In the 1850s, Sir John Benn Walsh, 1st Baron Ormathwaite (1798–1881) used letters and diaries from his family's collection, as well as his own memories, to write a memoir of the life of his mother, Margaret Benn Walsh (née Fowke) (1758–1836). To structure this lengthy piece, he used the different houses she had inhabited to organize her life story. Central within these homes was a relatively modest country house, Warfield Park in Berkshire. The structure that Benn Walsh employed underlines the importance the family placed on houses, and their roles as central nodes within family networks. Rather than the family's London town house, it was country abodes that Benn Walsh assumed to be the important sites that marked milestones in his mother's life. Often lived in by different generations of the family, it was country houses that mattered most and to which his family gave meaning. Towards the middle of the memoir Benn Walsh further extended the significance of Warfield Park by using it as a frame through which to distinguish between his parents' characters. He described how the ‘difference in their characters was perceptible in the manner each followed what was a favourite object with both, the improvement of Warfield’. He felt that his mother wanted to create a ‘handsome park like residence’ full of beauty, while his father fostered a different approach, ‘always endeavouring to improve the soil, to enclose & reclaim the commons, to add to the productive value of the property.’ Margaret Benn Walsh’s own writings confirm the importance of houses, and particularly Warfield
Park in Berkshire, in the maintenance of a familial dynamic and sense of belonging over generations. For the Walsh family, houses, and particularly their country house, became the central means by which different generations could construct an understanding of who they were and where they belonged.

This chapter acts as a complement to the earlier chapter on Montreal Park, Kent and Touch House, Stirlingshire, by exploring the ways in which elite East India Company (EIC) families constructed and reconstructed country houses when they returned home from the subcontinent. As with that chapter, this approach moves beyond questions of wealth and status, to examine how EIC families used country houses as important places within which to cultivate a sense of familial belonging. While the Montreal Park and Touch House chapter examines the specific point of return and the role played by the country house in initially embedding families back within broader kinship networks and alliances, this chapter follows the country house as it was utilized by families both immediately upon their return and then over multiple generations. It tracks the changing significance of Warfield Park to the Walsh and later the Benn Walsh family to demonstrate how different understandings of belonging were manifest over several generations.

Recent studies have underlined the importance of families and kinship networks to imperial enterprises. Sustaining and cultivating these relationships across distance and over time was an essential component of the work of empire, and the failure to maintain kinship networks posed an ever-present threat to the familial imperial project. Material culture afforded family members with multiple mechanisms for bolstering kinship networks in this context. Letters and gifts provided families with important means by which to remain connected and aware of each other’s different trajectories across ever-expanding imperial domains. Within letters families shared news about the Company, family members and family homes to keep each other informed of and invested in developments. As David Williams’ chapter in this volume shows, families with connections to the Company often retained those links over multiple generations. The work of building and maintaining a particular and recognizable family identity needed to take place not only over distance, therefore, but also over time. Families often completed such work, this chapter argues, through the employment of material spaces, as much as material objects and letters.

This chapter takes a multi-generational approach to explore how one imperial family attempted to instantiate a sense of familial identity. It argues that a key means of sustaining a shared familial identity over time
was through creating and maintaining a particular space and place, namely a country house which could act as the family’s central site in Britain. While London townhouses were adopted and well-used by East India Company families, particularly as sites that kept them close to Leadenhall Street and thus abreast with Company news, it was often country houses that proved important in shoring family belonging across space and time. Previously dominated by aristocratic and landed gentry families, the British country house tradition provided an important model for generational projects of alliance and shared identity elaborated by the Company’s mercantile and military men and women. Outside of the metropolis, within a distinct locale and often with particular aesthetic features, parklands and estates, the country house had long worked to symbolize and embody the identities of elite families. Particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century, wealth achieved through EIC service provided a number of families with the resources necessary to build, build or rent a country house. If families wished to then retain a house beyond the lifetime of a particular generation, however, they required a financial and emotional investment from multiple family members and different generations. In order for such investments to take place, the house needed to be highly valued and closely associated with the family and thus central to their continued prosperity. In EIC families, members could contribute to the centrality of a country house within the family network through practices such as writing and imagining, as well as directing and completing material practices such as cleaning, design, decoration, building and expansion. Recognized as vital to identity formation both by those outside the family and within it, the country house proved an important emotional, material and social investment. Hence, by privileging a country house as the central node within their family’s understanding of itself, Company families consolidated an understanding of even modest country houses as dynastic items and thus bolstered the British country house tradition in new ways.

