

Garden House, Wheathampstead

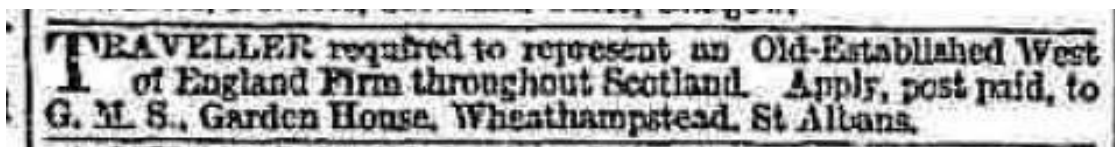


This is the only photograph we have of Garden House in its heyday¹. The house stood for nearly 100 years on the corner of Lamer Lane and Lower Luton Road, by the roundabout at the northern end of Station Road. Its history is closely related to that of Wheathampstead House which stands on the other side of Lamer Lane.

The Wheathampstead House we know today was built on the site of an earlier house in the late 1860s. In 1872 it was owned and lived in by the Reverend John Olive, Rector of Ayot St Lawrence. His wife Ellen, née Brown, came from Bath in Somerset, a link with the West Country that runs through much of the story of Garden House. John Olive was a wealthy man with houses in London and Bath, having inherited from his uncle Jeremiah Olive. His daughter Mary had married Viscount Kilcoursie, eldest son of Irish peer the 8th Earl of Cavan, in 1863. The Cavans lived in Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset. As a member of the Irish peerage, Kilcoursie could not sit in the House of Lords but sat in the Commons as MP for South Somerset from 1885 to 1892.²

When John Olive died on 3 January 1874, he left his estate, including Wheathampstead House and 'land and cottages in Lamer Lane', to his widow Ellen. There is no mention of Garden House in this will. In 1871, an unnamed house or cottage on the site was occupied by George Simons, master butcher, and his family. Conclusive evidence is not yet available, but it appears that Viscount Kilcoursie bought the house/cottage and land in about 1871 and that George Simons built himself a new shop and house, Leaside, that is now Marley's cafe and the Macintyre Home. He bought the half-acre site at auction from the estate of the late John Isaac House in 1871/2.

This is the first record we have of Garden House. It appeared in The Scotsman on 12 June 1877.



¹ The photograph is from the front cover of a sales brochure, probably dated 1930.

² See Appendix One for a family tree of the persons mentioned in this article.

The date of the advertisement suggests that Garden House must have been built sometime between 1871 and 1877. The story goes³ that it was built for the widowed Ellen Olive by her son-in-law, Viscount Kilcourse, but the advertisement shows that she did not take up residence at that time.

'G.M.S.' was George Wood Sheppard⁴. He was Ellen Olive's brother-in-law, having married her younger sister Emma Brown in Ayot St Lawrence in 1834. He came from Frome in Somerset where the Sheppards were a very wealthy family.

'The Sheppards had been established for four centuries near Frome and were cloth manufacturers. They had handsome country houses with luxurious gardens and full establishments.'⁵

John Sheppard, George's great-great-great-grandfather, founded the family business in the 17th century. The family had a strong philanthropic tradition, including being involved in anti-slavery campaigns and building homes for their workers and a cottage hospital. George's wife Emma was a J.P., Chair of the Board of Guardians, campaigned for improvements in the workhouse, and founded a Dame School. George's father, also George, built Fromefield House in Frome in 1797. The 1851 census shows him living there with his daughter Elizabeth, daughter-in-law Emma, five granddaughters, a governess, and 11 servants.



George (junior), Emma's husband, was staying in a hotel in Burton-on-Trent on census night, no doubt 'on the road' working for the business.

George and Emma had one son, also named George, and seven daughters, all born between 1835 and 1848. The 1871 census shows them living in Fromefield House with three unmarried daughters, three grandsons and nine live-in servants; he is described as a 'Woollen manufacturer' and J.P. for Somerset.

Emma Sheppard died on 31 July 1871 which perhaps helps to explain how George, now a widower, came to be living at Garden House in 1877.

His daughter Susan, aged 33 and unmarried, took on the household management, as shown by this advertisement which appeared in the Herts Advertiser of 8 February 1879.

