

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP

Notes from a promenade around the Newton graveyard

The Pasmore family was the fascinating subject of one of the family sagas recounted at the “Graveyard Promenade” meeting of the History Group on 14th July.

Four generations of Pasmores had close links with Newton St Cyres and are buried in the churchyard. Pasmore HQ was a house that is known today as Newcombes, but the Pasmores called it Norton House (not the same property as the present-day Norton House). For those of you who aren't familiar with the



Newcombes, formerly Norton House

area, it's located about a mile north-east of the Beer Engine and is close to the lovely thatched property called Churchills.

The Pasmores lived at Norton for about 90 years from around 1806 to 1899, after Thomas Pasmore acquired the estate when he married his first wife Mary Martyn. In the two months before the wedding, Mary's father and 16-year-old brother both died, so it must have been an emotional time for the family. Mary's brother is buried here, but not her father.

The estate comprised about 42 acres that Thomas farmed along with 70 acres of leasehold land in Upton Pyne parish. He was a capable farmer and made sound investments, finding the time to bring up eight children with Mary (two other children died in infancy). Mary died aged 36 in 1823, soon after the birth of her youngest child, and Thomas married Dorothy Pring three years later. Dorothy died just seven years after the marriage.

Thomas seems to have been a respected member of the local community. Newspapers of the time show that he entered Norton House estate in a ploughing match in 1839 and his man won top prize in one of the categories. The annual ploughing match, and the associated dinner seems to have been an important social event and a chance for all the influential members of the community to get together, deliver speeches and sing! (Editor's note: This year's ploughing match takes place on 19th September at Creedy Barton, Shobrooke.)

Through the marriage settlements of his daughters and, after his death, via his will, Thomas provided for all his children equally, making no distinction between sons and daughters. He died in 1858 aged 74.

About a month after Thomas' death, his son John married Elizabeth ("Bessie") Wilcocks, and they stayed on at Norton House after buying out John's brothers and sisters. They had just one child, a son called Martyn Wilcocks Pasmore, who was born in 1859. Like his father, John participated in the annual ploughing matches and also sat on a committee seeking to introduce steam power to agriculture in Devon. He made a significant donation to the building fund for the Albert Museum in Exeter, and volunteered for the Tiverton Volunteer Rifle Corps, which became part of today's Territorial Army.

Sadly, John had a fatal accident when he was just 49, as he was preparing to go out rabbit shooting. A faulty shotgun that he had been cleaning in the house went off. A report of the inquest into his death appeared in newspapers of the time. His widow Bessie stayed on at Norton House with their 11-year-old son. She died in 1884 aged 65 and is buried with her husband in the churchyard.

Martyn Wilcocks Pasmore lived at Norton House until his death, though censuses suggest that he employed others to farm the estate, describing himself as living on his own means. By Martyn's time, the Agricultural Depression was having a devastating effect on farming, as cheap grain imports flooded in from the US. His unmarried cousin Charles, a chemist, came to live with him some time before 1891, and he is buried here.

Martyn was an active and highly-regarded member of the local community. He was the elected representative of the parish on the Crediton Board of Guardians, a committee that oversaw Crediton Workhouse. In 1891, he purchased Stone Farm in Thorverton and donated a small piece of land for the building of a chapel. He was a member of the Crediton Highway Board and a churchwarden here at the church. When Newton St Cyres Parish Council was formed, Martyn was elected as vice-chair at the first meeting in 1895, and he continued to play an active role for several years.

In 1897, Martyn married a Canadian poet called Melvina "Birdie" Copp, and the couple had a son called Hubert in 1898. But, tragically, just two years after his marriage to Birdie, Martyn died in Ilfracombe after a short illness. He was 40 years of age. The death certificate records the cause of his death as 'acute mania, heart failure'. His obituary describes him as having been 'of a genial disposition, an enthusiastic sportsman and a generous friend of the poor'. A very moving account of his well-attended funeral appeared in the newspapers of the time.

Hubert, the son of Martyn and Birdie was brought up in Canada by his mother and became a well-respected aviation specialist. He returned to England and served in the First World War, becoming an instructor with the Royal Flying Corps (later part of the RAF). On returning to Canada, he became one of the most accomplished bush pilots and one of Canada's first airmail pilots, flying to remote parts the country with few navigational aids.

He later joined an aircraft manufacturing company called Fairchild Aircraft Ltd, becoming company president in 1933 and MD in 1934. He supervised the design and manufacture of the first Canadian-built plane with a metal-skinned fuselage (the Super 71,



Hubert Pasmore with his children Godfrey, Penelope and Pamela

later the F82). Hubert is said to have had exceptional leadership qualities and was able to motivate and inspire those who worked with him.

After World War 2, he diversified the company and set up Fairchild Homes to address the post-war housing shortage by producing prefabricated homes. Sadly, a shortage of components such as fridges and bathroom suites led to issues with supply, which resulted in cash flow problems, and Hubert retired in 1948 aged 50. A biography of Hubert is the subject of a fascinating YouTube video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1DOMznlbEI)

Hubert was married twice and had three children. He died in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1998, just a few months short of his 100th birthday. His second wife, Diana, brought his ashes back to Newton St Cyres – surprising the present owner of Newcombes when she knocked on the door! The ashes are buried in the churchyard with his father, Martyn.

The “Graveyard Promenade” was probably Brian Please’s last meeting of the History Group, and we are grateful to him for his invaluable contributions to our work. We wish him every happiness in his new home near Hereford.

Researched by Clare Wright and Midge Kelly