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‘Wants more capital than labour’: visiting the Harmony Hall site from 1839–2022

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SUMMARY: *Visiting, or observing a site in its surrounding environment, is a key point of archaeological and heritage assessment and research. This paper examines historic and contemporary site visits to Robert Owen's 1830s agricultural community at Harmony Hall. The site was described in letters, in articles, and in visual culture throughout the nineteenth century, after which the site became overgrown. The site itself is telling of some of the reasons behind the community's early problems, and the reasons behind its ultimate transformation from a community to a school. Today, both the agricultural community and the school are gone. This paper explores the site in the past and today, situating Harmony Hall within its historic and contemporary landscape. Drawing on place-based approaches to heritage sites, experience, and interpretation, this paper outlines the interpretive value in critical 'visiting' as a method for assessing sites with a complicated histories like Harmony Hall.*

KEYWORDS: Archaeological methods; socialist history; historical archaeology; buildings archaeology; built heritage

INTRODUCTION

We have learned from a letter of Mr. CF Green that you have visited Mr Goldsmids estate in Hamps. [B]ut the letter is totally destitute of any information respecting its fitness or otherwise for our purposes and leaves us in utter ignorance of your opinion and proceedings respecting it.
Letter from George Fleming to Robert Owen regarding the Harmony Hall site in April 1839 (COA ROC/6/17/17; 1097).

Visiting a site is a preliminary step in any archaeological or heritage assessment. Visiting a place to verify its extent, to observe the site in its surrounding environment, and to determine any mitigating factors around its operation or location is a key point of assessment and research, whether that be the site of an agricultural community in the nineteenth century,

or a heritage site in the present day. The focus of this paper is Harmony Hall, the focal point of Robert Owen's attempt to create a utopian agricultural community in the English countryside in the 1830s and 1840s. The establishment of the community at Harmony Hall was extensively documented in letters, accounts, and reports, and the main structure survives as an inaccessible, partially burnt ruin in a copse of trees near East Tytherly in Hampshire. The site itself is telling of some of the reasons behind the community's early problems. Descriptions of the site survive in archival materials which illustrate the reasons behind the ultimate closure of the community after just a few years and go some way towards explaining its more appropriate fitness for conversion into an educational institution. Today, both the agricultural community and the educational institution are gone. This paper explores the site in the past and today,

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situating Harmony Hall within its historic and contemporary landscape. Taking site visits of the past and present into account, the factors behind the closure and conversion of Harmony Hall will be discussed. Drawing on place-based archaeological approaches to sites, experience, and interpretation, this paper further outlines the interpretive value in critical 'visiting' (in the past and present) as a method for assessing an historic landscape with a complicated history like Harmony Hall.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The research on which this paper is based emerged from a British Academy Seed-Funded short research project on Robert Owen and Harmony Hall, collaborative research to explore the site from an archaeological and media studies perspective. The archaeological approach to the site was my focus and purview. I carried out some the archival research at in the Hampshire Archives, at Senate House, the Cooperative Archive and Glasgow University Archives, as well as the site visit described later in this paper during this research project. I completed archival research at the Library of the Society of Friends, the Cooperative Archive and the John Rylands Research Institute and Library the following year.

As part of the desk-based assessment of the site, I collected historic maps and aerial photography and input all data into a QGIS of the site, which allowed me to compare standing remains, of which there is little (described below) with historic maps, primarily from when the site of Harmony Hall was in operation as Queenwood College, a Quaker college that was destroyed by fire at the start of the twentieth century. The standing remains of Harmony Hall consist of the rear-range basement wall, a gate lodge, boundary walls constructed in a style dissimilar to the local vernacular, and a kitchen garden wall constructed of brick. There may be further standing remains in the surrounding farms, associated with out-buildings, as indicated by satellite imagery. Graphical and photographic representations of the site when it was in operation either as Harmony Hall or later as Queenwood College are rare. Of the latter, these relate specifically to the Queenwood College-era, while the former is limited to oblique elevations rendered in prints, and a floor plan that is likely a draft of the final plans of the building which have not been located at the time of writing.

There are a number of printed descriptions of the site by visitors as described in the paper, including a detailed overview of the landscape surrounding Harmony Hall by its first Director of Agriculture, Heaton Aldam, who visited the area prior to the Hall's construction. Each of these accounts was critically read to draw out the descriptive elements reflecting how the site was perceived and

experienced, as well as the motivations behind their composition. While carrying out this analysis, I compared these narratives with my own observations on the site as a subject of archival study, and as a physical place, noting commonalities between my own understanding of the Harmony Hall/Queenwood site and historical site visits. This formed the basis for the discussion of contemporary and historical site visits later in the paper.

