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Harcombe

Harcombe Estate (otherwise Higher Harcombe or Harcombe Barton)

Detail taken from Mary Jones' History of Chudleigh (1st Edition 1852)

Harcombe is situated about three miles north-east of Chudleigh, it is here that the ancient families of Stawell and Balle had heritances [sic]. From the pedigree of the Stawells we see that the last of the family who belonged to this parish was baptized in 1578.

The Balles of Higher Harcombe were among the most wealthy and influential of the ancient families in the parish and from them the Mamhead branch descended. On the side of the glen, immediately opposite their old heritage at Harcombe, a mansion was began to be built by the last of the Balles; this accidentally took fire which not only stopped the progress of the building, but caused the design of its erection to be stopped altogether. No entry occurs in the parish register of the Harcombe Balles later than 1673 but at Ashcombe memorials exist from 1693 to 1755.

The estate of Higher Harcombe was included in the purchase of Mamhead, and Lower Harcombe was bought by Sir Robert Newman and Mr Parker, of the executors of the Rev J Templer of Lindridge. (the Templer family had acquired through purchase from the Stawell family).

Higher Harcombe is now a farm of considerable extent, having about seven years ago (c1845) been introduced to the modern system of agriculture by T Newman Esq. A convenient farmhouse was erected now in the occupation of his Bailiff under the direct superintendence of himself.

The population of Harcombe comprises about sixty, the cottages detached and solitary. Private benevolence has provided a week and Sabbath school.

Detail taken from Mary Jones' History of Chudleigh (2nd Edition 1875)

The hamlets of Higher and Lower Harcombe are two miles north-east of the town, under Haldon. Higher Harcombe belonged to the Balle¹ family. Several branches of this family are mentioned in the Parish Register, and designated as of Harcombe, Ranscombe, Northwood, Wappell Well, and Bridgeland. The family is said to have removed from Harcombe to Mamhead. Dr. Oliver inquires (*Eccl. Ant.*) whether John Balle of Mamhead who is mentioned as overseer to the will of Nicholas Balle the elder of Chudleigh, dated 17th October, 1553, was not the first of the family who settled at Mamhead. The estate passed with the Mamhead property by purchase, in the year 1823, from the Earl of Lisburne to Sir Robert Newman, Bart. The estate has been much improved since it has become the property of the Newman family by enclosing, planting, &c., and it is now considered as a model farm.

On the side of the glen, immediately opposite their old heritage at Harcombe, the last of the Balles began to build a mansion which accidently took fire. This not only stopped the progress of the building but caused the design of its erection to be altogether relinquished. Some of the old walls are still standing, while such of the materials as were worth removing were taken to Mamhead to

¹ Arms :—Arg., a chevron between three fire-balls, gules; crest, an arm holding a fire-ball, proper.



form part of a mansion there. It is well known that Thomas Balle purchased the manor of Ashcombe of Edward Balle, Esq. No entry occurs in the Parish Register of the Harcombe Balles later than 1673, but in Ashcombe churchyard there are several gravestones to the memory of the Balles, yeomen, and Balles of Mamhead, from 1693 to 1755.

Lower Harcombe in the latter end of the sixteenth century belonged to a branch of the Stawell or Stowell² family. Eustace Stawell, in a pedigree from the Heralds' College, is described of "*Harcombe in the Parish of Chudleigh*." He was second son of Edmund Stawell, Esq., of Hatherleigh, and married Elizabeth, daughter of one Baker, of Monmouth. He was succeeded by his eldest son William Stawell, of Harcombe, in Chudleigh; baptized there April 8, 1548, buried Feb. 9, 1591. He married Joanna, daughter of John Bennett, of Whiteway. His eldest son was Anthony Stawell, of Wrosall, in the county of Dorset; born at Chudleigh, and baptized March 19, 1573. He was uncle of Sir John Stawell of Bovey-Tracey. The estate passed by purchase to the Templer family, and was sold by the executors of the Rev. John Templer, of Lindridge, to the late M. E. N. Parker, Esq.

Occupiers up to demolition 1912 and Harcombe House thereafter

Year(s)	Source³	Owner or Occupier & Notes
1564		Nicholas Balle of Harcombe
1590s		Lower Harcombe Stawell family
1595		Humfrey Balle of Harcombe
1601	BB	Humphrey Balle of Harcombe Barton
1605		John Avant of Harcombe
1640	RL	Mr. Burrington Harcombe Barton
1649		John Bennet of Harcombe and Harcombe Moors. John Balle son of Humfrey Balle of Harcombe died 8 August 1656, John's son (also John) died 21 November 1661. No Balle name appears in Chudleigh records after 1673.
1811	BRL	Higher Harcombe Earl of Lisburne
1815		Lower Harcombe Owner Rev James Templar of Lindridge Occupier Thomas Pike
1815		Higher Harcombe Owner Earl of Lisburne Occupier Joseph Edwards. Harcombe Mills was said to be derelict by the year 1814.
1823		Thomas Newman Esq of the Dartmouth wine merchant family purchased land at Harcombe
1830		Lower Harcombe (as part of the Whiteway Estate) purchased for £1300 by the Newman family from the Earl of Morley
1832	VL	John Cox, Harcombe Barton
1838	TA	Owner; Sir Robert William Newman. Occupier; James Cox

² Arms :—Gules, a cross lozengy, arg.

