

## Culver House (New Exeter Street, formerly Culver Street)

### Introduction

Standing in New Exeter Street the age of the existing house (or a former dwelling on the same site) has not yet been determined. Looking at the house today, it seems to be of three parts, suggesting that it was doubled in size for the Yarde family in 1851/52 and extended again in the early 1880s. It stands on the east side of the street and very close to what was the source of the Great Fire of 1807 but it is not mentioned in any of the subsequent reports. This is probably because there was a substantial gap between it and its neighbour (the cottage today 13 New Exeter Street) which created a natural fire break.

The earliest date (so far found) that the street name appears in parish records is in the year 1617. Use of the name suggests the existence of a nearby culverhouse (dovecote) that gave the street its name. A culverhouse would not have stood alone and would have been part of (usually) a substantial house. The birds kept in the culverhouse providing food for the occupants of the nearby house, particularly through the winter months.

We first meet with the name Culverhouse Meadow in the year 1679 and from much more recent records know that this meadow – standing to the east of the house and bordering Kate Brook – formed part of the Culver House estate and so it is reasonable to assume a house was hereabouts at that time and at least from the 1617 date.

What cannot be said for certain is who the occupiers of the house were but as the will was of gentleman John Wolcombe we might assume the estate belonged to that family from the time those of that name first appear in Chudleigh records.

The high substantial wall and gate piers that separates the house from New Exeter Street is a listed building Grade II (listed 28 April 1987) but the house itself is not listed.

The National Buildings Register entry is:

*A section of wall containing dipping place for drinking water and gate piers to the drive of Culver House. Local grey limestone rubble with dressed coping stones and ashlar gate-piers. Tall stone wall with a round-headed niche for dipping place (disused). Tall gate piers of square section with pyramidal caps. Larger inner gate piers have deep chamfered inside corners, the chamfers have stops or moulded corbels at their tops on which there are flat cap stones.*

A system for bringing water to Chudleigh town from the lowest slopes of Haldon was in existence at the end of the C16: both the supply system and the water known as 'Pot Water'. In 1867 William Bower Scott presented a refinement of this system to the Parish to improve the supply of water both for cooking and extinguishing fires. The tall stone wall is an important feature of the New Exeter Street streetscape.

## **1600 – 1736 Wolcombe family**

In the will of John Wolcombe, Gent, proved 11 April 1679, a bequest was made to his son Rev. Robert Wolcombe (1629–1692) of, amongst other things, Culverhouse Meadow and the mills in them. Rev. Robert Wolcombe was a non-conformist and after being ejected from the living at Moreton he lived out the rest of his life '*in his house in Chudleigh*', was that on the site of what is now Culver House? He was buried in Chudleigh Church. It is probable that in turn he passed his estate to his son, also Robert (1660–1736 buried Chudleigh 14 February). If we assume John Wolcombe (1604–1679) held Culverhouse Meadow for most of his life then it is possible that he was bequeathed it from his father, Rev. Robert Wolcombe (1568–1654) Vicar of Chudleigh.

The first time we meet with the Wolcombe name in Chudleigh is 1524 when the name Bennett Wolcombe appears in the Subsidy Roll for that year. A person of the same name was instituted as vicar of the parish in 1571. So might this family have held the estate from as early as the 1520s?

## **1738 – 1800**

In the Chudleigh Poor rate List of 1776 are mentioned the two fields called Flood Gates under Mrs Agnes Pike. These two fields can be identified on the 1838 Tithe Map and were then linked to Culverhouse Meadow and Culver House itself.

It would appear that there was no residence on the site until the arrival in Chudleigh of William Stidston Esq about 1800. William's wife Elizabeth had a brother, Joseph Lane, in Chudleigh at the time and this may have been the reason for the couple coming to the town.

Looking at the south-east elevation of the house today it is obvious that it was built in at least three stages. The central part is a classic double-fronted 3-storey Georgian style villa and this is likely the first part as built for the occupation of William Stidston. The left part was likely an addition of the Yarde family (early 1850s) and the right 2-storey part was originally the detached cottage (as mentioned in Stidston's will) that was later adjoined to the main house. This has been proven (in August 2016) by the lifting of the floorboards to reveal what was formerly an external cast iron drain and granite flagstone path leading from the 2-storey part to the original 3-storey (now middle) part.

The name Culver House for the property was apparently not formally in use until the arrival of the Seppings family in 1820.

## **1800 – 1818 William Stidston Esq (1745-1818)**

In 1838 we know that Culver House had a meadow and closes of land and backtracking we can see that those pieces of land were in the ownership of William Stidston Esq in 1811 and 1812. From the Land Tax Returns we first see the Stidston name in Chudleigh in the year 1808 when he was rated for Floodgates, Cole Brook Meadow, Cole Bidgoods, Lavis and Widgers and Barn Meadow. He was however in Chudleigh at the time of the fire (May 1807) or just before as he was one of the committee members.

