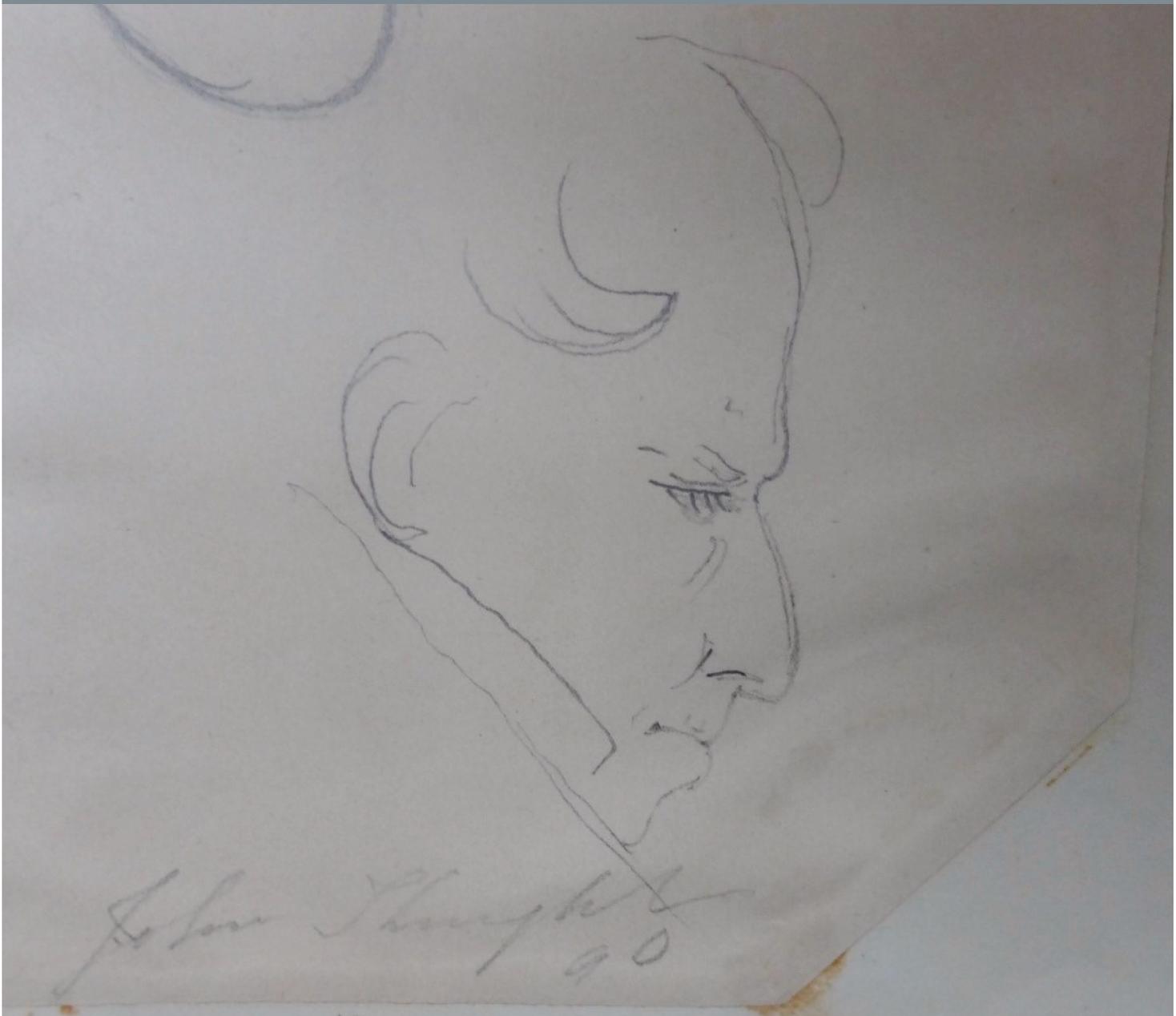


Exmoor National Park  
Historic Environment Report Series No 25

# JOHN KNIGHT OF WOLVERLEY AND SIMONSBATH: AN OUTLINE BIOGRAPHY





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Exmoor National Park  
Historic Environment Report Series  
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The research which underpins much of this report was carried out by the author independently in order to answer some fundamental questions about John Knight and his work on Exmoor. It was partly facilitated by a grant from the Exmoor Society as part of the Brian and Mary Chugg Conservation Award which enabled some of the research in Worcestershire to be carried out. It seemed appropriate to bring that research together in an interim report to support the current work of the Simonsbath Programme which is being carried out by a Steering Group supported by Exmoor National Park Authority.

This report series includes interim reports, policy documents and other information relating to the historic environment of Exmoor National Park.

Further hard copies of this report can be obtained from the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record:  
Exmoor House, Dulverton, Somerset. TA22 9HL  
email [her@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](mailto:her@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk), 01398 322273

## **FRONT COVER:**

**John Knight 1767-1850. This portrait was probably drawn when he was in his mid 70s. It is found in a commonplace book - now in the British Museum - which belonged to his daughter, Isabella Jane**

©Exmoor National Park Authority & the author



Jenkyn Knight of Salop  
(family coat of arms and tree in the possession of Enid Teague Knight)

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Portraits of two men (or the same man?) in Isabella Knight's commonplace book, with the later inscription 'John Knight 90' on the profile at the bottom of the page

## SUMMARY

John Knight purchased most of the former Royal Forest of Exmoor by 1820 and began an ambitious land reclamation project – the single biggest of its kind in England. After 17 years he left Exmoor and never lived there again; his son Frederic Winn Knight continuing the endeavour, which subsequently developed in a very different way. No one person has done more to shape the direction of Exmoor's landscape than John Knight; yet he is poorly understood and relatively little known. What kind of man was he? Who and what influenced him before he came to Exmoor? And how did these factors shape the Exmoor enterprise?

This report – necessarily an interim statement on John Knight because of the dispersed, fragmentary and emerging documentary evidence – provides an outline biography of the man and his close family and attempts to apply some colour and focus to the shadowy figure we have known until now. The report includes new research, which has uncovered the only two portraits of John Knight, a previously unrecognised James Ward drawing of the Exmoor coast and also a substantial collection of papers forming the entire residue of the Knight family archive from the seat at Wolverley when it was disposed of in 1944. This latter was formerly in the 'principal' residence at Wolverley (Worcestershire) and, on its disposal, remained with the last descendant of John Knight in England until his death in 1961. They then remained in the possession of his widow until now (she has kindly agreed for the papers to be deposited at the South West Heritage Trust, and hereinafter it will be referred to as the 'Knight Archive' – see Appendix 1 for a Catalogue of the material).

The report therefore uses this newly discovered information to present an outline chronology of the Knight family's interaction with Exmoor, it sheds light on the true significance of the physical remains on the ground, and it also places John Knight's Exmoor in its context. The importance of John Knight's creation is still underestimated nationally due largely to the fact that it is still poorly understood; this report identifies where some new avenues of research may lead us in the future. In particular it points out the need for more historical research, analysis of the existing historical information and further recording of the standing buildings, boundaries and archaeology associated with this period, and also a more analytical assessment of how John Knight's estate would have functioned if it had been developed further in his time.

## INTRODUCTION

John Knight of Wolverley, Worcestershire was born on 24th August 1767 and died on 24th January 1850 in Rome. He is the central figure in the Exmoor land reclamation story, which is described by Charles Orwin in *Reclamation of Exmoor Forest* (1929) as 'one of the greatest achievements ...that the nineteenth century has to show'. Despite this, John Knight has remained in the shadows. His motives and intentions are poorly documented, leaving researchers, as well as those concerned with the modern management of Exmoor, a huge challenge in understanding the landscape he created and, of course, the man at the centre of the story. This report provides an outline biography of John Knight, for the first time, and offers a broader perspective than has hitherto been available. It does this through looking at some aspects of his younger life and by following the Knight family after most of them left Exmoor in 1837. It provides a timeline of events to put the 'Exmoor Experiment' into context, rather than exhaustively analysing what happened on Exmoor.

No formally attributed portrait of John Knight is known to survive (see below for a convincing, but currently unattributed, contender which was sold in London in 2008), but a sketch profile of him has been found in his daughter, Isabella's, scrapbook, in the British Museum. The likeness was probably taken around 1840 (when he was in his mid-70s) and shows John Knight facing to the right with head bowed – perhaps he is asleep (Wilson-North 2016). There is a likeness of John Knight's father (below left), also called John (attributed to Joseph Wright of Derby), ([www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/attributed-to-joseph-wright-of-derby-portrait-5018574-details.aspx](http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/attributed-to-joseph-wright-of-derby-portrait-5018574-details.aspx)).

Another image is John (ii) Knight's son, Edward Lewis Knight (below right), on the grounds of the resemblance to a pencil portrait of him – discussed later). Described 'Portrait of a gentleman of the Knight family', it was sold in 2008 with four other portraits of the Knight family (John's children: his son Frederic, and his three daughters, Margaret, Isabella Jane and Helen Georgiana).



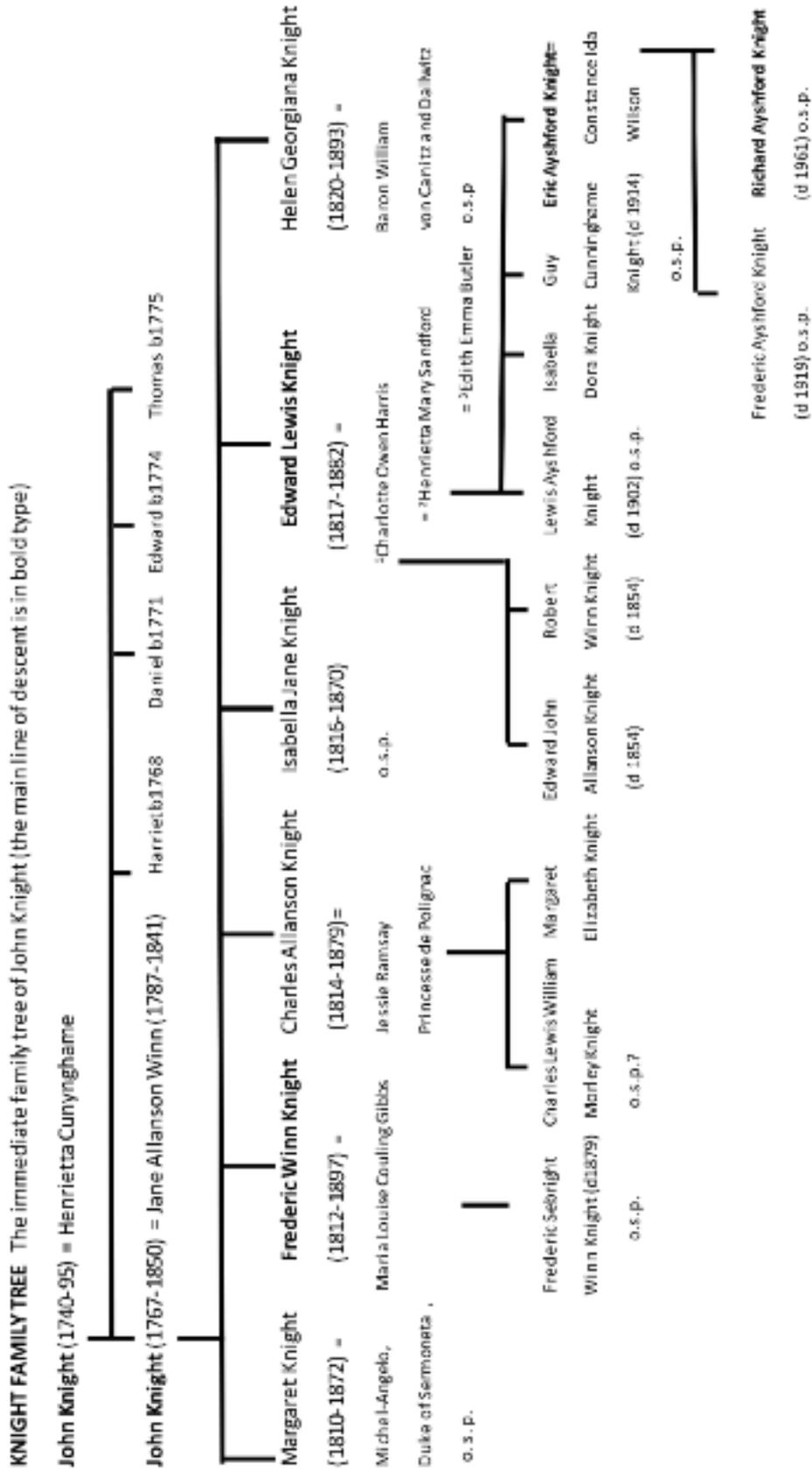
John Knight senior (1740-95)



Knight of Wolverley



Edward Lewis Knight



## JOHN KNIGHT: EXPERIENCE, MOTIVATIONS, TASTE, ARTISTIC AND ARCHITECTURAL COMMISSIONS

John Knight was born on 24 August 1767 (<http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=genesearcher&id=I94472>; accessed 8 June 2016), although CS Orwin erroneously puts his birth date as 1765. His parents were John Knight (1740-1795) and Henrietta Cunningham, daughter of Daniel Cunningham of St Kitts, West Indies. They had five known children: John (1767), Harriet (1768), Daniel (1771), Edward (1774) and Thomas (1775) all baptised at Wolverley near Kidderminster. According to C S Orwin (Reclamation of Exmoor Forest, Orwin and Sellick 1970; originally published in 1929), John spent his earlier life in a number of pioneering agricultural improvement projects in and around his home at Wolverley in Worcestershire (p 31, 32) where he reclaimed areas of heathland. Both Wolverley and Lea Castle were Knight properties, and passed to Edward Knight, John (ii's) uncle, who was also a renowned art collector. John Knight was equally concerned with the management of the family's well established Cookley ironworks. He was a man of energy and innovation who was very familiar with the iron industry, agricultural improvement and the management of estates. Not from landed gentry, he perhaps felt less of a sense of being tied to, or rooted in, any one place, and from his early 50s onwards moved: from Wolverley (Worcestershire) to Lynton (Devon), Simonsbath (Somerset), Jersey (Channel Islands) and finally to Rome, where he died aged 83.



**Edward Knight**  
(courtesy of the Lascelles family,  
Harewood House)

Key figures in the Knight family that would have brought a sense of connoisseurship and aestheticism into John Knight's young life are his uncle, Edward Knight, and John's father's cousin, Richard Payne Knight the creator of Downton Castle and its Picturesque landscape. While John Knight – from what we can see – was a highly practical man, he was brought up in a world in which his family connections placed a high value on taste and culture. Edward Knight was an esteemed art collector and also commissioned Thomas Chippendale, Flaxman and Vanini (Lane 1999) to furnish Wolverley, whilst Richard Payne Knight was renowned for his writing on the picturesque and taste and for his collections which subsequently earned the Knight family a family trusteeship at the British Museum.

The Worcestershire farming improvements of the Knight family were described by W Pitt (General View of the Agriculture of the County of Worcester; with observations on the means of its improvement 1810) as 'spirited cultivation' when he acknowledges 'J Knight Esq of Lea Castle, Wolverley' (p xii); though there is some confusion within the book which refers to 'the owner, T. Knight Esq Lea Castle, Wolverley' (page 26) and thereafter just to 'Mr Knight' as Pitt constantly references the Knight's innovative improvements in respect of cultivation, crops and livestock. Perhaps both John and his brother Thomas had a role in the management of the estates at that time, whilst their uncle Edward was in his dotage.

John Knight first married Helen Charlotte Hope-Weir in 1795 when he was 30, but she died in 1801, and there were no children. John married a second time to Jane Elizabeth Allanson-Winn. She was one of the four children of George Allanson-Winn (b. 1725), who in 1797 was created 1st Lord Headley, Baron Allanson and Winn of Aghadoe, Co, Kerry.

([www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/headley1797.htm](http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/headley1797.htm) ; accessed 21 June 2016).



