

Selected Pen Portraits of Prominent and Interesting Residents of Axminster

Other accessible sources

Some further information is available in 'Notes on Axminster' by Major W H Wilkin, which gathers in one place submissions made by him to the Exeter Diocesan Architectural and Archaeological Society (on Axminster Church, in 1932) and to the Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art (on various subjects, from 1933 to 1936). These latter submissions includes two sets of notes on 'Some Axminster Worthies', covering William Buckland, John Cranch, James Davidson, Nancy Dawson, Zachary James Edwards, Matthew Liddon, William Newbery, John Prince, George Pulman, James Small, Stephen and Micaiah Towgood, Thomas Whitty and David Willmott, several of whom are covered by the Dictionary of National Biography and by the notes below. Major Wilkins' Notes are accessible in Axminster library.

The individuals for whom there are entries in the Dictionary of National Biography are indicated by (DNB) in the title line. Where the entry is shown as (DNB*) this means that the entry there is appreciably more detailed than the summary provided below.

There are also notes on William Buckland, John Churchill, William Henry Duffield, George Pulman, Frank Rowe, Jack Sansom, Emily Sheppard, Thomas Wakley and Thomas Nicholas Webber in 'The Book of Axminster with Kilmington' by Les Berry and Gerald Gosling (2003, Halsgrove).

ARTHUR HENRY DYKE ACLAND (1811 to 1857)

Arthur Henry Dyke Acland was the second son of Sir Thomas Dyke Acland MP. As the younger son of a wealthy and prominent family, he was free to devote himself to a mixture of leisure and public service. After marrying Frances Williams in 1835, he settled at Axminster, roughly half-way between Killerton and Littlebredy (his and her families' homes respectively). At Axminster he rented Hill House on Lyme Road (which was later extended, becoming Old Park). As well as sitting as a local JP, he took an active interest in churches and other public buildings, and was one of the main proponents of a move to build a new church at All Saints, to serve the residents of Smallridge (in Axminster parish) and All Saints itself (in Chardstock), and to save them the long walk to either of their existing parish churches. Soon after the new church being consecrated, in 1840, he and his family moved to Dorchester, where he helped to get what is now the County hospital built. In 1852 he changed his surname to Troyte, as the condition of an inheritance.

BARTHOLOMEW ASHWOOD (c.1622 TO 1680) (DNB)

Bartholomew Ashwood was born in Warwickshire to a clergyman father of the same name. He was brought up as a puritan before attending Exeter College, where he obtained a degree in arts before being ordained and appointed to the parish of Bickleigh in Devon. By 1657 he had moved to Axminster, but on 24 August 1662, at the time of the Restoration of the monarchy, he was put in Exeter gaol and then ejected from the living here under the provisions laid down in the Act of Conformity. As detailed in 'Axminster Ecclesiastica' he

continued to preach for many years to a non-conformist congregation based on Axminster and its surrounds, despite the severe restrictions placed on such congregations at that time. By his old age he had been reduced to poverty, and died in about 1680.

He wrote three books of note, all of them published around the time of his death: 'The Heavenly Trade, or the Best Merchandizing, the only way to live well in impoverishing Times, a Discourse occasion'd from the Decay of earthly Trades and visible Wastes of practical Piety in the Days we live in, offering Arguments and Counsells; to all, towards a speedy Revival of dying Godliness, &c.' (1679); 'The Best Treasure, or the Way to be truly Rich, being a Discourse on Ephesians iii. 8, wherein is opened and commended to Saints and Sinners the personal and purchased Riches of Christ as the best Treasure to be possessed' (1681); and 'Groans for Sin' (1681). Copies of these works are unlikely to be encountered now, but they are reckoned to prove him to have been an original and imaginative thinker.

JOHN ASHWOOD (1657 TO 1706) (DNB)

John Ashwood, non-conformist minister, was born at Axminster in 1657, the son of Bartholomew Ashwood (see above). A delicate child, he was educated by his father, before being sent to London as a pupil of Theophilus Gale. Before he began to preach he was a teacher at Axminster, and later at Chard, but he was removed from his post at Chard because of his non-conformist beliefs. As a consequence he planned to emigrate to America in January 1683, but was prevented from travelling by an attack of smallpox.

He then lived at Ilminster, Haveland and Buckland before moving to Exeter, where he was considered "... a vigilant and faithful minister for about the space of ten years". He subsequently returned to London, and for about 2 years he taught at Spitalfields and preached at Hoxton, before receiving a 'call' from a congregation at Peckham, Surrey. He died there on 22 September 1706. His biography was for many years a favourite among devout non-conformists.

ARTHUR BIDWELL (1844 TO 1935)

Arthur Bidwell was born in East London in 1844 to Thomas Bidwell and his wife Susan (née Weakley) of 1 Brownlow Street, Haggerston. Arthur was the younger brother of James Bidwell (see below). Their father had established a brush-making business in 1839 in Hoxton, but died aged 31 in November 1850 when both boys were still young. His death was widely reported (e.g. the *Canterbury Journal*, *Kentish Times & Farmer's Gazette* of 23 November 1850) because although he was suffering from a pulmonary complaint, he was treated by a herbalist (the unfortunately named Dr Coffin), who gave him pills based mainly on Cayenne pepper. The conclusion of the inquest was that whilst the treatment had not killed him, it had hastened his death. His general preference for unconventional positions is borne out by the fact that he was also a registered supporter of 'The Movement and Anti-Persecution Gazette and Register of Progress' a radical, republican, anti-clerical publication inspired by the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham.

Based on the evidence of the 1891 census, Susan had been born at Burton Bradstock in Dorset.

On 26 August 1865 Arthur married Jane Maria Jop at St John's, Hackney, and in 1881 they and their family were living in Walthamstow, near the family brush-making business. Arthur and Jane Maria had six children, but only three survived to adulthood: Henry James, Percival and Minnie. In the early 1880s they moved their business out of London, first to Axminster and then to Ottery St Mary, where (in 1891) the family lived on Mill Street. The

business then failed, but was re-established with considerable success at Axminster. Following the death of Arthur's brother James (see below), in 1912 it was converted to a Limited Company.

When Arthur and Jane Maria moved to Axminster they lived at Mount House, Castle Hill. Jane Maria died in 1906, but Arthur lived to the age of 90. He died on 10 February 1935 at Lyme Regis, at which time his two sons were still running the business in Axminster.

JAMES BIDWELL (1841 TO 1910)

James Bidwell was born in East London in 1841 to Thomas and Susan Bidwell (see above under Arthur Bidwell). On 5 April 1866 he married Lucy Cloake at Heathfield, Sussex. Despite being married in Sussex, she was the daughter of Thomas Cloake, a tailor in East London.

In 1881 James, Lucy and their family were living in Stoke Newington in East London, near the family brush-making business. They had at least three children: Walter, Edgar and Mary. In 1891, like James' brother Arthur (see above), they were living on Mill Street, Ottery St Mary. By 1901 James and Lucy had moved to Colyton, and their children had all left home. James died on 7 October 1910, about a year after he and Lucy had retired to Seaton.

As well as running the family brush-making business James Bidwell was for 20 years an officer in the Volunteers (which later became the Territorial Army), ending as a Major, and receiving the Volunteer Decoration on his retirement from the force. Although he was a keen supporter of the Conservative party he established a Working Men's Club in Axminster, primarily for the benefit of his workforce. He was also a talented artist, having paintings exhibited by the Royal Academy.

JAMES BOON (1819 TO 1887)

James Boon moved his textile business to Axminster after his family's long-standing premises in Uplyme were burned down in 1866 (see the Lyme Regis Museum website for some information on their Uplyme textile works). He was the eldest son of another James Boon and his wife Elizabeth (née Groves, married at Bettiscombe in 1818).

He farmed, and then took over the Town Mill at Axminster, where he was in business as a wool stapler and miller for several years. A report in the Salisbury & Winchester Journal of 16 July 1870 records him buying wool at Blandford wool fair for his business in Axminster. The Western Times of 26 June 1874 then reports that he had been appointed as a new agent for Lawes' Manures, and the same newspaper (of 23 May 1878) reports that he had exhibited a wide range of farm machinery, including two traction engines and portable engines, at the Devon County Agricultural Show which had just been held at Honiton. The 1881 census shows him as employing 30 men and 5 boys, though by that time he had decided to let some of his mill space to James Coate and Bidwell Bros, two incoming brush-makers. He was married twice, his second marriage to Alice Jefford taking place in 1883, 4 years before his death in 1887.

WILLIAM BUCKLAND (1784 TO 1855) (DNB)

William Buckland, geologist and ordained Anglican priest, was born at Axminster on 12 March 1784, the eldest son of Rev Charles Buckland and his first wife Elizabeth (née Oke), who died in 1812. Although not the first English geologist, he did as much as anyone to channel the emerging knowledge into a scientific framework which, a generation before

Darwin, rendered a literal reading of the bible untenable. In 1818 he was appointed professor of geology and mineralogy at Oxford, and in 1824 was elected president of the Geological Society.

He was inquisitive, rigorous and collaborative (a rare combination in a leading scientist) and a noted communicator, via lectures, sermons, books and scientific papers. The list of his contacts ranged from the untutored but brilliant fossil-finder Mary Anning at Lyme Regis (whose achievements he championed) to Alexander von Humboldt, arguably the most famous scientist in Europe at a time when scientific knowledge was exploding.

