

356 Lower Luton Road

The History of a 1930s Semi

No. 356 Lower Luton Road is an unassuming 1930s semi-detached house but researching its history has revealed that it has links with some of the oldest families and estates in the parish and a history of changing ownership with some interesting “wrinkles”.

The land on which no. 356 and the Lea Valley Estate is built was acquired by Samuel Garrard of Lamer in 1681 when he added to his already substantial estate by buying Mackerye End house and its estate, which included Causewell (now Castle) farm and reached as far as the river.

In his will dated 14 January 1860, Charles Benet Drake Garrard of Lamer left his houses and estates “to the use of the heirs of his body lawfully issuing” and “in default of such issue” to his wife Honora (whose maternal grandfather was the 7th Earl of Cavan), then to other female relatives in their lifetimes and to their male offspring, if any.



He died childless in 1884, leaving his estates to his wife. When she died in 1892, the surviving beneficiary of the 1860 will was Major-General Apsley Cherry, second son of C.B.D. Garrard's sister Charlotte. A condition of the will was that whoever inherited Lamer should take the name Garrard so Major-General Apsley Cherry became Major-General Apsley Cherry-Garrard and inherited the Lamer estate. He had married Evelyn Sharpin in 1885. Their son was born 11 months later and christened Apsley George Benet.

Young Apsley came of age, i.e. 21 years old, on 2 January 1907 and, on 19 January, joined his father as a trustee of the Lamer estate. When Apsley senior died (he is buried in St Helen's churchyard) on 8 November 1907, young Apsley inherited the estate.

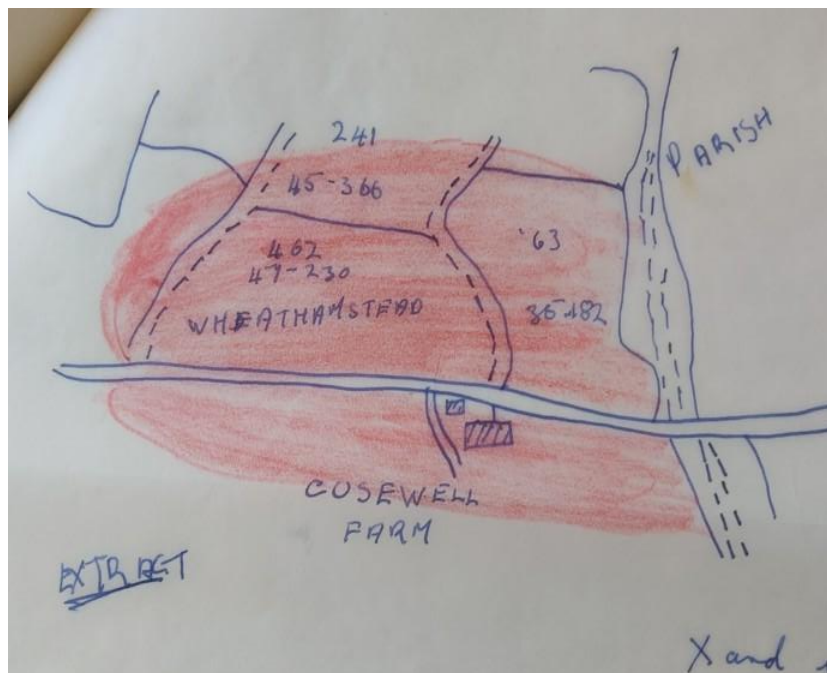
He is of course famous as a member of Scott's Terra Nova expedition to Antarctica (1910 – 1913) and author of *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922), an account of the expedition. In World War I, he was commissioned in the RNVR and commanded a squadron of armoured cars in Flanders. He was invalided out in 1916, suffering from clinical depression and what today might be called post-traumatic stress disorder.