**George Allanson-Winn, the 1st Lord Headley, Baron Allanson and Winn of Aghadoe co Kerry, as a boy and in later life. Lord Headley was John Knight's father in law.**





The landscape at Aghadoe, nr Killarney in Co Kerry, Eire. (Rob Wilson-North)

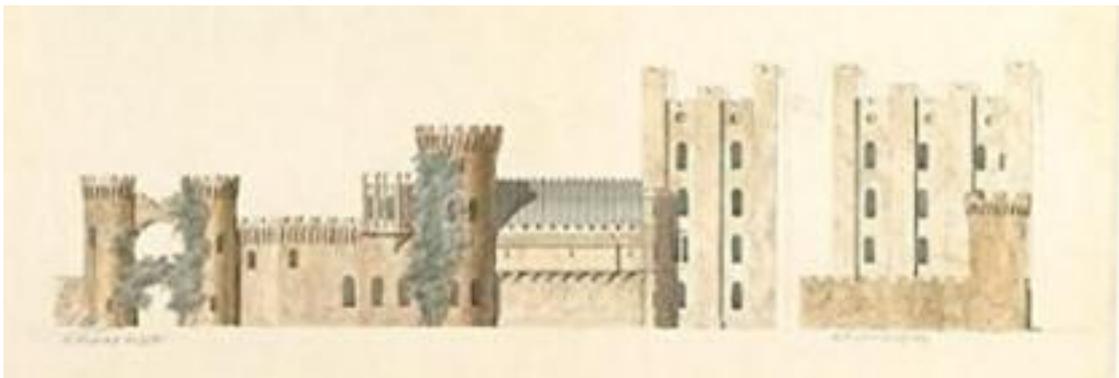
John Knight and Jane Elizabeth Allanson-Winn married on September 25, 1805 in St George's Church, Hanover Square, London (less than half a mile from the Knight residence in London, at 52 Portland Place). At this time John is styled as of 'Lea Castle, in Worcestershire' (Stockdale's Peerage of England, Scotland and Ireland, 1810, Volume 2, p313).

**Jane Knight (p 37 of Isabella Knight's commonplace book)**



John Knight inherited Lea Castle in 1812 on the death of his uncle, Edward Knight, and would have been very familiar with its Gothic revival castellated towers and battlements. A valuable insight into John Knight's taste is through his commissioning of the architect John Carter (1748-1817) in 1809 to remodel Lea Castle and to produce a 'house in the Norman style' and designs attributed to him survive (see below), suggesting that he had a strong hand in the place prior to his uncle's death. However, the scheme was never executed ('Simonsbath Conservation Statement', December 2015, produced by Nicholas Pearson Partnership for Exmoor National Park Authority, p25 para 4.3.8) and John Knight eventually sold Lea Castle in 1823, supposedly to finance the Exmoor project (VCH, Worcs).

A series of watercolours of the interiors of Lea Castle is held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; they are attributed to John Carter and were done around 1816, (Elisha Whittelsey Collection, no. 56.601). Carter was a strong advocate of the Neo-Gothic revival (Carter, John (1748-1817)". Dictionary of National Biography. London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1885–1900).



**Lea Castle proposed elevations (above and below), attributed to John Carter**





Lea Castle, Worcestershire. Sold by John Knight in 1823 and finally demolished in 1945. Only one of the gatehouses remains (not in this photograph)



Lea Castle, 'new front to the ice house'; proposal attributed to John Carter



**John Carter's view of the drawing room of Lea Castle about 1816**

John Knight also commissioned James Ward to draw Lea Castle in its setting in a series of picturesque views; Ward is generally recognised as among the leading artists of the British Romantic movement. The combination of Carter and Ward represents some of the finest artistic and architectural talent of the day, they were craftsmen of a picturesque style in terms of landscape and an authentic Romanesque revivalist style in terms of buildings. It is of interest that Carter

advocates improving the mock medieval, neo-gothic appearance of Lea Castle by the addition of large scale, heavy, 'Romanesque' elements and the use of round headed arches. Whether this was to John Knight's liking is not known as the designs were never executed, but the few images of the fragment of John Knight's mansion at Simonsbath are reminiscent of this blocky style of architecture, like Penryn Castle, North Wales built by the architect Thomas Hopper between 1820 and 1837. Although there is no known link between John Knight and the owner of Penryn, George Hay Dawkins Pennant, it is notable that their London homes were two doors apart from one another in Portland Place, with John Knight at no 52 and Pennant at 56.

Around Simonsbath are buildings with round headed arches, which also suggest that John Knight's liking for this style of architecture would be expressed in the estate's building style. Also, an entry for 18 March 1820 in the Exmoor Abstract No 1 (see Knight Archive) under 'Cornham Farm' states:

*'Getting 7 yards of stone for the arches'*

It is perhaps, too strong to suggest that it was an estate motif, but is certainly a recurring theme in his buildings.



**Enlarged extract from a late 19th century postcard view of what is now Simonsbath House Hotel with the blocky, tower-like structure behind it on the right.**



Penryn Castle in North Wales, built between 1820 and 1837 with its imposing keep on the right (reminiscent of John Carter's designs for the remodelling of Lea Castle).



Round headed openings are a distinctive feature of John Knight's buildings in Simonsbath.

Left: Stable flat;

Below left: gardeners' store, and below right, White Rock Cottage, (©Monica Evans) both in Ashcombe





**Lea Castle by James Ward RA for John Knight (above and below)**



John Knight began his mansion in January 1820 (the Knight Archive; document entitled 'Exmoor Abstract No 1), when expenditure is listed for clearing snow in order to progress the digging of foundations for the 'new house'. A month later payment is listed for digging the foundations. This work began before the purchase of the forest was complete and shows the urgency with which John Knight approached the Exmoor project. It seems almost certain that plans for the mansion would have existed, and also highly likely, given the date, that it would have been built in the Romanesque style that he had previously favoured. There are only a few architects who followed this style, and it is possible that original plans survive and are unattributed.

James Ward had a number of associations with John Knight which span the time before Exmoor through well into the 1820s (see *The Walpole Society* vol 75 for 2013), and although Ward's 'Stone House Grounds' of 1816 (below) is of the landscape at Powys Castle, it evokes the attraction of simple natural beauty which inspired the Picturesque movement, and could easily be of John Knight's Ashcombe gardens at Simonsbath on Exmoor with the tumbling stream, very rustic bridge and wooded landscape:



**Stone House Grounds, drawn by James Ward RA c. 1816 for the Earl of Powys**



**James Ward's detailed study of an old tree, figures and running stag**

John Knight is described as 'owning a number of Ward's paintings'. He is also described as 'a major patron of contemporary art, Governor of the British Institution' as well as 'appearing regularly' in Ward's correspondence. He was on the panel of the British Institution that gave Ward the commission to paint the national painting of the Battle of Waterloo (now lost).

John Knight also commissioned the painting *The Pool of Bethesda* for Lea Castle (Lowell Libson Ltd *Breadth and Quality: oil studies, watercolours & drawings by James Ward RA*, p21). This painting has now been lost, but a lavish modello for it in the form of an angel survives, giving a sense of the style and quality of the finished painting (ibid opp p 42):



**Modello for the Pool of Bethesda by James Ward RA for John Knight**

See also Edward J Nygren 2013 *James Ward RA (1769-1859): Papers and Patrons*, The Walpole Society, vol LXXV, 2013 p393 which refers to Ward's letters to/about Knight.

The painting was at an exhibition held in 1818 by the British Institution (*Catalogue of the works of British Artists placed in the gallery of The British Institution, Pall-Mall, for exhibition and sale, 1818*). On page 14 is listed:

'94. The Pool of Bethesda "For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the waters; whosoever then first, after the troubling of the

waters, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had" St John, chap v. ver. 4. James Ward RA. Dimensions: 8 feet high; 10 feet 8 inches wide'. On page 175 is a list of

*'the pictures sold at the British Institution in the Exhibition of 1818, with the names of purchasers etc to the 26th of March.'*

At the foot of the list of sold items is

*'besides Mr Ward's Pool of Bethesda, painted by commission for John Knight, Esq. and several others similarly disposed of before coming to the Exhibition.'*

In 1828 John Knight commissioned James Ward to paint his Arab horse *Mahmoud* from the Dongola district (then part of Egypt), showing that Knight and Ward were still very much in touch at that time (Orwin & Sellick 1970, 70).

The following extract is from *The Book of the Horse* (p23-5) by Sidney Samuel, published in 1880:

*'The Dongola is an Oriental blood-horse to which the term "pony" does not apply. Attention was first called to the Dongola by James Bruce, the traveller in Abyssinia.*

He described the first horse he purchased as a black Dongola horse, 16 hands high, fully equal to his weight with his heavy Turkish saddle and arms, this must have been some sixteen or seventeen stone (Bruce was over six feet high), with lofty action, but not remarkable for speed.

Some few years after the publication of Bruce's Travels, Mr. John Knight "who afterwards purchased Exmoor" being at the house of Sir Joseph Banks, the eminent naturalist and companion of Cook in his first voyage round the world (Lord Moreton, an enthusiast in horse breeding, Lords Headley and Dundas being also of the party), the conversation turned on the book of the day', and Bruce's description of the big Nubian horse.

It ended in their each writing a cheque for £250, and handing them over to Sir Joseph Banks on account of the expenses of bringing over some specimens of the Dongola.

The matter was placed in the hands of Mr. Salt, the British consul in Egypt. After a delay of some years, and an expense of several thousand pounds, eleven Dongolas "five stallions and six mares"

arrived in England. Mr. Knight purchased Lord Headley's share, and became possessed of two stallions and three mares. They fully answered Bruce's description; were 16 hands high, with the quality of skin of a blood-horse; had rather long legs, with white stockings, and the action of a "school-horse" right up to the curb-chain.

The Nubian groom who accompanied them used to perform a trick common amongst Oriental horsemen; gallop them at a wall in the riding-school, and stop them dead with the cruel Turkish curb.

Some of the produce of these Dongolas, out of well-bred English mares, turned out hunters of remarkable endurance and speed. General the Marquis of Anglesey admired them very much, but he was a fanatic on the subject of menage riding, which may account for his taste.

Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Winn Knight has permitted me to copy, for one of the coloured illustrations of this work, a portrait of the Dongola stallion, executed for his father by the celebrated animal painter, James Ward, R.A., in 1828. He writes, on sending the picture,

*"With the black Dongola horse, Mahmoud, came a bay, which, like the black, stood over a good deal at the knees. He was castrated, and I hunted him for several years on Exmoor with the wild stag hounds. He went well, and never tired. The black was in Scotland with Lord Moreton before he came to us, and was an old horse then."*

The picture of Mahmoud is, in Mr. Knight's opinion, very faithful "certainly it is not a flattering portrait" and such a stamp offers no temptation for a repetition of the experiment. Probably this horse, with his bright eye, burnished black coat, and fiery action, produced an effect which could not be translated on canvas. But the portrait is a curiosity, because it suggests the origin of a peculiar breed of horses which are still carefully preserved by several families of the Spanish nobility.'



**'Mahmoud'. John Knight's Dongola Arab horse, painted by James Ward RA in 1828 (reproduced from Sidney Samuel's 'Book of the horse' published in 1880). This painting was clearly in the possession of Frederic Knight in 1880; it was in Wolverley in 1928 where it is mentioned in an inventory of contents (Knight Archive), but its whereabouts are no longer known.**

It seems certain that Knight would have turned to Ward as a highly accomplished landscape painter, to paint Simonsbath on Exmoor, but no such works have so far been found, even though he used Ward in the 18-teens and in 1828. These would indeed be an invaluable source of information if they exist. Even in 1841 Ward was drawing a study of Dunster Castle not far from central Exmoor, and so there is a strong possibility of Ward depictions of central Exmoor at any time from 1820-1840. One drawing: 'studies of a hilly coast and a rocky waterfall (undated)' and previously unidentified, is certainly of the Foreland at Lynmouth on Exmoor, with its distinctive cliff profile and geomorphology; even the 'rocky waterfall' vignette is characteristic of the steeply descending West Lyn River as it approaches Lynmouth (it is now in the Yale Centre for British Art). Enticing evidence, especially as John Knight lived at Lynton from 1820-30. In fact, the view that James Ward shows may well have been based on, or inspired by, that from Castle Heights where John Knight lived, on the top of the cliffs at Lynton. The recognition of this drawing shows that Ward was on Exmoor, and it seems highly likely, if not certain, that he was there with John Knight and would have drawn Simonsbath and its surrounding landscape.



James Ward RA's 'studies of a hilly coast and a rocky waterfall (undated)' which are clearly Exmoor's Foreland Point near Lynmouth and perhaps a rocky waterfall on the West Lyn River nearby (below; image courtesy of Nigel Stone)



If there was a planned Exmoor collaboration with the architect John Carter, it was sadly not to be, because Carter died in 1817. One could imagine that John Knight might have turned to another leading Gothic revival architect, such as Thomas Rickman (1776-1841), but again, there is no evidence – so far - for such a commission on Exmoor. It is also worth reflecting on the context for John Knight on Exmoor in the 1820s and early 1830s. Whilst on Exmoor, Knight was contemporaneous – even if he did not meet him – with the artist Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) who painted Culbone in 1835, and it is true that Exmoor – or at least its coastline - had been sought out as a place which epitomised the sublime. At this time, however, the interior of Exmoor (the high moor) was relatively unknown.

Between 1810 and 1820 John and Jane Knight had their six children (see below) whilst living at Wolverley in Worcestershire. This seems to be a period of stability and consolidation in his domestic life, although the family iron business was changing and consolidating at one site at Cookley; perhaps his thirst for a challenge was growing, and nowhere in Worcestershire could fulfil this. In a sense his next step – the move to Exmoor - was akin to Thomas Johnes who sought out the extreme challenge of taming a Welsh mountain in his acquisition and building of Hafod near Aberystwyth. John Knight was very much in Thomas Johnes' footsteps – cousins (their grandfathers were brothers), they were both driven by an energy which sought out the challenge to improve the harshest of landscapes.

The Commissioners of Woods and Forests advertised the sale of the Forest of Exmoor in June 1818. It is unclear whether John Knight would have known of the sale before then but he moved quickly to outbid his nearest rival bidder to acquire the King's Allotment. John Knight finally concluded the purchase of most of the former Royal Forest of Exmoor in 1820. It was, and had been for more than a 1000 years, an uninhabited waste; remote, high moorland, grazed only in summer by livestock from surrounding farms, it was perhaps the greatest challenge in southern England. John Knight chose to live initially at Lynton, about 6 miles away from Exmoor Forest on the North Devon coast. At this stage, there was only one building in Simonsbath and no facilities, so it would have been harsh and inappropriate for a young family. Around 1830 the Knight family finally moved to Simonsbath, at the heart of the former Forest, taking residence in what is now the Simonsbath House Hotel, whilst the great mansion was being built.

John Knight's activities on Exmoor and his plans for the development of the estate are very poorly documented and are now the subject of fresh combined

archaeological and historical research. The recently found Knight Archive contains a single slim volume entitled 'Exmoor Abstract No 1' which lists expenditure for 1819 and 1820. From this one volume it is plain that John Knight had a masterplan for Exmoor, for listed in the volume are road building projects, the beginning of the mansion, cottage building (eg Cloven Rocks, White Rocks and Lime Rocks), the two farmsteads (Cornham and Honeymead), canals at Warren and Prayway (later known as the 'Pinkery Canal'), as well as drainage schemes, carriage gutters and the 'ring fence' around the Forest; a frantic pace of building beginning in autumn 1819. The importance of this book cannot be overstressed, because it counters some of the Knight detractors who have seen John Knight's legacy as one of a series of failed projects developing, ad hoc, over time. This volume shows that Exmoor was conceived and begun as one great enterprise, even before its acquisition had been actually completed.

The main secondary source on him has traditionally been Charles Orwin's *Reclamation of Exmoor Forest* written in 1929, (but revised and reprinted with Roger Sellick in 1970) – an outstanding book which has stood the test of time remarkably well – and which takes an unashamedly agricultural and economic historian's approach to the reclamation enterprise on Exmoor as a whole, but perhaps fails to fully understand the man and his own contribution. Orwin, and others, have seen John Knight's achievement and aspirations through the distorting prism of the legacy of Frederic Winn Knight (John's eldest son, who persevered with the reclamation and in a sense transformed his father's achievement). In simple terms, John Knight began to make a single Georgian estate out of nothing but moorland with a great mansion at its centre (probably akin to Penryn Castle in North Wales or John Carter's proposed remodelling of Lea Castle), pleasure grounds and two innovative in-hand farms at Cornham and Honeymead, and, crucially, a system of roads. Frederic, in contrast, created an expansive network of independent farms with a small, thriving community at its heart. In the end, what Frederic Knight left behind at the end of the 19th century was something very different to what his father had intended when he arrived on Exmoor in 1820. To perceive John Knight's vision: this greatest of great estates, standing alone in wild isolation, is remarkably difficult because of the later changes, but a sense of the scale and difficulty can be seen in the ghost of Thomas Johnes' creation at Hafod in West Wales which is the closest and only similar venture. Indeed, John Knight and Thomas Johnes were connected by blood. A further connection to the picturesque movement is through John Knight's aunt Mary who married Coplestone Warre Bampfylde, the creator of Hestercombe near Taunton.