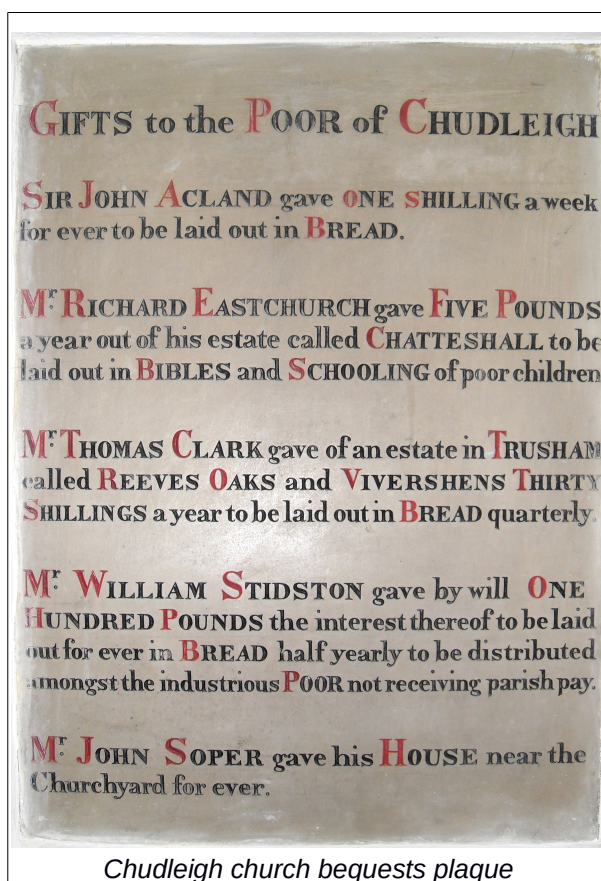
The *Exeter Flying Post* (EFP) of 29 April 1819 carried a For Sale advertisement for a house (unnamed) described as *late the residence of William Stidston Esq, deceased*. The advertisement stated that:

*possession could be had at Midsummer or Michaelmas next of the newly erected, substantial and commodious dwelling house. Having large courtlage, excellent walled garden, well stocked with the choicest fruit trees, stable, linhays and other Offices. Also about ten acres of rich meadow land, in the south front of, and immediately adjoining the dwelling house. In good repair and commanding a delightful view of the surrounding country, and the whole premises form a desirable purchase for a gentleman wishing to reside in a fine sporting neighbourhood. For viewings application was to Messrs Lane, Stidston and Furneaux at the House or the office of Hellyer and Kendall, solicitors of Chudleigh.*

William Stidston died on 13 April 1818 and although his will does not mention the Culver name, from the description and the mention of Kate Brook Meadow we can assume that he held Culver House up until his death in 1818. He was not buried at Chudleigh but in a chest tomb in Dean Prior churchyard with his wife Elizabeth who had pre-deceased him in 1814 (aged 64 – born 1750). In 1815 William is mentioned in the Apprenticeship Indentures as holding Floodgates. His obituary in the EFP (30 April 1818) stated he was formerly a successful upholsterer and had retired to Chudleigh from London. His marriage to Elizabeth Lane (spinster) took place at St Andrew's, Holborn on 24 October 1790. His will details many bequests, two of them, of £100 each were the benefit of the poor in each of the parishes of Chudleigh and Dean Prior; plaques detail these bequests in each of the churches.

William Stidston was baptised in the parish church of Dean Prior (near Buckfastleigh) in 1745 and had, by 1771, removed to London where his trade was that of an upholsterer. Records show that his premises were at 137 Long Acre, St Martins in the Fields (Covent Garden). Records also indicate he was in partnership with a Philip Abbott. He was still in London in 1797 according to a local apprenticeship indenture and appears to have moved back to Devon shortly after that and certainly in Chudleigh by May 1807.

In his time his Chudleigh house did not have a name and it was only on the arrival of the next occupants that the formal name Culver House came to be used. Following the house being



advertised for sale in early 1819 it was purchased by John Milligen Seppings who had come to Chudleigh from Greenwich.

William Stidston's brother-in-law, Joseph Lane was also in Chudleigh in the early 1800s and was proprietor of land at Coombeshead.

## **1820 – 1834 John Milligen Seppings**

John Milligen Seppings came to Chudleigh on retirement from the Royal Navy in 1820 aged fifty. Born at Fakenham, Norfolk in 1771 he was the sixth child of Robert Seppings (a cattle salesman) and Lydia (née Milligen). All his surviving siblings were sisters apart from Robert (born 1767).

His brother Robert was sent, when young and along with two female cousins, to be looked after by an uncle, John Milligen, a retired navy captain who lived at Plymouth. It is possible that Robert was accompanied there by his younger brother as in time John joined the navy having the rank of lieutenant.

In the early 1800s John married Ann Maria Marshall (maiden name possibly Swainston) who had been born at Plymouth in 1783 and this helps to strengthen the supposition that he had spent time at Plymouth when young.

Following their marriage his naval duties took him to Greenwich where they settled and lived for the next fifteen years. Eight of their eleven children were born there and all baptised at the local St Alphage Church.

31 July 1805	John Milligen Seppings
9 April 1807	Ann Maria Swainston Seppings
8 November 1810	Nicholas Lockyer Seppings
11 May 1813	Alsworth Merewether Seppings
11 May 1813	William Lawless Seppings
23 March 1814	Clara Seppings
6 September 1815	Eliza Jane Bricknell Seppings
17 July 1819	Emily Elizabeth Seppings

During his time at Greenwich he was latterly Comptroller of the Revenue Cutters for HM Customs.

