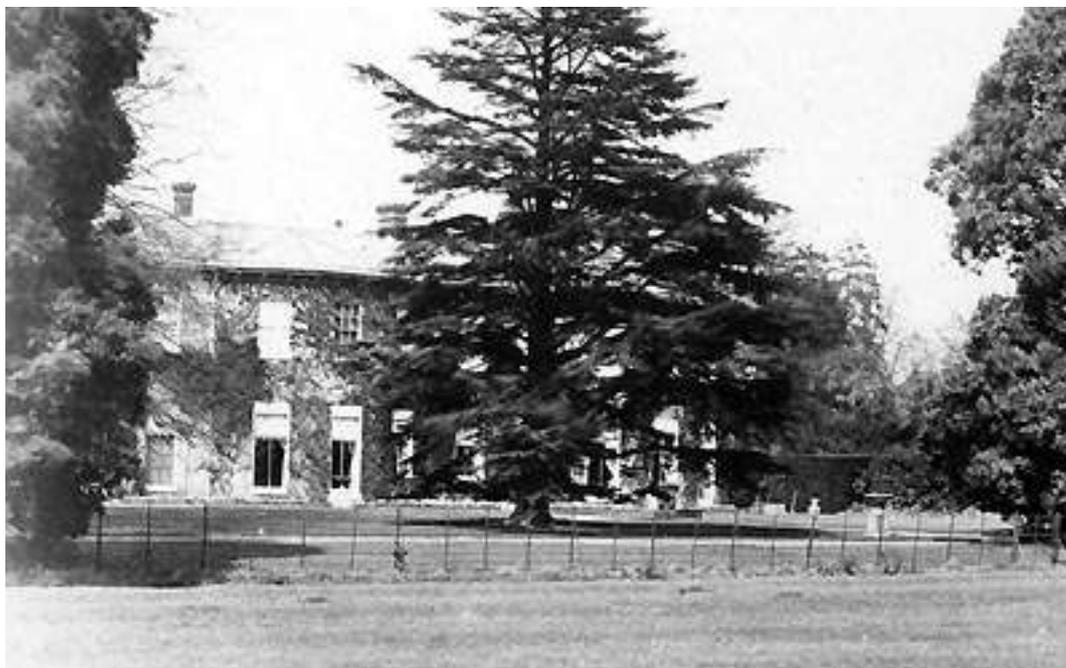


Warfield Park: Longing, Belonging and the Country House
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Warfield Park, Warfield, Berkshire¹

How did the processes of empire shape how individuals perceived and conceived of the country house in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain? Peter Mandler has argued that in the early nineteenth century the country house began to be recognized as part of Britain's national heritage.² Despite focusing on this later period, Mandler also identified certain changes in the later eighteenth century which precipitated such 'heritage consciousness'.³ These included the 'Picturesque' movement and its affirmation of particular landscapes as 'English' and a renewed interest in English traditions in art and architecture with particular reference to the Gothic. Building on Mandler's work, this case study questions how imperial agents' increasing connection to country houses impacted upon the idea of the country house in the later eighteenth century. More particularly it asks, did the longings, which East India Company officials and their families bore for 'home', England and their country houses, mark the country house as an important component of a specifically 'English' landscape and thus precipitate its entry into the heritage consciousness?

This case study seeks to answer these questions by exploring the biographies of different individuals within the Walsh family. Over at least three generations, the Walsh family were significantly involved with the East India Company (EIC). Consequently, different members spent considerable periods of their lives in India, an experience which led them to

¹ See David Nash Ford's *Royal Berkshire History* website.

² Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 7.

³ Mandler, *The Fall and Rise*, p. 21.

continually reassess their relationship to and understanding of 'home' and 'England'. Earlier generations of the family imagined not necessarily a 'home' in England, but rather a space 'England' and used it to ground their Indian experiences. In contrast later generations focused upon a particular place, Warfield, which conjured up ideas of belonging. Once returned to England, they invested this domestic space with time, effort and money. As generations of the Walsh family moved into and out of Warfield they altered and improved it in different ways, creating it anew. By examining the Walsh's relationship to Warfield, this case study also uncovers how the country house played an important role in EIC officials and their families' conceptions of place and home.

Warfield Park was demolished in 1955, a year in which one historic house was being demolished every five days. Increased death duties, post war social change, new planning legislation and falling land rents all impacted upon country houses, making them increasingly vulnerable.⁴ Notably then, this case study examines a house whose material presence has been lost. Nevertheless, aspects of the house and the meanings it held can be examined through the correspondence and diaries of the individuals who lived there or experienced a connection with it. An important source within this case study is a memoir, written by the son of one of Warfield's key inhabitants Margaret Benn Walsh. In writing the memoir, John Benn Walsh (1798-1881) who was to become first Baron Ormathwaite, attempted to write a full and entirely positive account of his mother and the life she led using letters and diaries from his family's collection. Although problematic, this source highlights the important role that houses played in the lives of Baron Ormathwaite's great uncle, mother and father as well as his own. In both material and immaterial terms houses defined many members of the Walsh family. Although the physical structure of Warfield no longer exists, its imagined presence remains recorded in this set of correspondence, diaries and the memoir. Its material presence was often, and in this case study is yet again, secondary to the imaginings it inspired.

Section 1: Imagining Home

In the eighteenth century, the Walsh family were connected in multiple ways to the East India Company (EIC) and its activities. Three generations of the family lived in India for sustained periods of time. For the second generation, returning to India (they were born there and then returned as adults) encouraged them to consider their relationships to England and 'home'. This section of the case study examines what form those considerations took to reveal the importance these individuals began to place on ideas of England.