A country house of one’s own

Following John Walsh’s (1726–95) initial purchase of Warfield Park in Berkshire in 1764, a series of family members contributed to the project of highlighting the house’s central role within the family network. First, there were periods when members of the wider family, such as his niece and nephew, joined John Walsh in living at Warfield. Second, the house was visited by the family’s wider social circle, often to pursue leisure activities, which marked it as an important and valuable site of domestic comfort. Third, a range of family members also wrote about the house in
their correspondence and thus marked the house as a shared project, in which different individuals were invested. Finally, building and rebuilding at the site ensured that the house could respond to the specific needs of the family at different moments, marking its possession by a succession of distinctive individuals. Together these social and cultural ways of inhabiting the house constructed Warfield as the Walsh’s primary family residence from an early stage.

After completing his role as Robert Clive’s secretary and agent, John Walsh returned to England in 1759, determined to establish himself as a Member of Parliament and give time to his scientific interests. In late 1764 he bought Warfield Park in Berkshire (see Figure 8.1), which allowed him to enjoy country pursuits, accommodate his nephew and niece and be near to Parliament and sources of EIC news in London. Writing to Robert Clive from his London house on Chesterfield Street in January 1765, Walsh apologized for his late response, noting that he had intended to write earlier, but had been prevented ‘by a troublesome Purchase I have lately made of a House & some Land in Berkshire’. For Walsh, purchasing Warfield was not simple. In his opinion, the house at point of purchase was incomplete and he was compelled to make ‘several other Purchases as well as enclosing some Common Land’. By acquiring additional land Walsh felt that he had created a ‘compleat Place’. Completing his project at Warfield proved important as it allowed Walsh to create a space in which Clive and he could enjoy the homo-social comforts of male friendship and sport. Walsh hoped that Warfield would offer Clive ‘a convenient place for you to run down to [from London] and hunt and spend what vacant time you had for the Country, when Shropshire was at too great a Distance’. He presented Warfield as a place where Clive could come and hunt with him. Yet, his vision of domestic comfort in England was entangled with his identification with the Company’s expanding empire in India: when describing Warfield Park in his 1813 *The History of Windsor and its Neighbourhood*, James Hakewill suggested that Walsh had named Warfield ‘Plassey House’ in commemoration of Clive’s victory at Plassey. Similarly, John Walsh’s grandson John Benn Walsh recalled how his grandfather had been known to describe the house as his ‘Tent’, underlining his and its associations with Clive’s military campaign. Walsh successfully cast Warfield as a country house able to perform the traditionally important role of providing country pursuits, hospitality and patronage and simultaneously recast it as a space shaped by his newly acquired imperial comforts of escape and mobility.
In February 1766, just two years after Walsh’s purchase, a fire afflicted Warfield and large portions of the house burned down, leaving only the offices standing. Rather than demolishing the remaining house and building a new house in its stead, Walsh rebuilt the house, incorporating what was left in the new structure. In doing so Walsh affirmed his attachment to Warfield. Writing to Clive about the destruction of the
house, he seemed unperturbed by the financial loss he had sustained. He also appeared relatively unconcerned by the loss of his furniture and books although he did acknowledge it was ‘something’ to lose such material possessions. What really affected Walsh, however, was the ‘Loss of Time’. His comments to Clive underline Walsh’s investment of time and money in making Warfield a comfortable and ‘compleat’ place, a significant and important site.15

In rebuilding the house Walsh benefitted from its being ‘insured for two thousand pounds’. Wilson and Mackley have calculated that the average cost of house building ranged from £7,000 to £22,000 between 1770 and 1800, depending on estate size.16 They estimate that, on average, building a new house on an estate of around 3,000 to 5,000 acres cost £7,000, while the cost of an estate of 5,000 to 10,000 acres was £12,500 and that of a large estate of greater than 10,000 acres entailed building costs of £22,000. That Walsh was pleased to have insured his house for £2,000 suggests that Warfield was a small property to begin with and that any rebuilding was likely to be modest. Nevertheless, his grandson John Benn Walsh, 1st Baron Ormathwaite later described how Walsh had employed James ‘Athenian’ Stuart (1713–88) to complete the rebuilding.17 He observed that ‘Stuart of Athens did his Work at Warfield judiciously, converting the house into a pretty modest residence according to the wants of that day, which was much less luxurious than ours’.18 Stuart had recently completed work on townhouses such as Spencer House (begun about 1759) and other country houses such as Hagley Hall, Worcestershire (1758) and Wimbledon Park, Surrey (1758) and continued to be in demand during the 1770s. It seems unlikely then, even in the late 1760s as Stuart moved into the later part of his career, that Walsh’s employment of him indicated modesty, rather than investment.19 Similarly, any calculation regarding the rebuilding of Warfield Park in 1766 must also acknowledge that Walsh is likely to have had large sums of money at his disposal after returning from India.

