

Woolverstone Park Obelisk

“The obelisk rose high over the dark trees, pointing to the clear, moonlit sky, its pinnacle still tinged with the last red light of the autumnal evening.”

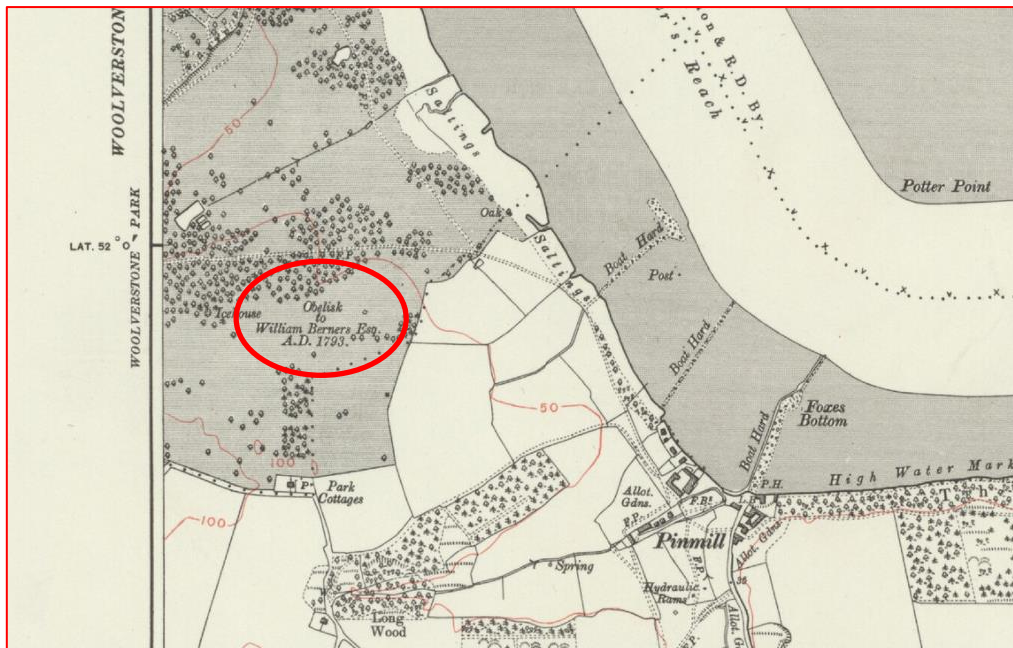
“History of Margaret Catchpole: a Suffolk girl.” Reverend Richard Cobbold 1885.

The obelisk was raised by Charles Berners (1740–1815) to the memory of his father, William Berners who died in 1783. William Berners (1709–1783) had bought the Woolverstone estate in 1773 and was responsible for the construction of Woolverstone Hall built in 1776.



The obelisk was designed by Architect and Engineer Robert Mylne II (1733 -1811) and built by an Ipswich Stone Mason, Edward Tovell, who lived in Carr Street. Mylne noted in his diary: Feb 14. 1791. “*Gave Mr. Berners a design for an Obelisk, washed neat, fit for execution, to be erected at Wolverstone, Suffolk.*” Then, on Sept 18. 1791 writes: “*Went to Wolverstone, examined with Mr. Berners situation for Obelisk, settled the business for it with, Tovel Mason*’ in “Robert Mylne: Architect and Engineer 1733 -1811” A.E. Richardson. 1955.

The square obelisk was 96 feet tall. (That is 6 feet taller than St. Lawrence Church in Ipswich and a full 20 feet taller than Freston Water Tower!) It must have been visible for miles on both land and especially the river. The obelisk was constructed of free stone, with a wooden staircase in the interior right up to the top where there must have been look-out openings. It is surmounted by a globe encircled by rays. There are decorative medallions with reliefs on the four faces which were probably made of Coade stone. The base was “*encompassed with iron palisades*” Placed easterly of Woolverstone Hall it would have been visible as a rising sun every day.