The Walsh family's relationship with the Company began in the early eighteenth century when Joseph Walsh (d.1731) was appointed senior merchant in Madras. Working in this role gave Joseph access to mercantile connections across India and Europe. In addition, Joseph increased his family's connection to the Company for future generations when on 27 December 1721 he married Elizabeth Maskelyne (1677-1734) in Madras.⁵ Elizabeth Maskelyne was sister to Jane and Sarah and daughter of Nevil Maskelyne (1663-1711) of Purton, Wiltshire. The Maskelyne family later became further linked to the EIC through Nevil's nephew Edward who worked for the Company and his niece Margaret, who married Robert, first Baron Clive. Joseph and Elizabeth had three children, Joseph (1722-c.1729), John (1726-1795) and Elizabeth (1731-1760?). In 1728, just two years after the birth of their

⁴ Roy Strong (ed.), *The Destruction of the Country House, 1875-1975* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974).

⁵ British Library, IOR N/2/1 f.42.

second child, Joseph decided to leave India. He had begun to experience financial difficulties and travelled to London with their eldest son Joseph in an attempt to resolve them. While in England, however, young Joseph contracted smallpox and died. The elder Joseph returned to India alone in 1729 and died there, just two years later in 1731, just before the birth of his last child, Elizabeth.

After his father's death in 1731, five-year old John (Joseph and Elizabeth's second son) was sent to England to be raised by his uncle John Walsh, a merchant living in Hatton Gardens, London. Elizabeth and her daughter Elizabeth remained in Madras, but in 1734, Elizabeth



Map showing the position of Madras, a key location for generations of the Walsh family.

Walsh went into decline and on 24 November she was buried in the city.⁶ Her daughter Elizabeth was just three years old and at this point it seems likely that her mother's sisters Jane and Sarah Maskelyne took her into their care in England.⁷

Despite leaving India at such young ages, both the Walsh children created paths that led them back to the country and to further develop their connections with it and the EIC. In 1742, at the age of 16, John followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Company as a writer. His first posting sent him to his birthplace, Madras. Five years later, John returned to England and rose (like his father before him) to the grade of senior merchant. In

1749 John Walsh travelled to India once more, this time with his sister Elizabeth who was only just eighteen.

Embarking on such a journey while so young and in a position of relative vulnerability under the care of her twenty-three year old brother must have been a daunting prospect for Elizabeth. In India, Elizabeth Walsh worked to make sense of what she saw, heard, smelt, tasted and touched. She frequently wrote back to her aunts, describing her experiences. Such correspondence provides us with a means by which to interpret Elizabeth's early life in India. Notably, in her letters, Elizabeth primarily used England as a reference point with which to make sense of her new experiences. It is perhaps unsurprising that in writing to relatives in England, Elizabeth situated her readers by using reference points they would understand. Nevertheless, it is significant that Elizabeth particularly focused upon Indian buildings to make sense of her new environment. For instance, in her letters, she made frequent reference to the houses in which she stayed. On arrival she noted that the first house she stayed in was more like a 'barn'.⁸ In comparison the Company house she shared with her brother in Madras was much more comfortable - Elizabeth described it as 'a little palace'.⁹ The social world into which she stepped also required description and she noted

⁶ British Library, IOR N/2/1 f.42.

⁷ In later life, Elizabeth frequently wrote very open letters to her aunts suggesting a real intimacy between them.

⁸ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, Letter from Elizabeth Walsh to Jane and Sarah Maskelyne, 10 October 1749, D546/2, p. 11.

⁹ Letter from Elizabeth Walsh to Mrs Jane and Sarah Maskelyne, 1 Feb 1749, D546/2, p. 15.

how with such limited sociable company 'it is just like living in a County town in England'.¹⁰ In describing India to her aunts Elizabeth greeted their desire for knowledge with a sense of humour based on their shared, intimate knowledge of England. For both those in India and at home, the central means of navigating these new experiences was through a shared knowledge of English social and cultural life.

The social world of Madras would have greeted the Walsh's favourably as they benefitted from their relation to certain family members already established in the city. When in 1750 Elizabeth Walsh moved to be with her brother in Madras, their first cousin once removed (Edmund Maskelyne) was already stationed there. As a close friend of Robert Clive, Edmund was well established within the East India Company network. While stationed in Madras, therefore, both John and Elizabeth became increasingly involved in Company life. Elizabeth met and began a relationship with Joseph Fowke (1716-1800). Like Elizabeth, Fowke was born in Madras and probably travelled to England in around 1728 with his father. He had returned to Madras in 1736 to begin work for the East India Company as a writer and by the time he met (or re-met) Elizabeth had risen to the rank of third in council. Elizabeth promptly married Fowke in May 1750, just one year into her time in India.¹¹

Despite establishing herself in India through her social network and new marriage, Elizabeth continued to fixate on England. She worked hard to maintain her connections with home, regularly sending gifts of textiles to members of her family. For example, she sent a package containing a dozen shifts, sixteen white pocket handkerchiefs and four gingham gowns to her aunts Jane and Sarah Maskelyne in September 1750.¹² In sending these gifts, Elizabeth engaged in a culture of gift giving, which reaffirmed her affective position within a larger kin network.¹³ She also provided her kin with material evidence of her current life, which created a further set of shared reference points.¹⁴

Nevertheless, after two years in India Elizabeth remained homesick for England. Writing to her aunts, Elizabeth warmly described how the house she lived in had 'a view of the sea.' Yet, in spite of such benefits and her enjoyment of the climate in India, she asserted that 'as for everything else give me old England'.¹⁵ Elizabeth's words are imbued with a distinct and poignant sense of longing for something distant and perhaps lost. What constituted 'old England' in Elizabeth Fowke's mind's eye? Did she refer to her old England, the England she had enjoyed while growing up? This was an England that now appeared in both geographical and temporal terms to be at a great distance. Or did she refer to 'old England' in a more historical and romantic sense? Perhaps Elizabeth longed for a simpler Merrie old England?