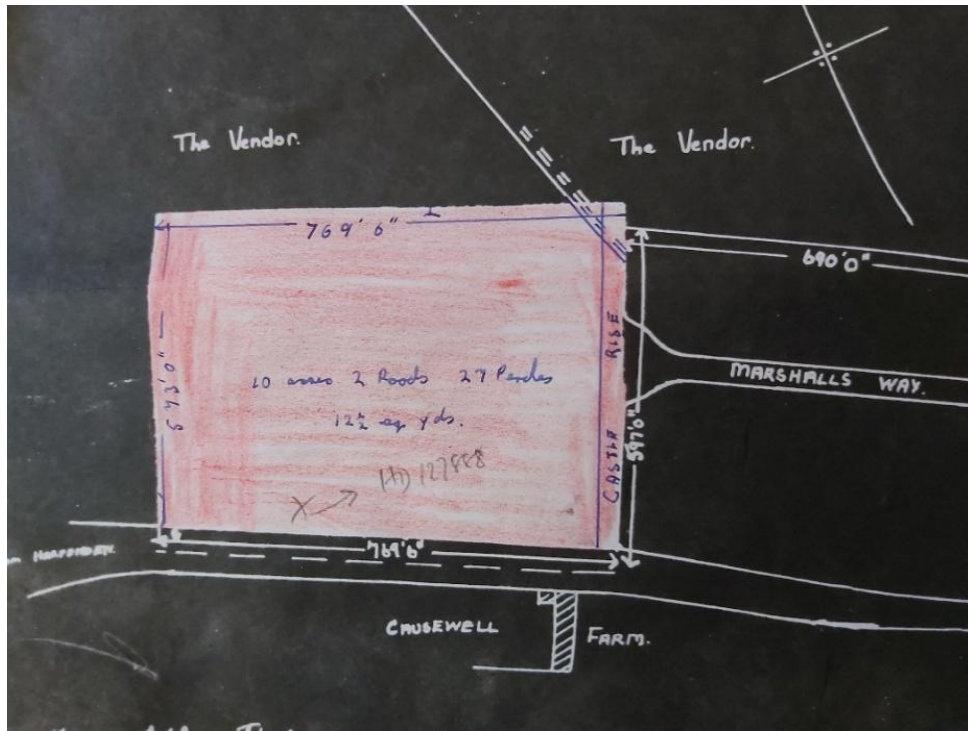
Like many owners of landed estates in the immediate post-war period, Apsley Cherry-Garrard was forced, by a combination of rising costs and increased taxation, to sell parts of the Lamer estate. On 7 August 1919 he sold Mackerye End with 547.5 acres of land, cottages and farms for £27,450 (about £1,140,000 today) to John E. Darnton who appears to have been tenant of Mackerye End at the time. Darnton took out a loan of £20,000 at 6% p.a. to fund the purchase.

Five years later, on 2 April 1924, Darnton sold 489.6 acres of land, together with its farms (including Causewell/Castle Farm) and cottages, to Dolphin Smith for £12,548 (about £675,000 today). He retained ownership of the house at Mackerye End while ensuring that he kept access to the land under which his drains flowed. At the same time, he paid off the loan of £20,000.



This rough sketch of the land sold in this sale is included in an Abstract of Title dated 1940.
(see page 4)

The next sale is the first that begins to focus on the land on which 356 Lower Luton Road is built. On 25 February 1936, Dolphin Smith sold a plot of land on Lower Luton Road measuring 769' 6" by 573' to Cecil Smith, Henry Smith and Frederick Young, who traded as builders "Smith and Smith" or "Smith Brothers" with an address in Folly Fields. They paid £1000 (about £63,000 today) for the plot which is described as measuring 769' 6" in length and 573' in depth and constituting 10 acres, 2 roods, 27 perches and 12.5 square yards.



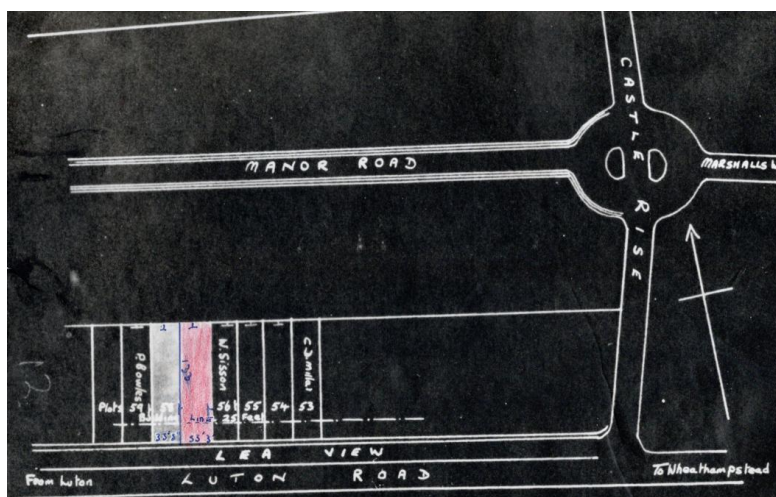
The contract explicitly stated that the land would be built on.

