

## Where was William Nicholson Nicholson's House (where he shot his Uncle's Gamekeeper)?

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The first of the Nicholsons of Roundhay Park (see Fig. 1), Thomas Nicholson, was a busy man. In less than twenty years, he had bought and landscaped the Park, created the lakes and built the Mansion. During this time his younger half brother, Stephen, who was also his junior business partner, lived in London while Thomas travelled between Leeds and the capital city where they had their main business interests.

Thomas and his wife Elizabeth had no children and Thomas's niece, Hannah Nicholson, predeceased him. When Elizabeth died, Stephen inherited his half brother's estates. By this time, he had retired and settled in Roundhay with his wife, Sarah, living at 'North Hill' in what is now North Lane. This historic house (see Fig. 2) was demolished in about 1960 to build the flats in North Hill Close.

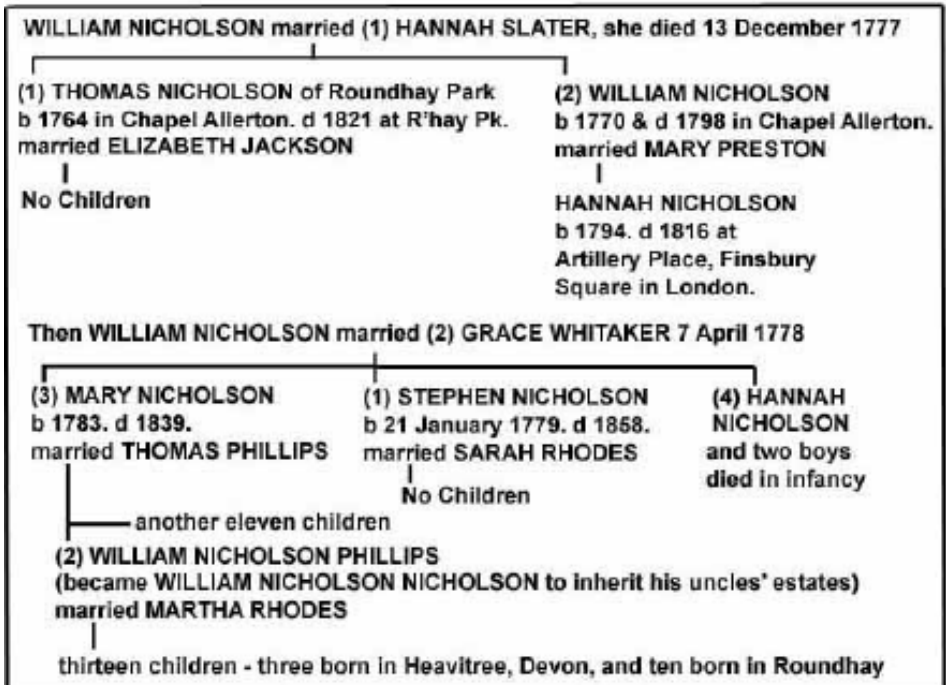


Fig. 1. The Nicholsons of Roundhay Park.



**Fig. 2. North east view of 'North Hill' in 1870.**

Sarah and Stephen had no children so when Sarah died in 1862, the Nicholson estates passed to William Nicholson Nicholson (WNN), Stephen's nephew, the son of his sister, Mary Phillips (see Fig. 1). He had changed his surname to Nicholson in 1827 to qualify for his inheritance.

William and his wife Martha's first few children were born at Heaviside in Devon but when Elizabeth Nicholson died in 1833, they relocated to Roundhay. They lived in the Mansion from about 1862, so for nearly thirty years, their home was somewhere else in Roundhay. The question is where?

Directories for 1838, 1847, 1857-58 and 1861 list William's residence as 'Park Cottage', as does the 1861 census. Evidence from various sources indicates it was not far from the Mansion.

