

Pit otherwise Pitt Place and its occupiers

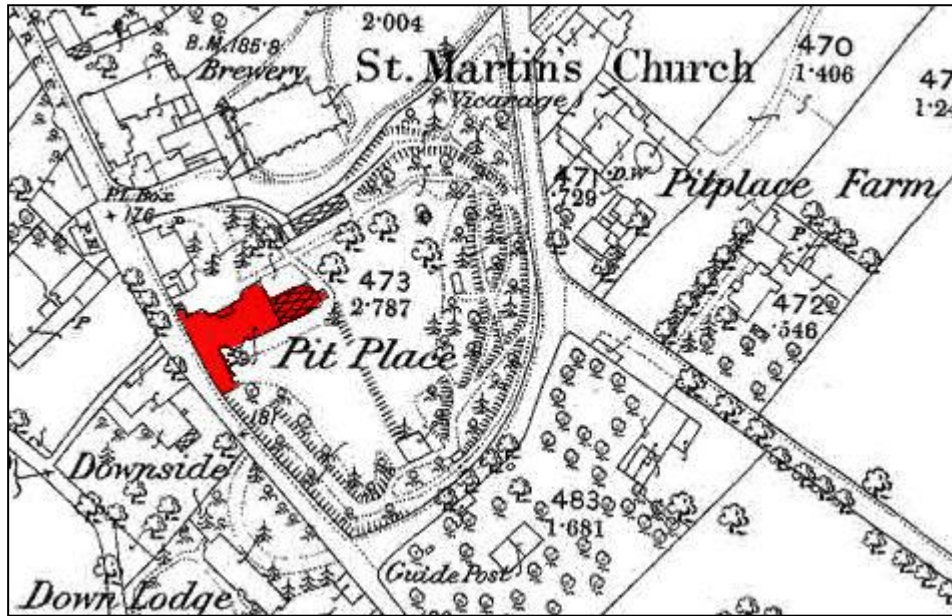


Pitt Place by John Hassells c.1816

After *Durdans* burnt down on 25 February 1755, Alderman William Belchier [a Banker of Lombard Street, trading in partnership as Belchier & Ironside, later Ironside Belchier & How, and sometime M.P. for Southwark, who was closely connected with the East India Company] developed an existing farmhouse, in an old chalk pit near to Ebbisham churchyard, called the Church otherwise Hydes Pit, for his own use. This “messuage or tenement containing 4 acres” came to be known, mundanely, as Pit Place (spelled with a single “t”). John Wesley visited Belchier on 13 August 1759 and wrote: -

“I dined at Mr. B.'s in Epsom, whose house and gardens lie in what was once a chalk-pit. It is the most elegant spot I ever saw with my eyes; everything, within doors and without, being finished in the most exquisite taste. Surely nothing on earth can be more delightful: O what will the possessor feel, when he cries out, ‘Must I then leave thee, Paradise? Then leave these happy shades, and mansions fit for gods?’”

which provides confirmation the property had been completed before that date. According to the Victoria County History “The lions at the entrance and some interior work (were) said to have come from Nonsuch”: parts of the chimney-work were also believed to have been derived from the old palace. It is speculated that the “supercilious lions”, caryatids and Tudor chimney pots could have been salvaged from the ruins of *Durdans*. Belchier, who is credited with having erected one of the first integrated glass buildings as the orangerie for Pit Place, got into financial difficulties during 1760 and 1767 but in 1770 he was again in business at 34 Nicholas Lane. He died on 14 December 1772 for his Will to be proved on 18 September 1773. His second wife and relict, Frances nee Thomson, survived until 1812 when she expired “without issue”, aged 93.



Detail from 1866 OS Map

Belchier was succeeded in the property by Rt. Hon. Thomas Lord **Lyttleton**, Baron Frankley, introduced in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [accessible via the Surrey Libraries website] as follows: -

“Lyttelton, Thomas, second Baron Lyttelton (1744–1779), libertine and politician, was born at Hagley, Worcestershire, on 30 January 1744, the son of George Lyttelton, first Baron Lyttelton of Frankley (1709-1773) and Lucy (1717/18–1747), daughter of Hugh Fortescue of Filleigh, Devon. The dissolute son of a pious father, Lyttelton attracted fascinated, and horrified, attention in life and death.”



