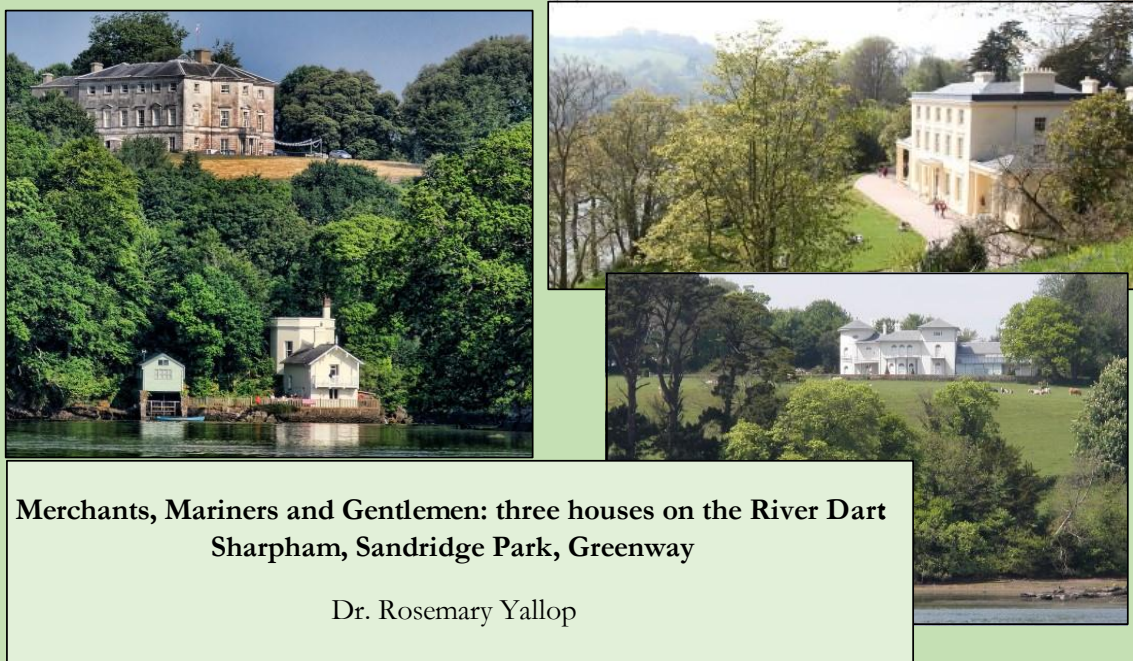
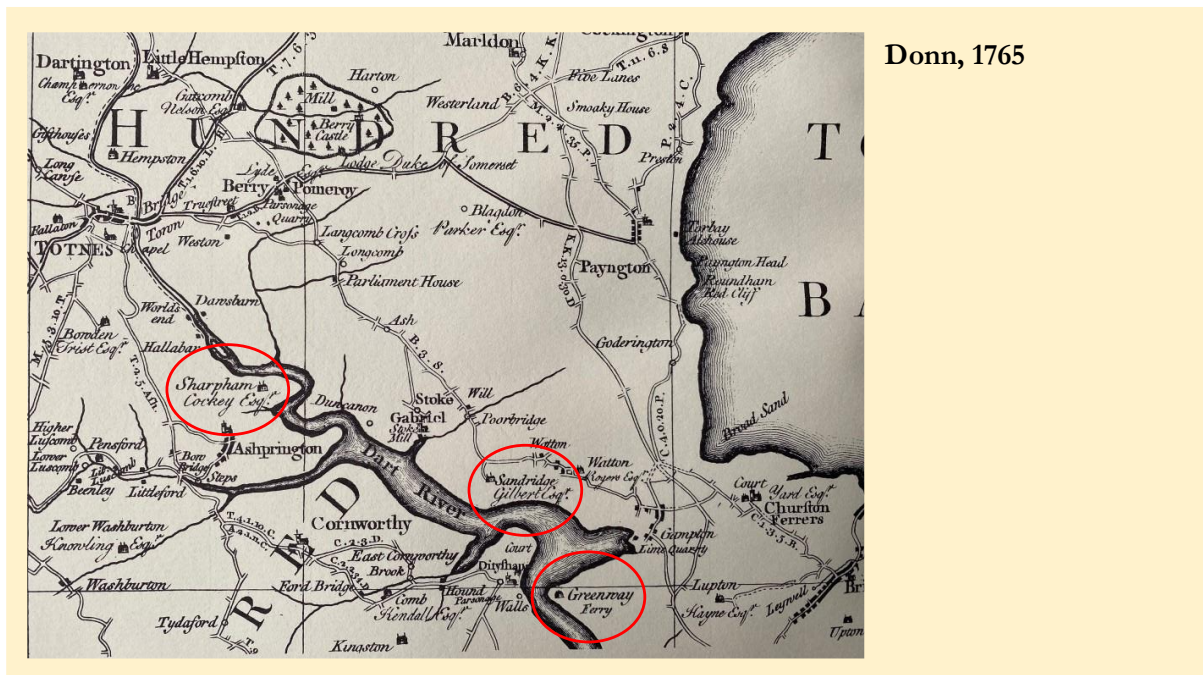


## Mariners, Merchants and Gentlemen: three houses on the River Dart



The three houses are Sharpham, Sandridge Park, and Greenway. These are of course not the only interesting houses on the river – far from it – but I have chosen them as a group because together they tell us much about the rich history of the River Dart and the people who chose to live on its banks. I am an architectural historian, but rather than focus on their differing architectural styles I want to tell the stories of these three houses through the people who owned and lived in them, trying to draw together some common themes which can tell us about the history and economy of the area over the centuries.



I am starting with a map which you may be familiar with. It is Benjamin Donn's famous map of

Devon, of 1765. It took Donn five years to create: drawn and printed in twelve panels it is extraordinary in its detail, not just roads and distances and elevation above sea level but inns, markets, ruins, and it is a fantastic resource for historians. Most importantly for our purposes, it records some 660 country seats and the names of their owners at that time. It is sheet 11 which interests us (only a detail of it shown here): we can see that the Dart and its surroundings were rich in gentlemen's houses: in the north, Dartington, close to Totnes are Bowden and Follaton; on the eastern side Churston Court, Lupton, as well as Sharpham, Sandridge Park and Greenway. They all have interesting stories to tell but I have chosen these three, clustered on the Dart. We can argue about my choice later!

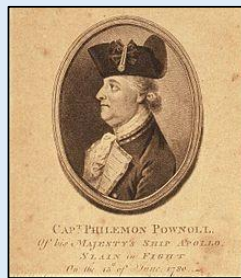


Let's work our way downstream, starting with Sharpham. You cannot fail to admire it if you are sailing up or down the Dart, and in fact that is the only place from which you can really get a good view of it. Some people find the building a little austere, gaunt perhaps, but its setting on that promontory as the river sweeps round a broad bend is breath-taking. Today it is owned by a trust, run largely as a retreat centre which focuses on well-being and the natural environment, but there are opportunities to walk in the grounds and occasionally to visit the interior. What we see from the river today is essentially a house of around 1770, grafted on to the remains of an older house behind, and then subsequently enlarged in a sympathetic way in the 1820s and again later.

