Alexander Nesbitt, a Sussex antiquary, and the Oldlands estate

by Janet H. Stevenson

In 1931 Sir Bernard Eckstein, Bt, proposed to enlarge the east end of Christ Church, Fairwarp, as a memorial to his father Sir Frederick. Despite local enquiries and advertisements placed in The Times from 1 June to 3 June 1931, it proved impossible to trace the representatives of Alexander Nesbitt to seek their permission to alter the position of the east window, which was dedicated to his memory. Thus, in the space of 30 years, the Nesbitts, for whom Oldlands Hall in Buxted had been built, and who had been instrumental in the establishment of a school and church at Fairwarp, had been forgotten, their presence there for 30 years entirely obscured by the later occupation of the Ecksteins. This paper seeks to redress the balance and to recount the history of the Oldlands estate.

Alexander Nesbitt, an amateur of medieval art and architecture and a collector of ancient glass, was the younger son and third child of John Nesbitt and his wife Elizabeth Tatam. Of Anglo-Irish descent, he was born at Wood Street in Walthamstow, Essex, on 9 July 1817 and baptized in Walthamstow parish church on 11 September. Before 1851 the family had moved to 9 Oxford Square, Paddington, and from August 1841 or earlier had a seaside home at 30 Wellington Square, Hastings. His parents apparently spent much time there and his father died at Hastings in 1853. His brother Cosby Thomas Nesbitt, a barrister and man of letters, suffered ill health and frequently travelled abroad. A volume of his Essays and Letters was published posthumously in 1864.

Alexander himself was destined for the family business, Nesbitt & Co. The firm had its origins as Baltic merchants and bankers in the city of London in the later 17th century. In the 18th century it was the chief London house acting as bill agents between London and Ireland and had many distinguished Irish clients. From the middle of the century its partners traded to the West Indies, where they bought estates, and imported wines from France to London and Dublin. From 1756 to 1782 the firm undertook a series of contracts with the government to remit money for the payment of troops in America and to supply provisions for them. Debts to the Treasury incurred during the contracts resulted in the bankruptcy of the partners in 1802, when the firm ceased to act as bankers. It continued as general provision merchants after John Nesbitt’s death in 1817 under his junior partner, Alexander’s father John, and other members of the Nesbitt family. It was based in Mincing Lane in the city of London and in Tooley Street, Southwark, until at least 1876. As Thomas Nesbitt & Co., the headquarters of the firm was at 255 Tooley Street and from about 1879 at 3 Borough High Street. The firm was last mentioned in 1902 at Hibernia Chambers, 2 Borough High Street. Alexander was employed in the firm and from 1853 was a joint partner with his cousin Thomas Nesbitt, presumably the Thomas who had earlier been his father’s partner.

Although destined for commerce, Alexander’s education was, as his adult interests show, thorough and wide-ranging. After his father’s death in 1853 the wealth the firm had created for him enabled him to leave day-to-day business to his partners in order to follow scholarly pursuits, although he was still named as a partner in 1863. His brother’s death in April 1856 at Algiers may have prompted Alexander’s marriage in London on 5 June to Cecilia, born to Lieutenant Frederick Franks, R.N., and his wife Frederica at Geneva on 14 October 1835. His scholarly preoccupations entailed extensive travels abroad, and a stay of four months in Rome during the winter of 1858–9 was evidently for study. A lithograph made there during an earlier visit in 1857 depicts him at the age of 40 as handsome, dark-haired, and with aquiline features (Fig. 1).
Alexander was one of the earliest and most active members of the Royal Archaeological Institute, and made numerous contributions to its proceedings and to the *Archaeological Journal*, including several on monumental brasses. He exhibited his extensive collection of rubbings of sepulchral brasses and incised slabs from France, Belgium, Germany and Poland at the Guildhall in Chichester, where the Archaeological Institute held its annual meeting in July 1853.9 It is likely that Alexander’s scholarly interests were encouraged by his friend and brother-in-law, Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, keeper of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum 1866–96, and President of the Society of Antiquaries from 1891 until his death in 1897. Alexander himself was elected a Fellow of the society in 1859 and contributed to *Archaeologia* and the *Vetusta Monumenta* series.10 He collaborated with W. S. Walford in an article on the 13th-century manor house at Crowhurst published in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, volume 7. The draughtsmanship exhibited in his illustrations for it and for the other publications mentioned below shows a high degree of technical competence. He provided the illustration of one of the capitals of the chancel for an article on Worth church published in volume 8, and in December 1869 alerted the Society of Antiquaries, apparently successfully, to what he described as a ‘destructive restoration’ of the 11th-century building.11 He contributed to T. H. Turner’s and J. H. Parker’s *Domestic Architecture in England*, for which he also drew illustrations, and wrote several articles, including substantial ones on Altar, Baptistry, Chalice, Church, and Reliquary, for Sir William Smith’s *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*. He wrote learned introductions to two catalogues of ancient glass, one (1871) to Felix Slade’s collections, the other (1878) to those of the Victoria and Albert Museum.12 His own collection of ancient glass fragments was donated to the British Museum by his brother-in-law, who was himself a substantial benefactor of the museum, in 1887.13 He also perfected a method of taking moulds of ivory carvings, the moulds forming the collection of fictile ivories belonging to the Arundel Society, of which he was a member by 1866. With Cecilia, he worked extensively on the history and particularly the medieval origins of the Nesbitt family, and in 1898 his widow published the *History of the Family of Nisbet or Nesbitt in Scotland and Ireland*.14

