

## Englefield House: Processes and Practices

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Englefield House, Berkshire. Image courtesy of Georgina Green

When W. Fletcher and Edmund J. Niemann toured Reading in the 1830s they noticed a ‘splendid mansion’ which was ‘seated on the declivity of a hill’ and remained sheltered from the north-east winds ‘by the verdant summit’.<sup>1</sup> Englefield House was the ‘splendid mansion’ in question. Fletcher and Niemann depicted Englefield as a solid, constant entity ‘bounded by swelling hills, adorned with elegant seats, woods, and cultivated grounds’.<sup>2</sup> In referring to Englefield’s surrounding land, Fletcher and Niemann stressed the importance of Englefield as a landed estate and thus a receptacle of power and wealth. In case the reader was in any doubt of the historical longevity of the house, Fletcher and Niemann set out further to reassure them. According to Fletcher and Niemann the house corresponded ‘in its style with those erected about the time of Elizabeth, with handsome bay windows, battlements, and towers’. Englefield’s appearance was ‘noble’, possessing as it did ‘all that uniformity of design characteristic of fine architecture’. A present day image of Englefield (shown

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<sup>1</sup> W. Fletcher and Edmund J. Niemann, *A Tour round Reading, a guide to its environs* (1840), pp. 88-89.

<sup>2</sup> Fletcher and Niemann, *A Tour round Reading*, pp. 88-89.

above) confirms and reiterates Fletcher and Niemann's earlier depiction. Although perhaps 'superficially mid-Victorian' its Elizabethan architecture continues to remain imposingly solid today.<sup>3</sup>

Surviving as it has for so many centuries, the architecture of the house represents continuity rather than change. As a result, its eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century history, particularly its connections with the East India Company in this period, remain largely hidden. There is no sign of the East India Company and its Indian ventures on the exterior of the building. There is no published record of individuals visiting Englefield and noting its East India Company connections. Nevertheless objects, people and money all linked Englefield House to the East India Company in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and this link shaped Englefield in its turn. This case study aims to uncover that hidden history to reveal how change rather than continuity shaped Englefield in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Rather than treating Englefield as an inert object, this case study examines the country house as a series of processes to uncover the histories that are seemingly absent from its exterior appearance. Building on Mark Girouard's contextual approach to country house history, it particularly focuses on the movement of people, objects and money into and through this house and explores the different processes that prompted such movement.<sup>4</sup> Marriage, inheritance and renting ensured that new people unconnected with the Englefield family entered and occupied Englefield House in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone's have demonstrated that in contrast to the myth of the 'open elite' relatively few new families joined the upper strata of society in the period between 1540 and 1880. Nevertheless, the Stones acknowledged that wealthy merchants featured heavily in those families that did manage to make the transition and that by the second generation these families had fully assimilated. The Englefield case study demonstrates a much slower and more circuitous route to assimilation for families linked to mercantile trade generally and the East India Company more particularly. Relying mainly on correspondence, this case study shows that a high proportion of the 'new' occupants at Englefield were connected with the East India Company. In turn they ensured that Englefield took its part in the 'English Hindostaan' that was eighteenth-century Berkshire. Whether numerically accurate or not, contemporaries perceived that Berkshire at least contained a worryingly open elite.

Englefield's new occupiers demonstrated their connection to the East India Company in material ways. Richard Benyon, for instance, invested material objects with meaning and used them to demonstrate the affection he felt towards his children. Similarly, his wife Mary bequeathed particular objects to her children creating a material legacy that connected different generations of the Benyon family. Despite such investment in material objects, the inventories, wills and correspondence that largely make up Englefield's historical record tell us little about how occupiers such as Richard Benyon, Lady Clive and Elizabeth Sykes used their East India Company connections and experiences to shape the domestic spaces of the house. This case study questions what the

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Tyack, Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 293.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

silences resonating from the gaps within the historical record tell us about the material world of Englefield and its occupiers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Englefield House's complex interior biography is not fully captured by the fleeting and static moments that inventories represent. Rather correspondence and wills point to the processes of change and movement which shaped Englefield's eighteenth and nineteenth century history. On some points the historical record remains frustratingly quiet. Yet by privileging moments of change, silence and loss that appear in the historical record a fuller picture of the house emerges – one that is significantly closer to a narrative of change and disruption than continuity and consistency.

## **PART I: The Movement of People**

Richard Benyon, Lady Margaret Clive and Elizabeth Sykes were all connected to the East India Company and came to reside at Englefield House at different points during the eighteenth century. Richard Benyon worked for the Company, Lady Margaret Clive was effectively married to the Company and Elizabeth Sykes was daughter to a Company man. This section of the case study tracks how such individuals came to inhabit Englefield House.

### **The East India Company Arrives (1745-1776)**

Englefield's imposing structure stands within rolling grounds near the village of Englefield in Berkshire, on the site of an earlier house, which belonged to the Englefield family. The Englefields surrendered most of the estate in 1585 and the house then remained in varying degrees of splendour until it was inherited in 1712 by Anne Wrighte (née Paulet) from her brother Lord Francis Paulet. At the time, Anne was married to Reverend Nathaniel Wrighte. During their marriage the Wrightes had three sons, the eldest of whom (Powlett Wrighte) inherited Englefield in 1729. Powlett Wrighte (d.1741) augmented his inheritance by marrying well. He tied his own estate to that of the Beauvoirs by marrying the heiress to Rachel Beauvoir's fortune - Mary Tyssen (d.1776), daughter of Francis Tyssen and Rachel Beauvoir from Hackney in Surrey.<sup>5</sup> The couple had one son, Powlett Wrighte the Younger.

After Powlett Wrighte's death in 1741, Mary Wrighte remained at Englefield. The estates and lands were held in trust by John Wilder and Daniel May for Mary and her son Powlett, until he came of age in his twenty-first year.<sup>6</sup> In 1745 Mary remarried, to a Richard Benyon (1698-1774) and it is at this point that Englefield House becomes of greater interest to this project. Richard Benyon was rich, and more significantly he had made his money with the East India Company.