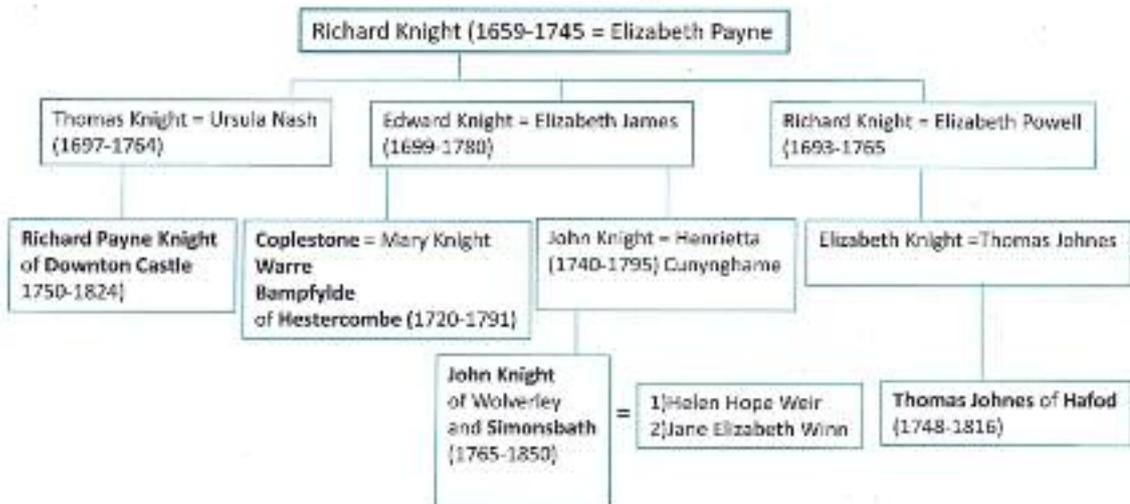
The process of reclamation on Exmoor began apace and by the early winter of 1819, there are accounts of building farmsteads at Cornham and Honeymead and preparing the ground for White Rock Cottage and Cloven Rock Cottage. Also mentioned are extensive road building campaigns, drainage and Lime Rock Cottage (Limecombe today). For January 15th 1820 there is a mention of 'moving snow for foundation of new house' and for 5th February 1820, under 'New House Simonsbath' '568 yds soil @ 7pence for the foundation'. It is therefore clear that the foundations of the mansion were being constructed early in 1820. The image created from the accounts in the 'Exmoor Abstract No 1' (Knight Archive) is one of intense energy and clear vision in terms of the road and canal infrastructure, farm building and land improvement.

The Knight family of Wolverley, Worcestershire:

'A Picturesque Pedigree'

John Knight was a cousin of Richard Payne Knight, the doyen of the Picturesque, and builder of the amazing landscape at **Downton Castle**.

Richard Payne Knight was Thomas Johnes' cousin – Thomas built **Hafod** near Aberystwyth, the most remarkable picturesque landscape. John Knight's aunt married the creator of **Hestercombe**.





**Hafod: Thomas Johnes mansion at the centre of the pioneering estate in the mountains near Aberystwyth, painted by JMW Turner (© Lady Lever Art Gallery)**

Another possible influence on John Knight was that of his wife's family. Jane Knight was the daughter of George Allanson-Winn (b 1725), created 1st Lord Headley of Allanson and Winn in Aghadoe in the county of Kerry. Jane Knight's mother was Irish; she was Jane Blennerhasset (b 1765) of Ballyseedy Castle near Tralee, County Kerry, a well established Kerry family with landowning and commercial interests. The 1st Lord Headley died in 1798, and his son, Charles Winn-Allanson (the names reversed) (1784-1840), inherited the Aghadoe estate. Charles Winn-Allanson was a great improver in the 1820s and 30s (as well as being Member of Parliament for Ripon, then Malton and finally Ludgershall) before his early death in 1840:

*On the expiration of the lease of this manor, held under its proprietor, Lord Headley, in 1826, his lordship took the estate under his own management; the farms, previously consisting of small portions of land held under middlemen by cottier tenants, were surveyed and improved upon an arrangement adapted to the mutual benefit of landlord and tenant, and let on leases of 21 years in portions varying from 100 to 200 acres, with stipulated allowances for building comfortable farm-houses, making fences and drains, and drawing the requisite quantities of lime for the improvement of the soil. Several miles of new road have been constructed, and extensive plantations made solely at his lordship's expense. The hovels formerly occupied by the cottier tenants have been superseded by good farm-houses built of stone and roofed with slate; attached to each are orchards and gardens, and the whole face of the district presents an appearance of improvement. Lord Headley has a pattern farm of considerable extent adjoining his demesne, and has erected a splendid villa in the Italian style of architecture, commanding an*

*interesting and extensive view over the great Lower Lake of Killarney; the approach is by a small but elegant bridge across a ravine, leading from the entrance gate and lodge, which are both in a corresponding style of architecture. The plantations of Aghadoe House comprise about 100 acres, extending along the hill overlooking the lake.*

(from Lewis, S 1837 *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*;  
[www.libraryireland.com/topog/A/Aghadoe-Magonihy-Kerry.php](http://www.libraryireland.com/topog/A/Aghadoe-Magonihy-Kerry.php); accessed 22 June 2016)

Orwin recognises this possible connection between John Knight and his brother in law and both cites and quotes correspondence from Lord Headley to the Knights in the 1820s and 30s (Orwin and Sellick 1970, 62-63, 69). In 1835 Westphalian pigs were sent by Lord Headley from Aghadoe to Exmoor, with his advice that 'I think they would do well wild in the Brendon Woods!' In fact the similarities between the improvements at Aghadoe and on Exmoor are striking: the importance of roads and providing a good infrastructure, the innovation of importing new breeds, the reliance on draining and liming the land.

The subsequent history of the Lords Headley was not as improvers but it was equally dramatic. By the second half of the nineteenth century they had become very unpopular landlords with a reputation for ruthless evictions of their tenants. In the midst of this the current Lord Headley began an ambitious building programme creating a castle overlooking the sea at Glenbeigh. Headley Towers – later known as Wynne's Folly – was never lived in by the family and was deliberately burnt in 1922 by the Irish Republican Army. The 5th Lord Headley, Rowland George Allanson Allanson-Winn, famously converted to Islam and was also known as Shaikh Rahmatullah al-Farooq. He died in 1935. The Headley title later became extinct.



**52 Portland Place today; the  
London home of John Knight**

During all of his time on Exmoor John Knight retained 52 Portland Place in London which he had inherited from his uncle Edward, who died in 1812.

Published sources name him as owner there in 1819 and as late as 1841. The 1819 reference comes from the extraordinary sale of his collection of paintings (below). The 1841 reference is found in the National Archives to the will of his housekeeper: Reference: PROB 11/1949/416 Description: 'Will of Isabella Carter, Housekeeper to John Knight of No 52 Portland Place, Middlesex. Date 28 August 1841'. This shows that John Knight, despite living in Rome, had retained 52 Portland Place.

In 1819, allegedly to fund his activities on Exmoor, John Knight sold a number of his 'celebrated collection' of paintings, which he had inherited from his uncle Edward Knight (1734-1812) (See National Library of Wales journal, Cyf. 15, rh. 4 Gaeaf 1968, 'The Knights of Downton Castle'; also The Distinguished and Interesting Collection of Paintings of John Knight Esq Portland Place A Catalogue of the Celebrated Collection of Valuable Pictures, Principally by Old Masters, the sole property of John Knight Esq. Removed from his residence in Portland Place (Sale catalogue Phillips, London. March 23-24 1819). There is also a reference to a sale in 1821: the 'original and Valuable Pictures, the property of John Knight Esq of Portland Place' The Magazine of the Fine Arts: And Monthly Review of Painting, Vol 1, 1821 edited by James Elmes.

*Catalogue of the original and valuable Pictures the property of John Knight Esq of Portland Place sold by auction by Mr Phillips at his Great Rooms 73 New Bond Street on Saturday March 17 1821*

Painters	Subjects	Purchasers	Prices
A Kanffman	Penelope	Hoffman Esq	15 15 0
Sir J Reynolds	St Agnes	JG Cholmondley Esq	42 0 0
Guercino	Cassandra Delivered from Captivity	John Fitzgerald Esq	100 16 0 1
Da Vinci	The last Supper	Mr Piazzetti	42 0 0
Bellini	Virgin and Child	Mr Heybens	42 0 0
Rembrandt	Portrait of G Dow	Mr Hill	52 10 0
Vandyke	Holy Family	Mr Harris	84 0 0
Guido	Susannah and the Elders	John Fitzgerald Esq	157 10 0
Pordenone	Christ at Emmaus	JG Cholmondley Esq	105 0 0
N Poussin	Acis and Gallatea	Mr Norton	178 10 0
N Poussin	Tancred and Erminia	JG Cholmondley Esq	52 10 0
Swaneveldt	A Landscape	Mr Hill	177 9 0
Teniers	Village Feast	A Baring Esq	420 0 0
A Carracci	Christ and St Ursula	Mr Harris	106 1 0
N Poussin	Discovery of Achilles	Taylor Esq	63 0 0
Sal Rosa	Diogenes with a Lanthorn	Lamb Esq	105 0
O Murillio	Dead Christ	Mr Harri	210 0 0
N Poussin	The Education of Bacchus 3	JG Cholmondley Esq	619 10 0
Fra Bartolomeo	Holy Family	Knight Esq	262 10 0
N Poussin	Cephalus and Aurora	JG Cholmondley Esq	724 10 0
Cipriani	Venus and Cupids	M Tavish Esq	54 1 0



Guido Reni's 'Susannah and the Elders', painted between 1620 and 1625  
(sold by John Knight in 1821 and now in the National Gallery)



Nicholas Poussin's 'Tancred and Erminia' (painted around 1630); sold by John Knight in 1821)

The paintings which John Knight sold, though of remarkable quality and inestimable cultural value, were perhaps not really to his taste. Instead we must turn to James Ward's landscapes and modern subjects to see how John Knight would have planned to furnish the walls of his great mansion at Simonsbath, if it had ever been completed. The power and striking imagery and colour of the modello of the Pool of Bethesda is in contrast to the subjects of the 'great masters' which John Knight disposed of in 1819/21. From this we may imagine that he was a man of his own tastes, driven by a passion for the picturesque and neo Gothicism rather than an inherited liking for classical subject matter. Ward's diaries show how close he and John Knight became, and perhaps for John Knight the act of commissioning was as important as the commissions themselves (see various references to John Knight in Nygren 2013).

In 1839 Knight sold more of his collection of paintings which were still in Portland Place.

THE SELECT COLLECTION OF PICTURES  
of  
JOHN KNIGHT ESQ

*MR PHILLIPS respectfully announces that on Friday the 24th instant at One for Two precisely he will submit by Auction AT THE RESIDENCE No 52 PORTLAND PLACE The Collection of Twenty four highly Estimable ORIGINAL PAINTINGS by the most distinguished Masters of the ANCIENT SCHOOLS embracing the Works of the following Admirable Masters:*

*Rembrandt, Titian, P Veechia [sic, probably P Vecchia], AV Velde [sic, Van de Velde], Albano Murillo, F Bartolomeo, Vandyck, Teniers, Carracci, Cu Cangisgio [sic], Rubins [sic], Poussin, Peronese, Valentina, Guido, Tintoretto, Ruysdael, and a few PICTURES by MODERN ARTISTS.*

*Amongst others is the celebrated Landscape Cattle and Figures by Cuyp which has ever been esteemed as one of his most splendid compositions, a pair of interiors by Teniers, Virgin and Child by Vandyck, Nolime I angere a capital picture by Albano, three landscapes by Rembrandt, AV Velde and Ituysdael, Descent from the Cross by Tintoretto, Dead Christ by Murillo and others of equal merit and undoubted originality.*

*The above are the Elite and reserved portion of a large collection formed with great research during the last century controlled in the selection by superior judgment and taste and are to be sold in consequence of the proprietor quitting his present residence. May be viewed six days previous by Catalogues and Tickets only to be obtained at Mr Phillips's 73 New Bond Street'*

(The Art Union (A monthly Journal of the Fine Arts) Vol 1 for year ending December 1839, No 4 for May 1839 (p79))

Interestingly the reason given for the sale is 'in consequence of the proprietor quitting his present residence' which presumably refers to Knight settling in Rome. A further sale took place in June 1841 of the contents of 52 Portland Place (copy of the catalogue in the Knight Archive) including the cellar of 'excellent Wines, consisting principally of Old East India Madeira and Carbonel's Port' which extended to more than 1200 bottles. A very good account of these sales is given by Joan Lane (1999).

A feature of John Knight's time on Exmoor was a long running dispute over the inheritance of Downton Castle, the creation and home of Richard Payne Knight – doyen of the Picturesque movement – who had died in 1824. Richard Payne Knight's brother Thomas Andrew Knight succeeded at Downton but it was John Knight's firm belief that he had a claim on Downton (the litigation that ensued – known as 'an amicable suit', though it was far from amiable - has gone down in English case law as 'Knight v Knight') but the eventual judgement – 20 years later - was not in John Knight's favour. This extinguished a hoped-for inheritance with which to further fund the Exmoor Experiment.

John Knight also seems to have acquired interests on estates in Leicestershire (Lease in Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, ref DR225/18-19). Attached to one of the documents is John Knight's signature and seal, dated 25-26 April 1837:



## AN INSIGHT INTO JOHN KNIGHT'S FAMILY: SOCIAL STANDING AND CONNECTIONS

In 1809, the Hon Mrs Knight is listed (Lady's Magazine or Entertaining companion for the Fair Sex vol LX for 1809) under 'Ladies' Dresses on his Majesty's Birth-Day' (p 258) as

*'Dress of jonquille-coloured crape, over white sarcenet, the right side of the dress in full folds of crape, fastened at the bottom with a bunch of yellow roses and green leaves; a large wreath of the same, extending all along the front of the dress, with small binders, tastefully disposed, supporting the upper drapery, and ornamented with satin riband; robe of crape, trimmed with ribbon and Mecklin lace.'*

In 1829 'Mr Knight, Hon Mrs Knight and Miss Knight' are listed as Subscribers to 'Concerts of Antient Music, under the patronage of His Majesty, as performed at the New Rooms, Hanover Square.' (Wilding, G. Concerts of Antient Music 1829)

Also in 1829 'John Knight, Esq., Portland-place' was a subscriber to volume 6 of John Curtis' book British Entomology; being illustrations and descriptions of the Genera of Insects found in Great Britain and Ireland.

In 1834 (Court Magazine and Monthly Critic and Lady's Magazine Vol 5) we find (p43) 'at The Sixth and last Drawing Room of the Season held on the 19th June, [amongst] the ladies presented to her Majesty were:

*The Hon Mrs Knight [presented by] by the Hon. Lady Hope...*

*Miss Knight, [presented] by her mother, the Hon Mrs Knight*

*Miss I J Knight, [presented] by her mother, the Hon Mrs Knight'*

This presumably refers to Margaret Knight (then 24) and her younger sister, Isabella Jane, (then nearly 18).

Such accounts make clear the elevated (London) circles in which the Knight family moved. Most striking of all, though, is plain 'Mr John Knight' in the presence of Lords and other aristocracy – he was an aristocrat in all but name.

A picture of the Knight family's social life and standing whilst on Exmoor (and in Exmoor circles) is hard to obtain. However, Jane Knight was clearly held in great respect locally as she opened a school whilst in Lynton: In *A History of the Parishes of Lynton and Countisbury* by John Chanter (1907), the creation of a second school at Lynton is described following the closure of the first:

*Another was started in 1818 by the Rev. Charles Kekewich, curate-in-charge and perpetual curate 1808-1932, assisted by the Hon. Mrs Jane Knight. (Her husband, John Knight, a successful iron master from Shropshire has just purchased most of Exmoor from the Crown. They had moved to the area and taken up residence in the village. They lived at the Castle, which was then a private house, while they had a mansion built at Simonsbath). Jane Knight saw the need for a good school for the local children. She rented a house which then stood near St Mary's Church and provided the funds needed to open a school.*

An undated letter (in the Knight Archive) is addressed to Jane Knight from Katherine Halliday (the Hallidays lived on the Exmoor coast at Glenthorne), and was written when Katherine had just heard of the Knight family's imminent departure from Exmoor:

*12th Dec  
4 Anerley Park  
Anerley  
SE London*

*To my dear friends on Exmoor,*

*I must say a few words before they make their move, as I may not know where to address them afterwards... it will not surprise you to know that I had the great pleasure yesterday of seeing Mr wise and Blanche who told me of your approaching departure were ignorant of your itinerary.*

The restricted nature of Exmoor society at the time would have meant that the Knight family were unavoidable, but in the case of the Hallidays, the friendship was to endure and went down to the next generation with photographs of members of the Knight family even finding a place in the Halliday family photograph album (I am grateful to Mr and Mrs G Halliday for sharing this with me).

