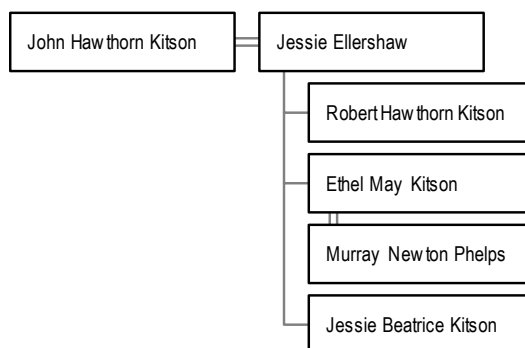


John Hawthorn Kitson



John Hawthorn Kitson made his appearance in 1843 with his birth registered at Leeds for the Apr-Jun quarter of that year. He was in the census count for 1851 and 1861 as being at home, and for the latter census described at a 17 year old Collegian. By the 1871 census John had married and left home to set up house at 19 Hyde Terrace, West Leeds.¹

John H Kitson	27	Locomotive Engine Maker	Hunslet, Leeds
Jane Kitson	28		Leeds
Elizabeth Dixon	23	Cook	Alnwick, Northumberland
Priscilla Wigglesworth	22	Waiting Maid	South Nieldford, Yorkshire
Hannah Rodwell	21	Housemaid	Cherry Burton, Yorkshire

I had no luck trying to find out who Jane was. I double checked the census transcription and the name given for John's wife was Jane. At first I assumed that Jane had died sometime before the next census as John Kitson now appears with a new wife, and having moved to 138 Cardigan Road, Headingley. There are now also three children in the household.²

John H Kitson	37	Locomotive Engine Maker	Hunslet, Leeds
Jessie Kitson	38		Leeds
Robert H Kitson	7	Scholar	Leeds
Ethel May Kitson	6	Scholar	Leeds
Jessie Beatrice Kitson	4	Scholar	Leeds
Mary Barker	34	Cook	Leeds
Mary Brown	29	Waiting Maid	Otley, Yorkshire
Ada Almgill	26	Housemaid	Hardsall, Nottinghamshire
Ruthetta Shann	29	Nurse (Domestic)	Otley, Yorkshire
Mary Ann Chappell	18	Kitchen Maid (Domestic)	Leeds

Interestingly both Jane and Jessie were about the same age, and both came from Leeds. A final check on the FreeBMD Marriage Index came up with a marriage registered in Kirkstall for the Jul-Sep quarter of 1868 between one John Hawthorn Kitson and a Jessie Ellershaw. So – the transcriber had made a mistake with the 1871 census and Jane and Jessie were one and the same!

Leaving aside the confusion with his wife and concentrating on John for a moment, a troll through the Internet for any references for John Hawthorn Kitson took me to a site on the Swiss Alps, and in particular to the Weisshorn, a mountain in the Swiss Alps, west of Zermatt and north of the Matterhorn and, with its 4505m, overtopping the illustrious Matterhorn by some 60m. The mountain was first climbed on 19 August 1861 by John Tyndall with guides J. J. Bennen and Ulrich Wenger. With these same guides, the north-east face was first climbed by John Hawthorn Kitson in 1871! From the general information on the site it would seem that today (and presumably also in earlier times) the best time to attempt a climb is in the European summer months.³ So it is likely that, apart from his business affairs, and his family, preparations for, and the climb itself, would have occupied quite a bit of John's time in 1871.

Returning to the wedding as provided by the marriage certificate, John Hawthorn Kitson and Jessie Ellershaw, both aged 25, were married at the Church of Headingley on 2nd September 1868 by licence and in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England. The profession of both John and his father James was given as Engineer, and John's residence was Roundhay. Jessie's residential address was given as Headingley and her father was Robert John Ellershaw, Merchant. There were three witnesses – Robert John Ellershaw (presumably Jessie's father), Ada Seymour, and Arthur Kitson, John's brother.⁴

So what more can we find out about Jessie? She was the daughter of Robert John Ellershaw, a merchant of Leeds and his wife Maria Ellershaw (possibly née Singleton).⁵ The Ellershaws were living at Wilby House,

Mount Preston, Leeds, for the 1851 census transcribed as Ellershan).^{vi}

Robert John Ellershaw	39	Oil Merchant and Soap Maker	Leeds
Maria Ellershaw	34		Leeds
Jessie Ellershaw	8		Leeds
Walter Ellershaw	6		Leeds
Rose Ellershaw	5		Leeds
Arthur Ellershaw	11 mths		Leeds
Mary Ann Ellershaw (Un)(Vis)*	31		Leeds
Harriet Hargreaves	34	Cook	Mansfield, Nottinghamshire
Maria Walker	33	Housemaid	Wakefield
Elizabeth Stead	34	Nurse	Leeds
Mary Ellen Sutcliff	16	Nurse	Shipley, Yorkshire

*Mary Ann was most likely Robert's sister.

The family, now all ten years older, but minus son Walter, had moved to 34 Otley Road, Headingley by the 1861 census.^{vii}

Robert John Ellershaw	49	Oil Merchant	Leeds
Maria Ellershaw	44		Leeds
Jessie Ellershaw	18		Leeds
Rose Ellershaw	15	Scholar	Leeds
Arthur Ellershaw	11	Scholar	Leeds
Ellen Brett	29	Servant	Leeds
Eliza Burras	24	Servant	Leeds
Sarah M Beanland	23	Servant	Otley

Sometime between 1861 and 1871 the Ellershaws moved to Scarborough and it was here that they were living for the 1871 census, at 8 Crescent.^{viii}

Robert John Ellershaw	59	Seed Crusher, Oil Merchant and Soap Maker	Leeds
Maria Ellershaw	54		Leeds
Rose Ellershaw	25		Leeds
Elizabeth Benson	25	Domestic Servant Waiting Maid	Leeds
Elizabeth Kay	31	Domestic Servant Cook	Scarborough
Emma Hodgson	33	Domestic Servant Housemaid	Bramley, Yorkshire
Rebecca White	20	Domestic Servant Housemaid	Lincoln