Buckland's knowledge and interest was directly fostered by his childhood observations of the rocks and landforms around Axminster, and although he left the town as a young man, he returned frequently, not least to visit his friend Rev William Daniel Conybeare (himself no mean geologist: see below) when he was the vicar of Axminster. Indeed, the Bucklands were staying with the Conybeares at the time of the 1839 Axmouth landslip, allowing them to make first-hand observations, illustrated by Buckland's wife Mary (née Molland), whose career as an internationally-known scientific illustrator pre-dated their marriage in 1825.

In 1845 he was recommended by Sir Robert Peel (the Prime Minister) to the post of Dean of Westminster, where his energetic reforms and improvements to the Abbey and to Westminster school caused Sir Robert to describe this as the appointment of which he was most proud.

Unfortunately in 1848 Buckland and two of his daughters fell ill with typhoid when the drains at Westminster were disturbed by workmen. Although he recovered, it was not long thereafter that he started to suffer from debilitating depression, making his final years uncharacteristically unproductive. He died on 14 August 1855, a year before the publication of 'On the Origin of Species'.

A much fuller note on Buckland's life and works is also available via the axminsterheritage.org website.

SIMON BUNTER (1725 TO 1784)

Simon Bunter was born at Cerne Abbas, Dorset in 1725, the son of John Bunter, a brewer. He qualified as a lawyer, and moved to Axminster. Whether his move came before or after his marriage to the considerably older Meliora Gundry (born 1710, daughter of a merchant from Lyme who served as the town's mayor and MP), or that of his younger sister Deborah to Matthew Liddon¹ of Axminster is uncertain, but Bunter certainly settled in Axminster in order to practise law.

In 1758 he had Oak House (described by Pevsner as the finest dwelling in Axminster) built. In 1759 he was a church warden (this is confirmed by an inscription, together with that of his fellow-warden Amos Liddon, above the north door, suggesting that they arranged some structural alterations affecting that part of the church), and in 1768 he gave a silver flagon and cup to the parish Church as part of the Communion plate. He subsequently commissioned another house in Lyme Regis (known as Bunter's Castle) which was built in 1774, the same year that his wife Meliora died. She is commemorated by a plaque in Axminster church. Whether Bunter moved to Lyme or not is uncertain, but he continued to

¹ Matthew and Deborah Liddon had a son, John Bunter Liddon, who was the father of Matthew Liddon (1782 to 1869) whose details appear below.

practise law in Axminster, where the courts sat. He was buried at Axminster on 17 November 1784.

WILLIAM EDWIN PITFIELD CHAPPLE (1863 TO 1927)

William Edwin Pitfield Chapple was born at Axminster in 1863 and baptised on 7 November, the eldest child of Edwin Chapple, a local bank manager, and his wife Sarah Ann (née Wakely). They had been married at Axminster on 22 July 1862.

He became a lawyer, and lived all his life in his parents' former home, The Shrubbery, West Street. He remained unmarried, and lived with his younger sisters, also unmarried. Something of his character can be observed from their return for the 1911 census. In answer to the question about their ages, the answer which he gave was "10 years older than last time". He died on 17 August 1932 at Seaton, but still described as 'of The Shrubbery'.

For 16 years in the 1890s and 1900s he was Chairman of Axminster Parish Council, and Chief Officer of the Axminster Fire Brigade, in which he took a strong, even a proprietorial, interest, to the extent that when he lost his seat on the Council in 1909 he reclaimed the Fire Brigade's uniforms and hose, on the grounds that he had paid for them out of his own pocket. The story is recounted in full in Chapter 13 of 'The Book of Axminster with Kilmington' by Les Berry and Gerald Gosling.

By the time he retired his legal practice was a partnership with Richard John Measures, who in turn went into partnership with Daniel Scott Rowe, practising as Chapple, Measures & Rowe.

JOHN CHURCHILL, FIRST DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH (1650 TO 1722) (DNB*)

John Churchill was baptised at Axminster on 25 June 1650, the son of Sir Winston Churchill and his wife Elizabeth (née Drake). His mother's family had lived at Ashe House, Musbury for several generations. Sources differ as to the exact date and place of his birth, but it was May or June 1650, and he was probably born at Great Trill, due to Ashe having been badly damaged in the Civil War.

He was educated at St Paul's in London, and on leaving school he became page of honour to the Duke of York (the King's younger brother, and the future James II). In 1667 he received a commission as ensign in the foot guards, and saw some action at Tangier. In 1672 he was promoted to captain in a foot regiment, and served under the Duke of Monmouth in Flanders. Monmouth later presented him to Charles II, saying "... I owe my life to his bravery".

In 1678 Churchill rose to the rank of colonel, and married Sarah Jennings of St Albans, a lady in the household of the Duchess of York. Churchill was sent by the Court to open communications with the Prince of Orange, in an effort to align the Dutch with England's interests. When, in March 1679, the Duke of York was forced to leave England, the Churchills followed him to the Hague before returning to England when Charles II fell ill. He was created Baron Churchill of Aymouth in 1682, and in 1683 was appointed colonel of the newly-formed 1st regiment of dragoons, the same year that Sarah Churchill became one of the ladies of the bedchamber to the future Queen Anne.

Churchill was at heart a cavalier, a Tory, and (despite his closeness to the Duke of York) an instinctive adherent to the Church of England, with no sympathy for fanatics, whether papists or puritans. When the Duke of York took the throne as James II in 1685 he soon made

Churchill a Baron (of Sandridge), and as the Duke of Monmouth's insurrection got under way he appointed Churchill to command his troops at Salisbury, with a brief to harass the insurgents. He was second-in-command at the battle of Sedgemoor (on 6 July 1685), and was credited with recovering the disorder into which the royal troops were thrown by the rebels' night attack.

At court Churchill was closer to Princess Anne than to the King. In a letter to the Prince of Orange (the future King William) Churchill "... declared that the princess would suffer death rather than change her religion, and that he was equally determined, though in any other cause he would give his own life for the king". James II was widely thought to be Catholic in all but name.

As some of James' courtiers transferred their support to the Prince of Orange, Churchill re-stated his loyalty to James, and was again placed in command of the royal garrison at Salisbury, where James had collected a force to oppose William's march towards London. On 24 November 1688 James decided to retreat, against Churchill's advice, and that same night Churchill deserted the King, and joined the Prince of Orange at the Dolphin Inn at Axminster, which he had reached on his march from his landing-point at Torbay. He explained his decision to switch sides in terms of the primacy of his conscience and his religion, and his defection was critical to securing the succession of a Protestant monarch who would not persecute dissenters unduly vigorously.

After the overthrow of James II and before the coronation of William and Mary, Churchill was one of the peers who formed what amounted to a provisional government. In the debates in the Convention Parliament he voted for a regency before absenting himself from the House of Peers. He was further rewarded with the earldom of Marlborough on 9 April 1689, two days before the coronation of William and Mary of Orange as joint monarchs of England. Two months later he was back fighting the French, this time on behalf of the Dutch, soon to be followed by a campaign in Ireland.

Following complex political manoeuvrings back in London Marlborough was dismissed from all his positions at the start of 1692 due to his continued closeness to Princess Anne and suspicions that he still really supported James II in exile. In May he was even committed to the Tower of London until the specific accusations against him were shown to be untrue as well as malicious, though he lost his position as a Privy Councillor.

It was not until 1698, following the death of Queen Mary, that Marlborough was fully restored to favour, being reinstated as a Privy Councillor, and a General. When King William died in 1702, power passed to Anne and her favourites. Marlborough was at once made a knight of the Garter, captain-general of the forces and master-general of the ordnance, and his wife was granted further positions of her own.

Marlborough returned to the Hague as ambassador extraordinary to secure Dutch support for war with France. On 4 May 1702 war was formally declared, and Marlborough was appointed to the chief command of a motley force of Dutch, English, and Germans. Success in battle was followed by further honours and grants of money when Marlborough returned to England.

During what became known as the War of the Spanish Succession Marlborough won four great victories at Blenheim (1704), Ramillies (1706), Oudenarde (1708) and Malplaquet (1709). These victories, which required considerable political as well as military skill, given the multiple parties involved in the alliance and army which he led, cemented his reputation as England's most successful general. He also enjoyed a reputation as a humane commander and victor.

To honour the first of these four victories, Queen Anne granted his family the ruined Royal Manor and park at Woodstock, near Oxford, along with £240,000 with which to build a grand house. This became Blenheim Palace, but the construction costs far exceeded the Queen's grant, which caused heated public disputes.

The remainder of Marlborough's life, and that of his wife, was not particularly happy. They had both sought and received such enormous rewards, particularly from Queen Anne, that they were widely disliked, and Sarah Churchill was viewed by her many enemies as particularly venal and vindictive. For a time, while Blenheim Palace was being built (at huge cost) they even left England for a couple of years. When Queen Anne died in 1714 they did not receive the same support from her successor, George I.

Although the Marlboroughs had moved in to live at Blenheim in 1719, he died at another of their houses, Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park, on 16 June 1722. His wife died, leaving a massive will, on 18 October 1744.

JAMES COATE (1814 TO 1907)

Although James Coate moved his brush-making business from London to Axminster, he was actually born in Membury, to Thomas Coate, a dairyman, and his wife Mary: he was baptised there on 26 November 1814. He moved to London, and set up his company in Bow in 1846. On 31 March 1859 he married a widow called Fanny Martin (née Tapper) in London. Like him she was originally from Devon. They did not have any children.

