

THE MANORS OF STADDISCOMBE & STADDON

By Robert Rowland

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The manor of Staddiscombe begins just one field east of the old village and extends westward, north of the old parish boundary between Wembury and Plymstock that went down Hurry Lane, which runs directly from Staddiscombe to Bovisand Beach. The manor extends along the ridge to what was Staddon Gate, almost at the junction to Bovisand Bay. Staddon consisted mainly of the down land at Staddon Heights. It was for many years let in four quarters and used as common land. Latterly before the building of the defensive works, there was Staddon Barton situated on the right as you go down to Bovisand. This was the home of Samuel Popplestone for many years.

Ownership of the manors since before the time of Domesday was in the hands of the de Britte family, who also held Halwell in Brixton. Walter Britte was a famous Oxford Scholar and mathematician the maker of an astronomical clock, and follower of Wickliffe. There was a long line of Guys, Williams and Ralphs terminating in Margaret who married Thomas Wyse of Sydenham Damerel in 1370. John Wyse fought in France with Henry V in 1415. The Wyse family had also inherited Stoke Damerel, and their name is perpetuated in Mount Wise. Sir Edward Wise, his sons having predeceased him, sold his estates including Staddiscombe and Staddon to Sir William Morice of Werrington in 1667 for £11,600. Sir William had been very instrumental in the restoration of the monarchy with General Sir George Monck. Humphrey Morice was heavily involved in the slave trade and Governor of the Bank of England 1727-28 he was thought to be a very wealthy man, but on his death in 1731 was found to have embezzled funds from the bank, to the tune of £29,000, but his son another Humphrey Morice inherited a fortune from his uncle. Young Humphrey, like his father, also served as a member of parliament. He was of a sickly constitution, unmarried and retired from public life to Naples where he died in 1785. The manors are then owned for a short time by kinsman William Molesworth of Pencarrow, before coming in to the hands of the Bastards of Kitley around 1800. This ends with the sale of their lands in Staddiscombe and Wembury in 1913. They did retain part of Staddon that was not requisitioned for the building of the Forts at Staddon Point and Staddon Heights.

The exceptions to the above are Leyford and Blackhall farms. Blackhall situated in the centre of Staddiscombe is owned in 1765 by Edward Smith, who sells it in that year to Dr John Huxham for £840. He was a well known Plymouth Physician who in 1755 received the Copley Medal for his study of fevers, and one of the first in Britain to classify influenza. In 1825 the farm was sold possibly by his grandson another John Huxham to John Milton a butcher from Stoke Damerel, who also had purchased Taylors Farm at Down Thomas around this time. He let both to the Barber family. In 1839 John Milton dies and the property becomes the estate of John Luscombe another butcher of Stoke Damerel. John Luscombe sells to Baldwin Pollexfen Bastard in 1863. There are several leases over the years to the Sherwell, Dearing and Barber families, and in more recent times Blackhall was incorporated into Manor Farm.

Leyford unlike the other farms in the district, was ring fenced and appears to be a separate entity altogether. It extends from the yard and buildings eastward to Ridge Cross. In the 1500s it was leased by Thomas Reade of Traine Wembury, and in 1572 there is a deed recording the change of ownership from Richard Calmady of Langdon to Sir John Hele of Wembury. From 1780s to 1790 it was the property of Admiral St Vincent John Jervis, who was based at Maker while Admiral of the Fleet. Leyford was put up for sale in September 1790. The advertisement in the Exeter Flying Post describes it as having a very good farmhouse (one part of which has been fitted up for the owners own use). Perhaps this was a handy place to stay adjoining the estate of Admiral Calmady at Langdon. There were 140 acres arable pasture and meadow land with an orchard and quarry. Mr Warn was the tenant. It was purchased by Thomas Splatt of Brixton House Brixton. He was a generous employer, and when he died he left a pension for life to his Hind at Leyford James Horn, and paid for James' son to serve apprenticeship with a wheelwright. Thomas Splatt was a very wealthy man and also owned Shilston at Modbury at the time of his death in 1832. He bequeathed much of his estate to the second son of his friend Henry Collins on condition that he added Splatt to his surname. The above mentioned James Horn was a relative of mine, and Thomas Splatt's servant girl Mary Selleck who received £10 in his Will was my Gt Gt Grandmother. I think it likely that Leyford at one time included Furze Park on the right of the Wembury main road going towards Ridge Cross, as this would explain the position of the former Parish boundary between Brixton and Plymstock being on the far side of this field. Henry Collins Splatt let Leyford to Arthur Rowe, followed by Thomas Pearse, and in 1905 James Henry Atwill purchased it and was followed by his son James Fernleigh Atwill who died aged just 42yrs in 1942. Known as Fernleigh he lived at Higher Leyford and had the last funeral at Wembury Church with black horses and plumes. The farm was split at this time with James Baker having the main farm and Lesley Veale having Leyparks as a market garden at the eastern end.

