



Wheathampstead History Society

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News and events

- There will not be a meeting in August so our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 16 September** when **Anne Rowe** will present on **The Lost Gardens of Hertfordshire**.
- The **Second Herts Archaeology Festival** will be held next Saturday, 18 July, from 10.00 to 5.00 at Welwyn Roman Baths. There will be stalls, activities, talks and visits to the baths. For details, go to <https://tinyurl.com/nhjahs9p>

Wheathampstead House

Wheathampstead House stands on the corner of Lamer Lane and Codicote Road, opposite the restored railway station. The back of it can be seen from the road. Old maps (Dury and Andrews 1766, Mumford 1799, Bryant 1822) all show a small enclosed area with buildings on the site but no detail of what they are. The 1841 tithe map shows a horseshoe-shaped house with garden and paddock owned by John Dorrington (a farmer who lived at Delaport) and occupied by the Reverend Joseph Douton, curate of St Helen's. The census of the same year tells us that Douton, aged 50, was headmaster of a boys' boarding school with two teachers, 24 pupils and three young female domestic servants. This was the same Joseph Douton who, in 1838, had tried to calm down a very drunk Mr Wright in a beerhouse in Gustard Wood and was stabbed for his pains. By 1851 he was a vicar in Biggleswade.

John Dorrington died in 1863 and the house was sold for £2,000. Four years later, it was bought by the Reverend John Olive, rector of Ayot St



Ordnance Survey 1898

Lawrence, who had inherited wealth from his uncle. He made major changes to the house, probably demolishing and rebuilding it. His daughter Mary had married the 8th Viscount Kilcourseie, later 9th Earl of Cavan, and they moved into the house with John Olive and his wife Ellen in 1872. When John Olive died in 1874, Mary inherited the house and gardens.

Soon afterwards, Kilcourseie, wanting more privacy, bought some land from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, re-routed the road, and built the

high wall and gates that we see today. He also embarked on a major landscaping of the gardens.

On census night in 1881, Wheathampstead House was occupied by the Viscountess Mary Kilcourseie, Ellen her widowed mother, four children and ten live-in staff. The 8th Earl died in 1887 so Kilcourseie became 9th Earl. When he died in 1900, his son Frederick Rudolph Lambart



inherited the title at the age of 35, having lived at Wheathampstead House since he was seven

years old. For more about the 10th Earl and his distinguished military career, see [Bulletin 61](#). He was a keen huntsman and the Hertfordshire Hunt regularly met at the house. He was twice married and had five children with his first wife.

The Cavans lived at the house until 1924 when they moved to London. The house was sold to two local builders, Mr George and Mr Owens, who sold it in 1928 to Albert Murphy. The sales brochure refers to "*The delightful pleasure gardens and grounds ... extensive lawns, rose walks, rosery, rock garden, four tennis and croquet lawns ... extensive terraces ... formal garden ... glasshouses ... peach house ... cucumber house ...*".

Murphy made the house the head office of Murphy & Son, his company that specialised in developing chemicals for the brewing industry, and used some of the rooms as research laboratories. He sold the house in the mid-1980s and it stood empty and neglected for some years until it was converted into offices in 1990. In 1995, Polaroid UK made it their registered office and installed their sales and marketing departments. In 2002, the house was bought by St Albans High School for Girls, who opened their prep school there in 2004.

A longer version of this article is in preparation.