



Ashbury House



Ashbury Church



Hemerdon House

WOOLLCOMBES REUNITED



Welcome to the 2023 Woollcombe Family History Update

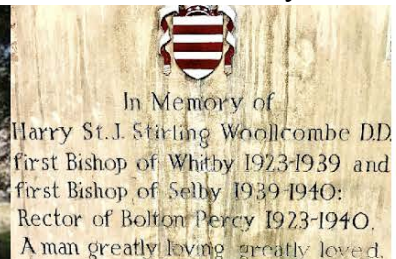
Welcome to the 2023 Christmas Update of the Woollcombe Family Archive in the year when we mark the 4th anniversary of this website and the celebration, on July 8th 2023, of the first, highly successful, Woollcombe Family Reunion at Brockfield Park, York. That Reunion, generously hosted by Charlie and Hatta Wood and assiduously managed by Click Woollcombe-Mitchell, brought together Woollcombes from across the UK and around the world in a delicious lunch, addressed by our host, followed by an [Introduction to the Family Archive](#). We then visited Bishop Woollcombe's church at Bolton Percy.



The Brockfield Family Reunion Lunch - sur l'herbe
July 8th 2023 (in the rain!)



Click Mitchell at Bolton Percy Church
Bishop Harry Woollcombe's home and final resting place



In Memory of
Harry St.J. Stirling Woollcombe D.D.
first Bishop of Whitby 1923-1939 and
first Bishop of Selby 1939-1940:
Rector of Bolton Percy 1923-1940.
A man greatly loving greatly loved.

A small group of us then toured significant Woollcombe landmarks in Devon (*where most Woollcombes come from*), including Woolacombe Bay, Ashbury Church, Rumleigh House and Hemerdon Manor.



Woollcombes & Chataways with Philippa Morrison,
grand-daughter of Rev. Percy Woollcombe



Rick & Bev Chataway at Woolacombe
- one of the world's top beaches! -



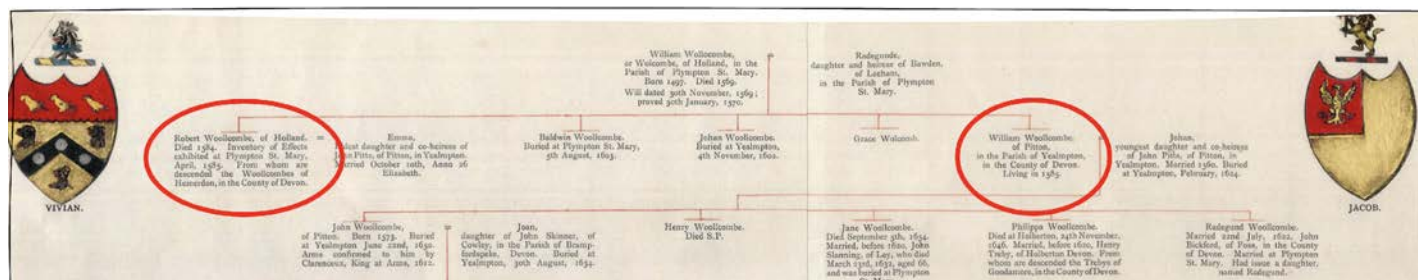
Ashbury - still Signposted!
with Rick Chataway



The Oxton Hall Reunion Party
generously hosted by Humphrey & Julia Smith

The Reunion has triggered the first major revision of this Website's home page: take a look at it at - <https://www.woollcombe.co.uk>. The first landing page was entitled "*A Tale of Two Houses.*" And I wrote: "...our family is split, quite decisively, between the Ashbury and the Hemerdon Woollcombes. Quite why – and how – it is the purpose of this website to describe."

