

# GLEBE LAND, POORS LAND & DROPMORE

## Hitcham, Buckinghamshire.

February 6th 2025

This paper outlines the creation and the subsequent sale of the Hitcham Glebe Lands (which were owned by the church through the rectorship of Hitcham), and the Poor's Land, (which was intended as common land for the poor to take firewood and graze a few sheep, and often owned by a local parish in trust), together with details of the expansion of William Wyndham Grenville's Dropmore Park which was itself highly influential on the final disposition of the local glebe lands and poor's lands.

*Please note that this paper has relatively little original research work and is heavily indebted to extensive work by local historian Mervyn Eden [REF D] and a PhD thesis by WGM Wood [REF A], though I have referred again to the papers held by the St Marys Church archive.*

There are four sections to this paper :

- .1 THE ENCLOSURE ACTS**
- .2 THE GLEBE LANDS AND RECTORY**
- .3 THE POOR'S LAND**
- .4 DROPMORE PARK AND HOUSE**

### **.1 THE ENCLOSURE ACTS**

Since 1217 the 'Charter of the Forest' signed by Henry III had entitled the poor to use large areas of uncultivated land to gather firewood, take mushrooms and fruit and graze animals. This freedom effectively ended in 1770 (and the Charter was formally repealed in 1971). The various inclosure (nowadays spelt *enclosure*) acts from 1770 were a response to a growing national population and the needs of agricultural efficiency.

The acts were intended to consolidate small separate plots of land into coherent parcels that could be run as economic and efficient farms. Unfortunately, the wealthy landowners were particularly advantaged by this process, at the expense of both small landowners and the large number of people who had no land at all. In particular common land, usable by everyone in the parish was much reduced. Between 1786 and 1816 the number of independent landowners reduced from 250,000 to just 32,000.[REF C]

A particular exception is Dorney Common, near Eton Wick, which has somehow survived intact. Interestingly, this 169 acre common is actually owned by the Palmer family of Dorney Court but the recognised local Commoners have rights of access and grazing in perpetuity under ancient statutes.

### *Summary of The Inclosure Act 1773 [REF C]*

*"An Act for the better Cultivation, Improvement, and Regulation of the Common Arable Fields, Wastes, and Commons of Pasture in this Kingdom."*

*Royal assent    1 July 1773*

*The Inclosure Act 1773 (13 Geo. 3. c. 81) created a law that enabled enclosure of land, at the same time removing the right of commoners' access.*

*The Act required the enclosure procedure to start with a petition delivered to Parliament signed by the principal landowners, tithe holders and a majority of people affected. The petition then went through the stages of a bill with a committee meeting to hear any objections. The petition would then go through to royal assent after passing through both Houses of Parliament. Commissioners would then visit the area and distribute the land accordingly.*

*The powers granted in the Inclosure Act were often abused by landowners: the preliminary meetings where enclosure was discussed, intended to be held in public, were often made in the presence of only the local landowners. They regularly chose their own solicitors, surveyors and commissioners to*

*decide on each case. In 1774, Parliament added an amendment to the Act under the standing orders that every petition for enclosure had to be affixed to the door of the local church for three consecutive Sundays in August or September.*

The Hitcham Inclosure Act was passed in 1778 (Geoll.18) but was not immediately implemented [REF A p207]

The local committee consisted of Rev Richard Wells of Maidenhead, Henry Emblem surveyor of Windsor and John Mitchell of S Weston Oxfordshire, assisted by the Earl of Inchiquin, Rev Richard Sleech of Hitcham, Peter Syle and Andrew Pope. The costs of enclosure were met presumably in proportion to the acreage owned - thus Dr Friend Lord of the Manor paid 71% (£600), the Earl of Inchiquin who occupied Cliveden 21%, Sir John Borlase Warren 5% and Sir G Palmer 3% [REF I p36]. The Earl of Inchiquin was married to the Countess of Orkney who actually owned in her own right both Cliveden and Taplow Court.