Johannes Hofer, a Swiss doctor, coined the term 'nostalgia' in his medical dissertation of 1688. He asserted that nostalgia defined "the sad mood originating from the desire for

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ BL IOR N/2/1 f.246.

¹² Letter from Elizabeth Walsh to Mrs Jane and Sarah Maskelyne, 13 September 1750, D546/2, p. 19.

¹³ Margot C. Finn, 'Colonial Gifts: Family Politics and the Exchange of Goods in British India, c. 1780-1820', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40:1 (2006), p. 221.

¹⁴ Russell W. Belk, 'Moving Possessions: An Analysis Based on Personal Documents from the 1847-1869 Mormon Migration', *The Journal of Consumer Research*, 19:3 (1992), p. 354. Belk's research found that female Mormon migrants sent home samples taken from their new clothes to show geographically family members what they were wearing. There is no evidence of this among East India Company families, but the desire to send home materials could be seen as activated a similar process of knowledge sharing.

¹⁵ Letter from Elizabeth Walsh to Mrs Jane and Sarah Maskelyne, Feb 1751, D546/2, p. 32.

return to one's native land".¹⁶ In the seventeenth century this newly defined disease constituted a single-minded obsessional longing for the native land and is particularly associated with Swiss soldiers fighting abroad. Where do Elizabeth Fowke's longings for England fit within this wider experience of nostalgia? Lacking single-minded obsession her longing does not appear to have manifested itself in such terms. But her longing for a lost time and lost home are evident in her letters and need to be noted, particularly in the context of her future family. Soon, however, Elizabeth's longing was sated and her wishes were met – she returned to England with her husband in 1752.

Elizabeth was not alone in holding to England's houses, landscape and social life as her main reference points, as other case studies show (see for example Warren Hastings' nostalgia for the English country house while in India in the Daylesford Case Study – currently unavailable). Moreover, individuals employed England as a reference point in the descriptions contained in their correspondences, not only to offer their readers a means of sharing their experiences, but also as a way of expressing their own 'home'. For Elizabeth Fowke, England represented something simpler than her present situation, something known and understood. At the same time, her longing for an entity as broad as 'England' appeared vague and uncertain. In contrast future generations of the Walsh family, particularly Elizabeth's daughter Margaret, would experience a much clearer idea of what they longed for while away in India. As this case study goes on to show, Margaret longed after a particular home, a specific country house in fact, named Warfield Park.

Section Two: A Country House of One's Own

When returning to England, how did East India Company officials and their families marry the England they imagined to that they were greeted with? For the Walsh family, on their return home they created another important place in both imagined and material terms. Warfield Park grew to be a significant family reference point, whether at home or abroad. It was not the town house, which filled the pages of their correspondence but rather the country house. Country houses had a particular resonance with East India Company officials and their families, offering up a site on which to build a sense of belonging.

¹⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 3.



Hockenhull Hall, nr Tarvin, Cheshire¹⁷

After returning to England in 1759, Elizabeth Fowke's brother John Walsh decided to settle and establish himself. During his final two years in India, John had worked as Secretary to Clive. On returning to England he sought out a house in relative proximity to Clive's newly purchased Shropshire estates and purchased Hockenhull Hall in Cheshire in 1761 (see above). Hockenhull was a seventeenth-century mansion house, which still stands to the southwest of the village of Tarvin. The house had been remodelled in 1717 for Hugh Wishaw of Chester by architect Francis Smith.



Warfield Park, Warfield, Berkshire

¹⁷ See Chester Chronicle Website (www.blogs.chesterchronicle.co.uk).

Three years later John Walsh was keen to move and in late 1764 he bought Warfield Park (see above), a house, which possibly allowed him to be nearer to his niece and nephew.¹⁸ In a letter to Robert Clive on 12 January 1765, John Walsh described how he had recently bought a house in Berkshire. Writing from his London house on Chesterfield Street, Walsh apologized to Clive for his late response, noting that he had intended to write earlier, but had been prevented 'by a troublesome Purchase I have lately made of a House & some Land in Berkshire'.¹⁹ For Walsh, purchasing Warfield was not simple. In his opinion, the house at point of purchase was incomplete and he was compelled to make 'several other Purchases as well as enclosing some Common Land'. By making these purchases Walsh felt that he had created a 'compleat Place'.²⁰

In his efforts to turn Warfield into a 'compleat Place', Walsh appears to have developed a genuine attachment to the house. Writing to Clive in the mid-1760s he began to increasingly imagine Warfield as a place where he could offer friends refuge from the politics and pleasures of London. At a later stage Walsh reflected on how he had worked to turn Warfield Park into 'a convenient place' and more particularly a convenient place for Clive.²¹ Indeed, when describing Warfield Park in his 1813 *The History of Windsor and its Neighbourhood*, James Hakewill suggested that Walsh had named Warfield 'Plassey House' in commemoration of Clive's victory at Plassey.²² Walsh hoped that Warfield would offer Clive a sort of sanctuary, a place to 'run down to [from London] when Shropshire was at too great a Distance'.²³ Like his sister who desired an 'old England', Walsh constructed Warfield as a place where men could hunt and enjoy each other's company. He writes to Clive of his ideas of what Warfield is and what it should be, hoping that when next in the county Clive will 'come and hunt' with him. Not only do his hopes reveal how Walsh and Clive retained a loving friendship, they also reveal how Walsh began to invest his country house with particular characteristics. Like England before it, Warfield became a place filled with imaginings.