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Tyssen of Flushing, came to London, naturalised, died 1690 [Tyssen family papers are in Hackney Archives Department D/F/AMH]. He had a son – Francis Tyssen [poss EIC Dep Gov 1693-95 (IOR/B/40), defo 1697-99 bought manors in Hackney, 1699 died] (d.1699). He had a son - Francis Tyssen (d.1710), who also had a son – Francis Tyssen (d.1712) m. Rachel Beauvoir in 1712. They had a son Francis John Tyssen (d. 1717) who inherited and a daughter Mary Tyssen, who married Powlett Wrighte and then Richard Benyon. Francis John Tyssen didn't marry but recognised several illegitimate children – Francis, Francis John and Mary. Mary married Captain John Amhurst (a distant relation of the Amhersts) and their daughter Amelia Tyssen-Amhurst married William George Daniel-Tyssen and they had a son William Amhurst Tyssen-Amherst (1835-1909).

<sup>6</sup> The National Archives, PROB 11/708(106/114).

Richard Benyon was born in 1698, and fourteen years later, he began his career with the East India Company.<sup>7</sup> Little is known of Benyon's early life or family connections. In *Swallowfield and its Owners* (1925), Lady Russell suggests that the Mr Benyon who witnessed Thomas Pitt's (1653-1726) acquisition of his famous diamond in 1702 was a Daniel Benyon, who she asserted to be Richard Benyon's father, a claim confirmed by Bernard Burke and The Debeauvoir Association.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, in *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, Clive Williams argues that the Benyon described by Lady Russell might have been Bernard Benyon (d.1715) who was then a member of the Madras council. Henry Dawson Love, writing his *Vestiges of Old Madras* (1913), thought Bernard Benyon might be Richard Benyon's brother.<sup>9</sup> Dawson Love's suggestion seems possible as Bernard Benyon of the Madras council had a daughter (Grace) with his wife Grace in 1713, but then died and was buried in Madras on 7 February 1715.<sup>10</sup> It is likely therefore that he would have been established in Madras in 1712 when Benyon arrived.

Bernard Benyon was certainly well connected: when [Thomas Pitt of Swallowfield Park](#) (who had been Governor of Madras from 1698 to 1709) found out that Benyon was dead he described how he had experienced 'a great loss, which delays my leaving town till Monday'.<sup>11</sup> With such connections, Bernard Benyon would have been well placed to ensure his family's rise through the Company and indeed Richard Benyon rose swiftly. In 1718, just six years after beginning work with the Company, he had become a member of the Madras Council, and he later went on to become the Governor of Madras in 1735.

At the age of twenty six, on 17 October 1724, Richard Benyon married Mary Fleetwood.<sup>12</sup> Mary was the granddaughter of Robert Fleetwood, who had arrived in Madras in 1662 and became the Chief at the Company's Factory at Madpollam in Golconda (Hyderabad). Robert Fleetwood survived for fourteen years in India before dying in 1676 in Madras.<sup>13</sup> Mary Fleetwood was possibly the daughter of a Mr. Fleetwood, who Constance Russell believed to be the Governor of Fort St George when he died in 1715.<sup>14</sup> Clive Williams infers that Mary Fleetwood was related to Elizabeth Fleetwood (b.1700) who married Richard Shelley in 1726 and became grandparents to [Anne Barbara Whitworth, who married Henry Russell in 1782](#).<sup>15</sup> If this is the case, Richard Benyon had multiple links to [Swallowfield Park](#): first through Thomas Pitt's connection to Bernard Benyon and second through his first wife Mary, who was great-aunt to Anne Barbara Whitworth. Like many other East

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<sup>7</sup> Clive Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire* (Purley on Thames: Goosecroft Publications, 2010), p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, p. 174. See Constance Russell, *Swallowfield and its Owners* (London and New York: Longman, Green and Co.,1901) , p. 206.

<http://www.archive.org/stream/swallowfielditso00russ#page/206/mode/2up/search/benyon>. Many thanks to John C. (featured in comments on website) for his notes on Bernard Burke's *A genealogical and heraldic dictionary of the landed gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1855) and the findings of the Debeauvoir Association. These texts note that Daniel Benyon (1664-c1709) was Richard Benyon's father. [Note added [07.10.13]

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, p. 174.

<sup>10</sup> British Library, India Office Records, N/2/1 f.15, N/2/1 f.12.

<sup>11</sup> Russell, *Swallowfield and its Owners*, p. 208.

(<http://archive.org/stream/swallowfielditso00russ#page/208/mode/2up/search/shelley>)

<sup>12</sup> British Library, India Office Family Search, N/2/1 f.66.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, *Swallowfield and its Owners*, p. 208.

(<http://archive.org/stream/swallowfielditso00russ#page/208/mode/2up/search/shelley>)

<sup>15</sup> Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, p. 175.

India Company officials Richard Benyon soon became connected to multiple Company people and sites.

An eighteenth-century conversation piece (see below) further confirms the link between the Benyons and the Shelleys. The piece, which was possibly painted by William Hogarth (although it could arguably be attributed to others), features the Shelley family and includes a certain Mr Benyon. The information listed for the painting in the catalogue to the 1906 Whitechapel Gallery exhibition 'The Georgians', notes that Lady Shelley, Mr and Mrs Richard Shelley, Misses Fanny and Martha Rose Shelley, Capt The Hon. W. Fitzwilliam, Mr. Benyon, and Miss Beard were all featured in the image.<sup>16</sup> As we are unsure of the provenance of the painting it is difficult to tell to which Benyon the painting refers.



