

WOOLLCOMBE FAMILY UPDATE – CHRISTMAS 2024



Perhaps the best news of the year is that Maude Smith – painter, stitcher and [artist extraordinaire](#) - got married at Bolton Percy church in July, to Thomas Caldecott. Daughter of Humphrey and Julia Smith, she is a great-grand-daughter of Bishop Harry Woollcombe. She and Thomas are expecting a baby in the Spring – which means that, at future Woollcombe weddings in Yorkshire, there will be even more than the FOURTEEN(!) little Woollcombe bridesmaids and pageboys (*see above*), Maude had at her wedding.

A couple of Woollcombe-related babies already arrived this year. A sister for Noah, baby Jane Elizabeth VanderCrist arrived on 27th November 2024 – a little premature and only 5lbs 1oz. But she is now doing well – and is home in Sacramento for Christmas with her grand-parents, Kate and Will + Aunt Fiona. Michael Woollcombe-Clarke reports that a little sister for Lara, Cora Thomasina Rose, arrived at 3:29am in the morning in a hospital lift on 8th August weighing in at 9lbs 15oz. Many congratulations to them all.

At the other end of the age spectrum, Tamsyn Blaikie, a Hemerdon Woollcombe, celebrated her 100th Birthday at Hemerdon with a large family party. Many, many congratulations to a wonderful Woollcombe lady who remains sharp and active – and an amazing repository of family History.

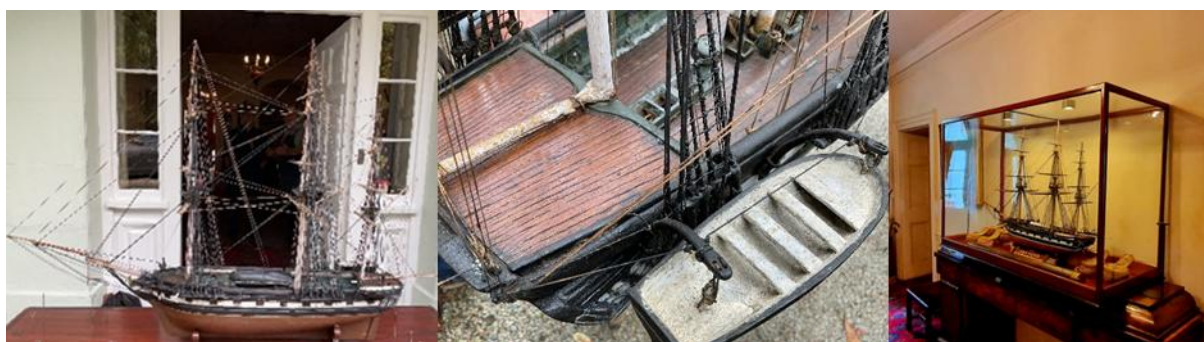


Top: Tamsyn Woollcombe aged 10; Tamsyn now – and Tamsyn on her Wedding Day

Bottom: Lucy, Mag, Sophie and Sukey Woollcombe, Kate Vanderburgh, Kate & Valentine Woollcombe and Rosanna Cole;



If you're in South Devon, I urge you to visit Hemerdon House: the family has kept it in excellent condition, and it is now open to the public on 28 days a year between May and August. Check the [Hemerdon Website](#) for the exact dates. No need to book unless there will be six of you or more, in which case do phone ahead on 07704 708416 or email hemerdon.house@gmail.com. The family tells me that no charge will be made to Woollcombe family members, which is a very generous offer. But I hope anyone visiting will make a donation – the upkeep of a house like Hemerdon is high, and there is ongoing maintenance and restoration of the historic contents, a case in point being this model of Vice-Admiral George Woollcombe's ship, the Victor – now beautifully restored and on display at Hemerdon. This was the ship of the West Africa Squadron on which he intercepted illegal slaving traders:



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While there, do make time to visit the beautiful Plympton St Mary's Church to see Vice-Admiral George's tomb, [now beautifully restored](#), by specialists Orchard Stonemasons, thanks to the efforts of Kate Woollcombe Gambrill – George's great, great, great grand-daughter – and other members of the family. If anyone would like to contribute to the cost, please feel free to contact Kate at hemerdon.house@gmail.com or on 07740 626595.



