

GREAT WIGSELL



Great Wigsell is a country house a little south of Hawkhurst but in the parish of Salehurst and Robertsbridge.



The estate was owned by the Culpeper family from the middle of the fourteenth century, though it took more than a century for them to build a house there. As landowners this family occupied local positions in Kent and Sussex (the house is only just in Sussex and the family was originally from Kent). They played minor national roles too, in support of whoever was

Great Wigsell

king; these included assisting Thomas Cromwell when he was in power under Henry VIII.¹

The present house dates mainly from its being rebuilt by Richard English, who bought it in 1625. It is a listed building (grade II), and the listing statement runs:²

Large irregular-shaped house mainly early C17, restored by Sir Ernest George in 1905 after it had been unoccupied for some years. The original portion, built by Henry English, is L-shaped with the staircase in the angle and has the date 1641 on a doorway. It is very similar in character to Batemans, Burwash, which is dated 1631. Ashlar. Tiled roof. The main front faces North West. 2 storeys and attic. 5 windows. 3 gables with attic windows and finials over. In the centre is a porch with 2 storeys and gable over. The porch has a flat archway and enriched cornice with cartouche above. Casement windows of 2 lights with stone mullions and transoms. Chimney breasts at each end of the front and behind with red brick stacks. The south east wing has one gable and a gable end facing south east. Parallel to this wing is an C18 wing of ashlar with red brick dressings and sash windows with glazing bars intact and doorway with rectangular fanlight. This has 2 storeys and attic, 3 windows and 2 dormers. At the south west end it was prolonged by Sir Ernest George when the house was restored in 1905. Good early C17 staircase and panelling. The house was the home of Viscount Milner at the end of his life.

In 1669 the English family mortgaged the estate to Walter Burrell of Cuckfield, who mortgaged it to John Lee of London. His daughter Elizabeth inherited it. She married Sir Philip Harcourt of Stanton Harcourt in Oxfordshire, who does not appear to have lived there. Elizabeth did so, with her son Philip, but both had died by 1714; they are both buried in Salehurst church. Ownership thereafter is not wholly clear, but by the turn of the next century it appears to have been in the hands of John Gregson. In 1844 he mortgaged it to Lord Bateman of the Hanbury family.³

Shortly before 1905 the new owner was Lord Edward Herbert Gascoyne-Cecil.

It is unclear how long Lord Edward lived at Great Wigsell, because he spent almost all of his rather odd life in other countries. His wife Violet, however, of whom more below, lived there until she died in 1958.

Cecil was a son of the third Marquess of Salisbury, prime minister 1886-92 and 1895-1902. Although a Conservative and imperialist, the prime minister was cautious in foreign affairs, and it was probably with great regret that it was under his premiership that the second South African war, the second 'Boer war') began in 1899. How it occurred will be referred to below, for a family connection with its chief promoter arose at a later point.

The family were immensely influential in British politics, and the fifth marquess, the prime minister's grandson, was the man chosen by the Queen to advise on the appointment of Anthony Eden's successor in 1957. He was a man warm towards the apartheid regime in South Africa and he once referred scathingly to the then Colonial Secretary, Iain Macleod, as "too clever by half". This was very much the old world talking to the new.

Edward was one of several brothers. One succeeded their father, but two others made their names: one became Lord Cecil of Chelwood, a proponent of the League of Nations, and another Viscount Quickswood, a strong and sometimes over-vigorous right-winger.

Edward went for a military career but failed at Sandhurst. One can imagine that it was only his status that allowed him to join the Grenadier Guards and establish a military reputation, fighting in Egypt and the Sudan and taking part in Kitchener's expedition to Fashoda that resulted in the French leaving that part of Africa. Shortly after that he was part of Kitchener's victorious army at Omdurman. In 1899 Colonel Baden Powell engaged him as Chief Staff Officer and they left for Cape Town.⁴



The origins of the South African war have been discussed at length ever since it began. It is clear, however, that the prime mover was Alfred, later Viscount, Milner, a brilliant if outspoken imperialist who pushed the then Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain into making demands that the Afrikaner leaders of the Transvaal were bound to reject. Just as clear is the inadequacy of the British army to carry out a rapid and successful campaign to suppress the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Cecil was notorious for his financial incapacity but in South Africa he triumphed. The army was generally under-provisioned, and believing that the war would last longer than his over-confident colleagues did he wanted better supplies. The army would not produce them so he personally guaranteed £500,000 and obtained them. That he did

Lord Edward Cecil, by 'Spy'

so made sure that when Mafeking was besieged it famously held out, though towards the end only by seriously reducing the rations made available to the native population, including soldiers.