After only one year of marriage the Benyons returned home to England in 1725. On their return Benyon made full use of his new found wealth and bought the Manor of Coptfold Hall in Margaretting, Essex in 1728.<sup>17</sup> The original Coptfold Hall was demolished in the 1850s and replaced by a new house. The image below shows the new house, which was built on the site. This house was demolished in the 1960s, although the stables and chapel remained intact. A new house was built on the site between 2002 and 2005.

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<sup>16</sup> The catalogue also notes that the painting was lent by Sir C. Russell and describes it as 'A Family Group by HOGARTH (Lady Shelley, Mr and Mrs Richard Shelley, Capt The Hon. W. Fitzwilliam, Mr Benyon, and Miss Beard'. Many thanks to Elizabeth Einberg of The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art for the reference.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, p. 173.



Coptford Hall

Image from 'Lost Heritage' website - [http://lh.matthewbeckett.com/lh\\_complete\\_list.html](http://lh.matthewbeckett.com/lh_complete_list.html)

Despite the purchase of his new home, Richard Benyon soon returned to India. In 1732 he was reappointed to Fort St George, Madras as Second-in-Council and arrived in Madras in 1733. On 20 January 1735 the East India Company appointed Richard Benyon Governor of Madras.

After losing his first wife, Mary, Richard Benyon married again on 14 October 1738, to Frances Davis in Madras.<sup>18</sup> Just over two years later, on 24 January 1741, Frances gave birth to their daughter Frances who shortly died, leaving the couple to bury her the next day.<sup>19</sup> The following year, 1742, Richard Benyon was the victim of further loss when his wife Frances died in childbirth on 21 October.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after this, in January 1744, Benyon boarded the *Duke* and returned to England for the final time.



Gidea Hall,  
The Seat of J. Benyon Esq.  
ESSEX.

Gidea Hall, Essex

<sup>18</sup> British Library, India Office Family Search, N/2/1 f.161.

<sup>19</sup> British Library, India Office Family Search, N/2/1 ff.185,188.

<sup>20</sup> British Library, India Office Family Search, N/2/1 f.195.



Benyon had not been home long before he sought another property. In 1745 he bought Gidea Hall near Romford (now a boys' school), which had recently been rebuilt as a mansion (the nineteenth-century print shown above depicts its eighteenth-century mansion shape). In the same year, Benyon acquired another property through marriage. In 1745 he married the widow Mary Wrighte (née Tyssen) of Englefield House.

Richard and Mary Benyon lived together in Englefield for twenty-nine years before Richard died in 1774. Despite the affective value that both Richard and Mary Benyon placed on objects (to be discussed in Part II of the case study), little is known of the changes they made to the interior of Englefield House while they lived there.

Alongside Englefield House and Gidea Hall (the location of which is shown in the map below), the Benyons also owned Great Newbury in Ilford (see map below), which they had purchased from Thomas Webster in 1747, and in 1758 they purchased yet another property - North Ockendon in Essex from Hugh Meynell (see map below).<sup>21</sup> Gidea Hall, Great Newbury and North Ockendon all lay along a fifteen mile route which stretched around present day Romford and finished in Ilford. North Ockendon, like Gidea Hall, descended through the Benyon side of the family with Newbury until 1891. The *Victoria County History* records that 'North Ockendon Hall lay within a moated enclosure immediately south of the churchyard. The redbrick house was of sixteenth-century origin with additions of the early eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It was damaged by bombing in 1944 and later demolished.'<sup>22</sup>



<sup>21</sup> Thanks to Georgina Green for these references. *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. V, p. 208; *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. VII (1978), p. 112.

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Georgina Green for this reference. *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. VII (1978), p. 112.

Unlike North Ockenden, Gidea Hall and Newbury, Englefield descended through the Powlett Wrighte side of the family and when Mary Benyon died in 1776, Englefield passed to Powlett Wrighte the Younger (d.1779), her son by her first marriage.

### The Wrightes Return (1770s)

During the 1770s Powlett Wright made many changes to Englefield. He added a neo-Classical frieze featuring a repeating lotus and anthemion pattern (which originated in Ancient Egypt and profoundly influenced the arts of Eurasia) to the drawing room. At the same time, Wrighte also picked out a matching white marble chimneypiece and Corinthian pilasters for the dining room.<sup>23</sup> Such opulence was matched in other areas of the house. Powlett Wrighte's executor accounts list payments of over £1,400 to the upholsterers Ince and Mayhew for two sets of chairs and settees.<sup>24</sup> A few clues remain as to whom Powlett Wrighte might have employed as an architect. A certain 'Mr Woods Surveyor' was paid 10 guineas by Paulet Wrighte's executors in January 1781. Jackson-Stops argues that Mr Woods was 'most certainly' the landscape gardener Richard Woods who came from Essex and who laid out the park at Gidea for Wrighte's half brother Richard Benyon.<sup>25</sup> Another surveyor, Clement Read was paid £60 in November 1781.

In making these changes Powlett Wrighte accumulated many debts upon the estate. As John Habakkuk has argued, such house building often arose from motives of comfort, aesthetics, prestige or taste and was generally paid for not by capital or an enlarged income but by a landowner's current income. In paying for house building using this method many families accumulated debt as costs became uncontrollable.<sup>26</sup> The debts incurred on the estate by Powlett Wrighte the Younger ultimately became a problem that the next owner of Englefield would have to solve.<sup>27</sup> Although Powlett Wrighte the Younger married in 1777, he died childless in 1779 and left Englefield to his uncle Nathaniel Wrighte, in accordance with his father's will.<sup>28</sup>

At this point, according to Nathaniel Wrighte an 'Inventory and Appraisements of the Household goods & Furniture of Englefield House' was carried out by Higgs, while a 'Catalogue of & Valuation of the Books in the Library' was completed by Fletcher.<sup>29</sup> As a result of the appraisal the 'Goods' were valued at '160' and the books at '144'. After having the books 'clean'd and properly arranged', Wrighte offered to send the books to Benyon, 'if you would chuse to have them sent to you, please to let me know where and I will send them immediately'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gervase Jackson-Stops, 'Englefield House, Berkshire II', *Country Life*, March 5 1981, pp. 560-61.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson-Stops, 'Englefield House, Berkshire II', p. 561.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 562.

