'the largest academic quadrangle in Europe' (Thomas 1987, 4). These buildings were simple in detail, with much use of brick, but the Terrace Front (Fig. 138) was to be given the full Classical treatment and faced in Portland stone. It was this front in particular



FIG. 138 – Haileybury College, Hertfordshire: the Terrace Front.

which occupied the de Carles.

Wilkins was at the start of a brilliant career, during which he designed many important public buildings, including the National Gallery in London. On a much smaller scale he was also responsible, in 1819, for the charming little Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds, of which his father subsequently became the lessee. He was Norwich born, and his choice of the de Carles to do a major part of the construction work on Haileybury is not surprising.

Work was continuous there from May 1806 to May 1809, with an escalation of activity during 1807 and again in the summer of 1808. As later at Ickworth, the de Carles seem to have been responsible for the provision of bricks as well as stonework. In the *Bury and Norwich Post* for 18 June 1806 a joint advertisement was issued by John de Carle, Bury, James de Carle, Ipswich and James Frost, Harwich: 'Wanted immediately, a number of BRICK-MAKERS; good hands may have constant employ and liberal wages...'. By mid-1807 the work-force they were employing doubled to a fairly constant dozen, some of whom may have been bricklayers rather than stonemasons. Few of the names which occur regularly for work in the Bury St Edmunds area appear in the Haileybury accounts, and it seems that a good deal of additional labour was taken on, particularly as other activities based on Bury continued unabated. Details of wages paid for the period 1806–09 are given in the account book for the period.¹³ Much of the work at Haileybury lay in sawing large quantities of stone, with rates of pay varying from 3d. to 6d. a foot according to skill. Both John Parkerson de Carle and his younger brother James were employed on sawing, earning the higher rate. Extra labour was taken on to unload further large amounts of stone in March 1808, by which time the wage entries include mention of chimney-pieces, architraves, the fluting of columns and the insertion of windows. The total wage bill for the whole three-year period came to £4,609 9s.

In the payment of wages the de Carles were as precise and meticulous as in all their other financial dealings, and we can be confident that no workman was ever over- or underpaid. In the wages book which begins in 1806 the workmen are named in weekly lists, and the same six or seven names recur for considerable periods, sometimes with a reference to where they had been working. Payment was reckoned by the day, which included quarter, half and three-quarter as well as full days. Six days made up the full week, and the frequent mention of six-and-half days suggests overtime payments for extra hours. The length of the working day is nowhere stated, but is likely to have varied between winter and summer. Daily wages ranged from 2s. 4d. for the humblest tasks to 4s. for the most important, though strictly speaking no task could be considered quite unskilled: even unloading the stone on its arrival required care and was most rigorously checked by the management. The consistency of employees' daily rates indicates a not surprising specialisation between workers, with the most skilled earning £1 or more per week. 'Wegg 6½ days, 2¼ at Rushbroke £1. 6. 6d.', 'Harding 6½ days, 3¼ at Culford 15/2 plus 2/- allowance', 'Head 6½ days, 3¼ at Mr Cullums 17/2 plus 1/6 allowance' are typical entries, and the last entry for each week was for a boy apprentice, who took home a regular 4s. Apart from a succession of boy apprentices, the work force at Bury remained the same year after year. Unsatisfactory workmen were dismissed promptly, however: 'Smart discharged for idleness' reads a terse entry of 1798. Nor was working as a stonemason without its hazards. The *Bury and Norwich Post* for 28 June 1826 reported that 'on Monday last Edward Airey, a stonemason in the employ of Mr de Carle of this town, who was at work at the Duke of Norfolk's house at Fornham, fell from a scaffold and so much injured as to render his recovery doubtful', and there must have been other accidents, major and minor.

The prestigious façade at Haileybury was built of Portland stone, one of several types of stone employed regularly by the de Carles. As the finest and most expensive of the oolitic

limestones, even in texture and colour, it was used sparingly and only for superior work (Clifton-Taylor 1977, 68–70). There was also considerable use of marble from the quarries at Purbeck, near Portland, for monumental work or fireplace surrounds. Veined marble, sometimes spelt 'vain' in the order books, was particularly popular for the latter, and survives round many 19th-century Suffolk fireplaces today.

