

## Who was Wilmot? – an inquiry

Mark McCarthy June 2017

St Pancras Way, once known as Kings Road, lies between Kentish Town Road and old St Pancras Church in London. Panel 11 of Panorama by James King shows that, around 1800, there were still meadows on the north side.



From the 1820s, the new Camden Road cut across from Hampstead Road, at the Mother Red Caps inn, upwards to Maiden Lane. From the 1830s, on either side, Camden Villas were set out, with entries for side roads.

Some of the early buildings of Camden Town were the houses around Jeffreys Street, and on the north side of Kings Road were Camden Cottages and a row (Sussex Terrace) leading towards Kentish Town. A map shows the position by the early 1840s. On the east side of Camden Road are indicated Rochester G(ardens). and Murray St(reet), and Stretching north from Jeffreys Street there is Wilmot Pl(ace). In due course, this land on the west side was further filled with Rochester Road and Rochester Terrace.



Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge 1840s / Ordnance Survey 1915

Over the eighty years of its building, the streets that became Camden Town were mostly named after the Camden family – direct names (Pratt and Jeffreys) or family place names (Bayham, Sussex, Brecknock) – while one corner of the estate reflected the underlying land ownership by the church of England (St Paul's, Prebend).

Camden Road was set out soon after the marriage in 1835 of Charles George Pratt to the 22-year old Harriet Murray, first daughter of George Murray, Bishop of Rochester. These names reflect the roads on the east side of Camden Road. On the west side, Wilmot Place was named before Rochester Road. Who was Wilmot?

The answer, in *Streets of Camden Town*, a publication of the Camden History Society, is either that the name is of a builder or that it records John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester.<sup>1</sup>

It is attractive to consider the names in this corner of Camden Town as being one person. John Wilmot (1647-1680) is the most celebrated poet of the early Restoration period, who played out the morals of the Court and theatre in poetry and life, dying young with syphilis. His poems only circulated in manuscript, so his legacy remains open for scholarly debate – a recent biography suggests about sixty poems. His picture from his early twenties, now in the National Portrait Gallery, shows him being fed scraps of paper from a book held by a monkey. A play of his life by Stephen Jeffreys gained a film version, *The Libertine* (2005), with Johnny Depp and John Malkovitch.



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.camdenhistorysociety.org/streets-of-admin/streets-of-camden-town>

But which attribution is correct: is the linkage of names Rochester and Murray or Rochester and Wilmot?

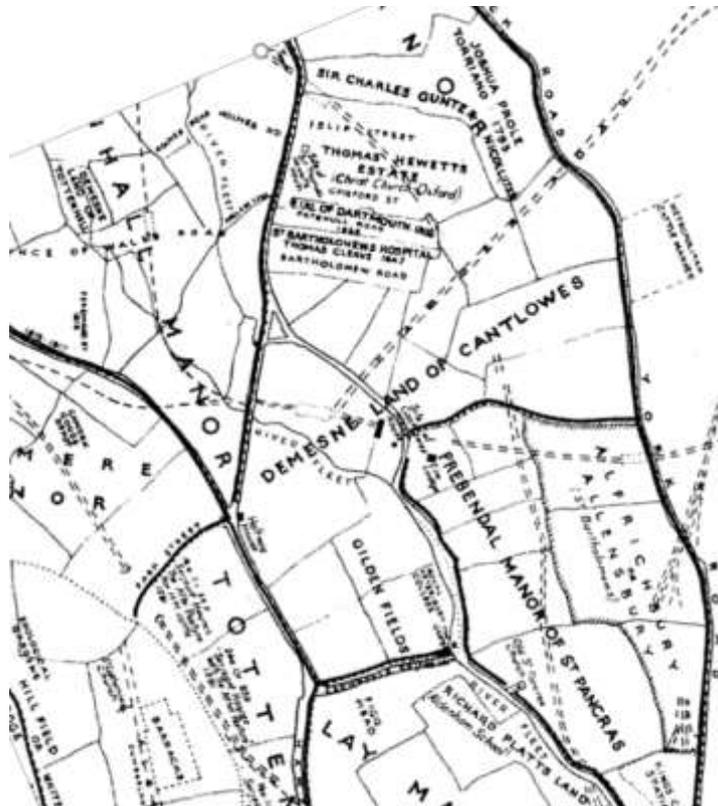
The Camden Estate characteristically used family names, or names of significant associates, in the land development – the Jeffreys who originally owned the land, the Pratts, their second family home at Bayham on the Kent / Sussex border, and also after Joseph Randolph, who, as Canon of St Paul's, held leasehold rights with the Lords Camden. They did not use unrelated historical names.