## **.2 THE GLEBE LAND AND RECTORY**

*Glebe is an area of land within an ecclesiastical parish used to support a parish priest.. Glebe is land belonging to a benefice and so by default to its incumbent, the rector. [REF G]*

*Glebe associated with the Church of England ceased to belong to individual incumbents as from 1 April 1978, by virtue of the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976. It became vested on that date, "without any conveyance or other assurance", in the diocese to which the benefice owning the glebe belonged, even if the glebe was in another diocese.[REF G]*

### **1779**

In 1779 under the Inclosures Acts the Rector of Hitcham was awarded 200 acres of land in lieu of tithes. That is, instead of collecting the value of one tenth of all agricultural production within the parish, the rector instead received a parcel of 200

acres of land which he could rent out to local farmers to maintain his income. These 200 acres turned out in practice to be scattered fields which were quite difficult to farm

From later transactions it appears some of this land was poor, and also some additional glebe land acreage, not necessarily productive land, may have been acquired by the rector.

*In 1796 William Wyndham Grenville purchased the Lordship of the Manor of Hitcham for £17,500, and at about the same time he was able to exchange over 200 acres of the Rector's glebe land for other land in the south. The main portion of this was 215 acres of the Hitcham Upper Heath, and the whole transaction was ratified, as law demanded, by a special Act of Parliament. The land thus transferred forms the major part of the present day Dropmore Estate. Other lands were gained by Grenville on lease or purchase from other owners, and include lands leased by indenture from the parish of Burnham in 1792 and 1801 for example.[REF D]*

*1797 "An Act of Parliament to enable the rector of the parish church of Hitcham to exchange part of his glebe lands for other lands in the same parish belonging to the Rt Hon William Wyndham, Lord Grenville." Thomas Pulton MA was rector of Hitcham at the time. He needed the approval of the Provost of Eton (Jonathon Davies DD) and George, the Lord Bishop of Lincoln" [REF E Doc 1][REF A p208]*

*The **glebe land** offered for this land swap consisted of 4 parcels totalling 221 acres (of which 215 acres was worthless heathland) valued at £70.19s.10d per annum located in the north of the parish near to Grenville's fledgling Dropmore estate..*

***Grenville's land** offered for the swap consisted of 5 parcels totalling 65 acres of land valued at £72.9s tithe-free per annum located in the south of the parish near the church and the Bath Road. He must have been accumulating these parcels over a short period with an eye to an eventual swap.*

*This was in fact a good deal for both parties. The church obtained parcels of useful land which, many years later, raised considerable*

*sums. Grenville got what he wanted most - large acres of heathland that suited his ambitions for a large estate at relatively little cost.*

*There is more on Grenville's land transactions in section 4.*

*In 1867 a loan of £1000 was taken by Revd Adolphus Carter from the Governors of Queen Annes Bounty in the form of a mortgage secured on glebe land. "[REF E Doc 2] to expand the rectory at Hitchambury.*

*In 1883 glebe land was sold for £340 and the money invested in consols (government bonds) under the Ecclesiastical Leasing Act 1858 [REF E doc 3 ] This land consisted of 3 roods 4 perches (about 0.75 acres) and the sale included the timber thereon.*

*In 1890 glebe land was sold for £950 to Mr Edward Dyke and the money invested in 'local loan stock' under the Ecclesiastical Leasing Act 1858 [REF E doc 3 ] This land comprised 3 acres 2 rood 5 perches (about 3.5 acres)*

*In 1895 there was an agreement for Revd Geo Frewer, rector of Hitcham to lease four acres of glebe land called 'Lower 14 Acres' for £9 per annum to Hitcham Parish Council for use as allotments. [REF E doc 5] This regularised an informal arrangement begun in 1894. This land included the site of present-day Poplar Farm Cottages The allotments went out of use in the 1920's consequent on the sale of the glebe lands [REF D]*

*"The story of Hitchambury as a Rectory also comes to a close soon after 1900. Adolphus Carter had ambitiously and foolishly enlarged it, and had saddled the benefice with a large mortgage in 1867 for £1000 [REF E Doc2]. Soon after that was paid off, and in the time of Rector Edward Carter (son of Adolphus), it was decided to sell the rectory together with some adjacent land, and to build a new Rectory near the church. The old Rectory (Hitchambury) was half a mile from the church and was only suitable for a farming parson with a large family. So in 1909 the Rectory was sold to Charles Selwyn Awdry [a partner in WH Smith & Co, who as a colonel in the army was declared missing*

*presumed dead in France in 1918] for £4,200, and with it went 4.5 acres of land for a further £3,429. The other nearby glebe lands were rented out. The new Rectory, which cost a mere £1,800 was commenced in 1908. Plans to sell further plots of glebe land were made but not effected until after the War. [REF D]*

