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Mansion Gallery 50th Anniversary

# Ege University Rectorate “The Big House”

An important part of Izmir’s architectural history can be found in its Levantine houses. Only a few of those that remained were restored back to their past splendour through renovations carried out in recent years. These houses were originally built by families of European origin, known as Levantines, which had settled in this area mainly for trading purposes at a time when, starting in the 17th century, Izmir had begun to acquire some prominence. The mansions dated mostly from the 19th century, and because they represented status symbols of economic power, they not only attracted European travellers but also hosted a whole array of well-known personalities, including sultans and royalty. The most famous of those guests, without a doubt, was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who stayed at the Steinbüchel House following the liberation of Izmir.

Ten of those Levantine houses are incorporated within Ege University. The oldest is that which, in the course of the 19th century, became known as the “Big House”, and is now used as the rectorate of our university. The more than 200-year history of this establishment cannot be dissociated from the saga of its founding family, the Whittalls.

Starting in the 17th century Izmir, like some of the other Eastern Mediterranean coastal cities, came to be used by countries such as France, England, Holland and some Italian cities as an eastern trading port. Because of the agricultural and industrial products it offered, as well as the safety of its harbour, Izmir was very well suited to the European shipping trade. Many European companies, within the framework of trading privileges granted to their countries by the Ottoman State, opened agencies in Mediterranean cities such as Izmir and sent representatives to them.

The recorded history of this mansion, which is

today the Rectorate of Ege University, starts in the early years of the 19th century with the arrival from England of two brothers. Charlton Whittall (1791-1867) came to Izmir in the year 1809, at the young age of 18, to represent Breed & Co. of Liverpool. In addition to his work for that company, he also applied his keen intelligence and enterprising spirit when, within two years, in 1811, he founded his own firm, C. Whittall & Company. One year later, C. Whittall & Co. became a member of the Levant Company, one of England’s largest and most prominent eastern trading firms.

Infectious diseases were an intimate part of

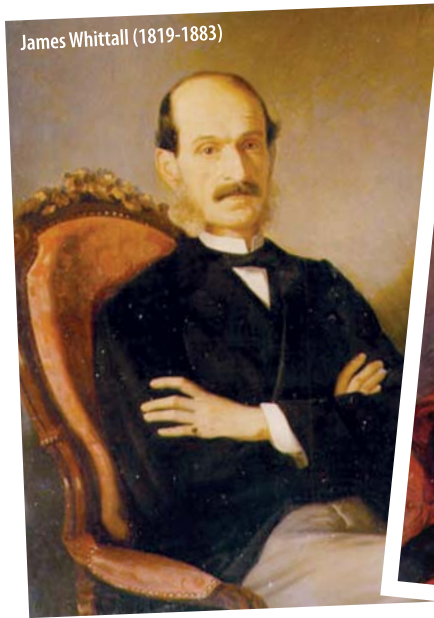
Charlton Whittall (1791-1867)



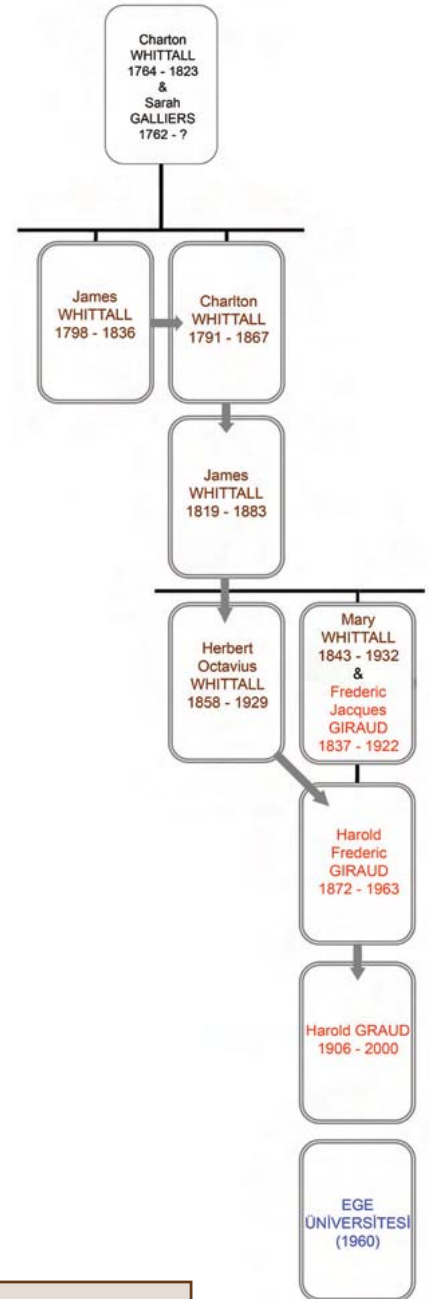
Magdalene Victoire Blanche Whittall (1790-1861)







