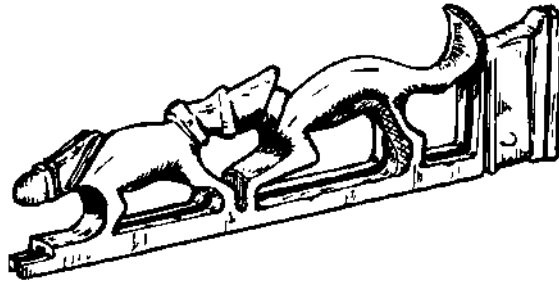


# **Ampthill & District Archaeological**



## **& Local History Society**

### **Ampthill Park House**

Photographs of Lord Wensleydale's Family  
and the Park

**C. 1860 -1880**

Simon Houfe, FSA

Kevan Fadden, FSA

# **Amphill & District Archaeological & Local History Society**

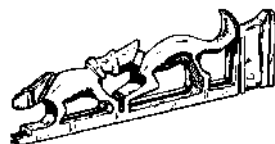
These photographs are copied from a recently discovered book of Henry Lutterel's "*Lines Written at Amphill Park*" published in 1819, containing pasted in photographs and engravings relating to Amphill and district. This copy bears the authors written presentation inscription to James Parry (or Perry). (Ref 1).

The photographs dating from the period c. 1860-80 relate to Lord Wensleydale's family who were resident at Amphill Park during the period. It is possible that they were taken by the family's French governess Mdme. Corrinne Du Jongand. Lord Wensleydale's grandson, later Lord Ullswater, in his memoirs mentioned being initiated into the mysteries of photography by Mdme. Jongand, during his childhood at Amphill Park in the 1860s.

Identification of the various sitters, especially the children, is difficult. Only those positively identified from known portraits are named: with the remainder, a copy of the family tree is of help as is knowledge of the costume of the period in establishing dates.

Family research was by Mr. Simon Houfe.

Photographs copied and tree research by Kevan Fadden.





Lady Wensleydale.

Presumed to have been taken at Ampthill Park House c.1870



Family group, taken on the terrace at Ampthill Park House.  
Lady Wensleydale is surrounded by her children and grandchildren. The gentleman standing to the right is the Hon. William Lowther, his wife Alice is seated to his left. The gentleman seated in the window is George Howard flanked by his wife. Presumed date early 1870's.





Charlotte Alice Lowther surrounded by her children c. 1874, taken on the terrace at Ampthill Park House. The Lowthers had three boys and three girls, the eldest being James William, born in 1855, and the youngest Henry Cecil, born in 1869. The identity of the seventh figure is unknown, possibly the standing young lady is the governess.