In 1820 he moved with his large family to Chudleigh and settled at Culver House. His daughter Augusta was born here on 29 October that year so their arrival was likely earlier in that year. It is possible he was already familiar with the house, no doubt having passed through the town en-route to and from his uncle in Plymouth and latterly to the naval docks.





In 1821 the Chudleigh churchwarden accounts note for the first time payments received from parishioners for the letting of seats in the church. In that year it is recorded 'Mr Seppings for his seat £1 17s 6d.'

Two of his youngest three children were born at Culver House.

29 October 1820     Augusta Mary Seppings (baptised 4 December 1820)

2 March 1821     Charlotte Ellis Seppings (baptised 2 April 1822)

1824     Edward James Seppings (not born or Baptised Chudleigh)

John Milligen Seppings spent five years of retirement at Chudleigh with his large family, dying at Culver House on 25 March 1826 aged fifty-five. Not long afterwards (4 May and 10 May) the 'Fee Simple and Inheritance' of Culver House was advertised in the Exeter Flying Post. The detailed announcement of sale mentioned it was then in the occupation of his widow and that *the house has lately very considerably improved at a great expense and is replete with rooms of every description and fit for comfort of a large and genteel family.*

**SOUTH OF DEVON.**

**T**WO be SOLD; with immediate possession if required, the Fee-Simple and Inheritance of and in all that Capital MESSUAGE or DWELLING-HOUSE, called

**CULVER HOUSE,**

with the conveniently attached and detached offices, out-lage, yards, coach-house, stables, and gardens, thereto adjoining; situate and lying in or near Culver-street, within the town of Chudleigh, in the county of Devon, late the residence of John M. Seppings, Esq. deceased, and now of his widow.

And also, all those TWO FIELDS or CLOSES of RICH PASTURE GROUND or MEADOW, lying immediately adjoining the gardens, containing about 10 acres, amply supplied with water, and in a high state of cultivation.

The House has been lately very considerably improved at a great expence, is replete with rooms of every description, is perfectly dry and substantially built, and in every respect fit for the reception and comfort of a large and genteel family.

It's south-east front commands extensive and beautiful views of the adjacent country, and the gardens are well stocked with useful vegetables and fruit trees of the best sorts, and in the most thriving state.

*The Land-Tax of the whole is Redeemed.*

For viewing the Premises, apply at the House, and for further particulars and to treat for the purchase of the same (if by letter, post-paid,) to Mr. DOLLING, Solicitor, Chudleigh, or to EDMUND LOCKYER, Esq; Plymouth.

Dated 2d May, 1826. 1774

*For Sale notice in the Exeter Flying Post of 2 May 1826*

Ann Maria Cuming, her husband and family had left Chudleigh in 1843 for residence in London and at about the same time her mother Ann and her three youngest siblings, Augusta, Charlotte

and Edward also left the town and by the time of the 1851 census Ann Seppings was living at 22 Cathedral Yard, Exeter with her two daughters, then aged thirty and twenty-nine respectively. Augusta Seppings married in 1855 and her sister Charlotte in 1858 (both marriages registered Exeter). The death of Ann Seppings was registered at Exeter in 1859.

In the mid-1840s John Seppings' son Edward had moved to the Honourable East India Company's training school at Addiscombe in the suburb of Croydon. He graduated and was made Lieutenant of 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Light Cavalry in 1849 at which point he moved to India and there, on 20 November he married Jessie Turnbull. They went on to have three children. In 1855 he was made a Captain. Their lives were to be cut short in what became known as the '*Mutiny of Cawnpore*' (June 1857). Cawnpore (or Kanpur) is in the city of Uttar Pradesh, NC India on the River Ganges.

The most horrific of the many events of the Indian Mutiny was the massacre of the British garrison at Cawnpore. It gave rise to the expression '*Remember Cawnpore!*' to justify the actions of the British forces in putting down the Mutiny. When the Indian troops mutinied in the town on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1857, there were about 300 British soldiers with around 500 associated family members. With Captain Seppings were his wife Jessie and three infant sons. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> June the British were besieged in a small indefensible group of buildings outside Cawnpore. The lack of food, water and the heat at the height of the Indian summer took a dreadful toll on the women and children. In the end the survivors negotiated safe passage down the Ganges. As the force staggered into the boats on the river, the mutineers opened fire from both banks. Only Captain Seppings' boat escaped but both he and his wife were wounded. Their boat was recaptured and the prisoners returned to Cawnpore with the men separated. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, Captain Seppings read prayers to the others before they shook hands and faced the firing squad. Seppings' family and the other women and children were taken to the Bibigarth, or House of the Ladies, to join the 200 or so who survived the massacre on the boats. After 3 weeks in horrendous conditions, the women and children were literally butchered and thrown down a well, as the relief force approached.

Ann Seppings, John's widow, and previous owner was living with her daughter and son-in-law at the grammar school in Fore Street.