³ BB = Beating of the Bounds List (1601); [B]RL = [Basic] Rate List; C = Census; OS = Ordnance Survey (map); TA = Tithe Apportionment (1838); TD = Trade Directory; VL = Voter List



Year(s)	Source	Owner or Occupier & Notes
1838	TA	Lower Harcombe Owner Rev James Templar of Lindridge Occupier
1838	VL	John Cox
1841	C	John Cox (60)
1851	C	Robert Hole, farm bailiff, occupying 270 acres and employing 16 labourers.
1856	TD	Robert Hole
1857	TD	Robert Hole
1861	C	John Mortimore, farmer 300 acres
1866	TD	Benjamin S Beley, farmer
1870	TD	Jonas Mitchell, farmer. Jonas was born at Ilsington in 1839. His marriage (likely at Chudleigh) was registered at Newton Abbot (Jun Q 1864) to Mary Jane Cleave (b. 1841 Chudleigh). They came to Harcombe in 1866/67. Their eldest son, Jonas Walter Soper Mitchell was born at Ilsington in 1866. The following year they were at Harcombe and a daughter Mary Ellen was born. In 1868 a second daughter, Edith was born.
1871	C	Jonas Mitchell (33) Mary Jane (31) Jonas W S (5) Mary E (4) Edith (2)
1872		A second son, Richard Jeffery Mitchell was born. He was Mayor of Plymouth 1925/26 and gave an address at the unveiling of the Chudleigh War Memorial on 9 May 1926. His death was registered at Plymouth March Qtr 1936 aged 65.
1873	TD	Jonas Mitchell, wife and family
1875		A third daughter, Anna Jane was born at Harcombe, within two years the family had left Harcombe and by the time of the 1881 Census were at Home Farm, Mamhead, at that time Jonas was shown as farmer of 518 acres.
1878	TD	John Harris
1881	C	John Harris, farmer of 280 acres, employing 5 men and 2 boys
1883–1890	TD	John Harris, farmer
1891	C	John Hellier, auctioneer & farmer
1893–1910	TD	John Hellier, auctioneer & farmer
1912		Harcombe House built for Sir Edward Channing Wills
1956	OS	The higher of the 3 ponds on Kate Brook is shown. The 3 ponds as they exist today first show on the 1984 OS map.
1961	VL	Evershed, Dennis and Patricia
1971	VL	
1981	VL	Harcombe House Hotel – 7 named occupiers
1981– present (2026)		Firefighters' Benevolent Fund now named the Firefighters' Charity https://www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/harcombe-house

Harcombe Cottage (Harcombe Moor)

The original Harcombe Cottage was located on Harcombe Moor and right on the boundary line with Kenn parish in the far north-east of the parish close to what was known as Rushy Combe.

The cottage was included within the 1838 Tithe Apportionment (no.83) and was then in the ownership of Sir Robert William Newman of Mamhead (as part of the Harcombe Estate) and nominally 'occupied' by James Cox, the farmer at what was then Higher Harcombe Farm.

Year(s)	Source⁴	Name	Occupier
1838	TA	Harcombe Cot	Tenant not specified
1841	C		Tenant not specified
1851	C	Harcombe Moor	Two households – J Perryman and S Dymond
1861	C	Harcombe Moor	Two households – J Perryman and J Field
1871	C	Harcombe Moors	One household, Robert Harris
1881	C		Not listed
1891	C	Harcombe Moors	Unoccupied
1901	C	Harcombe Cottage	Two households – William Blackmore and William Tuckett
1911	C	Harcombe Cottage	Two households – William Blackmore and William Tuckett

At some point following (c1920s) the moor was planted with fir trees by the Forestry Commission and the cottage became derelict. An outline of the building was still extant on the 1956 and 1976 OS maps. By 2015 an outline of the stone walls could just be made out on this difficult to access site.

⁴ C = Census; TA = Tithe Apportionment (1838)

Harcombe Cottage (Higher Harcombe)

At Higher Harcombe (on the junction with the Sticksend to Kerswell lane) were originally three cottages that at some point were converted into one detached and substantial dwelling. This dwelling was given the name Harcombe Cottage. In recent years, this property has been substantially renovated externally and modernised internally.

Year(s)	Source⁵	Name	Occupier
1930	KD	Harcombe	Leslie Norman (MRCVS Lond.) Veterinary Surgeon
1935	KD	Harcombe	Leslie Norman (MRCVS Lond.) Veterinary Surgeon
1939	KD	The Cottage, Harcombe	Leslie Norman (MRCVS Lond.) Veterinary Surgeon
1951	VL		Not listed
1961	VL	Harcombe Cottage	Sutherland and Dorothy Dumbreck
1971	VL	Harcombe Cottage	Sutherland and Dorothy Dumbreck
1981	VL	Harcombe Cottage	Anthony and Barbara Pitkin
1994	VL	Harcombe Cottage	Anthony and Barbara Pitkin
c2009 to present (2026)		Harcombe Cottage	Dr D A and R Ducker (Tony and Roberta)

⁵ KD = Kelly's Directory; VL = Voter List



Vampire crash 1952

The Times of 24 June 1952 carried the following in its News In Brief section: *Pilot Officer A. Durham was killed when a Vampire jet he was flying from Maryfield R.A.F. station, Somerset, crashed in a field at Harcombe, Devon yesterday. An open parachute was found near the wreckage.*

On 23 June 1952, an RAF DH100 Vampire F1 jet (TG298) crashed into a field close to the house. Flying in formation at 30,000 feet with others from RAF Merryfield, Somerset, it is considered that a lack of oxygen caused the pilot to pass out. The pilot, 19 year old Allan Durham, lost his life in the crash. He was buried in St Peter's Churchyard, Ilton, Somerset although originally from Swallownest, Sheffield.



A de Havilland DH100 Vampire F1 of the type which crashed at Harcombe



Resources

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

Our4bears.net/southhams

Familysearch.org

Discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Devonheritage.org

Genuki.org.uk/big/eng/dev