SITE VISITS

This paper accounts for multiple site visits to the same site, Harmony Hall, by historic visitors and by the author. Before describing those visits, it is first necessary to account for how I understand the process of carrying out a site visit. The site visit, as far as one can be carried out, is a key step for an archaeologist and heritage researcher before doing any work on a place. Finding a consensus on how to carry out this work is not straightforward. Textbooks on archaeological fieldwork variously describe 'Site Surface Survey' (Renfrew and Bahn 2000, 89), and the importance of initial desktop research and assessment before a project is carried out (Grant, Gorin, and Fleming 2008, 4–8; Greene 2004, 103–106). This lack of detailed guidance may be explained by the assertion that all sites are different, and it is not possible in some cases to visit a site on the ground. In the United Kingdom, where this fieldwork took place, guidance on carrying out a site visit, or a Heritage Area Assessment, or a 'Reccie' is necessarily aimed towards professionals for whom a site visit forms part of heritage research design (set out in Lee 2015), and planning policy. There is no consistent guide for this practice, especially one that is applicable outside of a professional UK heritage context. Historic England guidance on Historic Area Assessment (2017) and, more broadly, 'Reconnaissance' (2007) account for methods of data collection prior to and on a site visit, while the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists advises on the purpose of the visit 'to assess ... character, identify visible historic features, and assess possible factors that may affect ... condition' (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists 2020, 8–9). The Museum of London *Archaeological Site Manual* (Museum of London Archaeology Service 1994), the red book ubiquitous in any British archaeological office or welfare cabin, contains valuable guidance on photography and survey, and though these relate to the fieldwork stage of site evaluation they may be applied to site visit. The application of these guidelines beyond the UK would necessitate adaptation.

A site visit assesses a site's verisimilitude, effectively cross-referencing its spatial representation in maps and photographs with what is on the ground. This is a crucial step in identifying features which make up the sense of *place*, the meaning and 'existential or lived consciousness of it', in the words

of Tilley (1994, 15). Other intangible and unrecordable elements of a site may be observed during an unstructured visit. This is valuable engagement with a site that can draw out the 'spirit' of a place', which can be lost in structured recording or survey (Shapland 2020, 19). In the narrative accounts of visits to Harmony Hall in the nineteenth century, described in detail below, this experiential engagement with the place and the landscape was represented alongside reporting back other more tangible points such as the accessibility of the site and its fitness for agriculture. As such, I combined both approaches to draw out a sense of meaning and spirit through experience, recording the process adapted from guidelines set out by professional bodies.

The first step was travel to the site and its surrounding neighbourhood. Observation of the landscape on approach to the site allowed for assessment of accessibility and situation of the site within its broader context. I made a note of limitations on the means of travel and routes taken. While travelling to the site and on arrival, I made a note of environmental factors that might impact the site, such as weather, activity on or near the site, and issues pertaining to access such as overgrowth. These issues may impact the observable site, so were noted down. I explored the area using a base map and sketched a site plan from what was visible. I carried a tablet on which I could annotate the base map and make a sketch. This step was key in identifying discrepancies between base maps and historic maps, and the site itself, including topographic features that were not immediately apparent on maps or through virtual visits. I took photographs of all features that I could observe, noting what I could of the dimensions of the site, distinctive features such as walls and gates, and other relevant landscape features on the site or nearby (such as the garden wall). I recorded all photograph locations and orientations on the site sketch and in a photographic register and used a pocket scale for small features such as gateposts and bricks. Finally, I wrote up my collected notes on immediate return from the site visit. I wrote this up in a narrative, first-person style. I then plotted photographs, paths of travel and other relevant data on QGIS. This method allowed me to gain a sense of the site in its landscape context, and to determine any variations between what is visible on the ground and what is already known from aerial photography and maps of the site. My on-site observations gave me a personal perspective on the site; an extra layer to add to descriptions of Harmony Hall gained through desk-based research. Much has already been written about Harmony Hall and how the site was intended to function, as well as the fallout amongst its supporters and detractors when the site failed as a colony. I drew on these sources to interpret the site.

THE IDEA OF HARMONY

What was Harmony Hall? Before I continue this discussion of the site, it is necessary to explain its significance as an historical place in the nineteenth century. Harmony Hall was an experimental community established on a swathe of farmland between the villages of Broughton and East Tytherly, about 15 km east of the city of Salisbury in the county of Hampshire in England in the 1830s. The entire Harmony Hall site spread out over an area of approx. 470 ha by 1841 (based on georeferencing of site outline as reproduced in Royle 1998), but the main structure was the Hall itself (illustrated in Fig. 1). In 1839, the land on which the community was established was leased to the utopian socialist Robert Owen. The idea behind Harmony Hall was to construct a perfect society to reflect the ideas of Owen's new 'Millenium', his 'cooperative commonwealth' which he tried to start several times in different places until Harmony Hall (also called Queenwood in sources) closed in 1846 (Tsuzuki 1992, 31). This idea called for the creation of a co-operative community towards a better society. The community at Harmony was organised towards equality of all settlers, with six 'departments' which were agriculture, manufacturing, education, domestic economy and general economy, and commerce (Cole 1965, 245). These departments would prove a source of criticism, as the fragmentation of organisation away from a central authority meant, according to visitor and critic George Holyoake, that the chain of management was confused (1844).

