

Bitham Hall, Avon Dassett and Clonalis House, Castlerea, Co Roscommon

We are very grateful to Mr Pyers O’Conor-Nash of Clonalis House in County Roscommon, Ireland for providing us with information about the connections between Bitham Hall in Avon Dassett and Clonalis House.

The link originates with Georgina Perry, the third of Thomas Aloysius Perry’s six daughters. Georgina was born in Middlesex and moved to Bitham House (now Hall) in the mid 1850s when her mother, Helen, inherited the property from Joseph Knight, the original owner and builder.



Thomas Aloysius Perry (photograph from Clonalis House)

Both Knight and Perry were Roman Catholics and in addition to building Bitham House they provided the village with a Catholic Church, Convent and Reading Room. Knight was a leading horticulturalist and ran a successful nursery of exotic plants on the Kings Road in Chelsea in partnership with Perry before retiring to Avon Dassett. The grounds and parkland of Bitham House were planted with exotic

trees and shrubs including Giant Redwoods, Monkey Puzzles and a Pagoda. Thomas Perry was a member of Warwickshire gentry society serving as a JP and a Lord Lieutenant of the County. The 1851 census for Avon Dassett lists Georgina along with her sisters as members of a substantial household of seventeen people:

Forename	Surname	Relation to Head	Single/Married	Sex	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Thomas A.	Perry	Head	M	M	41	Landed Proprietor and Fund holder	Oxon
Helen	Perry	Wife	M	F	45	Landed Proprietor	Lancs
Mary	Perry	Daughter	S	F	19		Middx
Helen	Perry	Daughter	S	F	18		Middx
Georgina Mary	Perry	Daughter	S	F	13		Middx
Agnes M	Perry	Daughter	S	F	12		Middx
Anna Maria	Perry	Daughter	S	F	8		Warks
Pauline Maria	Perry	Daughter	S	F	3		Warks
Elizabeth	Fagan	Servant	W	F	54	Cook and Housekeeper	Ireland
Ann	Bobbett	Servant	S	F	34	Ladies Maid	Somerset
Ann	Milne	Servant	M	F	33	Upper housemaid	Scotland
Sarah	Gunn	Servant	S	F	17	Under House maid	Devon
Mary A	Woods	Servant	S	F	21	Nurse maid	Warks
Amy	Mew	Servant	S	F	19	Kitchen maid	Warks
Caroline	Woods	Servant	S	F	18	Assistant	Warks
James	Milne	Servant	M	M	34	Butler	Scotland
Thomas	Hawtin	Servant	S	M	25	Footman	Warks

The Perry daughters married into some of the leading Catholic families of Britain. In 1868 Georgina married the O'Connor Don MP of Clonalis in a double wedding at Avon Dassett with her sister Agnes, who became the wife of Wilfrid Tempest of Ackworth Grange in Yorkshire. The wedding breakfast at Bitham House had musical accompaniment from the band of the 3rd Oxon Rifles. In the afternoon there was a dinner for the tenants of the village in a large tent. Sports were played and in the evening a large bonfire was lit on the hill above the house. Sadly having borne Charles Owen four sons Georgina died of consumption at the tragically young age of 27 in 1872 only four years after her wedding. She is buried in the family graveyard commemorated with a beautiful Celtic High Cross.



Georgina Owen O'Connor (née Perry, photograph from Clonalis House)

Charles Owen O'Connor was distraught at losing his young wife and it is believed that he could no longer bear to live in the old Clonalis House which held such memories of his happy marriage cut so short by her death. In 1878 Charles Owen built the 'new' Clonalis House which like Bitham Hall employed the Italianate style which was very unusual for the Victorian era. The architectural similarities are unmistakable (see pictures below). Thus Georgina received a lasting memorial and tribute to her memory in the erection of Clonalis House modelled on her childhood home.

Clonalis House



Bitham Hall



Gates at Bitham Hall and Clonalis House



For more information on Clonalis House, please see their website: <http://www.clonalis.com> .