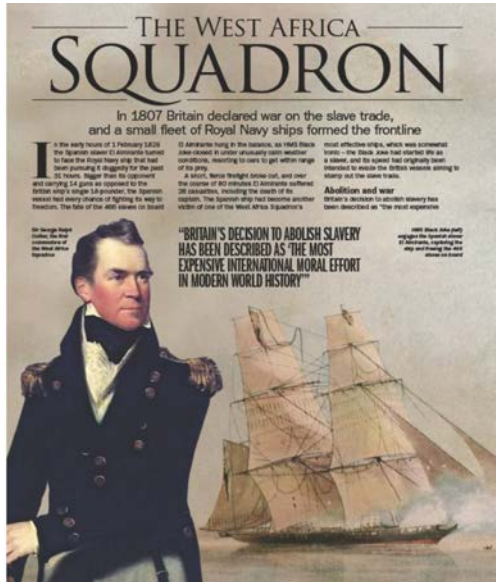
Well if the Brockfield Hall reunion did nothing else, it finally laid to rest the myth that we Woollcombes are a Divided Family. We are not! There was no acrimonious split: unlike the famous blood feud between the Grangerfords and Sheperdsons in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* – famous because no one can remember how it started! – there is no mystery about how the split in the Woollcombe family started. As the [Family Pedigree in the Gallery](#) shows, in the reign of Henry VIII, William and Radekunde Woollcombe had 4 sons: Robert, Baldwin, John and William. John and Baldwin's line quickly died out – but William married Johan and had 4 x surviving children from whom descended the Ashbury side of the family. And Robert married Emma and their children launched the Hemerdon side of the family.



They were all living close to each other in South Devon, near Plymouth, so probably didn't even think of themselves as different sides of the family until William's great grandson, Henry, married Elizabeth Walter in 1694. She was 16-years older than him and heiress to the Ashbury Estate, 30 miles north of Plymouth. They had no children, so the estate passed to Henry's nephew, John, the Plymouth MP – then to John's brother, William. Neither of them had any children, so it then passed to Philip who married the daughter of the Bishop of Exeter and they had 3 x children. It was their son, John, a High Sherriff of Devon, who married Mary Morth from Cornwall, and together they expanded the first [Ashbury House](#) beside the Church in the 1750s. A few years later, in 1790, Plymouth surgeon, Thomas Woollcombe, bought the land around Hemerdon and gave it to his daughter, Maria. She married her cousin, George Woollcombe, and they built [Hemerdon House](#) together raising their family there. 30 miles was a long way in those days – so not unnaturally, the two sides of the family drifted apart. Their sons and daughters would not have grown up together, or even seen much of each other, so it became a useful short-hand when Woollcombe met Woollcombe, to ask "Which side of the family are you: Ashbury or Hemerdon?"

It will probably continue to do so for generations to come but, at the end of a year that has seen divisions engender so much agony and violence across our world, I hope you will forgive for asserting an end to the Tale of Two Houses, and claiming that Woollcombes are Re-united.

We laid the crest of [Ashbury College, Canada](#) on one of the windows alerting future visitors to the fact that Woollcombes journeyed from that place to all corners of the world. John and Mary Woollcombe's Ashbury House burned down and the one built to replace it (seen in the photograph above) was, like so many other large houses last century, demolished in 1934. But Ashbury church remains and, for me, visiting it for the second time this year, I had a very real sense that it stands as a symbol the values and history of both sides of the family. As we saw with the [Tale of Two Bishops](#) last year, both sides of the family have produced distinguished figures in the church. A cursory look at this family archive will show that there have been many brilliant examples from both sides of the family who have served their communities, country and planet as faith leaders, as teachers, in the armed forces, the legal and medical professions, as missionaries, adventurers and now international development specialists. There were probably many Black Sheep too – but I have not come across any. Yet!!



LT. GEORGE WOOLLCOMBE
Commander, *The Glendower*
- West Africa Squadron -

Between 1807 and 1860, the West Africa Squadron seized approximately 1,600 ships involved in the slave trade and freed 150,000 Africans who were aboard these vessels.

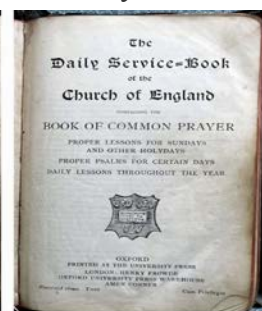
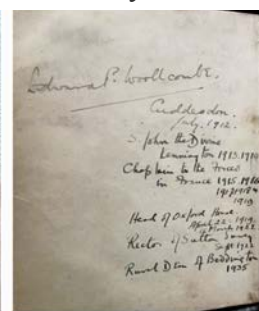
Rather, I choose to celebrate people like [Admiral George Woollcombe](#) who helped start the West Africa Squadron which, after Parliament passed the Act to abolish the British Slave Trade in 1807, captured slave ships and gave the Act teeth, where before it had been just an expression of good intentions.



