

Charles Pratt created Camden Town. He inherited the land not through his own family but through the family of his wife Elizabeth, and gained an Act of Parliament in 1788 for its development. He himself was a successful lawyer turned politician, holding the position of Lord Chancellor for five years and considered to have progressive sympathies.

He was born in 1713, the third son of his father's second wife and spent much of his childhood at Wilderness, the family's Kent country house. He was educated at Eton, at Kings College, Cambridge, and from the Middle Temple was called to the bar in 1738. Although his father had been a Chief Justice, Charles' early career was unpromising:

'He ... sat patiently in chambers, but no knock came to the door... He often declared that his father's memory never brought him a guinea... During the summer circuit [west country assizes] in 1741, his nag died... With difficulty did he get back to London-whence he thus wrote to a friend:- "Alas! ... I have scarce money enough to bear me in a summer's ramble; yet ramble I must if I starve to pay for it." ... But, not inviting attorneys to dine with him, and never dancing with their daughters, his practice did not improve, and his "impecuniosity" was aggravated. At last he was so much dispirited that he resolved to quit the bar, to return to the seclusion of his college, to qualify himself for holy orders ... where he might end his days in peace and obscurity.¹

At this point he was helped by Robert Henley, six years his senior, who also 'took the circuit' in the west country. It is recounted that, at one assize, Henley feigned sick with an attack of gout, enabling his junior (Pratt) to take over the case and initiating success in his career. Henley was MP for Bath from 1747 and became Recorder for Bath, and Lord Chancellor in 1761, positions to which Charles succeeded him. Henley was also close to William Pitt, the leading politician of his day, as well as the radical John Wilkes.

Charles was soon appearing as an advocate at Westminster Hall and was noticed by Pitt, who chose him for Attorney-General in 1757. When Pitt's government fell in 1762, Charles was made a Chief Justice, and gained national appreciation in a judgement towards Wilkes which protected civil liberties. Lord Rockingham promoted him as Baron Camden in 1765 and in 1766, with the return of Pitt as leader, he became Lord Chancellor.

¹ John Lord Campbell, Lives of the lord chancellors, vol 6.



Charles Pratt as Lord Chancellor. Nathaniel Dance, 5th Marquess Camden Will Trust
Kenneth Clarke chooses also to sit before Lord Camden (Wikipedia page)

He had six years in office and continued in-and-out of the Cabinet for the remaining years, having taken the side of the colonies in the American War of Independence. In 1782 he was made President of the Council and in 1786 he was raised to Earl Camden. He died on the 18th of April 1794.

He married Elizabeth Jeffreys in 1749. She was the second daughter of Nicholas and Frances Jeffreys. Charles would have got to know Elizabeth through his eldest brother, who had married Nicholas's sister. Nicholas, a Justice of the Peace living in Holborn, had died in 1747. But it was not until 1785 that his inheritance (including the land of future Camden Town), which had passed to his four children, finally arrived with Charles.

Charles and Elizabeth had five children – four daughters and one son. He showed special favour towards Frances who married Lord Londonderry (as a second wife) and was step-mother to the future Lord Castlereagh. Their only son was named John Jeffreys Pratt in recognition of the marriage.

'Camden was short in stature but of a fine physique. For recreation he enjoyed music, theatre, romantic fiction, conversation and food. His vices were sloth and gluttony rather than womanising and gambling.' (Thomas, ODNB, 2008)

William Daniell, who later lived on King's Road in Camden Town, made an etching of Charles Pratt, after George Dance, in 1793, which is now in the National Portrait Gallery (NPG 12188)



This fine porcelain figure of Lord Camden is posted by Fiona Atkinson.



The Derby connection to the Camden family can be traced further back to the early 1770s figure of Lord Camden who became the first Earl Camden and was father of John Jeffreys Pratt.

Posted by *Fiona Atkinson* on 07/01/2019 03:41