Now in looking at country houses, it is always instructive to ask: who built it, why, and where did the money come from? Pretty obvious questions perhaps but they can reveal a great deal and sometimes some surprises. In Sharpham's case, until the latter part of the eighteenth century, it was a modest-sized estate with a farmhouse or small manor house at its core. There is a record of a 'de Shearpham' family in the 1200s, and a building on the site from at least the late 1300s, and the estate passed through the hands of a succession of families by inheritance or marriage, including the Frenches, Prideaux, Drewes and Yarde – all recognisable Devon gentry names. In 1748 the estate of 220 acres and its Elizabethan farmhouse was bought by a Philip Cockey, partly for its timber. But in 1765 comes the real turning point in Sharpham's history, when Cockey sells the house and estate to one Captain Philemon Pownoll of the Royal Navy.

'The best officer, & most excellent, kind -hearted man in the Profession'  
Admiral of the Fleet, John Jervis, Earl St. Vincent

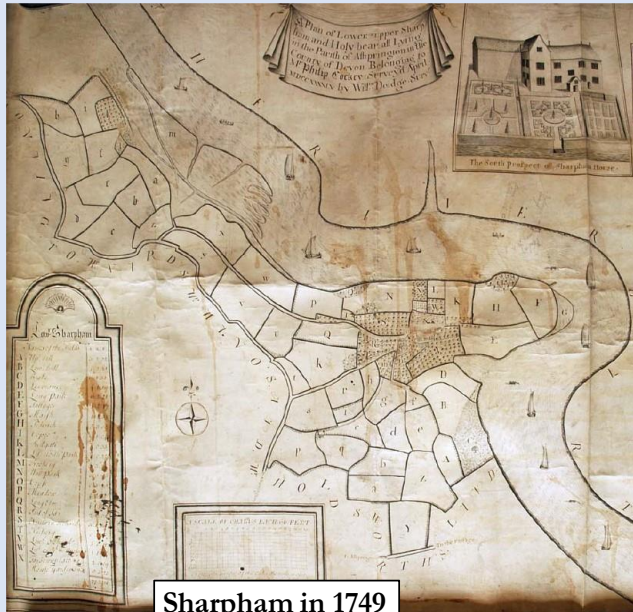
**Philemon Pownoll, R.N.**



Pownoll, as you may know, was born in Plymouth in 1735, son of the Keeper of the Cheque – in modern parlance Finance Director - at the naval dockyard at Plymouth and nephew of the master shipwright there, Israel Pownoll; the Pownoll family had long been associated with naval shipbuilding at Plymouth and elsewhere. So Philemon had a comfortable but not aristocratic background, but grew up with a good technical understanding of how ships were constructed and therefore how they sailed, which no doubt contributed to his outstanding naval career. He entered the navy at the age of 14, and did very well, becoming a lieutenant by 1755, and he was made commander of the armed sloop *Favourite* in 1759. In 1762 the *Favourite*, together with the frigate *Active* which was under the command of his friend Captain Herbert Sawyer, encountered a Spanish frigate, the *Hermione*, off the coast of Cadiz, at a time when Britain and Spain were at war. After a short skirmish the *Hermione* surrendered, and was found to be carrying a cargo loaded in Peru and bound for the Spanish Royal Treasury: not only was there cocoa and tin, but also a vast quantity of gold and silver coins and ingots. According to naval rules, this cargo was declared a prize and the value shared between both British ships, including both officers and men. It set a record for prize money which was never beaten; as captains both Pownoll and Sawyer were given £65,000 each, roughly equivalent, depending on which measure you take, to around £10m today. Even ordinary seamen got the equivalent of thirty year's wages. The capture of the *Hermione* and her cargo caused huge excitement in London; here's an engraving of the skirmish, from the National Maritime Museum, and another popular print showing the procession of the spoils, both published to commemorate the event. The Spanish captain by the way was court-martialled.

This new-found wealth unsurprisingly had great consequences for Philemon Pownoll: first, he married Jane Majendie, daughter of a wine and spirit merchant in Lisbon, Portugal. Jane's father had lost a great deal of money in the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, and there is an apocryphal story that her father had not been keen on the marriage but rather changed his mind after the capture of the *Hermione*. And rather engagingly Pownoll's friend and naval colleague Herbert Sawyer, also now enriched, married Jane's sister, apparently in a double wedding in Gibraltar in 1762. We will return to Philemon's wife Jane shortly. Next, Pownoll celebrated his new wealth and higher social status by commissioning portraits of himself and his wife from Sir Joshua Reynolds, leading portrait painter of the day. Here he is, looking very polished and distinguished, together with a

slightly less flattering engraving. Third, as I noted a moment ago, in 1765 he acquired from Philip Cockey the Sharpham estate, and engaged a leading architect to build him a more fitting house.



Sharpham in 1749



Sir Robert Taylor

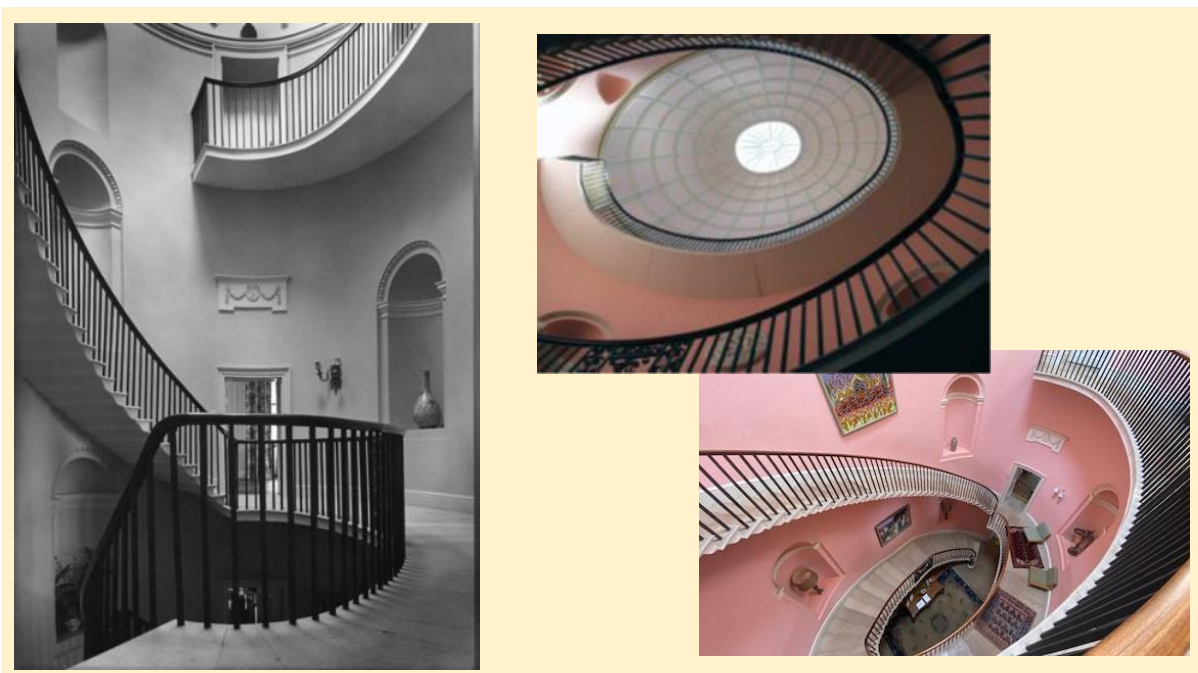
Here is what the old house looked like, from an estate survey produced for Cockey. The architect Pownoll chose was Robert Taylor, later Sir Robert Taylor. The son of a stonemason, also trained as a sculptor, he had a practice building country houses for clients with what we might think of as ‘new money’ – merchants, bankers, East India Company officers, lawyers and successful military men, and Pownoll fitted very well into this category: these were on the whole clients who had not inherited family seats but whose new status demanded that they inhabited an appropriate house and who had the means to fund one. Taylor had developed his own concept of the villa – a terminology with a nod to the ancient Roman and Renaissance practice of having a country retreat, not necessarily as the focal point of a vast, feudal agricultural estate, but a place for private relaxation and entertainment, more compact and comfortable than grand.