*Thomas Lyttelton, 2nd Baron Lyttelton(1744-1779)
Image Source Wikipedia*

A story* about supernatural events attending upon his death is attributed to his uncle. William Lyttelton, first Baron Westcote, in a written statement made by him and dated to 13 February 1780. Thomas Lyttelton had previously suffered from a guilt complex and irrational fears which led him ultimately to desert Hagley, the family

seat which he found both much too solitary and in too close proximity with the parish burying-ground, and remove himself to a country-house near Epsom, Pit Place, “said to have been won from Lord Foley [Thomas 2nd Baron Foley of second creation, an inveterate gambler, died July 1793 ‘absolutely bankrupt’] at play” – in another version, received “to satisfy a debt of honour”.

In a letter, Lord Lyttleton explained his preference for Pit Place as follows: -

“You are not the only one of my many criticising friends who have expressed surprise at my taking so kindly to the Surrey dell, and becoming so dead to rural magnificence as to neglect Hagley's gaudy scene and proud domain. [Clara Haywood], in one of her visits to this place, told me that I looked like a toad in a hole. Be that as it may, it is shady, elegant, convenient, and snug a term peculiar to English comfort, and not translated into any other language. Besides, a villa is a necessary appendage to that rank whose dignity you so often recommend me to maintain; and in what spot could a British peer find a more delightful retreat than mine, to solace himself in the interval of public duty? Or where is the Aegerian grot[a reference to a poem by Alexander Pope], in whose auspicious solitude he could better hold his secret counsels with the guardian genius of his country? But, badinage apart, its vicinity to the metropolis is one of its principal recommendations; and, to a man of my tendencies, a cottage at Pimlico is preferable to a palace in the distant counties. Here I find no inconvenience in a rainy day; the means of dissipating a gloomy temper are within my beckon. If I wish to be alone, I can shut my gates, and exclude the world; if I want society, my post-chaise will quickly bear me hence, or fetch it here.”

After Lord Lyttleton's demise, *Pit Place* is known to have been tenanted for short periods – at first by Pellegrin Treves (1733-1817), “The first British ‘Court Jew’”. He was later described as “Another unfaithful Jew, but extremely familiar Brighton figure, ...one of the Prince Regent's dissolute set, who figures prominently in the memoirs of the time and was caricatured by Dighton in 1801 as ‘a fashionable JEW Travers-ing the Steyne at Brighton’” -

<http://www.thorngent.eclipse.co.uk/provincialjewry/bathcamb.htm>

Although Mrs Maria Anne Fitzherbert (1756-1837) entered London society after the death of her second husband in 1781, she was not introduced to George, Prince of Wales, until the spring of 1784 and is therefore unlikely to have been entertained by Treves, or indeed the next named tenant, at *Pit Place*.

George Robert Fitzgerald followed Treves into occupation of the property. The former, a member of the late Lord Lyttleton's social circle, may be identified as a notorious character from the period: - ‘Fighting Fitzgerald’, born in 1748 and educated at Eton, who joined the army at 17. He was a favourite at the French court before being caught cheating at the gaming tables and indulging a fondness for duelling. Having been posted to Galway in 1767, he was shot in the head during yet another duel and underwent a trepanning operation that affected “his power of reasoning and control of his actions”. Ever a wild man, he continued to live the life of a rake. Eventually, a family feud led to “the monstrous murder of two neighbouring gentlemen” and his death, after the hangman's rope had broken twice, ensued on the gallows outside Castlebar prison in 1786. Full particulars of his trial and execution

appear in pamphlets published immediately after those events whilst further biographical details may be found in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography accessible via the Surrey Libraries website.

On 10 April 1782, Lyttleton's Executors sold the Epsom estate, still known as *Pit Place*, to Thomas **Fitzherbert** of Stubbington Lodge, Southampton. Fitzherbert, a bachelor [b. circa 1746], described as M. P. for Arundel, married Miss Anne Pye ("only daughter of the late Rev. Rob. Pye, LLD and niece to Sir Rowland Alston of Odel Castle, Bedford") on 26 November 1789 at St George's Church, Hanover Square. They are reported to have added the "Bow room" to *Pit Place*. He did not, however, give up Stubbington Lodge until 1811 and retained a lease on Stubbington Farm until 1822 that appears to have been the year of his death. *The Ambulator* by John Bew in an edition published 1807 described Mr Fitherbert as then "the last proprietor" and named the current owner as Mr Jewdwine (sic).