The 1861 census shows him as a master brush-maker. By 1862 he had premises at 41/42 Lisle Street, Leicester Square, and a few years earlier he had established a second factory at Nimmer Mills, a couple of miles north of Chard. In about 1883 he moved his main business to Axminster, and he and Fanny lived at Lea Combe House, Axminster until her death in 1902 and his in 1907. The business was variously known as Messrs Coate & Co and The London Brush Works. He was a staunch Conservative, and a generous supporter of many local causes.

GEORGIANA EMILY CONYBEARE (CRAVEN) (1852 TO 1920)

Emily Conybeare was born at Kew on 4 February 1852 to John Charles Conybeare, a barrister, and his wife Katherine Mary. Her father was the second son of William Daniel Conybeare, the former vicar of Axminster (see below). She was the second of their three daughters, and of their seven children.

Although she did not actually live in Axminster, she was the moving force behind the establishment and initial financing of Axminster's first hospital. In June 1886 she obtained the lease of the former carpet factory on Silver Street, converted it into a hospital, and engaged a Matron, a Nurse and other domestic staff. She personally paid the rent (of £25 a year) for many years, plus the full running costs in the first year, and a contribution of £100 a year for the next 9 years (which met roughly half of the operating costs over that period, even though it was by then under public control).

She travelled and lived for a while in both Canada and the Cape Colony (South Africa), and was a strong advocate of young women settling in the colonies, not just young men. She was active in supporting women's education and independence through clubs and societies.

On 14 January 1896, aged almost 44, she married Arthur Henry Craven in London. Although the Conybeare family's financial interest in Axminster ended in 1897 when their ownership of

the Manor of Prestaller reverted to the Church Commissioners, she retained a personal interest, and on 18 July 1912 she opened the new Axminster Hospital on Chard Street at the invitation of the Management Committee. As an active proponent of women's independence she welcomed the fact that Axminster Hospital was among the first in the country to have women on its Committee.

She died on 31 October 1920 at Broguewood, Biddenden, Kent, and was survived by her husband.

Much of the information above comes from 'William Daniel Conybeare (1787-1857): His Family and Axminster' (by Christopher Powell, 2008. A copy can be found in Axminster library).

WILLIAM DANIEL CONYBEARE (1787 TO 1857) (DNB)

William Daniel Conybeare, churchman and geologist, was born at Bishopsgate, London in June 1787 to William Conybeare and his wife Margaret Esther (née Olivier). He was educated at Westminster and Christ's Church, Oxford, where he was in the same year as Sir Robert Peel, with whom he took a first in classics and a second in mathematics. He remained at Oxford until he took his MA degree, at which time he formed a life-long friendship with William Buckland (see above). Both Buckland (the first professor of geology at Oxford) and Adam Sedgwick (who held the same post at Cambridge) considered Conybeare an exceptional geologist.

Conybeare's aptitude for geology was confirmed by one of his early papers, written in 1814, which appeared in the second volume of the 'Transactions of the Geological Society', entitled 'On the Origin of a remarkable Class of Organic Impressions occurring in Nodules of Flint'.

On 23 August 1814, at Kensington, he married Sarah Ann Ranken of Belfast, and left Oxford for a country curacy in Suffolk. Nine years later he moved to the vicarage of Sully in Glamorgan. He subsequently held the curacy of Banbury and lectureship of Brislington, near Bristol. While there, and in conjunction with Henry de la Bêche, who he had first met in 1816, he founded the Bristol Philosophical Institution and Museum, and corresponded with George Cuvier about geology. Cuvier recognised his contributions to science, and advocated his admission to the French Academy, which was granted in 1828. Conybeare was by then a fellow of the Geological Society of London (since 1821), and was later elected a fellow of the Royal Society (in 1832).

In 1836 Conybeare became the vicar of Axminster, a post which was at that time in the gift of his family, along with the lordship of the manor of Prestaller which lies on the northern edge of Axminster. While at Axminster he preached, at the request of the University of Oxford, the Bampton lecture for 1839. On the geological front, his examination, with William Buckland, of the 1839 landslip at Axmouth, also illustrated his active interest and knowledge of earth sciences. In 1842 he presented a 'Report on the Progress, Actual State, and Ulterior Prospects of Geological Science' to the meeting of the British Association at Oxford, and in 1844 he was awarded the Wollaston medal, the highest recognition which the Geological Society could grant.

In 1844 he resigned the living of Axminster, and was appointed dean of Llandaff, on the edge of Cardiff (though he did not actually move there until 1848). While there he carried on the work of restoration with zeal and success. In 1850, while at Llandaff, he gave a plot of land from the Manor of Prestaller (which his family still retained, along with control over the

living at Axminster) to enable a National School to be built on Chard Street, where it remains today.

He left Llandaff to attend the deathbed of his eldest son, William John (see below), and en route back to Wales, while visiting another of his sons in Hampshire, he was stricken with apoplexy, and died on 12 August 1857.

His other scientific papers included a paper on the 'Hydrographical Basin of the Thames,' examining the causes which had formed the valley of the Thames, and an examination of Elie de Beaumont's 'Theory of Mountain Chains'. His work with Sir Henry de la Bêche on the fossils discovered by Mary Anning at Lyme Regis developed a convincing case for acknowledging a new genus of reptiles, which they called the Plesiosaurus, linking the Ichthyosaurus and the modern crocodile.

WILLIAM JOHN CONYBEARE (1815 TO 1857) (DNB)

William John Conybeare, churchman and author, and eldest son of Rev William Daniel Conybeare (see above) was born on 1 August 1815. He was educated at Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he became a fellow. He took his degree in 1837, and in 1841 he took holy orders, and was appointed Whitehall preacher. In 1842 he was appointed first principal of the newly founded Liverpool Collegiate Institution, and that same year he married Eliza Rose, a vicar's daughter from Leicestershire.

His failing health obliged him in 1848 to resign his post at Liverpool, and he succeeded his father as vicar of Axminster. At Liverpool he was succeeded by Rev J S Howson, in conjunction with whom he brought out the 'Life and Epistles of St Paul' in 1851. His other published works included 'Essays Ecclesiastical and Social' (1856), and 'Perversion', a novel (also 1856). Illness obliged him to resign his position at Axminster in 1854, and he died at Weybridge in 1857.

JOHN CRANCH (1751 TO 1821) (DNB)

John Cranch was born at Kingswear, Devon on 12 October 1751, the son of Joseph Cranch. Several of the details below can be found on-line via 'Kingsbridge and its Surroundings' by Sarah Prideaux Fox; others come from the fact that he was distantly related² by marriage to Abigail Adams, wife of the second President of the United States, whose family papers contain several references to him.

Having shown talent in writing, drawing and music as a child, in about 1772 Cranch obtained a position in Axminster at a salary of £15 a year as a 'writer' in the office of John Knight (see below), steward to Lord Petre. After 3 years working for John Knight in 1775 he became the pupil of Simon Bunter, the leading lawyer in Axminster. After qualifying as an attorney, he remained in Bunter's employment until the latter's death in 1784. Cranch acted as executor to Bunter's will, through which he personally inherited £2,000.

When John Adams was posted to London to represent the newly-independent American states, Cranch wrote to him, and urged him to visit Axminster, which he did, with his wife Abigail, on 26/27 July 1787. Their visit is described elsewhere on the axminsterheritage.org website.

² His uncle, Richard Cranch, had emigrated to America, and married Abigail Adams' sister, Mary (née Smith).

Having inherited enough money to support himself, later in 1787 Cranch moved to London where he became a minor painter, before moving to Bath in 1795. He was not accepted by the Royal Academy, but was more successful with the Society of Artists and the British Institution. He was also elected a Fellow of the American Society of Arts & Sciences. He never married, and died at Bath on 24 January 1821. Details of several of his paintings can be found on the-athenaeum.org website. He also published two essays: 'On the Economy of Testaments' (1794), and 'Inducements to promote the Fine Arts of Great Britain by exciting Native Genius to independent Effort and original Design' (1811).

JAMES DAVIDSON (1793 TO 1864) (DNB)

James Davidson remains, almost 150 years after his death, the single most important historian of Axminster. He was born at Tower Hill, London on 15 August 1793, the eldest son of James Davidson, a stationer and deputy-lieutenant of the Tower, and his wife Ann (née Sawyer).

On 6 March 1823 he married Mary Bridge of Frome St Quentin, Dorset, and at about this time he bought Secktor (now spelled Sector), a small estate just outside Axminster. Having bought the land and farm, he enlarged one of the cottages which occupied a particularly favourable spot into what is now Sector Hall. He lived there for the remainder of his life, playing an active part in local life, but above all immersing himself in the history of Devon as a whole, whilst still devoting particular attention to the parishes of the Axe valley.

His most notable published books of local interest, all of which are available through Axminster library, cover local archaeology, Axminster Church, Newenham Abbey, and the Civil War as it affected Axminster. All of these books drew on his researches and text for an unpublished (and very substantial) History of Axminster, which is available in manuscript in the Devon Heritage Centre. The table of contents is also accessible via the axminsterheritage.org website.

His chief contribution to Devon's wider history was his 'Bibliotheca Devoniensis: a Catalogue of the Printed Books relating to the County of Devon', published in 1852 with a supplement dated 1862. It did not pretend to cover all of the more general writings of Devon authors, but within the limits that he set himself the completeness and accuracy of his research is generally acknowledged. To achieve this he had, at his own expense, "... caused all the libraries of London and the universities to be diligently ransacked".