John Knight had also become a Family Trustee of the British Museum on the death of his cousin Richard Payne Knight. On John's death this passed to Frederic Winn Knight, and on his death in 1897 it passed to his nephew Charles Lewis William Morley Knight, with whom it remained until his death in 1937 at which point it ceased.

## AFTER EXMOOR

John Knight left Exmoor for the last time in 1837, apparently because of his wife's health, and passed the day to day management of Exmoor to his eldest son Frederic Winn Knight (below left and right).



**Painting of Frederic Knight**  
(sold by the Sebright Educational Trust in 2008)



**Photograph of Frederic Knight c. 1860**  
(©National Portrait Gallery)

John Knight and his family moved to Trinity Manor House on Jersey (according to CS Orwin *Reclamation of Exmoor Forest* p 32), but no record has been found so far of their occupancy there. The house may have been rented by Knight from the incumbent family, probably the de Carterets. Further research is needed to shed light on their life there, but it was only for two years.

In 1839 Knight moved to Rome. Again Orwin (p32) says he lived in the Palazzo Bracci, Via Rassella. No modern record has been found so far of this building to help identify where it stands. However in *Walks Through the Studii of the Sculptors at Rome*, Volumes 1-2 (Grice H L 1841, p277) Frederick Trupp [sic] is listed under 'Via Rasella, Palazzo Bracci'

(<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=qKgOAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA276&lpg=PA276&dq=palazzo+bracci+rome&source=bl&ots=yxYDqGZJgF&sig=CBI0HbxqTIPJ835kIFX3lZ3RfYc&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjXuund1O3KAhVEqQ4KHSEqA9gQ6AEIOjAE#v=onepage&q=palazzo%20bracci%20rome&f=false>).

The preface to the book is dated January 1841. 'Trupp' is certainly a mis-spelling of Thrupp. Frederick Thrupp was an English sculptor who lived in Rome from early in 1837 until his return to England in October 1842 (Greenwood, M "Thrupp, Frederick". *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.). Oxford

University Press. doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/27397

The Via Rasella (Number 155) was also home to Joseph Severn in 1840. Severn was a friend of John Keats and was also visited by John Ruskin there in the winter of 1840. (Deardon J S 1999 John Ruskin: A life in pictures p8; Sheffield). Severn's letters give detail of life in Rome, and journeys to and from England (it took 10 days by steamer in 1838). Severn returned to England with his family in March 1841. (See After Keats: The Return of Joseph Severn to England in 1838, Grant F. Scott, Muhlenberg College: [www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2005/v/n40/012458ar.html](http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2005/v/n40/012458ar.html)).

From this it seems that Palazzo Bracci in the Via Rasella was an affluent townhouse in a quarter of Rome that was respectable and inhabited by notable English people, characteristics that were well known by the time the Knight family arrived there. It appears that the family retained Palazzo Bracci until at least the 1860s. During the 1840s, from letters to both John and Jane Knight from their son Frederic (Knight Archive) it is clear that other addresses were also used, for examples: the Villa Taverna in Frascati (now known as the Villa Parisi-Borghese), Palazzo Spina d'el Angelo Custodi (Rome). It is also mentioned how well Jane Knight's health does in Frascati, implying they were regular visitors there, and probably regularly rented property, including rooms in the lavish Villa Taverna.

Jane Knight died in 1841 but, somewhat perplexingly, there does not seem to have been any attempt by John Knight to return to Exmoor at that stage. Little is known of his life in Rome (the last 11 years of his life), and, as usual, he seems to remain stubbornly in the shadows. Even the profile portrait of him, probably drawn at this time (around 1841-43), has the feeling of a hurriedly drawn – but very proficient – sketch, perhaps drawn surreptitiously whilst he dozed in a chair.

On 19 August 1843, John Knight, in Frascati, wrote a letter to his son Frederic, in which he says that his dislike of letting Simonsbath House is unabated. He goes on that he would not live at Wolverley and would be

*'surprised if the place hadn't been ransacked by next summer because of the dreadful plight of the thousands of destitute unemployed people'*

He talks about the site of the 'intended bridge over the Barle' at Simonsbath and goes on to say

*'All I want at Simonsbath is the House, garden and cottage with the stables and Barn, carpenter Smith lived in – and the two small fields walled in for garden ground... and after all life is so uncertain at my age that I may never*

*want any of it.'*

On 23 June 1845, John Knight, in Rome, writes again to Frederic

*'At Wolverley I must reside, as I am far too advanced in years to build in Somerset and cannot again live in the Cottage at Simonsbath.'*

(Roger Sellick's papers in the Somerset Heritage Centre contains transcripts of these letters (A/BAZ 1/5))

However, letters from Frederic Knight to his father throughout the 1840s (Knight Archive) show a preoccupation with the family's poor financial situation and the pressures on Frederic. In January 1848 Frederic, writing to his father from his house at 10 Dover Street London, says:

*'My Dear Father*

*I cannot tell you with what pain I write to you. I send you the best account I can of the affairs and the only mode I can imagine of improving them is reducing the expenses of every part of the family. ...*

*...Had it not been for very great mismanagement on my part the gap would have been filled by this time by Exmoor rents and we should have been independent of the iron works...'*

By July 1848 Frederic writes to his father from Leghorn (Ligorno) imploring him to move to Pisa where the costs of living would be halved as compared with Rome. Frederic and Charles had viewed apartments in Pisa and were making plans to move him. On 21 January 1849 Frederic writes to his father and sketches out a plan in the letter of improvements to the house at Simonsbath which he hopes will entice his father to return to England.

Paradoxically, what we learn from all of these letters is that John Knight plays with the idea of coming back and Frederic implores him to do so, but it was not to be. Frederic Knight's last letter to his father was written on 6th January 1850, a little over two weeks before he died. In it he says:

*'My Dear Father*

*I hope to leave England in about a week to join you...'*

He goes on to discuss the improvements on the Forest in characteristic colour:

*'...Tom Acland is coming here tomorrow. He is writing a report of the agriculture of Somersetshire for the prize of the RA Society, which I presume he is going to get. It gives him a good opportunity of canvassing the county and making himself known and agreeable to people. It is well*

worth our while to try to get a good report in his book – He had been crammed with every description of lie about the Forest, before his first visit here, chiefly I believe by that scandalous, malignant toady old Ralph at Exford – Smith however gave him a better opinion of it, and showed him, how intimately the whole doing of the Forest was connected with the work of his father's high land in Winsford etc – I shall see what he means to write and let you know when I come. I hope you are all going on well.

Sent with my love to all  
Your affectionate son  
FW Knight'



## RESTING PLACE OF JOHN AND JANE KNIGHT

John Knight died on 24 January 1850 and was buried in the Protestant cemetery in Rome, the Campo Cestio. An exhaustive survey of the cemetery has been carried out (by The British School at Rome, University of Oxford and Italian authorities) and a catalogue of graves, photographs and a cemetery site plan are available. For further information visit: [www.cemeteryrome.it/about/about.html](http://www.cemeteryrome.it/about/about.html)

The survey of the cemetery records John Knight's grave thus:

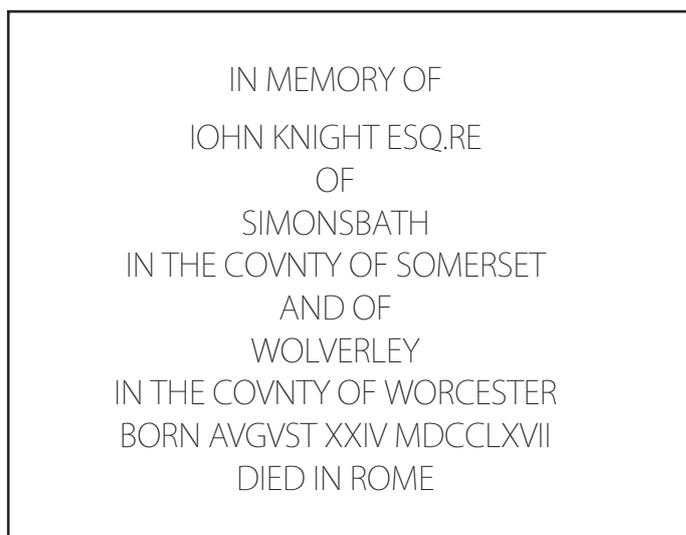
*John Knight 24 August 1767 – 24 January 1850*

*Tomb Number: S288*

*Location within the cemetery: Zona Vecchia*

*Type of monument: Chest; stone. 199cms x 108cms x 60cms*

*Face: top. Condition: reasonable. Method: incised and filled. Type: primary inscription.*



(<http://tei.oucs.ox.ac.uk/pc/S288.html>)



The grave of John Knight in Rome  
[www.cemeteryrome.it/infopoint/MostraFoto.asp?NTomba=1710](http://www.cemeteryrome.it/infopoint/MostraFoto.asp?NTomba=1710)

Knight's wife, Jane Elizabeth (nee Headley, 8 July 1787 – 18 July 1841) had been laid to rest nearby in 1841 (tomb number 1738, Stone S231), having died in Frascati, just outside Rome.

*Jane Elizabeth Knight 8 July 1787 – 18 July 1841; Zone: Zona Vecchia; Type of monument: chest; stone. 198cms x 106cms x 58cms; Face: top. Condition: reasonable. Method: incised and filled. Type: primary inscription.*

IN MEMORY OF  
IANE ELIZABETH  
WIFE OF  
IOHN KNIGHT  
DAVGHTER OF  
GEORGE LORD HEADLEY  
BORN IVLY VIII MDCCLXXXVII  
DIED AT FRASCATI  
IVLY XVIII MDCCCXLI

[www.cemeteryrome.it/infopoint/MostraFoto.asp?NTomba=1738](http://www.cemeteryrome.it/infopoint/MostraFoto.asp?NTomba=1738)



The grave of Jane Elizabeth Knight in Rome

## CHILDREN OF JOHN AND JANE KNIGHT; KNIGHT FAMILY LIFE IN ROME; EDWARD LEAR

John and Jane Knight had six children: Margaret (1810-1872), Frederic Winn (1812-1897), Charles Allanson (1814-1879), Isabella (1816-1870), Edward Lewis (1817-1882), Helen Georgiana (1820-1893).

### Margaret Knight (June 4, 1810 - October 19, 1872)



Margaret Knight  
drawn by Franz Nadorp  
(on p55 of Isabella Knight's  
commonplace book)



Unknown member of the Knight  
family sold by Christies in 2008.  
Comparison with Margaret's portrait  
in Isabella Knight's scrapbook  
suggest that this might be Margaret.

Margaret married Onorato Gaetani, Duke of Sermoneta, prince of Teano. The marriage is recorded in *The Spectator* in January 1855 (p12):

*On the 11th December [1854], at Rome, Don Michel-Angelo Cailani, Duke of Sermoneta, Prince of Teano, &c., to Margaret, eldest daughter of the late John Knight, Esq., of Wolverley House, Worcester, and Simonds bath, Somerset*

Margaret was the Duke's second wife out of three. The first died in childbirth, The Duke also outlived Margaret, and then married again to Miss Harriet Ellis. He died in 1882.



**Michel-Angelo,  
Margaret's husband.**

The following is a preface to Duchess Harriet's letters:

[https://archive.org/stream/lettersofharriet00serm/lettersofharriet00serm\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/lettersofharriet00serm/lettersofharriet00serm_djvu.txt)

Letters of Harriet, duchess of Sermoneta, to Miss Denison : 1862-1905 (Printed for private circulation. London 1912. John Murray, Albemarle Street)

*'Growing tired of this wandering life without any settled home, she [Harriet Ellis] made up her mind, in 1874, to take a small flat in Florence. She had*

*not, however, been established there many months before she married, in 1875, the Duke of Sermoneta, with whom she had become intimate the previous winter in Rome. Michel Angelo Caetani, Duke of Sermoneta, was born in 1804, and was therefore past 70 when he married Miss Ellis, and some years previously he had become totally blind. He had been married twice before – his first wife, Countess Rzewuska, who died young, was the mother of the present Duke of Sermoneta and of Countess Lovatelli – of both of whom frequent mention is made in the letters. The Duke's second wife was Miss Knight, who died in 1872, leaving him in his blindness very forlorn and lonely. Miss Ellis, also, was lonely, and felt her life an objectless one...'*

The Duke of Sermoneta was a cosmopolitan; with an especial interest in the arts. His house was the meeting place of national and international scholars, such as François-René de Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Franz Liszt, Honoré de Balzac, Renan, Hippolyte Taine, Frédéric Ozanam, Jean-Jacques Ampère, George Ticknor, Ferdinand Gregorovius, Alfred von Reumont, Démosthène Ollivier.

A series of letters to Margaret from the Duke were written before their marriage (*The Last Days of Papal Rome 1850-1870*, R De Cesare, London 1909 p71) in which the Duke condemns the naivety of Italian society in terms of its politics. Around this time (1848) 'the Duke knew personally nearly all the intellectual men of his day – from Sir Walter Scott to Stendhal, from Nibby to Fea – receiving them in that simple lodging in the Botteghe Oscure which he called 'the Catacombs' (p 71). Sermoneta also received the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII.

Another visitor to the Duchess' home was Edward Lear (Edward Lear, A Life by Peter Levi). Edward Lear had known the Knights since 1838 'and was on intimate terms with them' (ibid p90). Lear lived in Rome between 1837 and 1848 (*E Lear The Complete Nonsense and Other Verse*, edited by Vivien Noakes, Penguin 2002). Lear is best known for his Complete Nonsense which comprises cartoons, limericks and nonsense stories. However he is less known as an accomplished watercolourist, who travelled in search of places to paint.

Edward Lear painted the castle where Margaret lived:



**Castello  
Caetani  
by Edward  
Lear**



Margaret Knight photographed around 1860 (on p 84 of Isabella Knight's commonplace book)

**Frederic Winn Knight (1812-1897)** was educated at Charterhouse School (c.1823–1828) and in his mid to late 20s took over the management of the Knight estates on Exmoor. In the same year that he took over the running of the Knight estates he was elected MP for West Worcestershire. A letter to his mother, written on 19th March 1841, makes his dilemma clear:

*'My Dear Mamma*

*It is long since I wrote to you but I do hold it a principle that when one has nothing agreeable to say or communicate it is best to be silent and neither speak or write – I have now however a good deal of news for you – the unhappy writer after much mature consideration on his circumstances, his family and what is more to the purpose, his fate, finds it adverse, and finds himself annually compelled to remain for the present in England – Exmoor! Downton! What the devil is to be done? I am farmer? Duced disagreeable! Go into Parliament? Uncommon stupid! And yet fate is fate, and 'the man who was born etc.'*

Frederic Winn Knight married Maria Louisa Couling Gibbs in 1850 and they had one son (who predeceased his father, dying in 1879). Financial uncertainty forms a constant theme in Frederic's incredibly busy life. Ann Headley sums it up in a letter to Frederic from the Headley Estates in Aghadoe, Co Kerry on 29 November 1852 (Knight Archive):

*'Dear Frederic*

*Your letter gave me most sincere and heartfelt pleasure as it conveyed the pleasing intelligence that the first step on the ladder was surmounted and hope a higher advancement in permanency may 'ere very long be obtained. God grant your praiseworthy exertions may meet success and that you may not be deterred by pleasure and society from perseverance in your very arduous task almost night and day and that your good health may not be impaired by constant application. When I reflect upon the prospects of your father when he married and the reality of wealth in various ways after his uncle's death and then to have his eldest son in the state you are now placed, I am not only grieved but bewildered, it seems as if impossible.'*

Not only was Exmoor short of funds, but following the death of John Knight, and through the terms of his will, Frederic was forced to make payment to the other beneficiaries (his siblings), but there was insufficient revenue in Exmoor. This led to another Chancery suit; Ann Headley writes again in an undated letter from Aghadoe (Knight Archive):

*'...for indeed you have need of consolation for the mystifying conduct of your nearest relatives. Their behaviour is past all imagination unkind and perfectly unaccountable. I was told that Charles last year had received 3000 as his last year's share of the iron works. It is a cruel case after all your exertions to have the property sold just as the benefit of management is beginning to repay the outlay etc. You do not state how Lewis behaves or in what light he considers C and your sisters' proceedings.'*

Frederic Winn Knight represented the constituency for 44 years and while an MP he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Poor Law Board in 1852 under Lord Derby's administration and again in 1858–9 under Lord Palmerston. He took on the running of the family's Cookley ironworks late on in life; his only previous commercial experience was gained as a director of the Bank of London and the National Provincial Insurance Association. Frederic Winn Knight was knighted in 1886 for public services as a member of parliament and a justice of the peace. He seems to have inherited the family trait of making bold decisions, for in 1886 he moved the iron business from Cookley to Brockmoor at Brierley Hill in the Black Country. He died at 19 Marlborough Buildings, Bath, on 3 May 1897. He

was survived by his wife; however, his only son predeceased him, dying in 1879. The new works at Brockmoor was operated by a new limited company with Knight involvement into the early years of the twentieth century. He was a man of great determination, almost boundless energy and with a strong sense of public duty. (This content is derived from Laurence Ince's account of the Knights in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography; © Oxford University Press 2004–16, all rights reserved)



**Portrait of Frederic Knight sold as such by Christies in 2008**

**Charles Allanson Knight (1814–1879)** was closely involved in the Exmoor farming improvements and various letters from him and references to him survive in letters found in the Knight Archive. He married Jessie Ramsay (1828–1922) in 1862, daughter of William Ramsay (1800–1881) (a.k.a. Innes) of Barra, Inverurie, and widow of Count Alexander de Polignac (d.1858). Jessie Ann Ramsey (styled Jessie Knight of Wolverley (1828-1922)). She was daughter of William Ramsey and wife of Alexandre de Polignac (1821-1858) and later, Charles Allanson Knight. She is sometimes styled as Jessie Ann, Comtesse de Polignac (see [www.lincstothepast.com/Records/RecordDisplaySearchResults.aspx?oid=576005&mode=c](http://www.lincstothepast.com/Records/RecordDisplaySearchResults.aspx?oid=576005&mode=c))

His children were under the guardianship of the Fane Family of Fulbeck Hall, Lincolnshire, between 1876 and 1887. W.D. Fane wrote in his correspondence of summer 1855 of visiting his friend 'Knight' in Rome, probably at the house of John Knight in Via Rasella.