Thomas Jewdwine

In fact, there is evidence that Thomas **Jewdwine** had acquired the Epsom estate much earlier because the Court Rolls for Epsom manor record an agreement dated 11 July 1791 for him to purchase Fitzherbert's copyhold land to which Jewdwine, of Temple, City of London, was "admitted" on 4 November 1793. In a King's Bench case, *Jendwine (sic) v Slade* (1797) 2 Espinasse 572; 170 ER 459, Jewdwine had purchased, from a dealer called Slade at a cost of £621, 12 old masters for his house near Epsom but paintings sold as the work of Teniers and Claude Loraine were shown to be copies. Lord Kenyon held that it was impossible to establish a warranty as to the identity of the painters because the age of the paintings meant that authorship could only be a matter of opinion of the seller and left the determination of authorship to the judgment of the buyer. Jewdwine, a "monied" Velvet & Silk Manufacturer of Huguenot origin, trading from premises at 69 Basinghall Street, London [partner in Messrs Jewdwine and Fromanteel subsequently Messrs Jewdwine & Smart until 24 December 1811] was later said to have developed a habit of "harassing and vexing his neighbours [indulging] a lust for the law which was never to be satiated". Reportedly, he brought a case against a farmer "for picking and smelling a clover flower which grew on one of his fields and, on that occasion, got a farthing's damages" for trespass. On 12 August 1800 at Surrey Assizes in Guildford, he was found guilty [in the name of Judwine] of assaulting a King's officer who was attempting to serve a warrant. A year later he again turned up at the Assizes to prosecute his gamekeeper, an officer on half-pay called Cunningham, on three counts – one lost, another won & the final allegation withdrawn. During May 1806 he may be found in *The Times* offering to sell land occupied by him, and another, "dispersed in the common fields" of Epsom but the genesis of more than one additional dispute seems to lie in extra transactions concerning property situated outside of the parish. An early indication is contained in a newspaper report of 13 October 1806 which has him taken into custody and appearing at Bow Street on a charge of writing and sending an anonymous letter threatening "to kill and murder" Charles Browning, "late [having, earlier in the year, sold the office for £4,000] High Bailiff of the City of Westminster and a Magistrate for the County of Surrey". The alleged offence was "a capital felony, under the 27th of George II, chap.15" but Jewdwine was bailed and is shown by later events to have escaped the legal threat to his life.

On 18 April 1815 Thomas Jeudwine filed a suit against Alcock [defendants, Joseph Alcock, formerly one of the Chief Clerks of His Majesty's Treasury (died 1821), his brother Thomas, and Catherine, John Alcock's widow and Executrix, as presumed beneficiaries] to compel specific performance of an agreement for sale of "an estate in Ewell which, having previously been rented by him, John Alcock, Attorney, Joseph's late brother [died 2 May 1814 at *Kingswood Lodge* otherwise *Kingswood Warren*] allegedly undertook to purchase around 1810. According to Jeudwine's will, the action related to "his old Warren Farm, Parish of Banstead, Hamlet of Kingswood" [because Kingswood Manor had been an outlier in Ewell Manor, Kingswood became a "detached liberty" regarded as part of Ewell] Interest lies in the further involvement of the Charles Browning mentioned above and his mentally incapacitated mother Louisa nee Calvert who, for some years from 1816, sought but failed to recover possession of the real estate and premises in question – they figure as characters in an accompanying article about Frederick Lord Baltimore [See the web entry at <http://epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/CalvertFnew.html>] The sum of money paid into Court to compel specific performance was mentioned in the later complicated case in Chancery of Jeudwine v Agate which also reveals that Thomas Jeudwine had entered into a settlement in February 1772 on his marriage to Penelope Paice [3 March 1772 at St Giles', Reading]. They had three children, one of whom was a son [Thomas Guitehead Jeudwine b. 13 April 1774, c. 5 May 1774 at St Michael, Bassishaw, London] who died early and two daughters named as plaintiffs, Mary Penelope and Anne Jeudwine. Mrs Penelope Jeudwine had died in February 1810 [actually at *Pit Place*, aged 63] and during 1812 the widower, Thomas, had a second address at 5 Cleveland Court, St James, London.

Jeudwine appears to have become estranged from his wife and two daughters before 1805 [the year in which Penelope herself initiated legal proceedings against her husband] because he subsequently employed a housekeeper, Sarah Agate, and fathered two sons with her – Thomas Agate [Christened at Epsom 9 January 1807] and Henry Agate. In his hand-written and un-witnessed will dated 10 May 1815 it was stated "Whereas my daughters have behaved in a most unnatural manner for some years past without just cause and instituted Suits against me in various Courts...[to recover]... more than £10,000... [and had arranged for his arrest on 9 May 1814 for alleged late payment of a particular sum]...I bequeath [to them] only one shilling as a punishment for conduct so horrible to their father". On the other hand, each of the Agates was to receive £3,000 although Sarah would be deprived of benefit "should she be so foolish and inconsiderate as to marry"!