Although the Ellershaws have not been located for the 1881 census, it is likely that the Scarborough registration of the death of Maria Ellershaw for the Apr-Jun quarter of 1883 marks the passing of Jessie's mother.^{ix}

Returning to John (who incidentally was better known as Hawthorn) and Jessie, it is interesting to note that by 1891 they had moved into Elmete Hall, where previously his father James had lived before his death in 1885. Note also that John's place of birth has changed from Hunslet to Roundhay. Wife Jessie is not at home for the census, nor are son Robert or daughter Ethel May who are away at boarding school. John was one of the few Kitsons for whom we have an 1891 census record.^x

John H Kitson	47	Engine Manufacturer	Roundhay
Jessie B Kitson	14		Roundhay
Gladys J Parry	20	Governess	Rowsley, Derbyshire
Audrey A M Playfair (Niece)*	15		Middlesex, London
Dora L Ellershaw (Niece)*	14		Hull, Yorkshire
Catherine Joyce	48	Cook	Kingweston, Somersetshire
Annie F Campy	23	Housemaid	Newland, Yorkshire
Sarah Sectney	23	Kitchenmaid	Lincoln
Annie Cullinworth	19	Housemaid	Harewood, Yorkshire
Fannie Barnett	17	Scullerymaid	Leeds
William Mason	20	Footman	Hadley, Staffordshire

*Niece Audrey Playfair is one of the daughter's of John's sister Emily. Niece Dora Ellershaw is a daughter of Jessie's brother Arthur.

Also recorded in this census are the occupants of the various properties contained in the Elmete estate.

Elmete Hall Gardener's Cottage

Albert E Brown	26	Gardener	Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
Charles E Ives	27	Gardener	Hessle, Yorkshire
Elmete Hall Stables			

Robert Jackson	29	Groom	Cherry Burton, Yorkshire
<u>Elmete Hall Cottage</u>			
Charles Dixon	42	Coachman	Bigby, Lincolnshire
Hannah Dixon	45		Naburn, Yorkshire
Elizabeth Duffield (Daug)	21		Naburn, Yorkshire
Harry Dixon	13	Scholar	Chapelton, Yorkshire
Arthur Dixon	11	Scholar	Seacroft, Yorkshire
Margaret Dixon	8	Scholar	Keswick, Cumberland
Walter Dixon	7	Scholar	Keswick, Cumberland
Herbert Dixon	4	Scholar	Roundhay
<u>Elmete Hall Cottage</u>			
Thomas Bonsall	41	Gardener	Roundhay
Ellen Bonsall	38		Ludlow, Shropshire

At the time of the 1891 census, Jessie is in London with her father and step mother. The group was staying at the Savoy Hotel and Restaurant, St Clement Danes. From the records, Robert Ellershaw had remarried and his new wife Elizabeth is about 23 years his junior and only eight years older than Jessie. She was most likely the Elizabeth Anne Rapier who is listed with Robert John Ellershaw as having married in the last quarter of 1885 in Wandsworth district of London. In fact any doubts are dispelled by the fact that, for the 1881 census, Elizabeth A Rapier, an unmarried woman of 46, born at Morpeth, and living off the income from dividends, is the head of a household at 14 Albermarle Street, Scarborough.^{vi}

Robert John Ellershaw	79	Nil Occupation	Leeds
Elizabeth Anne Ellershaw	56		Morpeth, Northumberland
Jessie Kitson (Daughter)	48		Leeds, Yorkshire

John, who had been made a Justice of the Peace in 1894, and who had worked with his brothers in the Kitson firm, died suddenly at home on 21st May 1899 at the relatively young age of 56.^{vi} According to the death certificate he was found dead on his face on the Elmet Hall dining room floor, having apparently fallen in a fit, as determined by the inquest held on 22nd May by Thomas Taylor, Coroner for Yorkshire.^{vi}

The news was conveyed by a Death Notice in the Times :

KITSON.—On the 21st inst., suddenly, at Elmete Hall, Leeds, JOHN HAWTHORN KITSON, J.P., aged 56. Funeral at Roundhay, Leeds, this day (Wednesday), 11 a.m.

His burial on 24th May was recorded in the St. John's Burial Register :

Kitson John Hawthorn 24 May 1899 56 Roundhay, Elmete Hall

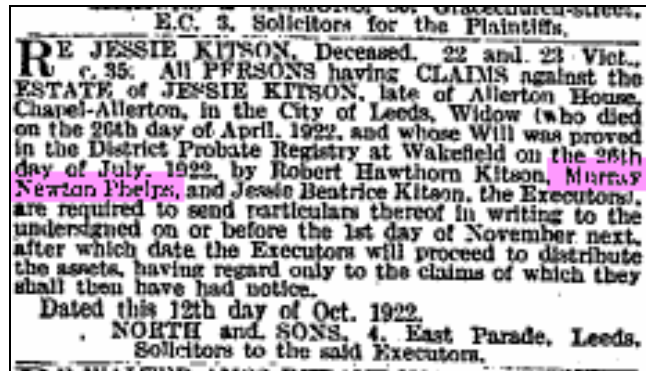
Shortly thereafter the following notice was placed in the Times.

JOHN HAWTHORN KITSON deceased. Pursuant to the Statute 22 & 23 Vic cap 35 intituled "An Act to further amend the law of property and to relieve Trustees" Notice is hereby given that all persons having any CLAIMS or DEMANDS upon and against the ESTATE of JOHN HAWTHORN KITSON late of Elmet Hall in the Parish of Barwick in Elmet Engineer deceased (who died on the 21st day of May 1899 and whose Will was proved by Jessie Kitson the Widow John North Solicitor and Robert Hawthorn Kitson the Son of the said deceased the Executors therein named on the 20th day of July 1899 in the Wakefield District Registry of the Probate Division of the High Court of Justice) are hereby required to send in particulars of their debts or claims to us the undersigned on or before the 30th day of September 1899 and Notice is hereby also given that after that day the said Executors will proceed to distribute the assets of the said John Hawthorn Kitson deceased amongst the parties entitled thereto having regard only to the claims of which they shall then have had Notice and that they will not be liable for the assets or any part thereof so distributed to any person of whose debt or claim they shall not then have had Notice.

