

John Jeffreys Pratt, second Earl of Camden, (1759-1840) took on politics from his father, but with less success, although gaining a Marquisate for long service as President of the Council – the liaison with the Sovereign – in the government. He married Frances Molesworth and had three daughters and one son, George.

He was born 1759, when his family had houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields and Chislehurst (Kent). He did not go to Eton, as his father had, but was placed with Rev. Thomas Powys, Rector of Fawley in the New Forest, Hampshire for seven years¹. Lord Camden made Mr Powys Prebendary of Hereford and Bristol as payment.



John, Sarah and Jane Pratt by Nathaniel Dance © 5th Marquess Camden Will Trust

He went to Cambridge University (and was Chancellor of the University in his last years, 1834-1840) and was elected MP for Bath in 1780 (his father Lord Camden being the Recorder for Bath and the franchised electorate only the city councillors).

1785 was a momentous year. His father Charles returned to the government (under Pitt the Younger) as President of the Council of Ministers and was made Earl Camden – moving house from New Burlington Street to Hill Street, Berkeley Square. John was given the title Viscount Bayham. John's mother, Elizabeth, had died in 1779. When his aunt Frances Jeffreys died in 1785, Lord Camden placed the Jeffreys family estate (including the lands of the future Camden Town) in trust for John Jeffreys and his new wife, Frances Molesworth, whom he married on 31 December that year.

¹ Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys, of Hardwick House, 1756-1808



Wilderness, engraving; Bayham: British Library (Ktop XLII, 27-2), unknown artist

They lived at Wilderness and Bayham and had four children – three girls, and in 1799 a son George. Charles Lord Camden died in 1794 and that year John Jeffreys accepted the political role of Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. It was a period of great tension, with the UK government's continued reluctance for Catholic emancipation and the challenge of French invasion. On arrival in Dublin he was described by Lord Charlemont as 'a plain, unaffected, good humoured man, of pleasing conversation and conciliatory address, and though in understanding he be not exactly his father's son or his sister's brother, yet he does not seem to be in any way deficient.'²

After an uprising was put down with military force, John Jeffreys resigned and returned to England. Sitting in the Lords as an hereditary Peer, he was briefly Secretary of State for War and the Colonies between 1804 and 1805 and subsequently held the same position, President of the Council, that his father had held. But his nephew, Lord Castlereagh, was making much greater impact as a leading politician, despite the episode of a duel³ (and indeed his later suicide). John Jeffreys was out of government from 1812 but compensated with promotion to Marquis.

² Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

³ Giles Hunt The duel: Castlereagh, Canning and deadly cabinet rivalry Tauris, 2008.



John Jeffrey Pratt, Tonbridge Museum; Frances Marchioness Camden

Lady Frances' estate at Wembury, Devon, was sold in 1803 and Bayham became her preferred place of residence, although she maintained an impressive presence at 22 Arlington House for the 'season' and her husband's political affairs. (The London house was sold in 1839 and now, entirely rebuilt, is a part of the Ritz Hotel.)

But these years are marred by the 'old corruption' of ministerial pensions. Lord Camden arranged for his six-year old son to receive the 'Tellership of the Exchequer' in 1766,⁴ when he became Lord Chancellor. The sinecure started at around £3000 a year, and had risen to £27000 a year in 1815⁵. Although John Jeffrey agreed to reduce his benefice to the same level as others, there was public scorn from radicals including Cobbett. His total income from public funds was estimated as up to a million pounds. And he made a steady accrual of properties around Wilderness, creating an estate of 500 acres⁶ (and sold in 1886), as well as around Bayham.

⁴ This date, 1766, is given in the Camden family records, U840/08, Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone. Presumably Lord Camden received the income until John Jeffrey's majority.

⁵ *Spectator* 10 November 1831:10.

⁶ http://thewildernessestate.com/P5_History.html