Pit Place Farm had been leased to John Willoughby but almost inevitably he was named as Plaintiff against Thomas Jeudwine and Sarah Agate as co-defendants in a further case listed for 1816.

**PITT PLACE,
The Seat of Thomas Jewdwine, Esq.**



Pitt Place by John Hassells c.1816

As described by John Hassells in *Picturesque Rides and Walks with Excursions by water, Thirty Miles round the British Metropolis*, 1817

“This elegant retreat was the whimsical offspring of the late Mr. Belchier, who converted a chalk pit into a most desirable residence. Mr. Fitzherbert, who afterwards possessed it, made considerable improvements; but its present possessor, Mr. Jewdwine, has completed what taste and judgment must allow to be a very pretty chateau. It is much to be regretted, that in giving a view of this structure, there is no point that can be taken which embraces the rich woody scene on its opposite side. For so small a space, it has an abundance of luxuriant native and exotic shrubs and trees. The bowling-green in front of this mansion is kept in very high order, and affords an opportunity for a gentlemanly pastime. Mr. Jewdwine's pinery, green, and hot houses, are of the most excellent kind. By a subterraneous passage from the lawn, you are conducted to the kitchen and flower gardens, and from thence to his farm, &c. The interior of this mansion has every convenience for a family residence: - among its elegant luxuries, is a marble bath. The drawing room, conservatory, and aviary, are supposed to be the most beautiful in the county of Surrey.

In the conservatory is a myrtle of extraordinary growth, which Mr. Jewdwine has taken infinite pains to cultivate and preserve; it is fifteen feet in height, and covers an area of seven yards in diameter; at bottom it measures thirty-six inches in circumference, and at the height of three feet upwards, it is twenty-eight inches in girth; at six feet from the ground, it divides into two stems, each of which are two spans round. It is presumed to be the largest myrtle in the south of England. With this tree are several citrons, Maltese oranges, and shaddocks.



The Drawing Room, Pitt Place 1959

The interior of the villa is fitted up with elegance: the drawing-room is thirty-nine feet long by thirty feet broad, and about twenty-eight feet in height: - the looking-glasses have an excellent effect, by being let into the panels, and appear to represent a continuation of the grounds one way, and the orangery the other. The panels are ornamented with groups of flowers, and subjects from the antique, and shaped with borders. The windows reach from the very top to the bottom of the room, corresponding with the one that leads into the conservatory. In this room, Mr. Jewdwine keeps the chef-d'oeuvre of his collection of pictures; a most beautiful gem, entitled, *La Fille Retrouve*, presumed by some to be by Gerard Dow, to which I cannot agree, ascribing it rather to the pencil of Vanderwerf. It is a most rare and beautiful production, and evidently painted to commemorate a domestic calamity: - the recovered daughter is convincing her parents of her identity by pointing to a mole on her breast, and to confirm her relationship, she presents her Dutch pass, and the family jewels she wore before her departure; the mother is weeping over the daughter with rapture - the tear, and her convulsed and swollen throat, denote her excessive joy and surprise: the father, with closed hands, returning thanks, is a strong marked character, habited in a Spanish dress. Another female is seen wiping the tear from her eye, and forms the group on the left side. An old gipsy woman, who, it is presumed, has brought back the fugitive, makes up the group: - there are some flowers introduced, touched with sweetness and delicacy.



The Chinese Chippendale Room, Pitt Place 1959

The dining parlour is a spacious room, twenty-seven feet square, and about eighteen feet in height, and possesses the principal part of the collection of pictures at Pitt Place. There are three charming pictures, by Berghem; one of Fording the River, in his broadest and boldest manner, with a peculiar richness of colouring; the other two are cabinet gems, the one Ploughing, and the other a Cattle Piece, both sweet pictures; - one by Wovermans, Going out Hawking, in his early manner; - a Bridge, by Ruysdale, fine, and a Ferry Boat, with a river scene, by the same master;—the Debauch, with Louis XIV. in character, by Old Wenix ; —a Remus and Romulus, by Coypel; —a Merry Making, by Teniers; -three, by Mieris, very fine, of Venus and Diana, Ariadne, and a sleeping Venus; - a Landscape, Both; - Temptation of St. Antony, with a well composed Landscape, Salvator Rosa; - an upright Landscape, by Cuyper; - Landscape and Cattle, by Du Jardin ; - Separating the Flocks, by Both and Berghem, an exquisite picture; - the Embarkation of St. Rosario, Claude; - a fine crayon drawing of the celebrated Kitty Fisher; - the rape of Dejanira, after Guido; - Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne, a delightful composition, by Luca Giordano; - two subjects of the Bay of Naples and the eruption of Mount Vesuvius; beside many more pictures of less note. On the staircase, is the Triumph of Silenus at the Fountain of Bacchus, after Jordaens, a composition of considerable interest.