As an absentee, Alexander owned estates at Lismore in county Cavan and at Clonsast in Offaly (formerly King’s County). Neither he nor his father had, so far as is known, ever lived in Ireland. The mansion built at Lismore near the town of Cavan shortly after 1713, probably to the designs of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, for their ancestor Thomas Nesbitt (d. 1750), was uninhabitable in the late 19th century. Alexander and Cecilia are likely to have lived in a smaller house on the estate when in Ireland.15 Where he and Cecilia, who were childless, lived immediately after their marriage is unknown. Although Alexander had inherited the moiety of a lease of 13 Bolton Street, Piccadilly, first acquired by his great-uncle John Nesbitt in about 1807, he is not known to have lived there.16 He and Cecilia may have spent time abroad pursuing Alexander’s antiquarian interests, as in the winter of 1858–9. At an unknown date they took a lease of Kidbrooke Park in Forest Row where they were living in 1861 and 1867. They afterwards lived briefly at Ashdown House and at Stone House, both also in Forest Row.17

What attracted them to Ashdown Forest and its neighbourhood is unknown. The likeliest reason is that the Nesbitts had several acquaintances in the
area, which had the added attraction of a convenient railway connexion to London. They were close friends of Lieutenant-Colonel Cuthbert Larking and his wife Lady Adela, a daughter of the second Earl of Listowel, who were lessees of Stone House, Forest Row, where they were living in 1869. Cuthbert Larking was the son of John Wingfield Larking, a British consul in Egypt and one of the first Englishmen to acquire influence there. Like his father, at whose expense Henry Holman Drake re-wrote and published in 1886 *Hundred of Blackheath*, a portion of Hasted’s *History of Kent*, and his uncle, the Kent antiquary Lambert Larking, vicar of Ryarsh near Maidstone, he may have had antiquarian interests, perhaps encouraged by service in Egypt where he was a bey and an aide-de-camp to the khedive. In later life, however, he wrote reminiscences and novels. Through his brother-in-law A. W. Franks, Alexander is also likely to have been acquainted with Coventry Patmore, who had been an assistant in the Department of Printed Books of the British Museum when Franks was an assistant in the Department of Antiquities. Patmore rebuilt the house, called Puxty’s, on the eastern part, and when he sold the 263-acre estate west of the road in 1869 to Alexander Nesbitt, he renamed the part east of it, and his new house, Heron’s Ghyll, from the chief feature of the land, a long wooded valley, or ghyll, which he considered not nearly so picturesque as the ravine on the Oldlands estate.

The name Oldlands was known in the late 13th century. The estate was formed in the early 14th century from lands in Buxted and Maresfield. It is likely to have originated as assarts from Ashdown Forest and later evidence shows that it abutted the forest on the north-west, the lands of Hendall manor in Buxted on the south and a road from Barnsgate to Buxted on the north and east. Most of the estate was a freehold of the manor of Buckhurst in Withyham. Oldlands was called a manor in the early 17th century when it included rights of common for all types of animals on Ashdown Forest. It was said to contain about 100 acres in 1558–60 and 1597–8, and about 120 acres in the 1680s. About 20 acres of the estate formed Mill farm in Maresfield which also had common rights on the forest. A small portion of land in Maresfield called ‘Snyderfield’, later Siderolls or Cinderbank farm, was a freehold of Maresfield manor and became part of Oldlands in the 16th century.