Pownoll had by no means retired from naval service and Sharpham should be seen very much as his retreat. So Pownoll’s brief matched Taylor’s practice perfectly. Taylor’s credentials and standing were also underlined by his being appointed architect to the Bank of England in 1764.





Pownoll bought Sharpham in 1765 but work did not start for three or four years. Sharpham epitomises Taylor’s studiously neo-classical style: it is symmetrical, and favours external simplicity and letting the shape and the quality of the stonework – denoting the house’s high status - speak for itself, rather than applying fussy detail: this is why to some eyes its outline can look quite severe, intimidating perhaps, and unlike at Sandridge Park for example, as we will see – a very different type of house, and designed thirty years later – Sharpham’s external appearance makes few concessions to the landscape other than its immaculate positioning on the promontory, with Taylor’s characteristic use of the canted or angled bay opening up the views. Inside, the polite rooms were at ground level: no imposing external entrance stair up to a raised piano nobile which might be seen of grander house of the same age: this is all part of the less formal approach which the villa represented.



BUT Taylor provides one piece of stunning extravagance, whether at Pownoll’s suggestion or, more likely, because it appealed to Taylor. And that is the internal staircase hall which rises up through the entire height of the building and contains a cantilevered elliptical stair which seems to defy gravity and terminates in a glazed lantern to light the entire thing from above. It is the largest room in the house. Visitors must have been astounded. If you get the chance to go and see it on an open day you must.

So Taylor gave Pownoll a beautifully simple house, but not a pompous one: no grand processions of rooms stretching out leading from one to the other in what is called an *enfilade*. We may think

of it as enormous, but as Taylor originally built it, it was more compact than what we see today. It is a house for an off-duty officer, albeit a famous and highly-regarded one, and a house for a family. I said we would come back to Pownoll's wife Jane.



**Jane Pownoll, 1745-1778**  
née Majendie

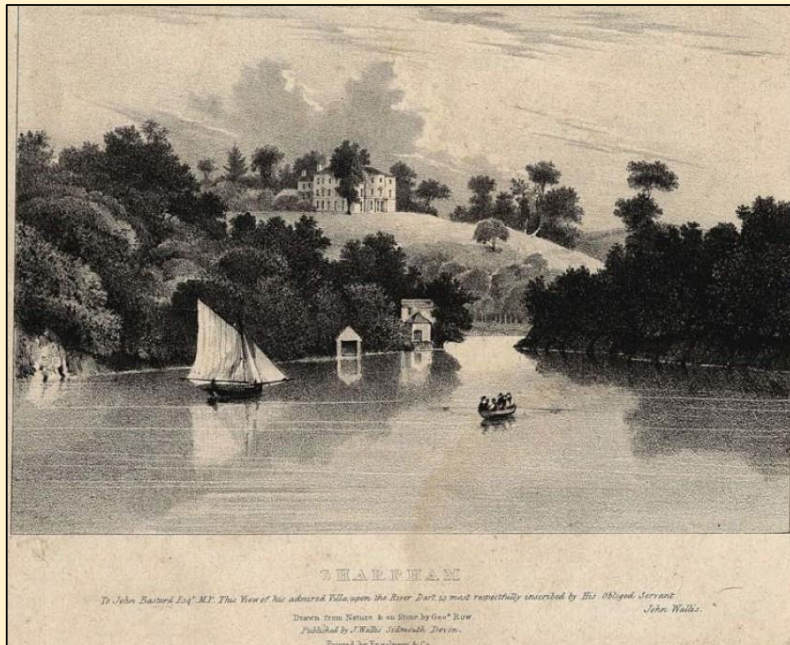
*Mrs. Pownoll as Hebe,*  
Sir Joshua Reynolds, c.1764



When I first read that she was the daughter of a merchant in Lisbon, by the surname of Majendie, I assumed that she was Portuguese, perhaps of middle-eastern extraction: an Arabic-derived name, perhaps Lebanese or Syrian. And indeed one blog has (mistakenly) described her as Portuguese. But the reality is less exotic but to us, more interesting. Her father Lewis or Louis Majendie was of French Protestant stock: the Majendies were Huguenots, who were forced to flee in large numbers from France to Protestant countries in Europe because of religious persecution. Many Huguenots came to England, bringing with them their trade and business skills, setting up as silversmiths, silkweavers, but also as merchants and doctors. Some arrived with very little: in 1685 a boatload of Huguenot refugees landed at Appledore in north Devon. Among them was Huguenot pastor Lewis Mauzy, his wife Suzanna and their children. He settled at Barnstaple, looking after a congregation there, and one of his daughters married André Majendie, the Huguenot minister at Exeter, who later moved to Dartmouth, where in the eighteenth century there was a sizeable Huguenot community: merchants, doctors, lawyers. And there are lots of Dartmouth family names even today which are derived from Huguenot names. André Majendie is in fact buried at St. Petrox, Dartmouth, as are other members of the family. And André was Jane Pownoll's grandfather. His 4th son, Jane's father Lewis Majendie, born in Exeter, established himself as a wine trader first in London and then at Lisbon, where Jane and her sister and other siblings were born.

The English merchant communities at Lisbon and Oporto were sizeable and they all knew each other very well and often inter-married. Other Devon families there at the time for the same reason included for example the Newman family of Dartmouth, active in port-shipping (and who coincidentally also have a connection with Sandridge Park and Greenway as we will see), the Hunts of Dartmouth, and the Parminter family, of Lisbon and of Exmouth: Jane Parminter, who built that enchanting shell-house, A la Ronde near Exmouth, was the daughter of one of Lewis Majendie's partners. So this slice of Sharpham's history illustrates the role played by maritime south

Devon, and Dartmouth families in particular, in international trade in this period. And while originally perhaps I had imagined that Jane Pownoll was by origin an exotic bird of paradise brought to the River Dart by her seafaring husband, in fact in coming to Sharpham Jane Majendie was in a way coming home.



Sharpham in the 1820s,  
home to John Bastard

Philemon and Jane had a daughter, but as a family they had only a short time to enjoy what had been created at Sharpham. Jane died in 1778, aged only 33; Philemon had returned to sea and was killed in 1780 in a naval battle against the French. In 1783 their orphaned daughter, also Jane, only 19, married Edmund Bastard, of the Bastard family, whose seat was at Kitley, on the Yealm near Plymouth. It's said they eloped to Gretna Green, before Jane's guardians were reconciled to the marriage and they then married publicly at St. George's Hanover Square, London. In 1816 Edmund succeeded to Kitley as well as owning Sharpham through his wife. Jane having died three years before him, on his death in 1825 he left Sharpham, as the sort of second house in the family, to his brother, Royal Naval captain John Bastard, later MP for Dartmouth. John altered and expanded Sharpham in the 1820s, and I discovered evidence that his architect was George Stanley Repton, son of the celebrated landscape designer Humphry Repton, and pupil of John Nash, about whom more later. (And incidentally George Repton also remodelled Follaton House near Totnes.) John was well-connected, and in 1828 he and his wife hosted at Sharpham Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Clarence, wife of the future King William the Fourth, known as the Sailor King, who at the time was Lord High Admiral and was touring West Country ports. She travelled on by boat from Sharpham to Dartmouth, and *The Western Times* reported that

*'every preparation was made to receive her with suitable éclat. An escort of about 120 boats proceeded up the river to meet Her Royal Highness, and the procession was received in Dartmouth by a royal salute from the Castle. The fine peal of bells from St. Saviour's Church rang merrily through the day, and in the evening the town was brilliantly illuminated.'*

It sounds wonderful.