Dated this 3rd day of August 1899
NORTH & SONS 4 East Parade, Leeds Solicitors for the said Executors

I have not found Jessie in the 1901 census, and even looked to see if she was perhaps staying with parents. All this revealed was that Jessie's father had died and her widowed stepmother was living at Bedford Hill, Streatham, in the borough of Wandsworth, the district in which she and Robert had married.^{vi}

However Jessie was more than likely the Mrs. Kitson referred to in Kelly's 1908 Directory as living at Elmet Hall.^{vi} She outlived John by 23 years and died on 26th April 1922. Six months later the following notice was carried in the 21st October 1922 edition of the Times.



Their passing is recorded in the Monumental Inscriptions at St. John's Church, Roundhay, Leeds :

FF3 Headstone with curved top.

In loving memory of John Hawthorn KITSON who died on Whit Sunday May 21st 1899 aged 56 years.

Also of Jessie his wife who died April 26th 1922 aged 79 years.



Robert Hawthorn Kitson

Born in 1873, the oldest and only son of John Hawthorn and Jessie Kitson, Robert was at home for his first census nights in 1881 but for the 1891 census is found boarding at Shrewsbury Public School, the headmaster of which at the time was Henry Whitehead Moss.^{xvi}

Robert H Kitson 17 Scholar Leeds

Shrewsbury School was founded in 1552 by King Edward VI, and in 1571 was augmented by Queen Elizabeth I. In 1868 the school was named one of the nine 'great' schools of England (along with Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Merchant Taylors' Rugby, St Paul's, Westminster and Winchester) in the Public Schools Act passed by the British Parliament. Sir Thomas Ashton, the first headmaster, gave the school a classical and humanistic tone that has been retained, though sciences and other studies are now also in the curriculum. In 1882, Headmaster Henry Whitehead Moss moved the school from its original town centre location to a new site across the River Severn, in the affluent Kingsland suburb. The original buildings are now used as the Shrewsbury Town Library. After completing his education at Shrewsbury, Robert went up to Cambridge University where he acquitted himself well.^{xvii}

College : TRINITY

Entered : Michs 1892

Adm pens at TRINITY, June 18 1892. S. of John Hawthorn of Elmet Hall, Roundhay, Leeds. B. 1873, at Leeds. School, Shrewsbury. Matric Michs 1892; B.A. 1895; (Nat Sci Trip., Pt II, 1st Class, 1896); Harkness Scholar, 1897; M.A. 1901. Of Elmet Hall, Leeds, in 1908; subsequently of Taormina, Sicily, where he died Sept 17 1947. (Shrewsbury Sch Reg).

Robert Kitson never married and, after completing his education, spent most of his life abroad. He had been drawn to Taormina, not just by the sun, but by its reputation. Ever since Goethe, in the 1780s, hailed the town as "insuperable. A patch of paradise", the Sicilian resort had been on the Grand Tour of every aristocratic European. Its virtues had been extolled during the 19th century by, among others, Alexandre Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, Gustav Klimt, Edward Lear and Walter Swinburne. But while they liked to visit, Kitson could afford to build a home there.

He arrived in the town in 1900, at the age of 27. With his pale skin, careful coiffure and penetrating blue eyes, he looked every inch the fin de siècle English aesthete. Taormina, he quickly realised, could satisfy his needs - its light, beauty and sublime landscape would inspire his painting; its climate could benefit his rheumatic fever; and he could escape the sexual repression of his native England, epitomised by Oscar Wilde's recent trial and detention.

Almost immediately, the young Englishman began work on Casa Cuseni. He chose a site on the very outskirts of Taormina, becoming the first foreigner to build outside the medieval walls and earning himself the nickname "il pazzo inglese" - the mad Englishman. Kitson, who came from an engineering family, planned and supervised every detail of his project, ensuring his home would have a stunning view of the Bay of Naxos and Mount Etna. He was architect, draughtsman, surveyor, engineer, landscape gardener and interior designer, although he enlisted some help with the latter from an old friend and mentor, the artist Frank Brangwyn. (Ironically, Kitson was to be remembered more for this act of artistic patronage than for any of his paintings.)

Brangwyn had been apprenticed to William Morris, and by the time he received Kitson's commission, he was working closely with art nouveau pioneers in Paris, Munich and Vienna. Brangwyn was responsible for Casa Cuseni's dining room interior: furniture, panelling, detailing and murals. By the time the house was complete, the locals had taken Kitson to their hearts. "Il pazzo inglese" gave way to "Don Roberto": respect was due to the Englishman who showed such commitment to his adoptive home. He was popular, too, for the innovations he introduced to Taormina: the first private swimming pool, for instance, sited (with an artist's sensibility and engineer's precision) to reflect Etna's moonlit slopes; and the first motor car, in which he helped to ferry the injured during the earthquake of 1908.^{xviii}

The Leeds University Library (Handlist 128) holds in its Special Collections MS 1652 some sketchbooks and other papers related to Robert. The list of the collection (the gift of Miss Daphne Phelps - the niece of Robert Kitson - August 2001) is prefaced as follows :

Robert Kitson was the son of J.H. Kitson of Elmet Hall, Roundhay, Leeds. The Kitson family business was locomotive engineering, but Robert became an artist, (mainly in the medium of watercolour), exhibiting regularly at the Leeds Fine Arts Club, the Royal Academy and the Society of British Artists. He was a pupil and friend of Alfred East, RA and it was through East that he met Sir Frank Brangwyn and became his friend and patron, commissioning a number of works, most notably the mosaic cycle for the apse of St. Aidan's Church in Roundhay.

For health reasons, Kitson settled in Sicily where he designed his own villa, the Casa Cuseni in Taormina, which he was forced to abandon after the outbreak of the Second World War, but returned there shortly before his death in 1947.