The date at which iron-working was begun on Oldlands is unknown, but it was perhaps by the 14th century when the Culpepers of Bayhall in Pembury, Kent, who had iron works near by at Tudeley, owned it. Iron was certainly founded at Buxted in 1492. The frequent changes of ownership in the 16th and early 17th centuries suggest commercial activities connected with the iron industry, either from direct exploitation of the estate or, more likely, through letting it to tenants. The increase in the purchase price, from £563 in 1576 to £2200 in 1609, may indicate that such financial speculation was justified.

In 1313 or 1314 Thomas Culpeper of Bayhall and his wife Margery acquired a messuage and 60 acres of land in Buxted from Ralph Marescot and in 1319 or 1320 another messuage and 50 acres in Buxted and Maresfield from Reynold Burgess. Culpeper was appointed forester of Rotherfield in Tonbridge chase in 1315, and in 1318, at the request of his patron, Bartholomew de Badlesmere, and others, Edward II granted to him the forestership of Ashdown and the keeping of Maresfield park. He was involved with Badlesmere in the rebellion of Thomas, Earl of
Lancaster, and was sentenced to death and executed at Winchelsea in 1322. His possessions were forfeited to the Crown, but the lands in Buxted and Maresfield were restored in 1324 to Margery, whose date of death is unknown. Their son and heir, Walter, died childless between 14 July 1359 and 20 July 1364, and the estate descended under an entail to Walter's younger brother Sir John Culpeper. The John Culpeper, esquire, whom John of Gaunt appointed constable of Pevensey castle in 1372 and master forester of Ashdown chase in 1375, may have been a kinsman, possibly a younger son. By 1378 Sir John had succeeded in the estate by his son Sir Thomas, who died late in 1428 or early in 1429. Sir Thomas devised it to a younger son Nicholas, who died late in 1434 or early in 1435. From Nicholas it descended to his daughter Joyce (d. 1486) and her husband Walter Lewknor (d. 1498), whose elder brother Richard Lewknor (d. 1503) held the manor of Buxted itself in 1483-4.

Walter's and Joyce's son and heir Humphrey Lewknor (d. by 1531) sold Oldlands at an unknown date to George Nevill, Lord Abergavenny (d. 1535), who sold it in 1533 to Edmund Pope of Little Horsted. Pope sold it at an unknown date to his kinsman William Levett, the rector of Buxted, who may have founded the first ordnance in England on the estate, possibly near Oldlands farm. Between 1552 and his death in 1554 Levett conveyed Oldlands to his niece Mary, daughter of his brother John Levett, and her husband Francis Chaloner, then of Little Horsted.

Chaloner was holding the estate in 1558-60, and in 1576, when he was described as of Lindfield, sold it and a water mill, presumably part of Mill farm, to Hugh Cornford, a yeoman from East Malling in Kent, and his son Robert. Robert Cornford, himself possibly an ironmaster, leased Oldlands to William Basset of Withyham, who was the tenant in 1593. In 1609 Cornford sold the estate, including a furnace, to William Wood, son-in-law of Gregory Relfe (d. 1605), an ironmaster who had leased Crowhurst furnace and forge from 1588 to 1590. Wood, his wife Constance, Constance's sister Mary and Mary's husband Urban Best, vicar of Iford from 1625 to 1629, sold Oldlands and its furnace in 1614 to Richard Amherst, a serjeant-at-law and member of parliament for Lewes in 1614 and 1621-2. The purchase price, £1400, apparently reflected the fact that the estate was burdened with a debt of £600 from Wood to William Mason of Hartfield. Three months later Amherst charged Oldlands with an annuity of £40 for Mason until he was able to repay the debt, and from 1614 to 1617 leased the forge to William Crowe of Selmeston and David Middleton of Chailey. Amherst sold the estate in 1624 to John Nutt (d. 1653) of Mays in Selmeston, a pluralist who was patron and rector of Berwick, vicar of Bexhill and prebendary of Ferring in Chichester cathedral. Nutt immediately repaid Mason and in 1651 settled Oldlands on his eldest son Thomas (from 1660 Sir Thomas) Nutt and Thomas' wife Katharine Parker. Still called a manor, the estate then included a furnace, an iron mill and a water mill. The house and agricultural land were let to Thomas Bray for £70 a year, and the woodland was exploited directly for the Nutts. Sir Thomas (d. 1675) devised Oldlands to his nephew Thomas, elder son of his younger brother John Nutt (d. 1664), and in 1677 Katharine released her interest to him. Thomas charged the estate in 1679 with an annuity of £70 for his uncle George Nutt (d. 1696). While in Lewes on 14 September 1688 Thomas was fatally stabbed by Archibald Clinkard but survived until the following day, when he made his will. His murderer was still at large a year later. Thomas' heir was his brother John Nutt, a witness to his murder, who died in 1704, leaving an infant son William. At William's death in 1769 Oldlands passed to his daughter Ann (d. 1795), the wife of Peter Holford (d. 1804). Under the terms of her father's will she was succeeded by her children Robert (d. 1838), George (d. 1839), Sarah (d. 1811), afterwards the wife of Sir Charles Hudson, Bt, and Charlotte (d. 1839), afterwards the wife of Charles Bosanquet, who held as tenants in common. In 1839 Robert Holford's nephew and heir Robert Stayner Holford, the son of George, extinguished his mother's dower in his father's portion and Charles Bosanquet's right to hold Charlotte's by the courtesy of England, and bought that of his surviving tenant in common, the Revd R. W. Bosanquet, son of Charlotte and Charles. It was R. S. Holford who sold the estate to Coventry Patmore.

