Where did the Whiteknights sarsen stones come from?

Katy Whitaker | 2017

Welcome to my home, White Knights!
I moved here in 1998.

... and my gardens are SPECTACULAR!

Dear Smith, August 1998
I have just had notice of between 200 and 300 plants having left Jamaica... I shall be very happy to show them to you, as well as all my others, when I am settled at White Knights.

As soon as he acquired a property with the prospect of a long tenure, he also showed that he was a garden-maker on an imaginative and extravagant scale.

George was probably influenced by contemporary designers like Humphry Repton. Repton's eclectic garden at Ashridge (1814) had many similar features to White Knights.

The great variety in early nineteenth-century garden design included picturesque, at its height from 1780 to 1810. This called for rugged wilderness. Rockwork was an essential element: often grottos, with water features.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare, antiquarian, was riding on the Downs one day in 1814:

...I saw three wagons heading with these stones, which were in the act of being transported to... White Knights, near Reading...

Georges father, the Duke of Marlborough, owned lands in north Wilshire where SARSEN STONES are commonly found on the Downs.

It is likely that George used the new Knet and Avon Canal, completed in 1810, to ship his sarsen stones 60 miles from Wilshire to White Knights.

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This new transport technology helped him to build The Grotto and a stone row in his fabulous new gardens - our campus!

The grotto has lost its decorative coral, sea-shells, mineral spars, and water pool...

...but the Wiltshire sarsen stones are some of the few surviving structures on campus from George's garden. They remind us that White Knights epitomised fashionable garden design, plant exploration, and innovative technology.

References
9. "LD" (1878) "The Wilderness, near Reading" The Gardener’s Chronicle 30 December 1878, p814

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