*In 1900 there was a land swap involving Mr Grenfell of Taplow Court and the glebe land. The Grenfells lived at Taplow Court from 1852 until 1913 and made it a fashionable haunt of royalty and literati.*

*In 1907 there was a rental agreement with John Dykes of Hill Farm and Rev Edward Carter to rent 40 acres of glebe land for £40 per annum. [REF E doc 6]*

*In 1909 there was a rental agreement with CS Irby of Hitcham Grange for rector Edward Carter to lease him 1 acre of land near Taplow Court for £2 per annum. [REF E doc 7]*

*In 1910 there was agreement for Rev Edward Carter with the approval of patrons Lords Boston and Desborough for the sale of land, and lease of some more, to Walter John Fryer of Kaylis House, Maidenhead [REF E doc 8 and doc 9] 3 acres for 21 years at £6 per annum, as well as a sale of the house on the site for £600.*

*in 1913 there was a valuation of some glebe land near Taplow Station for a possible purchase by Mr Horwood. Mr Horwood had offered £300 but the church surveyor valued the land at £600 so the sale did not go through [REF E Doc 10]*

**1918-1950**

*"After the First World War many factors, including the economy, long term plans and the need for new housing land all supported the idea of selling most of the glebe land. In addition, the Rector and his tenants had before the war experienced Land Tax, which was an added if modest incentive. Eton Rural District Council had been keen to see new houses erected to house the war veterans, and in the case of Hitcham the steadily increasing population gave its own pressure..[REF D]*

The glebe land was sold in ten lots, some near the old Rectory, and the rest with two exceptions were in the south of the parish. *The areas varied from 1 to 39.5 acres, and the sale prices varied according to the farming and gravel potential of the land.*

*The tenants of these southern lands at the time of sale were Mrs Dykes, widow of the Headmaster Dykes, R.H. Cleare, and W. Horwood. 1-acre plots in the area went for £300, but larger arable areas fetched about £125-£150 an acre. The small plots were a continuation of the process of 'infilling' - empty plots between houses were sold to be built on. In 1911 Hitcham had lost its small recreation ground, 'The Croft' being built on it in such a way. [REF D]*

*Lot 5 was to become the main part of the lands of Learig - so named by Mrs Dykes who built it because she came from Learig in Scotland. [REF D]*

There is scope for confusion here. According to Burnham historian Mary Bentley – John Dykes and his wife, Jane Murdock Dykes, lived at Hill Farm. After John died, Jane built Learig. Meanwhile Edward Dyke (a retired headmaster) and his wife lived at Beechwood (1911 census) after they had sold Taplow Grammar School.

In 1920 glebe land was sold to Mrs Jean Murdock Dykes consisting of 27 acres, 1 rood and 23 poles for £1800, upon which she built Learig (or Lea Rig). [REF J]

*Lot 6, north of the Taplow end of the track leading to Nearway Road, Burnham, (now Eastfield Road), was to have a crop of wooden and brick bungalows, some of which remain (in 1967). [REF D] The first shops in Eastfield Road seem to have been bungalows built on part of the glebe land lot 6 and adapted as shops.[REF D]*

*In 1920 Lot 8 was south of Eastfield Road, and is the area from opposite Bingham Road to the Geest yard: this was used for housing, the land being sold at £5 per foot frontage - the depth was 360 ft [1920 lot 8 sold to Eton RDC for £850 4 acres] [REF E Doc 11][REF D] The land in Lot 8 of the glebe land, south of the road, was sold at £5 per foot of frontage and the houses built there were the 'best' in the road.[REF D]*

*Lot 7, on the other hand, was purchased by a nurseryman and established as an orchard (Bayley's Orchard) from which fruit was sent to Covent Garden Market. It was not developed until 1949, and is now Bayley Crescent, Bingham Road and the extension of Byways. [REF D}*

*In 1920 Lot 9 was a one acre site next to the Bath Road. [1920 lot 9 sold for £300 1 acre] [REF E Doc 11][REF D]*

*Lot 10 consisted of two large fields south of the Bath Road. The northern section is not developed [in 1967], and was used for show jumping events from time to time; but to the south are a series of long narrow one-acre plots on which individual houses were built in the 1920's.[REF D]*

*Until this time there was an annual Hitcham Fair every year on the Windmill Field (now the Marshgate Trading Estate). What is clear from early maps is that when the glebe lands were sold gravel, sand and chalk extraction had already commenced in Taplow, Hitcham and Lent Rise..[REF D]*