In 1841 most of Holford's agricultural land in Buxted, about 84 acres, formed Oldlands farm. On it, standing north of the road from Fairwarp which ran east to a junction with the Uckfield-Crowborough road, was a substantial T-shaped stone and timber-framed house of 16th-century origin, but with features mainly of the 17th century. It presumably incorporated William Levett's house, for which Edmund Pope bequeathed 20 loads of wood from
his manor of Hendall in 1552. The initials ‘TN’ on a first-floor overmantle suggest that Levett’s house was enlarged and altered for Sir Thomas Nutt in the mid-17th century. That building, called Oldlands House at the beginning of the 19th century and identified by Alexander Nesbitt as the ‘old house’ of Oldlands, was then occupied by farm bailiffs and later in the century by tenant farmers. On Mill farm, Old Mill Cottage stood south of the road from Fairwarp.36

A small freehold of Maresfield manor which Maud Oldland held in about 1290 for a yearly rent of two barbed arrows was, as her surname suggests, evidently at Oldlands. John Rootes, a citizen and grocer of London, sold it in 1548 to Nicholas Eversfield of Buxted, who sold some 16 acres called ‘Syggers’ or ‘Synderfeld’ to Francis Chaloner in 1549. The land was afterwards part of the main Oldlands estate, and the arrows were still due to the lord of Maresfield manor in the early 17th century.37 Siderolls, as ‘Synderfeld’ was often called in the 19th century because it abutted the Buxted parish boundary, contained about 20 acres in Maresfield. It too included a substantial house, possibly also of 16th- or 17th-century origin, which stood north of the road from Fairwarp and west of Oldlands Farm. In 1839 Holford sold Siderolls to John Villiers Shelley, from 1852 Sir John Villiers Shelley, Bt, whose widow sold the land, then called Cinderbank farm, to Alexander Nesbitt in 1869.38

The enlarged Oldlands estate comprised about 280 acres in 1873. Nesbitt’s entitlement to common rights drew him and other landowners bordering the forest into a lengthy dispute with its owner, Reginald Sackville, Earl De La Warr (d. 1896), which began in 1877 and was finally resolved in the commoners’ favour in 1882.39

A house called Oldlands, later Oldlands Hall, was built for the Nesbitts from 1869 to the designs of Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt on a new site south of woodland called Brown’s Brook and Birch Wood in the 1840s and Oldlands Wood from the late 19th century.40 Alexander and Cecilia were living in their new house in about 1870. A temporary residence in 1871 with their indoor staff, including a French chef, at Ashurst Lodge near East Grinstead may have been necessitated by further work at Oldlands.41 The house was built of ashlar and had a gabled roof of red tiles and chimneys in a style of the 16th century. A watercolour which represents an early design by Wyatt shows a house smaller than, but in a similar style to, that which was eventually built (Figs 2, 3 & 4).42 It stood at the head of a valley on ground rising from south to north. The main entrance, leading into an oak-panelled hall, was on the north side of the house and to the north-east there was an extensive service wing. The principal rooms, which included a drawing room also panelled in oak, were on the south side of the house, from which there was a wide vista to the South Downs. There was a lodge in 1871 in which one of the under-gardeners lived. The red-brick tiled lodge on the west side of the Uckfield–Crowborough road was built between 1874 and 1901.43