From the start, the mission of the community was not clear. Owen's idea was to create two communities: one to be educational, and the other to focus on manufacturing (both would be agricultural) (Garnett 1986, 155). Owen is more famous for his work on the mill settlement New Lanark, now a World Heritage Site on the River Clyde in Scotland, in political discourse for his concept of the Millenium (discussed below), and popular ideas like one-person one-vote, and promoting education (Sennett 2013, 44). At New Lanark in the 1810s, Owen implemented a number of progressive measures towards a more ordered society, including an eight-hour day. Owen's work and influence extended beyond Britain; in 1825 he purchased the town of Harmony in Indiana, renaming it New Harmony in a short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to create a utopian community there. In Ireland, his followers established an early example of a co-operative settlement at Ralahine in Co. Clare (Doyle 2023). That many of these settlements didn't last long in their original iterations does not seem to have deterred Owen or his followers from the pursuit of utopia. Harmony Hall is a late example, having only commenced construction in the 1830s.



FIG 1

Site plan, drawn by author. Scale 1:5000.

Harmony Hall represents a material as well as ideological attempt to create an ideal. In my previous work on institutional buildings and the pursuit of a model for social improvement in the first half of the nineteenth century, I have argued that the pursuit of perfection was never answered, ideals having been overtaken by the practicalities of managing people and places (Fennelly 2019). Harmony Hall is a good example of an attempt to impose an institutional approach to settlement and bears much architectural and material resemblance to other large-scale institutions contemporaneously constructed in Britain and across the world, namely workhouses, prison colonies, and lunatic asylums. Indeed, an archaeologist of institutions would find much to compare with more familiar institutional sites, not least the ultimate unfulfillment of the best-laid plans of Owen and his followers.

Harmony Hall was designed in an H-shape. There was a double entrance at the front rather than a single main door, suggesting division of access according to groups. Given that the front range also included the dormitories, which were divided by gender, and that on the ground and first floor, the matron's office was located to the right while the master's office was located to the left, it is probable that the entrances divided access according to gender. The Dining Hall was located on the ground floor of the front range, while the rear range was for a school, with dormitories in the top story. The building had three storeys including a basement. Holyoake described it as 'imbedded in a mountain', referring to the way the building emerges from a hillside to the rear. It is this hillside which supports the remains of the building, with a basement story built into it. Kitchens and stores lined the connecting block. The style of the

building was Tudoresque, with neo-gothic elements concurrent with architectural trends in urban Britain. The front range had two towers topped with cupolas. Inscriptions on the gable ends and the towers reflect the original purpose of the building. The gable was inscribed with the date of foundation, 1842, and the letters *CM*, meaning 'Commencement of the Millenium'. Owen's concept of the Millenium was the creation of a society built on universal truth and equality, an idea of human kindness and moral order in which religion had no place. Even so, the builder's notes for the inscriptions include amendments to elements to make them more religious, for instance adding 'under the creator' to the western tower (Senate House MS 578-103).

Owen's idea was that a better society could only come about through 'universal charity, and universal kindness'. People, Owen said, 'must be trained to love one another as they love themselves, and then there will be peace and good will towards men' (1844, 65). Owen's treatise, *The Book of the New Moral World* appeared just three years before Owen leased the land at East Tytherly to establish Harmony Hall, and this community was intended to be reflective of the perfection described as being possible through the management of people and their behaviour. Owen is, of course, not alone in his belief that the creation of an ideal physical environment was required to catalyse social change. This idea of civic and social *improvement* was widespread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and inspired projects as varied as the replanning of St James's under George IV, penal reform and the modern concept of the prison, and the New Poor Laws. Owen was preaching to an audience whose worldview was already informed by the idea that the circumstances of the populace wanted only an ideal environment in which to thrive. That he acted on his ideas, translating his rhetoric into real-world experiments may account for Owen's popularity amongst practical men of the middle classes: men like Heaton Aldam who will be the focus of discussion later in the paper.

The following section presents accounts of site visits to Harmony Hall and its environs from 1840 to 2022, followed by a discussion of features which each visitor noted on the site which inform on why the community was not maintained as a utopian settlement beyond those initial first years. My site visit method (with the exception of photography) is not very different from how Heaton Aldam carried out his site assessment, and when George Holyoake visited the site in 1844. Both visitors observed the site within its broader landscape in detail. Pictures of the site, whether drawings or photographs, are scarce, so in the summaries of site visits below, I have also included a series of photographs taken at the site in the 1880s, when Harmony Hall was in operation as the Queenwood School.