## Family Tree of the Big House



Izmir's daily life at that time. In particular plague epidemics, also known as "the black death", often occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries, causing the deaths of tens of thousands. As did many other foreign merchants, Charton Whittall moved to Bornova, which in those days was a pleasant little village. There he rented a house from H  l  ne Tricon, the widow of French merchant Jean-Baptiste Giraud, who had died in 1811. In 1814, Charton married his landlady's daughter Magdalene Victoire Blanche Giraud. During the course of his business life Charton proved himself to be trustworthy, fair, and a gentleman. Because of his short stature the Turks called him the "little big man". In 1817, with his business expanding, Charton brought over his 18-year old brother James to Izmir in order to help him. A very few years after his arrival, in the early 1820's, James Whittall (1798-1836) acquired the property which is now the Rectorate, while carrying on his duties of running the Izmir business when his brother Charton was away on professional trips to England and America.

James initially moved in with his brother. Bornova at that time had a population not exceeding 8000 consisting of Turks, Greeks, Armenians and Levantines all living together in what travellers would describe as a small village nestled in the corner of a very fertile plain, "where one would find beautiful country homes, corn fields, rich vineyards and olive groves, filled with poppies, tulips, cockscombs and cypress trees". Travelling between Izmir and Bornova was done riding donkeys. One could also reach by boat the inner end of the bay (what is today the approaches to Salhane) and continue one's route with donkeys. During those years, until the advent of the railway in Bornova in 1865, the two brothers lived in the western extremity of the village which was considered the best residential quarter. The fine houses there were situated near an old fountain by the pine trees close to the present Paterson mansion. It was at this fountain that Charton and James

would meet their neighbours every morning to be carried on their donkeys to their offices in the city.

During those years Charton would request from his father in England that he provide him every month with all possible information regarding the ships for the Mediterranean and particularly for Izmir, the names of the shippers, and the details of all Izmir produce saleable in Liverpool such as dyeing materials from madder root and valonea, figs, raisins, Bursa silk, olive oil and wheat.. Some time later Charton made his brother James a partner in C. Whittall & Company. The two brothers imported iron products, alcohol and coffee from England.

The oldest mention of the Whittall name by a traveller dates from 1821. In the course of John Madox's journey to Izmir he also went to Bornova and was a guest at both the Whittalls' and Richard Wilkinson's Bornova houses.

With the profits they earned from their trading activities the brothers soon started acquiring pro-

Group showing five generations of the Whittall family, 1888





# 100 years of The Square

End of 19th century



1930's



1940's



2010



perty in Bornova. In 1819 Charlton purchased from the heirs of his father in law J.B. Giraud the house which he had been renting, near the Paterson mansion. In his travelling notes Charles G. Addison, who visited Bornova in 1835, is probably referring to Charlton Whittall's house, acquired from J.B. Giraud's heirs and in which he was to remain till the late 1830's, when he writes: " ...In the evening we took a boat and sailed to the low spit of land about two miles below the town, where we found donkeys ready bridled and saddled, and mounting them we proceeded along a pleasant lane bordered with hedges and trees, through corn-fields, rich vineyards, and groves of olives, to the village of Bournabat, the favourite country residence of the rich Smyrna merchants. In the environs of the village are several very fine houses fitted up with European luxuries, and surrounded by beautiful gardens, the residences of the English or French merchants, consuls, &c The finest house and garden belongs to an English merchant, who has spent several thousand pounds upon it, and has furnished it in the most elegant manner. The views from some of these houses, and especially from the mountain sides, are lovely".