Some detailed stipulations (conditions) were included in the contract, including that the purchasers would:

- within two years, bring Castle Rise up to a standard to "the reasonable satisfaction of the vendor's surveyor" and to keep it in good repair, thus ensuring Dolphin Smith's access to his land to the north;
- not dig sand, gravel or brick earth for purposes of sale;
- build only private dwelling houses on the land but could have up to two shops, but not a fried fish shop or one that would cause nuisance to the vendor or other tenants;
- not engage in manufacturing or commercial horticulture (e.g. a nursery garden);
- within 6 months, erect a 3'6" fence on the boundaries to keep out cattle and sheep, and maintain it.

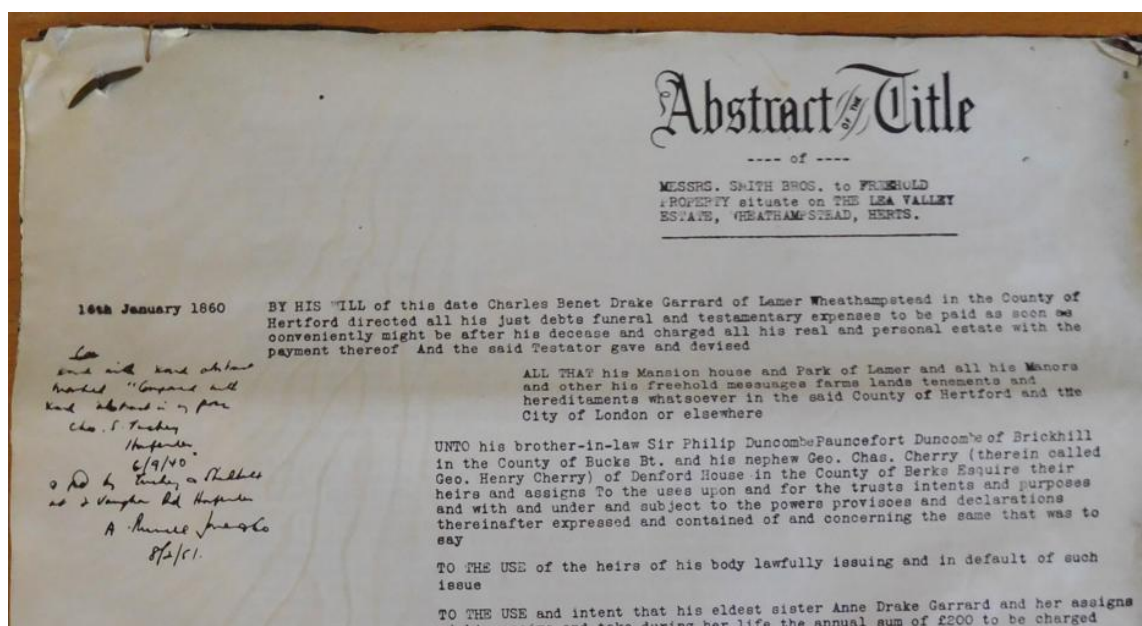
By September 1939, when the 1939 Register was taken, a new road, Lea View, had been built standing back from the main road and 50 new houses were occupied. There is no evidence of how many of these were built by Smith Brothers. Frustratingly, the names of the occupants of nos.43 and 44 are redacted in the Register.

On 9 August 1940 (i.e. a year after the Second World War broke out), Henry and Frederick Smith sold nos. 43 and 44, with a frontage of 66 feet 6 inches, to Frederick Young for £500 (£25,000 today).



Note: the numbers on this diagram are plot numbers not house numbers. The 1939 Register shows Mr Sisson (plot 56) at no.42. The diagram also shows a building line of 25 feet.