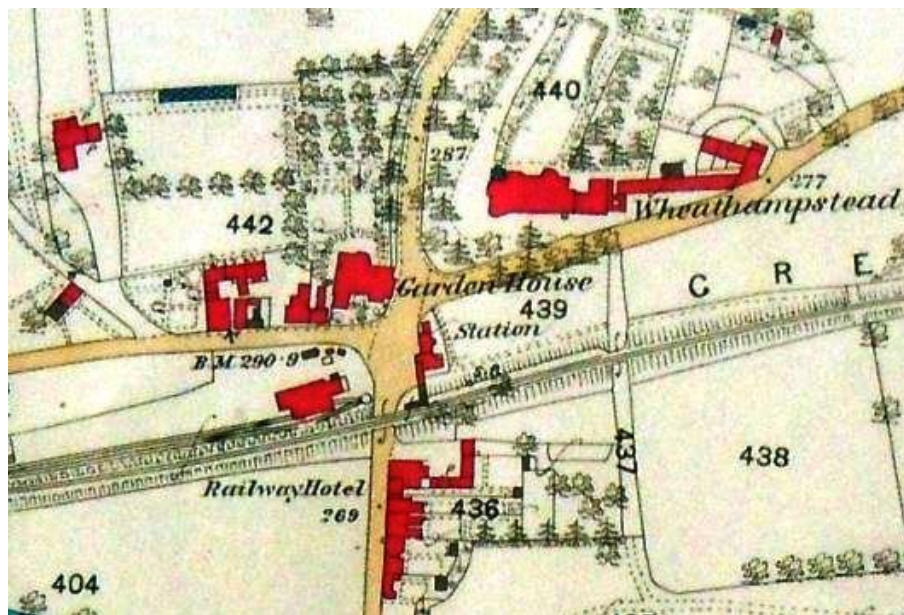
³ Memories of Win Deans on website wheathampstead.net

⁴ The 'M' in the advertisement is a typographical error.

⁵ Oman, C., (1965) *Ayot Rectory: a Family Memoir* Hodder & Stoughton, p.166

A LADY can recommend a respectable girl of 15, as a Kitchenumaid in a gentleman's family.—Apply to Miss Sheppard, Garden House, Wheathampstead.

The 1879 Ordnance Survey map shows Garden House together with a large garden and an orchard on the northern boundary. The garden must have been important for George Sheppard; Carola Oman says that 'One of the attractions of George's amiable character was that he was an enthusiastic gardener'.⁶



OS 1879

The 1881 census confirms that the Sheppards were still at Garden House; also in the household were three grandsons (George junior's children) and four servants. Now aged 73, George senior continued to be an enthusiastic gardener, becoming a Vice-President of the Harpenden Horticultural Society⁷.

Viscount Kilcourseie inherited the title of 9th Earl Cavan in 1887. When Ellen Olive died, aged 80, at Wheathampstead House in the following year she left both Wheathampstead House and Garden House to her son-in-law the new 9th Earl. She also left 'Effects' valued at £16,160 0s. 7d. (about £1,468,516 in today's values); this does not include the value of the two houses.

The Sheppards must have left Garden House at about this time. In 1891, they were living in London and Garden House was the home of Thomas Chittenden, a 35-year-old general practitioner who came from a well-off farming family in Sussex and had recently lived in Whitwell. The household was made up of his wife Helen whom he had married in 1885, their 4-year-old twin daughters, Enid and Erica, a cook, a nurse and a housemaid. No link between them and the Olive or Brown families has been found.

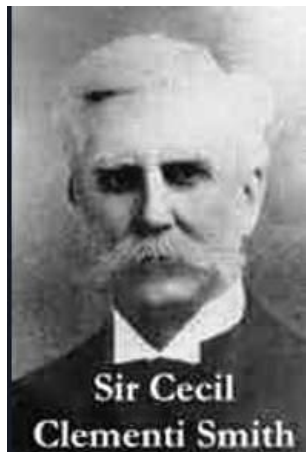
⁶ Ibid. p.167

⁷ Herts Advertiser and St Albans Times 27 August 1887.

The Chittendens were not at Garden House for long. This advertisement appeared in the 'To Let' column of the Eastbourne Gazette on 9 January 1895.