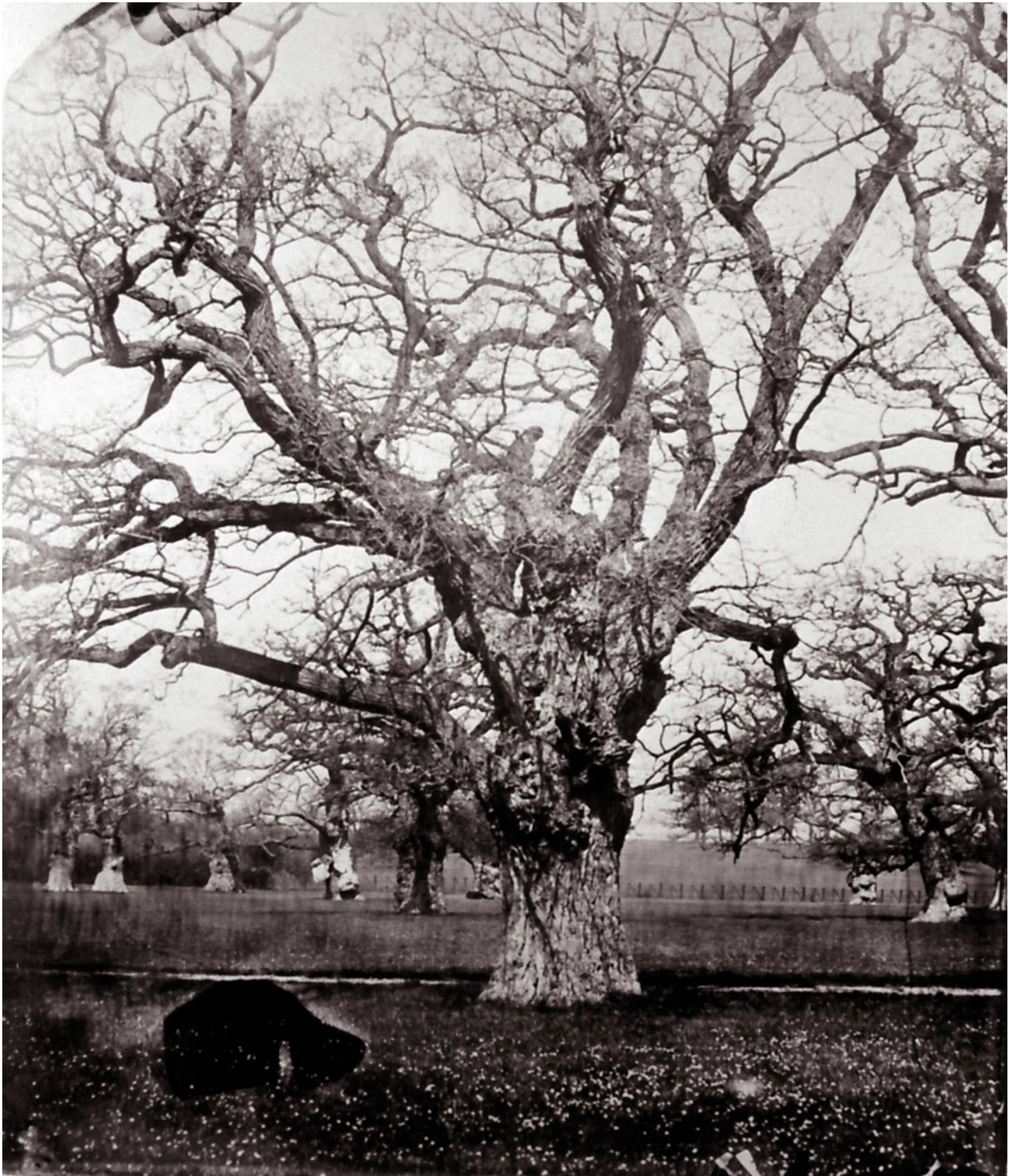
Presumed to be Alice Lowther C. 1870





Presumed to be Alice Lowther's daughters Mabel and Mildred, early 1870's. The younger girl Mildred was killed in 1875 as a result of a carriage accident at Millbrook.





The Ancient Oaks for which Ampthill Park was celebrated, c. 1870. These were favoured subjects of the early photographer. Their obvious age suggest they were probably planted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.





A view of Ampthill Park with an unidentified lady seated beneath one of the Ancient Oaks c. 1870





Lady Wenssleydale, members of her family and servants in Ampthill Park. In her later years she used to employ a small carriage drawn by a pony or donkey to enable her to enjoy the park.





A croquet party at Ampthill Park House. The elder figure is presumed to be Lord Wensleydale c. 1864. The croquet lawn at Park House was situated off the Lime Avenue near to the present gate at the boundary of the Park.





A previously unknown view believed to be the original stables to Park House. The cupola seems to closely resemble that on the Market Hall in Ampthill which was given to the town by Lord Ossory when Park House was rebuilt in the 1770's. It is likely that the original house built by Lord Ashburnham in the early 1700's incorporated a matching pair of cupolas to the flanking wings. Lord Ullswater in his memoirs "A Speakers Commentaries" describes visiting Park House during the early years of the century and finding the only change to be the demolition of the old stables.





Ancient oaks with a man close to the garden fence. Trees in the background show signs of natural retrenchment. (see addendum)





Unknown woman possibly a servant and a boy. The density of trees in this area is quite remarkable.





Ornamental evergreen tree probably a Cedar of Lebanon. A very large specimen was growing near the garden front of the house until the 1980's.

A Cedar was planted at Ampthill Park House c. 1751 (ref. 1)





Two unidentified men in stove pipe hats and frock coats presumably with a servant





An early picture of the locally famous “Old Oak”, more wooden posts propping up the lower branches were added to in later years. The banker poet Samuel Rogers wrote some lines which were painted on a lead sheet nailed to the tree.