The documents referred to include :

Sale Catalogue of the Elmet Hall Estate, 1919, with additional interleaved photographs of the Hall and gardens.
Notebook (with inserts), containing records relating to Casa Cuseni, including records of the Italian military occupation of the villa, December 1940-August 1941.
File containing press cuttings relating to Kitson's family, life (including obituary notices) and exhibitions.
Various family letters.

The Leeds University synopsis of Robert Kitson's life is very much a sanitised version. As alluded to above, and confirmed from the following excerpts from an account of Wilhelm Von Gloeden - A Memory of Taormina by Charles Leslie of the Leslie-Lohman Gay Art Foundation, Robert was in fact a homosexual and, rather than, or in addition to leaving England for health reasons, it is much more likely that he would have found life in England rather difficult.

From time to time a moment of artistic ferment burgeons in a place so remote and unlikely that the phenomenon can only be regarded as - well - surprising. Such a place was Taormina, Sicily at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries...Coupled with this evolution and substantially contributing to it was a fact never openly acknowledged, although everyone in Taormina knew about it. The fact was that many, indeed the majority of the well-to-do foreigners who established permanent residences there, with the construction of beautiful villas or the conversion of wonderful medieval buildings, were homosexual men and not a few of them were artists; mostly gifted dilettantes or serious amateurs of the arts. Very often their first awareness of Taormina was the sight of a Von Gloeden photograph. At the "fin de siecle" Taormina had already become a place where homosexual men of the late Victorian era found, and would continue to find, a hospitable and privileged atmosphere into and through the Edwardian era and "The Jazz Age"...

The first important arrival who came to stay - and certainly the best painter of the many artists who followed - was a young Englishman, Robert Hawthorn Kitson. Born in Leeds in 1873, he was far and away the most elegant, cultivated and intellectual personality to settle in Taormina after Van Gloeden. Kitson was the Scion of a distinguished English family which became immensely wealthy as a result of establishing the first commercial railway in the world (London to Birmingham) thereby becoming the parent company of all railway systems for some time to come. He first visited Taormina in 1898 at the age of 26 when his family "adventured" around Sicily by the coastal railroad. When they stopped off in Taormina he secretly visited Von Gloeden's studio every chance he had to steal away from his relatives. Like Gloeden before him, he knew at once that he had found his place of destiny. He went back to England only to make arrangements to transfer his life to Sicily forever and before the end of 1898 he was steered into a rented house. By 1905 he had embarked on the construction of Casa Cuseni, a large Italianate villa of exceptional beauty and situation.

Robert Kitson knew he was a homosexual very early on and determined not to let that fact damage his life. He was in the fortunate position of being able to - much as Von Gloeden - create his own world. As a painter of genuine ability he was very much fulfilled as a creative artist and was known to be absolutely serious about his work and greatly disciplined...Carlo's [Kitson's lover] special friendship with Kitson lasted for as long as both men lived and Kitson became an additional "grandfather" to his children. Carlo's descendants live in Taormina to this day, prosperous and respected hoteliers...

Kitson is also remembered in Taormina for more mundane but decidedly pleasant innovations. For example, he

built the first private swimming pool and brought in one of the first motor cars Taormina had ever seen...

The story of the elderly Kitson's return to Taormina after his forced exile to England during World War II is pure melodrama. In the first months after the war conditions of civilian travel were almost impossible in Europe. But Kitson, who felt that the end of his life was near, was determined to return to his beloved home.

Against all advice, he set out. A younger man - whom Kitson had known since he was a boy and who was now a hotelier in Rome to oversee the reopening of a big hotel there - arranged to meet Kitson and, after a rest, accompany him to Taormina. The man was Francesco Rigano, the charming and witty son of an upper class Sicilian family, who had bonded with Kitson and his circle as a youth and maintained warm friendships with them through the years. He once said "They saved my life. As a young 'gay' person growing up in a little Sicilian town I could have been lost, ruined my life. Because of my family I was not nearly so free as fisher boys and other working class boys who could do what they wanted to do. They [Kitson and his friends] taught me everything...how to make life wonderful. When 'Cicio' as Frances was affectionately called by his friends, saw Kitson he was so alarmed he tried to dissuade him from continuing the journey...Kitson would have none of it.

The frail old Englishman and the handsome, impeccably dressed little Italian (Rigano was only about 5 feet 6 inches) began the arduous journey through the war ravaged southern Italy in half ruined railway cars with little food available and almost no potable water anywhere. Using the last of his strength Kitson was able to make it to Taormina. Rigano said that when he entered the house he seemed to go into a kind of "trance of memory". He was able to spend one night in his own bed in his beautiful Casa Cuseni. He never woke up.

Today the gardens and monuments of Sicily are a tourist attraction. For instance, the American Horticultural Society conducted a tour in March 2006, which includes :

....Our morning will conclude with a visit to the gardens of Casa Cuseni, residence of Miss Daphne Phelps. Those of you who have read her book, A House in Sicily, will have a marvelous preview of this special place. The gardens were created by the present owner's uncle, Robert Hawthorne Kitson, who settled in Taormina in 1903. Citrus trees that he planted in 1931 now shade the lower terraces. On the front of the house is a pergola covered with wisteria, bougainvillea and jasmine. Behind the house, a series of terraces lead up to the hillside to a ciottolato, or ornamental patio. A narrow path edged with cypress, citrus, pomegranate and olive trees leads to a swimming pool that is oriented to view the summit of Mt. Etna.



Robert Hawthorn Kitson and Casa Cuseni, Taormina



1906



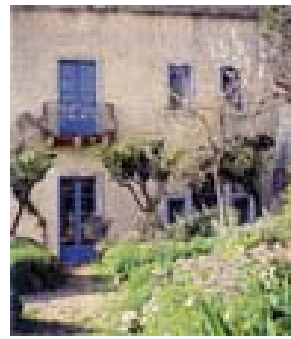
1916



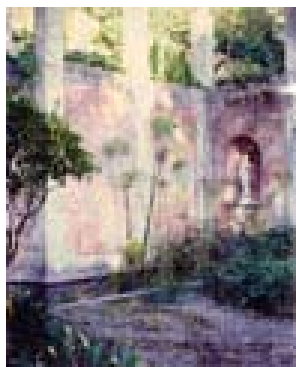
1939



The Salone



The Front Door



Pool with Papyrus

Robert Kitson built his house in 1900. The three main rooms - with airy ceilings and uneven oak floors - open on to the terrace. On one side is the dining room, an Arts and Crafts jewel created by Sir Frank Brangwyn, on the other, the library, lined with faded book spines. In the middle, in the salone, pieces of beautiful old furniture stand in the shadows and patches of sun are sifted through settling dust motes.