Two of John Seppings daughters married at Chudleigh. The eldest, Ann Maria Swainston Seppings, married Rev. Joseph Cuming (c1830) who at the time was master of Pynsents Free School in Fore Street and curate to Rev. Gilbert Burrington. By 1841 they had five children and stayed in the town for a further two years. In that year Rev. Cuming had been one of two nominated as vicar but he lost out to Rev. Wilmot Henry Palk and no doubt due to the way the voting system had taken place he felt aggrieved enough to resign his position as grammar school master and leave Chudleigh with his family. They moved away to London where he took up the headship of a grammar school there.

The third daughter, Eliza Jane Bicknell Seppings, was the second daughter to marry at Chudleigh. On 19 January 1843 she married Thomas Yarde (born 1793) the only son of Thomas Yarde and grandson of Hugh Yarde the Chudleigh apothecary. As for John Milligen Seppings'



wife Ann she died in Exeter in 1859 having seen her daughters both marry there, Augusta in 1855 and Charlotte in 1858.

John Milligen Seppings' brother Robert achieved much success as a naval architect; first apprenticed at Plymouth dockyard in 1800 he rose to master shipwright assistant. In 1804 he moved to Chatham docks as master shipwright. He was made Surveyor of the Navy in 1813 and knighted in 1819. He retired in 1832 and moved to live at Taunton where he died in 1840. On the death of his younger brother John he placed a memorial within Chudleigh church:

**TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN MILLIGEN SEPPINGS ESQ  
HE WAS A LIEUTENANT IN THE ROYAL NAVY  
AND FOR MANY YEARS FILLED AN IMPORTANT POST  
IN HIS MAJESTY'S CUSTOMS  
AS AN OFFICER HIS CONDUCT WAS MARKED WITH FIDELITY AND JUDGEMENT  
HE DIED ON THE 25<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF MARCH 1826  
AGED 55 YEARS  
DEPLORED BY HIS FAMILY, LAMENTED BY HIS FRIENDS  
AND REGRETTED BY ALL WHO KNEW HIM.  
AN ONLY BROTHER HAS ERECTED THIS MONUMNET AS A  
SMALL TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION AND ESTEEM.**

Mrs Seppings' name last appears in the Land tax Returns for the year 1828 where she was taxed on house and lands, £1 3s 1 1/2d.

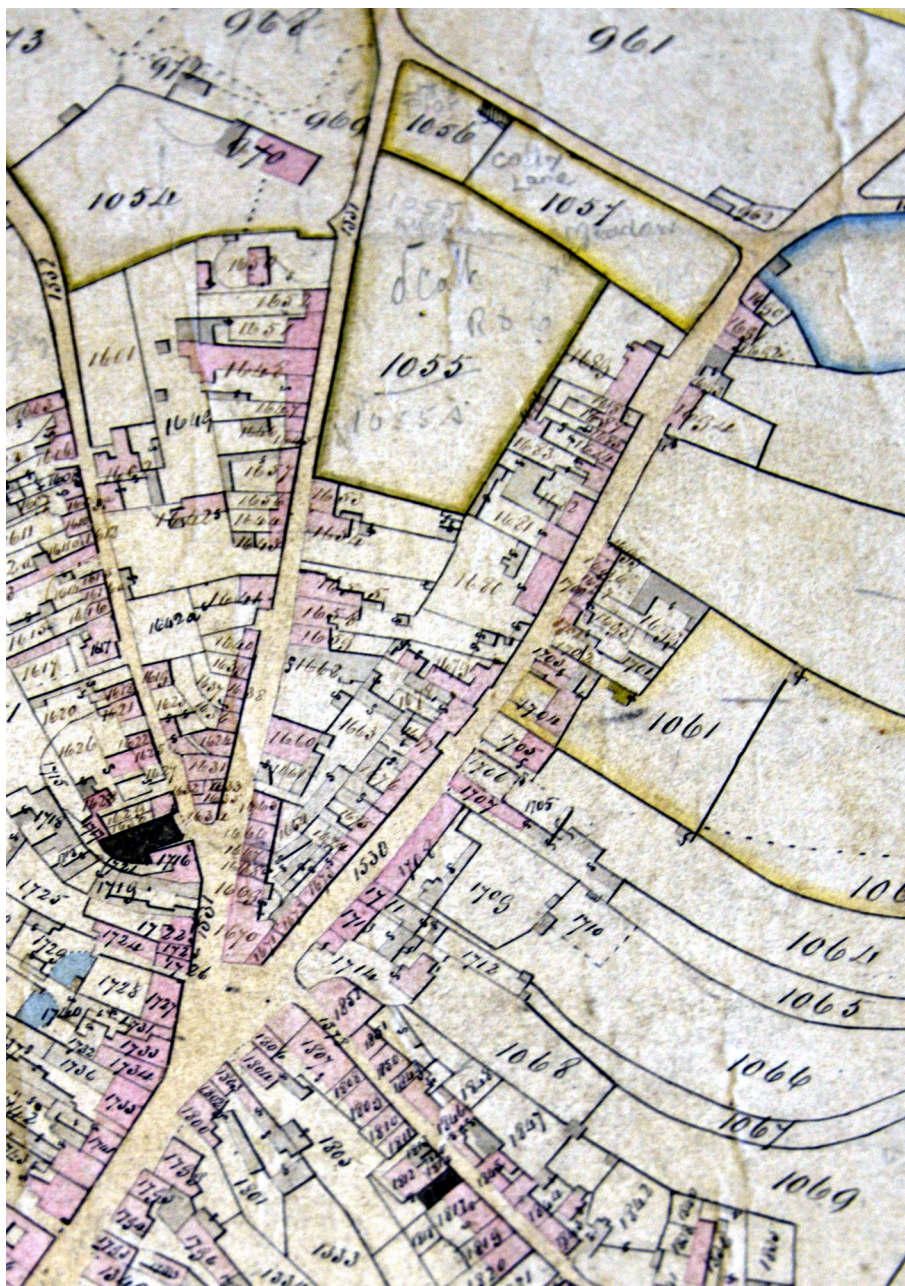
On 14 May 1833 a sale notice was circulated around the town (a copy survives at DRO). An auction was to take place at the Clifford Arms at 6 o'clock on 7 June to sell *all that commodious house usually called Culver House, now in the occupation of Rev. John Templer. In all the estate comprising about ten acres, a coach-house, stable, linhay and courtlage.* The advertisement went on to state that the tenancy was about two or four years unexpired. The house was described as having two parlours, drawing room, seven bedrooms (besides attics), kitchen and convenient offices and commands a very picturesque view. *On many accounts it is exceedingly well adapted for the residence of a most genteel family. The house is situated about nine miles from Exeter.* Viewing particulars were to be had from Mr Isaac Winsor, builder.