¹⁸ Letters from John Walsh's sister Elizabeth to her aunts suggest that in 1753 at least she was living at Binfield with her children Arthur (b. 1752) and Francis (1753-1819). See British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, MSS Eur D546/II, p. 51. When Elizabeth's third child Margaret moves to Binfield at the end of her life, however, there is no acknowledgement of this earlier connection and perhaps therefore by 1764 the family had moved elsewhere. Margaret was born in London in 1758, perhaps the family were therefore living at a London house?

¹⁹ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, Letter from John Walsh to Robert Clive, 12 January 1765, G37/33, ff.24.

²⁰ Letter from John Walsh to Robert Clive, 12 January 1765, G37/33, ff.24. I have checked the Berkshire Record Office's enclosure records. Enclosure awards are only available for his nephew-in-law John Benn Walsh, they are not available for John Walsh.

²¹ As cited in Clive Williams. *The Nabobs of Berkshire* (Purley on Thames: Goosecroft Publications, 2010), p.305.

²² James Hakewill, *The History of Windsor and its Neighbourhood* (London: E. Lloyd, 1813), p. 290.

²³ As cited in Williams, *The Nabobs of Berkshire*, p.305.



Image of Uppark, West Sussex, which caught on fire on 30 August 1989, devastating much of the house. This image gives some indication of the violence of country house fires.

In February 1766, just two years after Walsh's purchase, a great fire afflicted Warfield and large portions of the house burned (see image included above of the fire that afflicted Uppark in West Sussex in 1989, the image gives some indication of the violence of country house fires). At the fire's end, only the offices were left standing. Rather than demolishing the remaining house and building a new house in its stead, Walsh decided to rebuild the house, incorporating what was left. In doing so Walsh reaffirmed his attachment to Warfield. His previous investment in Warfield is expressed in his response, written unsurprisingly to Clive. Describing the destruction of the house, Walsh seems unperturbed by the financial loss he has sustained. He is also relatively unconcerned by the loss of his furniture and books although he does acknowledge it is 'something'. What really affects Walsh is the 'Loss of Time'. He had worked hard at making Warfield a comfortable home and his efforts had been destroyed. As is clear from the other case studies in this project, making a landed estate a 'convenient' and 'compleat' place involved much time and effort (see for example the [Swallowfield Park Case Study](#)). Walsh's regret over the loss of time, which the burning of Warfield had afforded, underlines that this house was not an investment property, but rather was viewed by Walsh as meaningful place, as a home.²⁴

In rebuilding the house Walsh benefitted from the house being 'insured for two thousand pounds'. Wilson and Mackley have calculated that the average cost of house building ranged from £7,000 to £22,000 between 1770 and 1800, dependent on estate size.²⁵ They estimated that building a new house on an estate of around 3,000 to 5,000 acres cost £7,000 on average, while on a estate of 5,000 to 10,000 £12,500 was average and finally on a large estate of greater than 10,000 acres the cost of building a new house averaged around £22,000. That Walsh was pleased to have insured his house for £2,000 suggests that Warfield was a small property to begin with and that any rebuilding was likely to be modest. Yet any calculation regarding the rebuilding of Warfield Park in 1766 must also acknowledge

²⁴ Walsh did buy several properties, which seemed to have been exclusively retained as investments rather than homes. For instance in 1769 he bought lands in Co. Cork from the Ogle family, who had them as part of the Anglesey estate. In 1771, Walsh purchased Co. Kerry lands and in 1774 he bought further lands from the Earl of Kerry.

²⁵ Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2000), p. 294.

that Walsh had large sums of money at his disposal. It was estimated that Walsh returned from India in 1760 with a fortune of £140,000.

When writing a memoir of his mother's life, John Walsh's grandnephew described how Walsh had employed James 'Athenian' Stuart (1713-1788) to complete the rebuilding.²⁶ He described how 'Stuart of Athens did his Work at Warfield judiciously, converting the house into a pretty modest residence according to the wants of that day, which was much less luxurious than ours.'²⁷ Stuart had recently completed work on townhouses such as Spencer House (begun about 1759) and other country houses such as Hagley Hall, Worcestershire (1758) and Wimbledon Park, Surrey (1758) and continued to be in demand during the 1770s. It seems unlikely then, even in the late 1760s as Stuart moved into the later part of his career, that Walsh's employment of him indicated modesty, rather than investment.²⁸ At the same time, despite later being described by John Benn-Walsh as a 'modest residence', Warfield continued to hold the imagination of its residents in the late eighteenth century.

While developing his own attachment to Warfield, Walsh also encouraged others to form similar attachments to the place. He shared it not only with his friends, but also with his family. After her mother Elizabeth's death in 1760, Walsh began to take care of his niece Margaret (1758-1836) and in consequence she spent much of her youth at Warfield.²⁹ As a result, Margaret developed what was to become a life-long attachment to the house.

In 1776, at the age of eighteen, Margaret journeyed out to India. She embarked on this journey in order to both join her father and brother, but also in search of a husband. From the 1670s onwards the East India Company had sought to counteract the single life experienced by their young officials by paying the passage of women willing to make the journey out to India in search of a husband.³⁰ In his memoir of Margaret, her son notes from a letter written by John Walsh to Lady Clive in 1775, which described how the decision to go to India had been Margaret's alone. Although a later letter from Margaret to her uncle John describes the expectations placed upon her (by herself and others) of finding a husband, her desire to go to India seems more complex. In the memoir, John Benn Walsh speculates that she might have been lonely with her uncle (a suggestion that later passages in the memoir contradicts) and that she dearly wished to see her father and brother.³¹ Although Margaret found her first few years in India difficult, she did come to live happily there and engaged in different aspects of Indian culture. Nevertheless, a longing for something else remained and manifested itself around her attachment to a particular house in England – Warfield.

