

## Pitt House

### Introduction

Pitt House is not in Chudleigh Parish, but 'over the river' off the B3344 between Chudleigh Bridge and Chudleigh Knighton (just past Finlake) and so lies in the parish of Hennock. As such, Pitt House has had little attention from the CHG, but having had several requests for information over the past year or so, we have put this report together from mostly publicly-available internet-based and other published resources, together with a document on the Pinsent family provided to CHG by Robert Pinsent of Canada in 2017. Should more information come to light, we will update this report.

### The House



*Pitt House and grounds.*

*Extract from the OS 6-inch map of 1888 (Source: NLS)*

**Pitt House** is a Grade-II\* Listed Building (Historic England No. [1165950](#)); the following is the entry for the House itself.

HENNOCK

SX 87 NE

6/107 Pitt House 24.3.83 GV II\*

*Large country house. 1841. By Scott and Moffat. Squared and dressed grey limestone, granite plinth and quoins, cream limestone dressings to windows, doors, strings, gables; slated roof. Compact main block symmetrically composed to principal, south-east front, another block containing billiard rooms and ballroom across courtyard to north-west added c.1880, linked by single-storey wing, right; former coach house, now dwelling at west corner of main blocks, same*

style and detailing as house. South-east front E-plan, Jacobean style 3-gabled 2½ storey, two-storey crenellated bows to each wing with 8-light transomed windows in plate glass, some lights with thin horizontal bars; 3-light oriel in projecting central porch, on moulded corbel, and with crenellated top. Wall plane between wings and porch, 3-light ground floor, 2-light first floor windows with mullion and transom, and in small decorative gables very small single light openings. In Dutch gables left and right, 2-light mullion and transom windows. Ground floor windows and door contained under continuous moulded drip, stepped up over openings, and upper level of bow windows with string continued as coping to gables. Triple ashlar stacks with moulded skirt and cappings at ridge either side of porch, and double stacks similar, to end gables. 2-leaf part glazed main door set back in porch in Tudor arch.

Rear wing containing ballroom and billiard room has square turret with cross gabled roof, then main run of wing, approached by flight of 10 granite steps externally to fine pair of oak panelled doors in Tudor arch with stopped drip and small plain shields; roof with decorative open parapet, large multi-light mullioned and transomed window at south-west end with small diamond panes in rectilinear margins.

Coach house wing with central gable, and small end cross-gabled turret all in detail as main block.

Interiors were being converted to flats at the time of re-survey. A few features were apparently being kept, including the main open well stair with heavy square moulded newels, square tapered balusters and moulded handrail. This is a consistent carefully organised and rich design by GG Scott and WB Moffat, still in largely unchanged external form at the time of the survey.

Listing NGR: SX8518778014

In his *Buildings of England: Devon*, Pevsner notes that the house was built c1840 for the **Inclendon-Webber** family and that the house was converted to flats in 1987. Pitt House is mentioned as one of Sir George Gilbert Scott's (1811–1878) creations:

*Pitt House, Chudleigh Knighton – Chudleigh*

*Scott, in partnership with Moffatt, built this for the Inclendon-Webber family between 1841-5 in a symmetrical Jacobean style which Pevsner calls 'surprising'. It has later additions from 1880 and was converted into flats in 1985-6. A scale model of Pitt House, complete with travelling box, by Scott and Moffat, is today in the Royal Institute of British Architects<sup>1</sup> Collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, made out of card, cork, velvet and wood.*

However, we have found no connection between this family and Pitt House; rather we believe that **Thomas Pinsent** built the house 1841–1845 perhaps after the architects had been commissioned by the Inclendon-Webbers. The RIBA image collection on Pitt House confirms the house was *for Thomas Pinsent*.

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1 Today known as just RIBA



*Pitt House, Chudleigh Knighton, Devon, for Thomas Painsent: perspective : 1841  
Painted by Thomas James Ricauti (d. 1842)  
(source: RIBA Ref No RIBA83573)*



*Presentation model of Pitt House, Chudleigh Knighton, Devon, for Thomas Painsent : 1841  
(source: RIBA Ref No RIBA28556 & RIBA28586)*

*The Chudleigh Book* contains two passing references to Pitt House:

1. When the route of the proposed Teign Valley railway was being planned in 1863, various 'discussions' with local land owners resulted in consideration of alternative routes ('deviations') in the Chudleigh stretch. One such objection was from a **Robert Pulsford** 'of Pitt House' who had been promised that the railway would not run over fields on his side of the river. Despite counter-objections the line was eventually built on the Chudleigh side, though not starting until 1877 and only completed and opened in 1882. [pg.302]
2. In 1943, a large number of American troops arrived in Devon – with a significant contingent billeted in the Chudleigh area – in preparation for D-Day. Most units were from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry. There was a large encampment on Chudleigh Knighton Heath and several local houses including Pitt House, were used. (Other houses noted were Rock House, The Elms and the Town Hall.) [pg.229]
- 3.

We understand that today the house still comprises four luxury flats.



*Pitt House after conversion (source: Gilbert Scott website)*



## The Folly

Just to the west of the main house there is a round tower. Hidden by trees until recently cut (or blown) down – and now best seen from the A38 overbridge by Bellamarsh Farm – few local people probably even know of its existence. Marked on OS maps (see e.g. 1888 6" map extract above) as 'Tower', the structure is best described as a 'folly'.