Moreover, the streets set out in the 1840s were 160 years after John Wilmot / the Earl of Rochester died, while John Wilmot is not known to have had any contact with the land.

And third, the land either side of Camden Road was being set out for housing a few years after George Charles Pratt, third Earl and Second Marquis of Camden, married Harriet Murray, first of eleven children in the family of George Murray, Bishop of Rochester.

So why Wilmot?

### ***Cantlowes***



Cantlowes manor lands exist in the Domesday book. It was recorded as 210 acres in the 1649 Parliamentary survey, with just one farm house. An annual rent was paid to support a cannon (prebendary) of St Paul's Cathedral, but the land was bought and sold by gentry.

In 1681, the year following the death of John Wilmot, the Demesne of Cantlowes was bought by Jeffrey Jeffreys, a lawyer, from George Ent, a physician. It passed to his brother in 1683, merchant 'Alderman' John Jeffreys, who was one of the richest London merchants in the Virginia tobacco trade. On his death in 1689 it passed to his nephew, Sir Jeffrey Jeffreys in 1691. When he died in 1709, his second son, Nicholas, inherited the Cantlowes demesne, held as ultimogeniture, for his mother. In the year his mother died, 1717, Nicholas married Frances Eyles – also from a family of merchants in the Atlantic and Levantine trades. Elizabeth, their second daughter, married Charles Pratt in 1749. But their only son, Jeffrey, died without issue and the Cantlowes land finally passed to Lord Camden in 1785.

Who was Camden?

William Camden, a famous Elizabethan historian, who made the first systematic description of 'Britannia', bought a house in (now) Chislehurst, Kent, which he called Camden Place. It was bought by Charles Pratt (1714-1794), a judge and politician, who chose the name on his elevation as Baron Camden.



Camden Place, now Chislehurst golf club

Charles Pratt became Lord Chancellor in 1766 and is celebrated in legal history for arguing against the State's right of entry to an individual's house (as it happens, of his friend John Weeks) without a warrant. In a second judgement, he determined that of a slave from the

West Indies was a free man in Britain because 'we have no slaves here'. After resigning as Lord Chancellor in 1770, he remained involved with politics in support of the Pitts and later as President of the Privy Council.

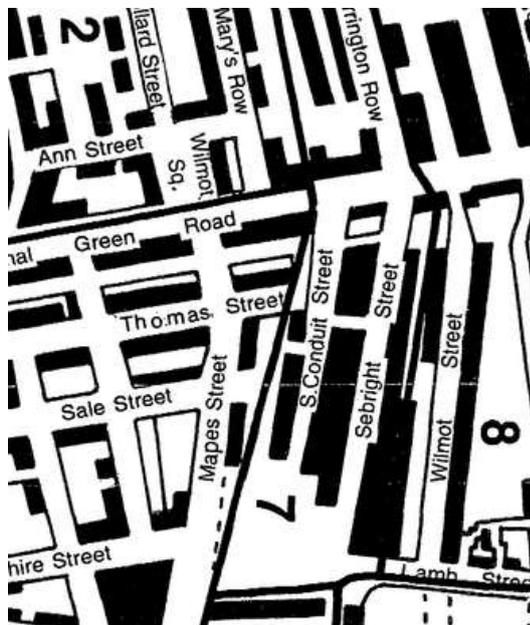
Lord Camden had a son, John Jeffreys Pratt, who became Second Earl in 1794 and rose to be Marquis Camden in 1812. He married Frances Molesworth in 1785 and they also had only one son, George Pratt, who was first titled Lord Brecknock and became third Earl in 1840.

The Lords Camden never lived on the Jeffreys land, despite it being called 'Camden Town' as landlords – in London, they lived in Lincoln's Inn square, Hill Street in St James' and then Eaton Square, Belgravia, while their family houses were Wilderness in Kent and Bayham Abbey in Sussex.

They managed development of Camden Town through an agent. In the period 1823-1847, the agent was the architect Joseph Kay. John Jeffreys, the second Earl, was land lord through to 1840, and his son George, the third earl, thereafter.