Cecil kept close to Kitchener, who valued him although he was not appreciated by many senior leaders, including Baden-Powell. This led him to Egypt, where he served in several governmental capacities. In those days Egypt was in a curious position. The Ottoman empire

still had some rather distant control but effectively it was a self-governing British colony whose every department of state was subject to British observation and ultimately to their control. That Cecil was tolerated by the pro-consuls Lord Cromer and after him Eldon Gorst was because of Kitchener's influence, and when Kitchener became pro-consul in 1911 things were clearer. Among other posts he held that of Financial Adviser, which led to some mirth in his family, all too aware of his inability in that area. He continued even after Kitchener's untimely death in June 1916.

In 1918 he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and went to Switzerland to recover. He died there, apparently of influenza, in December of that year.

Cecil made an unfortunate marriage: to Violet Maxse, sister of Ivor Maxse who became one of the better British generals of the First World War. Although Cecil possessed great charm, Violet had more. Moreover she was talented in art and writing and was an attractive woman. She went to South Africa with her husband and at once fell under the spell, which was reciprocated, of Alfred Milner; it is thought that this happened as early as 1900.⁵ (Milner was much admired in England and his last major appointment was to Lloyd George's War Cabinet in 1916.) Her marriage – which had yielded a son killed in the first month of the First World War and commemorated on the Robertsbridge war memorial – was already agreed by all to be unsatisfactory, and things got worse. When she came back to England she lived at Great Wigsell though her husband returned only for periods of leave. She married Milner in 1921. In that year he moved, at least officially, to Sturry Court (now Milner Court), a listed building near Canterbury.

South Africa had its revenge on Milner. In 1925 he made a brief return there but was bitten by a tsetse fly, contracted sleeping sickness and died. His funeral was at Canterbury Cathedral but he was buried at Salehurst.

Violet, now twice a widow, lived on at Great Wigsell, active in the defence of her property against those wishing to designate footpaths across it. The house was sold and remains in private hands.

George Kiloh

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Lord Edward Cecil

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Lord Edward Cecil
KCMG DSO**



"[at Mafeking](#)" Cecil as caricatured by Spy ([Leslie Ward](#)) in *Vanity Fair*, November 1899

Birth name	Edward Herbert Gascoyne-Cecil
Nickname(s)	Nigs
Born	12 July 1867 Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, England
Died	13 December 1918 (aged 51)
Allegiance	 United Kingdom
Service/branch	British Army
Years of service	17 years
Rank	Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel
Unit	Grenadier Guards
Commands held	ADC (Egypt) to Lord Kitchener, Military Secretary to Lord Kitchener.
Battles/wars	Second Boer War
Relations	Marquess of Salisbury

Lord Edward Herbert Gascoyne-Cecil [KCMG DSO](#) (12 July 1867 – 13 December 1918), known as **Lord Edward Cecil**, was a distinguished and highly decorated English soldier. As colonial administrator in [Egypt](#) and advisor to the Liberal government, he helped to implement Army reforms.

A son of Hatfield

Lord Edward was the fourth son of [Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury](#) and Georgina Charlotte. When Edward was born, his father asked the [Earl of Carnarvon](#) to be a godfather. He was educated at [Eton College](#), but did badly in his exams, failing to get into Sandhurst, which his father blamed on the school (because he had been bullied there).^[1] His family called him 'Nigs', which his