<sup>26</sup> John Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 285-289.

<sup>27</sup> For more on the significance of debt and credit in modern England see Margot Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> The National Archives, Powlett Wrighte of Englefield (1741), PROB 11/708 (106/114).

<sup>29</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte, Tidmarsh to Richard Benyon, Grosvenor Square, 27 September 1779, D/EBy/C1.

<sup>30</sup> Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte, Tidmarsh to Richard Benyon, Grosvenor Square, 27 September 1779, D/EBy/C1.



Just one year later, in 1780, Nathaniel Wrighte wrote to Richard Benyon the Younger (1746-1797) expressing his concerns about the amount of debt owed on the Englefield estate.<sup>31</sup> By the summer of 1781, Nathaniel Wrighte had begun to take action – he was keen to let Englefield. Although renting remains understudied in country house literature, it was an important strategy by which houses could be retained within families. As this case study shows, however, renting simultaneously stabilised and destabilised the country house. Although in the long term it allowed Englefield to remain within the wider structure of the Wrighte and Benyon families, in the short term renting resulted in a change of character for the house as a new occupier inhabited it. Nathaniel Wrighte and Richard Benyon were alert to the possibility of destabilisation, which renting prompted and worked hard to find a ‘suitable’ tenant.

Initially Wrighte courteously offered Richard Benyon first refusal on the estate, which Benyon turned down despite his hopes that the estate would remain in the family. In a letter to Wrighte, Benyon described how he felt ‘much obliged to you for your attention in giving me the first offer, which numberless reasons tender it absolutely impossible for me to accept. I hope however that your resolution is not unalterably fixed & that you will still pass many happy years there.’<sup>32</sup> Wrighte was determined, however, and after careful consideration felt that ‘I am to find myself obliged to make a temporary resignation of it, but so it must be, for after having been now all most two years in possession of this Estate, I am fully convinced, that the unavoidable outgoings and deductions are greater than any Income can support’.<sup>33</sup>

Almost three weeks later, Wrighte wrote to Benyon again. He valued Englefield highly and estimated that the rent should be four hundred guineas per annum, ‘for the use of nearly two thousand Pounds worth of furniture & Books, a hundred acres of exceeding rich lands, a Park well stocked with Deer a Pond or rather Lake abounding with the most excellent Fish, the sporting Liberties of three good Manors, cannot be thought one farthing too much’.<sup>34</sup> Wrighte hoped that Benyon would be able to recommend some potential tenants, ‘such a one as you yourself may approve of’.<sup>35</sup>

It is difficult to know who Richard Benyon would have recommended to Wrighte – perhaps one of his mother’s family or one of his father’s East India Company connections. Wrighte though clearly felt that Benyon was well-connected enough to recommend someone suitable. From Benyon’s correspondence it seems that he was keen for a certain Mr D’Oyly to take Englefield.<sup>36</sup> But after making enquiries through Mr Southouse, he found that Mr D’Oyly had already taken Ware Park in Hertfordshire.<sup>37</sup> By December 1781, Mr Wrighte had found a tenant, although he had been

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Benyon Papers, Letter from Richard Benyon to Nathaniel Wrighte, 29 June 1781, D/EBY/C3.

<sup>33</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte, Englefield House to Richard Benyon, Gidea Hall, 3 July 1781, D/EBY/C3. For more on Englefield in debt see Gervase Jackson-Stops, ‘Englefield House, Berkshire – II’, *Country Life*, March 5 1981, p. 562.

<sup>34</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte, Chicklade to Richard Benyon, 21 July 1781, D/EBY/C3.

<sup>35</sup> Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte, Chicklade to Richard Benyon, 21 July 1781, D/EBY/C3.

<sup>36</sup> This is not Charles D’Oyly (1781-1845) or his father Baron Sir John Hedley D’Oyly as he did not return to England from India with his family until 1785.

<sup>37</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Benyon Papers, Letter from Mr Southouse, Bridge Lane, Blackfriars to Richard Benyon, 9 August 1781, D/EBY/C3.

persuaded to let it for three rather than four hundred guineas.<sup>38</sup> The new tenant of Englefield House was the widow of Lord Robert Clive – Lady Margaret Clive (1735-1817).

### **Lady Margaret Clive at Englefield House (1780s)**

It seems that Richard Benyon did not recommend Lady Clive, but rather that she came under recommendation from others. Nathaniel Wrighte described to Benyon how he had been ‘informed by many who had the honour of being acquainted with Lady Clive, that her Ladyship was possessed of many excellent Qualities, and that there was no room for doubt but that she would take all possible care of the Books, Furniture etc left in the house and of the Premises in general’, therefore he ‘prevailed...to give her Ladyship the preferences to all others who had before made or were then making applications for that most delightful place.’<sup>39</sup> Wrighte chose Lady Clive to be tenant at Englefield in part because he believed that she would cherish and give due attention to the material objects and interiors belonging to the house. Wrighte clearly valued Englefield’s interiors and objects highly and was prepared to accept a lower rent in order to secure a tenant whom he believed would do the same.

In 1787, the house saw its links with the East India Company enlarge still further. In this year Margaret Fowke, niece of East India Company official John Walsh (who lived at nearby [Warfield Park](#)) planned to marry John Benn of Ormathwaite, Cumbria (who had worked in the service of the East India Company and had been based in Calcutta from 1778 to 1786) at Englefield House. Lady Clive was cousin to John Walsh and retained close connections with the family and Margaret in particular. Although Margaret ultimately decided to have the ceremony at her brother Francis’s house in London and the reception at Richmond on Saturday, June 30, she visited Englefield with her new husband in July 1787. Writing to John Walsh in 1787, Margaret explained that ‘I should be happy to follow your advice in having the ceremony performed at Englefield & should receive a most [?] pleasure from the presence of Lady Clive. The only reason why I prefer London & my brother’s house is that it is infinitely more private – a circumstance to my feeling of the utmost moment in a marriage.’<sup>40</sup> Country houses could be used to host marriage ceremonies on a large scale, but they also acted as important sites from which East India Company families could launch young daughters onto the marriage market.