HEATON ALDAM, JUNE 1839

In 1840, Heaton Aldam was appointed the first Director of Agriculture to the new Harmony Hall estate (Royle 1998, 83), the central building of which was not yet built on his appointment. Before he was offered this role, Aldam was a farmer on the Whalley Hall estate in Nottinghamshire. Some secondary sources put him at Whaley Bridge in Derbyshire, but his own correspondence lists his place of employment and dwelling as Whalley Hall. Aldam was in his early twenties when he was appointed to inspect the site chosen for the new settlement. When Aldam was sent to inspect the site, supporters and friends of Robert Owen were concerned that the community project they were planning was taking too long and were anxious that a site be selected to establish the community quickly, though the intention of many of his followers was to establish such a settlement closer to manufacturing cities. George Fleming, who succeeded Owen as editor of the socialist newspaper *New Moral World* in 1845 suggested a site between Yorkshire and Lancashire (COA ROC/6/17/9), for instance. Owen had his own plans. By 1839, he had identified a site through his own connections, specifically an acquaintance Dr Isaac Goldsmidt, who was willing to let the Harmony Hall site in Hampshire to Owen and his community for 999 years (COA ROC/3/28/1). This was not uncontroversial amongst Owen's followers at the time and later, as will be described in Holyoake's account. One of the reasons cited frequently for the failure of Harmony Hall as an utopian community, both at the time and subsequently, was the distance between the site in Tytherly in rural Hampshire, and manufacturing districts or markets. Other limitations on the site included the unsuitability of the land for cultivation, which was the substance of Aldam's report back after his visit in 1839. Aldam's qualifications for the position of Director of Agriculture ultimately and as a site inspector at first were thus: he was a keen farmer, he attended the Birmingham Congress of the Association of All Classes which Owen addressed in 1839, and he volunteered for the job.

Aldam visited the site in 1839 and sent back a detailed letter to George Fleming in Salford accounting for the advantages and disadvantages of the site (COA ROC/1/9/2). Aldam had a lyrical turn of phrase, transforming a straightforward site assessment into an atmospheric account of the beauty of the Hampshire countryside. Aldam visited the site that would become Harmony Hall probably in late-May and early-June of 1839 (his letter to this effect is dated June 8, 1839). He described the peacefulness and rurality of the site, noting the nightingale song which abounded during his walks around the parish. He described an idyllic countryside retreat and included details on the site such as a reservoir beside which he 'reposed... a while beneath the shade of

the fine beech trees’. The road, now Queenwood Avenue, he described in detail as including a ‘fine Yew Tree walk’, some of which remains extant as described in the Author’s site visit, below.

Aldam’s descriptions of the site were not limited to the raptures of a romantic young man, however. Following this lyrical account, he described in detail the farms that occupied the site. He described dry chalky soil with no clay, and the land ‘badly farmed, and in a very poor state and condition’. These observations from a farmer indicate that he did not believe the land suitable for intensive arable cultivation, or the cultivation of grazing crops to support animals. He noted that drought was likely on the land as water was scarce, and that the wells that did exist were sunk very deep. Aldam noted that the land was unenclosed. Aldam’s own farm was located near the village of Elmton in Nottinghamshire, and this landscape had been comprehensively enclosed and drained in the eighteenth century towards the intensive cultivation of arable crops. As such, Aldam’s preoccupation with arable and grazing crops is understandable. He included a list of advantages and disadvantages, as detailed in Table 1. Though there were more advantages than disadvantages listed, the nature of the disadvantages were considerably weighted against the establishment of an agricultural community.

The location of the site was both an advantage and a disadvantage. The list reads at points as an attempt to extract positives from an overwhelmingly negative impression of the site as a potential community. This is likely due to the fact that the site was, at that time, already decided upon and Aldam was a young man seeking approval from men he admired. Even so, from this list of comparative advantages and disadvantages, it is difficult to discern how the site could be successful from Aldam’s perspective. For example, an advantage of the site was that it was ‘not

liable to inundation’ but his first disadvantage was that the site was ‘liable to drought’. Water was a problem, as he points out elsewhere in his letter. With regards to crops, he remarked that the land grew excellent *sainfoin* (a grazing crop that thrives on chalky soils) but could not sustain white clover (a common grazing crop that is tolerant of heavy grazing and tramping). To a farmer from the midlands, these grazing crops would have been essential in crop rotation and arable farming in the nineteenth century. An outsider to this part of the country, the comment on white clover is indicative of Aldam’s inexperience with making this particular landscape with its chalky soil productively cultivable, and by extension reflects the lack of nuance and regional consideration in Owen’s overall scheme. Despite all of these disadvantages, Aldam did state that the site is available, and that this in itself was an advantage. Aldam concluded his letter by reiterating that he had a pleasant journey.

GEORGE HOLYOAKE, 1844

George Jacob Holyoake is well known in the history of working-class movements today as an advocate of the cooperative movement, and as a secularist. In his youth, he was an Owenite, a follower of Robert Owen. When he visited Harmony Hall, he was in his 20s, and it is telling from his writing that he was already critical of the kind of ideal community that Owen had attempted to establish at Harmony Hall. Further, many of Holyoake’s criticisms related to the site itself and its unsuitability as behind the agricultural community’s inevitable failure.