In 1859 he contributed a series of articles on history to Pulman's Weekly News. Then in 1861, 3 years before his death, he published a selection of 'Notes on the Antiquities of Devonshire' from before the Norman conquest, and when he died he left behind in manuscript a record of the principal facts covering every parish in Devon.

He died at Sector Hall on 29 February 1864, and is buried in the town's cemetery. His eldest son, James Bridge Davidson, qualified as a lawyer and shared many of his father's interests. He too wrote many papers, but no books. Many of the books from their joint library were sold by William George of Bristol, in 1887.

EDWIN HENRY DAWKINS (1851 TO 1914) AND HIS SON EDWIN HOWARD (1882 TO 1925)

Edwin Henry Dawkins was born at Romsey (Hampshire) on 8 January 1851. On 19 April 1879 he married Kate Matilda Phippen, a farmer's daughter, at Wotton Fitzpaine (though later census returns show that she had been born at Smallridge), and they settled in Axminster where they developed a draper's shop, and where he was a staunch member of the

Congregationalist church. The 1881 census gives their address as Market Place, but the section of street between Market Square / Castle Hill and the George Hotel was subsequently known as Victoria Place, which is where all subsequent records of the shop show it to have been. Their only child, Edwin Howard, was born in 1882.

The shop was initially a draper's, and in 1881 the only non-family employee was Mary Rendell. By 1891 the scope had expanded to include groceries and an ironmongery department, and Edwin's brother George was working in the grocery department. They subsequently dropped the food, and concentrated on furnishings, clothing, footwear and haberdashery, becoming Axminster's largest shop.

As the shop prospered, the family moved out, and in about 1909 Edwin and Kate went to live at 'Brooklyn' (now the Kerrington House Hotel) on Musbury Road. He died there on 13 February 1914.

Edwin Howard Dawkins (the son) married Elsie Bodley Towell in 1907, and by 1911 they were living on King Edward Road with their two surviving children, Edwin Herbert Haswell (born on 22 May 1908) and Cuthbert Howard (born in late 1910). Elsie died in the Sherborne district in 1922 aged just 38, and Edwin Howard died at Weymouth on 30 August 1925 after suffering a stroke the year before.

NANCY DAWSON (c.1730 TO 1767)

Nancy Dawson may have been born at Coaxdon, near Weycroft, and she is reported (by James Davidson, generally the most reliable of sources) to have been a barmaid at The George in her youth.

She soon left for the bright lights of London, and was a dancer at Sadler's Wells, Covent Garden and Drury Lane. In 1759 the hornpipe that she danced in the 'Beggars' Opera' became much celebrated. She used to visit friends and relatives in Axminster, where her metropolitan ways were much remarked on, and she used to dance for the amusement of her friends in the local inns. A Mrs Burch told James Davidson that she had seen Nancy Dawson dance a minuet at the Dolphin Inn in petticoats trimmed with silver lace.

She retired from the stage in 1763 and died at Haverstock Hill on 26 May 1767. Her public reputation was as a beautiful and graceful dancer, but with a shrewish temper and a heartless, mercenary and immoral approach to life.

The information above comes from 'Notes on Axminster' by Major W H Wilkin (1933), which can be found in Axminster library.

WILLIAM HENRY (HARRY) DUTFIELD (1908 TO 1999)

Harry Dutfield was born in Glasgow on 12 December 1908, and raised in Kidderminster. His father was from 1909 the head Wilton designer for Bond Worth of Stourport. Harry was keen on both sport and fishing from an early age. He was also practical, and in 1925 he solved the problem of making a reversible carpet (or rug) design, a challenge which had eluded his father for years. He left school and started making and selling rugs on his own account. At 18 he took on his first premises in Kidderminster, but they burned down (at very much the same time that he was suffering from appendicitis). His insurance had run out a couple of days earlier, but Royal Insurance agreed to pay his claim if he agreed to stick with them when he got re-established, which he did.

By 1928 he was back in business with a small factory, and a partner, Ken Quayle. They sold most of their reversible rugs through one London outlet, but in 1929 they changed to making Axminster carpets. By the time he was 21, Harry Dufield and his partner had about 12 men working for them, and were running two 12-hour shifts every day. In 1934 Harry's father joined him, when his former employers refused to allow him to provide free designs to Harry, who was emerging as a rival.

In 1936, after learning that Axminster carpets were no longer made in Axminster, he wrote to the Town Council, and on receiving an encouraging reply came down to Axminster, enlisted R J Luff and S O Gill as investors, and set about building a new factory near the station on a field belonging to Mr Luff with easy access to the railway sidings via which he could move goods in and out. He himself moved to Axminster in February 1937, and lodged with Mrs Phippen at Gloucester House, Castle Hill. The first carpet was completed by Coronation Day, and was displayed in the window of Potter's store in West Street. In the beginning there were 3-4 staff from Kidderminster and about 12 local employees. In 1938 Harry married Iris Huxter from Wootton Fitzpaine.

For much of World War II the factory was not allowed to make carpets, but made pumps and aircraft parts. When Shand's factory was re-located to Axminster they initially took some of the space within the carpet factory.

After the war Harry's daughter and son were born, and the factory reverted to making carpets for domestic and export sale. As their workforce returned, the carpet factory supported a self-build scheme for employees, which was the origin of about 20 bungalows at Dragon's Mead.

In 1950 Harry started a new venture spinning yarn at Buckfast, and in 1959 he got involved in a project to build and run a new carpet factory in Christchurch, New Zealand, which was sold in 1968 when it was well-established. Travelling between England and New Zealand allowed Harry to stop off in Fiji, where he indulged his passion for big game fishing, as well as selling a lot of carpets to hotels there.

Much of the information above comes from his own memoir written in about 1984, 'Harry Dufield: Carpet Manufacturer and Fisherman, 1908 to 19??'. He died on 21 May 1999.

In 1984 Simon Dufield, Harry's son became joint Managing Director, and he was subsequently followed into the business by his son, Josh.

ZACHARY JAMES EDWARDS (1799 TO 1880)

Zachary Edwards was born on 19 July 1799, the son of a Chard lawyer (Charles Edwards) who in 1796 had purchased an interest in the Manor of Combyne from the Petre estate. He (Zachary) was installed as rector of Combyne after a protracted legal tussle (recounted in Major W H Wilkins' 1933 account in 'Notes on Axminster').

He was a graduate of Wadham College, Oxford, and on 16 April 1833 had married Charlotte Andrews of Yeovil, by whom he had four sons. He chose to live in Axminster rather than Combyne, and it was his observations during his on-foot commute to work which provided the raw material for the book for which he is remembered: 'The Ferns of the Axe' (1862).

In 1870 he resigned the living at Combyne and moved to Misterton (Somerset) as vicar until his death there on 1 September 1880.

WILLIAM FORWARD (1844 TO 1908) AND HIS TWO SONS

William Forward was born at Salway Ash near Bridport, the son of Charles and Mary Forward. He qualified as a solicitor in 1867 and by 1873 had set up in practice in Axminster. On 22 September 1870 he married Maria Eliza Clarkson in the St Pancras district of London, and they had two sons: William Graham in 1877 and Cecil in 1879. The family lived at The Elms on Lyme Road until after William's death in 1908. Maria lived on until 1 April 1944.

Both sons qualified as solicitors and both joined their father's practice, but only William Graham (generally known as Graham) stayed. He served as the Captain of 'H' Company (Axminster) of the Devonshire Regiment Territorial Force in the years leading up to World War I, and was promoted to Major after war broke out and they were posted overseas.

He did not marry, and acted as the Registrar and High Bailiff for Axminster County Court in the 1920s and 1930s. After he died (in 1948) the legal practice was run by his partner, William Donnithorne, and it survives as Milford & Dormer, still based in offices on Silver Street.

Cecil left the family partnership, set up almost next door in competition, and did a lot of work for the local Councils. He married Harriet Dunstan in Brixton, South London on 1 June 1907, and they had a son, Alan, in 1913. He acted as Clerk to the local Magistrates' Court, to both Axminster Urban and Rural District Councils, and to the Guardians' Committee (of the Workhouse). He was also the Superintendent Registrar for Axminster District until responsibility for registrations passed to Honiton. In the 1930s he joined forces with John Beviss and Bruce Beckingsale to form Beviss & Beckingsale, whose successors still practise under that name in the Silver Street offices where Cecil Forward had lived for a while in the 1920s. He died in 1952.

ARTHUR BENJAMIN GAGE (1895 TO 1950)

Arthur Benjamin Gage was born in 1895, the son of John and Ellen Selina Gage (see below). Following the death in quick succession of his father and his grandfather when he was just coming up to 20, he joined Messrs R&C Snell, and played an active role with them as a local auctioneer and land agent.

He married Beatrice Larcombe in 1925 and they had a son and a daughter and lived at Terrace Lodge, Lyme Road. When the Devon County Show was held at Axminster in May 1939 Arthur was the chairman of the local organising committee. He died on 1 May 1950.

BENJAMIN GAGE (C.1828 TO 1915) AND HIS TWO SONS

Benjamin Gage was born in about 1828, the son of Joseph and Ann Gage of Great Trill, Axminster. On 26 March 1851 he married Mary Jane Rockett at All Saints, the daughter of James Rockett, a local farmer. At the time of the census a few weeks later Benjamin was farming on his own account at Marsh Farm, Kilmington, and he remained there for many years. As well as a farmer, he was a well-known local auctioneer, specialising in livestock.