mother used when writing to him at boarding school. When only 11 years old, he wrote a play on "[The Eastern Question](#)" from his father's foreign office papers. The tone of the play was anti-Beaconsfield, showing a resentment for a longevity in office. Written in 1878, at the time of [Congress of Berlin](#), perhaps unaware that Beaconsfield had only three years to live, the Prime Minister is personified as Dickens 'Artful Dodger'.^[2] A latent racism was characteristic of Cecilian 'clannish' behaviour.^[3] Gascoyne-Cecil became a Second Lieutenant in the [Grenadier Guards](#) in 1887. He served for four years in the regiment before being promoted first lieutenant and appointed to the staff of [Field Marshal Garnet Wolseley](#). On the [Dongola Expedition](#) in 1896 he served with distinction: mentioned in despatches, he was promoted a Brevet Major, winning the [Order of Medjidie](#) 4th Class and the [Khedive's Star](#) for service in Egypt and Sudan, with two clasps. He was *aide de camp* to [Lord Kitchener](#) in the Egyptian campaign of 1896, who had a profound influence on his career. "All shall be at home known by the proper people" wrote Lord Edward in his diary. The following day, his father Lord Salisbury announced in parliament that Dongola was not the objective, but the conquest of the Sudan, and recapture of Khartoum to avenge the murder of Gordon.

Cecil was appointed a member of the [Rodd Mission](#) to the [Emperor Menelik II of Abyssinia](#) in 1897 that negotiated the [Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1897](#). The following year the [Fashoda incident](#) occurred when [Captain Marchand](#) leading a small military expedition occupied the [White Nile](#) town of [Fashoda](#) in present-day [South Sudan](#) after an epic 14-month march from West Africa, and claimed the area for France in opposition to Anglo-Egyptian claims, bringing the two powers close to war. On 18 September Lord Edward arrived at Fashoda with Kitchener's expeditionary force of five steam-boats carrying 100 Highlanders, 2,500 Sudanese troops and four machine guns. Kitchener set up a meeting on 19 September at which they drank whisky and champagne with Marchand.^[4] The French troops withdrew on 3 November on instruction from Paris. On the [Nile Expedition](#) they conquered Darfur and annexed the South of Sudan. Kitchener's army returned in triumph to a speech at the Mansion House. In Cimiez, south of France that summer an elated Queen congratulated Salisbury. The campaign culminated at the [battle of Omdurman](#) he was mentioned in despatches at the [battle of Atbara](#). For his part in the re-capture of Khartoum he was mentioned in despatches and won two clasps. Cecil was present at the [battle of Omdurman](#).^[5]

With Kitchener and Baden-Powell in South Africa

On 3 July 1899, Colonel Baden-Powell was informed by Wolseley at the War Office that he should go immediately to Mafeking, taking Lord Edward Cecil as his Chief Staff Officer. They sailed on 8 July, Cecil taking with him, wife Lady Violet. When they landed at Cape Town, Cecil went to contractors [Julius Weil & Co](#) to order £500,000 worth of supplies for what Cecil correctly anticipated would be a long siege. As a son of the Prime Minister, Cecil's signature carried weight with Weil & Co although, the Cecils expected parliament would approve the amount.

In October 1899, Cecil was serving with Colonel Baden-Powell, when besieged at Mafeking. October 30 was known as 'Mournful Monday' as three British columns surrendered; the situation became desperate. As second-in-command Cecil imposed the death penalty for spying, looting, trespassing, and loitering outside a women's laager at night. He was in charge of provisioning: when the food ran out the people had to eat dogs and horses, there was one reported case of cannibalism. 478 people died during the siege. Baden-Powell kept the Boers tied down for seven months, only to emerge later as a national hero. Cecil set up the Mafeking Cadet Corps that led onto Baden-Powell founding the Scouts later on.^[6] Cecil was chivalrous towards women, but it became clear that the English expected the blacks to starve first. When the siege was finally lifted on 17 May 1900, there was ecstatic rejoicing in London at the news.^[7] Cecil had a poignant reunion with his wife at Mafeking on 29 June, and then rode out north into the Transvaal.^[8] Lady Edward was staying at Groote Schuur and probably conducting an affair with Lord Milner. Frances teased the Prime Minister "Gainst death could wrestle with Gallant young Cecil!" When Lord Edward Cecil came home to a triumphant welcome at [Hatfield House](#) his father had written off his debts, and the whole town turned out to cheer as the celebrations began on 18 December.^[9] The houses were decorated with bunting, the brewery men decked out in livery.^[10] Lord Edward made a speech, and was formally thanked by Lord Salisbury. They lit a huge bonfire in the park with fireworks.^[11]