Much larger quantities of oolitic limestone came from the quarries at Ketton in Northamptonshire, which enjoyed a long period of popularity in the Eastern Counties and was the major stone for building purposes, notably in Cambridge and for various great houses (Clifton-Taylor 1977, 81–82). If not used for whole façades, it was still employed for the porticoes, door and window surrounds and other detailing in many early-19th-century Bury buildings. In the humbler houses and terrace rows being built extensively by the local builder William Steggles in the early years of the 19th century, it was used, according to a note in the order book, for window-sills and door lintels. It is a fine-grained and evenly textured stone, and this, in addition to its accessibility, may well have been a pertinent reason for its widespread use. When a heavy raw material comes from a considerable distance, consistent quality is clearly a great advantage. The de Carles sometimes ordered Ketton stone in quantities of fifty or sixty tons at a time.

The other main material which the de Carles used was York stone, and in particular that from the Roche Abbey quarries. This was a magnesian limestone used principally for street paving and flights of steps, for both of which it was in considerable demand (Clifton-Taylor 1977, 94–95). There was also a steady demand for grindstones, which came ready prepared from granite quarries in the Newcastle area, while the Ballingdon yard took in the soft chalk-like stone called Clunch, principally from Burwell in Cambridgeshire (Clifton-Taylor 1977).

Not only had suppliers to be kept up to the mark; arranging transport was also a constant problem. Finished goods went by road but, apart from very small quantities of raw materials, which might be sent by wagon from London to the Ballingdon yards, or from Ipswich to Bury by 'son James', water transport by a variety of routes was used almost exclusively. Details of transport needed efficient organising, requiring a knowledge of dependable watermen, tides and the dates of regular sailings.

Portland stone and Purbeck marble were obtained through agents in Westminster and were shipped by them to King's Lynn, thence up the Great Ouse and the Lark for the Bury yard or to Harwich and up the Stour to Mistley for Ballingdon. Stone for Haileybury went from London by several minor rivers into Hertfordshire. Ketton stone was taken down the Welland to the Wash and across to King's Lynn; from there it went by barge to Bury by way of the Great Ouse and the Lark. York stone was shipped from Hull to Lynn and similarly by barge to Bury. Granite grindstones were sent from Newcastle, and a letter from John de Carle dated 12 March 1824 underlines the complications of obtaining goods from a distance.

To Mr Richard Kell of Newcastle: Sir, We want a few grindstones at Bury & a few at Ballingdon. Those for Bury may be consigned to Messrs Stockdale & Son at Lynn to be forwarded here by any of the Coal Barges – We are informed that there is but one regular trading Vessel from Newcastle to Lynn and that she is now at your port – the name is 'The Lively' – Captain Geo. Jary. If you should not be in time for her, we also understand that there are frequently Vessels from L to N that would convey them. Those Grindstones for Ballingdon Yard should be put on Board one of the Coal Vessels sailing directly to Mistley near Manningtree, Essex, and be consigned to Mr Allen to be forwarded by him in Coal Barges to Sudbury. No mistakes should be made in these last for if they are put into a Vessel sailing direct to Ipswich only they will cost more, but Mr Allen informs us that if

you enquire for a Coal Vessel sailing *direct for Mistleley* they will no doubt be glad to take them.

A postscript adds: 'Hope you will give orders to have them all good ones.'