But John died in 1835, and his son John, an army officer, let down the family name by gambling away his inheritance, although to be fair it was already heavily mortgaged. In 1841 the Pownoll

connection was finally severed when the estate was sold to Richard Durant, a London silk broker. The Durant family came originally from Exeter but two generations before Richard had left for London and founded a silk business. Richard became a very wealthy man when he inherited both the business and the Canons Estate near London from a cousin, but Sharpham presented him with an opportunity to return to Devon in some style. Squire Durant was as you will know a benefactor to the village, restoring the church and the village school, and of course the pub is called the Durant Arms. Richard's tenure was probably one of the high points in Sharpham's history.

To cut a long story short the estate passed through various descendants until in 1940 Trustees decided to sell, but although the contents were dispersed the house was withdrawn when bids reached only 1900 pounds. It played its part in the war effort, as did all three houses I am talking about tonight, when it housed a displaced convent school, and was strafed in 1942 by enemy aircraft at one point: you can still see marks in the stonework. It had two further owners after the war, both of whom struggled with the necessary repairs to its neglected fabric, before being bought by Maurice Ash and his wife (incidentally a daughter of the Elmhursts, of Dartington) and turned into the environmentally-based trust which we know today.



**Ashprington church:  
Pownoll and Bastard monuments**

But the Pownolls are not forgotten: you may be familiar with some rather lovely monuments in Ashprington church, to Philemon, to his wife Jane Majendie and to his grandson, naval captain John Bastard, as well as to other members of the Bastard family, including Jane, grand-daughter of Jane Majendie, who died aged only 12.





**Sandridge Park**

The next house, Sandridge Park, is of course further down the river from Sharpham and on the eastern bank. In fact if you stand on the highest point of the Sandridge headland you can look upstream and see Sharpham. Like Sharpham, the house is set high up, on a wooded promontory above the river and designed to be seen from the water. The house you see today was built in around 1805, designed by famous Regency architect John Nash for the Dowager Lady Ashburton: we will come back to her in a moment. The history of the estate has much in common with that of Sharpham in the sense that it was owned by a series of prominent Devon families before being acquired in the eighteenth century by someone who bought it for love and whose widow transformed it by building a new house, before it fell into disrepair in the twentieth century, before finding a new life after the war.



1770s

1820s



There has been a house on the Sandridge headland since the Conquest, and the estate was in the ownership of the de Sandridge family, then the Grandison family (the then Bishop of Exeter), and then acquired by the Pomeroy family of nearby Berry Pomeroy in 1371. The later sixteenth century was quite an exciting time for Sandridge because of its maritime connections: we all know of John Davis, who was one of the company of men chartered by Queen Elizabeth to seek the North-west passage. A courageous mariner and explorer, the Davis Strait off Greenland is named after him, he was the first person to record and chart the Falkland Islands in 1592, where he is still commemorated, and died at the hands of pirates in the South China Seas in 1605. He was born on the estate but probably as the son of a tenant or yeoman farmer: amazingly we still know very little about his early life. But in Davis's time the Pomeroy family were not in occupation, having leased Sandridge out for 80 years to a man called Adrian Gilbert.



John Davis

Humphrey Gilbert

Monument to Joan Pomeroy,  
Stoke Gabriel church

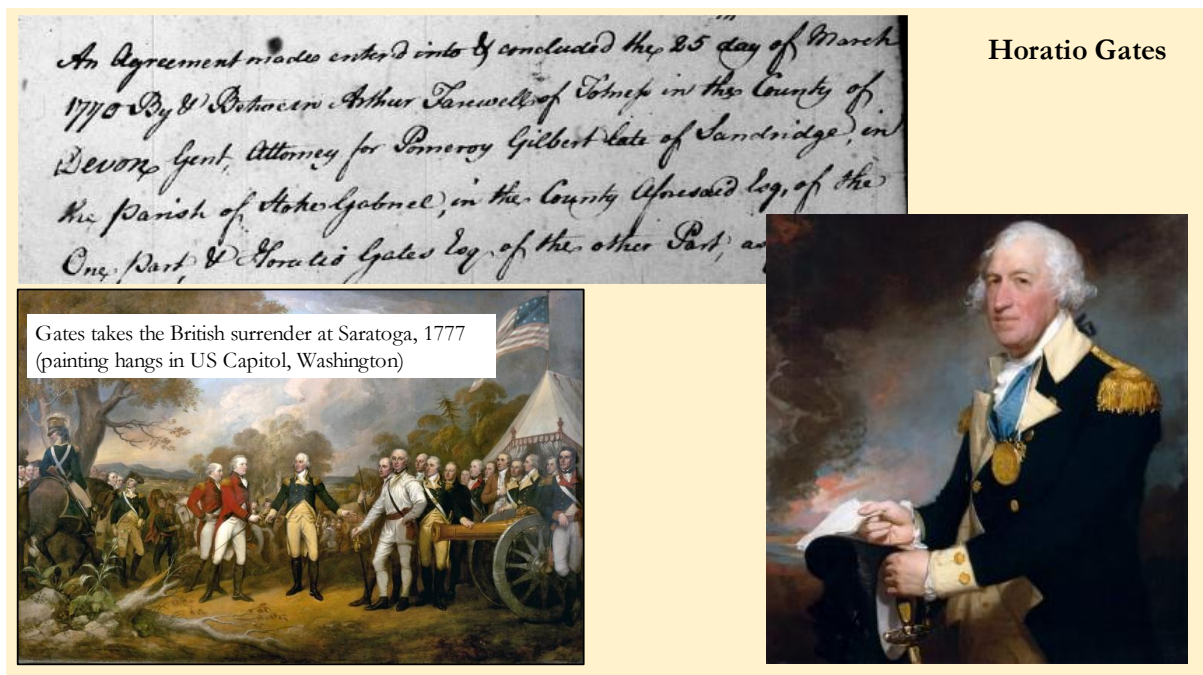
The Gilberts were a very well-connected Devon family, and Adrian is an intriguing figure: youngest son of Otto and Katherine Gilbert, of Greenway and Compton Castle, his elder brothers were John, later Sir John, a senior figure in Court circles, and Humphry, who also knighted and acquired fame as an explorer, adventurer, and the man who claimed and colonised Newfoundland for the English Crown. The three also had a half-brother, for after Otto died Katherine remarried one Walter Raleigh and had a son, also Walter, who was of course to become Sir Walter Raleigh. Adrian Gilbert, was brother-in law to John Davis through their marriages to the Fulford sisters of Bosomzeal behind Dittisham. He was a fascinating man who trained in law and medicine, was a horticulturalist, and was also interested in magic, or necromancy and was a close friend and collaborator of Queen Elizabeth's necromancer, Dr. John Dee. It was to Adrian Gilbert of Sandridge and his associates that Queen Elizabeth granted the patent in 1584: they were known as the Colleagues of the Fellowship for the Discovery of the North-West Passage.