Benjamin and Mary Jane had at least six daughters and two sons, Charles Benjamin (1862 to 1932) and John (1867 to 1914). Quite soon after Mary Jane's death in 1880 he was re-married to Annie Emmens, who was originally from Colchester, Essex. They left Marsh Farm, and lived at Sisterhood Farm, Axminster (in 1881) and later at Alma Villa and then on Willhaye Lane.

Both of his sons became auctioneers. Charles Benjamin married Helena Hammett in 1884 but was not in business with his father. John married Ellen Selina Badham at Bristol on 29 January 1889 and was in partnership with his father as B&J Gage.

Their business included the selling of livestock at auction in Axminster, and when the law prompted local authorities to close down town-centre street markets in favour of dedicated sites B&J Gage obtained a licence from the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries (in 1910), and negotiated with both the Knight family (as owners of the market rights) and Messrs R&C Snell (as fellow auctioneers and likely successors to the Knights) to move the selling of livestock to a site off South Street. A conveyance to this effect was signed on 11 May 1911.

Then in early 1914 John Gage was shot dead in his office. The inquest returned an open verdict. His father Benjamin died the following year, on 28 April 1915. His executors included Charles Snell rather than his surviving son Charles Benjamin. Ellen Selina Gage, John's widow signed a further agreement regarding the market house, market toll rights and dues on 23 July 1914, the other parties being Robert Snell, Henry Knight (senior and junior) and Axminster Rural District Council.

John and Ellen Selina Gage had three sons, including Arthur Benjamin (see above).

WILLIAM REGINALD HAYMAN (1842 TO 1899)

William Reginald Hayman was the second son of Philip Charles and Anne Hayman. Philip Hayman was an Axminster-born doctor and surgeon who practised in Axminster in the mid-19th century.

William Reginald Hayman left Axminster as a young man, and in 1858 he emigrated to Australia, where he became a pastoralist at Lake Wallace in western Victoria. He either went there with one of his uncles, or joined him. Once there he took a close interest in the welfare of the Aboriginal population, and among other things encouraged them to take up cricket. One thing led to another, and in 1868 he brought an Aboriginal cricket team on a tour of England, from May to October, and acted as the team's manager. This was actually the first Australian cricket team to play in England, and it played 47 matches, the first and last matches being at The Oval. During their tour team members also gave displays of their traditional skills of boomerang and spear throwing.

On 18 October 1868, the day after their final 3-day match at The Oval, they left London for what was described as a 'brief holiday' in Devon, though whether they came to Axminster has not been established. The main party sailed from Plymouth for Australia on 26 October, but William Hayman stayed on for a while, and on 29 October 1868 he donated several Aboriginal artefacts to Exeter's newly-opened RAMM museum.

Much of the information above comes from the website of the British Museum, and the tour, which was quite controversial at the time, is widely referred to in Australian historical records.

GEORGE HEAL (1843 TO 1909)

George Heal was born in 1843 at Paulton, near Midsomer Norton to John Heal and his first wife Elizabeth. In the 1860s George moved to Axminster, where he started an iron and brass foundry. In 1866 he married Ann Orchard, but she died within 2 years. He was then re-married on 24 December 1868 to Tryphena Harvey, daughter of a local farmer and innkeeper. As well as the foundry, by 1871 they were running the Green Dragon Inn and the

first two of their 15 children had been born. By 1881 George was employing eight men and a boy at the foundry, and the 1891 census describes him as a millwright and engineer. He died in 1909, followed 10 years later by Tryphena, who ran both the Green Dragon and the foundry after his death. The foundry was then bought by the firm of Henry Norrington & Sons. George's half-brother Thomas Bull Heal ran a separate timber business in Axminster.

HENRY KNIGHT JUNIOR (1805 TO 1894) AND HIS FAMILY

Henry Knight junior, Lord of the Manor of Axminster, was the eldest son of a father of the same name and his wife Mary, and a grandson of John Knight (c.1734 to 1801: see below).

He was born on 14 March 1805 and was educated at Stonyhurst (the Catholic school) from 1816 to 1824. In the late 1840s he married Mary Barns, daughter of Amos Barns of Tillworth, Hawkchurch, and they had three sons (see below) and four daughters. By 1861 the family had moved to Cloakham House. They subsequently moved back into Axminster itself, living at Terrace Lodge. In 1871 Henry Knight junior was in sole possession of all of the remaining Manor lands, and Lord of the Manor following the resolution of legal actions started by his uncle William Knight (see below under John Knight). He died in 1894.

Henry Knight junior's eldest son (also called Henry, 1849 to 1917) joined the Army, became a Major in the Royal Artillery, married a wife called Eileen, had one child, and split his time between London and Ireland. His son Henry (1878 to 1947), the last male Knight from this family, became a barrister in London. Major Knight and his son gradually sold off their land and property in Axminster. In 1911 they disposed of the remaining Manorial rights (which were connected to the market), and in 1916 the formal title of Lord of the Manor was sold to Charles Snell.

Henry Knight junior's second son, William Henry Barns Knight (1853 to 1923), was a solicitor who lived at Hilary House and practised law in Axminster. He married but did not have children. His younger brother, Alexander John Henry Knight (1856 to 1931), was a land agent and auctioneer who married and moved away from Axminster, and did not have children.

JOHN KNIGHT (C.1734 TO 1801) AND HIS FAMILY

The Knight family was strongly Catholic. In 1763 John Knight moved from Cannington, near Bridgwater to Axminster to work for Lord Petre, the then Lord of the Manor of Axminster, and another Catholic. Either John Knight or another member of his family also carried out estate management work for Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, another Catholic landowner with links to Cannington.

John Knight lived at Hilary House, Lyme Road. He died on 24 June 1801 and has a memorial tablet in Axminster parish church (there being no Catholic Church in Axminster at that time).

John Knight had at least two sons: William (1762 to 1839) and Henry senior (1779 to 1858). William was Steward of parts of the Petre estate, and when Lord Petre sold his land holdings at Axminster in 1824 William was the co-purchaser, with James Alexander Frampton. For various reasons the partners became embroiled in litigation, which outlasted both of them before being resolved in favour of William's nephew Henry Knight junior (see above). William died on 3 December 1839 according to a tablet in Axminster church. Although he married (his wife was Sarah, who died aged 94 on 19 January 1851) he did not have any surviving children.

In 1828 Henry Knight senior, a land agent by profession, founded the first Catholic Church in Axminster since the 16th century. He and his wife Mary had two sons (Henry junior: see above) and James Alexander Knight (c.1815 to 1881). They also had three daughters, including Sarah Ann, who married Sir John Haggerston in 1851. Henry Knight senior died in 1858.

James Alexander Knight lived at The Lawn and sat as a magistrate at Axminster, but although he married, he did not have any children.

MATTHEW LIDDON (1792 TO 1869)

Matthew Liddon was the third son of John Bunter Liddon, an Axminster tanner, and his wife Mary (née Hill). Matthew was baptised at Axminster on 25 April 1792, and joined the Navy in May 1804, in the middle of the Napoleonic wars.

He served in the Caribbean, South America and the Mediterranean before he was 20, and in 1810 was mentioned in despatches following a skirmish off Calabria. On 3 May 1811 he was made a Lieutenant.

He then served with distinction in North America, before being appointed second-in-command of an Arctic expedition sent to look for the North-West Passage. The expedition's leader, Edward Parry, named a gulf after Liddon, and it was many years before others made better progress through the North-West Passage.

In 1827 Liddon, by then a Commander, married Ann Bilke of Blackfriars, but formerly of Weycroft. After a few years in Hampshire they moved to Colyton in 1832, where Ann died in 1849. They had four sons and six daughters. Liddon was promoted to Captain on 1 April 1856, and died at Clifton (Bristol) on 31 August 1869.

The information above comes from 'Notes on Axminster' by Major W H Wilkin (1933), which can be found in Axminster library.

RAWLIN MALLOCK (1771 TO 1854)

Rawlin Mallock was born in 1771, the son of Richard and Susan Mallock. He was a lawyer in Axminster, and was responsible for building Hill House. He also purchased the former carpet factory for £800 on 31 August 1836 following the bankruptcy of Samuel Ramson Whitty in 1835 (see below).

In 1796 he married Charlotte Sobey, and they had three sons and a daughter. Their first and third sons, James (1797 to 1846) and John Adolphus (1802 to 1831), were both surgeons, while their middle son, Thomas (1800 to 1869), was a Naval Officer, ending his career as a Commander. Their daughter, Charlotte, married Charles Bond, who also practised law in Axminster. After his wife Charlotte's death in 1808 Rawlin Mallock was re-married to Sarah Williamson of Westwater. She outlived him, dying in 1861. Their family memorial is one of the very few remaining in the churchyard surrounding Axminster church.

Litigation regarding his estate went on for at least 10 years after his death on 23 October 1854.

ABRAHAM SKINNER NEWBERY JUNIOR (1885 TO 1972)

Abraham Skinner Newbery was born on 20 January 1885, the son of a father of the same name and his wife Martha (née Thomas). They had married in 1872, and they lived at West

House on West Street, Axminster. The family included one older brother (Charles) and one younger one (Isaac).