**Charles Allanson Knight drawn by Franz Nadorp (on p 62 of Isabella Knight's commonplace book). The set of five paintings of John Knight's children, sold by Christies, does not include one of Charles.**



**Jessie Knight  
(nee Ramsay) of  
Wolverley**

Charles Allanson was good friends with Edward Lear (1812-1888). The following extract is from an auction catalogue:

Description: Bethlehem signed with monogram (lower right) and further signed and inscribed 'BETHLEHEM/EDWARD LEAR 1875/Painted for Charles Allanson Knight Esq.' (on the reverse) oil on canvas 93/8 x 181/4 in. (23.7 x 46.4 cm.)

PROVENANCE Charles Allanson Knight. Anon. sale; Sotheby's, London, 22 November 1983, lot 24. Private Collection, by 1986. We are grateful to Vivien Noakes for providing us with the following catalogue entry: In the early months of 1858, Edward Lear visited Palestine arriving in Jerusalem on 28th March. He quickly moved south to Bethlehem and Hebron and then on into the desert to

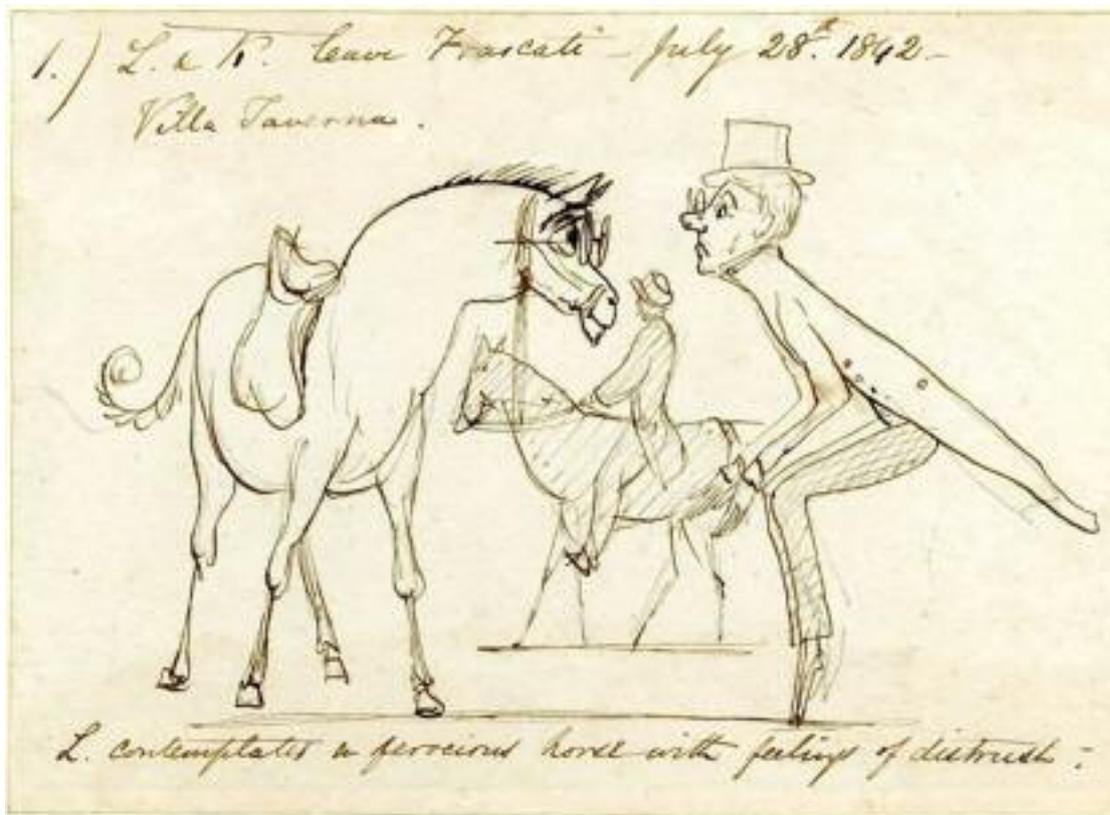
Petra. His trip to the Holy Land also included the Dead Sea, Masada and Jericho. In writing to one of his patron's, Lady Waldegrave, regarding this trip, he concludes 'My stay at Bethlehem delighted me greatly - & I then hoped to have got similar drawings of all the Holy Land. - All the country near it is lovely - and you see Ruth in the fields all day below those dark olives.' (*Edward Lear - Selected Letters*, edited by Vivien Noakes, Oxford, 1988, p. 157). Bethlehem is noted as no. 101 in Lear's portfolio. It was painted for Charles Allanson Knight. The date 1875 on the back may relate to the delivery of the painting, for Lear did not go to England in 1873 but left for India in November of that year. Lear met Charles Knight shortly after his arrival in Rome in 1837. He accompanied Lear on travels in the Abruzzi, described by Lear in *Illustrated Excursions in Italy, volume I* (1846). In preparation for the tour Knight gave Lear some riding lessons, and Lear made a series of nonsense drawings of his adventures while learning to ride, described as 'Lear's adventures on horseback' (in Lear and Noakes 2006; Lear's complete Book of Nonsense); (also Royal Academy catalogue, 1985, pp. 102-3).

Charles Knight was an accomplished horserider having learnt to ride at home on Exmoor, where his father had acquired a stable of arab horses. At their departure on 26 July 1843 from La Mentorella, Lear writes: 'Having sufficiently rested and fed Gridiron, Iron-Grey and ourselves, we proceeded downward on our way to Subiaco;' (Lear, E *Over the Land and Over The Sea; selected nonsense and travel writings*)



**Edward Lear's painting of Bethlehem for Charles Allanson Knight**

The sixteen cartoons of Lear and Knight on their adventures on horseback (Lear and Noakes 2001, 63-70 and Notes on p 483) cover a visit by the pair to the Abruzzi, for which Charles Allanson Knight lent Lear his Arab horse, Gridiron. The subject of the cartoons is chiefly Lear's inept attempts to stay on Gridiron. As such they are funny and affectionate. Lear subsequently retraced their steps on foot, at his own pace, to make drawings of what he had seen. (The original cartoons are not found in Isabella Knight's 'commonplace book' (see below) held in the British Museum as stated by Noakes.)



'L' (Lear) and 'K' (Knight) leave the Villa Taverna, Frascati, 28th July 1842.

A bespectacled Lear views his bespectacled horse 'with feelings of distrust' whilst the elegant figure of Charles Allanson Knight rides off quietly!



**Villa Taverna, Frascati; a mid 19th century view.**

**Clearly, from correspondence addressed to the Villa, the Knights used it in summer months from time to time. Jane Elizabeth Knight died in Frascati, implying, perhaps, a regular summer residence there.**

The following is taken from Handbook for Travellers in Central Italy: including the Papal States, Rome and the cities of Etruria 1843 p 489-93; published by John Murray, London

*This excursion is generally performed in a single day, but the best plan is to sleep at Frascati for at least two nights, and combine a visit to the ruins of Tusculum, Grotta Ferrata, and Marino with an excursion to Monte Cavi and the site of Alba Longa. The charge for a carriage with two horses, to go to Frascati and return to Rome on the same day, is four scudi, exclusive of buonamano... Those who do not object to travel in a public carriage will find one daily at the TreRe near the Capitol: the charge is from four to five*

*pauls for each seat. The road leaves Rome by the Porta S. Giovanni (P260): for a few hundred yards beyond the gate it traverses the ancient Via Latina. It leaves the ancient road soon after crossing the Maranna, but pursues a course nearly parallel to it for about half the distance to Frascati....'*

*'Frascati – this interesting town is prettily situated on one of the lower eminences of the Alban Hills with a population of 4975 souls. (Inns: H. de Londres, very good; H de Paris; Croce Bianca, now a lodging house). Frascati is one of the favourite resorts of the Roman families during the villeggiatura, and in the summer months every house is filled with company. Many English families who spend the summer in this part of Italy prefer it to every other place in the neighbourhood of Rome: the climate is pure and healthy, and the excursions in its neighbourhood, if not more beautiful, are more accessible than those in the contorni of Tivoli....'*

*The villas of Frascati, which constitute its most remarkable feature, were built chiefly in the sixteenth century. The most important is the Villa Aldobrandini....'*

*...Villa Taverna, built by the Cardinal of that name in the sixteenth century, from the designs of Girolamo Rainaldi. For many years it has been the property of the Borghese family and was the favourite residence of Paul V.'*

The following is from: [www.parisivilla.com/history/](http://www.parisivilla.com/history/)

*In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century families that were linked to the papal court built twelve great villas in the Alban Hills. Villa Parisi, in Monte Porzio Catone, near Frascati, is one of the remaining villas and was built in 1603 by Monsignor Ferrante Taverna. Taverna belonged to a prestigious family from Milan and was at the time the Governor of Rome and appointed Cardinal under Pope Clement VIII*

The Knight's life in Italy seems to have included Rome; Frascati, which is situated a little to the south-east of Rome and where Charles Allanson and Edward Lear seemed to have spent time together; Sermoneta (where Margaret lived) and Florence (where Isabella eventually lived for the remainder of her life).

The Tablet (<http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/5th-december-1840/3/foreign-correspondence>) puts 'Hon Mrs Knight, Misses Knight and Mr C Allanson Knight in Florence on 5th December 1840 with other 'respectable visitors'.

Charles Allanson Knight had two children: Charles Lewis William Morley Knight (1863-1937) and Margaret Elizabeth Knight 22 June 1864 – 20 August 1940).



Charles Lewis William Morley Knight and Margaret Elizabeth Knight, known as 'Rita'.(photographs in Halliday family album)



Charles Lewis William Morley Knight and Margaret Elizabeth Knight, known as 'Rita'  
(photographs in Halliday family album)

Colonel Charles Lewis William Morley Knight (1863-1937) was a soldier and entrepreneur. Charles Lewis William Morley Knight born February 13, 1863 in St Cyr, France (info from Ancestry 1891 census) and died in Argentina in 1937. In 1884 while still a Captain, he wrote *Hints on Driving*, referring to the driving of horse drawn carriages. Thomas (1919) wrote that the tuco-tuco 'is named in honour of Col C Morley Knight, by whom, in conjunction with his partner Col J L Porteous, the explorations of Messrs Kemp and Budin have been so much facilitated in various ways.' As he was resident in Buenos Aires, Knight would have facilitated expeditions to Argentina. He was joint owner with Porteous of a successful horse-breeding operation at a farm called Las Tres Lagunas in Las Rosas, Santa Fe Province, Argentina. Knight and Porteous first went to Argentina in 1889 to look for horses for the British army. They became partners, not only in horse breeding but also in cattle, and they introduced the Aberdeen Angus breed of cattle into Argentina in 1890. Whereas Porteous returned to the UK and looked after the European end of the business, visiting Argentina only occasionally thereafter, Knight stayed on in Argentina for the rest of his life. The tuco-tuco is found in north-west Argentina. (Beolens, Watkins and Grayson 2009, 225-6; *The Eponym Dictionary of Mammals* by Bo Beolens, Michael Watkins, Michael Grayson, Baltimore 2009; ISBN-13: 978-0-8018-9304-9)

Elizabeth Margaret Knight (1864-1940; known as 'Rita', and styled on the genealogy website, 'Geni', as of Château de La Roche Gençay, France) was born in Chateau de la Source, Loiret, France. Elizabeth Margaret Knight married Camille Armand Jules Marie, Prince de Polignac (1832-1913) who was a French nobleman who served in the Crimea in the French army and then in the American Civil War on the Confederate side. He was born into one of the most well established families of the French nobility; they had strong royal connections and his grandmother had been the closest friend of Queen Marie Antoinette.

After the Civil War, Polignac returned to his large estate in France, and resumed his travels and studies in Central America. He published several articles on his Civil War experiences. He returned to the French army as a brigadier general and commanded a division in the Franco-Prussian War (1870 to 1871).

In Ober-Ingelheim on 4 November 1874 he married Marie Adolphine/Adolfine Langenberger (Frankfurt, 7 June 1853 – Paris, 16 January 1876) and had one daughter: Marie Armande Mathilde.

In London on 3 May 1883 he married secondly Margaret Elizabeth Knight (Olivet, 22 June 1864 – La Roche-Gençay, 20 August 1940) and had two daughters and one son:

- Mabel Constance (London, 29 January 1884 - Tamaris, 28 March 1973), married in Torquay on 12 July 1906 Marie Henri Thierry Michel de Pierredon, Comte de Pierredon (Paris, 11 September 1883 - La Roche-Gençay, 8 July 1955)
- Hélène Agnès Anne (Vienna, 30 June 1886 - Limpiville, 23 December 1978), married in Torquay on 20 August 1910 Henri Marie Georges, Le Compasseur Créqui Montfort Marquis de Courtrivon (Saint-Adresse, 27 September 1877 - Neuilly, 4 April 1966)
- Victor Mansfield Alfred (London, 17 June 1899 - 4 November 1998), married in Monaco on 27 June 1963 Elizabeth Ashfield Walker (Washington, 11 May 1896 - Monaco, 17 November 1976), without issue

An insight into the marriage between Margaret Elizabeth and Camille Armand Jules Marie is found in a letter from Margaret's mother, Jessie Knight, to W D Fane a family friend and guardian of Margaret. The letter describes how

*'last season an old dirty looking Frenchman called Prince Polignac lived as a guest in Charles Street [with Jessie Knight's sister in law], Countess Polignac and her daughter. In March last the Prince prosecuted a young man who claimed to be his son, who had set on fire his house in France.'*



The letter details the 'story of the Prince's two previous marriages and finds that but for the absence of Fane's consent, the marriage would have already taken place between the old Ruffian and his sister-in-law's daughter. It must be put off till the girl comes of age, and the Frenchman should be sent away'.

**The marriage of Prince Camille de Polignac to 'Rita' Knight (photograph in Halliday family photograph album)**

**Date:** 4 May 1883

**Repository:** Lincolnshire Archives [057]

**Date:** 4 May 1883 1-FANE/5/33/17

Charles Allanson Knight died on 26 January 1879 and is buried in Cannes. The cemetery record lists: 'photo no 214, alley 9. Knight, Charles Allanson, died 26 Jan 1879, born July 1814 Wolverley, Worcestershire'.

Charles Allanson Knight's will states

([www.lincstothepast.com/Records/RecordDisplaySearchResults.aspx?oid=576005&mode=c](http://www.lincstothepast.com/Records/RecordDisplaySearchResults.aspx?oid=576005&mode=c)):

1. Guardianship of children of Charles Allanson Knight of Wolverley, Worcestershire, esq. under his will

Charles Allanson Knight of Wolverley, Worcestershire, esq.

All his share in the Cookley Iron Works in par. Wolverley and all his lands and hereditaments in Worcestershire, to son Charles Morley Knight. Executors to give his brother Edward Lewis Knight first option at purchasing his shares in the works. Residue of real and personal estate to trustees upon trust to sell same and invest the proceeds and pay the income to testator's wife, Jessie Ann, Comtesse de Polignac, during her life. After her death, to be held in trust for his children when they come of age, in equal shares. Guardians of his children during their minority: his wife, his friends Barwick Baker of Hardwick Court, Gloucestershire, esq., and William Dashwood Fane of Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire. 16 March, 1876.