The other brother, James, acquired two plots of land in the then less fashionable part of the village. At the beginning of the 1820's he bought the two plots which later became known as the Edwards and Clarke sites (today's Murat Mansion and the nearby Nevvar-Salih İsgören Retirement Home). After selling the larger of these two plots to Mr. Edwards, he bought the "Big House" property across the road.

According to Edward Whittall's granddaughter Ray Turrell "...It was then a long, low building, plain and solid as the Dutch settler who first owned it.... Tradition has it that in the early 18th century a Greek monastery occupied the site of the Big House. The monastery was built in the centre of a great cross formed by a double row of cypress trees. Some of these have disappeared with time, but enough remain to bear out the legend". In connection with this statement, the study carried out by Professor Dr. İlçin Aslanboğa regarding the age of the cypress trees confirms it to be in the 340-to-350-year range. The trees must therefore have been planted in the 1670's.

In 1825 James Whittall married Mary Schnell, and they had seven children. However, he passed away in 1836 at the age of 38. Following his death in 1836 the house was bought at auction from his heirs by his brother Charlton for the sum of 135,000 piastres. At the same time, the other plot acquired by James in the early 1820's (later the Clarke property) was bought by Charlton's son James (1819-1883). James, who upon the death of his father in 1867 would be moving to the Big House, built a house on this plot. On the location of what was then known as the "Clarke" property is now the sports arena of the Nevvar-Salih İsgören Retirement



Home, situated opposite the Rectorate of Ege University. In that house James and his wife Magdalen Blanche Giraud had 13 children. In January of 1841, while being toured in Izmir by James Whittall, the well-known Scottish painter David Wilkie had a visit with him and described his impressions as follows: *"...Went with Mr. Whittall in a boat to the head of the Gulf of Smyrna; then about two miles; then mounted donkeys, on which we reached the village of Bonobat. Found it a beautiful specimen of a Turkish village. Went to see a corn-mill, with horizontal water-wheel; came to the magnificent villa of Mr. Whittall; greatly pleased with it; had lunch in superb style"*.

During his visit Wilkie drew two portraits of James's son James William. The portrait of the 3-year old child dressed in local Greek costume was recently sold abroad, at auction, for a substantial price. (In this story the reader may become rather confused by the continuous use of similar names. But in this family every brother or son would name his own sons with the same name as his own, his brother's, or his father's, which resulted in a very complicated family tree. For example one can find the name James at least thirty times in the Whittall family tree).

Charlton Whittall bought the house in 1836 and added the first floor. According to Ray Turrell, his bedroom was on the northwest corner of the garden floor (now the Strategic Planning Office), while the living and reception rooms were on the first floor. When adding the first floor Charlton raised the grade around the building, either for the purpose of levelling the gardens or because of the addition of the large front staircase; in this way, the level of the garden having been raised, the building's ground floor (according to my estimates) became lower by 20 to 70cm, thus diminishing the height and slope of the front staircase. We can notice this raised grade level by observing the descent of approximately 70cm from the doorsill at the back of the building, as well as the buried parts of the cypress tree trunks in the front part. Traces of the water and ice wells in the old kitchen are still visible.

Nassau William Senior travelled to Bornova in 1854, and in his travel notes he describes his visit to James Whittall, who lived opposite the Big House: *"...We passed the day with Mr. James Whittall at Bournabat. His father, who is the great man of the village, has built a Protestant church; but it is not quite finished, and in the meantime the service is performed in a pavilion in the garden of Mr. J. Whittall. . . . The house of Mr. Whittall, the father, stands at the intersection of two avenues of cypresses, two hundred years old and sixty feet high"*.

In 1857 Charlton Whittall built the family church in the garden of the Big House. Before that time religious services were performed in a small chapel in the garden of James Whittall's house on



## 1930's and today...



the opposite side of the street.