The following day C-in-C, General Buller landed with an army at Cape Town. During the [Second Boer War](#) he was mentioned in despatches, made Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel, awarded the Queen's Medal, with two clasps. In February 1902, Cecil was appointed as Military Secretary to the Sirdar, Lord Kitchener travelling back to Egypt. The Cecils remained bullish and optimistic, but Kitchener estimated there were about 5,000 Boers left in the field.^[12] Edward was the only son never to see his father at the death, he had embarked from Egypt three days before on 19 August 1903.^[13]

Later career

Cecil was appointed Agent-General to the Government of Sudan and Director of Intelligence at Cairo for two years. Returning to Britain the new Liberal Government invited Lord Edward Cecil to be Under-Secretary of War in 1906. He was Under-Secretary of Finance from 1907 until 1913, and Financial Advisor to War Office from 1912 until the end of the Great War. In 1915 he was awarded Grand

Cordon Order of the Nile. He died during the worldwide [1918 flu pandemic](#) which resulted in tens of millions of deaths around the world

Character

Cecil was a tough but dissolute army officer, laden down by gambling debts. He was a keen baccarat player, a charming fellow, and a well known raconteur. He was always tapping his father for money, demonstrable in the copious notes in the Cecil family correspondence. But Lord Salisbury's patience ran out in 1891. In May 1891 he paid in £1,126.8s.6d, money originally intended for unmarried sister, Gwendolen. But fighting abroad, the mess bills continued to mount, and by May 1894 he owed another £2,000.

His book *The Leisure of an Egyptian Official*, published posthumously in 1921, gives a detailed account of his role and interactions with the Egyptian politicians in nominal control of the country. He married [Violet Georgina Maxse](#), second daughter of Admiral [Frederick Augustus Maxse](#), a son of Baron Berkeley on 18 June 1894, at St Saviour's Church, Chelsea. The vicar was his brother Rev William Cecil. A wide range of society guests appeared at the wedding, Asquith, Morley and Chamberlain, as well as Balfour and Salisbury, and liberal poets Blunt and Wilde. His mother, Lady Salisbury remarked: "It will be good for Nigs to have a clever wife and one accustomed to raking care of expenses and I hope will convert her. I don't believe in pious pagans - and my only real objection to the Souls, is their heathenry." His father warned him about her character; and settled a further £1,000 pa having settled his debts again. Lord Edward earned £200 pa in Army pay, but his wife's contribution was double that, making their life comfortable. Salisbury urged them to work on their relationship, but the marriage did not work and ended in divorce.

Lady Cecil was appointed Grand Dame of the [Order of St John](#), and Chevalier of the [Légion d'honneur](#).^[14] Her second husband was the first and last [Viscount Milner](#) (died 13 May 1925). They had two children: [George Edward Gascoyne-Cecil](#) born on 9 September 1895. He was a Lieutenant in the Grenadier Guards, and was killed in action on 1 September 1914 on the Western Front. Helen Mary Gascoyne-Cecil was born on 11 May 1901. She was an author. She married [Alexander Hardinge, 2nd Baron Hardinge of Penshurst](#), and died in 1979.

Own Works

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4727515/What-really-happened.html> What really happened? Andrew Roberts reviews *Imperial Marriage: An Edwardian War and Peace* by Hugh and Mirabel Cecil and *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecils 1558-1612* ed by Pauline Croft

By Andrew Roberts

12:00AM GMT 17 Mar 2002

VIOLET MAXSE was the intelligent, attractive, free-thinking daughter of the Radical politician and Crimean War hero Admiral Frederick Maxse. She enjoyed the company of intellectuals, and eight poets including Oscar Wilde attended her wedding to Lord Edward Cecil, who was the brave, charming soldier son of the Conservative Prime Minister the Marquess of Salisbury. Alfred Milner, the other man in her life, was the brilliantly clever and fanatically hard-working High Commissioner in South Africa at the outbreak of the Boer War.

This is the story of the very Edwardian relationship between the soldier, his wife and her (probable) lover. All three were passionately committed to the British Empire, believing it to be the noblest blessing Britain could bestow upon civilisation. They spent their whole careers promoting and extending it - Edward through fighting dervishes, Violet through writing articles, Alfred through smiting Boers - and Violet and Edward lost their only son George in its defence in the Great War.