*Trying to establish the value of the benefice is a bit difficult, but by the end of 1920 the benefice held £3496 of London Corp stock 5% and in 1921 this had risen to £8130 of 4% Funding Stock. [REF E Doc 11]*

*In 1924 .The Mission Room was sited on a tiny plot on the glebe land at the first bend. It was closed and,sold in 1924 to the new owner of the adjacent site, Mr Edwards, whose daughters still reside there [in 1976] in the house which Mr Edwards built in 1923. [REF D]*

*In 1926 investments from sale of land were cswitched from Indian Govt stock to British Govt stock for greater security [REF E doc 11]*

*In 1927 there was a sale of 0.477 acres to Sir HD Kimber for £200 [REF E doc 11]*

*By now the benefice had £11936 of 'local loans 3%', though it is not clear whether this, together with the rectory made up the whole of the rector's benefice.*

What seems remarkable today is how narrowly spread the benefice's investments were. Indeed by 1947 there are several letters concerned with addressing losses on investments. Fixed interest stock was badly affected by WW2.[REF E doc 11]

*1928 sale of 125 acres [REF E doc 11]*

*In 1930 the rector Lewis Evans took out a mortgage of £265 from Queen Annes Bounty to improve the parsonage house, secured on the glebe land [REF E doc 12]*

*In 1931 under the Tithe Act 1925 the Ecclesiastical Commission issued guidance to surveyors regarding glebe land" REF E doc 13]*

By 1961 there was some confusion about ownership of land. There was some enquiries made by Buckinghamshire County Council over who actually owned land that they used. This was a plot of land on the junction of Hitcham Road and Hag Hill Lane used for many years by the Buckinghamshire County Council as a highway 'dump' but they had no idea who owned the land.[REF E doc 14]. Presumably it was simply adopted by the county council soon afterwards.

*In 1978, by virtue of the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976 all remaining glebe land was sold and the assets transferred to the Oxford diocese, though by now in the case of Hitcham there was probably no glebe land left to sell..*

Finally, in 1981 the large rectory near St Marys was sold [and re-named 'The Old Rectory'] and the rector, now designated simply a vicar, moved to a small family house near St Peters Burnham.

### **.3 POOR'S LAND**

*"Under the Inclosure Award the poor were catered for by an award of five acres of land which were to be planted with furze and heath to provide them with fuel, thus replacing the rights of commonage and collection of fuel which they had hitherto. The 'Poor's Land' was situated astride the Taplow Common Road at the point called Hitcham Lower Heath, a few hundred yards north of the Parliament Lane turning. [Including presumably part of what is now Burwood House believed to be currently owned by the Emir of Kuwait] It was*

*central for the population and was unsuited for farming. Access was easy, for it lay at the junction of roads from all parts of the parish."*[REF D]

*The Poor's land was awarded by the Inclosures Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1779* [REF I]

*"By 1830 the stage was set for Lord Grenville to gain local agreement for the Poor's Land to be exchanged for a 5-acre plot in the south of the parish [at what is now Maypole Road and Fairview Road] We can thus presume that between 1792 and 1830 there had been almost total eviction of the families from the [Dropmore] Estate lands, and their replacement in many cases by family servants, perhaps from London "*[REF D].

*As with the glebe land swap, this gave Grenville some relatively valueless heathland to add to his park while the poors trust gained some potentially useful land nearer the church and the developing population.*

*In 1926 the Rev Grimes reports in his booklet on Hitcham that the five acres of Poors land near what is now Maypole Road provided an income of £10 per annum.*[REF I]

*In 1963 the Charity Commissioners gave permission to the trustees of the Poor's Land to sell its 5 acres [now of course in the SOUTH of the parish] and to invest the proceeds of "not less than £48,000" for the benefit of what is now known as the Hitcham Trust.*

### **From the Charity Commission deed of 1963 [REF H]:**

*This 1963 deed references a 25 May 1830 Deed of Exchange between Lincoln diocese and Lord Grenville in High Court of Chancery*

*Land containing 5 acres or thereabouts situated in ... Burnham ... having a frontage on the Taplow Road of 310 feet ... numbered 68 and 20 on the OS map 1938 edition being the land comprised in .... the deed dated 25th May 1830 between ... the Bishop of Lincoln of the 1<sup>st</sup> part, William Wyndham(Lord Grenville) and 2 others of the 2<sup>nd</sup> part, Pascoe Grenfell of the 3<sup>rd</sup> part and William Chisholme of the 4<sup>th</sup> part enrolled in the High Court of Chancery on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1830.*

So this 1963 sale is of the 5 acres in the SOUTH that had been swapped in 1830 for the 5 acres of land in the NORTH

There is a document, so far not inspected, in the Cornwall Record Office ( Kresen Kernow) of Grenville's enquiries about the Poor's Land dated as early as 1827 [Kresen Kernow F/4/125/2].