In the late sixteenth-century the ownership and possession of Sandridge had become quite fraught, complicated both by marriage settlements and by some underhand dealings, and there were a number of protracted Chancery suits over its ownerships. In 1602 Sir Walter Raleigh sued for possession of the Sandridge estate, claiming to have bought Adrian Gilbert's interest in it. Raleigh

was protective of his half-brother's interests, and when his own estates were confiscated after he was imprisoned for treason against James the First, he wrote in 1603 to his wife from the Tower of London:

*I commend unto you my poor brother Adrian: the lease of Sandridge is his and none of mine. Let him have it, for God's sake.'*

But although the leases continued their term, the Pomeroy's remained in ultimate ownership until the seventeenth century when there was a marriage between Joan, heiress to her father Roger Pomeroy of Sandridge, and Humphrey Gilbert, grandson of Sir Humphrey of Newfoundland fame whom we have just heard about. So while the Gilberts had already been associated with Sandridge, this marriage brought the estate formally into the Gilbert family, who held it until the 1770s although like the Pomeroy's did not always live there.



The estate was leased in 1770 by Pomeroy Gilbert to another interesting and perhaps unexpected character: Major Horatio Gates. He was an English soldier who had fought with distinction against the French in North America, but had then resigned his commission. He took a lease over Sandridge and part of the estate, including a substantial quay which was near Sandridge Point, and came to live there with his wife. But after a couple of years none other than George Washington, whom he had met while in America, wrote to him suggesting that he go out to Virginia to settle, which he did. With the outbreak of the American Revolutionary War Gates changed sides and fought for the Americans, defeating the British under General Burgoyne at Saratoga and being awarded a Congressional medal. Interestingly, Burgoyne sailed over to North America in the 1770s on a ship captained by none other than Philemon Pownoll. So a few years earlier Pownoll and Gates had faced each other across the River Dart before later finding themselves at war on opposite sides in North America. Gates's portrait hangs in the Senate building at the Capitol in Washington and he was buried at Trinity Church, on Wall Street in New York. I love the idea of a letter from George Washington being brought all the way from the New World by messenger along the lanes to Sandridge.



Lord and Lady Ashburton

When Pomeroy Gilbert died his executors sold the estate in 1772 to one John Dunning. Born in and educated in Ashburton, son of a local lawyer, he was sponsored by a family friend to become a barrister at the Temple in London and quickly became both successful and very wealthy. He became MP for Calne in Wiltshire, was appointed Solicitor-General in 1767, created a Privy Councillor, painted by Joshua Reynolds – a sure sign of social success. This, and his Devon origins, brought him into the ambit of the Baring family of Exeter. Johan Baring of Bremen, a wool merchant, had settled in Exeter, marrying the daughter of a prosperous Exeter merchant and living in fine style. They had five children, four boys - of whom two were to become the Baring Brothers of banking fame – or infamy – and one daughter Elizabeth, who married John Dunning in 1781.

A year later Dunning was ennobled, taking the title Lord Ashburton. He already had an estate at Spitchwick, near Widecombe, as well as farms and 1500 acres on Dartmoor, but in 1772 saw Sandridge and was seduced by the beauty of the landscape and immediately resolved to buy it but ‘to build an house more worthy of the situation’. For whatever reason he did not start any work: perhaps because of his increasingly poor health, made worse by the sad death of his first son at the age of 18 months. In 1783 he died suddenly at Exmouth, and buried in Ashburton parish church. Elizabeth Ashburton, married for less than 4 years, was left a widow with an 11 month-old baby, the new Lord Ashburton. She was preoccupied with his health, understandably becoming a sort of 18<sup>th</sup> century helicopter mother, but once he was 21 – probably no coincidence – she engaged the most fashionable country house architect of the day, John Nash, to build her a at Sandridge in place of the old house, in a playful, picturesque rustic Italianate style which Nash was the first to develop in Britain. It was quite a bold move for the 60-year old widow. Her beloved son had vowed never to live in Devonshire ‘That county is for me a hell’, preferring to live in Edinburgh where he met and married his wife. But he conceded that for his mother, ‘for you Devonshire is a paradise, and when you are at Sandridge, busy planting trees and laying out grounds, all your blue devils fly away’.



The old house in 1748

Nash's Sandridge Park of 1805



Nash's house, of a striking design, is placed to take advantage of the landscape and the light, with full-length windows and a long south-facing façade onto the river, and glazed conservatories to bring the outside inside; he blasted through a rocky outcrop to give a second, westward view of the river after it has rounded the Sandridge headland. And like Sharpham it is a villa rather than a seat: a place for a widow to entertain quietly and enjoy the company of friends: not a place for political plotting and affairs of state – she would have seen enough of that during her husband's life. So Nash, like Taylor, understood the concept of the modern villa. No coincidence, as Nash had been a pupil of Robert Taylor possibly while Taylor was working on Sharpham; George Stanley Repton, who was the architect of the additions to Sharpham in the 1820s, had been a long-time pupil and assistant to Nash, which is another link between the houses.

Sadly Elizabeth, like Philemon Pownoll, did not live very long to enjoy her creation, dying in 1809. Her son Richard, second Lord Ashburton and now extremely wealthy, leased Sandridge to Robert Newman, born in Dartmouth into the prosperous family of shippers and merchants in the cod and the port wine trade, operating out of Dartmouth and Portugal, a family whom I mentioned in connection with Sharpham and the Majendies. While at Sandridge he married, and his nine children were born there. He became MP for Exeter and High Sheriff for Devon, and was later given a baronetcy.

But in the 1830s, after 20 years at Sandridge as tenant, Newman bought the Mamhead estate, near Dawlish, and commissioned a new house for himself. In the meantime the second Lord Ashburton had died young without direct heirs; his somewhat flighty Scottish wife only spent a short time at Sandridge and when she died in 1835 the terms of his will came into play. He was extremely wealthy: his estate (which as well as Sandridge included thousands of acres and a number of farms on Dartmoor, as well as estates and houses in Scotland) was to go, as a life interest only, to each of five people in turn – all of whom were Scottish relatives on his wife's side – in a specific order, with the last one alive to receive the full, permanent freehold interest. Not a recipe for family harmony, and more like the plot of an Agatha Christie novel.

First up was the elder nephew of the second Lady Ashburton: James, Lord Cranstoun. Born in the Caribbean, where his family owned sugar plantations, he succeeded to the title at the age of 9.

After Harrow and Oxford, he spent some time as diplomatic attaché in Paris before settling down to a life divided between Court in London, social activities and regatta balls in fashionable Torquay, and hunting in Devon and Scotland. He was a close friend and in fact a relation of Lord Henry Kerr, the vicar of Dittisham who surprised his parishioners with his sudden conversion to Catholicism in the 1850s. Cranstoun also added to the estate with the purchase of Byter Mill and South Downs Farm. At some point he married, or did not marry, Elizabeth Seale, of the powerful Seale family of Dartmouth, and had a daughter. But when he died in 1869, under the Ashburton will the estates descended to his younger brother, now the new Lord Cranstoun, a clergyman, who died only three months later in Brighton without ever taking possession of Sandridge.