The Library is extensive and well chosen, with a considerable number of very rare and scarce books. In this room are the principal works of Hogarth, with a few good pictures, and a print of the celebrated large cask of Heidelberg, which is elegantly ornamented, and will hold thirteen thousand gallons. This celebrated tub was filled with fine hock at the time Bonaparte visited, with his army, that part of Germany: - there would need little occasion to observe, he emptied it. He ordered it to be drained to the last drop, and sent it to Paris for his own and generals' private services. Here is also an original portrait of Garrick, by Gainsborough ; and a curious drawing, by

Marcellus Larron, a French artist, of the ancient manner of throwing the stocking at an English wedding.

The circumstances attending the death of Lord Littleton are generally known, though but few persons were acquainted with its being at Pitt Place. The following is a detail given of that event by one who was of the party, and on a visit to that nobleman.

***Lord Littleton's Dream and Death.**

'I was at Pitt Place, Epsom, when Lord Littleton died; Lord Fortesque, Lady Flood, and the two Miss Amphletts, were also present. Lord Littleton had not been long returned from Ireland, and frequently had been seized with suffocating fits ; he was attacked several times by them in the course at the preceding month while he was at his house in Hill Street, Berkeley-square. It happened that he dreamt, three days before his death, that he saw a fluttering bird, and afterwards that a woman appeared to him in white apparel, and said to him, ' Prepare to die, you will not exist three days ' ; - his lordship was much alarmed, and called to his servant from a closet adjoining, who found him much agitated, and in a profuse perspiration; the circumstance had a visible effect all the next day on his lordship's spirits. On the third day, while his lordship was at breakfast with the above personages, he said, 'If I live over tonight, I shall have jockied [in another version this word is rendered as "bilked"] the ghost, for this is the third day.' The whole party presently set off for Pitt Place, where they had not long arrived, before his lordship was visited by one of his accustomed fits: after a short time he recovered. He dined at five o'clock that day, and went to bed at eleven, when his servant was about to give him rhubarb and mint water} but his lordship perceiving him stir it with a toothpick, called him a slovenly dog, and bid him go and fetch a tea-spoon; but on the man's return, he found his master in a fit, and the pillow being high, his chin bore hard upon his neck, when the servant, instead of relieving his lordship on the instant, from his perilous situation, ran in his fright, and called out for help, but on his return, he found his lordship dead.'

The two Miss Amphletts, that were with him at his decease, and their sister, whom his lordship had left in Ireland, were seduced by him, and prevailed on to leave their mother, who was a widow, and resided near his lordship's country residence in Shropshire. The desertion of her daughters brought on Mrs. Amphlett a despondency which caused her death, which happened at the exact period his lordship described having seen the ghost; whom, before the termination of his existence, he acknowledged to be that personage, though her dissolution at the time was unknown to him. The morning after Lord Littleton's decease, the Miss Amphletts received an account of their mother's death, which corresponded with the exact time that the female vision appeared to his lordship.

Another very curious circumstance used to be related by the late Miles Peter Andrews, Esq. who was the companion and friend of Lord Littleton in his revels. Mr. Andrews frequently declared that a personage of the description of Lord Littleton visited his bedside about the period of his lordship's dissolution: - throwing open the curtains suddenly, he desired Mr. Andrews to come with him who, not knowing his lordship had returned from Ireland, presumed he came to play off a joke on him; when, suddenly getting up, the phantom disappeared. Mr. Andrews described his alarm as affecting his whole nervous system, and caused him a short fit of illness. In his subsequent visits to Pitt Place, which were frequent, no solicitation could ever

make him take a bed in that mansion; hat he would invariably, however late, return to the Spread Eagle Inn for the night.”

Rowland Stephenson

There is evidence that Rowland Stephenson, considered later, had taken up residence in *Pit Place* by 1 August 1816 although he seems only to have been Jeudwine’s tenant at that date.