Grade-II listed, the entry reads:

*HENNOCK*

*SX 87 NE*

*6/109 Folly about 110 metres north-west of Pitt House GV II*

*Folly. 1841. Stone rubble. 2 storeys. Round tower with battered sides and oversailing battlemented parapet on block machicolations. Cross-shaped slit windows in lower storey; tall, narrow round-headed windows in upper storey. Interior not inspected.*

*Sources: Hennock tithe map, 1840 (Devon Record Office). Lithograph of 1841, of Pitt House (Westcountry Studies Library, Exeter).*

*Listing NGR: SX8505678046*



*Pitt House Folly tower  
(as seen from the A38 overbridge near Bellamarsh Farm)  
© Dave Offiler*

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Using the larger Haldon Belvedere (aka Lawrence Tower) on Haldon Hill and similar folly (Belvedere Tower) at Powderham as analogues, we may speculate that the Pitt House tower was not built as a classic pre-ruined style folly of an earlier classic romantic era, but as a (small) pleasure palace – a statement to impress visitors, provide beautiful panoramic views of the lower Teign Valley from the top and possibly had rooms for entertainment on one or two floors – dancing and dining for honoured guests. But given its rather smaller size, it may have been just a fancy summer-house.

## The Owners

Of the **Inclledon-Webber** family noted as the 1841 builders of Pitt House in Pevsner's entry, we have yet to find any information of this family relating to Pitt House, although the family has roots back to 1319 in Braunton, North Devon and the name still exists today [Wikipedia].

However, in a biography of the Pinsent (aka Pynsent) family, **Thomas Pynsent** (1808–1887) – son of Charles (1766–1826) who owned Pitt Farm which Thomas inherited – is more likely to have built Pitt House in the mid 1840s, while he was living abroad. This builder and date are confirmed by the RIBA image collection as being *for Thomas Pinsent*, with image and presentation model dated 1841. It's possible that the Inclledon-Webbers commissioned the architects, but Pynsent was the builder and first owner.

The text associated with a sales blurb (written in 1907) for a lithographic reproduction of a picture of the house and grounds, states

*".... a handsome mansion of stone, in the Elizabethan style, pleasantly situated in its own park of about forty acres, on the main road from Newton Abbot to Chudleigh. It was built around 1845, from designs by the late Sir Gilbert Scott, R.A. The pleasure grounds are worthy of admiration, being well laid out in the Italian style, and from many parts of these may be obtained magnificent views of the surrounding country".*

Thomas cannot have spent much time there. He was back travelling in Europe in the 1850s; this time with his cousin Charles Pitt Pynsent and his family. He was back in England in the 1860s and eventually settled near Bideford, in Devon. Robert John Pinsent (son of John Pinsent and Susanna Speare) wrote, in a letter in 1860, that Thomas had "*sold the Pitt Estate (and house) a very few years ago, and thus it has, I regret to say, passed out of the family*".

A biography of **Robert Pulsford** (1815–1888) – owner of Pitt House in 1883 as noted in *The Chudleigh Book* – from Ancestry.com reads:

***Robert Pulsford** was the son of William Pulsford the elder and Martha; grandson of Robert Pulsford the elder and brother of William Pulsford the younger (each of whom q.v.). Robert Pulsford was baptised on 21 April 1815 at St John, Hackney. Robert Pulsford was also MP for Hereford in 1841 (giving his address as 11 Hyde Park Terrace). He died on 3 June 1888 at 6 Upper Belgrave Street and of Pitt in the parish of Hennock Devon; proved by Charles Seale Hayne of 3 Eaton Sq., and Frederick William Allfrey of Stanbury near Reading surviving executors, personal estate £192,468 3s 5d, resworn August 1888 £194,068 3s 5d.*

We may surmise that Pitt House was not Pulsford's main residence, but his 'country cottage'. There is no evidence in the above source that he married or had offspring, so Pitt House may

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have been inherited by his brother William in 1888. However, we have yet to firmly establish any owners since 1888.

## Other Nearby Grade-II Listed Buildings

- [Pair of Urns About 16 Metres South-East of Pitt House](#)
- [Pitt Farmhouse, Including the Farm Buildings](#)
- [Pitt Farm Cottage, Including Range of Linhays and Barn About 5 Metres to Rear](#)
- [Pitt Lodge, About 170 Metres North-East of Pitt House](#)

## Resources

Ancestry.com, *London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813–1906* [database online]

British Listed Buildings:

<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101097416-folly-about-110-metres-north-west-of-pitt-house-hennock#.WdP6Aa3QRhE>

CHG (2009). *The Chudleigh Book*

Robert H Pinsent, *Charles Pinsent of Pitt*, document dated 20/10/2017

Historic England:

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1165950>

National Library of Scotland (NLS) online map archive:

<http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=15&lat=50.5939&lon=-3.6081&layers=1&b=1>

National Probate Calendar 1888

Pevsner, N. (1989) . *Buildings of England: Devon*

Sir George Gilbert Scott website:

<https://gilbertscott.org/buildings/pitt-house-chudleigh-knighton-chudleigh>

RIBA Image Collection:

[https://www.ribapix.com/Pitt-House-Chudleigh-Knighton-Devon-for-Thomas-Pinsent-perspective\\_RIBA83573](https://www.ribapix.com/Pitt-House-Chudleigh-Knighton-Devon-for-Thomas-Pinsent-perspective_RIBA83573)

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckland,\\_Braunton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buckland,_Braunton)