To confirm their right to sell these two houses, the Smiths had to prove their title to the land on which they were built, which they did in a lengthy Abstract of Title that spells out how the land had passed from Charles Benet Drake Garrard, via his 1860 will, to Apsley Cherry-Garrard, then to Darnton, then to Dolphin Smith, then to Smith Brothers.



This contract confirmed the stipulations of 1936 with some variations.

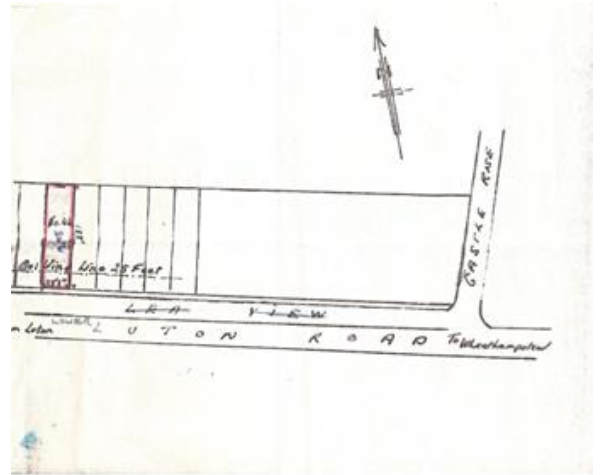
- Only private houses can be built (i.e. no shops);
- The cattle-proof fence must be chain-link Penfold, or a hedge must be planted;
- There must be no caravans, huts or sheds that would cause a nuisance;
- No notices can be erected other than to advertise the sale of a house;
- The purchaser's frontage onto Lea View must be maintained until such time as the Local Authority adopts the road.

Every subsequent sale of no.44 (later no. 356) reaffirms these stipulations and the purchaser indemnifies the vendor against any breaches, though from 1940 onwards the contract of sale includes the words "so far as the same are still subsisting and are capable of taking effect".

On 21 March 1951, Frederick Young sold no.44 (frontage 33' 6"), to Josiah Alfred Briscoe, an engineering draughtsman, for £1,500 (£42,000). Briscoe took out a mortgage of £1,350 from the Woolwich Equitable Building Society.

There is a long break (1940 to 1951) between Frederick Young buying no.44 and selling it to Josiah Briscoe. It may be that he lived in the house in these years.

Briscoe was living at 34 Lea View in 1939 and was probably still there in 1951. He may never have moved into no.44 because, just three months after buying it, he made a smart profit by selling it on 12 June to Harold Tait, a schoolmaster from Topstreet Way in Harpenden, for £2,400, paying off his mortgage at the same time. Mr Tait had to comply with the stipulations from 1936 and 1940 and indemnify Briscoe. He took out a mortgage for £1,650 at 3.5% p.a. with St Albans Rural District Council, who had given the house a market value of £1,850.



On 8 July 1958, Mr Tait sold 44 Lea View to Mrs Constance Harriet Fisher, wife of William Gordon Fisher, who came from Westcliff-on-Sea. She paid £2,585 (£55,000 today) for the house, subject to the 1936 and 1940 stipulations. Mr Tait took the opportunity to pay off the balance of his mortgage, £1,072.10s.

44 Lea View was renamed and renumbered as 356 Lower Luton Road on 6 July 1961, as confirmed in a letter to solicitors from St Albans District Council dated 5 July 1979.

Mrs Fisher sold the house on 23 May 1974 to John and Kathleen Grigg from St Albans, for £11,000 (£107,000). The Griggs took out a mortgage with the Halifax Building Society at a variable rate of 11%.

In February 1977, Mr Grigg applied for planning permission to build a garage and kitchen extension to the house. This was granted in April of the same year and the extension was built.

On 8 February 1980, the Griggs sold the house for £38,500 (£170,000) to Rod and Liz Adams from Sandridge.

In 2012, Rod and Liz were granted planning permission to build a single-storey extension across the back of the house, relocate the kitchen and add a utility room and downstairs cloakroom with shower. These were built.

In July 2026, after more than 46 years' residence, Rod and Liz sold 356 Lower Luton Road for £686,667.

Patrick McNeill

17 September 2026

Acknowledgement

Most of the information in this account is based on documents kindly donated to Wheathampstead History Society by Rod and Liz.