In *The Times*, 30 July 1817, appeared announcements under SALES BY AUCTION of: -

“The spacious elegant commodious and much-admired FREEHOLD VILLA, called Pit Place, situate near the town of Epsom, in Surrey; comprising on the principal floor a dining room 24 feet by 21 feet 6 inches, a saloon 32 feet by 22 feet, with ante-room adjoining, a library, 30 feet by 22 feet; on the attic storey 3 best bed-chambers, with a good coach-house, and stables, and every other requisite, attached and detached offices, together with about 5 acres of pleasure-ground laid out with exquisite taste; a most beautiful orangery, fully stocked with luxuriant and valuable plants, a very capital pinery completely stocked, 4 forcing houses for peaches vines and strawberries, and about 300 feet of wall, clothed with choice fruit trees, also a gardener’s house, in 2 tenements, with a farmyard, and kitchen garden, well stocked with fruit trees and vegetables: also a new farm house, barns, sheds, and every requisite building, with a good farm yard, and about 100 acres of copyhold and freehold land, part of which lies dispersed in the common fields of Epsom, together with 2 cottages and gardens”

“Elegant furniture, choice wines, splendid Library, scarce exotics &c., and a rare collection of Paintings ...the property of Thos. Jeudwine, Esq., who is going to reside on the Continent.”

Thomas Jeudwine appears to have died in September 1818. After Thomas Charles Burt had provided an affidavit as to the authenticity of Jeudwine’s signature, Sarah Agate, spinster, obtained a grant of administration of his will, on 5 October 1819, as one of the residuary legatees. [One of the two Executors named in the Will died in the testator’s lifetime – the other was Edward Stephenson (1759-1833), Banker, 69 Lombard Street, City of London, both uncle & father in law of Rowland Stephenson.] By 1820 additional litigation had begun in the connected cases of *Burt v Alcock* and *Browning v Stephenson* which, one way or another, involved Thomas Charles Burt, Joseph and Catherine Alcock, Mary Penelope and Ann Jeudwine, Louisa Browning, Sarah Agate & Rowland Stephenson.

Rowland **Stephenson** (1782-1856), as far as one can now tell, became the next owner of *Pit Place*. Particulars of his life are available from the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography accessible via the Surrey Libraries Website. There it is remarked that “Stephenson’s parliamentary career was distinguished solely by his manner of leaving it in December 1828”, as amplified in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* for 1829: -

“The Journals have been engaged, during the greater part of the past month, with the stoppage of the banking-house of Remington, Stephenson, and Co.; and their columns have been crowded with details respecting the frauds of which Rowland Stephenson has been guilty. He seems, from the concurrent testimony of all the papers, to have been a consummate villain, and to have committed unheard of depredation on the property of the house and its customers. A reward of one thousand pounds was offered for his apprehension. He was accompanied by Lloyd, a clerk in his house, and an accomplice in his nefarious proceedings, for whose apprehension a reward of £300 was offered. It appears that Mr. Cope, the City Marshal, and two Police Officers, traced Stephenson and his clerk Lloyd to Clovelly, where they remained three days. They ascertained that on the 2nd instant, Stephenson and his companion took a skiff and arrived at Milford Haven, from whence they went into Angle Bay (an inlet on the south side of Milford), next day. On Sunday the 4th of January, they embarked on board the Brig, Kingston, and sailed the next day for Savannah. At a late meeting of the creditors a paper was exhibited, containing a rough sketch of the state of the Company's affairs. The estate was liable for property abstracted by Stephenson to nearly £70,000, which would increase the Company's liabilities to about £500,000. The deficiencies in Rowland Stephenson's private accounts had no reference to the general accounts of the estate.

Mr. Rowland Stephenson was a Member of Parliament for Leominster, and Treasurer of St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

At the Old Bailey sessions January 16th, an indictment was preferred against Rowland Stephenson. The indictment charges the bankrupt with embezzlement, and it is preferred as a preliminary to a writ of outlawry, or otherwise with the ulterior view of inducing the Lord Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench to issue a warrant under his seal for the apprehension of the absentee.”

As indicated by the DNB, “Extradition proceedings failed but he was formally bankrupted under the twelve-month rule on 19 January 1830, and thus forfeited his parliamentary seat. From October 1829 until his death on 2 July 1856 Stephenson lived at Farley Hill, a 170 acre estate at Bensalem township near Bristol, Pennsylvania, where he was buried in the churchyard of St James's Episcopal Church.”

Since Stephenson had retained other homes, notably *Marshalls* near Romford in Essex and at the Treasurer's Residence in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, *Pit Place* might have been acquired mainly as an investment. Certainly, F. Hodgson, MP for Barnstable, was Stephenson's tenant there in 1825/1826, succeeded for a time by his mother before he quit the premises altogether in the summer of 1828. Hodgson is also reported to have entered into negotiations over the winter of 1825 with a view to purchasing the property but his conveyancer regarded an abstract of Stephenson's title “very defective” and the matter did not proceed to completion. Stephenson continued to let the premises and “Digby Neave” is known to have entertained the artist John Constable at the house during September 1831 whilst Stephenson remained in exile.