As her mother dreamt of England, so Margaret dreamt of Warfield while in India. Writing to her uncle John Walsh from Calcutta on 20 April 1781, Margaret noted that 'I have heard so much of the improvements of Warfield that I shall expect to see it quite changed by the time

²⁶ This is collaborated in James Hakewill, *The History of Windsor and its Neighbourhood* (London: E. Lloyd, 1813), p. 291.

²⁷ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, Memoir of Margaret Elizabeth Benn-Walsh, Volume 3, p. 117.

²⁸ For more on Stuart's country house commissions see Julius Bryant, "'The Purest Taste" – James "Athenian" Stuart's Work in Villas and Country Houses', in Susan Weber Soros (ed.), *James "Athenian" Stuart, 1713-1788: The Rediscovery of Antiquity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 265-315.

²⁹ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, Memoir of Margaret Elizabeth Benn-Walsh, IOR Neg 11670. Volume 1, p. 41.

³⁰ Anne de Courcy, *The Fishing Fleet: Husband-Hunting in the Raj* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012), p. 2.

³¹ National Library of Wales, Memoir of Lady Clive, FE5 (Which vol?), f.51.

we return to England. I was very fond of it in the form I left it but I am persuaded you have increased its beauties.³² Although perhaps simply writing to flatter her uncle who had clearly supplied her with ready details of the changes he has made to Warfield, the tone of the letter suggests at their shared warmth for the place and her excitement in its improvements. Similarly, in a letter written to her uncle five years later on 3 February 1786, just before embarking for Europe, we learn how important a reference point Warfield has become for Margaret. She describes how, 'The Residents house is just on the skirts of the town, and is an exceedingly good one, but my Brother resigned it to the officers who were stationed there, and lived entirely in Bungalows, a few miles from Benares, and so delightfully situated that they might almost lie in that particular, with your house at Warfield.'³³ In the same letter she goes on to note that 'I reflect with singular pleasure on the new beauties & improvements I shall discover at Warfield.'³⁴ Warfield, rather than his London house in Chesterfield Street, was an important place for Margaret.

As the second and then the third generation of the Walsh family grew they became attached to Warfield as a particular place upon which they focused their desire for belonging. After buying Warfield in 1764, John Walsh demonstrated his increasing attachment to the house and all it represented through continual rebuilding. Even after the majority of the house was burned down in 1766, Walsh decided to rebuild rather than begin again. In his imaginings Warfield was a sanctuary to which he could invite and entertain others. His niece Margaret greatly benefited from his generosity and lived there for most of her childhood. During this time she also constructed a ready attachment to the house, which when she lived in India in her early adult years she referred to as her reference point. It was her uncle's country house rather than his town house that she invested with notions of home and belonging. In her later life Margaret continued her connection to Warfield, investing in it anew as the next section goes on to explore.

Section Three: Rebuilding Warfield

As he had no legitimate children of his own, the inheritance of his estates, including Warfield was entirely at Walsh's behest. Although it had earlier seemed that Walsh would bequeath his estates to his good friend Sir Henry Strachey, a fierce argument between the men meant that when Walsh died in 1795 Warfield passed to his nephew-in-law, Margaret's husband, John Benn (1759-1825).³⁵ John Benn was, like Walsh, an East India Company man. Like his uncle-in-law he had started working for the Company as a writer, but quickly rose up the ranks. In 1781, just four years after becoming a writer, he became Assistant to the Resident at Benares.³⁶ Margaret's brother Francis Fowke had acted as Resident at Benares for eighteen months beginning 1775 and was briefly reinstated in this position in 1780 and then again in 1783.³⁷ During his time in Benares, John Benn must have become acquainted with

³² British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscript, Letter from Margaret Fowke to John Walsh, 20 April 1781, MSS Eur D546/11, ff. 37.

³³ Memoir of Margaret Walsh, Photo Eur 32/1, p. 92.

³⁴ Memoir of Margaret Walsh, Photo Eur 32/1, p. 92.

³⁵ According to John and Margaret's son, Sir Henry Strachey did not inherit due to an argument that occurred between him and Walsh. See National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/2, p. 65.

³⁶ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/benn-walsh-john-1759-1825>

³⁷ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscript, Memoir of Margaret Walsh, Photo Eur 32/1, p. 67. See also T. H. Bowyer, 'Fowke, Joseph (1716–1800)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63560>, accessed 12 Sept 2012]

Francis and possibly with his sister who moved there in 1782. In that year Benn became Factor, before changing roles again in 1785 to become junior merchant.³⁸ Crucially for the Benn-Walsh alliance, John Benn returned to England in 1786 on the *Dublin* with Margaret and soon after landing, they married in 1787. The wedding may well have taken place at the house rented by her uncle's first cousin at one removed, Englefield House, Berkshire, if it had not been for Margaret petitioning her uncle for a small and intimate affair.³⁹ Nevertheless, while on their wedding journey, the newly married couple visited [Englefield House and Lady Clive](#).⁴⁰