Rev. James Templer (1789–1869) was the seventh child of James and Mary Templer of Stover. He attended Exeter College, Oxford and matriculated 4 July 1805. He gained BA in 1809 and MA in 1818. He married Elizabeth Sunter of Ashburton in the same year and in 1819 was vicar of Cullompton. Their four children were all baptised in Ashburton. In 1832 he became rector of Teigngrace and continued there until his death in 1869. During that period he lived at The Knowle, Newton Abbot.



## 1834 – 1848 John Harry MD

The next owner and occupier of Culver House was a physician, John Harry who lived at the house with his wife Sarah. He first appears in Chudleigh on the Voters List for the year 1836. He was listed in the 1838 Tithe Apportionment as owner/occupier of an *unnamed house* holding 46 acres 1 rood 33 perches. His holding in all amounted to 25 separate pieces of land, mainly of pasture, arable and orchard.



Extract from the 1838 Tithe Map showing Culver House (#1704)  
garden (#1061) and Culver Meadow (#1062/3)



He was away at the time of the 1841 census, his wife was however in residence on that day, she was aged 58. Culverhouse Meadow and Floodgates were also part of the estate.

John Harry, born at Bodmin in 1782 moved from Culver with his wife to Oldenburg House, Paignton sometime in the mid-1840s. At the time of the 1851 Census they were both residing at Oldenburg House, Polsom, Paignton. He was described as a magistrate MD & MRCS (not practising). Mary Jones (1875 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) stated that a John D Harry was still in possession of Burroughs Head in Chudleigh at that time. This may have been a son of John Harry as his death was registered at Totnes in March 1852 and Sarah's in March 1861. As they had moved away from Chudleigh before Mary Jones' first edition of *The History of Chudleigh* (1852) she may not have been aware of his death in the same year.

### **1849 – 1909 Yarde family**

Mary Jones (1875) described the Yarde Arms as:

*Argent, a chevron, gules, between three water bougets, sable.*

The Yarde's had for some years past resided in a large house in Fore Street (today number 11 and called Alpha House). By the time of the 1838 Electoral Roll Thomas Yarde (1796-1870) was listed as freeholder of a *house in the main street*. Thomas Yarde married Eliza Jane Bicknell Seppings at Chudleigh Church on 19 January 1843. It was likely at that house that his three children were born, all were baptised at the parish church.

11 April 1844     Thomas John Yarde (died Chudleigh 19 March 1908)

1846     Hugh Henry Yarde (died at sea 15 March 1870)

2 April 1849     Gilbert Francis Yarde (died 29 November 1849)

The Yarde's appear to have purchased Culver House from John Harry MD in the late 1840s as Thomas was listed at the house in the 1850 White's Directory. The family were still in Fore Street at the time of the 1851 census and according to Mary Jones (1852) Thomas Yarde, his wife, Eliza Jane and their two surviving children moved to Culver House after refurbishments in 1852. Sadly Eliza died there aged only 39 years on 23 October 1854 (buried churchyard). Four years later he remarried in Chorley, Lancs to Mary Louisa Brendon (born 13 October 1817 in Callington, Cornwall).

On 15 March 1870 Lieut Hugh Henry Yarde died of dysentery at sea aged 24 and has a memorial on the family grave at Chudleigh Churchyard. He had been in India with the army for two years and was being invalided home when fever struck four days out from Southampton. He was buried at sea in the Bay of Biscay.

Thomas Yarde died at the house on 15 November 1870 (buried in the churchyard) leaving his widow Mrs Mary Louisa Yarde in residence. Her eldest and only surviving son Rev. Thomas John Yarde had moved to the house by 1880. He had married at Torre, Torquay (24 April 1879) to Katherine Annette Pauline Alcock (born 26 February 1858, France) and not long after coming to



Chudleigh he purchased the nearby detached house Ivy Lawn, on the corner of New Exeter Street and Clifford Street. From the garden and orchard of that property was built a new lengthy carriage drive to Culver House. This initially went south, on a line to the north of and to the rear of the houses on the north side of Clifford Street. It then swept around to the north and west to reach the east side of Culver House thus creating a much grander approach than the original one direct from New Exeter Street.