Due to its height, the obelisk was used in a Trigonometry survey referenced in “Account of the Trigonometrical Survey carried on the years 1797, 1798 and 1799 by the order of Marquis Cornwallis, Major General of Ordnance and Captain William Mudge of the Royal Artillery.” It was used as a triangulating point between Dovercourt, Rushmere and Copdock steeples.

Name of stations	Observed angles		Distances
Dover Court - - - -	12 43 40	} Obelisk - - - -	{ 26766 25503
Rushmere Obelisk, Woolverstone Park	13 22 10		
Rushmere - - - -	61 35 58	} Copdock - - - -	{ 28984 28057
Copdock Steeple Obelisk	53 5 10		
Rushmere - - - -	85 25 0	} Henley - - - -	{ 21209 34520
Copdock - - - -	37 46 0		
Henley - - - -	56 49 0		
	180 0 0		

In the supplement to the “County of Suffolk, Topographical and Genealogical” Augustine Page, 1844, it is described as: “an interesting monument of filial affection”.

The inscription on the obelisk is recorded by Mr Shorbel thus:

In
Memoriam
Gulielmi Berners, Armig:
Patris optimi
Et
Bene merentis
Hunc obeliscum extruxit
Filius
Carolus Berners
1793

On the contrary side, next to the river is the following

Gulielmus Berners
Natus
Jul 10 A.D. 1709
Denatus
Septeb. 18. 1783

“Suffolk, Or, Original Delineation, Topographical, Historical and Descriptive of that
Account”

Mr Shoberl 1818

[In memory of William Berners, bearer of heraldic arms, the best of fathers and well
deserving to have this obelisk raised by his son Charles Berners 1793 - *my translation*]

on the contrary side

[William Berners. Born July 10 1709. Died September 18 1783.]

The obelisk was a local landmark and referred to in a steam boat guide to the journey down the Orwell thus: *“On the high ground near the river, stands the noble mansion of Woolverstone Hall, the seat of Archdeacon Berners, erected in 1776, by William Berners, Esq., of London, once the proprietor of Berners’ Street, Oxford Street. The park of the domain affords some of the best views of the Orwell to be found in its entire course. Being well covered with wood, in some parts hanging to the edge of the briny stream, it is highly picturesque. In the park stands an obelisk of free stone, ninety-six feet high, and furnished with an internal staircase. This monument is erected to the memory of William Berners, who died in 1783.”* *“A Steam Boat Guide between Ipswich and London Describing All Objects of Interest on the Banks of the Orwell...”* 1839

A little more detail was added more recently by a resident of Stutton who worked on the Woolverstone estate as a young man: *“It has a door and staircase of wood, and it was possible to go up inside it. On top was mounted a golden sun in bronze.”* Len Page. Stutton Local History Group. Journal 25

Sadly, the obelisk was badly damaged by fire on July 2nd or 3rd, 1943 at around 2.00 a.m.

“The fire was reported to the police by the R.O.C Post on the roof of the Hall at 2.00 a.m. and the N.F.S from Ipswich were called, but when they arrived the interior staircase was well alight and soon afterwards the “Rising Sun” fell from the top down through the centre of the column. After the fire it was found that the column was damaged beyond repair and it was demolished on 29th July 1943. It was believed that some naval ratings, returning from the Butt and Oyster at Pin Mill about 10.30 p.m. to their landing craft at the Cat House, broke into the obelisk and accidentally ignited rubbish which had collected at the foot of the stairs.” Vic Scott. Stutton Local History Group. Journal 19

It was demolished with explosives. The remaining materials from the obelisk were used in a variety of ways, mostly as rubble. However, in Pin Mill, I believe, one of the small Coade medallions from the bottom of the obelisk is mounted on the wall of a pink cottage. It would be nice to know where some of the other decorative pieces ended up.