Descendents of Robert Kitson, currently the custodians, hope one day to operate the Casa Cuseni as a guest house.

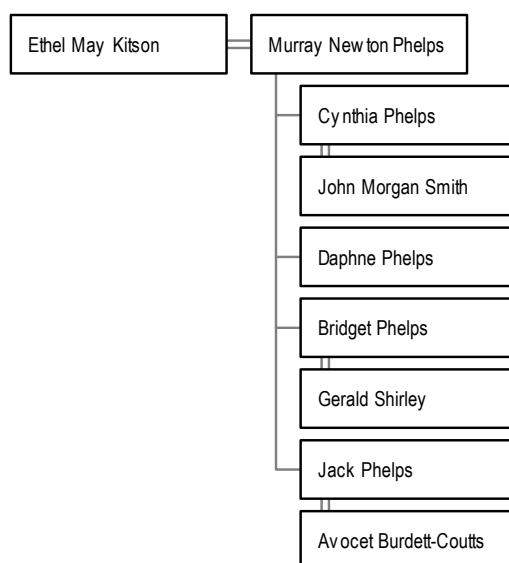
(www.casacuseni.org)

Ethel May Kitson

Ethel May, born in 1874, the elder of two daughters of John Hawthorn Kitson and his wife Jessie, was the only one of their children to marry and have a family. At home at Cardigan Street for the 1881 census, Ethel was subsequently sent off to boarding school. For the 1891 census she was a 16 year old pupil enrolled in the Hallowick House Ladies School in Frien Barnet, Middlesex, run by a Miss Constance Hill, and at which the curriculum centred on English, German and French.^{xix}

Ethel is another 'no show' for the 1901 census. However her name appears in the Charterhouse Register Vol 1 1872-1910 as the person who married Murray Newton Phelps in 1907. In fact they married on 12th February of that year at St. John's Church, Roundhay.

Ethel was 32 and Murray's age was given as 36. Murray, a bachelor, and a solicitor, was another person whose father had seen service in India. The marriage certificate records his father as Arthur Phelps, Lieutenant-General, Indian Army. At the time of the wedding Murray was living at home at 23 Augustus Road, Edgbaston, and Ethel was still at home at Elmet Hall. There were a number of witnesses to the ceremony representing both families. For the bride were Jessie Kitson (mother), James Kitson (uncle), Jessie Beatrice Kitson (sister) and Walter Ellershaw (uncle) and, for the groom, A Phelps (father). The ceremony was conducted by Arthur W. Swayne, Vicar of St. Aidan's, Leeds, who was the husband of Ethel's half-aunt Eva Swayne (née Kitson).^{xx}



Murray Newton Phelps was born in Aden on 5th January 1871, the second son of Lt. Gen. Arthur Phelps of the Bombay Army. The first census record found for him is 1881 where he, aged 10, is found living with his uncle William Phelps at 18 Greenfield Crescent, Kings Norton, Edgbaston.^{xxi}

William Phelps	45	Retired Army Captain	Funabel, Madeira
Catherine A Phelps	37		Draxford, Hampshire
Malet(?) P Phelps (nephew)	12	Scholar	Aden, Arabia
Murray N Phelps (nephew)	10	Scholar	Aden, Arabia
Elsie L Phelps (niece)	8	Scholar	Bombay, India (NBS)
George Phelps (nephew)	5	Scholar	Bombay, India (NBS)
Helene A De Stoker	20	Governess	Gelabiz, Turkey
Caroline A Jones	36	Cook	Birmingham
Margaret Tayson	23	Housemaid	Hampton Bishop, Herefordshire

This was a very international household, and the children had obviously been sent 'home' for their education. Murray continued his education at Charterhouse, which he left in 1889 and then went up to Cambridge University where is for the 1891 census, having been admitted as a law student at Jesus College in 1889. In 1901 he has completed his formal education as is at home with his father and brother George at 23 Augustus Road, Edgbaston. His father, now retired, is listed as being married, but the wife/mother is not at home, so we are no closer to finding out who she was from the Census records.^{xxii}

Lt Gen Arthur Phelps(M)	63	Unemployed Supernumary Bombay Infantry	Madeira
Murray N Phelps	30	Solicitor	Aden, Arabia
George I de Brissac(?) Phelps	25	Civil Engineer	Poona, India

Ethel and Murray had four children :

Cynthia Phelps who married John Morgan-Smith and who had four children - Christopher, Philip and Barbara.

(Margaret) Daphne Hawthorn Phelps, who did not marry.

Bridget Phelps who married Gerald Shirley and had one son – Martin.

Jack Phelps who married Avocet Burdett-Coutts, and who had four children – Anthea (Boylston), Celia (Catchpole), Melissa and Bridget (Martin-Jones).

In the next section I will deal only with Daphne Phelps.

But to continue with Ethel and Murray. The Charterhouse Register and the Cambridge University Alumni help to fill in some details.

One of the things Murray did either in his last year at Charterhouse or after he left was to join the 1st Volunteer Battalion R Warwickshire Regiment and by 1904 he had reached the rank of Captain. He attained his LL.B in 1892 and was admitted as a solicitor in August 1896 and practised in Birmingham as a Partner in the firm Messrs. Phelps and Keeling. He served with distinction in the Great War (1914-1919) as a Captain in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment (TF). He was mentioned in despatches and was awarded the Ordre d'Etoile Noire.