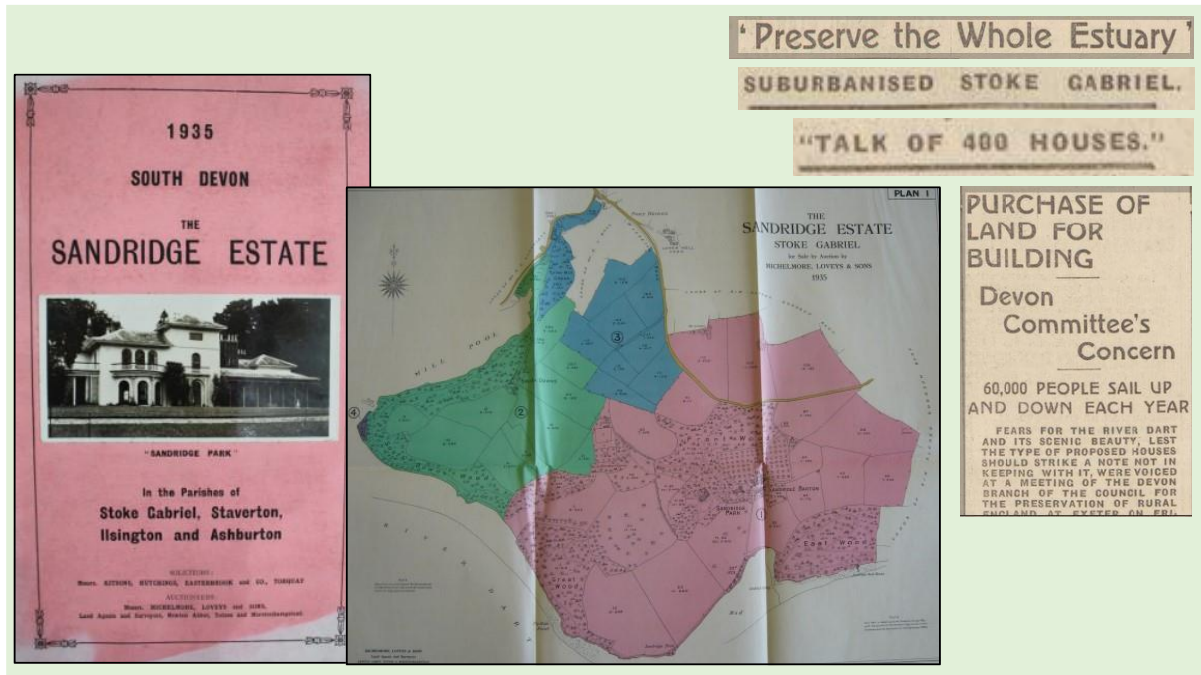


The game of Ashburton musical chairs was well under way. Beneficiary number 3 was Margaret Macleod of Cadboll, a niece of the second Lady Ashburton, born in Invergordon Castle to a prominent Scottish landowning family. Margaret led an extraordinary life – I would love to write a book about her – shocking her family by converting to Catholicism in Italy and fleeing to a convent in Pisa, until she met – somehow- a dashing Alsatian cavalry officer, who was an equerry to the Duke of Lucca, grandson of Charles the fourth of Spain. Unsurprisingly Margaret decided that cutting herself off from the world had all been a terrible mistake, married her Baron, becoming the Baroness de Virte de Rathsamhausen Ehenweyer, and claimed her inheritance. So between 1869 and 1904 she and her husband and their daughter divided their time between their estate in Tuscany, near Lucca, and Sandridge, sending pheasants to Italy and wine and olive oil from her estate to Sandridge. A keen breeder of South Devon cattle, and astute businesswoman, her tenure could be seen as representing the golden years of the estate. She also bought in her own right the Dittisham Court estate across the river: what we now think of as the Gurov Point estate, and gave the land for what is now The Hams at Dittisham; and until it was renamed recently there was a Baroness Cottage there.

But by now the game of last man standing was becoming rather toxic. Margaret was the eldest of the three Macleod sisters named in the will; the middle sister had already renounced all her interest in the estate, so Margaret's youngest sister Mrs. Wilson moved up a place. The Baroness's scheming son-in-law Arthur Wilson, scenting victory, claimed that Margaret's renunciation of her

inheritance in Italy was irrevocable, and that through his mother he was entitled to claim the Ashburton estates outright. Two decades – and a lot of money - were taken up with lawsuits, like something out of a novel by Charles Dickens. To cut a very long story short, Margaret outlived her sister but finally, on her death, Arthur Wilson got the lot: the Sandridge Estate, with nearly 400 acres and three farms, the Bagtor estates on Dartmoor with a mansion house and another 1100 acres, and land and property in Ashburton.

Wilson lived at Sandridge for twenty years, dying in 1924; his widow died the following year, and sadly their only surviving child, an invalid daughter, died at Sandridge Park in 1935, intestate. The Ashburton connection, by now rather distant, was finally at an end.



So in 1935 the whole thing went up for sale: land, farms, mills, houses, contents. The Sandridge estate itself was offered in 4 lots which went to different purchasers and so was split up. The Goodsons of Waddeton bought most of the agricultural land and Sandridge Barton, the home farm. Sandridge Park, as the Nash house was known, with nearly 250 acres was bought by a syndicate with a view to knocking the house down and building 170 houses between Sandridge Point and Stoke Gabriel, through South Downs Woods. Understandably this caused local uproar and a fierce newspaper correspondence ensued about the need to preserve the ‘English Rhine’ as Queen Victoria had called the River Dart on one of her visits. A bitterly-fought planning enquiry finally turned down the scheme in 1938.

But that left Sandridge Park without a purpose and as war approached, like so many country houses in this period no private owner would want to take it on. As a result, during the war the house played a number of roles, from home for evacuees to cadet training camp; it was requisitioned for American forces as Sandridge Camp in the D-Day preparations, and finally was used as an agricultural prisoner of war camp, as late as 1948.

**Sandridge Park in World War Two**



WANTED, for evacuee hostel, ALADDIN  
LAMPS or similar.—Burke, Sandridge  
Park, Stoke Gabriel.

1 PREPARING  
YOUTH  
OF BRITAIN  
Stoke Gabriel  
Adventure  
MOULDING NEW  
LEADERS  
DART COMBINED  
OPERATION

of the water main laid from an  
existing main to the Ministry of  
Agriculture and Fisheries  
of War Camp at Sandridge Park  
Stoke Gabriel under the highways  
consisting of two roads leading from

US Navy Advanced Amphibious Base 114

The house meanwhile had gradually been falling apart and the grounds neglected. It was rescued in 1951 by General the Earl Cathcart who turned it back into a family home although at the cost of demolishing part of it. Then it had a succession of private owners in the rest of the century before Mark, my husband, and I bought it and renovated it, putting it back as far as possible on its original 1805 plan but with rather better heating and plumbing.