A COMMODIOUS Unfurnished Residence, one minute's walk from Wheathampstead Station (G.N.R.), 25 miles from London; nine trains up and down a day. House contains nine bedrooms, three sitting rooms, two staircases; very good stable and coach-house; and is close to the village and church. Rent £150 a year. (Apply A. Rumball, Esq., St. Alban's, agent for the Countess of Cavan.) Use of produce of large garden free of expense, as reserved and kept up by owner. Can be seen any day.—Garden House, Wheathampstead.—c

The Countess of Cavan named in this advertisement is Mary, wife of the 9th Earl. It is interesting that the new tenant will have 'use of produce of large garden free of expense' while the owner will 'reserve' it (i.e. have access) and 'keep it up'.



The next tenant was Sir Cecil Clementi Smith, a distinguished colonial administrator who had been Governor of the Straits Settlements, High Commissioner to Malaya and Lieutenant Governor of Ceylon⁸. He moved into Garden House sometime in 1895 with his wife Teresa and daughters Beatrice and Alice.

They were definitely in residence by January 1896. Evidence for this is in the form of a letter written on headed notepaper from Garden House on 29 January to F.W.Swettenham Esq. at Whitton Lodge, near Rugby.



Part of the letter reads as follows.

Friday: Every day – every post I have been hoping for a letter from you – Do you know how it is to wait for a letter you want very badly? You watch the clock till post time approaches – Then you listen for the ring – the step of the maid as she goes to

⁸ Source: Wikipedia

the door – for her returning steps – you take the letters from her with splendid indifference, although for the last five minutes every pulse has been throbbing and your heart thumping in your throat – you glance at them casually – and freeze inside with sickening disappointment while you hand the letters to their owners and say something pleasant or facetious ...

The letter was written by Beatrice Clementi Smith, aged 24, to Frank Swettenham, aged 46, an eminent British colonial administrator like her father, and presumably a family friend. He had been married to his wife Constance since 1878 but the marriage was strained and marked by long periods of separation; he divorced her in 1938 on grounds of her insanity. He had had a child by an Anglo-Indian woman in Calcutta in 1883. He was later awarded the GCMG and the Order of Merit.⁹

In July 1896, five months after this letter was written, Frank Swettenham was appointed the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States. In November of the same year, Beatrice Clementi Smith married Rear Admiral Sir Douglas Egremont Robert Brownrigg, Fourth Baronet.

The Clementi Smiths were still at Garden House on 16 January 1897, the date of a letter from Sir Cecil that was published in The Army and Navy Gazette in which he paid tribute to a former colleague in Singapore.

The Right Honourable Sir Cecil Clementi Smith (1840 – 1916) was the most distinguished resident of Garden House.

A British colonial administrator, he began his civil service career in 1864 in Hong Kong where he became Colonial Treasurer. He moved to Singapore in 1878 as Colonial Secretary for the Straits Settlements where he became known for his effective work in quelling Chinese secret societies.

In 1887 he was appointed Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner to Malaya. He later became Lieutenant Governor of Ceylon, and High Commissioner and Consul-General for Borneo and Sarawak. He returned to England in 1893.

He was appointed K.C.M.G. in 1886, G.C.M.G. in 1892, and Privy Councillor in 1906.



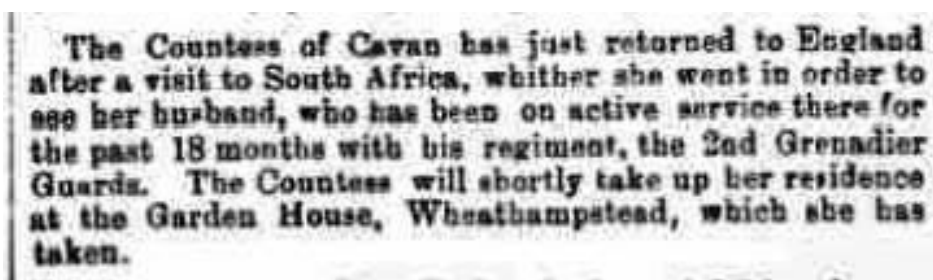
Sir Cecil Clementi Smith

In 1898, Clementi Smith attended a conference of 'gentlemen of the district' in Luton 'with the object of impressing on the Great Northern Railway the necessity of a better train service for the districts of Dunstable and Wheathampstead. The agitation was brewed by Sir Cecil Clementi Smith, Garden House, Wheathampstead and the mayor of Dunstable, Alderman F.T.Garratt.'