Lady Clive moved to Englefield in the 1780s in order to place her youngest daughter in a suitable location for entry to the marriage market. Outside of London, but close enough to visit out of season and near to other East India Company connections in the area, Englefield was an ideal location at this moment in Lady Clive’s life cycle. When that moment ended in the late 1780s, Lady Clive decided to move to another location. As demonstrated in the [Swallowfield Park Case Study](#), women connected to the East India Company returned from India with young children and often led

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<sup>38</sup> Berkshire Record Office. Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte at Mr Fisker’s, Galloway’s Buildings to Richard Benyon, 19 December 1781, D/EBy/C3.

<sup>39</sup> Benyon Papers, Letter from Nathaniel Wrighte at Mr Fisker’s, Galloway’s Buildings to Richard Benyon, 19 December 1781, D/EBy/C3.

<sup>40</sup> British Library, India Office Records, Letter from Margaret Fowke to John Walsh, 1787, Mss Eur D.546/22 ff.61.

peripatetic lives, moving from country house to country house. Lady Clive's experience demonstrates how that mode of living could continue into later life.

Just before her youngest daughter married a certain Mr Walpole, as her motherly duties ended, it was assumed by others in the Englefield household that Lady Clive would leave for a smaller residence.<sup>41</sup> In 1788 as she began to look for another house and considered renting Dunston Park, located around nine miles away from Englefield House in Thatcham, Berkshire, but decided against it. She also looked at some houses in Essex. Her desire to change residence could not have come too soon. In 1789 Nathaniel Wrighte died and Richard Benyon the Younger inherited Englefield.

### **The Benyon Legacy (1796-1854)**

Richard Benyon the Younger died in 1796, leaving his son [Richard Benyon \(1770-1854\)](#) to inherit. On 27 September 1797, a year after his father's death and inheriting Englefield, Richard Benyon married Elizabeth Sykes, only daughter of [Sir Francis Sykes of Basildon Park](#). Upon this marriage Englefield's connection with the East India Company grew stronger still. At the same time, Benyon's connections to Berkshire and the English establishment became stronger too.

In *An Open Elite?* Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone argue that in the period between 1540 and 1880 the elite were not as open as has previously been assumed. They assert that 'Only a very small handful of very rich merchants succeeded in buying their way into the elite, and by the second generation they were fully assimilated'.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to this, this case study demonstrates that 'rich merchants' did not necessarily buy but could in fact marry into the elite. Moreover, in this case it took a third generation to become assimilated and even then such assimilation was not necessarily 'full'. Richard Benyon assimilated himself into the elite by focusing on parliament, local civic responsibilities and building. Nevertheless in his marriage and in his building schemes he revealed his other connections to the East India Company – he continued to be part of local, national and global worlds.

In 1802, Richard Benyon became MP for Pontefract and remained in his seat until 1806. He may have been helped to this position by his father-in-law Sir Francis Sykes who had connections to Pontefract both through his upbringing in Yorkshire and his marriage to Elizabeth Monckton, daughter of Viscount Gallway. In the same year, Benyon sold Gidea Hall to Alexander Black and Englefield became the principal family seat.<sup>43</sup> In the following two parliaments, from 1806 to 1812, Benyon acted as MP for Wallingford. He continued to focus his attentions on Berkshire by becoming Justice of the Peace, Deputy Lieutenant of Berkshire and High Sheriff of Berkshire. From 1806 onwards, Benyon also began making changes to Englefield.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Benyon Papers, Letter from R. Crockford, Englefield to Mr Benyon, 9 April 1788, D/EBy/C5.

<sup>42</sup> Lawrence Stone & Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone. *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 283.

<sup>43</sup> Thanks to Georgina Green for these references. *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. VII, p. 67-69.

<sup>44</sup> Jackson-Stops, 'Englefield House, Berkshire II', p. 565.

Although the alterations were relatively simple, Benyon employed Sir John Soane to complete the designs.<sup>45</sup> One alteration was particularly simple – they added roof-timbers above the long gallery. The second alteration, however, was more complex as Benyon added an elevation to the east front. Gervase Jackson-Stops argues that this change suggests that they intended to remove the eighteenth-century Venetian windows on the south side and the cupolas to the towers and insert a new door and windows.<sup>46</sup> Jackson-Stops also suggests that the construction of the elevation might have been connected with the removal of ‘Paulet Wrighte’s offices’ on the east front.

In 1814 Benyon was in the fortunate position of acquiring an extensive inheritance through his connections to the Powlett Wrighte family and rapidly adopted the Powlett Wrighte name. Eight years later, Richard Benyon Powlett Wrighte lost his wife Elizabeth. In that same year 1822, he also gained a fortune and became Richard Benyon de Beauvoir. He inherited the fortune of his de Beauvoir cousin, who owned land in Hackney and used it to begin another improvement campaign at Englefield.<sup>47</sup>

Initially Benyon de Beauvoir approached architect Thomas Hopper who had previously worked on Penrhyn Castle and Leigh Court and restyled Purley Hall between 1818 and 1820. In the earliest surviving letter to Hopper, Benyon de Beauvoir included a pencil sketch of the south-east corner of the house – he outlined the addition of two bay windows, which would light the room and rooms above it.<sup>48</sup> In response to Benyon de Beauvoir’s desire for more light Hopper added windows to the dining room side that replicated the proportions and decorations of the central porch bay. Hopper also changed the silhouette of the house by adding a series of tall, square turrets, many of which disguised chimney stacks. He also made some internal alterations, for instance the ceilings of the library and dining room even though the latter incorporates earlier plasterwork. These alterations carried on throughout the decade.