Rev. Thomas and Annette had two daughters, both born at Culver House, Amy Margaret (1880) and Mary Annette (1882). The eldest died unmarried at Lustleigh in July 1950 and the item in the MDA (21 July 1950) also mentioned that if it had not been for her grandmother (who owned land called Burgages – behind Orchard House) the Chudleigh Railway Station would have been built there rather than at Chudleigh Bridge. The item also mentioned that her father (Rev. Yarde) had a mission room (located behind Lloyds Chemist in what was then called Heaven's Lane. Her sister Mary Annette had died unmarried in the March of 1950 (registered Newton Abbot) and from a 1930 Lustleigh directory it can be seen that they had resided together at a house called Woodlands.

Their mother, Katherine Annette Pauline Yarde had died at the house on 24 January 1893 aged 34, she was buried at the cemetery.

The Yarde family had lived at Culver House throughout the Victorian era and the grounds were often made available for summer fêtes and similar functions. Rev. Thomas John Yarde died at the house on 19 March 1908 aged 64 and was buried in the cemetery.

The following details appeared in the MDA 21 November 1908 obituary.

*Manager and correspondent of  
the Church Schools  
Governor of the Grammar  
School  
Governor and Hon. Sec. of parochial charities  
Hon. Sec. of the Clothing Club  
Staunch Conservative  
One of the founders of the Constitutional Club  
Keen interest in the Chudleigh Cricket Club  
Keen fisherman  
He passed away after a lingering illness.*



Extract from OS Town map of 1885

His step-mother, Mrs Mary Louisa Yarde died at the house on 6 May 1909, aged 91 years (buried in the family vault in the churchyard) her death marking the end of the Yarde connection with Culver House. A funeral report was contained in the *MDA* of 15 May 1909. The chief mourners were her two granddaughters, the Misses Yarde.

The Yarde family had, for many years prior to occupying Culver House lived at The Fernery (11 Fore Street, now Alpha House). From their departure in the early 1850s that house was let to a succession of tenants (usually of the medical profession) and was put for auction in the May of 1912. Although not sold at that point it was subsequently disposed of by private treaty to a Mr Gill in the July of that year. This sale suggests that it was sold by the executors of Rev. T J Yarde who had died in 1908 as there is no evidence of any sale in the years 1851–1912.

## **1909 – 1960**

Following the death of Mrs Mary Louisa Yarde the house was put up for auction. The *MDA* of 14 August 1909 comprised the following detail:

*Lots 1 & 2, detached family residence, stabling, glass houses and grounds of about 7 and a half acres, together with the detached residence and stabling and garden known as Culver Cottage adjoining. Offered in 1 Lot and after some competition sold to Mr C(harles) T(homas) Towell of Torquay for £2000. C T Towell was occupying a 12-room house called Greenway at Chelston, Torquay at the time of the 1911 Census, with him his wife, Alice Edith (nee Roberts) whom he had married in 1895, she was originally of Romsey, Hants. The SDWE of 28 February 1919 reported the death of Mr Towell at his home in Chelston, it mentioned that he was a former owner of Culver House and that he had been mayor of Torquay for many years. Research has shown this to be the years 1911-16.*

A freehold orchard adjoining Culver House of 3¼ acres was sold to Mr H(enry) Stephens of Chudleigh for £470. The latter was a dairyman whose premises were already by then located in New Exeter Street.

On 12 November that year the house was advertised to let. It was again advertised to let on 24 June 1910.

The 1911 Census taken in the April of that year shows Rev. William Henshaw Starling MA to be in residence, born 1864 at Higham Ferrers, Bucks he was present with his wife, Rosamond Florence Starling (born 1864 Odmaston, Derbys) to whom he had married on 14 August 1892. There were two children of the marriage, a son and daughter. With them at the house were three females, probably servants. By the 1930s they were living in Hampshire. He died on 15 September 1931 at Winton Lea, Andover Road, Winchester (funeral Newtimber, Hassocks, Sussex) Times death 18 September 1931 and Rosamond at Salisbury on 13 March 1938.

The next occupier so far traced is revealed in the *South Devon Weekly Express* (SDWE) of 15 March 1912. The item records the death of RCO Darby, aged 16 years at Malvern College. He



was stated to have been the son of Mr C W Darby of Bournemouth and Mrs G D Bowles of Culver House.

Sale notices from this period describe the house as having 12 bedrooms and with about 7 acres of land comprising 2 park-like meadows and orchard. There was also a tennis court and croquet lawn.

Kelly's Directory of 1914 contains no entry for Culver House, but for 1919 shows that the house was in the occupation of Capt. Edgar Clough who stayed for a couple of years.

On 11 September 1919 the house was advertised for sale for £2250 with possession 29 September 1920.

The house with 7 acres was once again advertised for sale on 15 May 1923; the sale also included Culver Cottage or Ivy Lawn. Additionally 5 cottages in New Exeter Street were to be included as was a 4 acre freehold building site on the main Exeter Road. The public auction was to take place on 29 May 1923.