I haven't yet been able to locate the original 1830 Deed of Exchange. It references Pascoe Grenfell MP (1761-1838) of Taplow House and William Chisholme Esq but the implication is that these were witnesses to the Deed rather than direct participants. Indeed 1970s researcher AH Packe is said to have identified Chisholme as Grenville's attorney. Also, the Bishop of Lincoln seems to have acted as trustee of the Poor's land at that time.

**Hitcham Trust exists to this day and dispenses its annual income as grants for poorer residents of Hitcham.**

**There is a commonly-held belief that the Hitcham Poores Trust money resulted from the generosity of local landowners. Unfortunately this does not appear to be the case, the large landowners seizing vast amounts of the common people's land and offering instead some very poor heathland for sheep grazing and winter fuel.**

Of additional interest was a so-called 'Handkerchief Piece' [REF A p208] of Poor's land owned by Burnham Parish that could not be identified by later researchers and was presumed simply absorbed by a neighbouring estate, though Pat Naylor has identified a small piece of land owned by Burnham Parish on Nashdom Lane at the top of and to the west of Brickfield Lane which could well be this elusive common land, and Burnham Civil Parish has now confirmed it has full ownership of this piece of land.

Burnham parish's experience of the inclosures was markedly different to Hitcham's.

*"Burnham was not subject to a Parliamentary enclosure act as the landscape of the parish was already enclosed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century much of Burnham parish had been subject to early enclosure, the landscape was made up of coaxial fields to the south and north of Burnham, with some irregular fields to the east possibly formed as a result of assarting [conversion from forest to arable]. Although the fields surrounding Burnham are enclosed early, evidence from the tithe map for Cippenham shows that fields in Lent Rise and north of Gore Road were communally farmed, with strips in multiple occupation."*  
[REF L]

In 1792 and 1801 Dropmore Estate leased at least some (and probably all) of the Burnham Poor's land within the Estate as follows.

1792 – a 500 year lease - 3 acres and 1 acre near Hitcham Common  
rental : one peppercorn pa to the freeholders of Burnham, and £2 to the poor of Burnham

1801 – a 500 year lease - 7 acres (including a 'pocket handkerchief' piece)  
rental : £5 and 7 shillings pa to the poor of Burnham and 10 shillings pa to Mr Sayer

There was a further lease in 1813.

The Dropmore Estate was paying £7 and 7 shillings (later £7.35) to Burnham Civil Parish as trustee of the Poor, until 1999 when payment stopped and the leases appeared then to have been disputed. **This leased land is not the same land as the pocket piece, south of Nashdom Lane. at the junction with Brickfield Lane, referred to earlier, which we know is and was undisputedly held by Burnham Parish.**

## **.4 DROPMORE PARK AND HOUSE**

Dropmore Park is a private estate located along Dropmore Road, north of Burnham, Buckinghamshire, England, about 220 acres (89

ha) in size. The park with its buildings, including Dropmore House, have Grade I listed building status. [REF F]

## Biography of William Wyndham

A brief biography of William Wyndham Grenville is useful here. He was born 1759, the third son of Prime Minister George Grenville and related to the Pitts and to various aristocratic families. Nevertheless, as the third son he had little prospects or money.

In 1791 William proposed to Anne Pitt, daughter of Thomas Pitt who was wealthy. Thomas wrote a very long letter to his daughter concerning Mr G [*Grenville*] explaining that 'the basis of marriage is found not in passion but in reason' and although William was 'possessed of the great essentials of character in a degree you may never find in another' and was 'presently the second man in His Majesty's government', he had little money and, whilst declaiming 'your happiness is mine', her father then proceeded to analysis in great depth the financial implications and calculations and warned that 'you may be left a young widow with many children' with inevitable financial hardship.

In today's thinking the letter is incredible. It is at once kindly and tender but also harshly pragmatic and very much of its time.