Codicil. Revokes bequest of shares in iron works to son, and instead bequeaths them to wife Jessie Ann Comtesse de Polignac. 7 June 1877.

**Date:** 1876-1877

**Repository:** Lincolnshire Archives [057]

**Date:** 1876-1877 1-FANE/5/33/2



**Charles Allanson Knight**  
(photographs in  
Halliday family album)

### Isabella Jane Knight (13 September, 1816 - 17 July, 1870)



Isabella Jane Knight (on p 61 of Isabella Knight's commonplace book)

Isabella kept a 'commonplace book' which she began on Exmoor; on the inside leaves are written 'Isabella Jane Knight Simonsbath February 1837'. It seems therefore to have been started in Simonsbath and travelled with her to Jersey, Rome and then Florence. It is now in the British Museum (British Museum number 1938,0514.1.1-41). There is no information in it about Exmoor, but there are valuable portraits of members of the family as well as the only known attributed portrait of John Knight. Its broader interest is through the inclusion of material by Edward Lear.

The book is in good condition and is bound in maroon leather. It contains 100 numbered pages. Most of the text is in English but some also in German. There are 37 numbered drawings (mostly pasted in) including various portraits of the Knight family (some by Franz Nadorp). There are also topographic and other sketches by Edward Lear. There are three pressed botanical specimens. The portraits include John Knight, Mrs John Knight, the Prussian Ambassador at Rome, Margaret Knight (Duchess of Sermoneta), Helen Knight, Captain Edward Lewis Knight, Isabella Knight, Charles Allanson Knight. The views include Frascati (Villa Taverna), Rome, Leghorn (Livorno), and Jersey. At the beginning of the book are two sheets of notes by Arthur Hind (British Museum), dated 1938. They record details of the bequest, which was from Charles Lewis William Morley Knight who died in Argentina in 1937 and was a family trustee of the British Museum. There is also a Knight family tree and other details.

Several pieces in the book seem to be by admirers of Isabella. One poem in German is entitled 'On Fraulein Isabella Knight' and is dated 1850; another in English, gives an insight into the admiration of one of her followers:

On being repeatedly asked by a young lady to write some verses for her album

Thou still wilt ask some idle strain,  
Nor answer yet I've given to thee;  
But still I let thee ask again;  
For sweet that angel voice to me.

With sound lip sweet, in sultry hour,  
When gasps the thirsting earth for rain  
She hears at length the pattering shower  
That brings her verdant garb again.

Less sweetly falls the murmuring sound  
At first on fainting pilgrim's ear,  
That mid the tangled verbage round,  
Betrays the bubbling fountain near.

Then, dearest, should ill reply  
The music of that voice divine,  
Thy page that merits worthier lay,  
Deforming with such verse as mine.



Painting sold by Christies on behalf of the Sebright Educational Trust in 2008; probably Isabella Jane Knight through comparison with the pencil portrait of her in her own scrapbook in the British Museum



**One of Edward Lear's drawings, entitled the 'Villa Taverna Aug 21 1842; E Lear. del.' (one of a series of Lear landscapes inserted into Isabella Knight's commonplace book between pp 73-79) and probably drawn for her or the Knight family by Lear**

Five portraits of Knight family members were sold by the Sebright Educational Foundation at Christies South Kensington on 8 January 2008, (Sale Number 5343, lots 132-136). Although apparently unattributed they certainly include John Knight's daughters: Margaret, Isabella Jane and Helen Georgiana, because of the dress and portrait style and comparison with portraits in Isabella's scrapbook. Two other portraits sold at the same time were of Frederic Knight (the only one to be attributed) and an unknown member of the Knight family, now identified as Edward Lewis Knight (see above).

Isabella Jane Knight died on 17 July 1870. She never married. She lived at No 7 Piazza Pitti in Florence directly opposite the Pitti Palace. She is described in the London Gazette (Issue 23861, p 2504, see below) as being formerly of Palazzo Bracci in Rome:

*Miss ISABELLA JANE KNIGHT, Deceased.*

*Pursuant to the Act of Parliament 22nd and 23rd Victoria, chapter 35, intituled "An Act to further amend the Law of Property, and to relieve Trustees." NOTICE is hereby given, that all creditors and other persons having any debt or claim against or upon the estate of Isabella Jane Knight, formerly of the Palazzo Bracci, in the city of Rome, and late of No. 1, Piazza Pitti, in the city of Florence, in Italy, Spinster (who died at Florence, on or about the 17th day of July, 1870, and whose will, with two codicils thereto, was proved in the Principal Registry of Her Majesty's Court of Probate, by James Robert Hope Scott, Esquire, Q.C., the sole acting executor named in the said will, on the 4th day of November, 1870), are hereby required to send, on or before the 30th day of June now next ensuing, particulars of such debts or claims to Messrs. Currie and Williams, of No. 32, Lincoln's-innfields, London, the Solicitors of the said executor. And notice is hereby given, that after the said 30th day of June now next ensuing, the said James Robert Hope Scott will proceed to distribute the assets of the said Isabella Jane Knight among the parties entitled thereto, having regard to the debts and claims of which he may then have had notice and he will not be answerable for the assets so distributed to any person or persons of whose debt or claim he shall not then have had notice.—Dated this 22nd day of May, 1872.*



**Piazza Pitti, Florence, where Isabella Knight lived until she died in 1870**

Isabella was buried in the 'English Cemetery' in Florence (The English Cemetery in Florence, Italy is at Piazzale Donatello. Its names, 'Cimitero Inglese' and 'Cimitero Protestante' are somewhat misleading, as the cemetery holds bodies of Orthodox Christians as well as those of many Reformed Churches; but the majority of those buried here were of the Anglophone British and American communities of Florence).

A website cataloguing the individuals buried in the cemetery - [www.florin.ms/ChapterE.html](http://www.florin.ms/ChapterE.html) lists:

E12P/ E96/ 1099/ ISABELLA JANE KNIGHT/ ENGLAND/ SACRED TO THE MEMORY/ OF/ ISABELLA JANE KNIGHT/ ... / ROM./ 1099

Her father, an iron magnate, retired to Rome in 1841, leaving the oldest brother Frederick [sic] Knight M.P., to manage the large Exmoor estate. She dies at 52, likely unmarried.

Lastra. Marmista ignoto. Sec. XIX, post 7/1870. Ambito toscano. Marmo sporco. Possibile intervento di pulitura. [M: A: 2: L: 70; P: 133; P.s. A: 26; L: 80; P: 142.]

Iscrizione sepolcrale in inglese incisa in lettere capitali e numeri arabi: **SACRED TO THE MEMORY/ OF/ ISABELLA JANE KNIGHT/ ... / ROM./ 1099/** Eglise



**Isabella Jane Knight's grave in Florence, Italy**

Evangelique-Reformée de Florence  
Régistre des Morts: Isabelle Knight,  
l'Angleterre, fille de Jean/ III: 1865-1870  
'Registre des Sepultures' avec detail des  
frais, Francs 483/ GL23777/1 N° 424  
Burial 19/07, Rev Rothwell Johnson,  
Piazza Pitti, 7//Registro alfabetico delle  
persone tumulate nel Cimitero di Pinti:  
Knight/ Isabella/ Giovanni/ Inghilterra/  
Firenze/ 17 Luglio/ 1870/ Anni 52/  
1099/ Records, Guildhall Library,  
London: N&Q 360. Isabell Jane Knight,  
b. 13 Sept., 1816; ob. 17 July, 1870, d. of  
John Knight, Esq., of Wolverley, Worcs,  
and Simonsbath, Somerset. Chiesa  
Evangelica Riformata Svizzera, 1827-  
present.

For her brother, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick\\_Knight\\_%28MP%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Knight_%28MP%29), entry with portraits of three of his sisters who are not identified

**Edward Lewis Knight (1817–1882)**, of Hornacott Manor, Boyton, Cornwall. From family letters in the Knight Archive he seems to have been often known by the family as 'Lewis'. He was born on 7 December 1817 in Wolverley, Worcestershire. He died in 1882 and is buried in the cemetery of St John the Baptist's Church, Buxton, Derbyshire, although in the preceding year the 1881 census places him at Wolverley.



**Edward Lewis Knight (on p 60 of Isabella Knight's commonplace book)**

Edward Lewis Knight served in the 20th (The East Devonshire) Regiment of Foot (serving at Bermuda). He was made ensign in July 1842, Lieutenant in June 1843 and Captain on 3 April 1846. (The New Army List No XXIX January 1846 by Captain H G Hart:

[https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=0-cNAAAAQAAJ&pg=RA2-PA71&lpg=RA2-PA71&dq=captain+edward+lewis+knight,+20th+regiment&source=bl&ots=DWQhjZe4Kb&sig=qpQ9lc8pgp\\_rmO6JJmno9DSMdBw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjzqljRtJjMAhXMGD4KHeoKBjkQ6AEIkjAC#v=onepage&q=captain%20edward%20lewis%20knight%20%2020th%20regiment&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=0-cNAAAAQAAJ&pg=RA2-PA71&lpg=RA2-PA71&dq=captain+edward+lewis+knight,+20th+regiment&source=bl&ots=DWQhjZe4Kb&sig=qpQ9lc8pgp_rmO6JJmno9DSMdBw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjzqljRtJjMAhXMGD4KHeoKBjkQ6AEIkjAC#v=onepage&q=captain%20edward%20lewis%20knight%20%2020th%20regiment&f=false); accessed 18 April 2016). In April 1847 part of the Regiment proceeded from Bermuda to Nova Scotia ([https://ia800503.us.archive.org/3/items/cihm\\_48351/cihm\\_48351.pdf](https://ia800503.us.archive.org/3/items/cihm_48351/cihm_48351.pdf) p56; accessed 18 April 2016).

In June 1846 Edward Lewis Knight was promoted to Captain in the 1st West India Regiment

([www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/20613/page/2175/data.pdf](http://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/20613/page/2175/data.pdf); accessed 18 April 2016).

In her diary entry for 22nd July 1849 (page 21), Chasse Harris writes of Edward Knight her future husband:

*'All went to church except Papa and Mamma who are not very well. Mr. Howard told us that Captain Knight was kept a Prisoner of War at Rome and is to get three months more leave. I am very sorry for it as I long to see him...'*

In 1854 he is described as 'late of H.M.'s Twentieth Regiment'

(<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/13th-may-1854/20/births>; accessed 19 April 2016)

He married three times. First to Charlotte ('Chasse') Owen Harris, referenced in the Spectator (12 July 1851, p 20: <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/12th-july-1851/20/births>):

*On the 12th June, at Eldon House, London, Canada West, Edward Lewis, son of the late John Knight, Esq., of Wolverley House, Worcestershire, to Charlotte Owen, daughter of the late John Harris, Esq., Royal Navy*



**Left:**

Edward Lewis Knight and his wife Charlotte ('Chasse') Harris  
(courtesy of Phyllis Ryerse)

**Below:**

Painting sold by Christies on behalf of the Sebright Educational Trust in 2008; it can clearly be identified as Edward Lewis Knight by comparison with the portrait of him in Isabella Knight's scrapbook and the photograph of him with his wife, Chasse Knight.



In 1854 Edward and Charlotte were leaving Italy when appalling tragedy struck. They were travelling on the SS *Ercolano* from Genoa to Marseilles when it was in collision with SS *Sciliana*. The *Ercolano* was a wooden vessel, the *Sciliana*, newly built, made of iron. The latter rammed into the side of the former at speed and then withdrew. The accident happened at night in bad weather and the *Ercolano* sank within minutes.

The incident was vividly recorded by Edward Lewis Knight through his own accounts of the desperate, heart-rending attempts to rescue his wife and two sons who were trapped in their cabin. His attempts were in vain and Charlotte either died in the collision or was drowned with both her sons – Edward John Allanson Knight (2 years 2 months) and Robert Winn Knight (9 months) – Charlotte was also heavily pregnant at the time. An account of the sinking was published in 2014 by descendants of Charlotte Harris: *Tragic Sinking of the Ercolano* (2014 Phyllis Ryerse and Mike Crutchley).

In all around 38 passengers and crew were drowned including: Thomas Plumer, his wife Frederica (nee Johnson) and their son Ethelbert Arthur Sackville Halsey. Other passengers survived including Sir Robert Peel, son of the Prime Minister, who gave lectures about his experience, several entitled 'Lecture by Sir Robert Peel - Most Interesting Account of His Shipwreck' (source: Wikipedia) which perhaps contrast in self-promotion with the tragic recollections, numbing grief and harrowing loss of Edward Lewis Knight.



**Charlotte ('Chasse') Knight (nee Harris).**  
Image courtesy of Phyllis Ryerse

On April 27th 1854 Edward wrote to Harris family friend Henry Becher in London, Ontario:

*'Poor Chasse, could not have suffered many moments. I have no doubt that the bow of the steamer passed directly through their cabin and as it pulled back, the maids climbed up through the chasm. They had the larboard ladies cabin and were asleep in the forward berths against the ship's side. The maids may have been lying on the floor at the after end of the cabin – this is the only way I can account for hearing no cries from the cabin and for finding the maids on deck. I know they did not pass through the door.*

*On that dreadful night, from the first crash I knew that the moments were numbered. I moved quickly through the sinking ship never doubting my power to save her until I found every avenue blocked and heard those terrible words, "you cannot save them". Then the lantern went out and with it my last hope. I was not even permitted to die with her as I believe nothing but the loss of my thumb intervened to save my life.*

*The doctors say my hand will soon be well and if so I think I shall go to London and try to join the army in the East. I need to hear her advice now when I need it most.*

*I only hear her calling... "Edward, Edward".'*

Edward's sister, Isabella, wrote to her sister-in-law's mother on 4th May 1854, and we hear her own sensitive and emotional sentiments. To Amelia Harris, Chasse's mother:

*'Pal. Bracie, Rome, May 4th 1854...*

*By the time this reaches you, the first shock of this awful event will have passed and you will begin to realize that my brother is indeed a widower and childless and that your sweet Chasse and her darling infants have passed into that land where sorrow and suffering can touch them no more forever. Poor Edward utters no words of complaint but is crushed. He trusted in his own strength and coolness to save her and they availed him nothing.*

*If human sympathy could avail some comfort, few cases of private sorrow can ever have called forth such universal sympathy as this awful bereavement. Even the shop people say: 'they seemed to have*

*one heart' and they speak in tears of the winning ways of their baby boys. I wanted to tell you how much we loved them. How good and gentle and pure and kind-hearted she was – how happy and cheerful – how easily pleased, how earnestly striving daily to grow in holiness and in the fear and love of God. One read in her countenance that she was a happy wife and mother. The children were both very sweet tempered. Little Robert was thought very handsome and my darling Godson very small but so very loving and intelligent, so good and obedient – all that one could possibly will him to be – very fond of his little brother who seemed to return his love. Blessed are the dead who die in the lord.*

*With the deepest sympathy and respect I remain truly yours,  
Isabella Jane Knight'*

Despite the appalling loss, Edward Lewis regained his life after some time, and married again in 1858 to Henrietta Mary Sanford, (who died in May 1876), with whom he had four children. Edward Lewis Knight married a third time at Wantage in 1877 to Edith Emma Butler (1851–1936). (Edith) Emma Butler was a member of the Gosling Society (1859-77) which was founded by novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge to encourage young girls to write. Each girl had a pen name – Emma's was 'Frog' – and they wrote two essays a month. The best were circulated amongst the group. The foundation of the Gosling Society reflects the anxiety felt by many Victorians about the restricted educational opportunities for women.'

(<https://community.dur.ac.uk/c.e.schultze/context/goslings.html>; accessed 19 April 2016)

Edward Lewis Knight's four children with Henrietta were: Lewis Ayshford Knight (b 1858), Isabella Dora (b 1861), Eric Ayshford (b 1863) and Guy Cunninghame (b 1866). Lewis Ayshford Knight was born in January 1858 at St James, Westminster and died without children in Canada on 15th May 1902. He is buried at St John's Anglican Cathedral cemetery, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Eric Ayshford Knight (1863-1944) eventually inherited Wolverley. It is worth reflecting that the first 'future' heir of the estates, Edward John Knight, died aged 2 years, when he drowned with his mother and little brother on the SS *Ercolano*.

Eric Knight was Conservative MP for Kidderminster for four consecutive terms 1906-1922, Chairman of Kidderminster Rural District Council and Chairman of The Governors of Sebright School. Wolverley House was gifted to the Sebright Educational Trust by his son, Richard Ayshford Knight (1902-1961), in 1944.