South of Oldlands Wood the gardens of Oldlands and a park of about 30 acres south of the house were created from part of Oldlands farm after 1870 (Fig. 5) by a newly-appointed head gardener, Edward Luckhurst, who lived with his family in Oldlands Cottage. His duties also included arranging flowers and table decorations for the house, and dispatching produce, including soft fruits, to the Nesbitts on their visits to London and Lismore. In 1871 he was 32 years old and has been adjudged ‘one of the rising talents of the 1870s’. He was a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Horticulture, to which he contributed a series of articles from 1871 to 1884 describing in vivid and evocative prose all aspects of his work at Oldlands, indoors and outdoors. Although no direct evidence has been discovered, it is likely that most if not all the thousands of trees, shrubs and plants bought for the new grounds were supplied from Woodlands nursery in Maresfield. The more formal plantings, including a parterre, a rose garden and a long and wide perennial border, were near the house, and south of the parterre a lawn was separated from meadowland by a ha-ha. North-east of the house there was a large walled kitchen garden, in and around which 800 fruit trees were planted. Among the many fruits inside, which included peaches and nectarines, were over 100 varieties of gooseberries, and along one of the high walls 70 types of pear trees, each pruned back and trained in a single diagonal stem, were planted in order of ripening.

In the park Luckhurst used semi-natural woodland planting which also included many conifers and rhododendrons, as well as shrubs in more formal groups. He made the valley which had attracted Patmore the chief feature and aimed to recreate in it a Highland glen. In it the eastern and south-eastern parts of the park were marked by a feeder of the river Ouse in which there were four
ponds, the northernmost on the edge of the woodland and three further south. All were apparently associated with the 16th-century furnace at Oldlands farm, north-west of which the stream flowed into another feeder of the Ouse which marked the boundary between Buxted and Maresfield. Luckhurst made the three lower ponds into a lake and established a series of features beside the stream, planting ‘in bold irregular spreading masses’ with ‘no formal angularity of outline . . . but a blending of growth and a certain air of irregularity of nature’. The main shrub was holly; heather, ferns, lichens and mosses provided ground cover; and the northern slopes of the valley, where there were already ancient oaks, were planted with Scots pine, Norway spruce, silver fir and yew. North American conifers were planted beside paths along the valley floor. Two new lakes were made in the stream: that nearer the house was planted with water lilies and spanned by a balustraded stone bridge; the other, further south, had a waterfall, and was overhung by weeping birch, crossed by a rustic bridge and surrounded by flowering trees and shrubs such as laburnum, broom, mock orange, lilac and may. Other features of the valley included a fernery displayed on a rock face.  

For an unknown reason Alexander, then already terminally ill with cancer, revoked his bequest of two years’ wages and £100 to Luckhurst in July 1885. Perhaps Cecilia made good the deficiency because Luckhurst attended, and provided a wreath for, Alexander’s funeral. Cecilia’s gardener in 1900 was Arthur Fitt, to whom she bequeathed £100 and a year’s wages.