Pitt Place by John Constable

On the 29 June 1840 an announcement appeared in *The Times* of an auction sale of *Pitt Place* by “the Assignees of Rowland Stephenson”. A sequence of previous occupiers was stated as “Lord Lyttleton, The Prince Regent, Rowland Stephenson and Sir Digby Neave.” [This appears to have been the origin of a canard that the house had been “Prinny’s love-nest” – the lady who became the morganatic wife of the Prince of Wales, later George IV, was actually born Maria Anne Smythe and her second husband had been Thomas Fitzherbert of Swynnerton, Staffs.]

The Neave Family

The successful bidders at that event seem to have been members of the **Neave** family- Sir Thomas Neave, 2nd Bt. had been born on 11 November 1761. He was the son of Sir Richard Neave, 1st Bt. and Frances Bristow. He married Frances Caroline Digby, b. 1772, daughter of Very Rev. Hon. William Digby and Charlotte Cox, on 13 June 1791. His wife died 14 April 1835 at Dagnam Park and he followed her to the grave on 11 April 1848 aged 86. Children of Sir Thomas Neave, 2nd Bt. and Frances Caroline Digby were Reverend Henry Lyttelton Neave b. 21 Mar 1793, d. 4 Aug 1873, Sir Richard Digby Neave, 3rd Bt. b. 9 Dec 1793, d. 10 Mar 1868, Sheffield Neave b. 11 Apr 1799, d. 24 Sep 1868 and William Augustus Neave b. 5 Feb 1802, d. 3 Oct 1844.

After Sir Richard Digby Neave’s succession to the title of 3rd Baronet Neave, of Dagnam Park, Essex, on 11 April 1848, he and his brother, Sheffield established their main homes in the Romford area. Rev. Henry Lyttlton Neave was Vicar of Epping. Apart from his friendship with Constable, however, history has little to say about Sir R. Digby Neave although he became an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner in 1836, wrote *Four Days in Connemara* and held office as the High Sheriff of Essex.

The Neave’s (who are reported** to have made substantial alterations to the property) had a tenant in 1857 was James T. **Mackenzie** whose wife was delivered of a son there in June of that year, Claude Longueville Mackenzie.

On 6 May 1861, Sir Thomas Neave's surviving sons, Rev. Henry, Sir Richard and Sheffield Neave, conveyed the property, *Pit Place* manor house with lawns, plantations, shrubberies and land, to Francis Somerville **Head** for £3550.

An 1865 edition of C J Swete's *A Handbook of Epsom* reported that "Pitt Place is now occupied by Francis Somerville Head, Esq., son of the well-known and talented Sir Francis Head, Bart., author of many exquisite works in literature, among them 'Bubbles from the Brunnens', 'Stokers and Pokers', &c. There did exist in the conservatory a myrtle tree of extraordinary dimensions, having been two feet in girth, and 16 feet high; but the present proprietor, seeing probably that it had outlived its beauty, cut it down as cumbering the ground." Head (1817-1887) did not stay long before conveying the property to George James **Toby** of Prospect Villa, Forest Hill, Kent, on 21 August 1866 for £6150. In 1875, Francis Somerville became the 2nd Head baronet "of Rochester".

Dr John Fothergill Rowlands

Within a year, on 10 June 1867, Toby [a leather merchant at 19 Borough High Street, Southwark] had granted a lease for 21 years at a rent of £400 p.a., to John Fothergill **Rowlands** of Prestbury House, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, Esq. of "Mansion, dwelling house or tenement at Epsom called Pit Place with stables, coachman's cottages, lawn, pleasure grounds, kitchen garden and paddock, containing 8a 3r 15p".

Dr John Fothergill Rowlands, known to his friends a "Fog, Fogo or Foggy", was a Monmouth man. "Sent to London to go through the usual medical training, he had every opportunity of developing his taste for the turf, and soon became well known as a gentleman rider. One of his fads was to put on a pair of white kid gloves whenever he had a mount in either steeple-chase or flat race, but if anyone thought he was a muff in consequence they soon found out their mistake. At this time, somewhere about the [18]fifties, he was a great friend of Lord Strathmore, and often rode that well known 'chaser The Switcher for him. Afterwards he became Master of the Horse to Lord Stamford who then trained with Joe Dawson, and had the management of such horses as Diophantus, etc., etc. ...In the early sixties he took Prestbury Park, near Cheltenham, and starting training on his own account...From Cheltenham Foggy moved to Epsom, where he rented a real old-fashioned house called Pitt Place, and built a fine range of stabling later on."