This model of one of the ships he commanded sits in the entrance hall of Hemerdon House. It is one of many Woollcombe treasures in urgent need of restoration: this one is now being restored privately by the family, but several of us are now in discussions about how to set up a Woollcombe Family History Trust to spread the load of caring for family treasures. Like this: Edward Percy Woollcombe's Prayer Book.



Edward Percy Woollcombe (1888 -1975)



The Prayer Book he carried with him throughout his life;

Philippa, his grand-daughter, has written a moving tribute to “[My Grandpa](#)” – in which she says:
“I remember him well, from his days at the Rectory at Ecton(now a [hotel!](#)) where he served as a Parish priest. He had a wonderful giggle, and he loved black bananas and 'Grape-nuts' (*a crunchy breakfast cereal*) He also enjoyed tending to his raspberries. Funny how so many memories of him are based around food!
“He was one of eleven children seen below bottom right in the sailor suit.



“He experienced the horrors of the First World War first hand in his mid-twenties as an Army Chaplain with the 8th Leicester battalion. I quote an extract from one of his letters home:

October 7th 1916 – 8th Leicester Battalion, British Expeditionary Force (BDF)

My Dear Mother and Everyone:

“We slept in shell holes which, when the rain started, got full of water. The doctor and I got hold of two bits of corrugated iron and rigged them up as a shelter, but they didn’t work very well. I got caked with mud and soaked through to the skin.

“Then came the awful night when we lay in the water and the Boche started to shell us. I say “awful” – and yet at the same time it was a night of miracles: shells kept dropping right in amongst us and not one man was hit in my battalion – and only two men killed in the whole Brigade. I am being taught daily the enormous potential of prayer....”

Your loving son,
Edward P. Woolcombe

“2 x complete letters and more photographs and stories of his life can be accessed by clicking [HERE](#). Both his daughters, Daphne and Caroline, became nursing sisters. Daphne’s daughter, Catriona and I continued the tradition by working as nursing sisters in Oxfordshire. His son, Kenneth (my father), became the youngest Bishop of Oxford. My cousins, Penny, Janie & Catriona (all his grand-daughters) reminisced about the nicknames he had for us... 'Penny Pops', 'Meggie Weggie' and 'PP' to name a few.

We all loved him dearly....”

... as did my father, Rupert Woolcombe, who always referred to him and his wonderful wife, Elsie, as his favourite uncle and aunt. Many, many Woollobmes lived and died in the service of others – a tradition which lasts to the present day with so many living family members engaged in a caring profession.

It is those living family members we wish to focus upon. We will note and celebrate as many new arrivals in the Woollcombe family as we can each year and look to find out more about the work and careers of different Woollcombes around the world. For, as my son told me when I started this archive, *“I am not really interested in who begat whom a hundred years ago. I am interested to find out where other Woollcombes are in the world and what they are doing with their lives.”*



And Woollcombes have not just served, cared and prayed for each other: they have been active in plenty of other professions: there are novelists, historians, philosophers, artists, wine-makers and theatre impresarios who populate our family tree. *(see examples above)*

For me, the fascination lies in how we are all linked in an unbroken chain of DNA going back at least 1000 years. For Woolacombe features in the [Domesday book](#): Woolacombe Tracey was the seat of the Tracey family, famous because Sir William de Tracey was one of the four noblemen who obeyed Henry II's request to “rid me of this troublesome priest...” – by assassinating Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170. *(This gives rise to the family story that it may have been a Woollcombe who held the horses of the murderers while the murder was committed.)* Also, the name, “Woolacombe,” is not, as many have told me, related to sheep farmers in a valley or combe: rather it seems to have been drawn from the presence of wolves in the valley above Woolacombe Tracey. Our ancestors were probably those who hunted, or protected the aristocracy from, the wolves of the combe.

This Family archive is far from finished: there is a ton of work to do to add known family members, especially on the Hemerdon side. Also – it would be wonderful to dig out more photographs and expand the biographies of Woollcombes, past and present. So please contact me: David@peacechild.org if you have time and the interest to help. And I will set you up with the passwords and a training to make sure you know exactly how to add names, photographs and stories to the site.