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Plympton St Mary's Church

The tomb also commemorates: Thomas and Priscilla Woollcombe + their 3 x sons: George who built Hemerdon House, Dr. William, and Henry, + 2 x daughters: Mary and Anne; Vice-Admiral George (son of George who built the House) and Mary Elizabeth (his wife); Thomas Robinson and Sarah Anne (their infant children); Thomas and Jane Woollcombe + Ellen Daniell (*a governess to the Vice-Admiral's children*).

With similar generosity, Nicholas Woollcombe, in collaboration with the other owners, has finally set up a Charity to own, insure and maintain St Mary's Church Ashbury – the last surviving building on the Ashbury estate near Okehampton, Devon, where so many of our ancestors came from. It is a Charitably Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registered as UK Charity No. 1209781! Its trustees are Nick himself + Lizzy and Amy Woollcombe. This is its entry on the [Charity Commission website](#):

ST MARY'S CHURCH ASHBURY DEVON CIO		
Charity number: 1209781		Recently registered
Charity overview What, who, how, where Governance Trustees Financial history	What the charity does: General Charitable Purposes Religious Activities Arts/culture/heritage/science Who the charity helps: The General Public/mankind How the charity helps: Provides Buildings/facilities/open Space Where the charity operates: Devon	

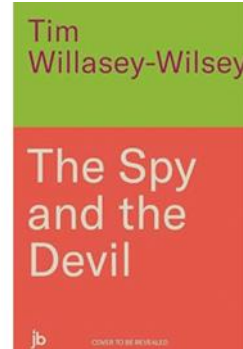
A letter now in Nick's possession reveals that Carol Woollcombe, who bought the church from the Exeter diocese for £1 when it was made redundant in 1982, always had the intention to set up a Charity to own the church. For reasons that are not entirely clear, she was unable to do so. It is still early days for the Charity: the trustees have yet to have their first formal meeting. When they do, it is likely that they will seek to appoint more trustees, including some who live locally to Ashbury. They will also explore ways that the Church can become a focus for Woollcombe family history with more displays on the walls and in cabinets.



Nicholas Woollcombe adds: "For some time, the owners of the church have been seeking ways in which the church could be preserved for future generations to enjoy and participate in. For centuries, St Mary's church has played an important cultural and religious function for the local community – an importance confirmed by the annual candle-lit service which is always packed with local people. The church is in an outstanding location with gorgeous views over to Dartmoor. In its tiny churchyard, many Woollcombes are buried along with others who lived and worked on the Ashbury Estate. Hopefully, in the future, the church will be permitted to host Weddings, Christenings and Funerals and, In this way, what Carol wished for can now be realised: Ashbury Church preserved for Future Generations."

Other News:

One of the delights of being the keeper of this Family Archive is that I get inquiries from people seeking information about distinguished Woollcombes of the past. Few were more distinguished than Malcolm Woollcombe – a distinguished British Diplomat and Intelligence Officer in the early years of the last century. He is mentioned 55 times in a book to be published next year called [“The Spy and the Devil”](#).



Written by Tim Willasey-Wilsey, it tells the story of Baron William de Ropp and his bid to stop the 2nd World War. He was a Baltic German aristocrat with direct access to Adolf Hitler and he was MI6's top-secret agent in Nazi Germany from 1931 to 1939.

I put Tim in touch with Malcolm's grand-daughter, Tamsyn (the Ashbury Tamsyn!) – who was able to flesh out Tim's characterisation of Malcolm with letters and this beautiful photograph, taken on the day that he was appointed to the Order of St Michael and St George – a British honour that recognizes distinguished contributions to international affairs.

To find out exactly the role that Malcolm played in Baron de Ropp's story, you will have to read Tim's book – out on 8th May – but [available for pre-order now](#). All Tim has told me is that “... *after Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy lay in ruins in 1939, and the FO urgently needed a new policy towards Nazi Germany, Malcolm Woollcombe, Head of Section 1 (Political) of MI6, wrote a paper called ‘What should we do?’*” We all know what Hitler and Churchill did – but it will be fascinating to read Tim's book and find out what a Woollcombe did to shape their policies. More news next year when I've read the book!



