



## News and events

- Our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 17 June** when Jeanette Kruger will tell us about **Lady Caroline Lamb: not mad, bad and dangerous to know**. Lady Caroline lived at Brocket Hall.
- It is worth keeping an eye on the talks at Harpenden History Society [www.harpenden-history.org.uk/public-lectures/public-talks-2026](http://www.harpenden-history.org.uk/public-lectures/public-talks-2026) On 26 May **Jon Mein** will give a talk **The “Naughty” Vicar and the missing £20,000**.

## The Wrens



OLD COTTAGE AT WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

This is a relatively well-known photo and, despite the caption, it is of the wheelwright's shop that stood where the forecourt of Jessamine Garage is today. A recent donation to the Society has enabled us to research more about it.

Paul Wren died recently in Harpenden at the age of 92. He had no surviving close family so his friends in the Methodist church sorted out his possessions including many documents and photos which, knowing that Paul came from Wheathampstead, they kindly offered to us.

This archive shows that Paul was the only son of Cyril Wren who had taken over the wheelwright and coachbuilding business in Wheathampstead from his father, Thomas, who died in 1925. The Wrens had been wheelwrights for at least six, possibly nine, generations. Paul's great-great-great-grandfather had what must have been a very successful business in Luton. In addition to the wheelwright's shop, he owned a dwelling-house, ten cottages, a “large well-built barn”, a well, a “highly productive garden” and an orchard. His son, William, was a wheelwright in Kimpton, as was his grandson Matthew. Matthew's son, Thomas, born in 1849, was living in Kimpton in 1871 but married in 1874 and by 1881 was owner of the wheelwright and coachbuilding business in Wheathampstead and living in Jessamine Cottage where Cyril and Paul were born. Why “Jessamine Cottage”? An article published in a Methodist magazine in 1906 describes Matthew Wren, then aged 87, as “Father Wren, the

Patriarch of Kimpton” a devout Methodist with 54 grandchildren and great-grandchildren whose home had “a charm of its own with its arch of roses and porch covered with jessamine.” Perhaps, when Thomas moved to Wheathampstead, he named his new home with reference to his childhood.

The Wrens were active Methodists in Wheathampstead and later at The Folly, Thomas being awarded in 1904 the Sunday School Union Diploma of Honour for “long and valuable service in the Sunday School cause” at the Wesleyan chapel on The Hill in Wheathampstead.



This photo probably includes Thomas and Cyril Wren

Cyril Wren was a sapper in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in the First World War and married Amy Henley in 1924. Their daughter Ruth was born in 1925, a son Ira in 1930 who lived for only 18 months, and Paul in 1933. He attended St Helen's School and, when he left, was apprenticed to his father in 1948 at the age of 15. However, the motor car had by now finished off the wheelwright and coachbuilding trades and in 1952 Cyril sold the house and the business premises for £4500 to G.J.W. (Peter) Titmuss who then built Jessamine Garage – pleasingly, a business still concerned with wheels and transport. Cyril donated his lathe to the Luton Museum. The family later moved to Harpenden where Paul found work at Putterills garage. He married Gladys Drawbridge in 1957. Their daughter Jean was born in 1960 but lived for only 36 hours. Paul was the last in his branch of the Wren family.