Abraham Skinner Newbery junior married Elizabeth Margaret Newman of Misterton in 1917. They had a daughter the following year, and their son Robert (Bob), who many years later was elected Axminster's first Mayor, was born in 1920. They lived at Newenham House, King Edward Road, and Margaret died in 1953.

Abraham Skinner Newbery junior was well known in local farming circles. As well as running a dairying business involving milk collection and processing and farming at Hunthay, he was active as a cattle dealer, organising large-scale shipments of cattle by rail, notably to Sussex. At one time he was the President of the Devon Cattle Breed Society, and has a stand named after him at the Devon County Showground near Exeter. He was also a staunch conservative, and active in local affairs. He died in March 1972, and is buried at Misterton.

FRANCIS HENRY NEWBERY (1855 TO 1946)

Francis Henry (Fra) Newbery was born at Membury on 15 May 1855 to William Newbery, a shoemaker originally from Stockland, and his wife Mary (née Elliot) from Bridport. While he was still an infant his parents moved the family to Bridport, where he grew up and trained as an artist and teacher. In 1875 moved to London to teach, and in 1882 he won a scholarship to the National Art Training School (now the Royal College of Art). Three years later, at the age of 30, he became head of the Glasgow School of Art, a post that he held until 1917.

This is the institution with which he is most closely associated, and where he became an important figure in the Scottish Arts and Crafts movement, helping a group of designers including the architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh to achieve international fame. After he retired he moved back to Dorset, settling at Corfe Castle. As well as the paintings which he did when at Glasgow, he painted several works of more local interest. Some of these, featuring the town's industrial heritage, are in Bridport Town Hall, and there is also a large religious painting of his in the Sacristy of the Catholic Church at North Chideock. He died at Corfe Castle on 18 December 1946.

WILLIAM NEWBERY (1808 TO 1887)

William Newbery was born at Axminster on 2 December 1808, the eldest son of Solomon Newbery, a grocer, and his first wife Sarah (née Drower). He was a keen angler, and a noted wit and raconteur, and for many years was a close friend of George Pulman (see below).

Newbery became an accomplished landscape artist who specialised in painting local views, mainly in water colours. Examples of his work can be found hanging in Forde Abbey, and he contributed several illustrations (and many amusing anecdotes) to the third and fourth editions of George Pulman's 'The Book of the Axe'. In 'Notes on Axminster' (1934) Major W H Wilkin reports that the quality of his output varied considerably, and hints that sometimes his social life impacted adversely on the quality of his art.

He should not be confused or conflated with William Newbery (1787 to 1838) of Heathfield in Sussex, who also painted landscapes, and was a friend of Constable and Turner.

'Our' William Newbery did not marry. In his latter years he lodged on South Street with the Trott family, and he died at Axminster on 6 March 1887.

SIR JOHN WILLIAM DE LA POLE (1757 TO 1799)

John Pole was born on 26 June 1757, son of Sir John Pole and his wife Elizabeth (née Mills). He succeeded his father before his third birthday, becoming the 6th Baronet (of Shute) on 19 February 1760. His mother then died before he was 10, and he was brought up by his aunt, Elizabeth Anstis. He was educated at Blundell's school, Tiverton, and Oxford.

He married Anne Templer in 1781, and they had two sons and a daughter. In 1782/83 he served as Sheriff of Devon, and in 1788 he bought the estate of Shute and Whitford, which had been tenanted by his family for 200 years. The following year he changed the family name back to De La Pole. He bought additional land, bringing his estate up to 10,000 acres, and built an Adam style mansion at Shute. In 1791 he edited his ancestor Sir William Pole's 'Devon Collections' and bought the ruins of Colcomb Castle, where Sir William had lived, but which he did not live long enough to restore.

He took an active interest in the East Devon yeoman cavalry, and was known as an accomplished horseman. From 1790 to 1796 he served as MP for West Looe (in Cornwall), and had a reputation as a reforming liberal generally aligned with the government of William Pitt.

In 1794 he was injured when a coach in which he was riding over-turned, and he did not stand for re-election in 1796. He died on 30 November 1799, aged 42, leaving his affairs in disarray.

Both his father and his eldest son, John George, celebrated their 21st birthdays with ox roasts to which very large numbers of local people were invited, in 1754 and 1829 respectively.³

JOHN PRINCE (1643 TO 1723) (DNB)

John Prince, author of 'The Worthies of Devon,' was born at Abbey Farm, Axminster, on the site of the former Newenham Abbey. He was the eldest son of Bernard Prince and his first wife Mary (née Crocker).

Prince was related to the Drake family of Ashe, and the Duke of Marlborough's uncle, Sir John Drake, was his godfather. He matriculated from Brasenose College, Oxford in 1660, and graduated BA in 1664. His graduation coincided with non-conformists being ejected from their fellowships under the Act of Conformity of 1662, and Lord Petre (Lord of the Manor of Axminster, and a leading Catholic) tried without success to obtain for him a presentation to one of the vacancies on the Petrean foundation. He was instead ordained as a curate at Bideford, and remained there until the rector's death in 1669. His next post was at St Martin's, Exeter, where he served as curate and minister until 1675, in which year he was incorporated at Cambridge, and graduated MA from Caius College.

From Christmas 1675 until 1681 Prince served as vicar of Totnes, after which he took the living of the neighbouring parish of Berry Pomeroy. Prince's best-known work was written at this time, namely his informal and entertaining book 'The Worthies of Devon', first published in 1701. His main sources were the works of Sir William Pole, and Westcote's 'Devon'. He left a second volume in manuscript when he died, which was not published, though a second

³ Source: An article in 'The Western Antiquary' Vol.XI pages 18-21 (1893) by WHH Rogers, entitled 'Coming of Age, and Ox-Roasting in Devon'. This is accessible on-line via the archive.org website, but can be hard to find. To do so, put "w h merle" "western antiquary" into an internet search engine. An illustration of the 1829 event done by WH Merle, and etched by George Cruikshank, is held by Axminster Heritage Centre.

edition of 'The Worthies' came out in 1810, under the editorship of the publisher, Mr Rees of Plymouth.

He also published the text of some of his sermons, and at least four other documents: 'An humble defence of the Exeter Bill in Parliament for uniting the Parishes' (1674); 'A Letter to a Young Divine, with brief Directions for composing and delivering of Sermons' (1692); 'A Catechistical Exposition of the Church Catechism'; and 'Self-Murder asserted to be a very heinous Crime; with a Prodigy of Providence, containing the wonderful Preservation of a Woman of Totnes' (1709).

Prince remained at Berry Pomeroy until his death, on 9 September 1723, when he was buried in the chancel of the church, and a small tablet was placed in it to his memory. He died intestate, and letters of administration were granted to his widow, Gertrude (née Salter, 1644 to 1725).

GEORGE PHILIP RIGNEY PULMAN (1819 TO 1880) (DNB)

George Philip Rigney Pulman was born in Axminster on 21 February 1819, the son of Philip Pulman, a local clock maker, and his wife Anne (née Rigney). He lived locally all his life, writing about the area, and founding Pulman's Weekly News. In his spare time he was particularly keen on fishing the river Axe.

As a young man Pulman wrote for local newspapers, and in 1841 he published the first consolidated edition of 'The Book of the Axe' (with further and expanded editions in 1844, 1853, and 1875), with illustrations by William Newbery (see above). As well as detailing his experiences as a trout fisherman on the Axe and its tributaries, he described the whole catchment, with histories of the towns and houses to be found along its banks. In the same year (1841) he published 'The Vade-mecum of Fly-fishing for Trout' (with further editions in 1846 and 1851).

In about 1843 he collaborated with Rev William Daniel Conybeare to produce 'The Western Agriculturist: a Farmer's Magazine for Somerset, Dorset, and Devon', which sought to encourage local farmers to adopt modern ways, but did not last long. He also wrote and published several other books, some of them celebrating local dialects, and some of them under the name of John Trotandot, as well as writing songs.

From about 1839 he was the organist of Axminster Parish Church, but in 1848 he acquired a printing and bookselling business at Crewkerne, and went to live there. This led to a bitter falling-out with Rev Conybeare, who felt that he could not discharge his duties as organist properly at Axminster, and sought to freeze his salary, and to introduce an alternative candidate (Thomas Nicholas Webber: see below) as organist. However, the ratepayers refused to go along with the vicar's scheme, and after the organ had been locked up for two years, Pulman won his case for unpaid salary in court (in 1850), at which point, having made his point, he stood aside.

Soon after moving to Crewkerne, on 12 December 1848, he married Jane Ewens of Axminster (daughter of a local butter merchant), and they had one son. He won a bronze medal at the Great Exhibition of 1851 for his artificial fishing flies.

After serving as the editor of the 'Yeovil Times' for some years, on 10 March 1857 he launched 'Pulman's Weekly News and Advertiser', which soon became the best-selling paper in the 3-county area of East Devon, West Dorset and South Somerset, and provided him with a platform for promulgating his views on many subjects. Those views were often in

support of local control, and against the trend towards government control and common standards, and were often vigorously expressed, whether in person or in print.

He remained the owner and editor of 'Pulmans' until June 1878, when he sold up and retired to 'The Hermitage', Uplyme, where he died on 3 February 1880. He is buried in Axminster cemetery, where an imposing memorial was erected by his friends. An obituary can also be found in the Exeter & Plymouth Gazette of 13 February 1880.