In 1864 the church was consecrated and attached to the Bishopric of Gibraltar. It was named "Magdalene" because the wives of both Charlton and James bore the name of Magdalene. The church was gifted to the Anglican Community of Bornova by Charlton Whittall.

The building of a toll road between Bornova and Izmir in 1861 and the extension of the railroad to Bornova in 1865 gave more prominence both to the road passing in front of the Big House on the way to the railway station, and to that part of the region in general.

Among the visitors to the Big House the most illustrious is Sultan Abdülaziz. Upon his return from Egypt in 1863 he came to Izmir and visited the Big House in Bornova. Charlton's two daughters-in-law Magdalene and Elise, wearing local dress, received him at the gates' entrance and presented him with the keys of the house on a silver tray. Abdülaziz remained at the house all day, took a walk in the







A winter view, 1942

until his death in 1883, enlarging the lower floors and adding a second floor to the house. In those days the basement floor contained the kitchen and pantry, the housekeeper's and servants' rooms, the children's school-room, the bathroom and tools' store-room. James Whittall's wife Magdalene Blanche's mother, Françoise Pletas (Llwelllyn), lived for a number of years preceding her death, in 1890, in the two small rooms near the south basement entrance.

The entrance to the mansion's first floor was from the marble stairway, which maintains its original structure to this day. Visitors to the entrance hall encountered numerous stuffed trophies of the hunt which adorned its walls. To the left of the entrance hall was a guest room (rector's advisory office), then further along in the middle was the great ballroom (rector's assistants' secretarial office), to the left of which was the library - although some family records mention this as a possible small ballroom - (rector's assistant's office), while to the right was the white and gold decorated dining room (rector's assistant's office). Meals were brought up from the basement kitchen to be served in the dining room using a small, rope activated, two-shelf dumbwaiter situated in the corridor. According to Jean-Pierre Giraud, one of the last occupants of the mansion now living in Canada, the cloakroom, which is currently located to the right of the entrance, was used for the same purpose in the past, while the other room adjoining it (the Public Relations Directorate) was the pantry. In this context, it is rather confusing to think that these rooms overlooking the gardens, two of the nicest in the mansion, should have been used for those purposes (when on the diametrically opposite side of the corridor was the visitors' reception rooms!). I believe that in Charlton Whittall's time there was no partition between those rooms, and that this in fact was the location of the library. With the addition

garden, and asked to see the church which had been built a few years earlier. On entering the church the sovereign bared his head - contrary to his Greek and Armenian officials who did not remove their fezzes -. His gesture of respect toward this religious space did not escape the notice of the Levantine families present. When he returned to Istanbul Sultan Abdülaziz, in recognition of Charlton Whittall's hospitality, sent each of the ladies who had received him a beautiful pearl and diamond brooch, and on Charlton Whittall he bestowed the Order of Mecidiye 4th Class.

Between 1854 and 1856 during the Crimean War, Charlton Whittall, together with Izmir's other English and French merchants, in a gesture of solidarity toward the Ottoman Empire, and with the encouragement of the English government, contributed a sum of 2000 pounds to the cavalry for the purchase of horse feed. Charlton Whittall's business activities increased considerably after that war, extending to other cities in the Empire. The use by the family, since it had settled in Izmir, of all the economic and legal privileges granted by

the capitulations, in addition to the enactment of new property acquisition rights for foreigners in 1867, as well as the completion of Izmir harbour in 1880, all contributed to the expansion of its business revenues not only in trading but also in mining, and the family thus became a very substantial economic power.

In 1865 a new villa was built in the garden between the Big House and the church. Following the marriage of James Whittall's daughter Jane (1842-1928) to Richard Wilkinson, who had been Consul at Manila, Salonica and Malaga, the young couple settled in this house which became known as the Wilkinson Mansion. This house was restored in 2005 to commemorate the 50 years since the foundation of Ege University, and assumed its new identity as the "Ege University 50th-Year Mansion". It is now used as an Arts Centre.

Charlton Whittall died in 1867, a year after his eldest son Charlton Arthur, and his next-in-line heir James sold the Clarke property, in which he lived, to Mrs. Azarian for 5000 gold pounds and moved to the Big House. Here James lived for 17 years





of the General Secretariat and the Directorate of Human Resources to the two sides of the structure in the 1970's, the original building's façade was extended from 21 metres to 38 metres.