Whether or not Warfield Park was materially and aesthetically compelling, we do know that multiple kin developed strong emotional attachments to it. Warfield became important for more than material reasons and Walsh seems to have actively encouraged others to form a relationship to the house. He shared it not only with his friends, such as Robert Clive, but also with his extended family. After his sister Elizabeth’s death in 1760, Walsh accommodated his nephew Francis (1753–1819) and his niece Margaret (1758–1836).20 Although Francis Fowke went to be educated at Dr Gilpin’s in Cheam, Surrey and then travelled to Bengal...
to become a Writer with the East India Company in 1773, Margaret spent much of her youth at Warfield. As a result, she developed a life-long attachment to the house. The first record of her relationship to the house can be seen in 1776, when, at the age of 18, Margaret journeyed out to India. She embarked on this journey to join her father and brother, but also ostensibly to search for a husband. While in India she also wrote about Warfield in order to reflect on her place in the family and its Anglo-Indian domestic life.

Although Margaret seems to have found her first few years in India difficult, she came to live there happily and engaged in different aspects of Indian culture, including its music. Yet, in letters back to family members, Margaret expressed her longing for England. Writing to her uncle John Walsh from Calcutta on 20 April 1781, for example, Margaret noted that ‘I have heard so much of the improvements of Warfield that I shall expect to see it quite changed by the time we return to England. I was very fond of it in the form I left it but I am persuaded you have increased its beauties.’ Although Margaret may have included these statements as a means of flattering her uncle, who may well have supplied her with ready details of the changes he had made, the tone of the letter suggests their shared warmth for the place and her excitement in its improvements. Similarly, in a letter written to her uncle five years later on 3 February 1786, just before embarking on her return journey to Europe, we learn what an important a reference point Warfield remains. Margaret described how, ‘The Residents [sic] house is just on the skirts of the town, and is an exceedingly good one, but my Brother resigned it to the officers who were stationed there, and lived entirely in Bungalows, a few miles from Benares, and so delightfully situated that they might almost lie in that particular, with your house at Warfield.’ Rather than the splendour of the Residency, a ‘rural’ situation is valuable to both her and her brother, suggesting at his particular suitability as potential heir to Warfield. In the same letter she went on to note that ‘I reflect with singular pleasure on the new beauties & improvements I shall discover at Warfield.’ Warfield, rather than his London house in Chesterfield Street, was an important place for Margaret and a significant shared reference point between her and her uncle.

Much later, after her return to Britain, Margaret continued to place great value in country houses. In the summer of 1811, Margaret journeyed north to visit her relation Lady Clive at Oakly Park in Shropshire. She found her ‘dear Lady Clive in excellent health & spirits. Her figure much bent, but with the same sweetness of countenance & vivacity of manner.’ While she greeted Lady Clive calmly, being in Oakly Park led Margaret to feel
‘many various emotions’. She had not been to the house since the summer she had spent there prior to ‘embarking for India’ in 1776. She had not returned to the house after she came back from India because Lady Clive had been living at Englefield House in Berkshire. She was pleased to finally return and described how ‘The many, many years which have rolled over my head since I inhabited that sweet spot seemed compressed into a small space, which fancy easily leaped over & restored the long lost scene’.27 For Margaret then, houses stored memories of previous times, which could be re-entered by visiting. They allowed her to collapse the time between her departure for India and her return home to England, providing an immediate connection with a familiar ‘English’ domestic past.