### ***Who was Wilmot?***

There was a Wilmot builder in east London in the eighteenth century – David Wilmot, a developer in Bethnal Green, where his name is remembered in Wilmot Square and Wilmot Road



Estates: 2: Saffron Close; 8: Markham



Moreover, one of his first acts buildings was a pub called the Camden Head – which, rebuilt in the 1850s in Regency style, continues today



Moreover, his home address, given at the 1774 Middlesex Sessions was – can you believe it? – Camden Row, Bethnal Green. Yet there is no reason to believe they ever met.

As a magistrate, David Wilmot had both friends and enemies.

In 1780, Lord George Gordon, President of the Protestant Association is said to have stirred up the mob against Catholic emancipation and supposed 'papacy'. Another cause may have been the American War of Independence, leaving England isolated from Netherlands, France and Spain. Whatever the origins, in the 'Gordon Riots', 50 000 people marched on Parliament, MPs were attacked, prisons were opened and prisoners released, and Catholic homes destroyed. The army was called out on 7 June, and 285 people were shot dead, with another 200 wounded.



Gordon riots (Charles Green, 1896)

In the east end, the rioters headed to the house of their magistrate – David Wilmot. “A thousand” people mobbed and pulled down the house. Of three people tried and executed, one man, John Gamble, was hanged at Bethnal Green:

The Ordinary got up into the cart, and prayed with him upwards of 20 minutes. Having finished, and gone to his coach, the executioner pulled his cap over his face, and at the request of the prisoner a handkerchief was tied over his cap. He put his hands together, and lifting them towards Heaven, cried out “Lord Jesus receive me,” when the cart drew away, and he was launched into eternity about half past eight o’clock, amidst a numerous crowd of spectators. After hanging upwards of an hour his body was cut down, and delivered for interment. The prisoner was about 36 years of age, a cabinet-maker, and has left a wife and three children.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Wilmot and Camden***

Wilmot is an English surname with Germanic origins. It is a diminutive of "Wilhelm", "wil" meaning "strength of mind" and "helm" meaning "protection", plus the diminutive suffix "ot(t)" meaning 'little' or possibly 'son of'.

Charles Pratt, as Lord Chancellor of England, would have known two brothers that were significant to him – Robert and John Wilmot. Their father, Robert Wilmot (1669–1738) was of Osmaston Hall, near Derby, and his wife Ursula Marow, came from Berkswell, near Coventry. Earlier, his father Robert (1641-1722), who was M.P. for Derby 1690–5, had married Elizabeth, daughter of Edward Eardley of Eardley, Staffordshire.

They had **two sons** and a daughter: we’ll call them the ‘blue line’ for the older, Robert (1708-1772), and ‘red line’ for the younger, John (1709-1792), and a further ‘green line’ for Maria, daughter of John.

**Robert Wilmot** (1708-1772), in the blue line, was Resident Secretary in England to the Viceroy of Ireland from 1740, serving twelve successive Viceroys, and from 1758 became Secretary to the Lord Chamberlain – the senior figure responsible for communication between the Sovereign and the House of Lords. He was created a baronet, Sir Robert Wilmot.

In the red line, **John Eardley Wilmot** (1709-1792) was as able a lawyer as Lord Camden, taking over Lord Camden’s position as Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, declining to succeed him as Lord Chancellor but continuing ten years as a judge and Privy Councillor.

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<sup>2</sup> General Evening Post, July 20, 1780 – July 22, 1780

Following the American Revolutionary War, he led a commission determining claims for compensation returnees from the American Revolutionary War. He died at his house in Great Ormond Street, London, in 1792.



John Eardley Wilmot, two portraits

John Jeffeys Pratt became the Second Lord Camden in 1794 and lived to 1840. It is probable he knew a second generation of Wilmots.



In the blue line, Sir Robert Wilmot's son, second baronet and from 1772 also called Sir Robert Wilmot had married Juliana Elizabeth Byron (cousin of the poet), with one son before she died in 1788. He then married Marianna Howard in 1795 and had six more children. While he lived at Osmaston, he also inherited from a friend of his father's, Sir John Cope.