Throughout this fascinating and fluently-written narrative, the Empire constantly emerges and re-emerges as the fourth part of their story. What signally does not emerge is the exact nature of the relationship Violet enjoyed with Alfred in Cape Town while Edward was trapped in Mafeking as Robert Baden-Powell's chief of staff during its climactic 217-day siege. This is not because of any over-protectiveness on behalf of the authors Hugh and his wife Mirabel Cecil (Hugh is the son of Edward's nephew Lord David Cecil) but because Violet burnt or bowdlerised her correspondence with Milner, which is perhaps in itself the sign of a guilty conscience.

This book is far more than a crude did-they-didn't-they tale, comprising as it does superb vignettes of Edwardian aristocratic society and excellent political analyses of Britain's imperial high noon; but it can also be read as a great sexual detective story.

The authors have uncovered a mistress of Alfred Milner's, the romantically-named Cecile D, who, less romantically, lived in Brixton. Because they believe that he was desperately in love with Cecile at the time, they aggressively take issue with what they call the "travesty" promoted by the historian Thomas Pakenham that Violet and Alfred were lovers while her husband was besieged up country and forced to eat face-powder, locusts, starch and horse-hides.

"There is no evidence to show that Violet and Alfred had a full affair at this time", the authors state, but as distinguished historians they must know there very rarely is actual evidence for such things.

Secrecy was paramount, for discovery would mean social suicide for Violet and the ignominious collapse of a promising political career for Alfred. And as they saw one another virtually every day in South Africa there was hardly any need for billets-doux. After his death she burnt any evidence there might have been anyhow.

One day in particular - June 18, 1900 - seems to have been very important for Alfred and Violet, to the extent that she noted it in her diaries for the next 58 years of her life. What exactly happened that day is forever their secret, but we know that Violet was staying at Government House. Alfred's ADC "Ozzy" Walrond had absented himself for the evening, so they dined alone. "Something made this evening a watershed in their relationship", admit the authors. "Was it a declaration of love?"

The authors entirely deprecate any suggestion that it might have been the actual act of lovemaking itself, while stating that "from this day on Alfred had the supreme place in Violet's heart". We are left wondering: as the motto on Edward's father's most treasured honour states: "Honi soit qui mal y pense."

By March 1901 the marriage was effectively over; when Edward went off to help administer Egypt for 10 years Violet stayed in England with their children. Although the process of divorce was legally open to this couple who had grown increasingly apart, it was an unthinkable resort in their social circle at the

time. Violet had to wait until after Edward's death in 1918 before she became Lady Milner. We do not know what happened to the tantalising Cecile D.

Patronage, Culture and Power (ed by Pauline Croft Yale, £40, 308 pp) is a sumptuously-produced book about the early Cecils, the father-and-son team of Lord Burghley and Lord Salisbury, Elizabeth I's closest advisors. It chronicles, in a series of 14 highly erudite essays by various experts, including the editor Pauline Croft, the way the two men used their great powers of patronage to increase their own political influence. The palatial houses of Burghley and Hatfield and the way they were built, maintained and decorated, form the basis of a superb work of which Yale University Press must be proud.

<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyunits/britishinfantry/grenadieredwardcecil.htm>

Lord Edward Cecil was Baden-Powell's Chief of Staff during the Defence of Mafeking. Latterly he was Director-General of Intelligence for the Sudanese Government and Financial Advisor to the Egyptian Government. He was born on 12 July 1867 the 4th son of the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury. He joined the Grenadier Guards on 30 April 1887 and did 4 years regimental duty. He was a lieutenant in March 1892 and served as Wolseley's ADC in Ireland. In Nov 1892 he went on a diplomatic mission to Abyssinia where he was decorated by King Menelik with the 3rd Class of the Star of Ethiopia. He was then Kitchener's ADC in the Dongola expedition where he was in the thick of the fighting on 7 June and 19 Sep 1896. He was mentioned in despatches and promoted to major. He later joined the British officers of the Egyptian Army and once again served under Kitchener at the battles of Atbara and Omdurman. He received the DSO from the Queen at Windsor on 1 Dec 1898.