Alexander was a deputy lieutenant for Sussex and served as high sheriff for county Cavan in 1862. He and Cecilia were presumably among those who
contributed money for the building in 1873 east of the Maresfield–Hartfield road on land given by Earl De La Warr of a National school for children to the age of eight years. In 1879 Alexander began a forceful and protracted correspondence with the Secretary for Education in an attempt to have the school enlarged to accommodate children to the age of fourteen. He based his argument on the fact that the population of Fairwarp had increased since 1871 and claimed that about 70 older children were in need of schooling nearer their homes than Maresfield. ‘It is obvious’, he wrote, ‘that to expect anything like regular attendance from children living from two to four miles distant from a school is futile, and that the refusal of such improvement of the Forest school as shall enable these children to receive their education there is practically a denial to those children of the educational advantages which the legislature has designed to be offered to all.’ In his opinion only coercion by the Secretary would achieve the school’s enlargement because Maresfield ratepayers refused to pay for it voluntarily. In a compromise, the school managers conceded that children might attend until the age of ten, dismissed the woman who taught the infants and engaged another teacher capable of more advanced work. The school was not enlarged or older children admitted until 1893, 20 years after its building. The Nesbitts were also instrumental in the building in 1880 of Christ Church, Fairwarp, to designs by Rhode Hawkins on an acre of land given by the earl south of the school. Although the church was opened for worship in November 1880, it was not consecrated until a year later.47
Alexander died at Oldlands on 21 June 1886, and, as befitted one dedicated to scholarly pursuits, his body lay in the library there before his burial on 25 June in Maresfield churchyard in a vault later surmounted by a Celtic high cross, Earl De La Warr having expressly forbidden burials in the churchyard at Christ Church. His entire estate was valued at about £53,000 gross. His entailed Irish lands devolved upon his surviving sibling, Mary Anne, widow of James Edward Burrowes, and he devised others in county Cavan inherited from his uncle Cosby Nesbitt to their son Thomas Cosby Burrowes. He devised the Oldlands and Clonsast estates to Cecilia, who caused windows in his memory to be placed in Maresfield and Fairwarp churches, and in Kilmore cathedral near the town of Cavan. The three-light east window in Maresfield church is by Messrs Powell of Whitefriars. The middle light depicts the Crucifixion, the left-hand light Christ carrying His cross to Calvary, and the right-hand light the Deposition. In the lower portion of each window angels bear a scroll with the text ‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive’, and across the base the window is inscribed ‘To the glory of God and in loving memory of Alexander Nesbitt of Lismore Co. Cavan, of Oldlands Buxted, and of this parish, born 9 July 1817, died at Oldlands 21 June 1886, and is buried in this churchyard’.\(^{48}\) The window in the north nave wall of Kilmore cathedral, stylistically similar and presumably also by Powell, depicts the risen Christ’s appearance to Mary Magdalene.\(^{49}\) In Christ Church, Fairwarp, an east window inscribed to his memory had three panels, each of two tiers: the central panel depicted the Resurrection and above it the Ascension, a left-hand lower panel St Peter and St John, and
the lower right-hand panel the Holy Women. The upper panels of the side windows each contained an angel. Cecilia also gave in his memory an alabaster and stone reredos inlaid with mosaics and glass, again by Messrs Powell. She had given a font, a pulpit, coronae and a harmonium in 1880. When the east end of the church was extended and rebuilt from 1935 at the expense of Sir Bernard Eckstein, Bt, the central panels of the east window were reset as single panels in the south wall of the chancel, and the side panels were reset, still double, in the north and south angles of the new apse.50
Cecilia died on 6 November 1900 at the age of 65 of acute jaundice caused by gall stones and was buried on 10 November beside Alexander in Maresfield churchyard, where her grave is marked by a plain stone cross. She devised the Oldlands estate to her husband’s godson Reginald Nesbitt Wingfield Larking, the son of Cuthbert and Adela Larking. She bequeathed £6000 of her £66,000 estate, known as the Fairwarp Legacy, for the endowment of the ecclesiastical district of Christ Church, Fairwarp, which was formed in 1901. R. N. W. Larking afterwards caused a two-light window depicting the Annunciation and the Nativity to be inserted to her memory in the south nave wall of Christ Church. In 1901, as a public memorial to her, a vicarage house, paid for by subscription, was built south of Fairwarp village to the designs of H. J. Powell of Lewes in a style similar to the east lodge of Oldlands Hall.\(^5\)