Holyoake set out to visit Harmony Hall on October 4th 1844. In his account, published first in Holyoake’s own newspaper *The Movement* (1844), he expends a substantial amount of words on how roundabout his

TABLE 1

List of advantages and disadvantages of establishing an agricultural community at Queen Wood Farm, extracted from Heaton Aldam’s letter to G.A. Fleming, 1839. List transcribed and edited by the author.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Dry friable soil	Liable to drought
Not liable to inundation	Great dependence on the weather
A southerly situation	Too far distant from the chief branches
Near Southampton and the Isle of Wight	Not suited for manufacturers
Suitable for annuitants	No streams
Grows excellent Sainfoin	No coal
Commencing a ploughing system could be achieved with £2500 capital	Not suited for spade cultivation
A turnpike passes through the site	Wants more capital than labour
Suitable for invalids	Not sufficiently central in England
The site is available now	Will not grow white clover
Likelihood of more land adding to it.	The land unenclosed ‘and bleak’.
Two nice halls in the neighbourhood	

journey to Harmony Hall was. The account is descriptive, written with humour but also a tinge of frustration betraying Holyoake's disapproval of the site before he even arrived. 'By three o'clock I was again on the line [towards the site], making another violent attempt to get to Harmony Hall', he says. He then went on to account for the countryside he passed through on his journey from London to Harmony Hall, describing the route. 'The road from Winchester to Stockbridge lies over bleak hills and barren dales', he wrote. 'Here and there a solitary tree or bush raises its disconsolate head, and looks half alarmed at its own temerity in getting out of the earth in that bald district' (1844, 5). He described the 'land of flint and chalk' (1844, 6) of the Test Valley as he passed through. Though undoubtedly written in such a way as to communicate his dissatisfaction with the distance between Harmony Hall and any urban centre, Holyoake's account of the landscape and the roads between nearby towns and cities and Harmony Hall offers a valuable insight into the journey workers would have taken to settle there. There are a number of accounts of visits to Harmony Hall which detail its remoteness and the difficulty in discovering the site without a roundabout tour of the country first. I can confirm from my own site visit that over 170 years have done little to alter the roundabout nature of the route between Winchester and the Harmony Hall site.

When he arrived at the site, Holyoake described the situation of Harmony Hall and the building itself. As the building was destroyed in the early-twentieth century by fire, very little remains today making this contemporaneous account of the centre of the community valuable. Holyoake also resolved a question around the topography of the site, describing how the building backed into a hillside. This is not evident on the surviving photographs of the site, or on building plans. It is clear from the remains of the site today, as will be discussed in a later section, and his account informs on what this kind of situation would have looked like to an observer at the time. Here is Holyoake's account of the building:

a very respectable looking building – imbedded in a mountain – half red, half blue – a compound of bricks and slate, of no conceivable shape, with two spires in front and two glass chimneys, apparently intended to let people see the smoke come up, but further examination tells you they are skylights over the corridors, leading to the dormitories. C.M.1841, are observable at one end of the building, which informed me, for the first time, that the Millenium had commenced three years ago.

(1844)

Holyoake was being facetious, his own dissatisfaction with Owenism bleeding into his description.

However, he does describe the inscription from engravings (such as Fig. 2) and plans of the building, which declared that the foundation of the building was to usher in a new era. These are essential descriptions which corroborate artistic evidence in the absence of a standing building. Holyoake's descriptions were not dispassionate or devoid of political critique. He mentioned that the building more closely resembled 'Drayton Manor, the residence of Sir Robert Peel, than the home of pioneers'. In 1844, Robert Peel was the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and his (now demolished) Staffordshire manor, Drayton Manor had been lately rebuilt in an Elizabethan style. Stylistically, the two houses are not aesthetically alike. As such, Holyoake must be read as critiquing Harmony Hall for the use of expensive building materials and furnishings.

Holyoake's description of the building materials matches a watercolour of Queenwood College from later in the 1840s (HRO 6M76/G3). His description also may refer to a vernacular building style in Hampshire that would have been unfamiliar to an outsider such as himself. The building is described elsewhere as having a stone foundation. In Hampshire, a type of flushwork is often deployed, with stone surrounding knapped flint packed and trimmed and stacked (Historic England 2007, 6), sometimes producing a blue effect. The red-and-blue Holyoake is referring to probably relates to the red brick of the façade and towers, and the blue slate of the hipped roof. Holyoake's description of the building is valuable, as descriptions of the form and aesthetic of the community are few.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SITE

There are two architectural plans of Harmony Hall dating from 1839, and a series of draft inscriptions (far more detailed than the ground plans in annotation) dating from 1841 (SH MS578). The ground plans are similar to a school, a workhouse or other institution of the period. There are two entrances, each leading into a stairwell and flanking a Dining Hall, with a parlour on the building extremities. The central spine of the building was occupied with a matrons room on the right and a master's room on the left, stores and a scullery and pantry flanking the corridor into the kitchen. There was no access to the ground floor rear range from the kitchen. Indeed, there was no access at all to the rear range of the ground floor from outside; this was presumably where the ground floor backed into the slope (Holyoake's *mountain*). The rear range is not labelled but for two bathrooms at the base of two stairwells. The first floor shows that the rear range was occupied by a school with two classrooms on the projections. There was no access from the rear range into the rest of the building from this floor. The spine of the