In an enterprise which depended entirely on raw materials brought from elsewhere, both efficiency in the organising of supplies and economy in their use were essential to success. A letter book¹⁴ covering the years 1824 to 1838 contains copies of the above and other letters, mainly to suppliers of stone and transport, as well as a few to clients. The earlier entries seem all to have been written by John de Carle in his somewhat exacting and imperious tone, with the constant preoccupation with keeping down costs; 'let us have your lowest price' occurs regularly, with the consistent demand for supplies of the highest quality. Ordering '30 tons by way of a sample' from a Mr Buckworth at Ketton on 15 March 1824, John wrote, '...as we cannot charge our employers more than stone cost us last year we must not give you more than stone cost us last year Which as before stated to you was 50/- the ton for Block & 40/- for Ashlar'. A further stern letter was sent to Mr Buckworth on 1 June:

The Ashlers were by no means so fair (in size) as we expected – instead of from 2ft & upwards in length agreeable to our letter of last March 15th, they are chiefly from 13 to 10ins and not more than 8 stones are 2ft long out of 73 – the number we received & being 1 short of your Invoice. As to the blocks we are Four Short of your Invoice, but in quantity only about 1ft. We do not wish to take undue advantage of these deficiencies but in consequence of them have declined accepting the Draft which you (so prematurely) sent for our acceptance...

The amount of re-use of stone is at times astonishing, reflecting not only the reasonable care which the circumstances of supply dictated, but also a desire for as little cost as possible on the part of some customers. Economy was particularly evident in the matter of gravestones and, considering the horrifying multiple deaths which could occur in some families in those times, coupled with a strong desire to commemorate the departed, this is hardly surprising. Headstones were repaired, reworked, relettered and repainted almost as a matter of course, with one employee almost continually engaged in their production. But there is evidence of economy in other fields also: paving stones both inside houses and in streets were lifted and reversed when worn, and so were doorsteps, which could be patched by fitting in new stone at the edges. New chimney-pieces could vary enormously in price; 'a Portland stone Gothick Chimney-piece...and fixing' cost £32 in 1818, and 'a vein [i.e. marble] chimney-piece...as agreed £16' in the following year; but making one up from re-used old marble with some stone renewal could cost as little as £2 16s. at the same date.

After John de Carle's death in 1828 Benjamin, his youngest son, took over the management of the business. He was then forty years old, and in course of time outlived all his brothers. His letters are more conciliatory than his father's, partly reflecting the changed economic climate in which he was operating by the 1830s. On 5 November 1830, under the impression that further work was being contemplated, he wrote an obsequious letter to Lord Bristol at Ickworth soliciting custom; something unheard of in earlier times. Nor was it any longer certain that bills would be paid promptly or paid at all. But in spite of hard times the same imperiousness which had characterised his father could still emerge in suitable circumstances. Writing to a Mr Wade in Ketton in July 1832, he says:

...Mr Joseph Mann, Waterman of Reach called upon me a short time ago and informed me that he expected to convey some of your stone shortly to Cambridge

and at the same time should like to bring me a small quantity. I told him that business had been, and now is so slack as to give no encouragement to add to my stock which is rather large already in small stuff. I have however since considered the subject and should have no objection to have 3 or 4 headstone blocks, altogether not exceeding ten Tons. The last Ketton stone I had was in 1829 at 45/- per Ton, but, as times are, it probably may be less now. That was good sawing and good colour'd stone – You are aware that for Head (or Grave) stones it cannot be *too sound also*. Please let me know by *return of post*....

Order books survive for the period 1792–1805 and again from 1818 to 1844.¹⁵ They reflect the changes between the two periods, major work on new buildings being confined mainly to the earlier time. But customers still needed many smaller items and a constant series of repairs, and their names occur as regularly as ever amongst a growing and diverse body of others. Nor did construction work cease entirely; it simply took on a different form, with householders occasionally seduced away by yet another phase of Gothic revival from the Classical styles which had provided the backbone of the de Carles' earlier work. There were extensive repairs to windows at Hengrave Hall in 1823, and in the same year 'H. Bennett Esq' introduced a wealth of Gothic fittings into Rougham Hall, while in 1828–29 completion of the work at Ickworth earned the de Carles a welcome £1,300 (Jackson-Stops 1990, 60). But these were the exceptions, and we find instead an increasing amount of work undertaken for churches and various local public bodies. The churches at Chevington, Horringer, Rougham and Fornham all show evidence of their repairs, and they were employed by bodies such as Bury Corporation, the Feoffment Trustees, the Trustees of the Turnpike, the Magistrates (for the Court at Shire Hall), the parish of Mildenhall and, in 1832, the Committee of the Suffolk Hospital. Some of this work was almost derisively small: once an employee appropriately named Mason was sent to the Magistrates Court to fix 'brass eyes into the steps of stairs for the Carpet Rods'. Evidently no requests, however modest, were ever refused. The de Carles never lost sight of their original pledge and the need for an ongoing series of small commissions to keep the business going. Without the addition of larger orders, however, these were not enough.