As the second and then the third generation of the Walsh family grew they became attached to Warfield as a particular place upon which they focused their notions of familial belonging and shared history. After buying Warfield in 1764, John Walsh demonstrated his own increasing attachment to the house through continual rebuilding. Even after the majority of the house was burned down in 1766, Walsh decided to rebuild rather than begin again. In his writings to others, we see that Walsh often represented Warfield as a place of comfort to which he could invite and entertain others. His niece Margaret greatly benefitted from his generosity and lived there for most of her childhood and teenage years. During this time she also constructed a ready attachment to the house, which, when she lived in India in her early adult years, she referred to as her reference point. It was her uncle’s country house rather than his town house that she invested with notions of home and belonging. In her later life Margaret continued her connection to Warfield, investing in it anew. While in the early period Warfield had been marked by the distant longings of other family members, as the second Walsh generation came to take possession of the house, they distinctly marked it through material practices which extended its reach and significance.

Rebuilding Warfield together

As John Walsh had no legitimate children of his own, the inheritance of his estates, including Warfield was entirely at his own behest. Although Walsh had earlier considered bequeathing his estates to his good friend Sir Henry Strachey (1736–1810), it seems that an argument between the men meant that Warfield did not pass to him.28 Walsh also overlooked his nephew Francis (Margaret’s older brother). A relationship with the actress Mary Lowe (c.1769–1847) from 1788 onwards, with whom he
had 15 children but who he did not marry until 1813, appears to have stopped Walsh from bequeathing the estate to him. Rather, Warfield was left in trust to his nephew-in-law, Margaret’s husband, John Benn (1759–1825) when Walsh died in 1795, with the hope that it would eventually pass to their first son (John Benn Walsh, 1st Baron Ormathwaite b. 1798).

John Benn was, like Walsh, an East India Company man. Like his uncle-in-law he had started working for the Company as a writer, but quickly rose up the ranks. In 1781, just four years after his initial appointment to the Company service, he became Assistant to the Resident at Benares. Margaret’s brother Francis Fowke had acted as Resident at Benares for eighteen months beginning in 1775 and was briefly reinstated in this position in 1780 and then again in 1783. During his time in Benares, John Benn must have become acquainted with Francis and possibly with his sister, who moved there in 1782. In that year Benn became Factor, before being promoted again in 1785 to Junior Merchant. Crucially for the Benn-Walsh alliance, John Benn returned to England in 1786 on the Dublin with Margaret and soon after disembarking, they married in 1787. The wedding would have taken place at Lady Margaret Clive’s abode Englefield House, if it had not been for Margaret petitioning her uncle for a much smaller and more intimate affair at her brother’s house in London. Nevertheless, as the chapter on Englefield House in this volume shows, while on their wedding journey, the newly married couple visited Englefield House and Lady Clive.

John Benn had made a reputed £80,000 trading in diamonds and opium while Assistant Resident at Benares. When John Walsh died Benn significantly enlarged his fortune by inheriting Warfield (including all the household goods, linen, furniture, china and glass ware, books and paintings contained within it) as well as his other property and land in Berkshire, Radnorshire, Cork and Kerry. Under the terms of the inheritance Benn assumed the Walsh name. As their son described it, ‘On the death of Mr Walsh, & their succeeding to his property, in March 1795, their pretty cheerful Villa at Leatherhead was given up, & they established themselves at Warfield.’ He went on to detail how the move to Warfield was ‘a source of great pleasure & happiness to both of them’. For his mother, Warfield had been a place of happiness in her childhood, but she also possessed ‘a strong taste for the country & the establishment of a country place’. At the same time, for his father, ‘it furnished a pursuit, and occupation, which became the principal business, and amusement of the rest of his life. The improvement of this place, & the management
of his farm, objects which he pursued with his characteristic … frugality, & economy, engrossed his whole time & thoughts. The dominant stereotype of the returned Company man was the nabob, a man addicted to luxury and metropolitan pursuits. Benn Walsh’s son countered this negative image, depicting his father – notwithstanding his vast Indian fortune – as a man of modest tastes and a love of rural pursuits, character traits epitomized by his country house life at Warfield.

Warfield undoubtedly enjoyed the benefits of Margaret and John’s efforts to improve and manage the estate. They invested both time and money in the house over a sustained period. Sixteen years after her husband inherited the property, Margaret noted in her memorandum book how in March 1811 she had been ‘much engaged in opening a road thro’ the shrubbery in the North-East, which is to be the approach to the new entrance in the house’. Her husband had relinquished ‘this amusing employment’ to Margaret because he was ‘so much engaged in building’. The division of labour, which this comment suggests, with Margaret improving the garden and John working on the house, however, is not consistently reflected in other sources. According to the memoir written by her son, Margaret was involved with the building work, allowing as it did a practical outlet for her mathematical interests. As her son described it, if he wished to ‘ascertain the quantities of roofing, & Brickwork in the erection of a range of Buildings, she was prepared to furnish me with them’. Nevertheless when describing the changes in full in the memoir, Margaret and John’s son gave full credit to his father. It seems likely, however, that the extent of the building works which Margaret and John embarked on, from around 1809 onwards, necessitated the active involvement of both. On inheriting Warfield they took on a house, which had primarily housed a bachelor and his visitors rather than a more extensive family. The rooms were deemed too small and low for the newly incumbent Benn Walsh family. In the memoir, John Benn Walsh Jr described how he remembered the house ‘perfectly’ and thought that his ‘fathers additions made it more commodious within’.