And encourage your children and grand-children to look at it – and soak up the rich history that flows in their veins, and the extraordinary genes that they are privileged to carry forward into their lives and the lives of their descendants!

Meanwhile, some Woollcombe Family News from 2023



Festival of Light at Ashbury Church:

The evening of 5th of November saw three Woollcombe Family members, Sue, Nick and Lizzy Woollcombe, join the local community of Ashbury and Northlew for their Annual *Festival of Light* Service at Ashbury Church. The whole interior of the church was lit by candles, just as it was when the Woollcombes of Ashbury Manor first attended services there. The service is run a vicar from Northmoor, and the church was packed with 70 local people who live and work nearby. Nick Woollcombe was much

moved, writing: “The church looked beautiful in the shimmering light and we were all impressed by the care and effort the local non-Woollcombe people put in to organise the event. Everyone I spoke to afterwards remarked how much the church was valued by the community.” We should too!! Next year – let’s hope that more Woollcombes will attend! We’ll let you know well in advance when it is to be held.

Two new twigs on the Woollcombe Family tree:



Kiran



Neve

On May 19th, here in the UK, Kiran arrived to parents, Natasha & Shridaran Woollcombe Pillay and proud big sister, Amira: a well-built young man with a beaming smile, he is already shaping up to be a powerful rugby player – but who will he play for? England or South Africa? (“*Springboks, if he has any sense...*” says father Shri!) A couple of months later in Australia, to the delight of parents, Amy and David Woollcombe-Gill and grand-parents, Tony and Joan Woollcombe, Neve was born on 7th August – a bonnie lass who has already impressed with her tolerance & sense of humour!(*See above - in a bucket!*)

Woollcombe family Reunion(s): Rick and Bev Chataway travelled from Canada to be with us at the Yorkshire reunion. Rick wrote to me afterwards saying: “We have many wonderful memories of the places we saw and the people we met. We especially appreciate the hospitality shown to us by Humphrey and Julia Smith, our hosts at Oxton Hall and to David and Nick Woollcombe who drove us to Devon to visit the ancestral church of my grandfather’s family. A wonderful remembrance of my Woollcombe heritage. Hearing the Woollcombe stories, I appreciate why my mother, Phyllis, her brother, Edward, and father, Lionel Woollcombe, were so proud of the scholarship, community spirit, and moral standards exhibited by Woollcombes throughout the centuries. Grandparents from both sides of our family emigrated from England to Canada in the closing years of the 1880’s.”

Rick also sent us a poem, adapted from one read at an earlier reunion as advice to Woollcombes everywhere:

*The day was for reflection,
A chance to meet, to talk, to laugh
To share with one another
Some stories of the past.
For it’s with anecdotes such as these
That family legends grow.
And we pass on to the younger folk
The things we’ve come to know.
So take time to be with relatives
To eat, drink and merry be.
For tall or short,
Or good or bad,
This is our family.*

The Reunion was also attended on zoom by Stephen and Dharini Woollcombe + David Carter from Canada, Tony Woollcombe and his family from Australia and several other Woollcombes from around the world. The Head of Ashbury College in Ottawa, founded by George Penrose Woollcombe, generously sent over several copies of Stephen Woollcombe's biography of him, along with a copy of the Ashbury College Shield with Rick Chataway. We shared these with interested family members and installed the Shield in Ashbury church during our visit to Devonshire in July.



Aurora Reunion, Canada: It is also good to note that the Canadian Woollcombe tribe still get together most years for what they call the WOCALU gathering – a meeting of WOollcombes, CARTers and LUXtons – all grand-children, or descendants of, George Penrose Woollcombe, the founder of Ashbury College or his brothers. This year, the Canada gathering will be hosted by the Carter / McKellar Clan in the town of Aurora, just north of Toronto, on December 16th. We wish them all a joyful reunion and hope that, after it, one of them will give us new stories from the extraordinary Canada Woollcombe clan!?

It remains only for me to wish you all a very Happy Christmas, and let us hope that 2024 brings news of more Reunions and less Divisions across our troubled planet!

Best wishes,

David Woollcombe, Keeper,
Woollcombe Family Archive,