Benyon de Beauvoir finally made his last payment to Hopper in 1829.<sup>49</sup> By around 1832 Benyon de Beauvoir was ready for others to see Englefield and decided to commission John Constable to paint the house. On gaining this commission, Constable went on to create an almost Gothic vision of Englefield (shown below). In doing so, Benyon de Beauvoir marked out his dual identity. As the owner of a financially buoyant family estate, well-established in national politics and the local community, Benyon de Beauvoir had assimilated into the British establishment. At the same time, his connections to the East India Company remained and were perhaps expressed through his Gothic taste. Moreover, Constable’s vision reflected not only the exterior character of the house but also the taste found within it.

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<sup>45</sup> Gervase Jackson-Stops notes that two of Sir John Soanes drawings remain in the family papers.

<sup>46</sup> Jackson-Stops, ‘Englefield House, Berkshire II’, p. 565.

<sup>47</sup> Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, p. 173; Jackson-Stops, ‘Englefield House, Berkshire II’, p. 565.

<sup>48</sup> Jackson-Stops, ‘Englefield House, Berkshire II’, p. 565.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



Englefield House  
John Constable, c.1832  
Commissioned by Richard Benyon de Beauvoir

Very little of the furnishings bought by Richard Benyon de Beauvoir survive, but when Jackson-Stops researched the house in 1981 he found a battlemented state bed supplied in 1833 by the upholsterers Allaway and Davis. It was originally hung with blue and silver brocade, the tester “trimmed with 52 Blue silk Gothic shape ornaments.”<sup>50</sup> By this point the Gothic has emerged as a distinct taste within the house. [During the project we hope to examine further what appears to be a link between East India Company families and the Gothic taste.]



In 1849 Richard Benyon de Beauvoir purchased South Ockenden Hall in Essex (see map above). The property remained in the family until 1937 when it was sold along with the family’s other Essex

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



properties.<sup>51</sup> Five years later, in 1854, Richard Benyon de Beauvoir died and Englefield passed to his nephew Richard Fellowes, second son of his sister Emma, on condition that he took the name Benyon. Richard Benyon (formerly Fellowes) died in 1897 and was succeeded by his nephew, James H. Fellowes, later Benyon (d. 1935).<sup>52</sup> After James H. Benyon's death in 1935, his son Henry was forced to sell North Ockenden, together with the other Benyon estates in Essex, in 1937 to pay for death duties.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Englefield remained in the Benyon family and does so today.

Englefield's Elizabethan facade is just that. By employing a social history approach to country house history and focusing on the processes which shaped the house its dynamism is revealed. Processes such as inheritance, marriage and renting brought new occupiers to its door. Amongst those new occupiers Richard Benyon, Lady Clive and Elizabeth Sykes brought their East India Company connections with them. Englefield took its due part in the English Hindostaan not necessarily because its exterior or interior changed but rather because the people connected to it changed its character. During this time Englefield was made by the marriages, rental agreement and bequests that brought new people within its rooms and halls.

## **PART II: The Movement of Things**

By the early decades of the eighteenth century luxury Asian objects, such as porcelain, lacquerware and silks, had become an important part of the British country house interior. Such wares were generally brought into Britain along trade routes that were journeyed by the European East India Companies. This part of the case study examines the movement of such objects into the interiors of Englefield and questions how personal objects brought back by individual East India Company officials were differentiated from other luxury Asian objects brought in by the Company. It asks what did these objects mean to the families who transported and owned them?

### **Global Goods at Englefield House**

Between 1530 and 1782 the executors of wills were obliged to compile a probate inventory, which listed and valued all the movable goods belonging to the deceased. When Powlett Wrighte died in 1741, the executors of Wrighte's will called upon Richard Chillingworth to compile an inventory. In responding to this request Chillingworth created a historical document that goes some way to showing what Englefield's interior spaces held before Richard Benyon entered them in 1745. Before any direct connection to the East India Company was established, Englefield House was full of globally-sourced objects.

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<sup>51</sup> Thanks to Georgina Green for this reference. *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. VII, p. 119.

<sup>52</sup> Web image not available – but portrait in NPG – Richard Benyon (Richard Fellowes), by William Henry Southwell, albumen carte-de-visite, 1860s).

<sup>53</sup> Thanks to Georgina Green for this reference. *Victoria County History of Essex*, Vol. VII (1978), p. 112.



Carpet, 1600-1725, Turkey, Romania or Bulgaria, Hand-knotted woolen pile on woollen warp and weft, 225-1889. © Victoria and Albert Museum,

Inventories are problematic sources, which often contained inaccuracies as they were dependent on the skills and knowledge of the appraiser.<sup>54</sup> The 1741 inventory of movable goods at Englefield House, for example, depended on Richard Chillingworth's ability to recognise and value particular objects. In this particular case Chillingworth recorded the movable objects of Englefield House in great detail. Such care may have been due to his skills, or as Mary Wrighte remained in the house she may have been able to assist him with the inventory process. The 1741 inventory shows that Powlett and Mary Wrighte lived well at Englefield, surrounded by a diversity of luxury objects. For example the inventory describes how the house included a dressing room adjacent to a bedroom, which contained green mohair curtains, two chairs, a small 'India' cabinet, a frame, a dressing table, two little japanned dressing boxes, four brushes, three 'India' pictures, sixteen small prints and two small family portraits or busts.<sup>55</sup> Here Chillingworth ably identified the

material of the curtains and the method of production for the dressing boxes. Nevertheless, his description of the 'India' cabinet and three 'India' pictures is more opaque. Jessica Keating and Lia Markey have shown, that in the early modern

period the term 'Indian' connoted objects from the Americas and India, as well as Africa, China, Japan, the Levant, and even Europe.<sup>56</sup> In this context Chillingworth's lack of specificity means that defining what exactly the 'India' cabinet and three 'India' pictures actually were, is difficult. Despite this uncertainty it is possible to see that the Wrightes lived in a home which contained objects imbued with global connotations. Nevertheless, the presence of these globally-inflected objects was not an unusual feature of domestic spaces (particularly elite domestic spaces) in the early eighteenth century.

