



## Woollcombe Family Archive

*A Tale of Two Houses*



## [WOOLLCOMBE FAMILY ARCHIVE – CHRISTMAS UPDATE 2020](#)

(*Note: I've changed the Keeper Email to: [david@peacechild.org](mailto:david@peacechild.org); also, I never disabled the original family user ID: [test@woollcombe.com](mailto:test@woollcombe.com); Password: **robin**. This will give you access to the whole site.*)

Dear Woollcombes:

This letter brings with it the best of good wishes for Christmas to all Woollcombes everywhere + a hope that the Covid pandemic has left you all unscathed + a fervent desire that 2021 be a better year than 2020!

**ONE: WHEN DID WE SPLIT INTO TWO HOUSES?** About four years ago, I met with my namesake, David Woollcombe and his delightful family in Toronto, Canada. He, like so many other Woollcombes, is a successful lawyer but we realised that neither of us knew the answer to the question: ***“When and How did the Ashbury and Hemerdon sides of our family split?”*** A year later, I sent out that a newsletter outlining my plan to digitise our Woollcombe family archive: to take the incredible labours of love performed by our ancestors in hand-written, beautifully illustrated (*but frequently inaccurate and incomplete*) family trees and mount them on the internet for all time for future generations to learn from and build on.

This year, I am proud to be able to offer the answer to that first question: the two sides of the family split back in the time of William and Rade Gund Woollcombe around 1550 when three of their five children – Robert, Baldwin and William – launched three separate lines of our family. It wasn't anything dramatic or violent: no blood was spilled. They just simply went their separate ways. Baldwin's line died out shortly there-after. William's line launched the Ashbury Woollcombes. Robert Woollcombe launched the Hemerdon line. In the end, it wasn't hard to find out: an excellent [Family Tree](#) (*see on the website*) sent to me by Stephen Woollcombe explains it in the Robert and William Woollcombe entries. Stephen is the grandson and [biographer of William Penrose Woollcombe](#), founder of [Ashbury College](#) in Ottawa: one of Canada's leading independent schools whose alumni include Canadian Prime Minister, John Turner, and Matthew Perry of *Friends* fame. He has been an amazing support to me this year.

So, for this year, I am happy that the question that exercised David and I – and my father and grand-father – is now settled: our two houses split over 400 years ago! If you click on the pictures of each house on the landing page of the archive, it takes you straight back to the Woollcombes who authored that split.



*James and Sue Woollcombe outside Hemerdon House 2003.*

**TWO: TOGETHER AGAIN AFTER 430 YEARS:** Nick Woollcombe, from the Ashbury side, probably knew this all along and never felt it was such a mystery. Instead, he drew my attention to an even more remarkable piece of family news: that, after +/- 430 years of cordial separation, the two halves of the family were re-connected in 1982 through the marriage of James Woollcombe, father of Kate, Sukey and their sisters, current owners of Hemerdon, to Sue Scott-Fox whose mother was an Ashbury Woollcombe. Nick eloquently tells the story on the Landing Page of our Family Archive Website. Here is a summary:

Many years ago, in the remoter regions of south Devon lived a family consisting of William Woollcombe (spelt at that time as Wolcombe) and his wife Radegund. William died in 1569 and left six children. The three boys were named Robert, Baldwin, and the youngest William. They all lived in south Devon but began to move to other areas in the region. Baldwin's line eventually became extinct and there is very little information about this branch of the family. However more is known about the descendants of Robert (? – 1584) and his brother William (1550 – 1598)

Robert, the elder of the two remained in south Devon in and around Plympton St Mary. It was William's great grandson Henry (1637 – 1692) who made his family's move to north Devon. The reason for this was his marriage to Elizabeth Walter in September 1685. Her brother was Henry Walter of Ashbury and she was his sole heir. She was also sixteen years older than Henry Woollcombe and was aged 63 at the time of their marriage, so there was no prospect of children.

Henry left Ashbury to his nephew, John Woollcombe (1680 – 1713), and it was John who resided at Ashbury and made it the family seat. Tragically, he and his wife died from fever within a few days of each other. He left Ashbury to his brother William. He died intestate and Ashbury passed to his younger brother Philip (1685 – 1730). It is from Philip Woollcombe that the current Ashbury Woollcombe's are descended.

Robert and his descendants remained in the south Devon area and, in the 1790s, a descendant of his built Hemerdon House, less than three miles from Plympton St Mary. The house remains in the family until the present day.

Sue Scott-Fox's mother was Cecily Rose Woollcombe, a direct descendant of the Ashbury branch of the family. The late James (Jim) Woollcombe was the great great great grandson of the George Woollcombe who built Hemerdon House. Her family had known James's family for many years and had kept in touch but both had taken different paths. James married and eventually settled in Ealing on his return from South America, before returning to Devon in retirement. Sue had a family of her own and after a lot of globe-trotting moved back to London in the 1970s. It wasn't till much later that they once again met up, marrying in London in 1982. Thus, after almost four hundred years the two families were reunited.

A little over a year after they were married, they moved to Hemerdon. It became their home and they both spent many years together enjoying it and its historic associations with South-West Devon, until James died in 2007. The Ashbury Woollcombes no longer have their seat in North Devon; however, the church of St Mary, next to where Ashbury House once was, is still owned and cared for by members of the Woollcombe family.