Prior to those additions there had been a partly covered terrace on the south side of the house, with access through a door from the dining room. This door has now been closed, but one can still notice, from inside, the round window which gave light to the stairs coming up from the kitchen. Under the terrace were located the kitchen and the service washrooms. The old kitchen used during the first half of the 19th century was enlarged under the terrace towards the outside, and the resulting new kitchen contained a food preparation section and a hooded stove, separated by an archway. The kitchen's old marble sink is still in use today. According to Ray Turrell..."*Above, on the second floor were the bedrooms and the bathroom which was the last and final addition to the house. I think that Octavius added it, but I am not sure. A bathroom upstairs! It was quite a wonder in its day. Most houses had a Turkish bath connected to the kitchen or the washhouse, so that the laundry and the weekly bath were connected too*".

During those years in front of the garden gates was a square. Five roads met in it, and in addition to the Big House two important houses, and several small ones opened onto it. There was a lamp post in the middle. The Square was a prominent meeting place and gossiping centre. Outside the garden gates were marble benches covered with cushions where the owners of the houses would sit and talk with neighbours and passers-by. One of the more important houses in the square was the one occupied by Charlton Whittall, son of James, who was the first owner of the Big House in the 1820's, and his wife Helen La Fontaine. This house was known as the "Charltons" ( and in some of the literature the Big House is often mistakenly referred to as the "Charltons"! ), and it was situated in what is today

# The age of our cypress trees

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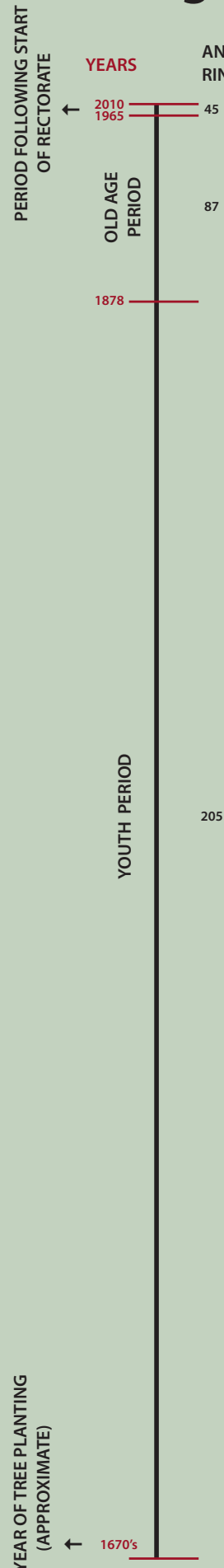
Among the cypress trees planted in the traffic roundabout fronting the E.U. Rectorate an increment borer was used on the northwest tree, and on the resulting dowel the annual rings were observed. From the observation of the annual rings the following information was obtained:

-The tree from which the sample was taken, as well as the other cypress trees of same size in the vicinity, were most probably planted during the same period of years, and they are approximately 340 to 350 years old.

-During the first 200 years of their lives because of favourable environmental conditions they showed rapid and balanced growth. Given that the annual rings can be narrower or wider depending on the seasons, it is possible to obtain information on climatic conditions in the area during that period by analysing the rings.

-During the last 150 years it is quite probable that there was a slowdown in the growth of both diameter and crown height. By comparing earlier and recent photographs one can notice a reduction in crown height size and a more sizeable increase in width.

-From 1965 to the present day the annual rings have shown a diversion from their natural course; the rings are rapidly getting narrower. That period represents the years when the existing building started to be used as the rectorate. In all probability, the work performed to bring the building to its new function (filling and excavating activities, infrastructure installation, ground stabilization work, interference with the underground water, etc.) had a detrimental effect on the trees.







Top: fireplace, 1897



away in 1883. One hobby which all three brothers had in common was game shooting. They would go out shooting to different parts of the Aegean region. It is said that Herbert Octavius owned perhaps the most important collection of deer, ibex, bear and boar trophies in the country. Another hobby of theirs was yachting. Edward, for whom gardening became the most passionate occupation, entered the botanical records with two new flower species, the "Tulip Whittalli" tulip and the "Fritillary Whittalli" lily, commemorating the family name and confirming himself as a botanist. His unique garden in Bornova retains its magnificence to this day.