John Benn had made a reputed £80,000 trading in diamonds and opium while Assistant Resident at Benares, nevertheless when John Walsh died Benn significantly enlarged his fortune by inheriting Warfield (including all the household goods, linen, furniture, china and glass ware, books and paintings contained within it) as well as his other property and land in Berkshire, Radnorshire, Cork and Kerry.⁴¹ Under the terms of the inheritance Benn assumed the Walsh name. As their son described it, 'On the death of Mr Walsh, & their succeeding to his property, in March 1795, their pretty cheerful Villa at Leatherhead was given up, & they established themselves at Warfield.'⁴² He went on to detail how the move to Warfield was 'a source of great pleasure & happiness to both of them.' For his Mother, Warfield had been a place of happiness in her childhood, but 'she had also a strong taste for the country & the establishment of a country place.'⁴³ At the same time, for his Father, 'it furnished a pursuit, and occupation, which became the principal business, and amusement of the rest of his life. The improvement of this place, & the management of his farm, objects which he pursued with his characteristic...frugality, & economy, engrossed his whole time & thoughts.'⁴⁴

Warfield undoubtedly enjoyed the benefits of Margaret and John's efforts to improve and manage the estate. They invested both time and money in the house over a sustained period. Sixteen years after her husband inherited the property, Margaret noted in her Memorandum book how in March 1811 she had been 'much engaged in opening a road thro' the shrubbery in the North-East, which is to be the approach to the new entrance in the house.'⁴⁵ Her husband had relinquished 'this amusing employment' to Margaret because he was 'so much engaged in building.'⁴⁶ The division of labour, which this comment suggests, with Margaret improving the garden and John working on the house, is not consistently reflected in other sources however. According to the Memoir written by her son, Margaret was involved with the building work, allowing as it did a practical outlet for her mathematical interests. As her son described it, if he wished to 'ascertain the quantities of

³⁸ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/benn-walsh-john-1759-1825>

³⁹ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, Letter from Margaret Fowke to John Walsh, 1787, D546/22, ff. 61.

⁴⁰ Letter from Margaret Fowke to John Walsh, 2 July 1787, D546/22, ff. 65.

⁴¹ The National Archives, John Walsh Will, PROB 11/1258. The only major asset John Benn and Margaret did not inherit from John Walsh was his estate in Pontefract, Yorkshire, which he had bought in order to enable him to nominate one MP for the borough. In his will Walsh stipulated that the Pontefract estate should be sold by his executors along with his London house in Chesterfield Street in order to pay off any outstanding debts.

⁴² Memoir of Margaret Walsh, Photo Eur 32/3, p. 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁴ British Library, India Office Records, European Manuscripts, Memoir of Margaret Elizabeth Benn-Walsh, Photo Eur 32/3, p. 47.

⁴⁵ National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Letters and Memorandum from 1811 to 1815 of Margaret Walsh, f. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

roofing, & Brickwork in the erection of a range of Buildings, she was prepared to furnish me with them.⁴⁷ Nevertheless when describing the changes in full in the memoir, Margaret and John's son, gave full credit to his father.⁴⁸

It seems likely, however, that the extent of the building works which Margaret and John embarked on, from around 1809 onwards, necessitated the active involvement of both.⁴⁹ On inheriting Warfield they took on a house which had primarily housed a bachelor and his visitors rather than a family. John Walsh had once described the house as his 'Tent' and his collection of rooms were deemed too small and low for the newly incumbent Benn Walsh family.⁵⁰ In the memoir, John Benn Walsh described how he remembered the house 'perfectly' and thought that his 'fathers additions made it more commodious within'.⁵¹

John Benn Walsh led the changes that took place at Warfield in the early decades of the nineteenth century. He fancied himself as an architect and set to, creating detailed plans and drawings to guide the work. As his son noted, 'Such a task was more feasible perhaps then, as the prevailing fashion required so little ornament.'⁵² Benn Walsh was significantly aided in his work by a man known as Lewis 'a remarkably intelligent practical Builder, Joiner & working Carpenter'.⁵³ Accompanied and aided by his two sons, Lewis based himself on site in the old offices at Warfield for several years while the changes at Warfield gradually took place. Benn Walsh decided to affix a new house onto the old one. Lewis was primarily responsible for carrying out the joinery, carpentry and finish on the new part of the house and although Lewis's joinery work may have provided a frame for the house it is not clear who completed the other aspects building work.⁵⁴ Brick laying must have taken place, however, as John Benn Walsh had spent the majority of 1808 preparing for the changes at Warfield by making bricks. Sustained brick working, joinery and carpentry resulted in substantial changes, such as raising a new floor on the North Front, and expanding Warfield's layout. By the end of 1811 it was possible to dine in the dining room, although the rest of the house took at least another year to complete.⁵⁵

What Margaret and John sought to create at Warfield remains unknown. They clearly used the house as a social space. Their son describes how it was 'often filled by a succession of old friends & relations for weeks together'.⁵⁶ Their Benn-Walsh's social circle was made up of relations such as the Hollands and Stracheys but also their Indian friends – the Plowdens, Metcalfes, Casamajors, Dallas's and Cummings.⁵⁷ After they moved to Warfield they slowly expanded their social circle by including families in the local area, some of which also had Indian connections such as the [Russells who moved to nearby Swallowfield Park](#) in the 1820s.⁵⁸ At the same time, the house became a project for both Margaret and John – something to improve and work on. Unlike Margaret's uncle, Margaret and John invested in the fabric of Warfield in order to create a house that could accommodate their family and

⁴⁷ Memoir of Margaret Walsh, Photo Eur 32/3, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 117.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/3, p. 131.

⁵³ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/3, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 133.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 135.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 163.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/2, p. 23.

friends. The time and money they spent on the house also suggests that they wanted it to remain in the family as their principle country seat. Warfield was no longer simply a sanctuary; it had ambitions of its own.