Eric's eldest son, Frederic Ayshford Knight, was born on 22 September 1900 and

was killed on 14 November 1919 in a flying accident: 'Avro, 31 TDS, Fowlmere. Banked and nose dived after take-off, Fowlmere. Frederic Ayshford Knight (19) killed (unauthorised civilian passenger). Lt Reginald James Read injured (pilot)'. ([www.rcawsey.co.uk/Acc1919.htm](http://www.rcawsey.co.uk/Acc1919.htm); accessed 18 March 2016).

Eric's other son, Richard Ayshford Knight, was born on 13 December 1901 (he married Hilda Gertrude Gibbons on 19 October 1927. Following her death, he married for a second time in 1956).

### **Helen Georgiana Knight (1820-1893)**

She was born in 1820 in Worcestershire and baptised in Brendon Church, Exmoor on 1 August 1826 (John Knight acquired the Manor of Brendon in 1820).



**Helen Georgiana Knight drawn by Franz Nadorp (on p58 of Isabella Knight's commonplace book)**

In 1854 she was living in Dublin when she heard of the awful death of her sister-in-law and two nephews. We hear Helen in her own words in a letter to Chasse Knight's grieving mother; 2nd May 1854:

*"88 Stephen's Green, Dublin:*

*My Dear Mrs Crutchley*

*You will have had from the papers some intimation of the heavy affliction which has befallen us. Today's post (dated Genoa April 26) has brought me a few lines from my poor brother asking me to let you know. They left Genoa on the 24th at a little after 2 o'clock in the afternoon and he saw them fast asleep that night where their berths were. He believes they must have been killed instantly as he never heard them. The decks were all broken up and fallen through so that all his efforts to get them were unavailing. He says he can write no more – and the letter is finished by another hand,*

*'...wife and children and servants all lost...'*

*I write in a hurry that you may no longer be kept in the fearful suspense we have been in these last days. Pray believe that we feel deeply for you all. We were very fond of dear Chasse who had been to us everything we could wish and we shall deeply feel her loss.*

*Helen G Knight"*

On 8 January 1861 Helen Knight married William von Canitz und Dallwitz ('Baron Karl von Kanitz' according to Orwin p 28), 'his Prussian Majesty's Minister at Rome'. The Oxford Journal states, erroneously, that they married at Barmeth, County Louth. (Oxford Journal 19 January 1861). However, a definitive source exists in *The Illustrated London News* vol 38 Jan. to June 1861 p60



A painting of a member of the Knight family, sold by Christies ion 2008 on behalf of the Sebright Educational Trust. Comparison with the pencil portraits in Isabella Knight's scrapbook suggests that this is Helen Georgiana Knight



**Drawing of a man in Isabella Knight's scrapbook, entitled 'Prussian Ambassador to Rome' and therefore thought to be Helen's husband Baron Charles William Von Canitz and Dallwitz**

*'On the 30th inst in the Chapel of the Prussian Legation at Rome his Excellency the Baron Charles William de Canity [Canitz] of Daliaitz [Dallwitz] his Prussian Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of Rome to Helen Georgiana youngest daughter of the late John Knight Esq of Wolverley House in the county of Worcester and of Sinnonsbath [sic] in the county of Somerset'*

([https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=cNRCAQAIAAJ&pg=PA60&lpg=PA60&dq=his+Prussian+Majesty's+Minister+at+Rome+1860+and+helen+g+knight&source=bl&ots=gAVzwe75B1&sig=6ndQkNh3nVBY0ddhwh5uvk\\_edTo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiZn5jsnObLAhUGKyYKHdWGDRkQ6AEIzAA#v=onepage&q=his%20Prussian%20Majesty's%20Minister%20at%20Rome%201860%20and%20helen%20g%20knight&f=false](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=cNRCAQAIAAJ&pg=PA60&lpg=PA60&dq=his+Prussian+Majesty's+Minister+at+Rome+1860+and+helen+g+knight&source=bl&ots=gAVzwe75B1&sig=6ndQkNh3nVBY0ddhwh5uvk_edTo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiZn5jsnObLAhUGKyYKHdWGDRkQ6AEIzAA#v=onepage&q=his%20Prussian%20Majesty's%20Minister%20at%20Rome%201860%20and%20helen%20g%20knight&f=false); accessed 29 March 2016)

Karl Wilhelm [or sometimes Friedrich, Helmut] Ernst Von Canitz and Dallwitz (1812-1894) was Prussian ambassador to Naples from 1854-59

([https://translate.google.co.uk/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_der\\_preu%25C3%259Fischen\\_Gesandten\\_in\\_Neapel&prev=search](https://translate.google.co.uk/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_preu%25C3%259Fischen_Gesandten_in_Neapel&prev=search); accessed 30 March 2016).

He was at Rome from 1859-62 and is listed as son of Karl Wilhelm and brother of Julius (Bringmann T C *Handbook of Diplomacy 1815-1963: Foreign Heads of*

*Mission in Germany*, p326; reprinted as ebook in February 2012, ISBN: 978-3-11-095684-9). This famous family are best known for Helen's father-in-law and Karl's father, who was Karl Ernst Wilhelm Freiherr von Canitz und Dallwitz (born 17 November 1787 in Kassel; died 25 April 1850 in Frankfurt (Oder). He was a Prussian general and statesman. The family of Canitz und Dallwitz are aristocrats with roots in the present-day municipality of Thallwitz, in the Meissen-Saxonian area of the Mulde. Karl Ernst Wilhelm Freiherr von Canitz und Dallwitz died on 25 April 1853 in Frankfurt (Oder). Helen's husband Karl, was the second son of Karl Von Canitz and Dallwitz and his wife Auguste.

Helen Georgiana Von Canitz and Dallwitz died on 22 December 1893. Her will is recorded in England where she is described as 'baroness of Mittel Sohra Kreis Gorlitz, [Silesia] Prussia'. She is described as 'wife of Charles William Baron Von Canitz and Dallwitz'. Her death is recorded at Carlstrasse, 2 Potsdam, Germany. Probate was given in London to Isabella Dora Wasborough (Helen's niece) and her effects valued at £229 11s 1d. In 1894 the will was resworn and assets valued as £18,039 8s 8d.

Her husband died on 28 June 1894.

Helen Knight was a competent artist. A drawing of hers is in Isabella Knight's commonplace book. But little else is known of her life.



**Drawing signed 'Helen G Knight'  
(on p 71 of Isabella Knight's  
commonplace book)**



Helen Georgiana Knight  
(photograph in Halliday family album)

## LINES OF DESCENT OF JOHN KNIGHT'S FAMILY

One of the striking features of John Knight's time on Exmoor is the lack of documentary and cartographic material, especially from the 1820s. It is exceptional for a large early nineteenth century estate to leave so little evidence. Modern researchers have retraced Orwin's footsteps to repositories in Worcestershire and Devon but very little in terms of significant information has come to light. It is not that there is no documentation connected with the Knights: there is a mass of material relating to the Cookley ironworks and significant amounts for Exmoor as a whole. It is just that virtually nothing survives to inform us about John Knight's intentions and activities from 1820-1835 (though see the recent discoveries in the Knight Archive; Appendix 1 here). For example, there are no architectural plans, surveys, maps or documents relating to the activities around the onset of reclamation, even though the 1819-20 account book ('Exmoor Abstract No 1') makes it clear that work had begun apace 12 months after John Knight knew he had acquired the Kings Allotment on the former royal forest.

To try and understand why there is such a paucity of evidence, it is perhaps useful to follow the descent of John Knight's family. This has not been done exhaustively, but does shed some light on why so little survives. In following this descent we can try and resolve what became of Simonsbath House and the Exmoor estates as well as Wolverley House. Of course there is also the matter of what became of John Knight's possessions, documents and papers (including some of his correspondence which is mentioned by Orwin, but no longer seems to survive).

Frederic Knight managed the Exmoor estate until his death. His only child – Frederic Sebright Winn Knight - predeceased him in 1879; after this he tried to interest his brother's (Charles Allanson) widow in buying Exmoor for her son, Charles Lewis William Morley Knight (Orwin and Sellick, 1970, 137). Nothing came of this and in 1886 he sold the reversion of the estate to Earl Fortescue of South Molton, Devon.

John Knight's three daughters all died without issue, and in the case of Isabella, one of her possessions, her precious commonplace book, passed to Charles Lewis William Morley Knight, her nephew, who lived in South America. Helen Georgiana's executor was her niece Isabella Dora Wasborough (the daughter of Edward Lewis Knight by his second marriage). Any possessions she may have had might have passed down in that line.

Charles Allanson Knight had two children: Charles Lewis William Morley Knight

(1863-1937) and Margaret Elizabeth Knight 22 June 1864 – 20 August 1940). Charles Lewis William Morley Knight lived and died in South America and it is not currently known whether he married or had any issue. Margaret Elizabeth Knight, also known as 'Rita' married the Prince de Polignac, and she had three children: a son and two daughters. The son, Victor Mansfield Alfred de Polignac married Elizabeth Walker in Monaco where they appear to have resided – they had no children. It is not known whether Rita's two daughters had descendants, and, as such, whether any of Charles Allanson Knight's possessions or archives passed to them. This lead has not been pursued, and may be fruitful.

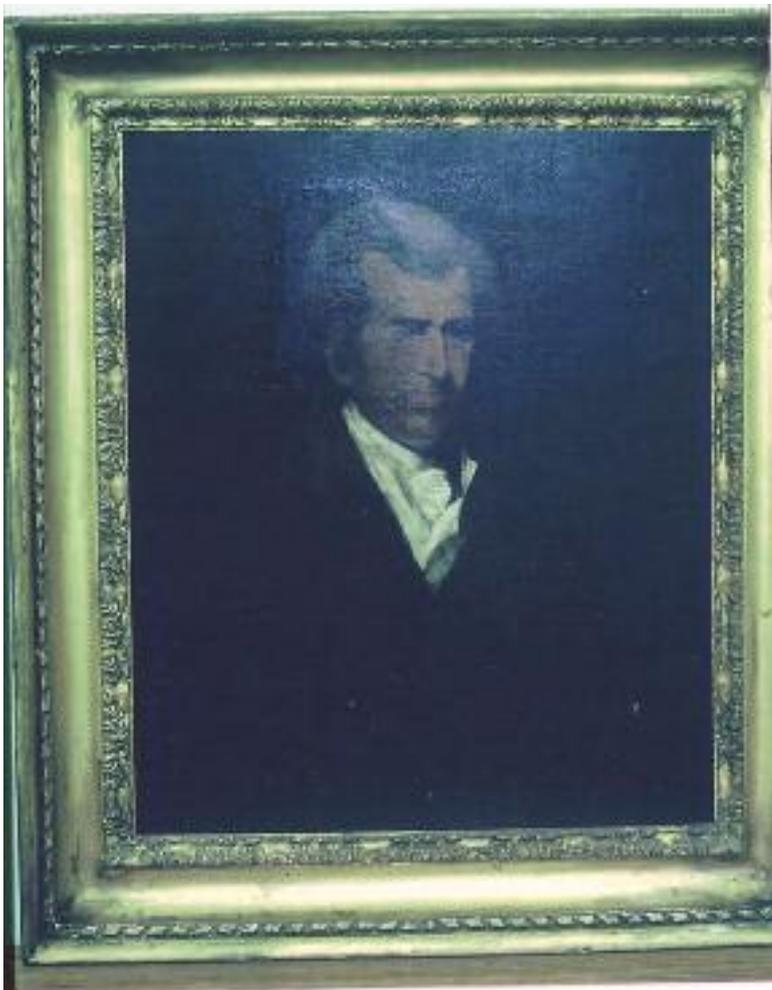
Edward Lewis Knight had lost his entire family in 1854, but had four children by his second wife: Lewis Ayshford Knight (b 1858), Isabella Dora (b 1861), Eric Ayshford (b 1863) and Guy Cunninghame (b 1866). Eric Ayshford Knight eventually inherited Wolverley and in him the line can be said to descend. His eldest son was killed in a flying accident in 1919, and his second son, Richard Ayshford Knight inherited Wolverley, but passed it to the Sebright Educational Foundation in 1944/5 on his father's death. Richard Ayshford Knight died in 1961 without issue. It is assumed that, at this time (1944), Knight family portraits were also passed to the Sebright Educational Foundation, where they remained in Wolverley until being sold by Christies in 2008. In November 1944 some of the contents of Wolverley were sold by auction (Sale Catalogue in Lincoln Record Office: Reference Name 1-DIXON/20/3/11; 'Furniture and china from Wolverley House, near Kidderminster (Major Eric A. Knight, decd.), etc., sold by Christie's'; Date: 23 Nov 1944; Repository: Lincolnshire Archives [057]).

Richard Ayshford Knight, although married twice, had no heirs and died in 1961. At his death John Knight's line in England came to an end.



**Richard Ayshford Knight. He was the last direct descendant in England of John Knight. (Painting in the possession of Mrs Enid Teague Knight)**

Richard died in 1961 but his second wife Enid Knight, subsequently re-married and became Enid Teague Knight. She survives and continues to hold a significant collection of documents of the Knight family, including papers relating to the Exmoor estate. These comprise documents and plans relating to the estate as a whole and especially iron mining on the former Forest; some were evidently seen by Roger Sellick in the late 1960s (see p17 - his 'Notes to the Second Edition' - in *Reclamation of Exmoor Forest* 1970), but many more have come to light since then. All of this material has now been passed to the South West Heritage Trust (for draft catalogue of this material see Appendix 1). Mrs Teague Knight's possessions seem to mark the end of the direct descent of John Knight's estates and possessions in England.



**Portrait of a gentleman (this image from a photograph by Elaine Smith taken in 2005 whilst the painting was at Wolverley). The painting was sold by Bellman's Auctioneers at their sale on 21 May 2008 (entitled '3 day Antique and Collectors Sale 21st May 2008'); it was Lot no. m1836. Its whereabouts is not known.**

The five paintings of members of the Knight family were sold at auction on behalf of the Sebright Educational Trust by Christies in 2008. However, Elaine and Peter Smith of Wolverley recall that one painting was not sold by Christies, but passed to another auctioneer, Bellmans. Bellmans have confirmed that they sold it to another dealer. Mrs Smith has kindly provided a photograph of that painting, taken in 2005 when it still remained at Wolverley (see below). It was in very poor condition at the time. It is of an elderly man who has a striking resemblance to the profile sketch of John Knight in Isabella's scrapbook and seems most likely, given the other items sold (the 5 paintings of his children) to be him. The current whereabouts of this portrait is not known, but it is worth reflecting that without the profile in Isabella Knight's scrapbook, the identification of the sitter in this painting would be impossible. Pleasingly the two images affirm one another in terms of their accuracy.

The Palazzo Bracci residence remained a family home for the Knights after John Knight's death in 1850, and it is unclear for how long this remained the case. What became of the majority of John Knight's possessions - the furniture, paintings and other possessions – both in England and in Italy, still remains unclear. It seems probable that some were disposed of when Palazzo Bracci was sold, perhaps some passed from Frederic Knight's estate to his widow, and the remainder generally dissipated through the Knight descendants and were dispersed through sales and gifts – some may have returned to Wolverley and certain items, like James Ward's painting of Mamoud, are mentioned in a comprehensive inventory of the contents of Wolverley in 1928 (see Knight Archive).

The rich seam of Knight letters unearthed by Phyllis Ryerse in Canada in her research into the death of Chasse Knight in 1854, shows that there is considerable potential to uncover other letters and documents which might give real insights into the Knight family, but in a rather oblique way: through their connections and through the evidence left from other people who existed in the same social circles, whether in the westcountry, Italy or further afield. It is not a clearly defined avenue of research, but the Chasse Knight letters show just how rich this might be. For example, a set of notes entitled 'Notes made at Glenthorne from Helen Cosway in the summer of 1937' (held in the Halliday family private archive at Ashton Farm, Countisbury) contains photographs of Charles Allanson Knight and his children Rita and Morley as well as of Helen Knight. Helen Cosway recalls that Frederic Knight 'used to come over to Glenthorne and dine, then ride back across the moor to Simonsbath after 2 or 3 bottles of port!' and that Charles' wife Jessie had been a great friend of 'grandmamma Halliday'.