James Whittall had been collecting antique coins since childhood, and after he died the sale of his very valuable collection at Sotheby's auction house lasted eight days. Large portions of it were acquired by the Leningrad Hermitage, the Berlin Museum, and the British Museum (365 pieces).

Following the death of her husband James, Magdalene Blanche Giraud lived in the Big House to the end of her life. She had 13 children, 91 grandchildren, and 256 great-grandchildren. As mentioned by Edmund Giraud, "...she was decidedly the greatest personality not only of the entire family but of the village of Bournabat itself. She was the head of the family for twenty-nine years, and her strong character fitted her admirably for that position. For many years before her death she had an ever-increasing number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren growing up around her, and for some years in succession used to gather her descendants at Christmas for dinner in the dining and ballrooms of the "Big House". At times over a hundred had to be seated. Before her death she kept to her rooms, which were on the left of the entrance hall of the "Big House". In her sitting rooms with her fully grown-up children habitually around her, she received the visits of her descendants from afar and of her numerous friends, in an atmosphere of great dignity and state".

In 1886 the two most illustrious visitors to the mansion were the Duke of Edinburgh, Alfred Ernest

the lefthand corner area opposite the gates of the rectorate. The other important house in the square is on the righthand corner opposite the gates, and is known today as the Steinbüchel House. It was the mansion inhabited by the Woods family in the 19th century, and in which Atatürk stayed during the liberation of Izmir.

The water used by the house residents came from their garden wells. In today's rectorate garden there are three wells remaining from those times. As in the old days, a variety of birds still nest in the old trees in the garden. The birdcages which were installed over the past two years have already found their occupants. In a corner of the garden, rocks were brought and a kiosk built to provide some income to the local villagers during a time of economic hardship: the kiosk had an open view of the bay, and is still standing. Mrs. Gwynneth Giraud remembers how this artificial hilltop was used for gun practice in the 1930's.

In 1878 James handed over the business to his three sons Edward, Richard Watson and Herbert Octavius. He passed

Kiosk built of rocks in the garden





Albert, who was on a visit to Izmir with the British Fleet, and George Frederick Ernest Albert, who later became king of England as George V. The mansion's gardens were lit with lanterns under the trees for a grand ball given to the naval visitors, while zeibek folk-dancers from Ödemiş also gave a display. In 1921 another visitor was Prince Andrew of Greece. It should be reminded, however, that when King Otto of Greece arrived in Izmir on the frigate "Madagascar" to meet his brother Maximilian, Crown-Prince of Bavaria, in 1833, the mansion King Otto visited was not the "Big House": the ball given in his honour by Charlton Whittall was held in his previous mansion, acquired from Jean-Baptiste Giraud's heirs and situated in the western quarter of Bornova.

On the death of his mother in 1912 Herbert Octavius purchased the Big House and continued to live there. Herbert Octavius was a clever businessman, and for many years his influence predominated in the affairs of the company. He was always greatly respected, and had a personality which was feared as well as loved. After Herbert Octavius left for Tunis in 1922, the mansion was purchased by his sister Mary Whittall's son Harold Frédéric Giraud (1872-1963), founder in the 1900-1913's of The Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Ltd., Izmir Yün Mensucat\_ and Izmir Pamuk Mensucat\_. The purchase was for his son Harold Giraud (1906-2000), from whom it was expropriated in 1959, then registered by title deed in the name of Ege University in 1960.

The renowned 19th century "Big House" today serves as the headquarters of Ege University, one of Turkey's largest, with close to 60,000 students and staff. With its simple and elegant architecture, in the shade of its centuries-old trees, it still receives visitors as important as heads of state, just as it did in its 150-year history. It is a very special place for more than 100 of its employees in one of Bornova's exceptional green spaces, far from today's stresses and sprawling city structures.



Atatürk on Harold Giraud's yacht, the Lillias



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