Despite the ubiquity of these objects, Englefield's 1741 inventory suggests that Mary and Powlett Wrighte not only lived with global luxuries but also placed a particularly high value on them. The objects contained in the dressing room (the small boxes, prints, chairs and table) mark this space out as intimate and personal. The warmth provided by the insulating qualities of the mohair curtains, the small japanned boxes sat on the dressing table, the chairs and multiple pictures and prints (nineteen in all) connote comfort and familiarity. In contrast, other rooms in the house such as the 'old library' seem impersonal and uncomfortable, containing worn objects and no fire implements. By reading

<sup>54</sup> See N. Cox and J. Cox (2000) 'Probate 1500-1800: a system in transition', in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds.), *When Death do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, pp. 13-37; M. Spufford (1990) 'The limitations of the probate inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.) *English Rural Society, 1500-1800. Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 139-74;

<sup>55</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Inventory of household goods of Paulet Wright esq – taken at his mansion house at Englefield (1741), D/EBY/E2.

<sup>56</sup> Jessica Keating and Lia Markey, "'Indian' Objects in Medici and Austrian-Habsburg Inventories: A Case Study of the Sixteenth-Century Term', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 23:2 (2011), p. 283.

the rooms in this way it is possible to suggest which spaces and therefore which objects were highly valued by the Wrightes.

The inventory lists that the 'old library' contained a pair of globes, a desk with drawers, five old chairs, two tables, a crossbow, a longbow, some armour and sundry shelves.<sup>57</sup> The presence of five 'old' chairs perhaps gives the impression that this room is in a state of decay and neglect; a sense, which is bolstered by non-convivial objects such as the crossbow and longbow. Moreover the inventory states that a 'new' library exists. According to the inventory, the 'new' library contained a large cherry tree book case, a large mahogany chest, a mahogany whist table, two glass sconces, a Turkey carpet (such as that shown above), a mahogany side board table, a mahogany pillar table, six walnut tree chairs, four coloured prints of houses in frames, one painted piece of Turkey horses, a pair of dogs, a shovel, tongs, bellows and brush.<sup>58</sup>

These contrasting rooms provide an important insight into the material culture of Englefield House in the early eighteenth century. They demonstrate how certain rooms and objects in the house were active and present members of a network, which constituted the family identity. For instance, the 'new' library was clearly in use. The glass sconces provide light, the active fire provided warmth and furniture provided intimacy. Prints and paintings characterize this room as an active space. Moreover, the particularity of the inventory – noting the furniture as made from specific materials such as mahogany, cherry tree and walnut – marks this room and the pieces within it as well-known and valued. At the same time, the inclusion of global objects in the 'new' library suggests that the Wrightes understood these objects as fashionable and novel. The presence of global objects in what Amber Epp and Linda Price might describe as the 'warm' space of the 'new' library demonstrates that these fashionable pieces were an important part of the performance of the Wrighte identity.<sup>59</sup> In contrast globes, crossbows and longbows seem neglected and forgotten, moved as they were into the 'cool' space of the 'old' library. Of course, the fire implements may only have been present in the new library on the particular day when the inventory was recorded. The old library may have been a much loved and used space. The poverty of material culture in the space and the lack of detailed description, however, suggests that such use was infrequent. Despite the possible neglect of the globes in the 'old' library, the objects that filled the 'warm' and thus the valued spaces of Englefield House in 1741 reflect the Wrightes' interest in and valuation of global material culture.

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<sup>57</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Inventory of household goods of Paulet Wright esq – taken at his mansion house at Englefield (1741), D/EBY/E2.

<sup>58</sup> Inventory of household goods of Paulet Wright esq – taken at his mansion house at Englefield (1741), D/EBY/E2.

<sup>59</sup> Amber M. Epp and Linda L. Price, 'The Storied Life of Singularized Objects: Forces of Agency and Network Transformation', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36 (2010), p. 821.

## Material Knowledge

As an East India Company official in Madras, Richard Benyon understood and valued objects. The preparations he made for his final journey to England from India in 1744 demonstrates the different ways in which Benyon used objects and his material knowledge to display affection and affirm familial ties. Letters between Richard and his brother Charles reveal that Richard bought a range of objects back from India to England with him when he boarded the *Duke* in 1744. Among the many objects he listed as accompanying him were a lacquered Chinese tea chest, two chests of drawers, a bureau, and various linens, a waistcoat and books. Benyon also returned with china ware, which he described as 'Cistern' china ware and some perishable items, such as tea.<sup>60</sup> Alongside the objects he brought home with him he also invested time in arranging for the return and distribution of particular objects to specific individuals. Richard asked his brother Charles to help him in this task and looked to him to facilitate many aspects of the return, at the same time he also called upon the resources of Captain Hanslapp. Captains acted as important mediators in the transferral of objects back to Britain for East India Company officials and their families.