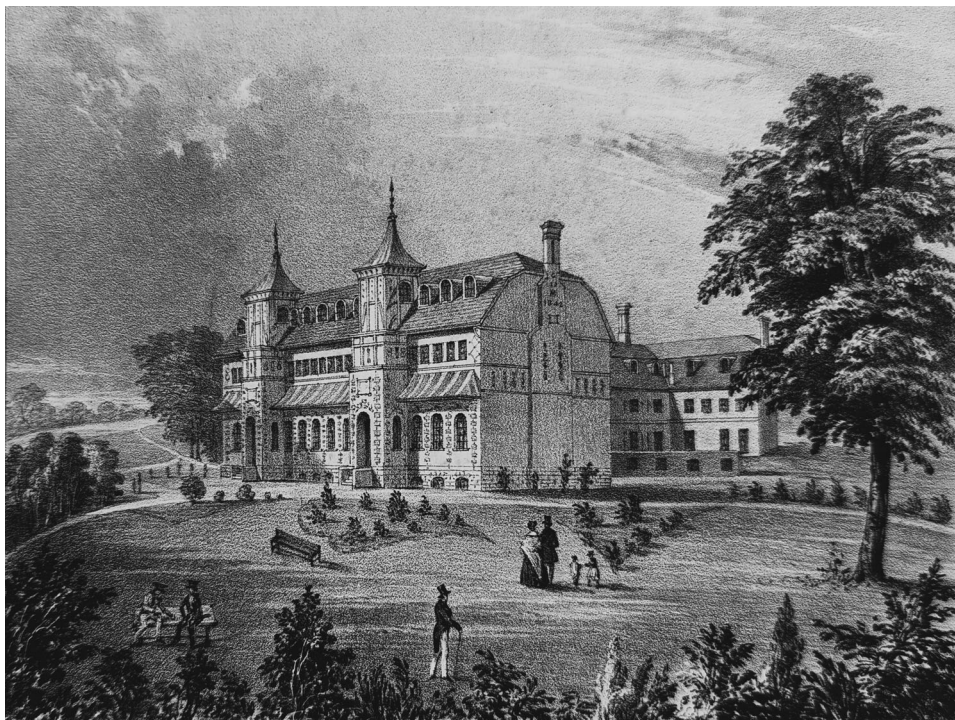


FIG 2

Engraving of Harmony Hall (image credit, Hampshire Record Office: TOP103/2/1).

building on the first floor was taken up with more offices for the master and matron, and ‘Chambers’. The only access to this section and the spine section on the upper floor was through the stairs from the ground floor. The front range of the first floor was taken up with dormitories, accessed *via* stairwell. There was no plan for the top story, but a note on the first-floor plan states that the top story was identical to the first floor, with the exception of the school on the rear range whose top story was used as dormitories. The division of the matron’s rooms to the left and the master’s rooms to the right suggests that the building was divided according to gender as previously mentioned. If the building shared a common organisation rationale with other institutional buildings of the period, this gender division was likely reflected in the dormitories and in the school.

Pictures of Harmony Hall and later of Queenwood College are rare. The above-mentioned watercolour and an engraving of the building from its Queenwood College period are south-east facing $\frac{2}{3}$ side-on elevations of the main building only, giving little landscape context to the site. An undated engraving, titled ‘Harmony Hall’ shows the gable of the building from close by (HRO TOP103/2/1). This representation of the building is similar to the watercolour described below,

but of the school that succeeded Harmony Hall on the site, there is little evidence. In this image, there are seven figures in the middle foreground, two of whom are children. No other buildings are visible in this representation, and the adults in the foreground may reflect an attempt to represent the site as it was under Robert Owen. The caption reads: ‘This Building was erected in 1842 by J. Hansom Esq. under the superintendence of Robert Owen Esq. late of New Lanark Scotland and is admirably adapted for a Normal School or Industrial College and is capable of accommodating upwards of 150 persons’. Given the caption, the lack of date, and the lack of school activities visible in the engraving, this representation likely pre-dates the watercolour, and represents Harmony Hall as it was in operation, and seeking an alternative use.

The watercolour (HRO 6M76/G3) is of Queenwood College and very clearly reflects the sites use. The watercolour represents the site in its landscaped grounds, showing the drive, through which a carriage approaches the front of the house. The laundry building is visible to the south of the site, and formal gardens are illustrated at the front of the building. The slope is visible to the rear of the house, where the silhouettes of students are seen participating in outdoor activities. Playground equipment is just visible,



FIG 3

Lithograph of Queenwood College in the snow. The image faces east towards the gate, with the ground floor visible to the right (From the collections of the Library of the Society of Friends).

including a possible climbing frame or high swing. The octagonal roof of the laboratory is also visible over the trees surrounding the site, and the gate lodge (which survives in ruins) is visible in the left foreground.

There are a number of *carte de visite* (small photographs mounted on card) photographs from the 1860s, and photographs from the 1880s and 1890s showing other parts of the site (such as Fig. 3). Pictorial representations of the school show the sections of the building other than the façade, buildings on the site such as the laundry and gasworks, and activities on the site such as sledging which offer glimpses into the life of the school (FHL Pers U/Queen Ser 1733/1). In both the watercolour and the photographs, the 'Slope' above the site (to the south) is represented as an essential recreation ground for the school. It is not clear if this was an inheritance of purpose from the use of the site as an industrial community but given that Holyoake referred to the slope (the 'mountain' into which the house was built), Harmony Hall and Queenwood's main building must be understood in context with this landscape feature. This slope certainly impacted the lived experience and understanding of the site.