JOHN SEYMOUR (1738 TO 1818) AND HIS SON THOMAS (1771 TO 1848)

John Seymour was born at Beaminster in 1738. By the mid-1760s he was working as a carpenter and joiner in Axminster, where he carried out work for the parish Church as well as for private clients such as the Taunton family of Purzebrook House.

Apparently frustrated by the limited opportunities available to him in Axminster, he emigrated with his family to the United States in 1784, as described on the website of the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts. After settling first in Portland, Maine in 1793 he moved to Boston. With his son, Thomas, who he had trained as a cabinet maker, John Seymour soon won some work making furniture for the growing middle classes of the city, though they made little money. Gradually Thomas in particular adapted his designs to the market, and gained a reputation as a maker of fine furniture, sold through his venture, the 'Boston Furniture Warehouse'. A mahogany clock case with crotch birch and satinwood veneers and a double lunette inlay made in Boston by Thomas Seymour in the early 1800s has stood in the Oval Office of the White House since 1975, and other Seymour furniture can be found elsewhere in the White House.⁴

The outbreak of war with Great Britain in 1812 led to anti-British sentiment, and at around the time of his father's death in 1818 Thomas Seymour gave up his own business to work as the foreman for another cabinet maker. In 1824 he quit cabinet making altogether, and spent the rest of his life in relative obscurity, dying at the age of 77 in Lunenburg, Massachusetts.

EMILY KATHLEEN (EMMY) SHEPPARD (1894 TO 1983)

Emily Kathleen (Emmy) Sheppard was born in 1894, the younger of two daughters of Sydney and Caroline Sheppard (who were originally from Bere Regis and Milverton respectively, but had moved to Axminster in about 1890). Sydney was a grocer's assistant in Axminster in both 1891 and 1901, but by 1911 he was managing a grocer's shop under his own name on South Street.

Emmy Sheppard worked as secretary to the Dawkins family, and later became the company secretary. After the Dawkins family sold their interest in the business to a Mr Burrough she continued to work there, and in 1943 she became the major shareholder. She ran the shop (still under the name Edwin Dawkins & Son) for 30 years, until in May 1973 the Dawkins shop and stock were bought by Frederick Baker of Trinity Square (though their business only lasted a further 4 years).

She was very active in local affairs, most notably as President of the Axminster Carnival organising committee. She died in 1983.

⁴ Several illustrated articles about Seymour furniture can be found on the afanews.com website. The most detailed of these can be found by putting "family's treasure" into the website's search box.

CHARLES SNELL (1872 TO 1965)

Charles Snell was a younger brother of Robert Snell (see below for the family background); 18 years his junior, and the sixth of seven sons in the family. In the early 1900s he joined Robert in the firm of Messrs R&C Snell.

Charles married Elizabeth Sarah Sutton in 1898, and they lived for many years at Newenham House, Axminster, looking straight across the Axe valley at his brother's house at Summerleaze Farm, Kilmington. Charles and Elizabeth had two sons and two daughters. In 1916 Charles bought from the last Henry Knight (see above) the title of Lord of the Manor of Axminster, which he held for 49 years.

His older son, John Sutton Snell, became an auctioneer in his own right, while his younger brother Richard (Dick) joined the family firm, and lived at Coryton Park, Kilmington.

Charles was living at Combe, Kilmington when he died in 1965.

ROBERT SNELL (1854 TO 1931)

Robert Snell was born in 1854, the third son of John Snell of Kilmington Farm (1824 to 1879) and his wife Anne (née Harris). John Snell had been born in Dalwood, the youngest in a large family. When he was growing up his father William farmed at Whitchurch Canonorum, Dorset, and it was there that John met and married Anne Harris, whose father also farmed at Whitchurch. They were married on 14 April 1853.

Robert married Joanna White Seward in 1883. They had two daughters and lived for many years at Summerleaze Farm, Kilmington. He trained as a surveyor and specialised in advising landlords and tenants on rental values and the residual values when incoming tenants took over from outgoing ones. When his younger brother Charles (see above) joined him in business, they established the firm of Messrs R&C Snell based in Axminster. In due course this merged with the business of B&J Gage, and became the pre-eminent auctioneering and estate agency business in Axminster, with branches in other nearby towns, including Bridport and Yeovil. Much of their business was based on the weekly livestock market at Axminster.

When Robert died in 1931 his executor was Arthur Benjamin Gage (see above), with whom he had worked for many years.

FRANCIS THORNHILL SWAIN (1855 TO 1932)

Francis Thornhill Swain was born in 1855, the son of Reuben and Anne Swain of Yeatlands Farm, Axminster. He had an older brother (Frederick) and two younger sisters. At the time of the 1881 census the family was farming 200 acres based on Yeatlands, and Frederick had taken over the nearby farm of Welland.

In 1885 he married Elizabeth Mary Madge from Gittisham, and in 1891 they were farming at Tolcis, adjacent to Yeatlands. They had three daughters and two sons, one of whom did not survive to adulthood, having been disabled from infancy. Tolcis had a quarry as well as an historic farm, and Francis Swain's attention was increasingly focused on the quarry. By 1901 the census return describes his as running the quarry, with the farm under the management of others.

Over the years Swain was responsible for developing the quarry at Tolcis into a fully commercial enterprise, supplying Blue Lias limestone and the top layer of the underlying

Penarth Group (Triassic) rock. The rock which was sold had a range of potential uses, as buildings stone for walls and dwellings, as well as for cement manufacture, bricks, tiles and agricultural lime. In 1907 he joined the Freemasons in Axminster, which counted amongst its members a number of builders, solicitors and other useful contacts.

By the time of the 1911 census his son (Thornhill Madge Swain) had gone to work for a firm of builder's merchants in Bideford, and in due course Francis Swain became a director of the Devon Trading Co (HQ in Barnstaple). There was a steady stream of lorries between the quarry, and the railway sidings at Axminster.

He died on 28 August 1932, still described as a resident of Tolcis House, and was survived by Elizabeth Mary.

THOMAS TAUNTON (1745 TO 1828)

Thomas Taunton was born near Bridport on 9 June 1745. His family was strongly Catholic, and had close links to the former Catholic Church at North Chideock. His father, Samuel Taunton, acted as land agent on behalf of the Arundell family (and particularly of Lady Arundell) in connection with their estates at Lanherne and Trevice in Cornwall. He (Samuel) evidently moved to Axminster in the 1740s, settling at Purzebrook House, Musbury Road. He died in 1762.

Thomas Taunton, who also qualified as an attorney, had connections to Purzebrook by 1769, and rented a substantial amount of land in and around Axminster from the Petre estate. Although he lived at Axminster, his children were all baptised at the Catholic Church at Shepton Mallet (between 1777 and 1794). There was a community of Catholic nuns at Shepton Mallet which had connections to the Clifford and Arundell families, as well as to the Knights. Although the evidence is purely circumstantial, it is possible that the Knights encouraged either Samuel or Thomas Taunton to settle in Axminster.

In 1804 Thomas Taunton was involved in a major lawsuit as a consequence of the financial difficulties of the Arundell family. This is widely described in legal textbooks and reports.

Although Thomas Taunton had three sons by his wife Margaret, they all pre-deceased him, as did Margaret (in 1822) and all but one of his daughters (Theresa) who married into the Knight family. One of his sons, John, had also practised as an attorney in Axminster, in partnership with George Smith until 1812, when the partnership was dissolved; another (Samuel) was a Captain in the South Devon militia. Thomas Taunton himself died at Axminster on 17 March 1828, and is buried at Chideock.

MICAIAH TOWGOOD (1700 TO 1792) (DNB)

Micaiah Towgood, dissenting minister, was the son of a surgeon of the same name, and grandson of Matthew Towgood, a dissenting minister from Wiltshire. He was born at Axminster on 17 December 1700, but left the town to get his education. Most of the information below comes from 'A Sketch of the Life and Writings of the Rev Micaiah Towgood' (by James Manning, 1792, accessible on-line), which was also the main source used to compose his entry in the Dictionary of National Biography.

In 1717 he entered the Taunton Academy (a training college for Presbyterian preachers, and fore-runner of the Western Academy). On leaving the Academy he became the minister of the large Presbyterian congregation at Moretonhampstead, where he was ordained on 22 August 1722, and then devoted himself systematically to pastoral work.

On 25 August 1723 he married Mary, the daughter of James Hawker of Luppitt, by whom he had four children. At Christmas 1736 he accepted an invitation from the non-conformist congregation at Crediton to become their minister, which post he filled from January 1737.

Whilst at Crediton he wrote a series of controversial publications which culminated in his 'Dissenting Gentleman's Letters' (1746/48) which made his reputation, and was long considered a classic compendium of non-conformist argument. Among his other publications written at this time were 'High-flown Episcopal and Priestly Claims Examined' (1737); 'The Dissenter's Apology' (1739); 'Spanish Cruelty and Injustice' (1741); 'Recovery from Sickness' (1742); 'Afflictions Improved' (1743); and 'An Essay ... of the Character and Reign of King Charles the First' (1748).

In 1749 Towgood, together with his first cousin Stephen Towgood (son of his father's elder brother, also Stephen, who was the second pastor of the Axminster independent congregation), became pastor of James's Meeting House, Exeter. The position was influential, and the duties were light and shared with the Meeting House at Bow; the four ministers preaching in rotation at the two places.