⁹ Source: Wikipedia

Sir Cecil could not attend in person but sent a substitute. In a letter, Sir Cecil said that there were no trains from Wheathampstead to London between 8.54 and 10.49 and a 9.30 train was needed. Representatives of Luton and Dunstable also spoke at the meeting, making the point that the growing amount of freight traffic was making it difficult to schedule passenger trains, including back from London in the evening; an additional track would solve this problem. After much discussion, the meeting was adjourned *sine die*.¹⁰ As we know, the second track was never built.

The 9th Earl Cavan died on 21 July 1900 so his eldest son, Viscount Kilcourse, became the 10th Earl. The 1901 census, taken on the night of 31 March, shows the Dowager Countess (Mary) living at Wheathampstead House with her daughter Lady Ellen Lambart. The 10th Earl was abroad at the time as shown by this notice in the Gloucestershire Chronicle dated 14 September 1901. The Countess of Cavan referred to in this report is his wife Caroline Inez (née Crawley).¹¹



It appears that she did not in fact take up residence at Garden House. On 9 August 1903, Sir Cecil Clementi Smith's daughter Beatrice, now Lady Brownrigg, gave birth to a son, Robert, there.¹²

Beatrice Clementi Smith is a rather sad figure. Robert died aged 3 and both her other children, Juliet and Gawen, predeceased her. She died in 1952, 13 years after her husband.

Mary Dowager Countess Cavan died on 2 August 1905. An announcement in the Luton Times dated 27 October 1905 stated that her daughter Lady Ellen Lambart planned to move to a house 'close by'. This may have been Garden House but could have been Sunny Cottage, a few yards along the road from Garden House. Whichever it is, she did not stay for long. This advertisement appeared in the Country Gentlemen's Newspaper on 5 September 1908. (see next page)

¹⁰ Bedfordshire Advertiser 24 June 1898

¹¹ The 2nd Grenadier Guards served in the Orange Free State in the 2nd Boer war, sustaining serious casualties at the Battle of Biddulphsberg on 29 May 1900.

¹² The Queen, The Lady's Newspaper, 15 August 1903

AND ST. BRIGTON AND EASTBOURNE.

GARDEN HOUSE, Wheathampstead,
Herts (situate in one of the prettiest parts of the county in an excellent hunting and social neighbourhood; close to the station on the G.N. Rly., within fifty minutes of town).—To be LET, Unfurnished, on Lease, a very attractive RESIDENCE, standing in well-timbered gardens of about 2 acres, and containing ten bed and dressing rooms, bath room (h. and c.), large lofty dining room, pretty drawing room, library, and complete domestic offices; excellent stabling for four horses, coach house, &c.; beautiful garden, with tennis lawn, pretty flower beds and borders, shrubberies, kitchen garden, conservatory, &c.; golf links within about half a mile. Rent £200 per annum.—For orders to view and full particulars apply the Owner's Agents, MAPLE and Co Lrn., Tottenham-court-road, London, W., who have personally inspected and can strongly recommend the property.

SUNNY COTTAGE, Wheathampstead,
Herts (close to station, amidst delightful country).—To be LET, on a yearly agreement, a well-built COTTAGE RESIDENCE, containing six bed and dressing rooms, bath room, three reception rooms, and usual offices; small garden with lawn, flower and kitchen garden, &c. Rent £50 per annum.—Inspected and recommended by the Owner's Agents, MAPLE and Co. Lrn., Tottenham-court-road, London, W.

The vacancy at Garden House may have been prompted by Clementi Smith moving to The Grange in Welwyn; he was living there in 1911. He died in February 1916.