Another book project I've learned about concerns Bishop Kenneth-John Woollcombe's father, Edward Woollcombe – about whose First World War experiences I wrote last year. Matthew Richardson wrote a book about Kitchener's Army battalions called [The Tigers](#) – in which the Rev. Edward Woollcombe features (see the photo above.) He has so much material on the Leicestershires, he now seeks to write another – and would love to hear from all Woollcombes who knew the Rev. Edward (“Percy”). Get in touch with him at: lone-pine@manx.net

In Memoriam:

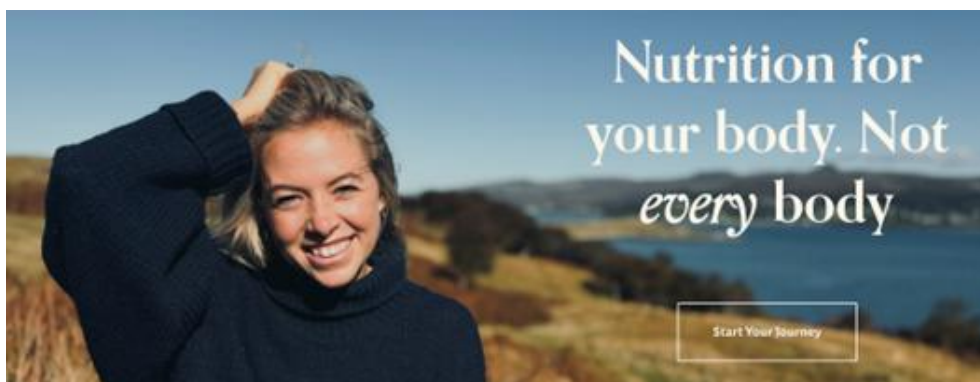


David Anthony Woolcombe: born on 29/08/1948; died 9/10/2024 after a tough battle with mesothelioma.

David grew up in Devon attending local schools and Kelly College, Dorset for secondary school, obtaining an Engineering degree from Shrivenham Defence Academy. In 1970 he emigrated to Sydney, Australia where he worked for the Australian Government as an engineer working on public and defence airports. In 1974 David married Susan and had 2 children, Damian and Janna + 3 x grand daughters.

The Great Wall Completed of Nova Scotia

I also ask what new jobs or career moves Woolcombes have made during the year – and Rick Chataway from Canada, who came to the Family Reunion in York last year, writes to tell me that he has completed building a sixty metre dry stone wall in 2024. *"I enjoy finding the right place for each rock as I build. It's very satisfying to see it completed."* But, he insists, unlike the Great Wall of China, his project can NOT be seen from outer space!



Venetia Woolcombe-Mitchell writes to tell me that she has a new job with [Peach Health](#) as a Partner & Senior Clinical Practitioner with their team of Functional Nutritional Therapists. Any Woolcombe family member can use her 20% discount code: VENETIA20 - for an assessment with them.

Being a Good Ancestor....

The more I read about my Woollcombe Ancestors, the more I am convinced that almost all of them wanted to do good in the world. In Robert Baden-Powell's words: ".... *To leave the world a little better than they found it.*"

At the September 2024 UN Summit of the Future, 193 UN Member Governments adopted the [Declaration on Future Generations](#) in which they agreed "... *to ensure that present generations act with responsibility towards safeguarding the needs and interests of future generations.*" This is a re-statement of the commitment UN Member Governments made in the Brundtland Report of 1987 which agreed that it is our duty as governments and citizens to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs." The fact is – we have massively compromised the ability of future generations to meet their needs – by failing to adequately address climate change, biodiversity loss, human poverty and resource depletion. Worst – we have signally failed to achieve the UN's founding goal: to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," or to deliver them from the world-incinerating threat of nuclear war.

As we settle back to enjoy this season of Peace and Goodwill, I hope you will not be offended if I remind you that the babies born in this, and future years, depend upon us to be [Good Ancestors](#) – to live with that strategic foresight and generosity that drove our ancestors – and drives Nick Woollcombe and his fellow trustees to conserve Ashbury Church for future generations, and Kate and Sukey Woollcombe to conserve and restore family artefacts for Hemerdon to remind us of our distinguished ancestor who helped eliminate the Slave trade. We owe them all a massive debt of gratitude!

I wish you all the happiest of Christmases – and a peaceful, stress-free 2025,
Sincerely,

David R. Woollcombe,
Keeper of the Woollcombe Family Archive

PS – Now THAT's a Family Tree: My friend, the Soviet-era Rock Star, Stas Namin, grandson of President, Anastas Mikoyan, just had his Family Tree done by the Russian equivalent of Ancestry.com. It identifies that he is related to Pushkin and Gogol – but isn't it beautiful the way that the family tree is laid out and illustrated?