At some stage Ethel and Murray moved to Five Ashes, Hythe Cross, Sussex, and it was from here that they wrote to the Times with a proposal to assist the miners in northern England who were so badly affected by the Depression. The letter, published on 13th October 1828, not only deals with the plight of the miners, but also reflects the fact that increasingly the more wealthy citizens of the south of England were finding it hard to find good workers for their land and houses, and that there was a dearth of people willing to do menial municipal type work..

Displaced Miners

Sympathy from the South

A Suggestion to the Editor of the Times

Sir, - No one who has read the articles that have appeared lately in your columns on the position in the mining areas can fail to have wondered whether there is any truth in the suggestion that the miners are really feeling that their fellow-countrymen in the South, secure in their own comparative freedom from industrialism and its problems, are callously indifferent to the state of permanent unemployment into which so many workers in the coalfields are drifting. Would it not be possible for the Southern Counties to make some organized effort to help to solve the problem? The Government scheme, admirable in itself, must necessarily work slowly and without the human touch. Could not villages, or groups of villages, in the more favoured rural districts where unemployment is almost unknown, help in the solution of the problem? Local committees could be formed to get into touch with the mining districts, and arrange for the reception of miners and their families, and for the raising of a fund to meet the expenses of removal.

In many country districts it is almost impossible to get "occasional" labour for digging, ditching, sawing, etc, so that it should not be difficult to draw up a list of those who would be prepared to guarantee a miner work for a week or weeks in the year at a fixed rate of wages. There is often, too, a great scarcity of boy and girl labour, so that it should be possible to get definite promises of work for the miner's family. The housing question is admittedly a difficulty, but should not prove an insuperable one. Effort and organisation will be required, but it should not be impossible to initiate a new "Big Brother" movement to deal with the serious position that has arisen. It is not a large subscription list, but hearty good will, that is needed.

Two facts must be clearly borne in mind. The first, that it is work and not charity that the miners want; the second, that the cooperation of those fully cognizant of the conditions in the mining areas is essential, or harm instead of good might result. Some such scheme, following the lines upon which the adoption of towns and villages in France and Flanders has been so successful, would, if initiated by someone of influence and authority in each county, have every chance of success, and would at any rate show that the South is ready and anxious to help.

We are yours truly,

Murray R [*should be N*] Phelps

Ethel M Phelps

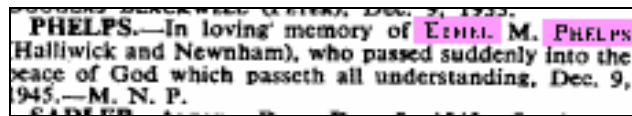
The Alumni record also shows that the Phelps later moved to Eynesham, Oxfordshire. It was here that Murray died on 2nd March, 1949, aged 78.

I have very little further information at this stage for Ethel May Phelps except this snippet gleaned from an obituary of her daughter, Daphne Phelps. The comment about the impact of the war on Murray is telling – whether of short or longer duration, the Phelps, like so many other families were emotionally scarred.

By the 1890s, Daphne's mother was on her way up to the stimulating company of Newnham College, Cambridge, and met Alys and Bertrand Russell, who put her name forward to the Fabian Society, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, for whom she undertook research for their history of English local government. Marriage,

three daughters and a son, and the depressive impact of the First World War on their father, curtailed her activities

From the following memorial, placed by MNP in the Times on 9th December 1946, we learn that Ethel died in the 70th year on 9th December 1945.



Daphne Phelps

Margaret Daphne Hawthorn Phelps, or Daphne as she preferred to be called, was born on 29th June 1911 at Kings Norton, Staffordshire, the second child of Ethel (née Kitson) and Murray Phelps. Unlike her siblings, Daphne never married and inherited Casa Cuseni from her Uncle Robert.

She led a full and interesting life, was dearly loved, and when she died in November 2005 there were many tributes to her as indicated in the number of newspapers who published her obituary.^{xviii} The following information has been compiled from the obituary carried in the Telegraph and the Guardian and from the Casa Cuseni website.



Daphne Phelps, who died aged 94, was for nearly 60 years the dutiful custodian and hospitable locandiera of Casa Cuseni, the villa built a century ago by her uncle, the artist Robert H Kitson. Kitson first went to Taormina in 1900, before Edward VII and the Kaiser had made it a fashionable resort. An engineer by training, he determined to build and design a house in the place - 800 ft above the sea and facing Mount Etna - that Goethe had once described as "a stupendous work of Art and Nature". The villa he constructed was of classical proportions, using local stone, marble, wood and terracotta, and its sturdy outer walls were covered in a golden-yellow stucco. Kitson commissioned Sir Frank Brangwyn and Sir Alfred East to create his unique dining-room, and the furniture that he designed and the frescos that he painted there constitute the only complete interior by Brangwyn at the height of his powers.

The site commands spectacular views of Mount Etna and the Bay of Naxos over the rooftops of Taormina, and has ample cisterns to collect water for the 13 garden terraces and fountain courts. Daphne embellished Casa Cuseni's terraces and courts with exotic plants and fruit trees. These flourished in the rich humus she produced, according to the principles of the Soil Association, of which she, encouraged by her friend Michael Bruce, became a life member. The gardens and house have been declared of "cultural and historic importance" by the Belle Arte in Messina, and Daphne's heirs intend to maintain this legacy, one of very few Sicilian properties still in the care of its expatriate creators.

Margaret Daphne Hawthorn Phelps was born on June 23 1911 and educated at St Felix School, Southwold. After St Felix School she trained in psychiatric social work at St Anne's College, Oxford. She qualified as a medico-social worker in 1935 and later took the Mental Health course at the London School of Economics before becoming a psychiatric social worker in London. Seeking further experience, she embarked for New York in 1939 to visit Child Guidance clinics in America and was stranded there at the outbreak of war. Since women at that time were not allowed to cross the Atlantic on their own, and since Daphne Phelps held only a visitor's visa that did not allow her to work in any professional capacity, she spent more than a year travelling around America on Greyhound buses and earning her keep through chauffeuring and charring. Her hand-to-mouth existence included taking a homesick Benjamin Britten for a drive on Long Island and enjoying the hospitality of the Russells on Lake Tahoe, and in the bizarre stockade of the Barnes Foundation, near Philadelphia.