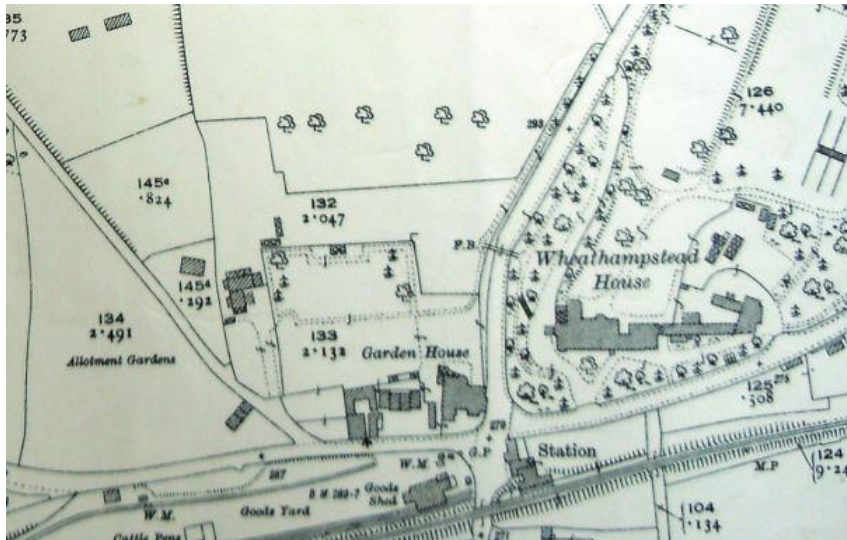
The 1911 census shows five servants in Garden House with a Mrs Reily listed as 'Head of Family or Separate Occupier' but not at home on census night.

Emmeline Julia Reily was born in 1849, the daughter of Rector Theodore Bouwens and Lady Julia Bouwens, whose father was a peer. She married Charles Horace Reilly, a barrister employed by the East India Company in Calcutta, who died in 1908. On census night 1911, she was staying with wealthy friends in Staffordshire. She is recorded at Garden House until she died in France on 4 April 1925, leaving an estate valued for probate at £43,677.7s.8d. (roughly £1,793,350 today).

At this time, a bridge across Lamer Lane connected the gardens of Wheathampstead House and Garden House.



¹³ Memories of Tony Penny on website wheathampstead.net



OS 1923

8

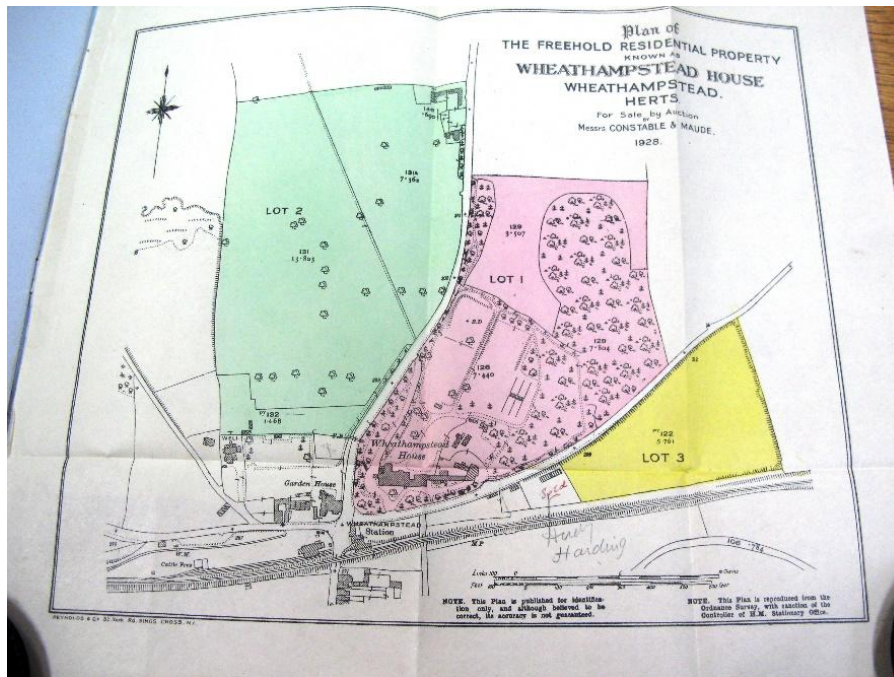
A comparison of these two maps also shows that a building that stood to the west of Garden House in 1898 had disappeared by 1923 and a terrace of four houses had been constructed.

... Grace Blaine ... said that the original line of the four properties was further forward but the Lady Dowager had insisted on the foundations being taken away and the building line moved further back so as 'not to take her light'. How true this is I do not know but we are further back from the road than the other properties. She discovered the building on her return from a trip, supposedly.¹⁴

In 1924 the 10th Earl of Cavan sold Wheathampstead House to two local builders, Henry George and Mr Owens. Garden House was not included in the sale, which was typical of this period when many large houses and estates were being sold as a result of changing economic circumstances and tax regimes after the First World War.

