

Philadelphia Walter – cousin to Jane Austen, the famous novelist Wife of George Whitaker of Pembury

By Jane Grooms, updated April 2024

Philadelphia was a cousin of Jane Austen. They shared an ancestor namely Rebecca Hampson who was married twice. Rebecca's first marriage was to a Mr Walter resulting in a son, William Hampson Walter. Philadelphia Walter was a daughter of William Hampson Walter. After Rebecca Hampson's first husband's death, Rebecca married William Austen. William Austen and Rebecca's son, George Austen was the father of Jane Austen, the famous novelist.

Philadelphia was known affectionately as "Phylly" to the Austen sisters, Jane and Cassandra who corresponded with their cousin.

Philadelphia Walter married George Whitaker of Pembury after the death of her mother in 1811. Philadelphia was fifty and George was forty-two when they married in Brisley, Norfolk. George was a son of John Whitaker (1745 to 1803), vicar of Pembury between 1752 and 1803 (his death).

An extract of Cassandra Austen's letter to Philadelphia on hearing the news of the marriage reads as follows:

"I think I cannot give you a better wish, than that you may be as happy as you deserve and that as a Wife you may meet the reward you so well earned as a Daughter. Mr Whitaker will of course feel himself included in every good we desire for you; pray assure him it will give us great pleasure to have an opportunity of being introduced to our new relation, and make our best compts. to his Mother and Sister. I shall hope soon to receive from you a very particular account of your new home. From what you have already said I am sure it must be comfortable....You are now a Farmer I think and will I trust have the pleasure of seeing your first crop got in in capital order. I quite envy you your Farm, there is so much amusement and so many comforts attending a Farm in the country that those who have once felt the advantages cannot easily forget them....Pembury is I suppose in a fine fruit country, I hope you are better off in that respect than we are this year....."

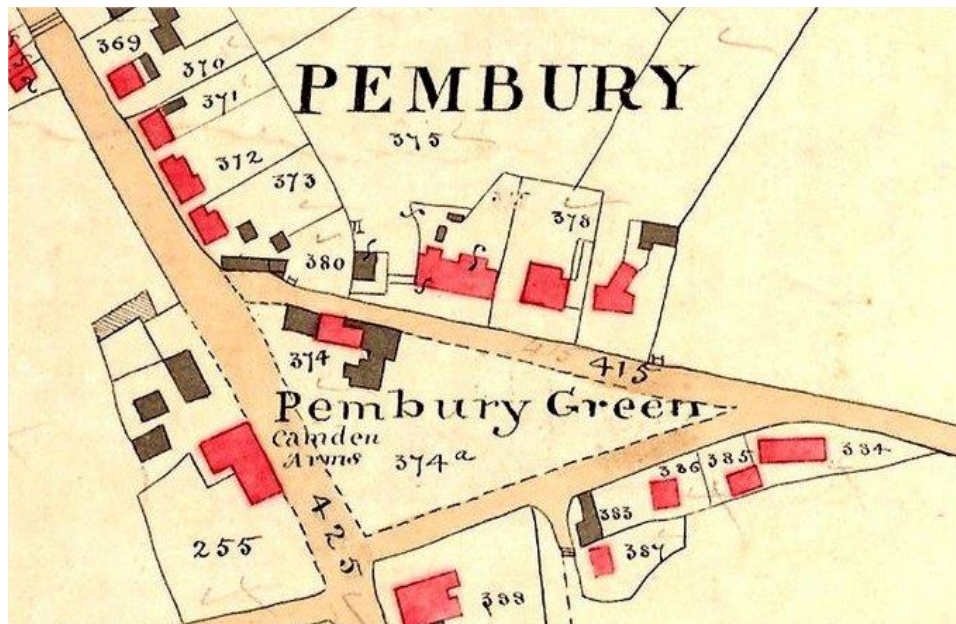
Extract from Jane Austen's family and Tonbridge by Margaret Wilson published by the Jane Austen Society, 2001

Cassandra's letter to Philadelphia refers to her comfortable new home in Pembury. So where did Philadelphia and George Whitaker live?

Sadly, Philadelphia died on 26 July 1834 but George Whitaker died in 1846* so appears on the Tithe schedule and in the 1841 census.

Tithe Schedule circa 1840

George Whitaker is shown as owner of plots 375 House & Garden etc described as "Meadow" and plot 380, Yard.



1841 Census

George Whitaker is shown at the top of a household after “Spring Cottage”. Unfortunately, his house is not named on the Census but because of its location next to Spring Cottage and the Tithe plots, it is known to be “The Manor House”. The Manor House still exists as of January 2024 and is next to the Upper Green on Lower Green Road.



*Obituary, George Whitaker Dover Telegraph and Cinque Ports Advertiser with reference to the Maidstone Journal

PEMBURY.—Funeral of the late G. Whitaker, Esq.—
The funeral obsequies of this good man were solemnized on Wednesday sennight, and such a scene Pembury has not witnessed for many years; he was followed to the grave by the resident gentry of the village and neighbourhood, the farmers, tradesmen and the poor—churchmen and dissenters, all alike—anxious to testify their respect for the memory of their departed friend and benefactor. The church and churchyard were thronged with mourners, and his remains were consigned to the silent tomb amid the tears and regrets of all present. Long indeed will he be remembered in Pembury as the charitable and munificent contributor to the distresses of the poor; for the heart of this good Samaritan was keenly alive to the cries of the necessitous, and his purse was ever open to alleviate their wants—hundreds will have cause deeply to deplore his loss, particularly at this inclement season. He was a man that “did good by stealth, and blushed to find it fame:” he lived in a quiet unostentatious manner, that his sphere of action might be enlarged, that he might be enabled to give more away to his poorer brethren: he was a sincere friend, joined to that of a true christian and a humble follower of the Lord Jesus: he had pressed forward toward the prize of the high calling that was before him with faith and patience in the hope that he might receive a glorious and incorruptible inheritance: but sleep came upon him and he murmured not at the decree of Providence. After living in the practice of every virtue, public and private, death appeared like the calm evening of a well-spent day—his end was peace.—Another correspondent says—Mr. Whitaker, who lived to the advanced age of 78 years—was the last surviving son of the Rev John Whitaker, 50 years vicar of this parish. His talents and time were devoted to the benefit of his fellow-creatures and neighbours. He lived a quiet and retired life, that he might have the more to give to the poor. He was a sound and zealous Churchman, and a kind neighbour and friend. The parishioners, of every class and grade, were anxious to pay their last tribute of respect to one whom they so highly valued. A long procession of mourning carriages, private carriages, horsemen and footmen, followed his remains. The demeanour of all present shewed how deeply they felt the loss they had sustained.—
Maidstone Journal.