*Majestic tree whose wrinkled form has stood  
Age after age the patriarch of the wood;  
Thou who hast seen a thousand springs unfold  
Their ravel'ed buds, and dip their flowers in gold,  
Ten thousand times yon moon relights her horn  
And that bright star of evening gild the morn;  
Gigantic oak! Thy hoary head sublime  
Erstwhile must perish in the weeks of time;  
Should round thy head innocuous light'nings shoot  
And no fierce whirlwinds shake thy steadfast root.  
Yet shall thou fall - thy leafy tresses fade  
And those bare scattered antlers strew the glade;  
Arm after arm shall leave the moldering bust  
And thy firm fibres crumble in the dust;  
The muse alone shall consecrate thy fame'  
Green shall thy leaves expand - thy branches play,  
And bloom forever in the immortal lay.*

A favourite spot for courting couples, the tree survived until the 1960's.

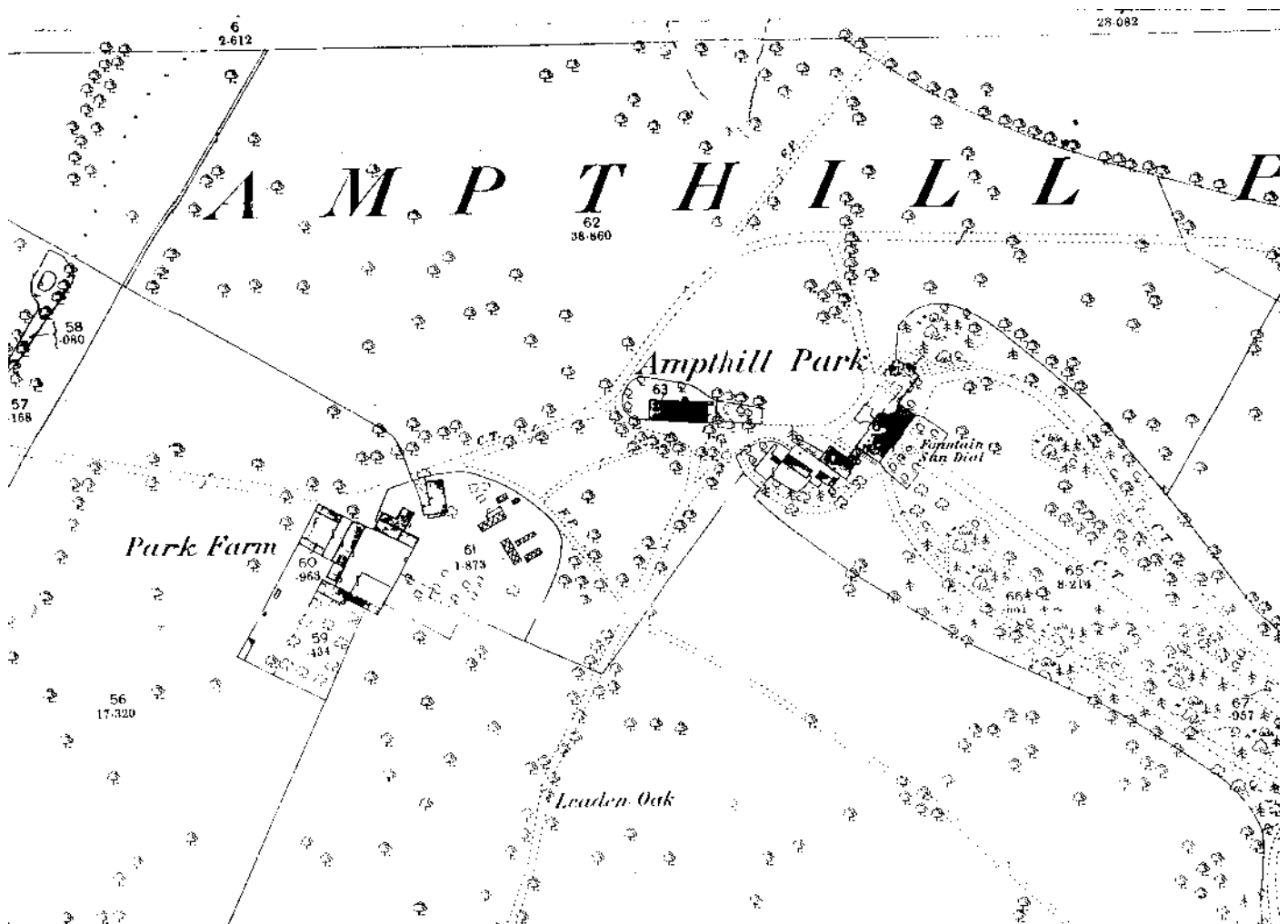


Appears to be the oldest Oak in the collection, it could have been planted in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.