Four years later, Messrs George and Owens sold Wheathampstead House to Albert John Murphy as a private residence. He made it the headquarters of Murphy & Son in 1941.

This plan from the 1928 sales particulars show that, once again, Garden House was not included in the sale.



The sales particulars included the following:

'The bridge connecting this Lot [shown in pink] with Lot 2 [shown in green] will be removed by the Vendors in the event of these Lots not being purchased by the same buyer.'

Murphy bought both Lots so the bridge stayed in place.

Garden House was sold in 1930¹⁵. It seems likely that it too was bought by Murphy; a later aerial photograph shows that Garden House was being used as the registered office of the Murphy Chemical Company. It remained in the ownership of Murphy's for the rest of its life.

¹⁴ Personal email from local resident.

¹⁵ The sales brochure in Appendix Two is almost certainly from this sale but this is not confirmed.

Ena Spearing, a resident of Wheathampstead, recalled that, in the Second World War:

‘The Eastern Command was billeted in Wheathampstead, Garden House being their headquarters. The Officers’ Mess was at the Mead Hall. The officers were lodged at various houses in the village.’

These aerial photographs were taken in the immediate post-war period.



1946



1952

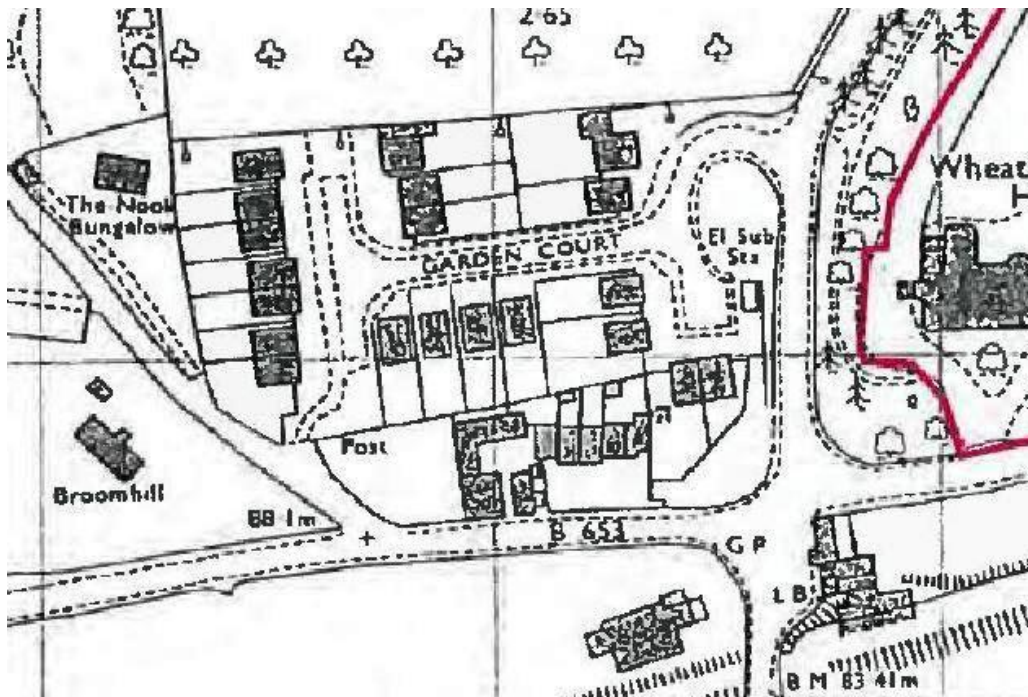
Several older Wheathampstead residents remember working for Murphy Chemical Company in Garden House in the 1950s and 1960s. Their memories include that the company, which manufactured pesticides, carried out trials on the trees in the orchard behind Garden House.

In 1955 I started work for the Murphy Chemical Co., in offices housed in Garden House. This was just opposite the railway yard and my office was at the front so when not busy one could watch the trains. This was quite an interesting job especially the switchboard. I remember when entomologists were abroad if we wanted to make a telephone call to them we had to book the call several days in advance, but when we made the contact I was so surprised how clear the line was.

NB The footnote on p.3 of the brochure.