In the red line, his cousin Sir John Eardley-Wilmot (1748-1815) was called to the bar at the Inner Temple in 1773, and became a Master in Chancery. He was an MP for twenty years, later for Coventry with his brother-in-law, Sir Gideon Eardley, but this proved too costly to continue. He married twice, first Frances Sainthill, when he was 28 and she a minor, with

whom he had five children, but whom he divorced in 1792 for his second wife, a colonel's daughter, Sarah Haslam, without issue. He was "a man of upright and unimpeachable character, learned and eloquent".<sup>3</sup>



Sir John Eardley-Wilmot (Benjamin West, 1812: Yale Center for British Art)

Following the American Revolution, Sir John was appointed by Parliament to head a committee for compensation of returnee soldiers. Amongst these were former slaves who had been offered their freedom to fight for Britain; however, they were refused any financial aid by the Committee, as under the law they were not born 'free'.

After the French Revolution, he further established a committee to provide for clergy and other less-well-off coming to Britain. The community (of Catholics) developed in Somers Town, and many were buried at St Pancras Church. Some praised Eardley-Wilmot for his charitable pursuit, and others criticized him as a papal sympathizer.

He was an active supporter of the Foundling Hospital in Bloomsbury. And, indeed, a road near the Hospital was named Wilmot Street. He would have surely known Joseph Kay, surveyor to the Hospital and architect of Mecklenborg Square. Kay, who had his office in Gower Street, was the agent, from the 1820s to his death in 1848, for the Camden Town developments.

Wilmot spent his later years preparing his father's biography and writing a 'History of the Commission of American Claims'. In 1804 he bought Bruce Castle, Tottenham – now the local history museum for Haringey borough.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Wilmot\\_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wilmot_(politician))



John Hoppner R.A. (1758-1810) Portrait of Sir John Eardley-Wilmot Half length, wearing a blue coat

As an interlude, on the green line, Maria married Samson Gideon (1744 – 1824), whose father (also Sampson Gideon, 1699–1762) had been a banker for both George II and George III but had not received a peerage because of his religion. Joining the aristocracy instead by marriage, Gideon the younger changed his name to Eardley, gained an Irish peerage, and continued in Parliament until 1820. His two sons, however, died before him.



Sampson Gideon and a companion, painted by Pompeo Batoni

### ***Wilmot 3***

John Jeffreys Pratt's son George, who married Harriet Murray in 1835, took over the management of Camden Town – and thus the naming of roads – after his father's death in 1840.

In the Wilmot blue line, the third Baronet, Sir Robert John Wilmot (1784-1841, after marriage, Wilmot-Horton), lived at Catton Hall, Derby. He was an MP deeply concerned with issues including poverty, and proposed emigration to the colonies for both English and Irish poor. He was Colonial Secretary in the government 1821-28, and then took on the role of Governor of Ceylon, 1831-1837, where his many progressive reforms included freedom of the indentured labourers.<sup>4</sup>



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Wilmot-Horton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Wilmot-Horton)

In the red line (second cousins) Sir John Eardley Eardley-Wilmot, (yes!), (1783–1847), promoted to Baronet for the good works of his grand-father and father, was an MP for North Warwickshire from 1832 to 1843. He continued the family concern for social reform, including the welfare of prisoners, the benefits of emigration, and campaigned against slavery and for the emancipation of black people in the empire.

In 1843, at the age of 60, he took up the post of Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land (later called Tasmania). Alas, his progressive views offended the interests of established gentry, who preferred penal servitude for prisoners rather than their liberty. In 1847 he was 'framed' for immorality (homosexuality, a practice common enough among the imprisoned convicts), and recalled by Gladstone, but died shortly afterwards. Parliament was furious, and he was afterwards given full vindication, and has a statue now in Hobart.

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Lamont, *Robert Wilmot Horton and liberal Toryism*, PhD thesis, 2015, University of Nottingham.



The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840, (Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1841, National Portrait Gallery)

We have an unexpected insight to this Wilmot through the diaries of Queen Victoria. She recorded in her Journal that Eardley Wilmot dined eight times with the future Queen at the seaside town of St Leonards in the winter of 1834 / 35. On one occasion, also, she reports: "At 1 we lunched. At ½ past 1 came Lady Wilmot and her two daughters the Misses Selina and Eliza Wilmot. At a ¼ past 2 we went out walking with Lady Flora and Lehzen.."