In 1941 she was given permission to return home and spent 22 days at sea in a convoy before reaching Britain. She then worked in Sir Solly Zuckerman's small psychiatric team that studied the effects of bombing and then at

the London Hospital before joining the West Sussex child guidance service, set up by her guru from the LSE, Dr Kate Friedlander.

The death of her uncle Robert in September 1947 redirected Daphne's life. He had just returned to Casa Cuseni, which had been commandeered in turn by Italian fascists, the German high command, Lieutenant Alan Whicker's Army Film Unit, and, as a rest camp, by a Canadian regiment. In 1948 Daphne Phelps was confronted with a decision: whether to continue her promising career as a psychiatric social worker, or to go to live in Sicily and restore the house she had inherited. Much against her initial instincts, she opted for the latter, and thus embarked upon her Sicilian adventure and a relationship with Casa Cuseni and with the local people who helped her maintain the house and its grounds, that was to endure for almost 60 years.

Daphne's initial intention was to sort out the estate and sell up, but the sale fell through, and by then she had a good working relationship with her uncle's cook. Courageous, witty, indomitable, and with more than a touch of the bluestocking in her manner ("mettlesome" was the very apt Scots adjective used by a journalist who interviewed her in 1999), Daphne Phelps was the sort of woman who stood no nonsense from petty bureaucrats; it was her pluck and perseverance in the face of formidable odds and a serious shortage of money that enabled her to maintain Casa Cuseni after the depredations of war, when others would have given up and sold it. She reduced costly commitments, fended off local suitors with an eye on her inheritance, and to make ends meet, she decided to run her house as a locanda (a humble lodging house). She had studio flats built on the roof terrace and took in paying guests. These were attracted through an extensive network of artists, writers, academics and other interesting people. Their friends, children and grandchildren were to follow.

But these were not just any guests, and those who came to stay with her had to be recommended by friends; moreover, Daphne Phelps did not disguise the fact that she preferred "creative people". So it was that celebrities (a word she would never have dreamed of using) such as Bertrand Russell, with whom she formed a close friendship, Tennessee Williams, Roald Dahl and - rather less welcome - Caitlin Thomas came to her door, some staying for a few nights, others for many months. Other guests included the artists Julian Trevelyan and his future wife, Mary Fedden. His father, Bob, probably introduced Kitson to Taormina where a Trevelyan aunt had settled many years before, and his cousin, Raleigh, became a regular visitor. Gaylord Hauser took the house and reputedly entertained Greta Garbo. The Russells came, as did the novelist Jocelyn Brooke, Dame Janet Vaughan and other Somerville College alumni, Alison "Monroe of Arabia" and Janet Adam Smith, and Robina Addis of the World Federation for Mental Health. Dennis Mack Smith of All Soul's College, Oxford, drafted his History of Sicily at Casa Cuseni. Bob Macrae of Toronto University drafted his study of John Stuart Mill there.

Daphne provided a haven for the young people who came with her nephew to support those made homeless by the Belice valley earthquake of 1968, and the Italian archaeologists who revealed the ancient Greek city at Gela. American guests included Alfred Barr of New York's Museum of Modern Art and academics such as Bette and John McAndrew, the architectural historian and founding director of Save Venice. Bette McAndrew was so impressed by Daphne's Venice in Peril fundraising - she opened the house to tour groups and displayed its collection of Venetian, Moroccan and Balkan costumes - that she left Daphne the residue of her estate. This enabled her, in the 1980s, to refenestrate the front of Casa Cuseni.

Daphne had misgivings about some guests, such as German matrons whose songs she associated with the Hitler Youth, and she kept out Caitlin Thomas, widow of Dylan, with her clinking bottles. But she always found room for the wayward Kentucky artist, Henry Faulkner, and his menagerie, which sometimes included Tennessee Williams. She liked to tell the story of when Bertrand Russell and other friends went sardine-fishing by night, and the local fishermen, who enjoyed the sight of foreigners getting drunk, had mixed their drinks. "We ate and drank happily until midnight," Daphne related, "but when we got up to leave we found our legs were distinctly uncertain, although our heads still seemed brilliant. 'This is most disgraceful!' announced Bertie. 'I was a teetotaler until I was 40 - my wife was a temperance reformer. I'm as drunk as a lord - but it doesn't matter because I am a lord!'"

If Daphne was quintessentially English in her patrician style and striking appearance, she was also totally at home among her Sicilian neighbours, many of whom she helped and befriended; and she regarded herself as extremely privileged to share their lives and to be able to look out on to Mount Etna, in all its varying moods, day after day. Daphne found a soulmate in her housekeeper, Concetta Cundari, who shared her love of horticulture, cooking, children and dogs, and was given the house at the garden gate for her family. However, when aroused, Daphne was formidable, and had no difficulty gathering a petition against the demeaning appendage of her uncle's name to an unkempt cul-de-sac. The Taormina Commune transferred it to a prominent highway.

Daphne did not publish her recollections of her uncle's close friend, Don Carlo Siligato, and never wrote up her scabrous tales about the princes of Biscari who lived next door for some years, but her accounts indicate her close integration into Sicilian life. She was on good terms with the same Mafia boss as her uncle, Don Ciccio, who took it upon himself to protect the English signorina by simply placing his cap on the bonnet of her car, thereby ensuring that no harm would come to her. And she is remembered with affection for continuing her uncle's support for the hostel for the aged poor, recommending struggling restaurants and shops to her guests, and patronising the now renowned Macri marionette theatre of Acireale.

In 1999, in her late eighties, Daphne Phelps published a delightfully anecdotal account of her life, *A House in Sicily*. In it she described her life at Casa Cuseni and the visitors who came to stay there. Translated into Italian, Turkish, Dutch and Chinese, the book's modest success brought many visitors to her garden and provided the author with great pleasure in her old age. The success of the book also paid for repairs and air conditioning in her

own apartment during what she termed her "yonderly" years.