John Benn Walsh, 1st Baron Ormathwaite presents his father as leading the changes that took place at Warfield in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Benn Walsh fancied himself as an architect and set to, creating detailed plans and drawings to guide the work. As his son noted, ‘Such a task was more feasible perhaps then, as the prevailing fashion required so little ornament.’ A man known as Lewis ‘a remarkably intelligent practical Builder, Joiner & working Carpenter’, significantly aided Benn Walsh in his work. Assisted by his two sons, Lewis based himself on site in the old offices at Warfield for several years while the changes
gradually took shape. Benn Walsh decided to affix a new house onto the old one. Lewis was primarily responsible for carrying out the joinery, carpentry and finish on the new part of the house and although Lewis’s joinery work may have provided a frame for the house it is not clear who completed the other aspects of the building work. \(^{48}\) Bricklaying must have taken place, however, as John Benn Walsh had spent the majority of 1808 preparing for the changes at Warfield by ordering bricks. Sustained brick working, joinery and carpentry resulted in substantial changes, such as raising a new floor on the North Front, and expanding Warfield’s layout. By the end of 1811 it was possible to dine in the dining room, although the rest of the house took at least another year to complete. \(^{49}\)

The exact nature of what Margaret and John sought to create at Warfield remains unknown, however, they clearly used the house as a social space allowing them to extend their reach with the Company. Their son describes how it was ‘often filled by a succession of old friends & relations for weeks together’. \(^{50}\) The Benn Walsh’s social circle was made up of East India Company connections – the Hollands, Stracheys, Plowdens, Metcalifes, Casamajors, Dallas’s and Cummings. \(^{51}\) After they moved to Warfield they slowly expanded their social circle by including families in the local area, some of which also had Indian connections such as the Russells, who purchased the nearby Swallowfield Park in the 1820s. \(^{52}\) The focus placed on the dining room, as the first complete room and the extent of the changes, suggests Margaret and John invested in the fabric of Warfield in order to create a house that could accommodate and entertain an increasingly wide circle of family and friends. The time and money they spent on the house and its use as a site for entertaining and hospitality suggest that Margaret and John wanted Warfield to remain and be recognized in both the family and their ever-extending network as a significant place, their principle country seat. Warfield was no longer simply a sanctuary then; it had ambitions of its own. Rebuilding Warfield also acted as a shared project in the family, something to improve and work on, and in investing time, care and money Margaret and John made the house their possession and more meaningful to them and their family. Such investments played dividends, as the house remained an important focus point and the central site of familial belonging.

**A new generation**

After a period of sustained investment by Margaret and John in the early 1800s, in 1819 the house was inherited by the next generation.
Once Warfield had passed to the third generation, the question of how it could continue to act as a central point of focus for the extended family emerged again. Although now living at a distance from Warfield, Margaret continued to contribute to its importance in different ways. As had been the case when she lived in India, Margaret expressed her longing for Warfield and thereby consolidated the value of the house. Her efforts to place herself in closer proximity to the house explicitly demonstrate its continued importance within the family. Moreover, Margaret’s continued emotional investment in the house further shows how the house had emerged as an intergenerational project of familial belonging.

In 1819, when John and Margaret Benn Walsh’s son John Benn Walsh came of age, John Walsh’s original will ensured that he inherited all the properties that John and Margaret had inherited in 1795. Nevertheless, Margaret and John continued to live at Warfield until 1825. In that year Margaret’s husband John Benn Walsh died after suffering a series of strokes. Six months later Margaret’s son John married and she began to look for a new country house. In his memoir John Benn Walsh, 1st Baron Ormathwaite described how it was his wish that his mother should continue to live at Warfield as ‘its Mistress’ and that he and his wife should live at the London house on Upper Harley Street. His mother, however, ‘would not hear of such an arrangement’ and resolved to find another house. Significantly, Margaret sought a house within the vicinity of Warfield.