Described as a tall drooping, rather melancholy young officer. His mother dominated his life and when, during the siege, he received news of her death, he fell into a sad decline. But Baden-Powell was not impressed by his soldierly qualities, describing him as 'not much use'. To be fair he was ill for much of the time and he was given the task of commanding the Mafeking Cadet Corps, the prototype of the future Boy Scout movement. But Cecil is credited with being responsible for feeding the garrison during lengthy siege. He purchased 500,000 pounds worth of supplies prior to the siege. This was a deal made with Ben Weil to purchase the supplies despite the fact that Cecil did not have the money to pay for them. Weil was impressed with Cecil's connections and took the risk. When the siege was lifted there was still enough food to keep the town going for another month. The Boers, who tied up thousands of men in besieging Mafeking, were astounded that the town could hold out for 6 and a half months. Cecil's foresight was praised in Parliament by Arthur Balfour.

In later life Cecil was living in Sussex with his wife Lady Violet who had scant regard for him. He hated the memory of Mafeking and when he heard that Baden-Powell was coming to live nearby he said "I dread anything that reminds me of that ghastly time, I really dread it." Lady Violet had been living in Capetown while the siege was going on, and having an affair with Lord Milner. In 1912 he was appointed Financial Advisor to the Egyptian Government, having worked in various posts in the Sudan and Egypt for 9 years. His power was considerable, being described as one of the triumvirate ruling Egypt in 1914. He remained in that post until his death in 1918 at the age of 52. The obituary in The Times finished by saying of him: *'In him the British Empire loses a servant who worked for it with a single minded devotion to duty and without a thought of self-advancement. To his friends in Egypt and elsewhere (there were many) Lord Edward's charm of manner, ability to talk well and interestingly on almost any subject, and readiness to help and advise when asked, will always be a grateful memory.'*

Lord Edward's Medals



The enamelled Distinguished Service Order cross on the left presented by Queen Victoria in 1898. Then the Queen's Sudan, then the Queen's South Africa with two clasps for Transvaal and the Defence of Mafeking. Next, the impressive and unusual Order of the Star of Ethiopia awarded to him by King Menelik in 1892. The medal on the right is the Khedive's Sudan medal 1896-1908 with four clasps inscribed in English and Arabic. As well as these he had the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, Knight Commander's set of insignia, and the Turkish order of the Medjidjie. These medals and decorations were sold at auction by Spink at a special Boer War Anniversary on 21 Oct 1999. The catalogue expected price was 10,000 - 15,000 pounds sterling. The information on Lord Edward Cecil is a shortened version taken from the catalogue.



British Pro-consuls in Egypt, 1914-1929: The Challenge of Nationalism

By Charles William Richard Long

Failed Sandhurst and staff college. Joined GG 1887.

1903 Cromer apptd him Sudan Agent and Army Dir of Intell. At Cairo. Later U-S of Egyptian Ministries of War (1904), Finance (1905). Mirth at Hatfield because he couldn't manage his own accounts.

Didn't get on with Gorst. Kitchener apt him Fin Adviser 1912, got him KCMG.

Much disliked by Egyptians and British.

TB 1918, left Egypt. Died Switzerland sanatorium month later.

Violet unfaithful with Milner in SA.

Son Cecil KIA 1914.

Mafeking: ordered extra provisions on own a/c tho had only major's salary.

Wikipedia

3rd M PM 85-92, 95-02.

Son Edgar V Cecil of Chelwood: pro L of N.

4th M. v Pmt Bill.

5th M. v react, pro apartheid. 'Too clever by half'

Violet d 'nr Hawkhurst' 1958. 'of Sturry Ct nr Canterbury' (gave it to King's Sch).

Milner 'of Sturry Ct'. d 1925. Funeral Cant Cath. Bu Salehurst.
Violet lived on at Great Wigsell until 1958.