When she had to give up travelling to England, she arranged for the donation of her uncle's sketchbooks and a selection of his watercolours to Leeds University, for which Kitson had commissioned Brangwyn to design the ceremonial verge on its foundation in 1905.



Daphne Phelps, was, as she liked to joke, wedded to Casa Cuseni. The house has been left in the care of her family, who have formed a cultural association in Sicily for its preservation.



Jessie Beatrice Kitson

The birth of John and Jessie's last child, Jessie Beatrice Kitson, was registered in the Jul-Sep quarter of 1876 at Leeds.^{xxiv} Her earlier years were spent at Leeds, and she was recorded with her family for the 1881 and 1891 censuses. She was possibly the visitor at the Tisdale home, Heather Wold, Queens Drive in the small village of Oxshot in Surrey, about 17 miles south west of London.^{xxv}

Alfred Tisdall	53	Chairman of London Dairy Co	Kensington, Middlesex
Ann Tisdall	52		Lambeth, Surrey
Annie Tisdale	24		Kensington, Middlesex
Harriet Tisdale	22		Kensington, Middlesex
Edmund P Tisdale	20	Secretary London Dairy Co	Kensington, Middlesex
Jessie Kitchen (Kitson?)(Vis)	24		Leeds
Florence Reakes	32	Cook	Somerset
Elizabeth A Gordon	33	Parlour Maid	Cobham, Surrey
Annie Palmer	24	House M	Norbiton, Surrey

Jessie Kitson never married and not much is known about her as yet. She was probably the Miss Beatrice Kitson of Stonegates, Stainbeck Lane, Meanwood, recorded in Kelly's 1927 Directory.^{xxvi} Jessie was the first woman elected as Lord Mayor of Leeds on 18th November 1942 after the death of the incumbent Arthur Clark. Her tenure was short lived as in 1843 the Lord Mayor was Albert Hayes. Her life long friend, Miss Elinor (Ella) Gertrude Lupton, served in the role of Lady Mayoress.

If we do not have much in the way of written material, the photographers were busy during her term as Lord Mayor, and the following pictorial record is from the Leeds Photographic Archive of Leeds.^{xxvii}





1943 Paul Jones Flag, The Lord Mayor of Leeds, Miss Jessie Beatrice Kitson on the left and Lady Mayoress, Miss Elinor (Ella) Gertrude Lupton are putting their stitches on the flag. Elinor commented that she and Jessie 'were the two worst dressed ladies in Leeds'.



1st April 1943 A replica of the Paul Jones Flag, after being displayed in the City Museum, is being handed to Mrs E.M. Cardwell MBE. She in turn presented it to Admiral Stark of the US Navy on behalf of the women of Yorkshire. Lord Mayor Miss J.B. Kitson is on the left. This scheme was instigated by the Yorkshire Evening News.



1st July 1943 This was designated 'Women's Day', part of a week long campaign to raise funds to buy aircraft. In the centre is HRH The Duchess of Gloucester (Alice), she has moved the indicator to reveal that the appeal total is over £4 million (£4,510,384). This was in Victoria Square, outside Leeds Town Hall. The Lord Mayor, Miss J.B. Kitson is on the left.



14th June 1943 Youth Week in Leeds, the Lord Mayor, Miss Jessie B. Kitson is opening the Youth exhibition in Lewis's store. This was organised by the Yorkshire Evening News newspaper and Leeds Youth Standing Committee. The walls are decorated with the slogans and emblems of various youth groups, some of the seated guests are wearing the uniforms of various organisations.



3rd November 1943 Over 100 repatriated POW and their families were entertained to lunch in Leeds Town Hall. The Lord Mayor Miss Jessie B. Kitson is making a speech of welcome, on her right is Mr F. Heywood. He was General Manager of the Yorkshire Evening News, who had sponsored the event and ran the POW club.

ⁱ Free BMD Birth Index; HO107/2321/p14; RG9/23393/p15; RG10/4565/p39.

ⁱⁱ RG11/4538/p30.

ⁱⁱⁱ www.summitpost.org.

^{iv} Certified copy of Marriage Certificate MXD339912. The fact that Arthur Kitson was present shows that he had not left for Australia before September 1868 – refer to section on Arthur Kitson.

^v Baines 1822 West Riding of Yorkshire lists one John Ellershaw, oil merchant and dry salter of Albion Street and the 1837 Leeds Directory of Trades and Professions also has a listing for: Ellershaw John, oil merchant and drysalter, 17 Albion street, and corn merchant, Albion wharf, h Moor Allerton grange. While these references are not for Robert, it seems that his family had been in the oil business for some time. FreeBMD Marriage Index.

^{vi} HO107/2321/p22.

^{vii} RG9/3353/p6.

^{viii} RG10/4817/p44.

^{ix} FreeBMD Death Index.

^x RG12/3714/pp30-31.

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- ^{xj} FreeBMD Marriage Index; RG11/4803/pp34-35; RG12/217/p8.
- ^{xii} FreeBMD Death Index.
- ^{xiii} Certified copy of Death Certificate DYB650058.
- ^{xiv} RG13/472/p9.
- ^{xv} Kelly's 1908 Directory of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Vol 2, p632.
- ^{xvi} RG12/2111/p29.
- ^{xvii} Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900.
- ^{xviii} Taken from the Casa Cuseni website : casacuseni.org.
- ^{xix} FreeBMD Index; RG12/1057/p7.
- ^{xx} Certified copy of Marriage Certificate MXS339731.
- ^{xxi} RG11/2956/p57.
- ^{xxii} Charterhouse Register, Vol 1 1872-1910; RG12/1287/p20; RG13/2814/p26.
- ^{xxiii} Refer to the listing in Ancestry.com.
- ^{xxiv} FreeBMD Birth Index.
- ^{xxv} RG11/4538/p30; RG12/3714/30; RG13/586/p53. An 21/7/07 article in the Times listed Queens Drive as one of the top 200 most expensive streets in Britain.
- ^{xxvi} Kelly's 1927 Directory of Leeds, p733.
- ^{xxvii} www.leodis.net.