Moreover, on Wednesday 23rd May 1838, at Buckingham Palace, Queen Victoria writes she heard from Lord John that

"Sir Eardley Wilmot's resolution for the immediate abolition of Slavery was carried yesterday evening at 9 o'clock by 96 to 93. This result was entirely unexpected. The House was anxious to divide, and as the matter had been discussed before, Lord John Russell thought it unnecessary to continue the Debate. Lord John Russell afterwards declared that he should oppose decidedly any Bill to carry into effect the resolution which had been voted. Sir Robert Peel cheered loudly this declaration".

That evening, Wednesday 23rd May 1838, ie the night following the debate, among guests at the palace were ... Sir Eardley Wilmot ... and ... Sir Wilmot Horton - who had then returned from Ceylon – ie both blue and red lines of Wilmots.

However, the Royal enthusiasm dissipated: For Tuesday 29th May 1838, at Buckingham Palace

Got up at a ¼ to 10 and breakfasted at ½ p. 10. Heard from Lord John that we had a majority of 72 upon this troublesome Slavery Question and that he hopes this Question is now disposed of. Sir George Grey moved the Counter Resolution against Sir Eardley Wilmot's motion.

But there is other evidence comes from a quite different source.

The Camden Trust deposited their records of the Pratt family with Kent County Council in the 1960s. Amongst the correspondence there is a small collection of letters between 'Camden' and 'Wilmot'. One letter is from George Charles Pratt (then Lord Brecknock) to "Wilmot"

Date: 10 Nov 1833

In the summary says "Father and sister have both returned much better for Malvern. ... Please visit him at Christmas.? at the Albion in Brighton. The port was so good he wouldn't leave ....

Then there are seven letters to the '2nd Marquess Camden' – George Pratt, signed by "Eardley".

He thanks Lord Camden for a stay at Wildernesse, the Camden's Kent home; commends his good wishes to the Marquess's wife; banter about the tailoring of the waistcoat of Lord Bayham (their son); remembers fondly past Christmastimes at Wildernesse; and gives advice for the Camden's to make a train journey to the Wilmot at home in Malvern.

Malvern? We haven't heard before of this. Which Eardley Wilmot?

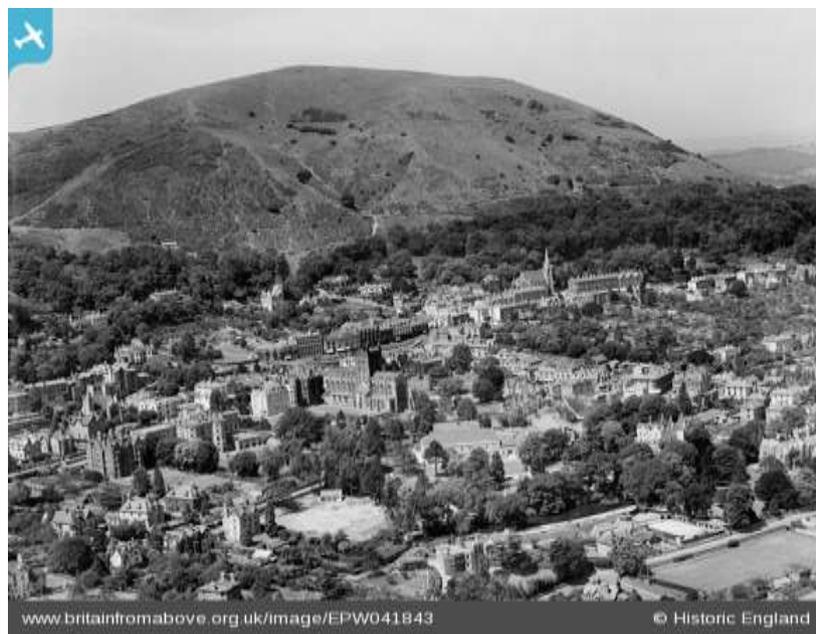
Lieutenant General Eardley Nicholas Wilmot, b. Nov 13 1800 in Osmaston, co Derby, Died Mar 02 1877 at Rose Bank, Great Malvern, Worcestershire

The Gazette Dated 29th August, 1859. Commissions signed by the Lord Lieutenant of the County of Worcester. Eardley Nicholas Wilmot, Esq., to be Deputy Lieutenant.