Stephen, Nick and I still have a lot of work to do to flesh out each side of the family, especially the Hemerdon Woollcombe side. Kate Woollcombe and James Woollcombe's other daughters have preserved various family trees at Hemerdon – which I hope to scan and transcribe for the website in time for my Christmas 2021 update. Thomas Blaikie and his mother, Tamsyn, (James sister) are a font of knowledge. Thomas corrected the identities of the Woollcombe ancestors in the photograph (*below*) – and gave me some background on them. Thank you for Thomas.



*The younger man (on the left) is H.W. Woollcombe, my grandfather. The one on the right (small mouth, older) is his father, J.Y. Woollcombe. In the middle is your great-grandfather, Richard Woollcombe. My grandfather worked in Richard's office in London for a while. My mother and I think the photo might have been taken at my grandparents' wedding.*

Please keep your corrections, photographs and information coming. They are so welcome! And next year's update will record and highlight them. Another Tamsyn Woollcombe (an Ashbury Woollcombe) has promised to scan her copy of Charles Louis's excellent family tree Scroll which he hand-wrote in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in a spidery script that is as distinctive as it is indecipherable! (*I will get it transcribed*). And Clarissa Woollcombe Smith was given a Woollcombe family tree that a friend found in a Junk Shop in Gloucestershire: we will get that scanned and mounted as well. Meanwhile, we all have some digging to do to find out dates of birth and death for several of the earlier ancestors and, hopefully, unearth some photographs of other ancestors

**THREE: IN PRAISE OF MIDDLE NAMES:** It has been delightful over the year to connect with Michael Woollcombe-Clarke, Clarissa Woollcombe Smith, Edward Bromet and others – and to learn how many Woollcombes who have lost their Woollcombe name through marriage have retained it, either through having it as their middle name, or making a double-barrel name out of it. We have found Woollcombe-Adams, Woollcombe-Clarks, Woollcombe-Boyces and Woollcombe-Gossons – and there may be many more! Stephen Woollcombe's daughter, Dharini, a professional psychiatrist and actor, retains her Woollcombe surname and both her children, Olive and Linden, have Woollcombe as their middle name. My son, Alexander, has my mother's maiden name, Harvey, as his middle name, and he has given his son, Robin, de Ambrosis as his middle name – the name of his maternal great-grandmother. Such traditions keep the Woollcombe name – and spirit – alive in succeeding generations. I thank and congratulate all who do it – and encourage others to consider adopting their example.

**FINALLY...** Last year, Kate Woollcombe drew our attention to a BBC story about Lt George Woollcombe, who was a Commander in the British Navy's effort to suppress the Slave Trade. [Click here](#) for that BBC story. This year, a friend showed me his copy of a new book: *Britain's War Against the Slave Trade 1807-1867* by [Anthony Sullivan](#) in which the exploits of Lt George Woollcombe are featured too.

In other news, we have acquired a new server for our site and it now has an SSL certificate. This means that we come up on top in any Google Search for the Woollcombe Family. We shall continue the arduous task of fleshing out the family tree from archive records throughout next year. Any help, or stories, or photographs that you can provide would be invaluable. I am determined to find out more about Bishop Harry Woollcombe, grand-father to the illustrious Yorkshire branch of the family. Intriguing facts are useful too: Stephen googled "Woollcombe" the other day, and found a graph showing that about 60% of living Woollcombes live in the UK, 30% in Canada, and tiny percentages in a few other countries. And finally – news: births, deaths, marriages, promotions, wacky stories and – importantly – new approaches to making Family Trees! Not much of these this year apart from Fergus Woollcombe who – at last! – got engaged to the wonderful Sophie in Sydney, Australia. Fergus is the eldest son of John Woollcombe, youngest son of Rupert & Elisabeth Woollcombe whose face I rather rudely put with antlers on the '[Wacky Woollcombe](#)' header on the website. John is the producer of the landmark documentary about Britain's most successful ever jockey, AP McCoy, "[Being AP](#)" and the "[From the Basement](#)" series of rock concerts. He has also immortalised his three sons – and spectacular Scottish wife, Melanie, in a series of family videos which are now on the website. As a 21<sup>st</sup> Century approach to family archiving, John sets the bar extremely high with his family videos. So – though one has to revere

and celebrate the Family Trees assiduously penned by Charles Louis and others – the John Woollcombe approach is perhaps the way to memorialise the Woollcombes of the Future? So PLEASE!! Be inspired by John’s family examples and make your own! If these be “Wacky Woollcombes” – we need more of them.

Best wishes, and Happy Christmas,

David Woollcombe – Keeper of the Woollcombe Family Archive

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century John Woollcombe Stories



*Fergus Woollcombe and Sophie – the Happy Couple – September 2020*



John and Melanie’s [‘Perfect Day’](#) wedding;



The [Fergus Woollcombe Story](#)



The [Ralph Woollcombe Story](#)



The [Rowan Woollcombe Story](#)

Melanie’s [50th birthday](#) (My Favorite Things) & [60<sup>th</sup> Birthday](#) (Time to Say Goodbye) videos;

For the John Woollcombes 21<sup>st</sup> Century Videos on the Woollcombe Family Archive, go to:

<https://www.woollcombe.co.uk/news/wacky-woollcombes>