William had been an (unpaid) MP from 1782 but had to get government posts instead to provide a small income. After serving briefly as Home Secretary he was elevated to the House of Lords as 1st Baron Grenville in 1790. Despite his lack of money Anne married William in 1792 . They both had a similar love of the natural landscape and botany which they pursued with zeal.

Their fortunes changed in 1804 when Anne inherited the Boconnoc Estate in Cornwall after her brother was killed in a

duel. Then in 1806 William was made Prime Minister and passed the famous law abolishing the slave trade.

They remained childless but devoted their lives to re-inventing the design of grand estates, concentrating on tree planting. William died 1834. He is buried at St Peters Burnham. [REF A]

### The first purchase

In 1780 William Wyndham, Lord Grenville bought 30 acres at Dropmore Hill. He purchased the land from the family of Dr John Freind, lord of the manor of Hitcham [REF A, p64]

The 30 acres at Dropmore Hill was considered 'unpromising land' [REF A p 62] Like most of the land north of Burnham it was non-agricultural, mainly heathland and trees and friends such as the Marquis of Buckinghamshire were scornful [REF A 63-65]. It seems that Grenville simply could not afford to buy any sizeable quantity of lucrative farmland. His idea instead was to acquire cheap acres of heath and woodland purely for the aesthetics rather than the income. Being common heathland the title was also questionable. He also never actually owned much of the land, being content to rent it provided he could claim mastery of the acreage.

What the site did have was a view of Windsor Castle, and indeed as far as the Hog's Back [REF A App6, p3] In fact this view of Windsor Castle [REF A p186] seems to have been used as a successful objection to the building of a large mansion in Burwood House in the 21st Century.

*Grenville knew the spot from rambles during his time at Eton College, and prized its distant views of his old school and of Windsor Castle. On his first day in occupation, he planted two cedar trees. At least another 2,500 trees were planted. By the time Grenville died in 1834, his pinetum contained the biggest collection of conifer species in Britain. Part of the present-day restoration is to use what survives as the basis for a collection of some 200 species.[REF F]*

## The expansion

This was just the beginning of an interesting series of land transactions so that from 1815 until his death in 1834 the estate comprised 2600 acres [REF A , p67-69] and even in 1987 the Dropmore estate covered a contiguous area of 865 acres. In 2024 Dropmore Park was recorded as 229 acres.

The first phase of development at Dropmore cost £14,000 while Grenville's total annual income was still only £7,686. [REF A p73] It became Grenville's principal home in 1801 [REF A p73] From 1802 Dropmore was most notable for its pinetum on Cedar Avenue [REF A 87-89]

*In 1797 there was an Act of Parliament to enable a swap of land between Thos Pulton, rector of Hitcham and William Wyndham, Lord Grenville, with the agreement of the Provost of Eton and the Bishop of Lincoln*[REF E Doc 1].*[REF A p208]*

**This transaction is described in greater detail in section 2.**

## Extract from The Hitcham Heritage

*"Grenville became settled in the parish quite quickly, though we have no record of his level of activity until 1792 when he purchased the cottage which lay at Widmer (Widmore) Common from John Williams of Little Shardeloes. Perhaps he bought some cottages on the Burnham side of the boundary also. At once Lord Grenville set about replacing the woodland cottage with a large country House, to be called Dropmore Lodge. The Lodge was constructed along an east-west axis, and through the middle passed the parish boundary. (The Hitcham section is now administered by Taplow, so that the house is still in two parishes.). In 1796 he purchased the Lordship of the Manor for £17,500, and at about the same time he was able to exchange over 200 acres of the Rector's glebe land for other land in the south. The main portion of this was 215 acres of the Hitcham Upper Heath, and the whole transaction was ratified, as law demanded, by a special Act of Parliament. The land thus transferred forms the major part of the present day Dropmore Estate. Other lands were gained on lease*

*or purchase from other owners, and include lands leased by Indenture from the parish of Burnham in 1792 and 1801 for example [REF D]*

*At some stage the tenants were dispossessed of the cottages or tenements as they were described, and by 1830 the stage was set for Lord Grenville to gain local agreement for the Poor's Land to be exchanged for a 5-acre plot in the south of the parish. We can thus presume that between 1792 and 1830 there had been almost total eviction of the families from the Estate lands, and their replacement in many cases by family servants [REF D]*