Gt Wigsell

<https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101221404-great-wigsell-salehurst-and-robertsbridge#.WfNMouRe4dU>

Listed grade II*

Large irregular-shaped house mainly early C17, restored by Sir Ernest George in 1905 after it had been unoccupied for some years. The original portion, built by Henry English, is L-shaped with the staircase in the angle and has the date 1641 on a doorway. It is very similar in character to Batemans, Burwash, which is dated 1631. Ashlar. Tiled roof. The main front faces North West. 2 storeys and attic. 5 windows. 3 gables with attic windows and finials over. In the centre is a porch with 2 storeys and gable over. The porch has a flat archway and enriched cornice with cartouche above. Casement windows of 2 lights with stone mullions and transoms. Chimney breasts at each end of the front and behind with red brick stacks. The south east wing has one gable and a gable end facing south east. Parallel to this wing is an C18 wing of ashlar with red brick dressings and sash windows with glazing bars intact and doorway with rectangular fanlight. This has 2 storeys and attic, 3 windows and 2 dormers. At the south west end it was prolonged by Sir Ernest George when the house was restored in 1905. Goad early C17 staircase and panelling. The house was the home of Viscount Milner at the end of his life.

<http://www.culpepperconnections.com/archives/uk/places/wigsell.htm>

Great Wigsell

Owned for three centuries by direct ancestors of the modern-day Culpeppers

The area where Great Wigsell sits today is about eight miles south of Goudhurst, lying close under the southwestern border of Kent, not far from [Bayhall](#) and [Bedgebury](#). The land was purchased in 1348 by Sir John Culpeper⁵ of Bayhall who was the sheriff of the county Kent starting in 1370.

For its first century and a half of Culpeper ownership, Wigsell consisted of some 600 acres of plough and pasture, with even more land of wood and heath, in the Sussex parish of Salehurst. Fairfax Harrison says, "It was not yet a place of residence, however: its original value lay in the supply of charcoal which its forest cover provided for the iron smelting industry in which the Culpepers, like so many of their neighbours in the Weald, were profitably engaged in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries."

Upon the first marriage of Sir Thomas Culpeper⁶ of Bayhall, Wigsell was given to him by his father, Sir John⁵.

From Sir Thomas⁶, the land passed to his son, Walter Culpeper⁷ who fought at Agincourt. In about 1425, Walter married the widow of the last Bedgebury of [Bedgebury](#) in Goudhurst and was buried with that family in [Goudhurst church](#), as was his son Sir John⁸, who inherited Hardreshull, Bedgebury and Wigsell from his father.



Sir John⁸ was knighted by Edward IV in 1468 and made sheriff of county Kent. He left a will disposing of his estates among two sons, Alexander⁹ and Walter⁹. These estates included the manors acquired by the Bedgebury marriage (Bedgebury and Haselden) in Kent, an inherited Culpeper manor (Wigsell) in Sussex, and certain lands in Essex which Sir John had purchased. Despite the Kentish custom of gavelkind, the elder son, Alexander⁹, was only given the lands in Kent, and the younger, Walter⁹ received those in Sussex and Essex.

Harrison says, "At the death of Sir John,⁸ Wigsell must already have been somewhat denuded and so of less value than it had been; but the title was sufficient, nevertheless, to enable its inheritor (Walter⁹) to pursue the thrifty practice of his ancestors and negotiate a marriage which established Culpeper of Wigsell for a century and a half to come... He married in 1500(?) Anne, daughter and heiress of Harry Aucher of [Lossenham](#). in Newenden, co. Kent."

Walter⁹, began life, like his grandfather, the squire of Agincourt for whom he was named, as a professional soldier; but, unlike his grandfather, he did not live to retire to his estates. In 1508 he was reported as the under marshal of Calais. Three years later, in November, 1511, being then recited a 'squire of the body' of Henry VIII, he was granted also the post of bailiff of the Scavage of Calais and the isle of Colne. His crowding hour came in August, 1513, when his young King was engaged in the invasion of France to assert an outworn claim of inheritance of that realm, and it was Walter's fortune to be left for the moment in responsible command of the garrison of Calais. In the face of a surprise attack in which the French greatly outnumbered the English and Walter's heir, William Culpeper¹⁰ appears to have begun life as a practicing lawyer.



In 1538 he was included in the long list of gentlemen enrolled as aids to Thomas Cromwell the powerful Vicar General and Lord Privy Seal to Henry VIII. At this time, he lived at Hunton, which was not owned by the Culpepers. At the very end of his life, William settled down at Wigsell, and his heir at his death in 1559 was his son John¹¹.

Little is known of John Culpeper¹¹ of Wigsell other than he was a justice of the peace and lived a long, uneventful life at Wigsell, John held Wigsell for 53 years, and at his death in 1612, passed it to his son, Thomas¹².