William's eldest daughter, Emily Armitage, wrote in her autobiography. *'My father was heir to a very large property... though we did not live in the great house, we lived close by and went everyday to see ... uncle and aunt'* and, *'every morning we had to take a walk ..., generally ... down the lovely park out to the road and up the lane'* In today's terms the 'road' was surely the Wetherby Road and the 'lane' was probably the old footpath leading up to North Lane. The latter was still being used until recently before the houses of Elmete Walk were built. John Thorp's map of Leeds of 1819-1820

shows this track continued on to Gipton in those days.

In 1927 Emily's son, Robert Armitage, wrote this about his grandfather William Nicholson Nicholson, "... *became back [from Devon] before Stephen died and they lived in a house which afterwards was pulled down - part of which became the Stables.*' The Stables' is marked on most Ordnance Survey (OS) maps of Roundhay Park (e.g. see Fig. 3, OS map of 1847), and seems to be the name for the group of buildings which today includes the Carriage House and the Roundhay Fox public house.

In 1825 Jonathan Taylor surveyed Roundhay and his survey report and map can be seen at the Yorkshire Archaeological Society at Claremont. However, the numbers relating parts of the map with the survey, have been crossed out and replaced with a different set (see Fig.3).

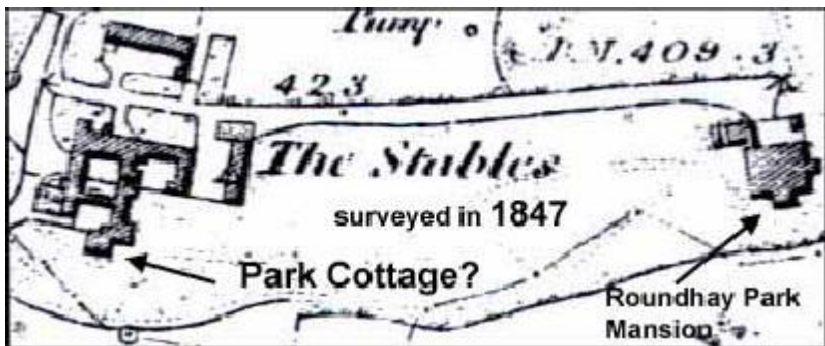
The middle map section in Fig. 3 is from another map at Claremont which appears to be identical in detail to the survey map by Taylor. It covers only part of Roundhay and the date and source is not recorded. St John's Church is on it but not the school and almshouses on the Wetherby Road which suggests a date between 1825 and 1837.

Fig. 3 also shows the same area in 1847. There is a building in these three map sections which I have labelled 'Park Cottage?' but which is mostly missing from maps of 1873 and 1886, see Fig. 4.

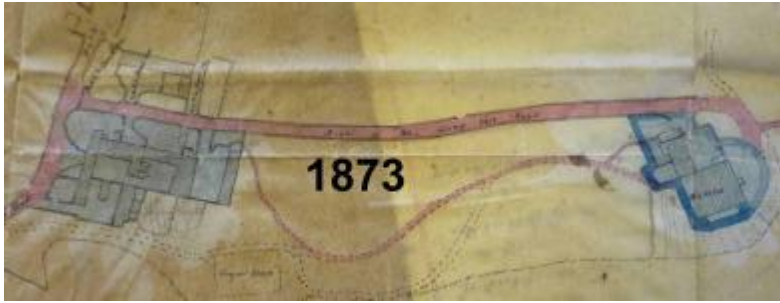
I have shown the building filled in black in Fig. 5. The main part of this, beyond the wall, has long since gone, but the part above still largely exists. This is as Robert Armitage wrote in 1927 saying that some part was not demolished. What is left has been modified over the years (see Figs. 7 & 8). Fig. 6 surveyed in 1847 includes the same area.

Before 1834, this house was occupied by Edwin Smith, a solicitor. Jonathan Taylor's survey of Roundhay shows Edwin Smith there in 1825. When Elizabeth Nicholson died in 1833, Edwin Smith left Roundhay and went to live at Acomb. It seems William and Martha then moved into the house he had vacated.