Finding a suitable country house near Warfield, however, was not easy and Margaret increasingly found herself travelling at speed across the country in order to secure first refusal on a particular house. In a letter written in August 1826, Margaret recounted how she had spent her summer poring over newspapers for house advertisements. At length she was surprised to see an advertisement for Cooper’s Hill – ‘ready furnished in capital letters!’ Although situated out of the immediate range of Warfield, Margaret decided that Cooper’s Hill was an ideal house and so she ‘instantly determined to set off & endeavour to obtain it’. Accompanied by her maid, she took the post from Malvern, slept at Tewkesbury and finally arrived in Upper Harley Street. Before ten the next morning she presented herself at the house agent for Cooper’s Hill and found that three applications had already been made for the property. Seeing that she had no time to lose, she travelled directly to Cooper’s Hill, again with her maid in tow. The house was offered for £600 per year and could only be rented until February 1828. After seeing the property, Margaret considered its advantages and disadvantages at length. As she did not require the house for six months and because the price of the lease was so high she was reluctant to agree. Nevertheless,
she felt that by living at Cooper’s Hill she would be well placed to find another property in the area without ‘scampering 150 miles to catch a place’. At the same time although the rooms were ‘low’, she liked the location of Cooper’s Hill, describing it as ‘high’, ‘dry’, ‘healthy’ and ‘shady’. For Margaret it was ‘a most pleasing residence’. In the end, however, her negotiations for Cooper’s Hill fell through and she resorted again to poring over advertisements, which she then neatly noted down in the back of her diary. Eventually Margaret secured the residence of Hurst Lodge from a Mr Elliott. She planned to lease Hurst Lodge for a short time until the tenants of Binfield died, at which point she would lease Binfield from Elliott.

Around six miles from Warfield, a certain Robert Palmer had purchased Hurst Lodge in 1742. By 1796 the Palmer family’s main residence became Holme Park in Sonning and it seems likely that the house was then rented out, possibly to the Elliott family. Margaret recorded some of her responses to the experience of renting Hurst Lodge in her diary. These brief notes suggest some of the anxieties endured by widows on removal from the main family home. She described how in early October 1827 her servants had worked hard to clean and tidy Hurst Lodge, removing ‘the immense confusion occasioned by Mr Elliott’s long continuance’ there. By Friday 11 October when Margaret finally took up residence in the house, ‘everything was put in its place’. Nevertheless, despite the servants’ hard work, despite everything being ‘put in its place’, when Margaret ventured into the new home she could not ‘conquer the melancholy that seized’ her on ‘taking possession of a new home!’ She experienced grief for all that she had lost. For Margaret that past was ‘still so vivid’ in her remembrance ‘it seemed like reality’.

The next day Margaret continued to feel downcast by her new surroundings. Although she conceded that ‘the pleasure ground is pretty & the house comfortable’ it gave her ‘very little pleasure’. She described how she ‘regretted that [she] had taken it, & yet condemned [her]self for any discontent’. Margaret’s wealth protected her from the trials of dependence that many women experienced. Nevertheless, the independence that her wealth bought her also guaranteed her removal from a home that contained multiple meanings and pleasures.

Margaret continued to live at Hurst Lodge until the summer 1831 when she finally took up the lease of Binfield. It seems likely that she rented Binfield Park from a descendant of the original builder of the property – Onesiphorus Elliot – who constructed the house in 1775. Her move to Binfield was a happy one. Her son John believed that his mother was much happier at Binfield because her happiness was so dependent
on her proximity to him. After his father’s death in 1825, John felt that, ‘the interest, the consolation, the enjoyment’ of his mother’s remaining years, ‘were all centred’ on him. Nevertheless, in the memoir he also writes at length about the interiors of Binfield and the time and money that Margaret invested in improving them. His lengthy descriptions of her improvement projects suggest that while Margaret may well have sought primarily to find comfort in living near to her son, she also worked hard to secure her own material comfort at Binfield and that of her fellow inhabitants.