Thomas Culpeper¹² inaugurated his family's interest in Virginia, but held Wigsell for only one year before his death in 1613. His heir was his son [John Culpeper](#)¹³ who was to become Lord Culpeper, first Baron of Thoresway.

In 1623, John Culpeper¹³ sold Wigsell to his cousin, Thomas Culpeper¹² of [Hollingbourne](#) who then gave Wigsell to his son, Sir Cheney Culpeper¹³.

After having been a Culpeper possession for 300 years, Wigsell passed, in the ruin of Sir Cheney Culpeper's estate, in 1625 to Richard English who had been 'table boy under the Colepepers whom at length he bought out.' Upon its sale, the original foundation was used to build the magnificent manor house that stands today and is called Great Wigsell. Ultimately, it came to a branch of the Harcourt family and in the 1920's was the residence of Lord Edward Cecil of the Egyptian service. The house has been several times rebuilt and so now bears little relation to its appearance when the Culpepers possessed it.

Photographs by Warren Culpepper, March 2000.

Location: On the west side of the B2244, just across the Kent/East Sussex border, about 1.5 miles S

of St. Laurence Church, Hawkhurst. (8 miles SSE of Goudhurst.)

National Grid Coordinates: [TQ 761 274](#)

A Visit to Great Wigsell

In October, 1999, *Culpepper Connections'* publisher Warren Culpepper and his wife Lee, had the opportunity to visit Great Wigsell and its current owner. This came about from an inquiry we made at the public house across the street from Salehurst Church.

We inquired to those in the pub if anyone knew the location and/or the owner of Great Wigsell. One couple said that they had attended a charity fund-raiser there and had met the current owner, an American woman. The couple gave us her name and we phoned to see if it might be possible to visit the house.

At the time, we had no idea of its scale or grandeur. While the owner didn't return the call for several days, she eventually did call, explaining she had been away in London. When I told her my interest in and connection to the house, she graciously invited us over for drinks the next evening.

The visit was delightful and the owner kindly showed us the mansion from top to bottom. The complete tour must have taken over an hour.

While the current home reportedly bears little resemblance to the home of the Culpepers of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, it is a most impressive home today, just as it apparently was several centuries ago.

Wigsell Culpeper Dates, Ownership (Monarch)

Until the later half of the 15th century, Wigsell was farmland and woods, not a place of residence:

☞ ?-1348: Simon de Etchingam

☞ 1348-1370: **Sir John Culpeper**⁵ of Bayhall and Hardreshull
(Edward III)

☞ 1370-1428: **Sir Thomas Culpeper**⁶ of Bayhall, Hardreshull and Exton
(Edward III, Richard III, Henry IV-VI)

☞ 1428-1462: **Walter Culpeper**⁷ of Goudhurst
(Henry VI, Edward IV)

☞ 1462-1480: **Sir John Culpeper**⁸ of Goudhurst
(Henry VI, Edward IV)

Sometime during the tenure of Sir John⁸, Wigsell was developed as a residence:

☞ 1480-1516: **Walter Culpeper**⁹ of Wigsell and Under Marshall of Calais
(Edward IV-V, Richard III, Henry VII-VIII)

☞ 1516-1532: **Ann Culpeper**⁹, dowager of Walter
(Henry VIII)

☞ 1532-1559: **William Culpeper**¹⁰, Esq.
(Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth)

☞ 1559-1612: **John Culpeper**¹¹ of Wigsell, Esq.
(Elizabeth, James I)

☞ 1612-1613: Thomas Culpeper¹² of Wigsell
(James I)

☞ 1613-1623: [John Culpeper](#)¹³ of Wigsell, later Lord Culpeper, First Baron of Thoresway
(James I)

☞ 1623-1625: Sir Cheney Culpeper¹³ (Wigsell was bought for Cheney by his father Sir Thomas¹² of Hollingbourne from his cousin John¹³)
(James I)

☞ 1625-?: Richard English

¹ <http://www.culpepperconnections.com/archives/uk/places/wigsell.htm>

² <https://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101221404-great-wigsell-salehurst-and-robertsbridge#.WfRgf-Re4dU>

³ ESRO: AMS7072/1/3/1

⁴ <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armyunits/britishinfantry/grenadieredwardcecil.htm>

⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4727515>