A house named Rose Bank appears in the 1841 census of Great Malvern. It was the home of Mary Ann Wilmot the widow of Sir Robert Wilmot 2nd Baronet (1753-1834) of Osmaston Hall in Derbyshire.<sup>5</sup> The Wilmot family lived at Rose Bank from about 1840 to 1880. Rose Bank House was bought later by Charles Dyson Perrins, of Worcestershire Source fame, who gave the four acres to the town in 1918. While the house was demolished in 1959, the Gardens lies on edge of the Malvern Hills overlooking Great Malvern.



<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/image/epw005393>



<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EPW041843>

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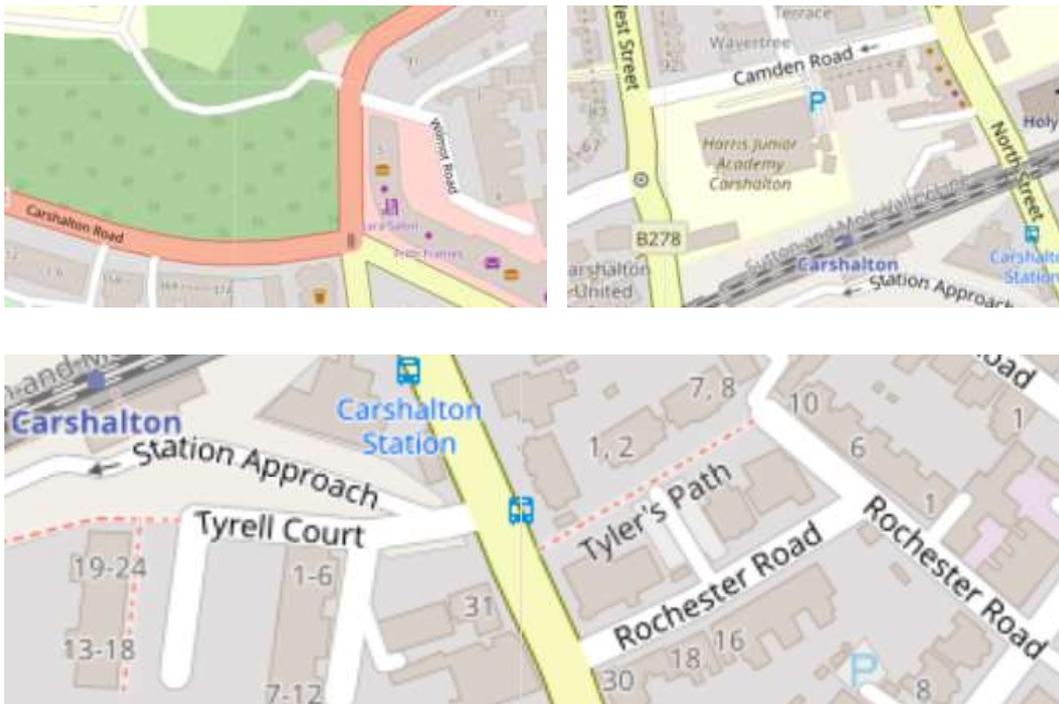
<sup>5</sup> Stephen Lamont, Robert Wilmot Horton and liberal Toryism. PhD thesis, 2015, University of Nottingham.

### ***Who was Wilmot?***

Over three generations, the Pratts knew the Wilmots, through shared interests of the law and politics and latterly in a social way. Moreover, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot (in the second generation) was a governor at the Foundling Hospital, Bloomsbury, where Joseph Kay, who was agent for both the second and third Lords Camden's, was the architect. The Foundling estate named one of its estate roads after Wilmot.

But Bloomsbury is not Camden Town. Was the apparent friendship of the (relatively) younger Lord Brecknock with 'Eardley' Wilmot, who had visited Queen Victoria, have been sufficient to name a road after him? Was it a tribute back to earlier generations – even the link of Lord Camden's original ruling on slaves being free people in England with the Wilmot interest in emancipation over three generations?

And - just to add confusion – in Carshalton, in south London, there are three roads called Camden, Rochester and Wilmot all within a few streets of each other.



It may, alternatively, be of interest to explore the cheese made in the home village of the Wilmots, Berkswell in Warwickshire.



Berkswell



“Rich, sweet fruity and nutty flavour. The texture is slightly grainy and depending on the age it can be very firm to almost moist. Berkswell cheese is made in Ram Hall near Berkswell, West Midlands.”