

Philadelphia Walter – cousin to Jane Austen, the famous novelist

Jane Grooms

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, she 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 Whittaker 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 Whittaker (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 Whittaker 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....."

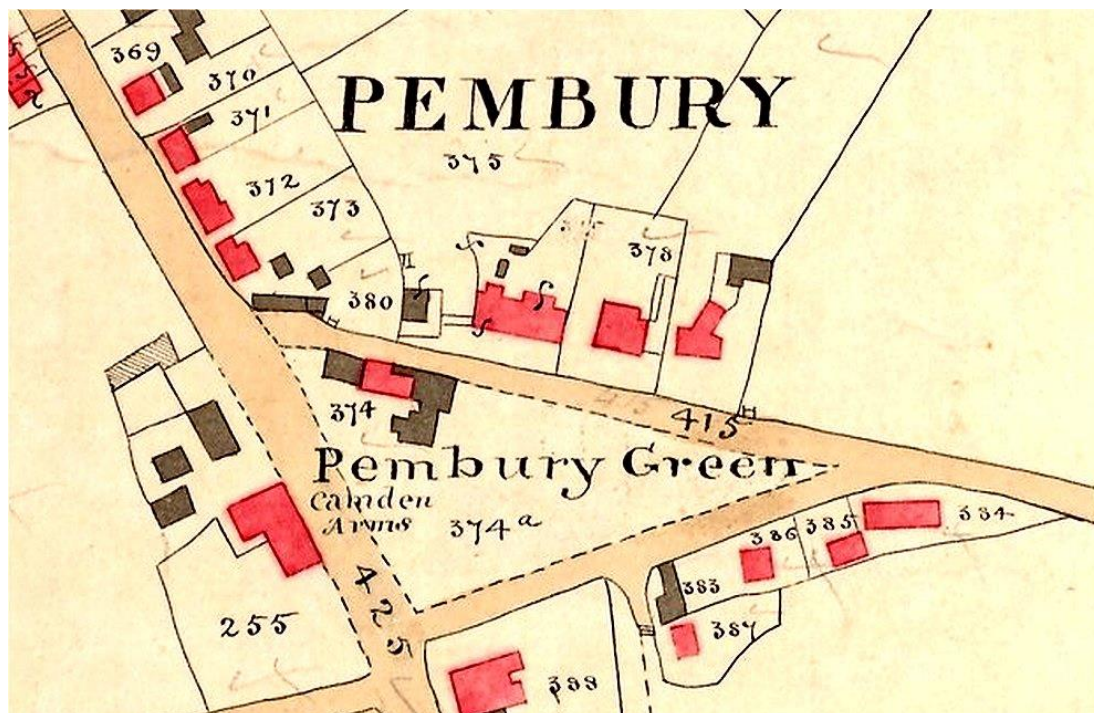
Extract from *Jane Austen's family and Tonbridge* by Margaret Wilson published by the Jane Austen Society, 2001

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

Sadly, Philadelphia died in 1834 but George Whittaker died in 1846 so appears on the Tithe schedule and in the 1840 census.

Tithe Schedule circa 1840

George Whittaker 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.