Her daughter Elizabeth, grandchildren, their governess and the servants all lived in Binfield with Margaret. John described how ‘Binfield Park was a large, Handsome, commodious, well built mansion’ with ‘ample accommodation’. The rooms were large and several showrooms were included in the layout. The drawing room and dining parlour were both ‘handsome moderate sized rooms, about thirty feet long’. On the first floor of the house, Margaret created a suite of rooms for herself, which included a spacious sitting room. As with the country house libraries built by elite gentlemen, Margaret’s sitting room lined with bookcases, existed as both a representation of her erudition and as a space in which her learning could be extended. Here she benefitted from having her ‘Books, papers and all her little personal belongings’ surrounding her, providing a space in which she could read and further her mathematical studies. Before Margaret began to inhabit the house with her family she had the whole property repainted and papered. Like Warfield before it, Binfield benefitted from the skills of a particular carpenter – this time a certain ‘Morris’ who worked closely with Margaret to enact the various repairs and improvements she wanted to take place. In the memoir John, as ever, uses his description of the project to emphasize his mother’s superiority and skill. In this case he describes her success by stressing how she implemented change at relatively little expense through tight management of the process. He describes how she ‘managed all this with so much calculation, & economy’. Here Margaret embodies the female ideal of genteel prudence and neatness explored by Amanda Vickery. Yet the economy employed by Margaret and commended by her son also suggests at Margaret’s vulnerable financial position and her awareness of it. Moved out of her home – the home – Margaret remained mobile until she was able to rent a house on the periphery of the grounds. John’s claim that improving Binfield was ‘a great amusement & occupation to her’ needs to be treated sceptically. His assertion that ‘Warfield was to her another home always in reach’ is perhaps more telling.
Conclusion

Finally, it might be assumed that John Benn Walsh, 1st Baron Ormathwaite’s intimate relationship with his mother (‘The word reserve was unknown between us’) assured that he would also assume a deep attachment to Warfield.72 Throughout the memoir Benn Walsh reaffirms the importance his mother placed on Warfield – ‘[Margaret] loved Warfield, she had known it all her life, it had been the home in such measure, of her childhood’.73 Yet before Margaret’s death on 29 September 1836, John expressed very little attachment to the house. Rather it was after her death that he established a much stronger relationship to the house and all that it represented about his mother. On her death John wanted to be at Warfield. In his own diary he described how ‘During my whole life I never was more disposed to remain quietly at Warfield.’ While there he began to enter into activities which he had previously enjoyed with his mother. He set to pruning and thinning the trees in the grounds and tried to complete little improvements that he felt his mother ‘would have liked, or such as she had planned’.74 These activities related to his earlier experiences, such as when he returned from school one Easter vacation and helped his mother to thin the trees in the shrubbery. He describes how he ‘was then about eleven or twelve, tall & strong enough to wield my Hatchet with very … desirable effect’.75 On Margaret’s death her son John imbued the house with new meaning. Rather than his childhood home, Warfield became important for its connection to his mother and the sense of belonging he associated with her. Unlike for earlier generations who were displaced from the house and thus linked it to broader narratives of home and belonging, for John the house was established in the family, meaning that it could be appropriated for much more particular and personal associations.

As different generations took possession of Warfield Park, they each invested money, time and effort on the house and gardens. Whether away from Warfield and expressing feelings and longings for it, or resident at the house and planning changes and expansions, different members of the family and kinship network contributed to the project of making Warfield an important and meaningful place. By engaging in an intergenerational project focused on one site, the Walsh and Benn Walsh family simultaneously worked to instantiate the importance of their own family and its position within broader Company networks. Giving a geographical and material location to their sense of belonging strengthened and clarified their familial identity.
While the purchase, building and rebuilding of country houses by East India Company families was clearly linked to the establishment of their status within elite groups in Britain, it must also be recognized that embarking on such projects allowed families to fashion other needs. Often globally mobile due to imperial service, EIC families were often adept at maintaining the necessary familial belonging over space. Once returned, locating themselves and their families at a particular country house and investing time, money and effort in its maintenance and expansion allowed families to create a sense of belonging over time. If they were to benefit from the wealth raised by Company service (a particular feature of the second half of the eighteenth century) embarking on an intergenerational project would prove significant. Moreover, if other family members were to benefit from imperial contacts formed by the first generation, retaining a sense of familial identity and coherence was also important. Nevertheless, in conclusion it is necessary to note that while Margaret prospered at and from Warfield, her brother Francis did not – the house was hers, not his. Building a coherent identity thus relied as much on exclusion as inclusion. It was through building, longing, editing and erasing that the Benn Walsh family managed to create and recreate Warfield and in turn maintain their family as a recognizable and significant unit over multiple generations.