Mrs Helen Flora De Cerjat was at Culver House by 1923 and for about the next eight years (c1932). She was the widow of Rev. Charles Roland Wynne De Cerjat (1860–1917) the former vicar of Crowan (a village between Helston and Camborne) and Rector of Bishop's Stortford.

The *SDWE* of 17 March 1939 reported her death at Winkleigh Court, Winkleigh, Devon aged 75 years, to which place she had removed on leaving Chudleigh. This was the home of her youngest son, Wynne St Aubyn De Cerjat Gent who died there 14 August 1976 aged 73. Her funeral on 13 March 1939 took place at Crowan, Cornwall where she was interred with her husband. It mentioned also that she was the daughter of Rev. Sir Hender Molesworth St Aubyn Bart. She had married at Crowan in 1891 (Sept QTR).

The *MDA* of 5 January 1929 mentioned Charles Sigsmund De Cerjat of Culver House, a professional dancer who was summoned for parking his car without displaying lights; he was ordered to pay costs. This Charles was the eldest son of Mrs De Cerjat, born at Crowan on 28 May 1895.

The son, Charles De Cerjat had a very distinguished lineage was said to have been descended from William the Conqueror. From 1908 to 1913 he was educated at Haileybury School near Bishop's Stortford and from there to Trinity College, Cambridge. In the Cambridge OTC he was gazetted at 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant and 1914–16 served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cambridgeshire Regiment. On 13 May 1915 he had married Dorothy Burton Rowley, herself from a distinguished and titled family. From 1916–19 he served with the Grenadier Guards and reached the rank of Captain. After the war he was an Examiner at the Incorporated London Academy of Music and a Member of the Imperial Society of Dance Teachers. He was ordained in 1933 and shortly afterwards was curate-in-charge of St Phillip's, Bethnal Green. However he returned again to Devon and was Vicar of Ugborough by 1938.

From Ugborough he was Vicar of Brixham in the period 1943–52 and then at Egg Buckland commencing in early 1952 (*SDWE* 1 February 1952). He was a Prebendary of Exeter Cathedral from 1965 and from 1968 Wing Chaplain, Plymouth Wing, ATC. He died on 23 February 1982 and was interred at Crowan with his parents, a large memorial in the form of a Celtic cross marks their grave.

On the departure of Mrs De Cerjat and by 1932/33 the house was in the ownership of local businessman Mr Frank Hellier, who lived at 40 Fore Street (next to Western House).

### **1939** (Kelly Directory)

Lt. Col. Arthur Alston Fenn DSO (1887–1966)

Short term resident c 1937–1940.

Born 13 May 1887, Churchill, Worcester

Married 25 January 1923 Monmouth to Dorothy Rose Constable Curtis (1890–1980)

Died 25 August 1966 Nayland, Colchester, Suffolk

WW1 Royal Fusiliers

King's African Rifles 1919–24

Major 15 December 1923

Transferred 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. Sherwood Foresters Lt. Col. 11 January 1932

Retired as CO 10 January 1936

During WW2 commanded a training centre at Derby

Retired to Risborough House, Pond Hill Road, Shorncliffe, Folkestone, Kent and then by 1945 to Alston Court, Nayland, Colchester, Essex.

With the house empty during the latter war years Frank Hellier converted the house to accommodate twelve self-contained flats. There were also plans to build houses in the grounds but this never materialised.

From his acquisition the grounds were regularly used for functions and fund-raising fêtes.

In 1943 the *SDWE* (26 November) noted the passing of Col Henry Welch-Thornton, the father of Lady Hammick who was noted as of Culver House; this may have been temporary as her main home with her husband was at The Lawns.

Part of the house (Flat 4) (at the north end) became the vicarage in 1948 until 1957 and another part (possibly on the third floor – Flat 3) used by Mrs Vera Adams (daughter of Mr Alfred Brooking – stationmaster and wife of Gerald Leslie Adams – married 1931) as a small school.

During the war years blackout offences were commonplace and two residents at Culver House were fined. They were Mrs Emma Edwards and Mrs Margaret Frances Carey. Miss Stooke was

also mentioned as of Culver House but in relation to a minor accident she suffered in Newton Abbot rather than a blackout offence.

Frank Hellier died in March 1960 and his wife Florence in 1966 and the house and extensive grounds were subsequently purchased by Mr Reginald James (Joe) Shorland whose widow, Winifred continued at Flat 3 into the mid-2000s. Her son, Stephen lived for a time at Flat 3A and after inheriting Culver was the person who sold on to Chudleigh builder Chris Cox of Oxencombe Farm.



*Crop of a 1948 aerial photo showing Culver House middle-left*

## **1960 – present**

Mr Reginald James Shorland (born 1913 or 1925 Newton Abbot registration, died 2004) known as Joe and his wife Winifred (Peggy) purchased the house at some point in the period 1960–66.

### **1961 (Voter List)**



Old Vicarage (as Flat 4) Anthony & Sylvia Caunter and Mary Clarke.