Nevertheless, for Margaret, like her mother and uncle before her houses were primarily important as places containing memories and connexions. Margaret sustained important relationships to other country houses and shored up her links to them through regular visiting. Country houses were not merely social spaces, but held other memories of different times and experiences. For instance in the summer of 1811, Margaret journeyed north to visit her relation Lady Clive at Oakly Park in Shropshire. She found her 'dear Lady Clive in excellent health & spirits. Her figure much bent, but with the same sweetness of countenance & vivacity of manner.' While she greeted Lady Clive calmly, being in Oakly Park led Margaret to feel 'many various emotions'. She had not been to the house since the summer she had spent there prior to 'embarking for India'. She had not returned to the house after she came back from India because Lady Clive had been living at Englefield. She was pleased to finally return and described how 'The many, many years which have rolled over my head since I inhabited that sweet spot seemed compressed into a small space, which fancy easily leaped over & restored the long lost scene'.⁵⁹ For Margaret then, houses stored memories of previous times, which could be re-entered simply by visiting the house. Houses, particularly country houses, were important places.

Section Four: A New Generation

In 1819, when John and Margaret Benn-Walsh's son John came of age, John Walsh's will ensured that he inherited all the properties that John and Margaret had inherited in 1795. Nevertheless, it seems that the family continued to live at Warfield until 1825. In that year Margaret's husband John Benn-Walsh died after suffering a series of strokes. Six months later Margaret's son John married and Margaret, now a dowager, began to look for a new country house. In his memoir John described how it was his wish that his mother should continue to live at Warfield as 'its Mistress' and that he and his wife should live at the London house on Upper Harley Street. His mother, however, 'would not hear of such an arrangement' and resolved to find another house in the vicinity of Warfield.⁶⁰



Cooper's Hill, which in 1970 became the Royal Indian Engineering College and is now part of Brunel University's Runnymede Campus

⁵⁹ Letters and Memorandum from 1811 to 1815 of Margaret Walsh, f. 9.

⁶⁰ National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/5, p. 45.

Finding a suitable country house near Warfield was not easy and Margaret increasingly found herself travelling at speed across the country in order to secure first refusal on a particular house. A letter written by Margaret in August 1826 recounts how she had spent her summer poring over various newspapers for house advertisements. At length she was surprised to see an advertisement for Cooper's Hill – 'ready furnished in capital letters!'⁶¹ Although situated out of the immediate range of Warfield, Margaret decided that Cooper's Hill was an ideal house and so she 'instantly determined to set off & endeavour to obtain it.' Accompanied by her maid, Margaret took the post from Malvern, slept at Tewkesbury and finally arrived in Harley Street. Before ten the next morning she presented herself at the house agent for Cooper's Hill and found that three applications had already been made for the property.⁶² Seeing that she had no time to lose, she directly travelled to Cooper's Hill with her maid. The house was offered for six hundred pounds per year and could only be rented until February 1828. After seeing the property, Margaret considered its advantages and disadvantages at length. As she did not require the house for six months and because the price of the lease was so high she was reluctant to agree. Nevertheless, she felt that by living at Cooper's Hill she would be well placed to find another property in the area without 'scampering 150 miles to catch a place'.⁶³ At the same time although the rooms were 'low', she liked the location of Cooper's Hill, describing it as 'high', 'dry', 'healthy' and 'shady'. For Margaret it was 'a most pleasing residence'.⁶⁴ In the end, however, her negotiations for Cooper's Hill fell through and she resorted again to poring over advertisements, which she then neatly noted down in the back of her diary.⁶⁵ Eventually Margaret secured the residence of Hurst Lodge from Mr Elliott. She planned to lease Hurst Lodge for a short time until the tenants of Binfield died, at which point she would lease Binfield from Mr Elliott.⁶⁶



Hurst Lodge, Berkshire

⁶¹ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/5, p. 71 In 1870 Cooper's Hill became the Royal Indian Engineering College and it now forms part of the Runnymede Campus of Brunel University..

⁶² Ibid, p. 75.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Margaret Walsh Diary, 1827.

⁶⁶ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/5, p. 77.

Around six miles from Warfield, Hurst Lodge had been bought by Robert Palmer in 1742. By 1796 the Palmer family's main residence became Holme Park in Sonning and it seems likely that the house was then rented out, possibly to the Elliott family. Margaret recorded some of her responses to the experience of renting Hurst Lodge in her diary. These brief notes suggest some of the anxieties endured by widows on removal from the main family home. She described how in early October 1827 her servants had worked hard to clean and tidy Hurst Lodge, removing 'the immense confusion occasioned by Mr Elliott's long continuance' there. By Friday 11 October when Margaret finally took up residence in the house, 'everything was put in its place'. Despite the servants' hard work, despite everything being put in place, when Margaret ventured into the new home she could not 'conquer the melancholy that seized' her on 'taking possession of a new home!' Margaret experienced grief for all that she had lost. For Margaret that past was 'still so vivid' in her remembrance 'it seemed like reality'.⁶⁷ The next day Margaret continued to feel downcast by her new surroundings. Although she conceded that 'the pleasure ground is pretty & the house comfortable' it gave her 'very little pleasure'. She described how she 'regretted that [she] had taken it, & yet condemned [her]self for any discontent'.⁶⁸ Margaret's wealth protected her from the trials of dependence that many women experienced. Nevertheless, the independence that her wealth bought her also guaranteed her removal from a home that contained multiple meanings and pleasures.⁶⁹

Margaret continued to live at Hurst Lodge until the summer 1831 when she finally took up the lease of Binfield. It seems likely that Margaret rented Binfield Park from a descendant of the original builder of the property – Onesiphorus Elliot – who constructed the house in 1775. Her move to Binfield was a happy one. Her son John felt that his mother was much happier at Binfield because her happiness was so dependent on her proximity to him. After his father's death in 1825, John felt that 'the interest, the consolation, the enjoyment' of his mother's remaining years 'were all centred' in him.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, in the memoir he also writes at length about the interiors of Binfield and the time and money that Margaret invested in improving them. His lengthy descriptions of her improvement projects suggests that as with Warfield, Margaret invested in this house and worked hard to secure her own comfort and that of her fellow inhabitants within it.