Benyon charged his brother with a range of gifts for his daughter Molly and her carer Mrs Drake. His description of these objects and his methods for choosing them demonstrate that Benyon not only had good connections, he also understood material objects. He describes how he had bought Molly a 'flower'd Apron and Handkerchiefs' along with three petticoats.<sup>61</sup> The flowered handkerchief he procured for Molly would have displayed the vibrancy of the one shown in the image above. Similarly, he bought 'two flower'd Aprons, six striped Aprons, and One piece of flower'd Caps marked with & for Mrs Drake.'<sup>62</sup> Benyon's attention to detail regarding Molly's presents is somewhat



Handkerchief, Pulicat, Coromandel Coast, India, 1700s  
Painted and dyed cotton in flower sprigged pattern  
IS.166-1950. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London

surprising. Despite Benyon's absence from England for eleven years, he was able to buy an apron, handkerchiefs and a set of petticoats specifically because he thought they would 'match some of the same sort left in one of the Chests at home'.<sup>63</sup> For Benyon these objects were intimately linked to the domestic spaces of home and he retained a detailed memory of them. His writings demonstrate his connections, in-depth knowledge of materials and his detailed remembrance of Molly's material world. By marking these objects out as particular and special through his knowledge and care, Benyon used these objects to express affection across space and time, differentiating them from other Asian objects available on the marketplace.

<sup>60</sup> Berkshire Record Office, Papers of R. Benyon inc. letters with brother and list of clothing D/EBy/B7 (1708-1757).

<sup>61</sup> Papers of R. Benyon inc. letters with brother and list of clothing, D/EBy/B7 (1708-1757). Letter from Richard Benyon to Charles Benyon, 12 January 1743/4.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Inheriting India

Like Richard, Mary Benyon used objects to affirm familial ties and express affection across time and space. Before she died in 1776, she was keen to use the power she held to bequeath objects of specific importance to family members. In her will she stated that her 'Japan cabinet' and her 'Rosewood Cabinet' should go to her 'son Richard Benyon'.<sup>64</sup> Although a rosewood 'chest of drawers' was listed in the closet that adjoined the 'Chintz' bed chamber in the 1741 inventory compiled on the death of her first husband Powlett Wrighte, a Japan cabinet was not listed at all. Moreover, these objects were not bequeathed to Mary in Powlett Wrighte's will suggesting that they were not in existence before 1741. It is possible then that one or both of these objects had belonged to her late husband Richard Benyon and that Mary now chose to bequeath them to her son in order to ensure that he retained objects which had an association with his father.

Richard Benyon brought a 'bureau' back with him from India onboard the *Duke* in January 1744 and it is probably this object, which Mary bequeathed. Benyon would have had access to furniture such as these while working in Madras. Vizagapatam, which sits five-hundred miles north of Madras on the eastern coast of India, was a key production site for ivory-inlaid furniture in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Kamsali caste artisans used their ivory carving skills to produce furniture in Western forms. Other East India Company officials working in Madras in the early eighteenth century returned to England with similar pieces. [Edward Harrison \(d.1732\)](#), for example, who served as the Governor of Madras between 1711 and 1717, [brought a similar bureau to England when he returned to Balls Park in Hertfordshire](#). By bequeathing this distinctly Indian object to her son, Mary invested the object with familial significance and sought to stress the importance of Benyon's previous relationship with India. Imperial connections did not necessarily simply shape the country house in one generation, but rather through the movement of objects between generations they were able to create an imperial legacy, which continued to shape younger generations and their houses.

## Timeline

1712 Anne Wrighte (née Paulet) inherits Englefield House from her brother Lord Francis Paulet

1729 Anne's eldest son Powlett Wrighte inherits Englefield

1741 Powlett Wrighte dies and Englefield passes to his son Powlett Wrighte the Younger. Mary Wrighte, his wife, has a lifetime interest in the house.

1745 Mary marries Richard Benyon (1698-1774) who has recently retired as Governor of Fort St George in Madras. Mary is his third wife.

1746 Mary Benyon gives birth to a boy on 28 June. They name him Richard Benyon.

1767 Richard Benyon the Younger marries Hannah Hulsein and in 1770 she gives birth to a boy – Richard Benyon.

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<sup>64</sup> The National Archives, Mary Benyon of Grosvenor Square, Middlesex (1777), PROB 11/1035.



1774 Richard Benyon dies. Richard Benyon the Younger inherits Gidea Hall, Newbury and North Ockenden Hall.

1776 Mary Benyon dies. Englefield passes to Powlett Wrighte the Younger. Powlett Wrighte makes many alterations and encumbers the estate with extensive debt.

1777 Powlett Wrighte the Younger marries.

1779 Powlett Wrighte the Younger dies childless and leaves Englefield to his uncle Nathaniel Wrighte, in accordance with his father's will.

1781 Fearing the extent of Englefield's debts, Nathaniel Wrighte lets Englefield House to Lady Margaret Clive.

1789 Nathaniel Wrighte dies and Richard Benyon the Younger inherits Englefield.

1796 Richard Benyon the Younger dies and Englefield passes to Richard Benyon the Younger's son – another Richard Benyon (1770-1854).

1797 Richard Benyon marries Elizabeth Sykes, daughter of Sir Francis Sykes of Basildon House.

1802 Richard Benyon sells Gidea Hall to Alexander Black.

1806 Benyon begins making changes to Englefield in 1806.

1814, Richard Benyon becomes Richard Benyon Powlett Wrighte

1822 Richard Benyon Powlett Wrighte, becomes Richard Benyon de Beauvoir – inherits the fortune from his de Beauvoir cousin, who owned land in Hackney. Richard Benyon de Beauvoir's wife Elizabeth (daughter of Sir Francis Sykes) dies.

1849 Richard Benyon de Beauvoir purchases South Ockenden Hall in Essex. The property remained in the family until 1937 when it was sold along with the family's other Essex properties.

1854 Richard Benyon de Beauvoir dies and Englefield passes to his nephew Richard Fellowes, second son of his sister Emma, on condition that he took the name Benyon.

1897 Richard Benyon (formerly Fellowes) dies and is succeeded by his nephew, James H. Fellowes, later Benyon (d. 1935).

1935 James H. Benyon (formerly Fellowes) dies and is succeeded by his son Henry.

1937 Henry sells North Ockenden, together with the other Benyon estates in Essex, to pay for death duties. Englefield remains in the Benyon family to this day.