One call I had to make was to Tanganyika. It was if we were talking internally. Then of course when meeting our reps it could sometimes be a let-down putting a face to a caller. Still a bit naughty even at this stage of my life we did have fun listening in to some of the calls. On another occasion whilst making a three-way call for one of the directors I was told off as it had taken 38 seconds to finally connect up the third person¹⁶.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1971 shows the newly-built Garden Court so Garden House must have been demolished in the late 1960s¹⁷.



OS 1971

The condition of the building and the roof in this rather sad photo from the 1960s (see next page) suggests that Garden House stood empty and abandoned for some years before demolition.

¹⁶ Memories of Barbara de Mornay Penny (née Davies) on website wheathampstead.net

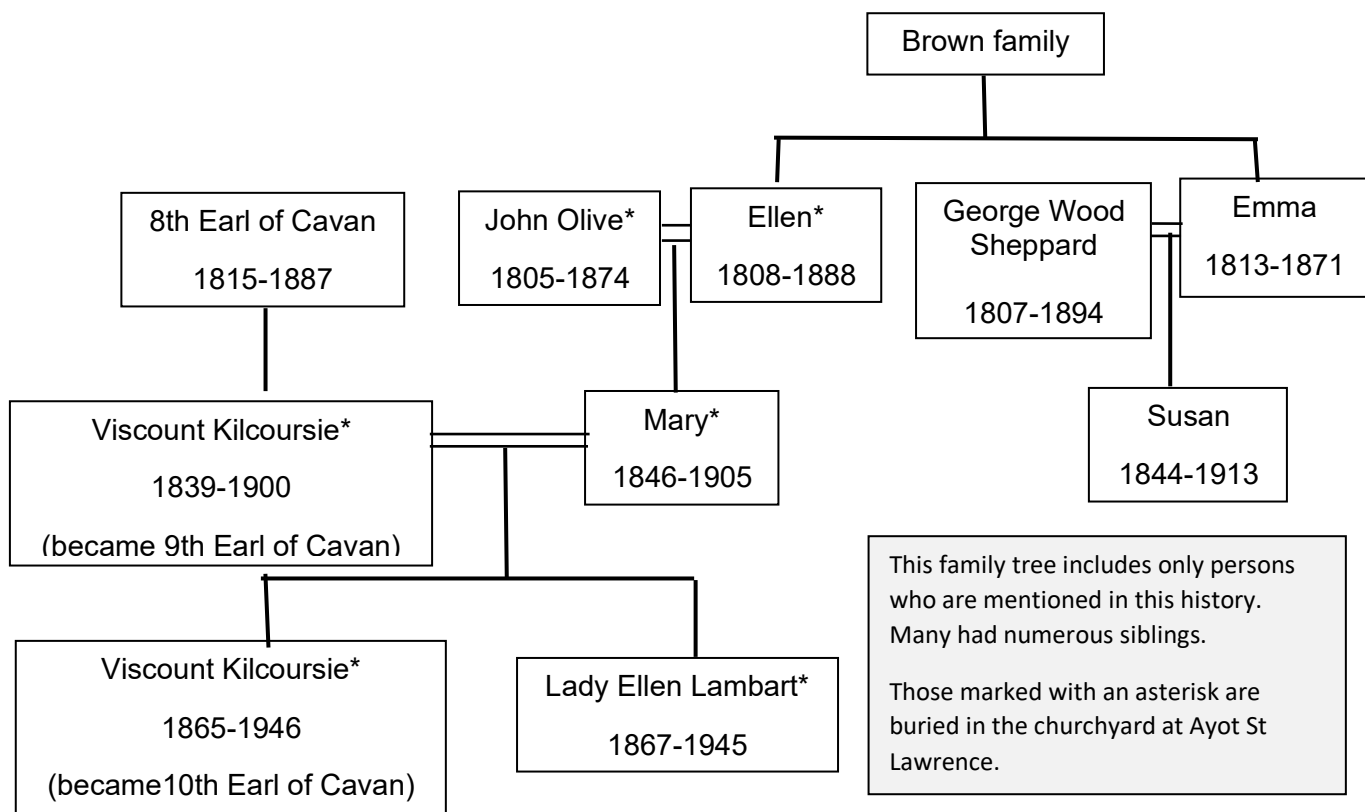
¹⁷ This clip is taken from a report into Wheathampstead House carried out by Archaeological Solutions Ltd in 2014. HER Req.No. 244/13.