In 1760, a year after the death of his wife Mary, Towgood's congregation left James's Meeting House for the newly built George's Meeting House in South Street. In the same year he took part in the establishment of the new Exeter Academy, where he led the department of biblical exegesis. That institution lasted till the death (in December 1771) of its divinity tutor, Samuel Merivale. While at Exeter Towgood published 'The Baptism of Infants' (1750); 'Serious and Free Thoughts on ... the Church' (1755); and 'The Grounds of Faith in Jesus Christ' (1784). He died on 1 February 1792.

LADY EMMA LOUISA TULLOCH (1819 TO 1903)

After the death of her husband, Lady Emma Louisa Tulloch bought Old Park, on Lyme Road. She subsequently gave the land and funds to allow both Woodbury school and chapel to be built, and she remained at Old Park until her death in 1903.

She had been born at Hull in 1819, the youngest daughter of Sir William Hyde Pearson and his wife Elizabeth Jane. In 1844 she married Alexander Murray Tulloch, a well-known reforming Army officer, and a pioneer of the use of medical statistics to demonstrate the debilitating effects of tropical diseases on European troops. He reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 1844, then Colonel in 1854 and Major General in 1859. Late in life he acted as a commissioner in the investigations into the Crimean war. He was created a KCB not long before his death in 1864.

THOMAS WAKLEY (1795 TO 1862) (DNB*)

Thomas Wakley, medical campaigner and radical politician, was born at Membury on 11 July 1795, the youngest son of Henry Wakley of Land Farm and his wife Mary (née Minifie). After attending the grammar schools at Chard, Honiton, and Wiveliscombe, he was apprenticed to a Taunton apothecary, and then to surgeons at Beaminster and Henley-on-Thames.

In 1815 he enrolled at the united schools of St Thomas's and Guy's, known as the Borough Hospitals, which is where most of his medical knowledge was gained. However, he also attended a private school of anatomy to enable him to qualify for membership of the Royal College of Surgeons. In 1819, with the assistance of Joseph Goodchild, a London merchant and governor of St Thomas's Hospital, he bought a practice on Regent Street. On 5 February 1820 he married Goodchild's daughter Elizabeth. Just over 6 months later he was

grievously assaulted, and his house burnt to the ground. His assailants were never traced, and his insurance company at first refused to honour his claim on the grounds that he had destroyed his own house. When he went to court, however, he was awarded his claim in full, with costs. Even so, his medical practice had evaporated during his enforced convalescence.

At around this time Wakley met William Cobbett, the campaigning radical and journalist, who helped to open his eyes to the nepotism and jobbery prevalent among leading surgeons. In 1823 he founded the 'Lancet', with the object of spreading emerging best medical practice throughout the country. As a sideline he used it to expose the family intrigues that influenced the appointments in the metropolitan hospitals and medical corporations, and to comment directly on cases which he regarded as medical malpractice. Not surprisingly, this repeatedly put Wakley in conflict with the medical establishment.

In 1828 he described one singularly unsuccessful operation at Guy's Hospital in which it was stated that the practitioner concerned was a "... surgeon because he was [a] nephew". The resultant libel trial found against Wakley, but awarded the plaintiff damages so small that the effect was to support Wakley's main contention. His legal expenses were met by public subscription.

Wakley also campaigned for the abolition of the rule which made it compulsory for medical students to attend the lectures of the hospital surgeons, unless they obtained certificates from the professors of anatomy and surgery in the universities of Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen. His case was that this excluded from teaching many of the best anatomists, to the disadvantage of both students and their future patients. This campaign attracted considerable support, not just from country surgeons. Despite obtaining a favourable order in Parliament, the entrenched power of the medical establishment was too great for Wakley's proposed reforms to succeed.

His response to this set-back was to stand as a candidate for election (having previously supported campaigns to extend the franchise), and after defeats in 1832 and 1834 he was elected MP for Finsbury in 1835. His forcible eloquence and knowledge of medical matters gained him considerable influence in Parliament, and several small victories. He was particularly concerned with reform of forensic medicine, public health, and other medical issues. He also became a regular butt of satirical comment in the newly-founded 'Punch' magazine. Although he retired from Parliament in 1852, the Medical Act of 1858 clearly showed his influence, even though he remained critical of some aspects of it.

In 1851 the 'Lancet' turned its attention to analyses of food-stuffs, resulting in a campaign against adulteration of food. In 1855 a parliamentary committee was appointed to look into the matter, which led to the Adulteration Act of 1860, and eventually to the Sale of Foods and Drugs Acts of 1875 and 1879.

Not content with the roles of campaigning journalist and MP, Wakley had since 1839 held the post of elected coroner for West Middlesex. He had been prompted to this move by his dissatisfaction at the way that lawyers conducted inquests, particularly when officials or powerful persons were involved. Under such circumstances inquests were sometimes moved behind closed doors or not held at all, and evidence was suppressed. Both in his own Coroner's Court, and in Parliament, Wakley campaigned to re-invent the office of the coroner as an open, democratic, and medically competent institution; and to raise the status of coroner's juries. These campaigns and interventions aroused considerable opposition, and he was accused of holding too many inquests, including cases involving deaths in prisons,

asylums, workhouses and the armed forces. Among those who supported his reforms was Charles Dickens.

Wakley was widowed in 1857, and died while visiting the island of Madeira, on 16 May 1862. He was buried at Kensal Green cemetery. Two of his three sons took active roles in the running of the 'Lancet'.

THOMAS NICHOLAS WEBBER (1814 TO 1905)

Thomas Nicholas Webber was born at Exeter on 27 April 1814, where he learned to play the organ, and where the high quality of his playing was recognised. In 1835 Axminster Church got a new organ, and he was appointed as the organist. However he must have left before long, because from about 1839 George Philip Rigney Pulman (see above) was the organist at Axminster.

In 1843 Webber married the slightly older Catherine Jerrard of Axmouth, and they had at least three daughters and a son. For many years she ran a school in Buckland House on South Street, Axminster where he taught music.

In 1848 Rev William Daniel Conybeare sought to re-appoint Webber to the position of organist at Axminster, but the ratepayers refused to go along with this, and voted heavily in favour of Pulman, even though he had by then moved to Crewkerne. In 1850 Pulman won his case in court, and Webber was belatedly appointed.

By the time he retired in 1903 it was said that he had played the organ at Axminster for 60 years, but quite how this number was calculated was not explained. The report in Pulmans Weekly News of 24 February 1903 reckoned that made him the oldest organist in England. Catherine died on 26 January 1888, but he lived until 17 June 1905.

THOMAS WHITTY SENIOR (1713 TO 1792)

Thomas Whitty was baptised at Axminster on 14 May 1713 to a father of the same name, his father being an Axminster tanner and mercer. His mother was reportedly from the Braddock family of Lyme Regis, possibly called Sarah. In 1731 he was apprenticed to Samuel Ramson, a clothier who lived and worked on South Street.

On 26 November 1739 he married Sarah Ramson. She was identified in the marriage register as Mrs Sarah Ramson. Although this might normally suggest that she was a widow, she is described elsewhere as the only daughter of Samuel Ramson and his second wife, Eleanor, who had previously been married to Daniel Harvey, another Axminster clothier. Thomas and Sarah Whitty had 12 children, of whom six survived to adulthood, including their eldest son Thomas (see below).

In 1755 Thomas established his carpet factory (see the section of the axminsterheritage.org website devoted to him and his carpets for further information). Having written a memoir of his own life, dated 16 April 1790, he died on 13 August 1792, and was buried at the Congregational Church on Chard Street (though the burial is recorded in the register for St Mary's Church of England church). His will was proved on 16 September 1793.

THOMAS WHITTY JUNIOR (1740 TO 1799) AND HIS TWO SONS

Thomas Whitty, eldest son of Thomas Whitty senior (see above) was born in 1740. He worked with his father in the family carpet-making business, but also started a banking

business. On 2 January 1772 he married Susanna Collier at Chardstock, and they had 11 children, including sons called Thomas and Samuel Ramson. Thomas Whitty junior only survived his father by 7 years, dying at the age of 59 in August 1799 (his burial, on 30 August is recorded in the register for St Mary's Church of England church).

His sons Thomas (c.1775 to 1810) and Samuel Ramson (1784 to 1855) took over the running of the business, but the third Thomas (who married Susanna Daw of Newport, Hampshire on 28 October 1802) died aged just 34 (his will was not proved until 28 July 1810), leaving Samuel Ramson Whitty in sole charge of the family business.

In 1809 he formed a partnership with James Blatch of Winterbourne and Samuel Devenish of Codford St Mary (Wiltshire), who appears to have been his brother-in-law, to lease a fulling mill at Quidhampton (just outside Wilton, near Salisbury). Unfortunately this was not a success: it was alleged that the water supply proved inadequate just 3 years later, though other records show that the mill continued working thereafter.

On 16 April 1812 Samuel Ramson Whitty married Sarah Luck Conder at St John's, Hackney. Their son Thomas Ramson Whitty, who later moved to Nottingham, was born right at the end of the following year.

The carpet factory fire, its rebuilding and Samuel Ramson Whitty's subsequent bankruptcy (in 1835) are dealt with in the section of the axminsterheritage.org website devoted to carpet making. Sarah died on 2 February 1839, and Samuel Ramson Whitty worked as an insurance agent in Axminster for many years, before he in turn died on 11 April 1855. His will, which is accessible via the Devon Heritage Centre, shows that he did not recover his fortune in the 20 years before his death.