The main farms of Staddiscombe are Court Gates and Manor Farm. Court Gates as its name implies is the old established land holding of the manor with its roots stretching back to the iron age fortifications within its courtilage, and the field known as castle haye. These old ramparts could have been an outpost for defending the Mountbatten peninsula. The substantial house and buildings is evidence of the importance of this farm over the centuries. The fields are large and mostly within a ring fence and straddle the road towards Staddon Heights. In 1768 it was leased to Jacob Ley of Wembury, 1784 leased to John Vine, 1814 James Honeywell, 1821 Joseph Pearse followed by several generations of the Pearse family who were also at Leyford. In 1878 Philip Hine took over and relatives Edward and Peter Hendy are still farming Court Gates today.

Manor Farm situated on the main road, where the house was once the Manor House Inn is an amalgamation of smaller holdings including Blackhall and Simons. The farm land lies along the main road to Down Thomas, with some either side of Leyford Lane. The farm does not appear as a separate holding until about 1835 when it was the home of Thomas

Gould and his wife Mary Doddridge. They were followed by their nephew Edwin Gould, who in turn left it to his wife's nephew Theodore Jones 1875-1958. Winifred Jones married Edwin Veale, and Wendy Veale, their granddaughter, is still in residence.

Staddiscombe as a village once had a pub, a blacksmith a mission hall, a shop and a police house, now sadly all gone. As well as cottages it would have comprised of perhaps six or seven tenements. There is a field called Natty Cross near Staddon Gate divided into six strips at the time of the Tithe Map. Each Tenement would have a land holding of three to thirty acres, in one two or three acre plots dotted around the manor. The names of these tenements would appear on their leases, but often would be called by the name of the preceding tenant. Some of the names are Avents, Averys, Birches, Fewens, Fosters, Hancocks or Higher House, Pass, Simons, Sweets, Vials and Woods. As time went on many of these smaller holdings were amalgamated into larger ones, many of the cottages were overcrowded, accommodation was in short supply. My own Gt Gt Gt Grandfather George Horn a thatcher from Down Thomas solved the problem in 1816 by marrying widow Ann James nee Avery. She already had three children and was ten years older than him, but she had a cottage. The Colliers were a prolific family in Staddiscombe in the 1800s. In October 1871 Jasper Collier won second prize at the Devon County Show for the Farm Labourer who had brought up the most children without parochial aid. He had eleven children. Other family's names that appear often are Blight, Doddridge, Rapson, Sherwell, Treble and Tremeer.

In more recent times Mr & Mrs Dean ran the post office, Mr Brailey had followed the Colemans and Mumfords at the village Smithy. The Rogers family ran the newsagent in the 1930s and Constable Huxtable was the local bobby.

It would not be right to conclude without mentioning the change to the landscape that the building of the defences and fortifications made at Staddon. Firstly the reservoir was built at Bovisand around 1811 and the water piped to the newly built Staddon quay to provide easy accessible water supply for the navy. Staddon Heights battery was built around 1845, and the Fort at Staddon Point completed in 1869. Staddon Heights Fort was also completed around this time as were Brownhill, Twelve Acre and Frobisher Batteries. All part of Palmerston's plan to counteract the perceived threat of Napoleon. Staddon Heights Fort had guns pointing in land and notable glacis running down towards Bovisand. All hedges were removed on high ground from here to Down Thomas and replaced with metal fences, some of which can still be seen today. Finally the great wall of Staddon Heights was partly built in the 1860s as rifle butts to protect stray bullets travelling out to sea. The second part completed for the Royal Marines in 1894. Gradually after two world wars some of the land was returned to farming. The Westlake family settled there and created Staddon Heights Farm. They milked cows and delivered the milk around Plymstock. Their farmhouse was a former officer's mess. Apparently the Golf Course began as early as 1904. In 1956 the War

Department began releasing property for commercial uses and Fort Bovisand as it was now called became a diving school.