THE AUTHOR, 2022

I visited the site in June 2022. My approach to the site was from the direction of Winchester and I travelled the distance there (about 22.5 km) by bicycle. This cross-country journey afforded an opportunity to understand the site in its wider context. The Test Valley is a rural landscape with several villages through which the traveller to Harmony Hall must pass. On arrival, the site was found to be overgrown with a plantation of trees. The landscape was navigated using a contemporary Ordnance Survey map, overlaid on available historic Ordnance Survey maps, the County Series 1st Edition (1871) and the County Series 1st Revision (1896).

The main Queenwood/Harmony Hall site (not including Little and Great Bently Farms which also formed part of the community) is located on a yew-lined road called Queenwood Avenue on the contemporary Ordnance Survey, onto which both side entrances open. Residential dwellings now occupy the remaining buildings on the site, including the Laundry which lies south-east of the site (now Orchard Farmhouse, NHLE list entry no. 1093772), and Queenwood Cottages (now a single dwelling;



FIG 4

Photograph of the gateway into the Harmony Hall site, June 2022.

NHLE list entry no. 1157491). The north, west, and south red-brick ranges of the walled garden marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey are also visible from the road to the east of Queenwood Avenue and southeast of the main site.

The original carriage-way entrance (Fig. 4) represented in the watercolour of the site was inaccessible due to overgrowth, while the northeast entrance to the site remained open. The remains of a gate lodge stood alongside the extant gate posts. Of the site, little remained following the fire at Queenwood College in 1901. The rear wall of the basement story was still standing, built into the hillside. The remains were too overgrown to approach. The relationship between the built remains and the slope, which extends from the site to the west, are clear from the ground. The built remains comprise brick laid in English Bond style (alternating rows of headers and stretchers) (Fig. 5). The vegetation obscured the base of the building, so it was not possible to discern on observation how deep the foundations extended. Visibility on the day of the site visit was good, though the site itself was heavily overgrown.

I made draft notes while resting nearby before returning to Winchester and edited them later into a narrative account.

The site is overgrown. There is a lot of new and old growth in the footpath around the site entrance, and I expect that the entryway is not often used. Through the trees, we saw that the rear range of the building remains standing. It's built into the slope behind it, so it's likely that this was why this part alone survived the fire. There is debris strewn about, mostly ceramic building material. The bricks I've seen are red. I wonder if they were imported here, or if there is a local brickmaker? To find out. The lodge is still standing, but it's very overgrown. There is a slate roof just visible under all of the overgrowth, and two wooden doors are visible. The lodge faces the road still. Both gate posts remain. Harmony Hall still looks like the entrance to a property, though no property remains. I might have passed it by and dismissed it as the entrance to a ruined house if I didn't know what was here.

The maps used on site were annotated in QGIS beforehand, so key features (such as the gatehouse, and the remains of the rear range, and the kitchen garden wall [Fig. 6]) could be identified on the ground if they were visible. Photographic survey was carried out where access was possible, and the



FIG 5

Photograph of the outer wall of the Harmony Hall site, with vernacular brickwork. Photograph taken from the North-South road which now bisects the original site illustrated in [Fig. 1](#). Photograph taken in June 2022.

basemap of the site was annotated after the site visit to include photograph numbers. This site visit was carried out to support the following discussion of Harmony Hall, as a place suitable for the establishment of a utopian community.

DISCUSSION

This short discussion section will consider the Harmony Hall site, and the points of failure observed by historic and contemporary visitors to the site. These points of failure led to the abandonment of the agricultural community idea in 1845 and the conversion of Harmony Hall into a school, which was considerably more successful. Three key points of failure are noted by visitors: the location and remoteness of the site, the suitability of the landscape to intensive farming towards a surplus, and the ideas behind the establishment of the community in the first place. Owen's opinions on the site are lacking from most accounts of the Harmony Hall site, and as such the suitability of the site is left to others to determine.

Given the mission of the community, and the popularity of the idea of communities and

cooperation in the West Midlands and the North of England in the 1830s and 1840s, the location of Harmony Hall in the Hampshire countryside is curious. The Harmony Hall site is located 15 km east of Salisbury, and 18 km west of Winchester. The nearest village is Broughton, 2 km to the northeast, and the nearest railway station in the nineteenth century and today is Dunbridge, 5.4 km to the southeast. Holyoake made much of the arduous journey he took to arrive at the site, not entirely hyperbolic or political in his critique of this aspect. The landscape has a long history of settlement: the Roman Road (Margery 1957, 45a) between Winchester and Salisbury passes just to the north of the site. This thoroughfare was perhaps the last time that the Harmony Hall site was situated in a location convenient for travel, however. The distance from centres of manufacture is cited by Holyoake and Fleming in their notes on the site as being a point of potential failure from the outset. That distance deprived the community of both a market and a source of ready labour to maintain the population of the community. Even so, the dual idea of education and manufacturing, alongside agriculture, could not have come to pass as that common point – agriculture – was the



FIG 6

Photograph of field to the southeast of the site, with the kitchen garden wall visible on the slope. This photograph was taken from the North-South road that bisects the original site. Photograph taken in June 2022.

chief source of Heaton Aldam's concern over the site from his visit in 1839.