A description survives from 1876: -

"The house ... lies in a hollow, and cannot be seen from any of the roads which skirt three sides of the grounds, or from the footpaths through the old churchyard which adjoins the fourth. The entrance is through a gateway flanked by stone effigies of lions sitting on their haunches, and looking very steadfastly at the ancient hostelry over the way. A score of yards of a carriage drive, bordered with flowers and backed by old trees, are seen through the gate, and the roofs of the coach-house and stables rise above the high brick wall which surrounds the grounds; but from any other point only the venerable chestnuts and Scotch firs which screen the house can be seen. The place is now occupied by Mr. Rowlands, the trainer, and the curious in family history and legend may be disappointed on learning that it underwent

*such extensive alterations about ** sixteen years ago as to be now almost a new house.*" [The renovation would have taken place whilst in the tenure of the Neave family]

Dr Rowlands died in 1878 but it took until 1 March 1881 before his daughter could obtain an order from High Court of Justice in matter of estate of John Fothergill Rowlands, deceased, that, as administratrix, his widow Cecilia Ann Rowlands was at liberty to surrender the lease of *Pitt Place* Epsom, to Ellen Toby and Thomas Wild, executors of will of George James Toby, deceased [in 1880 and buried in West Norwood Cemetery]. Full settlement of all Rowland's debts had not been reached 20 years after his demise.

Ellen Toby, widow (nee Huntley) married John Samuel Stevens, 21 Borough High Street, Southwark, surgeon dentist, in 1880, before conveying the real estate to Holland Thomas **Birkett** from Richmond for £8596 on 8 July 1881.

Holland Thomas Birkett

The Times reveals that in 1884 Holland Thomas Birkett, 52 St Martin's Lane, trading as "Hull and Wilson", woollen merchant, residing at Pitt Place, Epsom, had been declared bankrupt.

The property had already been sold on by Sir George Francis Pocock, Bt., as mortgagee in possession to William Coleman **Watson**, St James' Palace Chambers, Ryder Street, St James', Mx. for £6650, 22 September 1883.

The estate was subsequently advertised in *The Times* for sale split down into plots. William Edward **Bagshaw** of Waterloo Road, Epsom, purchased Pitt Place itself, on 2a 3r of land connected by a tunnel under the road, for £2,300.

During the ownership of Mr Bagshaw it was suggested an addition to the property could be dated to 1770 because that year had been cast on the fire-bell. On the north side was the farmhouse of two storeys, re-fronted in plain George III brickwork with a projecting wing, the new kitchen forming the other wing. The east front of the mansion had been constructed in stone but subsequently cemented, with round-headed windows below and square above.

William Edward Bagshaw and William Hastings Bagshaw of Pitt Place, Church Street, Epsom (father and son) were partners in Messrs Bagshaw & Co., Chartered Accountants, 6 Crosby Square, Bishopsgate, London), who were subscribers and also acted as auditors to various organisations in Epsom including the Cottage Hospital and the Public Hall and Assembly Rooms Company. W E Bagshaw died in 1917, aged 83, and his widow, Maria Roberts (nee Foot) Bagshaw, at the age of 77, in 1924. Another son, Claud Edward Bagshaw (admitted to partnership in the firm during 1903, 12 years later than his brother W. H.), expired in *Pitt Place* on 1 November 1945 at the age of 75.

Post World War II

Thereafter, ownership of the house becomes obscure. Allen Albert **Worboys** of Pitt Place, accountant gave his consent to a conveyance on 14 August 1957 and the real estate was taken to auction in 1959 to be acquired by a Mr R P **Brown(e)**. Extensive repairs were needed but the latter was reported to have died in Japan about 5 years later leaving the house, in a state of dereliction, held by a voluntary trust that had been established in his favour. Surrey County Council issued a building preservation order: a planning dispute ensued but eventually permission was given for the site to be redeveloped as flats on three storeys. As one commentator observed the old house was to be “destroyed by developers needing to turn a liability into profit”. St James Square Estates Development Company acquired the land on 4 June 1965. A final, sad, footnote to history was an advertisement that appeared in *The Times*, 14 July 1967, offering for the price of £800 “8 Doric Columns 16 ft high by Nash [in Cast Iron] and originally removed from the Regent Street Arcade in the 1800’s, at present situated at Pitt Place, Epsom.”



Pit Place Image courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum



A Tudor Chimney (with detail) photographed in July 1967 by LR James.



*The Doric Columns before demolition.
Image courtesy of Bourne Hall Museum.*



The Doric Columns during demolition photographed in July 1967 by LR James.

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