**Sandridge Park, January 2022**



Drone photography: Adrian Robinson

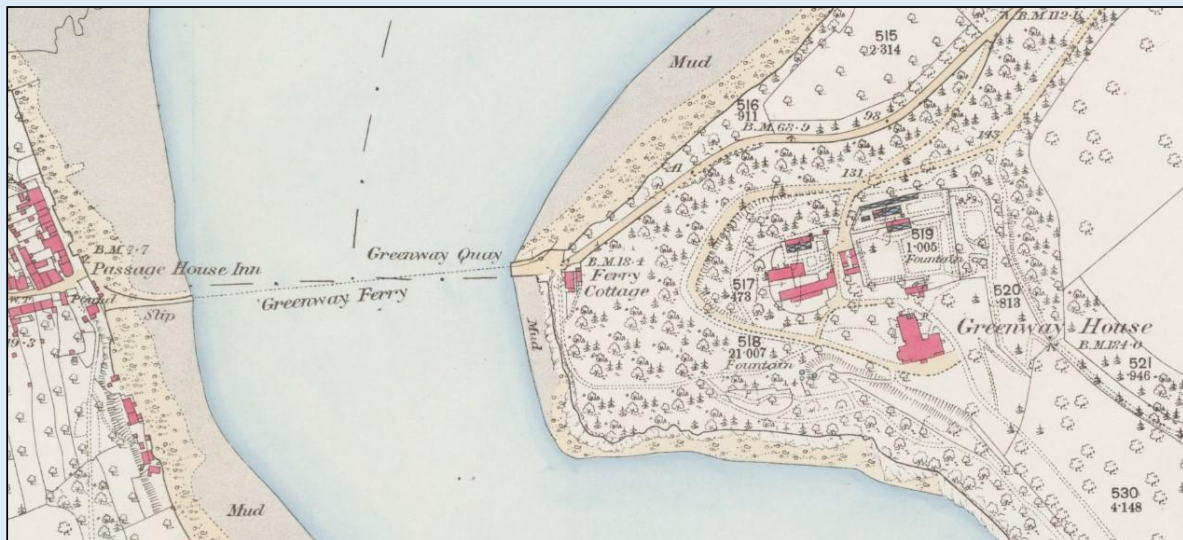
So it is a story with lots of ups and downs and family intrigue, as well as sadness. It was never an aristocratic house but, being acquired and built by the first Lord and Lady Ashburton with money sourced from her father's commercial fortune and his professional skills, it reflects changing tides in social and economic history.



## Greenway



Our last house, Greenway, is owned by the National Trust and the house and grounds are open to the public. So in a sense it is the best known of all three houses, and yet aspects of its history remain obscure. I include it because not just because of its prominence on the Dart but because it exemplifies some of the themes which I wanted to put before you: connections with North America, its ownership by families whose wealth came from international trade, and its connections in Tudor and Elizabethan times with the Gilbert family.



**Greenway Estate, 1880s (Ordnance Survey)**

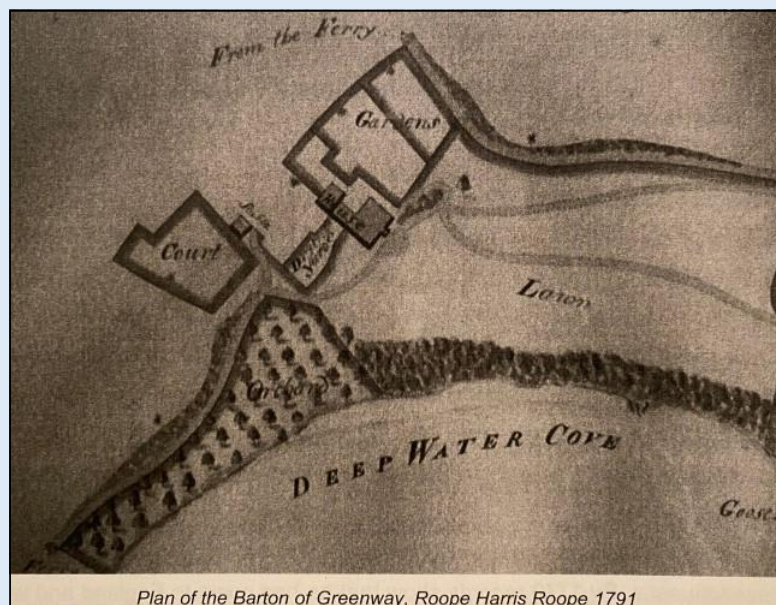
The house we are familiar with today dates from around 1790 with some later additions but the site had been inhabited for centuries before that. Its position on the eastern bank of the Dart is once again, like Sharpham and Sandridge, Picturesque, but also strategic, because it sits above a crossing point where the river has conveniently narrowed, and where there has been a ferry since

at least the fourteenth century. In 1493 the estate is recorded as being owned, along with the Greenway ferry, by Otto Gilbert. In the 1530s his grandson, another Otto Gilbert, and his wife Katherine, built a house, Greenway Court, roughly northwest of the present house. These are the same Gilberts who we encountered at Sandridge. Of their three sons, John, Humphrey and Adrian Gilbert, and Katherine's son Walter Raleigh by her first marriage, it seems to have been John who lived at Greenway: John was knighted in 1570 and in the 1590s reputedly laid out the grounds using Spanish prisoners from a captured Armada ship.

By 1700 the Gilberts had moved back to their seat at Compton Castle and sold the estate a Thomas Martyn of Totnes. It descended through his family until by 1742 it was in the ownership of the Roope family of Dartmouth, merchants and shipowners. Like the Newman family who we met at Sandridge the Roopes were long established in the port wine trade, in Dartmouth and Bristol with family branches in Lisbon and Oporto. In fact all of the Dartmouth families involved in this trade, the Hunts, Newmans, Roopes, Majendies and others, intermarried and often collaborated in joint business ventures.

At some time in the 1740s a certain Ambrose Harris, born in Dittisham, married a Mary Roope of Dartmouth and went to settle in Boston, Massachusetts. By 1770 their son Roope Harris had returned to England and was living in Bristol, operating a shipping and trading business. Under the terms of his aunt's will he would inherit her estate (including Greenway) only on condition that he added Roope as a surname, so in 1771 the unfortunate man became Roope Harris Roope.

The same year he married, in Bristol, the Dittisham-born Mary Newman. He went into business with his brother-in-law William, working the triangular trade of Dartmouth to Newfoundland for the cod fishing, over to Spain and Portugal to sell the cod and buy port and wine and citrus fruit, to ship back to Dartmouth or Bristol or London. He and Mary had fifteen children, some with Newman as a middle name.



In 1777 his aunt died and he inherited Greenway. Shortly afterwards he built a new house at Greenway, using an as-yet-unidentified architect, as a typical Georgian, neo-classical house which forms the core of what you see today. We don't know the name of the architect. This is an estate

map of 1791 which shows the new house as a square block with a service wing extending back from it. The remains of the old house are marked as the Court.