There was no longer sufficient demand in the area for a firm of specialist stonemasons like the de Carles. Even where a modified form of the Classical style was still in use, as in the modest terraces of small white brick houses which proliferated in Bury during the 1830s and 1840s, the stone used was plain and minimal in quantity. Larger houses, especially in the new Gothic or Elizabethan styles, were built almost entirely of brick. Moreover, with the spate of new building, competitors had emerged who were prepared to offer a range of trades necessary for construction. William Plowman, former partner of the ageing Benjamin de Carle, who described himself in the Trade Directories of the 1870s as a stone and marble mason, also called himself a 'contractor'; Lot Jackaman, builder of Bury's Corn Exchange, whose house on the corner of Maynewater Lane and Westgate Street still bears his name and a selection of decorative stonework on its exterior, is described as a 'stonemason, builder and contractor', and there are numerous others, as well as those simply listed as 'builder and contractor'. Any of the contractors who were also stonemasons were able to supply the simple stonework needed for Victorian houses or for plainer headstones.

Even when the de Carles were fulfilling their most prestigious orders the climate of the building trade was changing fundamentally. Builders in Bury St Edmunds who called themselves 'contractors' were simply following a national trend which was bringing about the rise, during the first three decades of the 19th century, of building firms which would undertake all the branches of construction (Wilson and Mackley 2000, 134). Sub-contracting, upon which the de Carles and many other specialists had relied, was being

superceded. Large firms, of which that created by William Cubitt (1788–1855) is the model (Wilson and Mackley 2000, 35), had employees from all parts of the building industry, and could fulfil the whole of a building contract without having to rely on outside specialists.

No doubt Benjamin de Carle was well aware of these new developments and the effect they would increasingly have on his own specialist firm. After his death his partner, William Plowman, placed a notice of the dissolution of the partnership in the *Bury and Norwich Post* for 7 March 1865, announcing his intention 'to continue the Business of a Marble and Stone Mason at 1 Sparhawk Street and Churchgate Street and trusts that by moderate charges and punctuality to merit a continuance of that confidence so long enjoyed by his late partner and himself'. Only three months later the idea of keeping both yards going was abandoned; Plowman operated thereafter only from Churchgate Street. On 20 June 1865, Benjamin de Carle's 'extensive stock' was sold at auction in Bury St Edmunds. It was the end of an era.

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NOTES

- 1 Details of John de Carle's life are taken from a typescript copy of his will, S.R.O.B., Acc. 492.
- 2 Partnership agreement, S.R.O.B., HD 553/1.
- 3 Revd Francis Haslewood, 'Monumental Inscriptions – Abbey Burial Ground', unpublished MS (6 vols), 1887, S.R.O.B., 929.34264.
- 4 Information from Mrs Elsie McCutcheon.
- 5 S.R.O.B., Acc. 505/4.
- 6 Beyton Vestry book, 1834–94, S.R.O.B., FL 528/1.
- 7 Receipt for obelisk, S.R.O.B., 941/83/3.
- 8 Letter book, S.R.O.B., Acc. 468.
- 9 Ballingdon, S.R.O.B., HD 1371/15.
- 10 Details from the order book, 1792–1805, S.R.O.B., 505/2.
- 11 Ixworth Thorpe. Order dated 14 Apr. 1824, S.R.O.B., 505/4.
- 12 Cash and wages book, S.R.O.B., 505/1.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Letter book, S.R.O.B., Acc. 468.
- 15 Order books, 1792–1805 and 1818–44, S.R.O.B., Acc. 505/2, 505/4.

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 Jackson-Stops, G., 1990. *Ickworth, Suffolk*, The National Trust. [London].
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Abbreviations

S.R.O.B. Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch.