



THE WOOLLCOMBE FAMILY ARCHIVE

1. Digitising the Woollcombe Family Tree
2. Preparing a Woollcombe Family Gathering in Devon, UK – Summer 2020

REQUEST FOR HELP!!

Calling ALL Woollcombes! (*spelt Double-U, Double-O, Double-L, C - Single-O, Single-M, Single B - E!*)

Apparently, it is only as you get older that you realise what a wonderful thing it is to be part of a great family. I only felt the urge to look into our Family Tree when Sukey Woollcombe-Morris opened the fabulously illustrated archive of family trees she, and her sisters, hold at Hemerdon, the family seat of our branch of the Woollcombe family.



Hemerdon House

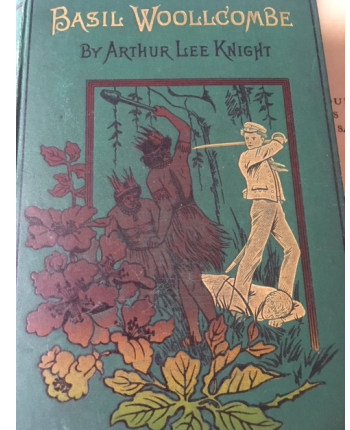


The other branch is known as the Ashbury Woollcombes who came from the tiny village of Ashbury near Okehampton in North Devon. The lovely church remains along with some Woollcombe gravestones:



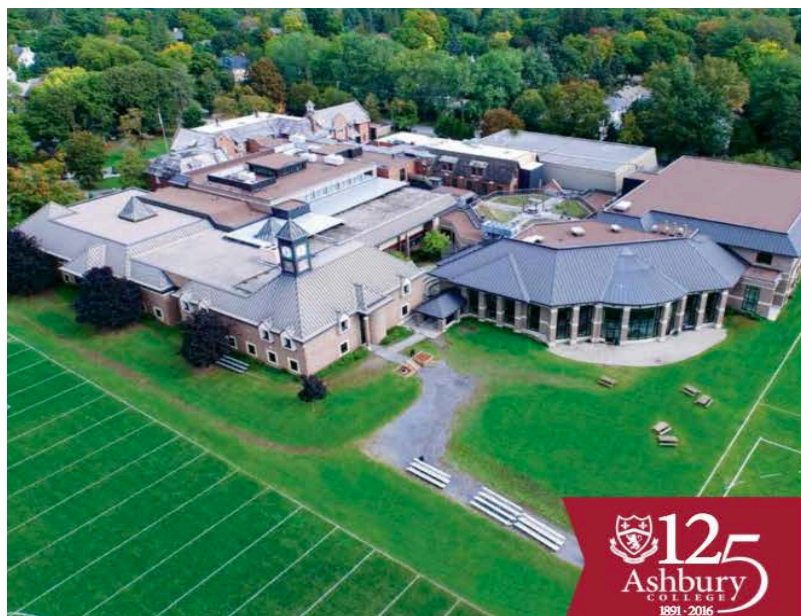


Of the pretty house that you can see beyond the church in the photo above, only the back wall of the remains. Twins, Tony & Nick Woollcombe sent me photos of the front of the house as it looked in Victorian times - which shows what a splendid place it was. Nick now co-owns Ashbury Church – where his wife, June, is buried. And he inherited a treasure trove of memorabilia which he shared with me – including an amazing hand-written book by Sir Charles Louis Woollcombe – detailing the family’s early history. His grand-father, Robert, wrote a very accessible Family history. I plan to publish both in full on the website. He reminded me that Robert was a published author. And he told me the amazing story of the friendship between Jack Russell and John Morth Woollcombe – which almost resulted in John taking over Jack’s kennel – which would have meant that popular little terrier would now be known as the “Jack Woollcombe”! And the Basil Woollcombe novel?! It’s about a midshipman’s adventures – so how did its hero get the same name as my father’s favourite uncle – for whom he did his articles?!

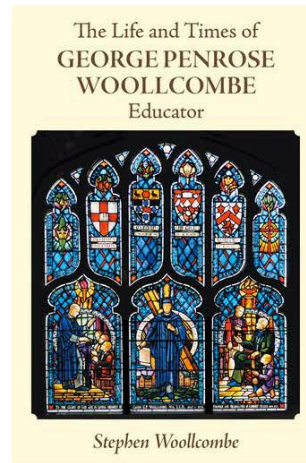
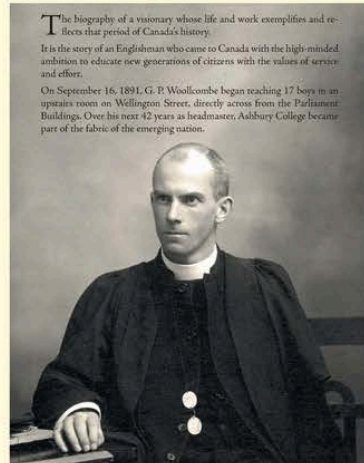
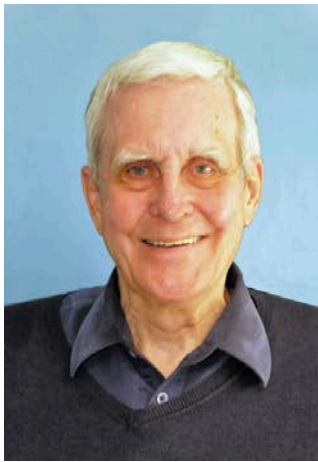


It was the Ashbury Woollcombes who spread out around the world. The Hemerdon ones were very successful business men and women, lawyers, priests and military officers – but most of them remained in the UK, chiefly in the South of England.

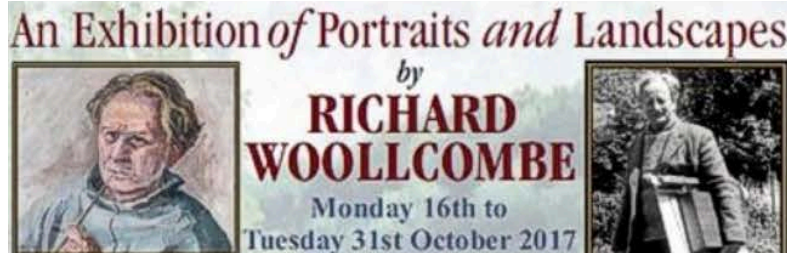
It was an Ashbury Woollcombe, George Penrose Woollcombe who travelled to Canada, and founded the famous [Ashbury College in Ottawa](#) – now one of the premier schools in Canada:



His grandson, Stephen, wrote a fascinating biography of George Penrose – revealing themes of Christianity, devotion to family and service that seems a common thread across our family. Stephen himself adopted an Indian child – Dharini Woollcombe, who has become a successful actress;



The arts were also represented by my uncle, Dick Woollcombe – who found time to paint hundreds of pictures and write a series of wonderful Socratic dialogues, entitled, “The Sage who knows nothing.”



I have yet to find out which side of the family Ben Woollcombe comes from: he settled in New Zealand and his [water-colour paintings](#) are a wonderful evocation of that extraordinary country:



Geoff Woollcombe, another New Zealander, produces the fantastic [Jackson Estate wine](#):



Geoff Woollcombe - Jackson Estate



And, of course, the famous [Samuel Smiths brewery](#) in Tadcaster, Yorkshire, is run by Humphrey and Oliver Smith, whose mother was a Woollcombe.



There was Charles, the Bishop of Whitby who was the Brewer's Grand-father. My father's cousin, Kenneth John Woollcombe, was a famous Bishop of Oxford and Canon Precentor of St Pauls. There are many more clergy in the family tree – and my father told me that Mrs C F Alexander, author of "Once in royal David's city" "All things bright and beautiful" and other famous hymns was related to us somehow:



There are hundreds, probably thousands, of other wonderful Woollcombes – living and dead: who knows what extraordinary relatives we shall unearth as we travel deeper into the Family History.

I hope that the taster above will make you interested and excited to join me on the journey. And – to focus my mind – and the families, I am eager to lay the digital foundation for the Family Archive Website by Summer 2020. *(Without a deadline, this could drag on for ever!)* So I would like to organise a family gathering in July or August 2020 so that as many of us that as are interested can meet, view the website, add to it – and celebrate our family's long history and magnificent variety.

Preparing a Family Gathering for August 14-15, 2020:

I got the idea for such a gathering from Raymond Simonds who organized one for my wife's family. It was a one and a half day gathering at his family's ancestral home, now a hotel and it featured Raymond's mega-work on the website + stories and music from family members. I would like to do something similar with Woollcombes, and since many of you hail from the Ashbury side of the family, and since Ashbury now has [Britain's biggest Golf/Sports Resort](#), I would propose hosting it there:



And I would to you the following outline Schedule. [PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ADAPT / COMMENT / SUGGEST ADDITIONS – THINK OF WAYS TO MAKE IT MORE FUN!!]

Day ONE: Arrive for a Devonshire Cream Tea on the Saturday afternoon – early enough to give you time to study the Family Archive – discuss it / suggest additions etc. Then we would have a celebration reception / dinner at one of the Country House hotels near Ashbury like [Lewtrenchard Manor](#) (below):



Day TWO: Tour of Woollcombe Landmarks: I'd like to take you all to see the site of Ashbury Manor and have a brief service of Thanksgiving for our ancestors at the family-owned Ashbury Church. The graves of all the Woollcombes buried there will be identified in the digital Family Archive. Thence, via Tavistock, Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley World Heritage Site where Dick and my father, Rupert, grew up looking at one of the best views in England:



Onward to Plymouth, perhaps visiting the offices of Woollcombe Yonge – the firm of solicitors where so many Woollcombes worked for so many years. Thence to Hemerdon where, in small groups, we shall have a chance to look at the portraits, memorabilia and family records that Kate, her six sisters and step-mother Sue have gathered, and kept in safe-keeping for so many years. See examples below:



In the evening, I would like to see the younger members of the Family organise some entertainments / activities to close out the Gathering – and send us home with some sense of where the next generation of Woollcombes might be taking our family. So: **First Question:** How does that sound? Would you come?

The Digitalising of the Family Tree:

Second Question: Is any one else doing this?? Nick, Mimi and I have done some of it, but It would be wonderful to find that some one else doing their part of it. Please let me know.

Third Question: Has any one got any preference on the kind of programme that we use to digitise the Family Archive?? There are – literally – hundreds of them. And I have bought / studied several. The one that I am tempted to use is the TNG programme: <http://www.tngsitebuilding.com>. This has the advantage of being able to have most of its information in a password-protected area. That way, we can have a big and brilliant public home page shining a spotlight on some of the Woollcombe Bishops, lawyers and Admirals past and present. Behind that, we can have a password-protected site for just family to view, and enjoy, more private elements of the family history. (IE. Completely GDPR compliant!)

Fourth Question: Who wants to help?? Even if it's only uploading some details about your own close family members, that would be great. *(With the TNG site – you can be certain that data will be protected and only available to registered family members. You should still be careful to get permission for anything you want to put up from all living persons that the material refers to.)* The Reunion will take some organisation – and it would be great to have a group to share responsibility! Also to help with the research and digitisation. This is mostly desk work these days – but it's also a matter of "... I'm going to Australia next month: is there any one I can look up??"

Fifth Question: What should be the focus? It might seem an odd for an archivist to say this but – I find myself much more interested in the living than the dead. As my son, Alexander, put it: *"I'd like to know who we all are, how we're all related and what we're all doing with our lives. I'm more interested in that than who begat whom two hundred years ago..."* True – but if we're to address that second question: "How we're all related to each other..." – we need to do some research into the begatting.

Fortunately, most of that work has already been done. Two hefty volumes, one from the 19th Century, one from the 1950s, exist at Hemerdon. Kate Woollcombe has kindly allowed me access to them. There is Charles Louis's book which Nick has, and a fascinating packet of information from Tony Woollcombe in Australia. We have Stephen's excellent full-length biography of his grand-father, George Penrose Woollcombe. And Mimi Petit, wife of Alan and daughter-in-law of the late Dick Woollcombe of Rumleigh, has gathered box files full of archives while clearing Rumleigh and digitised some 140 of them which she says is "... about 1% of what I found!"

Massive thanks to her – and to Kate and Sukey at Hemerdon, to Tony, Nick and all who step up to help. Thanks also to Anthony Cobbold, curator of the [Cobbold Family History Trust](#) and Mike Gibbs who does the same for the [Gibbs family](#). They, and [Raymond Simonds](#), have given me time and invaluable tips as I get started on this long journey to creating a Woollcombe Archive worthy of our great family.

In closing, if you have time, copy and paste these 5 x Questions into an e-mail & give me your answers:

- 1. The Family Gathering: how does that sound? – might you come?**
- 2. Do you know of any one else doing this?**
- 3. Do you have a preference for the Web Programme we use to make the digital archive?**
- 4. Do you have any appetite to Help??**
- 5. Do you have any thoughts / preferences on the focus / content of the Archive?? What parts of it would really interest you??**

If you've read this far, and have not fallen asleep, THANK YOU – and I hope to see you in Devon in 2020!

Best wishes, David Woollcombe