William Payne, painted between 1791 and 1815



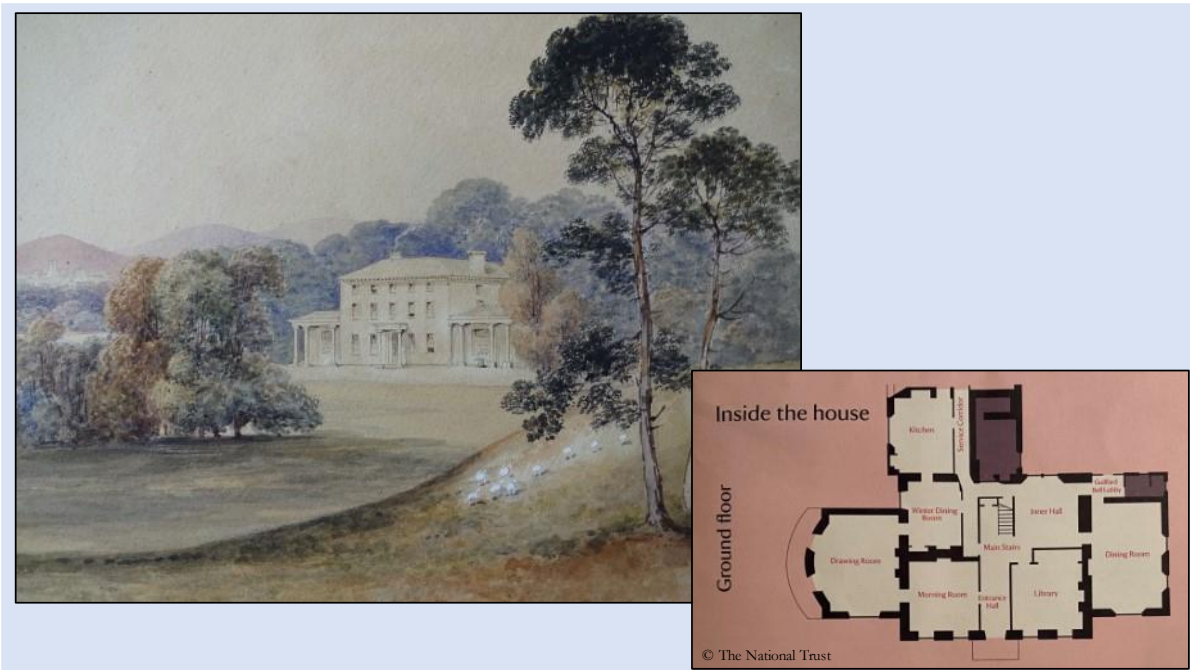
Edward Elton (1742 -1811)

And in this watercolour by William Payne, probably executed in the early 1800s we can see what he represents as the old house (which I have circled) to the west of the new house, the pale square block. It could be artistic licence to show them both together, as we don't know exactly when the Gilbert's Tudor house was pulled down other than the fact that it must be before 1815.

But by the 1790s the estate was for sale: it's possible Roope Harris Roope had financial problems. He was listed as bankrupt in 1800, although that happened more often than we might imagine, sometimes being used as a temporary device to preserve capital, and then subsequently reversed.

In any event, in 1791 he sold the estate to Edward Elton, of a Bristol family who were successive mayors of the city and prominent in the Society of Merchant Venturers there, and cousins to the Elton baronets at Clevedon Court. Elton's first wife had died and he moved to Greenway with his children as a sort of fresh start. He may have done more work to the house, and there is a possibility, as yet unsubstantiated, that he employed Humphry Repton as landscape designer at Greenway.

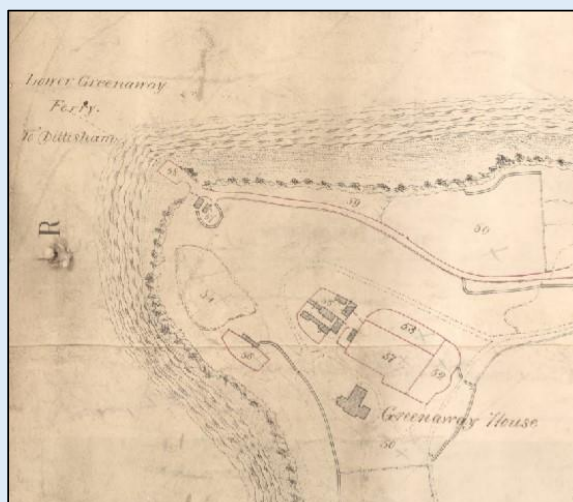
But it is his son, James Marwood Elton – incidentally a friend of Lord Cranstoun of Sandridge – who after his father's death in 1811 and perhaps in anticipation of his imminent term of office as High Sheriff of Devon in 1815, set about enlarging the house.



He made it a bit grander, adding a wing on either side which became the dining room and drawing room which we see today, enhancing the interiors, and laying out pleasure gardens, and diverting the road from Galmpton to the Greenway ferry away from his drive. But once more the glory days of Greenway were short-lived as his son Edward Marwood-Elton, who had been born at Greenway, a London barrister created a baronet, preferred his grandmother's family's estates in East Devon. His father died in 1827 and in 1832 the Greenway estate was put up for sale, with its 152 acres, melon houses, flower gardens and woodland walks.

### Greenway in the mid-nineteenth century

Tithe map 1840



1839 estate map

Greenway then had a succession of owners for the next hundred years, curiously many with Cornish connections. The Carlyons lived there for 20 years from the 1830s, before selling in 1851 to the Luttrells of nearby Nethway. Then in 1851 it was acquired by Richard Harvey, whose family had made money out of Cornish copper-smelting. The Harveys left their mark not only on the

estate but on the village of Galmpton, where they were benevolent Lords of the Manor, building workers' cottages, the school, and the Manor Inn. In the 1860s Richard Harvey won a long battle to prevent the railway being extended from Churston through Greenway land to the ferry where passengers would continue by boat to Dartmouth and then rejoin a new railway to Kingsbridge and then on to Plymouth. There was even talk of a bridge at Greenway over the Dart. So we have Richard Harvey to thank that it never happened. Twelve years after Harvey's death his widow sold to the Cornish Bolitho family, with wealth from banking and mining, and keen and knowledgeable gardeners who increased the acreage of the estate as well as adding to the house. In 1937 it was sold to the Goodson family of Waddeton Court (who had already bought the Sandridge home farm in 1935) who promptly put it back up for sale minus some of its land which neighboured their own.



*[Photographs © The National Trust]*

The purchaser in 1938 was of course Agatha Christie, and her archaeologist husband Max Mallowan, who bought it as a holiday home for their family. Greenway, like the other two houses, played its part in the Second World War, housing American officers, but leaving behind rather less mayhem (and a wonderful mural in the Library) compared to Sandridge. After Agatha's death it stayed in her family until it was taken over by the National Trust and, partly because of its wonderful position on the river and its gardens, is a magnet for visitors. Although it does make me rather - very - cross that its fascinating history before Agatha – the Gilbert and Roope connection in particular - is all but ignored. On the National Trust's Greenway website, there is a heading 'Greenway's Global Connections' – ah ha, I thought – but it refers not to Elizabethan seafarers and Georgian merchants but to Max Mallowan's international career as an archaeologist.



We have looked at three houses, with their own individual stories but, I hope you will agree, many common themes, not least how they rise and fall with family fortunes and misfortunes, and over time are adapted for reasons of fashion and status, or simply enjoyment.

To sum up, I suppose that I want to leave you with two thoughts. First, that while this part of Devon is full of many fascinating and beautiful houses, many of them have not been in long, stable family ownership as country seats, but have histories which reflect the changing patterns of economic and social history. Second, that while we have only looked at three houses, the names of those connected with them and the circles in which they moved encompass the worlds of commerce, banking and politics, naval and military history and maritime exploration, and the ripples spread out not only to London, and to Westminster, but overseas to the vineyards of the Douro, to the cod-fishing banks of Newfoundland, and to the colonies of New England. The River Dart, it seems to me, has never housed an inward-looking community, but people with ambition, skill, hard work and daring. These house-stories reinforce the richness of the history of the River Dart and of the significance of Totnes and Dartmouth as centres of trade and influence. And their families were joined in a net of social, commercial and professional connections. If you choose to delve into the histories of other houses in the area for yourselves, such as Follaton at Totnes, Waddeton just downstream from here, or Kittery Court at Kingswear to name only three more, you will see these patterns repeated and how this extraordinary network of people and places was created. It is a story in which we should take great local pride. So do go and investigate for yourselves - happy hunting!

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