In 1902–3 Larking, an officer in the regular army until 1907, leased Oldlands Hall, which was lit by electricity, with its fixtures and fittings, to Sir James Pender, Bt. In February 1905 the entire contents, which included much antique English and Italian furniture of the 16th and 17th centuries, were auctioned. The house and estate of about 289 acres were sold in March to Ventura Paul Misa, a senior partner in the firm of M. Misa, sherry shippers, of Jerez de la Frontera, Spain.\(^5\) Frederick Eckstein bought them from Misa in 1920. Eckstein had been born in 1857 at Stuttgart and educated there, and was a partner in the firm of Wernher, Beit & Co., which he represented for many years in Johannesburg. He was also chairman of the Sudan Plantations Syndicate. He was created a baronet in 1929. After his death in 1930 the estate passed to his son Sir Bernard, who also had business interests in the Sudan. A bachelor, he lived at Oldlands with his unmarried sister Herminie Beatrice. After his father’s death Sir Bernard extended the estate southwards and increased it to 379 acres by purchasing Furnace Wood in Buxted in 1931. He also made many alterations to the house and grounds. An outer hall on the north side of the house was fitted with marble walls and floors and double bronze-glazed ornamental doors. On the first floor three suites were formed, their bathrooms fitted with marble. One of the bathrooms in addition had a mother-of-pearl ceiling and a heated floor. Sir Bernard’s own suite included a gymnasium. Bedrooms on the second floor were opulently furnished, and a bathroom there, which still survives, was panelled entirely in plate glass. Although the house had attics, most of the servants’ quarters remained in the separate service wing. The alterations to the gardens, equally lavish, were carried out in the early 1930s under the direction of Leslie Wood of the firm of Wood & Walford, chartered land agents, surveyors and valuers of East Grinstead. A fountain and lily pond were made in the parterre from which a semi-circular flight of stone steps descended across the lawn in six terraces, each with a lily pool, to a lower walk paved with stone, at the end of which a bronze fountain was constructed as a fawn between two deer. The water of the fountains could be illuminated in colours. A swimming pool was also constructed. During the cleaning and enlarging of the lakes on the south-eastern boundary of the park an oak pentrough and penstock associated with iron-working near Oldlands Farm in the 16th and early 17th centuries were uncovered. Herminie died in 1945 and her brother in 1948 and they and their father are commemorated by tombstones designed by Sir William Read Dick in the churchyard of Christ Church, Fairwarp. The estate was broken up by sale in 1949. The house, then covered in wisteria, magnolia and other climbing plants, was afterwards stripped of its foliage and of many of its fittings. It and the stable block were divided about 1950 into 13 apartments for the owner, Mrs A. Webster. The house and stables remain in 13 freehold apartments.\(^5\)

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NOTES

Abbreviations used include:

CC  Church Commissioners
CCR  Calendar of Close Rolls
CKS  Centre for Kentish Studies
CPR  Calendar of Patent Rolls
ESN  East Sussex News
ESRO  East Sussex Record Office
ONS  Office for National Statistics
PRO  Public Record Office
PRFD  Principal Registry of the Family Division
SAC  Sussex Archaeological Collections
SRS  Sussex Society
VCH  Victoria County History
WSRO  West Sussex Record Office

1 A. Nesbitt & C. Nesbitt, History of the Family of Nesbit or Nesbitt in Scotland and Ireland (Torquay: Andrew Iredale, 1898), 60; Essex Record Office, D/CR 394/1, bishop’s transcripts, Walthamstow, baptism of Alexander Nesbitt.
3 E.g. Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, 1708, 292; PRO, C5/258/34–5, Chancery proceedings, 1706–7; C7/244/21, Chancery proceedings, 1706.
4 Their transactions with Thomas Conolly, reputed to be the richest man in Ireland, are recorded in the Conolly papers: Trinity College, Dublin, MS. 143, 149, 151, 371, 430, 433, 440, 451, 454–5, 1117.
5 Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, 1742–5, 505, 574, 579, 702, 711, 713, 769; Caribbeana 4 (1916), 331–2; Greater London Record Office, Acc. 775/826–7, sale, Touchet to Colebrooke, Nesbitt and Franks, 1766; Acc. 775/837–8, sale, Nesbitt to Colebrooke, 1768; Acc. 775/852, abstract of title, pp. 14–15.
6 Gentleman’s Magazine 87(1), 375; Robson, London’s Directory (1833 and later eds); Kelly’s Directory of London (1828 and later eds); PRO, A01/205/666, declaration of victualling account of Drummond, Franks and Nesbitt, 1782; PRO, C12/579/8, Chancery proceedings, 1779; PRO, B3/3768, proceedings in bankruptcy commission of Nesbitt & Stewart, 1815–27, f. 444; PRO, B4/26, docket book.
8 A. Nesbitt, Descriptive Catalogue of the Glass Vessels in the South Kensington Museum (London: Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, South Kensington Museum, 1878), p. xix; see Fig. 1.
11 Society of Antiquaries of London Lib., letter, Alexander Nesbitt to C. Knight Watson, 8 Dec. 1868. His notebook on castles and churches compiled between 1845 and 1847 survives as MS. 962 in the Society’s library.
13 Information provided by Mr S. Corri, Central Archives, British Museum.
14 F. Boase, Modern English Biography 2 (Truro: Netherton & Worth, 1897), 1108; Arundel Society, or Society for Promoting the Knowledge of Art, established in 1848: List of Members corrected to 1866 and 1872, 10; see also note 1.
16 Westminster Archives Centre, Rate Books, St George’s, Hanover Square (Dover Street and Out wards); PRFD, will of Alexander Nesbitt; PRO, IR26/719, death duty register, f. 487.
17 Kelly’s Directory of Sussex (1867); PRO, RG9/579, census returns 1861, ff. 69r–70; Society of Antiquaries of London Lib., letter, Alexander Nesbitt to C. Knight Watson, 8 Dec. 1868.
18 For the members of the Larking family mentioned here, see Boase, Modern English Biography 2, 309–10; Who Was Who, 1897–1916, 412; DNB 22, 665, 1121–2; cf. WSRO, EII16/75, bishop’s transcripts, Forest Row, baptism of R. N. W. Larking, 6 Jan. 1869.
20 FCH Gloucestershire 11, 286, corrected by VCH Wiltshire 13, 10; [Patmore], How I Managed and Improved My Estate, 4; PRO, IR29/35/52, tithe award, Buxted; IR30/35/52, tithe award map; notes from title deeds of Oldlands (see note 20).
21 PRO, IR29/35/179, tithe award, Maresfield; IR30/35/179, tithe award map; SAC 2 (1849), 171.
22 Patmore, Life and Times of Coventry Patmore, 142; [Patmore], How I Managed and Improved My Estate, 4–7, 43–4; notes from title deeds of Oldlands (see note 20).
24 E. H. W. Dunkin (ed.), Sussex Manors, SRS 20 (1915), 328;