## CONCLUSIONS

John Knight remains an elusive figure. He descended from a family that excelled in diverse areas of life: arts and aesthetics as well as industry and agricultural innovation and improvement. In some ways he defies categorisation: he was a patron of the arts, competent industrialist, interested in architecture, passionate about horses, as well as a vigorous agricultural improver. Lawrence Ince provides an insightful essay on the Knight family in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography ([www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47501/49111?docPos=9](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47501/49111?docPos=9)), and he regards the Knights as 'a unique family within the story of the British iron industry'. Ince's assessment of John Knight makes clear his pedigree as an industrialist:

'The death of John [i] Knight in 1795 allowed his son John [ii] Knight (1765–1850) to take a prominent position in the Stour partnership. He had a most dynamic disposition for he immediately drew up plans to modernize the family's forges. John [ii] Knight applied the new methods of making wrought iron with coke to the forges. However, the death of James Knight in 1808 prompted a dismemberment of the partnership. The Spooner family took over the ownership of the properties around Birmingham, leaving John [ii] Knight with a reduced number of forges along the River Stour. Knight now concentrated his resources at one site on the Stour. This was the Cookley ironworks, where the manufacture of wire and tin plate was introduced alongside the production of wrought iron. After successfully modernizing Cookley John [ii] Knight seems to have searched for further challenges using money generated by the sale of shares in the Cookley concern. This took the form of purchases of land on Exmoor and in 1830 Knight took up residence in the area at Simonsbath House. ...'

On Exmoor he probably sought to combine these varied interests and characteristics, but in reality the great agricultural experiment that underpinned it all was destined not to be achieved in the way he imagined. His legacy therefore is an incomplete series of projects on Exmoor, sometimes shrouded in myth and misunderstanding; all the more difficult to perceive now because of the changes made by Frederic and by the Fortescue family and the lack of nearly any documentation from John Knight's time. What we can say is that John Knight's legacy is characterised by achievement obscured by unfinished (and sometimes unintelligible) projects. That is not to say that improvement did not continue unabated or that his aims did not remain, but there are some inexplicable factors: the mansion was never completed – almost unconscionable in terms of stamping a mark on the landscape; its setting never fully imprinted; Pinkery Pond, with its undoubted purpose of powering the

elements of the estate, left strangely disconnected. Deer had escaped from the deerpark, which was therefore seemingly abandoned and the attributes of a great estate: the lodges, the follies, the character of the estate, not evident, except for the lonely tower beside the road to Lynton from Simonsbath and some other unexplained features in the landscape, for examples the massive building platform east of Simonsbath church and the drystone walls which are such a feature of the landscape of Simonsbath.

In 1830, after 10 years at Lynton, John Knight moved his family to Simonsbath to live – not in the mansion – but in what is now Simonsbath House Hotel, in front of the building site that was the mansion under construction. It seems like a commitment in the face of uncertainty. A gesture to further the estate. Or is it pure optimism about the future? Those years around 1830 are marked by both progress and setback, most striking of which was the attempted assassination of his agent Osmund Lock in 1834.

What underlying causes explain these factors? What changed the energy, confidence and clear vision that we find in the items and costs set out in the 'Exmoor Abstract No 1' for 1819 and 1820 (Knight Archive)? A lack of finance seems to be a key factor: John Knight sold Lea Castle, tried to sell Wolverley in 1824 (pers comm Elaine Smith) and variously disposed of many of his Uncle Edward's assets. It seems that the Exmoor project was dogged by lack of finance and perhaps did not yield the returns that he envisaged in the early years. The other known event that could have caused Exmoor to stall is the 'amicable suit', the litigation that seems to haunt the Knight family and that cast its shadow over things from 1824 when Richard Payne Knight died. From then the receding prospect of the inheritance of Downton Castle and a bitter, lengthy and ultimately disastrous Chancery suit combined to drain finances and temper John Knight's resolve.

John Knight never completely gave up on Exmoor – even in his 70s living in Rome with his frustration evident. It seems most likely, though, that an underlying shortage of money, familial bitterness and the additional financial uncertainty that it brought, combined with increasing age and the ill health of his wife, was enough to weaken the resolve of the man who sought to change Exmoor.

John Knight's legacy is certainly there in the Exmoor landscape – the crucial, dramatic first steps in reclamation in the form of two farms and 2,500 acres reclaimed, as well as roads connecting Simonsbath with the outside world, two canals, drainage schemes and irrigation – in all a remarkable and undervalued

agricultural/industrial landscape of national significance. But his legacy is also in our own new appreciation of the boldness of his vision: his aspiration, his confidence and his resolve. There is no such undertaking in England; nothing quite like it. The nearest comparable landscape is Hafod in west Wales where Thomas Johnes – John Knight's cousin – chiselled his estate and his dream out of the harsh Cambrian mountain rock. Johnes' bold scheme ultimately ended in family tragedy and the eventual demolition of the great mansion and the demise of his picturesque dream. John Knight's dream was also to fade, and eventually died with him in the Roman sunshine. However, another much lesser known legacy of the Knight family is an extraordinary one, played out in the lives of his children on Exmoor and also across Europe and beyond.

John Knight is a compelling figure from a truly remarkable family, but he has largely been written out of Exmoor's history, and when not overlooked, is sometimes judged harshly. He was a great visionary who, on Exmoor, took on what had never been attempted before. His contribution to the story of Exmoor's landscape leaves us with a host of unanswered, and possibly unanswerable, questions. He is the shadowy figure at the centre of the greatest single land improvement in England. But there is something else: he is a compelling figure, wronged in his time and by history – a man who, when the story is known, evokes both our sympathy and admiration.



## MODERN RESEARCH

Whilst CS Orwin's Reclamation is still the most valuable handbook to what the Knight family did on Exmoor, modern research is now adding to the way we see that period. Recent archaeological studies and surveys have shown how rich the physical landscape of Exmoor is in terms of features that may shed light on John Knight's activities: for example, Graham Wills has pointed at the enormous scale of the effort to bring water to Cornham and Honeymead farms, in contrast with the later farmsteads built by Frederic Knight (Graham Wills, pers comm). Though, thus far, no detailed buildings assessment has been made of either farm to see what survives from John Knight's time and how the buildings reflect John Knight's reclamation activities.

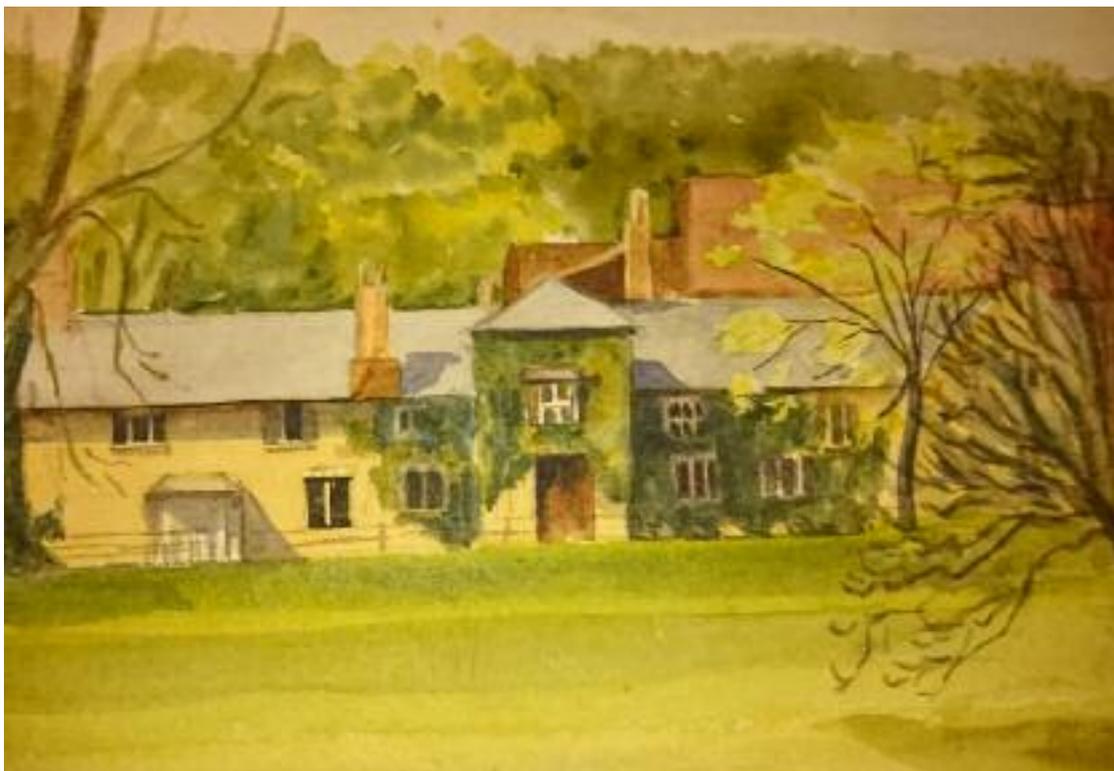
It is fair to say that at this stage, thanks to the work of the National Mapping Programme on Exmoor and, more recently, archaeological research commissioned under the Exmoor Mires Project, we are amassing archaeological data for the reclamation of Exmoor, including complete mapping of the drainage schemes on the Forest. In the coming years, this material will need extensive analysis and interpretation, but in prospect is a period in which we will be able to reassess the historical accounts and other documentary sources alongside the archaeological remains in the landscape. In the future we might even be able to 'peel away' later improvements and alterations by Frederic Knight and the Fortescue estate to reveal a map – albeit an incomplete one – of 'John Knight's landscape'.

One crucial element of his time are the strands of a designed landscape that John Knight seemingly intended. We know surprisingly little about what influenced him in terms of its design, but his familial connections hint at other locations (Hafod, Hestercombe and Downton Castle) but its place in his heart may be hinted at when he writes to his son Frederic from Italy in 1843:

*'All I want at Simonsbath is the House, garden and cottage with the stables and Barn, carpenter Smith lived in – and the two small fields walled in for garden ground... and after all life is so uncertain at my age that I may never want any of it.'*

In the last three years archaeological survey work has been done in Ashcombe to understand this Picturesque, hidden garden with its little stone bridges, woodland walks and buildings. However, much remains to be done, and in particular some consideration of the kinds of planting that John Knight would have planned for the wider setting of Simonsbath; what ornamental buildings would have been key to this landscape and where were the key views, view

points and eyecatchers (for example the 'Exmoor Abstract No 1' details the planting of beech on Flexbarrow, a prominent knoll within the Barle valley below Simonsbath)? The absence of contemporary descriptions and drawings of the designed landscape makes this extremely challenging (though a fruitful avenue of research may be to look for drawings by James Ward, who clearly visited Exmoor). More also needs to be done on what influences John Knight brought to Exmoor in terms of how his wider estate was to look: single storey buildings and round headed arched openings seem to be a feature of John Knight's style, but where do these influences come from and what other features might be identified? A clue to the colour of the estate is found in a painting of 1888, leant by the artist's grandchild, to Andy Flagg at Simonsbath House Hotel, to whom I am very grateful. From this painting we can suggest that the estate colour, when Frederic Knight was still in residence, may have been similar to 'Acland yellow': a pale, lemony cream.



**A painting of Simonsbath House done in 1888 and shown to Andy Flagg at Simonsbath House hotel by the grandchild of the artist. It shows the colour of the main house, but also, the fragment of John Knight's mansion behind.**

The current research for this report on John Knight has rediscovered papers in the possession of Enid Teague Knight, the former wife of the last of John Knight's descendants in England, Richard Ayshford Knight. These papers include a wealth of material about the Knight family and their properties dating back to the 1740s; it represents the residue of the Knight family papers that remained at Wolverley when it was disposed of in the 1940s. Mrs Teague Knight has kindly agreed to these papers being transferred into the hands of the South West Heritage Trust. The material will require analysis and further research. However, at this stage, it reveals compelling evidence for the early date of reclamation on Exmoor with the commencement of all of the key elements by January 1820. It raises new questions; for example: what was the purpose of John Knight's Prayway and Warren canals begun in 1819/20?

There are also highly detailed accounts of other Knight property and account books for the Cookley ironworks which would require specialist study. The diverse nature of the Knight family's interests and their straightened finances would bear further study. The reason for this is that a lack of money seems to preoccupy the Exmoor project from the very beginning, but no detailed work has yet been done to synthesise what survives of the family's accounts as a whole. This study has brought John Knight into clearer focus, but has also highlighted how much more work needs to be done before we truly understand his vision for Exmoor's reclamation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Charles Stewart Orwin's *Reclamation of Exmoor Forest* (originally published in 1929 but more widely found now in its 1970 edition which was co-authored by Roger Sellick) is a remarkable study and one that has survived the test of time. Orwin clearly gained insights into 'Knighthery' through his conversations on Exmoor and in Worcestershire with the family, which nuance the book in a way that the passing of time now denies us – Orwin spoke to the people who remembered Frederic Knight.

Lowell Libson's catalogue on James Ward's works is a valuable source and gives a balanced and insightful profile of this brilliant, but in his time sometimes cruelly maligned, artist.

Phyllis Ryerse has been enormously helpful in providing information and material about the Knights which results from her research into the tragic death of her ancestor Charlotte Harris along with her very young children on the SS *Ercolano* in 1854.

I am grateful to Faye Sturgess and the staff of the Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service. Thanks are due to Jennifer Reid and other staff of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for supplying an image of John Knight's seal and signature. Thanks are due to Marie Astrid Martin at Harewood House for help in tracking down the portrait of Edward Knight (in the Lascelles family collection), whose incredible art collection was sold to fund the reclamation of Exmoor.

My thanks are due to the Halliday family for their enthusiasm and willingness to talk about their own family history and how it interweaves with that of the Knights. In particular I am very grateful to them for allowing me to see and photograph the portraits of the Knight family members which are found in the Halliday family photograph album – in those photographs we see an enduring connection between the Halliday family and Charles Allanson Knight, his two children and his sister Helen.

Elaine and Peter Smith of Wolverley have been very helpful indeed, and have provided useful discussion on the Knight family. Elaine has been researching the Knights for many years and, thankfully, was able to photograph the painted portrait of him some years before it was sold by Bellmans in 2008.

I am very grateful indeed to Mr T Teague and Mrs Enid Teague Knight for their help and kindness, and for allowing me to see the Knight material in their possession, some of which was last seen by Roger Sellick in the late 1960s. I am also delighted at their generosity in depositing the remaining Knight family

Exmoor papers with the South West Heritage Trust. Through their willing help a new chapter has opened on our understanding of Exmoor's remarkable landscape.

My thanks are due to the Exmoor Society and to Helen Blackman the Society's archivist, for cataloguing the papers in the Knight Archive (see Appendix 1) and for helping in a number of ways with the material.

I have greatly valued a number of conversations with Graham Wills who, in his own research, has also been following in the footsteps of John Knight. Graham has a nuanced understanding of Simonsbath and Exmoor through the 19th and early 20th centuries, achieved through patient and thoughtful research over a number of years – I am in his debt.

## REFERENCES (NOT IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Charles Stewart Orwin's *Reclamation of Exmoor Forest* (1929) is the key source for research into John Knight and Exmoor. It was republished in 1970 with Roger Sellick.

*The Tragic Sinking of the Ercolano* (2014) by Phyllis Ryerse and Michael Crutchley provides an in depth account of the sinking but also includes transcripts from a number of letters from the Knight sisters to the Harris family which are deposited in Canada.

Lane J 1999 'The Dark Knight': Edward Knight of Wolverley and his Collections' *Apollo – The International Magazine of the Arts* 150 (448), p25-30. This article gives a sense of the family background from which John Knight came, and provides a list of all of the paintings collected by Edward Knight, which John Knight subsequently sold, many of which were to fund Exmoor.

Isabella Knight's commonplace book can be found in the Department of Prints and Drawings of the British Museum: British Museum number 1938, 0514.1.1-41

Nygren, Edward 2013 'James Ward, RA (1769-1859) Papers and Patrons' *The Seventy-Fifth Volume of the Walpole Society*

Wilson-North R 2016 'The Face of John Knight' *Exmoor Review* Vol 58 2017, 82-85

'Notes made at Glenthorne from Helen Cosway in the summer of 1937' (Halliday private archive at Ashton Farm, Countisbury, Devon)

Halliday family album of photographs (in the possession of the Halliday family, Ashton Farm, Countisbury, Devon)

Other sources found on the internet and consulted for this research are referenced in the text.

Archive material relating to the Knight family can be found at three principal locations:

The Hive, Worcester (at the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service)

the South West Heritage Trust in Taunton

the Devon Heritage Centre in Exeter

The portrait of Edward Knight, 'the Dark Knight', is found at Harewood House in Yorkshire, in the Lascelles family private collection.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### THE KNIGHT ARCHIVE

Note: this material comprises all of the residual papers of the Knight family that remained at Wolverley in 1944 when it passed to the Sebright Educational Foundation. At that time, the papers were the property of Mr Richard Ayshford Knight. On his death in 1961 they passed to his widow, Enid Knight. She later remarried and has now passed the archive into the care of the South West Heritage Trust. This catalogue has been prepared by Helen Blackman of the Exmoor Society.