Holyoake stated that when he set out for Harmony Hall, he 'had no confidence whatever in the success of the experiment'. He, 'did not doubt the industry of the members, but I much questioned the fertility of their soil' (1844, 16). He had good reason for this. Aldam visited the site to feed back on the suitability of the land for agricultural production. His letter to George Fleming in 1839 probably confirmed Fleming's own suspicions that the land was hastily selected. Aldam's tone was optimistic. He accounted for the beauty of the landscape but did not neglect to mention that the land was 'dry chalk, badly farmed, and in a very poor state of condition' (COA ROC/1/9/2); the underlying geology of the site is a mixture of clay, silt, sand and gravel to the south, and chalk to the north, with an underlying geology on the Culver Chalk Formation (after British Geological Survey, accessed *via* Digimap 2023). Aldam, seeking to be positive, suggested the introduction of bone manure as a means of improving the land, and went on to suggest that the dry, friable nature of the soil indicated that the landscape was too dry to support intensive arable farming.

There are notably absent features from the community that would mark it as a model settlement in the same vein as Bourneville or even Owen's own New Lanark. There was no clear development area for increased accommodation beyond the main building. There were no amenities or communal spaces beyond the front of the main building and the dining hall, and (unsurprisingly, given the secular nature of Owen's ideology) no church or structure for worship. As such, even a landscape survey of the site in the present day would have difficulty interpreting Harmony Hall as a former utopian community. It is closest in form and structure, at first glance, to one of the workhouses of Sampson Kempthorne's design (described in Newman and Fennelly 2024, 7–8), with its front and rear projecting ranges and a central spine. Unlike those institutions, which were in the 1830s being constructed across the English landscape wholesale, Harmony Hall does not have clear purpose written into its architectural plan. Indeed, from the plans, it looks most suitable to operate as a school. The institutional-style and paternalism inherent in such architecture is not conducive to attracting labourers, especially not urban migrants who enjoy

the freedom of anonymity and movement in the cities from which they came.

Aldam's position is worth considering, too. In his early twenties, he was an idealist and a socialist, a supporter of Owen's and a believer in the New Moral World. He was clearly delighted to be appointed to the task, and so his optimism must be considered in that light. It was not likely that Aldam would return a negative account of the site that his hero had earmarked as almost certainly the site of the new society. As such, his account is useful but flawed. Holyoake too, while more critical than Aldam of the site itself was writing from the perspective of a critic of the community in general. Indeed, Holyoake's account of Harmony Hall was so received as to elicit a reprint of his site descriptions as well as a statement on how his analysis was not, in fact, biased by his political views.

CONCLUSION

Understanding a site in its landscape is essential to understanding what factors went into its occupation over time. For Harmony Hall, these are the factors which underlay its ultimate change of use from an agricultural community beset by problems from the outset, to a school which saw considerably more success. A legacy of built heritage, associations with the ideals of Harmony Hall, and a history of association with men like Owen have impacted the landscape around this site. They are visible in road names like Queenwood Avenue, in the plantation that now occupies the ruined Harmony Hall site, and archaeological remains like the built heritage of the hall, the walls, and the gate lodge, the reservoir on the site's southern boundary, and the garden wall to the southeast.

The reasons behind the cessation of agricultural utopia at the Harmony Hall community after just five years are myriad. Aldam alluded to the weaknesses inherent in setting up a productive and successful agricultural community on the land, and Holyoake picked up the same train of thought and added to it in his description of the site five years later. By then, the rent was overdue, and the community had not been profitable. While the capital that Aldam had recommended investing in the site had been spent, it had been invested in the construction of a building unsuitable for manufacturing, unsuitable for any expansion of the agricultural community, and only fit for use as a school, which is what it became when Queenwood College was established there in 1847 (Garnett 1986, 214).

Reading beyond the tentative words of an admirer like Aldam, and the political criticisms of Holyoake, comparing their accounts with the physical remains of the site today, reveals these accounts to be loaded with subtext and meaning. Even so, there is a clear sense of place in the accounts of Aldam and

Holyoake, and in the photographs and accounts of a remote, idyllic rural college from later in the century. This site is distinctive, and as such an understanding of Harmony Hall within its rural context is important for understanding the place and its limitations, as well as the romance and peacefulness of the landscape which was a contributing factor (as accounted for in correspondence at the time) in garnering support for the site (as well as a lucrative rent contract) in the 1830s. The site today is coded with the legacy of Harmony Hall. The landscape also offers the most compelling evidence for the site's selection, its change of use, and its longevity as an idea in the history of ideal agricultural communities.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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