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The history of the estate from the 17th century has been touched upon by P. COMBS, ‘Oldlands Furnace, Marshalls and the Nutt Family’, Wealden Iron [2nd ser.], 16 (1996), 13–16; CKS, U269 E 341, f. 19v.; ESRO, SAS/F 201a–202, Oldlands deeds, 1576; PRO, STAC5/B90/39, Star Chamber proceedings, 1593.


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1901; *ESN* 2 July 1886, 6b.


48 *ESN* 2 July 1886, 6b; Petley, *Maresfield*, 32; PRO, IR26/3758, ff. 2277–8; CC file 62262/1; PRFD, will of Alexander Nesbitt.

49 Personal observation.

50 Petley, *Maresfield*, 12–13; WRSO, EPII/27/2217, faculty, Fairwarp, 1930; Christ Church, Fairwarp, foundation stone dated 1935 on external south wall of chancel. None of the fittings except the font survives.

51 *ESN* 16 Nov. 1900, 7f; ONS, death cert. of Cecilia Nesbitt; PRFD, will of Cecilia Nesbitt; PRO, IR26/7787, ff. 4213–18; CC files 62262/2, E3244, F5886, all Fairwarp; WSRO, EPII/16/75. Personal observation.

52 *Who Was Who, 1941–50*, 662; *ESN* 17 Feb. 1905, 4d; *Kelly’s Directory of Sussex* (1905); Pike, *Sussex in the Twentieth Century: Contemporary Biographies*, 280; ESRO, BMW/A4/5, pp. 23–4; Powell & Co., Lewes, inventory of Oldlands Hall, 1902; BMW/F2/18, unpaginated, accounts of Powell & Co. for the sale of the Oldlands estate, 8, 15 March 1905; ESRO, C/C70/105, East Grinstead constituency: electoral register, Buxted, 1905; notes from title deeds of Oldlands (see note 20).

53 *ESN* 9 July 1920, 8e; *Who Was Who, 1929–40*, 401; *1941–50*, 346; Burke, *Peerage* (1949), 673; Nairn & Pevsner, *Sussex*, 499; *Sussex Notes and Queries* 5 (1934–5), 134–6; *Kelly’s Directory of Sussex* (1934); Oldlands Hall Sale Catalogue and Map [1949]; ESRO, DW/A6/9, Uckfield Rural District Council, building plan register, plan 9544/56 and a (Oldlands Hall); notes from the title deeds of Oldlands (see note 20); inf. from Mrs Rosemary Mulady.