A view of the garden front of Park House.  
The formal layout of the pleasure grounds suggests a 19<sup>th</sup> Century modification to Capability Brown's improvements for Lord Ossory.



Detail from OS first edition map showing Park House & immediate surrounds in 1881

This collection of photographs taken in the 1860's contains a remarkable record of ancient trees in what was a Royal Park and the site of Ampthill Castle. The landscape of the Park was changed by Lancelot (Capability) Brown in the 18th century and is recognised as a good example of his work, but these trees in the vicinity of Park House were untouched. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (excerpt above) surveyed in 1881 helps to locate the trees as they are individually plotted. The photographs reproduced in this paper were taken before 1881 and the trees were obviously very old at the time. A conservative estimate of 3- 400 years puts their planting back to the 15th century. The disposition of the trees was undoubtedly influenced by the building of Park Farm in the 1740's, but any new trees planted after that time would have been young and healthy unlike any in the photographs. The Leaden Oak is almost certainly the "Old Oak" so named due to the lead sheet with the inscription written by Samuel Rodgers. The row of trees in the background tie in with those lining the carriage way shown on the map. A conifer, possibly the cedar felled in the 1980-90's appears on the map to the north of the West Wing of the House. There is a record of a cedar planted c. 1751. (Ref. 2)

The general impression is of an ancient wood pasture, certainly from the 15th Century. When this is considered with the historical records of 1649 (Ref. 3) when 400 timber trees in the Park were marked out for the use by the Navy, and 2000 other trees marked for sale described as "*for the most part old doterells & decay'd trees good for little save the fire*", it is reasonable to put the planting date back into the 13th Century.



## References:

1. In the Album of Christopher Gibbs
  2. Estimated age, Gardeners Magazine, Vol 12 1836
  3. Gladys Scott Thompson, "Journal Brit. Arch. Assn." (p18. 1950)
- Andrew Underwood "Home Rule for Ampthill"

Thanks to David Alderman for his comments on the Park trees.

## ADDENDUM

### Notes on Ancient Trees in Ampthill Park.

Many surviving ancient trees in the UK can be found in the vestiges of the once extensive system of Royal Hunting forests and their successors, the more formalised medieval deer parks. More scattered groups of trees can also be found in historic parkland, wood pasture and ancient wooded commons. The oldest surviving trees of Ampthill Park may date from c. 1600, but most are younger and in a veteran or early ancient phase of their lives. Historically the Leaden Oak, recorded as being too old for timber in Cromwell's time, is evidence of great trees being here before 1500 when they could have been part of a wood pasture system, ancient trees managed by pollarding amongst grazing animals. This tree was recorded as a Sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*) a species found in ancient woodland along the Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge. The creation of new pollards ceased in many areas around c. 1700 and oak were encouraged to be planted and managed for large scale timber as well as landscape features.

The oldest oak in the UK are mostly pollards, managed trees. Maiden unmanaged trees go through a natural process of retrenchment, natural pollarding, whereby the crown grows down, creating the dead branched stag-headed look of a veteran tree to establish a smaller crown supported by a hollowing trunk. Throughout this time of retrenchment trees are vulnerable to the forces of nature, but veteran trees can be managed to help ensure we have ancient trees in the future. Unfortunately the oldest surviving oak in Ampthill Park appear to have suffered from less sympathetic management. Ancient trees provide habitat for a huge array of other organisms. The special features of ancient trees which make them unique as wildlife habitat are the exceptionally species-rich communities associated with hollowing trunks, and decaying wood which may be present for several hundred years.

David Alderman

Director The Tree Register.

Reg. Charity No 801568

[www.treeregister.org](http://www.treeregister.org)