Culver Bungalow: Leslie Hutchings

5 flats occupied

**1971** (Voter List)

Old Vicarage:

Culver Bungalow:

5 flats occupied

**1981** (Voter List)

Old Vicarage: John & Patricia Francis

Culver Bungalow: Henry & Queenie James

8 flats occupied

By the late-1980s the house had seen better days and the flats began to be vacated and not re-let.

**1987** (June) – outline application by Intercounties Securities Ltd for demolition of house and boundary wall and for the building of 62 sheltered houses. This application never materialised.

The Voters List for 1994 has a Lynn Cardwell at *The Old Vicarage*’ this being the 2-storey north part of the house once rented for the vicar (Flat 4).

Culver Bungalow: Ernest & Kevin Herniman

2 flats occupied (Flat 3 and Flat 3A)

Eventually, at some date following 1994 Winifred (Peggy) Shorland was the only occupier in Flat 3. Her son Stephen (born 1964) occasionally stayed at Flat 3A.

In the latter 1990s most of the grounds to the rear (including the fields Culver House Meadow and Floodgates) were purchased by Cavanna Homes and subsequently built on and named Culver Green and Millstream Meadow. A small part close to the house in Culver Gardens still retains the original fern grotto (recently – 2017 – cleared and replanted with ferns).

**2004** – death of owner Joe Shorland, Culver passed to son Stephen.

There were plans submitted in 2008 by local builder, Mr Chris Cox to completely renovate the house, retaining it as a number of apartments. Due to the subsequent recession in 2009 building work was put on hold and the house became more dilapidated. In March 2010 Mr Cox renewed his planning application to refurbish the house and to restore twelve residential units and convert/rebuild two residential units in the yard with garages and hardstandings.

In August 2012, revised plans detailed the demolition of old outbuildings and garages, conversion of the house to four dwellings, remaining outbuildings into two dwellings, a new detached dwelling

and a garage block. By July 2013 the plan was changed to be three dwellings of 3-storeys each (rather like Swanston House).

In May 2013, work started in the old garage block to the north and with part what was used as the vicarage. There was no activity with the main house other than the erection of scaffolding on its west elevation (New Exeter Street side). By June 2013, the immediate vicinity of the house was cleared of unwanted bush and tree growth. Early 2014 saw more work to the former outbuildings that lie behind New Exeter Street, one two-storey conversion has been named Dovetail Cottage and is occupied by Mr Pounsberry of Woods Estate Agents, Chudleigh, he was formerly of the Old Mill House, Clifford Street.

With access from New Exeter Street a small single-storey part was modernised as a 2-bedroom dwelling, named Culver Bungalow and was in occupation by 2015.

### **2016 (April)**

The main house, still in a derelict state was put up for auction. The left part (as *Culver House*) with a guide price of 'in excess of £230,000' and the central part (as *The Old School House*) also with a guide price of 'in excess of £230,000'. The right-hand 2-storey end (the former vicarage) was not part of this sale. The auction took place at the Jolly Farmer public house, Newton Abbot on Wednesday, 18 May 2016.

By July 2016, the *Old Vicarage* had been purchased by Robert and Donna Ashbrook of Medland, New Exeter Street and formerly of Higher Mill House, Clifford Street. The left end, *Culver House*, has been purchased by Exeter couple, David and Susan (Dave and Sue) Spence. The middle part, *The School House*, was sold at action (guide price £175,000) in September 2016 to Sarah Parker and her son, Lewis.

### **2017 (September)**

By early 2017 work had commenced on all three sections and at the time of writing, new roofing is in place and progress on restoration of the exterior walls is essentially complete. The division of the whole property into a total of nine flats has been reverted to the three separate town houses, as Nos. 1, 2 & 3 Sycamore Way (since the main entrance is now from that road instead of from New Exeter Street).

The 7 April 2017 edition of the MDA carried an article on Culver House with Donna Ashbrook requesting any information of the house's history. Our Chairman, Alan Brunton, provided a short section on this for the article, and an earlier version of this report, with some other GHG-held material, has been passed to Donna. In return, Donna has kindly provided the above information to bring the house history right up to the present day.

## Resources

1776 Poor Rate List

1838 Tithe Apportionment and map

Land Tax Returns

Electoral Rolls / Voter Lists / Census Records

Devon Records Office (DRO)

National Buildings Register (NBR)

Kelly's Directory

White's Directory

Donna Ashbrook (*pers.comm.*)

*Exeter Flying Post* (EFP) newspaper

*Mid-Devon Advertiser* (MDA) newspaper

*South Devon Weekly Express* (SDWE) newspaper

Hoskins, WG (1966) *Old Devon*

Jones, Mary (1852) *The History of Chudleigh* [reprint of the 1852 first edition]

Jones, Mary (1875) *The History of Chudleigh* [reprint of the 1875 second edition]

A free version is available online at

<http://ukga.org/england/Devon/towns/c/Chudleigh/History/Contents.html>

and hardcopy reprints are available from various online retailers.

[Findmypast.co.uk](http://Findmypast.co.uk)

[Our4bears.net/southhams](http://Our4bears.net/southhams)

[Familysearch.org](http://Familysearch.org)

[Discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://Discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[Devonheritage.org](http://Devonheritage.org)

[Genuki.org.uk/big/eng/dev](http://Genuki.org.uk/big/eng/dev)