Park Cottage was the scene of a sad accident in 1840. There had been a spate of attempted burglaries in the area and Stephen Nicholson had men on look-out during the night. He did not tell his



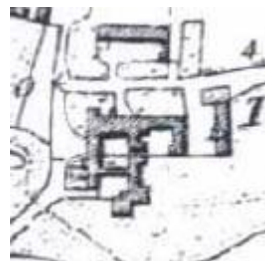
**Fig. 3. Maps of The Mansion and ‘The Stables’ buildings.**  
**Top: 1825, Jonathan Taylor’s survey of Roundhay map.**  
**Middle: Same era, probably between 1825 to 1837.**  
**Both courtesy of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society.**  
**Below: 1847 OS map 1850 Edition. Crown Copyright.**



**Fig. 4. Maps of The Mansion and 'The Stables' buildings in 1873 & 1886, from Leeds Corporation Roundhay Park Lease Agreements, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds LLD1/1/A958**



**Fig. 5. Map of Park Cottage? (in black) ca. 1825 - 1837.**



**Fig. 6. Map showing Park Cottage? in 1847.**



**Fig. 7. Possibly the end view (south side) of the surviving part of Park Cottage.**



**Fig. 8. View of the west side (i.e. from the left) of the building shown in Fig. 7. Photograph taken in the courtyard of the Roundhay Fox.**

nephew though, and Stephen's gamekeeper dozed off while sheltering in William's doorway during a night vigil. He shifted from time to time and noises such as the gun scraping on the door were heard by William and Martha in their bedroom. William armed himself with a shotgun and went out with his groom. Mistaking the gamekeeper for an armed burglar, William shot him when he did not receive a reply to his challenge. He said he aimed low but the gamekeeper died the following day from stomach wounds.

Accounts of the inquest in the local newspapers tie in well with the building shown in Fig. 5. The two men would have left the back of the house in the courtyard, turned left and left again to the front of the house via a gate in the wall. The spot where the gamekeeper was fatally wounded by this reckoning today would not be far from the walkway on the park side of the courtyard wall of the Roundhay Fox (see Figs. 9 & 10). If all this is correct, generations of visitors to the Park have passed by without any idea they were near the place where this tragedy was played out all those years ago.

In conclusion, I have one more suggestion. We know William was living at Park Cottage in 1861 from the census record. The following year he inherited the Nicholson estates and became a very wealthy man. From hereon William and Martha lived in the Mansion and the name Park Cottage disappeared from the directories. We know that most of the building in Fig. 5 was gone by 1873 so did William demolish his former home before he died in 1868? Why would he have done this?

William was a kind educated man (MA at Cambridge), with a record of public service as a JP and a Deputy Lieutenant for the West Riding. It is known he never got over the shooting. Perhaps he could not bear to see the scene of the accident, so rather than rent out Park Cottage, maybe he had it pulled down.

### **Main Sources**

Directories, maps and newspapers in the Local Studies Department of Leeds Central Library and maps at the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds.

John Thorp's map of Leeds 1819-1821 Steven Burt's book 'An Illustrated History of Roundhay Park', page 14.

Jonathan Taylor's survey of Roundhay, 1825 (MD279 A2/14), and

maps DD 177/1 and DD177/2 in the Yorkshire Archaeological Society at Claremont.

Emily Armitage's autobiography, 'The Story of My Life.' Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh, 1907. Private Circulation.

### **Thanks**

to the staff at the Local Studies Department of the Leeds Central Library, to archivists Robert Frost and Kirsty McHugh at the Yorkshire Archaeology Society, and Vicky Grindrod and Teresa Nixon at the West Yorkshire Archives Service. I am also grateful to the late Russell Mortimer who provided the extract from the letter, referred to in the text, from Robert Armitage to Hugh Lupton dated 5 August 1927, and to June Underwood and Ann Mellor for a transcript of Emily Armitage's autobiography.



**Figs. 9 & 10. View (above) along the walkway below the Roundhay Fox. Was this where William shot the gamekeeper? Branches of the magnificent tree on the left above (and shown in full in the picture left) may overhang the spot where this unfortunate man was fatally wounded.**