Her daughter Elizabeth, grandchildren, their governess and the servants all lived in Binfield with Margaret. John describes how 'Binfield Park was a large, handsome, commodious, well built mansion' with 'ample accommodation'.⁷¹ The rooms were large and several showrooms were included in the layout. The drawing room and dining parlour were both 'handsome moderate sized rooms, about thirty feet long'. On the first floor of the house, Margaret created a suite of rooms for herself, which included a spacious sitting room. Lined with book cases, the sitting room existed as a personal space in which surrounded by her 'Books, papers and all her little personal belongings' Margaret could read and study.⁷²

Before Margaret began to inhabit the house with her family she had the whole property re-painted and papered. Like Warfield before it, Binfield benefitted from the skills of a

⁶⁷ Margaret Walsh Diary, Friday 11 October 1827, p. 69.

⁶⁸ Margaret Walsh Diary, Saturday 12 October 1827, p. 69.

⁶⁹ For more on the trials of dependence that unmarried women and wives experienced see Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 184-206.

⁷⁰ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/5, p. 25.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

particular carpenter – this time a certain ‘Morris’ who worked closely with Margaret to enact the various repairs and improvements she wanted to take place.⁷³ In the memoir John, as ever, uses his description of the project to emphasise his mother’s superiority and skill. In this case he describes her success by stressing how she implemented change at relatively little expense through tight management of the process. He describes how she ‘managed all this with so much calculation, & economy’. Here Margaret embodies the female ideal explored by Vickery. Yet the prudent economy employed by Margaret and commended by her son also suggests at Margaret’s vulnerable financial position and her awareness of it. Moved out of her home – *the* home – Margaret remains mobile until she is able to rent a house on the periphery of the grounds. John’s claim that improving Binfield was ‘a great amusement & occupation to her’ needs to be treated lightly. His assertion that ‘Warfield was to her another home always in reach’ is perhaps more telling.⁷⁴

John’s claim on Warfield after the death of his father and his marriage in 1825 precipitated Margaret’s peripatetic lifestyle and her removal from a house to which she was clearly very attached. It might be assumed that John’s very intimate relationship with his mother (‘The word reserve was unknown between us’⁷⁵) assured that he would also assume a deep attachment to Warfield. Throughout the memoir Benn Walsh reaffirms the importance Margaret placed on Warfield - ‘[Margaret] loved Warfield, she had known it all her life, it had been the home in such measure, of her childhood.’⁷⁶ Yet before Margaret’s death on 29 September 1836, John expressed very little attachment to the house. After her death, however, he established a much stronger relationship to the house and all that it represented about his mother.

On her death John wanted to be at Warfield. In his diary he described how ‘During my whole life I never was more disposed to remain quietly at Warfield.’ While there he began to enter into activities which he had previously enjoyed with his mother. He set to pruning and thinning the trees in the ground and tries to complete little improvements that Margaret ‘would have liked, or such as she had planned’.⁷⁷ These activities related to his earlier experiences, such as when he returned from school one Easter vacation and helped his mother to thin the trees in the shrubbery. He describes how he ‘was them about eleven or twelve, tall & strong enough to wield my Hatchet with very...desirable effect’.⁷⁸ On Margaret’s death her son John imbued the house with new meaning. Rather than his childhood home, Warfield became important for its connection to Margaret and the sense of belonging he associated with her. Unlike for earlier generations who were displaced from the house and thus linked it to narratives of England, home and belonging, for John the house was so established in the family it could appropriate much more personal associations.

Conclusion

When writing a memoir of his mother’s life in the 1850s John Benn Walsh used the different houses she inhabited to organise her story. The structure he employed underlines the importance that Margaret Benn Walsh placed on the homes she lived in and the significance that the Walsh family as a whole placed on houses. More particularly, it is country houses

⁷³ Ibid., p. 131.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

⁷⁵ National Library of Wales, Ormathwaite Papers, Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/4, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/3, p. 163.

⁷⁷ National Library of Wales, Diary of Sir John Benn Walsh, 1st Lord Ormathwaite, May-November 1836, FG1/9, p. 162.

⁷⁸ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/4, p. 115.

that Benn Walsh repeatedly referred to in his account. It was these houses that mattered most and to which his family gave meaning.

Towards the middle of memoir Benn Walsh further extended the significance of the country house by using it as frame through which to examine the difference in his parents' characters. He describes how the 'difference in their characters was perceptible in the manner each followed what was a favourite object with both, the improvement of Warfield'.⁷⁹ His mother wanted to create a 'handsome park like residence' full of beauty, while his father fostered a husbandry approach, 'always endeavouring to improve the soil, to enclose & reclaim the commons, to add to the productive value of the property.'⁸⁰ For the Walsh family the country house and particularly Warfield became the central means of understanding who they were and to what and where they belonged. Earlier generations had longed for not necessarily a 'home' in England, but rather a space 'England', and used it to ground their Indian experiences. In contrast later generations focused upon a particular place, Warfield, which became synonymous with home, England and belonging. The importance that this particular East India Company family placed on the country house demonstrates how imperial agents, and the longings they experienced and gratified, reified the country house in a new way as a thing which could denote belonging. In this family, their native land was increasingly conflated with the country house, singling it out as an important component of a specifically 'English' landscape.

⁷⁹ Memoir of Margaret Benn Walsh, FE5/3, p. 175.

⁸⁰ Ibid.