*The people appear to have moved to a new settlement site well south of the church. The small area settled was the southern portion of the 12 Acre Field, itself a portion of the East Field. East Field was in 1843 owned by Lady Grenville, so this conjecture may not be at all fanciful. It seems that the 'New Town' as this settlement was called, numbered at first only about half-a-dozen houses. It was to grow rapidly shortly after because the newly founded Great Western Railway Company were to lay their line only four hundred yards to the south. The inhabitants were all described as Agricultural Labourers, so that they presumably worked for Lady Grenville's Hitcham Court Farm which was adjacent to the church.[REF D]*

### **Extract from The English Heritage register**

The following is from the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.[REF B]

Lord Grenville, Prime Minister to George III, began work on the Dropmore estate in 1792, having bought 15 hectares of land complete with a small labourer's cottage, which he demolished, then employing Samuel Wyatt to build the south range of the present house. Grenville wrote to his future wife, Anne Pitt, 'I think you will be pleased with the situation when you see it, though I know Lord Camelford [Anne's father] will think it a great deal too exposed. I do not think that a great objection, being compensated, as it is, by the advantage of air and prospect' (Country Life 1956).

Grenville began landscaping Dropmore immediately after he built the house, and his improvements are said to have included the

removal of a hill that blocked the view of Windsor Castle 12 kilometre to the south-east (Country Life 1956).

He was a keen botanist, and planted many trees, some supplied by his brother Lord Buckingham from Stowe, including, in the 1820s, a 25 hectare pinetum west of the house, around the lake.

## **East Burnham**

In 1811 Grenville sought to buy East Burnham Park valued at £42,860 by selling land at Boconnoc [REF A p201-207] but his tenure of East Burnham Park was one of neglect as he was desperately short of money. After Grenville's death East Burnham was left to rot by his widow and there was, according to resident Harriet Grote, claimed to be a lot of resentment towards her there [REF K], but this allegation may have been based on a personal vendetta between the Grotes and Lady Grenville's stewards. East Burnham was eventually leased to the Fortescues as life tenants in order to secure it [REF A , p209]

In 1815 Grenville exchanged further pieces of land with adjacent landowners Sir Charles Palmer and Mr Pocock.

## **After Grenville**

Grenville died in 1834, leaving his widow, also a keen botanist, who continued to develop the estate and gardens, constructing the alcove by the lake, and probably the Italianate features in the walled garden.

Following Lady Grenville's death in 1864, aged ninety-one, the estate, together with Boconnoc, was inherited by William's nephew George Fortescue [son of William's sister Hester Fortescue].. George Fortescue was very close to his uncle William and aunt Anne. They shared the same lack of ready money but the same passion in the landscape and George managed Boconnoc and Dropmore for many years before Anne's death. [By this time both Boconnoc and Dropmore were financial liabilities]. He was one of the few invited to William's funeral and was always considered his natural heir.

The Fortescue family left in 1938 [REF A,p2], and the estate was bought in 1943 by Lord Kemsley. Following its occupation by the Army during the Second World War, and consequent deterioration of the house and grounds, the Kemsleys restored the estate and planted many more trees to complement the existing planting.

Viscount Kemsley was the proprietor of The Sunday Times. He filled it with paintings, furniture and books. After his death in 1968 it was sold to United States International University and then to the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates, Muhammed Mahdi al-Tajir. [REF F]

In 1987 350 hectares of Dropmore Estate were entered in the Historic England Register as Grade II [REF A 61]

An indoor pool was added, but the house was rarely used. In 1990 it was badly damaged by a fire that took four days to put out. Another in 1997 left the house uninhabitable.[REF F]

### **1997 report on Dropmore**

"The majority of the house burnt down in 1990, and has not been rebuilt, although there are plans to do so (1997). Much of the garden has subsequently been vandalised and many structures have been stolen. The site remains (1997) in private ownership".

### **Recent restoration**

Dropmore was restored by a commercial company into a number of private luxury dwellings around 2006–2008. The restoration included the house, Edwardian stables and a number of garden buildings including a Chinese tea house and aviary. Further plans over a 15-year period included restoration of the formal flower beds, Italian garden, woodlands, lawns, vistas, roads, bridges and gates. The developer has since gone into liquidation before the redevelopment was completed. Dropmore was then reportedly purchased in 2012 by Richard and Ian Livingstone. [REF F].

All of the papers relating to the Grenville family's land transactions in Hitcham and Burnham are held in the Cornwall Record Office (Kresen Kernow) but are not unfortunately online.

## REFERENCES

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REF I 'Ye oulde storie of Hitcham', by CHD Grimes, Fisher and Sons, 1926

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