Patrick McNeill
July 2026

Additional research by Dianne Payne

Appendix One



Appendix Two

Garden House



*Wheathampstead
Hertfordshire*

GARDEN HOUSE

WHEATHAMPSTEAD

HERTFORDSHIRE

STATIONS

Wheathampstead, L.N.E.R.	Close by
St. Albans, L.M.S.	4½ miles
Hatfield, L.N.E.R. (Main Line)	5 miles
Harpender	2½ miles

About 2½ Acres. 3 Reception Rooms. 7 Bed and Dressing Rooms. Bathroom. 4 Maids' Rooms. Complete Domestic Offices. Good Water Supply. Main Drainage. Charming Garden including Grass Tennis Court in Excellent Condition. Further Land available if required—see foot-note.*

An attractive and comfortable Residence most conveniently situated in one of Hertfordshire's most attractive districts. On the outskirts of the delightful old-world village of Wheathampstead, yet within easy reach of many good centres whence London may be reached in little over half-an-hour.

SITUATED OVER 300 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL ON GRAVEL SOIL AND THE HOUSE IS SUBSTANTIALLY BUILT OF BRICK WITH TILED ROOF, THE PRINCIPAL ACCOMMODATION BEING MOSTLY ON TWO FLOORS.

Entrance Hall, Inner Sitting Hall, Gentlemen's Lavatory with W.C., Lofty Drawing Room about 30 ft. 6 in. × 26 ft. 6 in. Morning Room about 18 ft. × 18 ft., both enjoying a southerly aspect. Excellent Dining Room about 23 ft. × 22 ft. 9 in. with French Windows to Garden and to Conservatory.

THE DOMESTIC OFFICES are well shut off and comprise:—Kitchen fitted with Flavel Range, Dresser and sink (h. & c.), Scullery with sink (h. & c.) Pantry with sink (h. & c.), and ample cupboards. Servants' Hall, Store Cupboards and, below, good dry cellarage.

* There is additional adjoining Land up to 24 Acres, part of which has been used as an Experimental Orchard, planted with young full bearing Fruit Trees. This can be had by arrangement.

ON THE FIRST FLOOR and opening off from a large Landing are the principal bedrooms, comprising :- Bedroom (1) 25 ft. x 28 ft., Dressing Room adjoining (2) 17 ft. x 13 ft., Bedroom (3) 14 ft. x 12 ft., Bedroom (4) 18 ft. x 18 ft., Bedroom (5) 22 ft. x 14 ft., Bedroom (6) 22 ft. x 13 ft., etc. Bathroom, etc. Above are 4 Maid's Bedrooms, and Box Room, etc.

GOOD WATER SUPPLY PUMPED BY AN ENGINE
COMPANY'S GAS

ELECTRIC LIGHT AVAILABLE (the cable is already connected)
MAIN DRAINAGE TELEPHONE

THE GARDEN AND GROUNDS are a most delightful and outstanding feature of the property, they are fully matured in a high state of cultivation and shaded by many fine trees. Sloping to the South they are completely secluded and from them pretty views of the surrounding country are obtained. They comprise :- **Rock Garden, Gravelled Walks with Herbaceous Borders, Pleasure Lawns, Excellent Tennis Court, Rustic Summerhouse, Capital Kitchen Garden, Many varieties of choice Flowering and Ornamental Shrubs.**

THE TOTAL AREA IS ABOUT 2½ ACRES

RENT OF HOUSE AND GROUNDS £200 PER ANNUM
(REDUCED)

STABLING AND GARAGE CAN
BE HAD BY ARRANGEMENT

NEW CENTRAL HEATING, ETC., COULD BE INSTALLED
ON PAYMENT OF 5% PER ANNUM ON OUTLAY. ALSO
ANY STRUCTURAL ALTERATIONS ON THESE TERMS

THE WHOLE OF THE INTERIOR WILL BE REDECORATED
TO SUIT TENANT

GOLF. Mid Herts Golf Club, ¾ mile.

HUNTING. With the Hertfordshire and other packs within easy reach.

RIDING SCHOOL in village.

**The Owner prefers to Let the above Property, but would be
willing to Sell**

Two views in The Garden

