

## YESTERDAY'S EXMOOR by Hazel Eardley-Wilmot.

Challacombe extracts.

Boundary p19-20

Prior to the Commonwealth, Exmoor Forest was a Royal one. Under Cromwell, Exmoor was bought by a London merchant of Dutch origin, one James Boevey. He was a thrusting little man, much given to law suits. Being owner, not tenant, he immediately built himself a mansion at Simonsbath, and from this lonely centre he began suing his neighbours.

He was claiming areas of Exmoor beyond the old Forest boundaries, and demanding tithes from the occupants.

As plaintiff, Boevey called seventy three witnesses, many of them from Devon parishes, especially North Molton, High Bray and Challacombe, but they distinguished between Forest and commons as confidently as the defence did. Some said that it had always been understood that the Forest lay in Somerset; this, if true, destroyed Boevey's claims to any Devon tithes - and it had been true for many centuries. A Challacombe man who had been employed by the Warden's agent to claim tithes from two Lynton farmers, David and Thomas Dyer, reported that they had set out their tithe wools and said whoever had a right to it might take it - and the Rector's agent did so. Witnesses added that several Challacombe parishioners had in recent years paid tithes to the Warden *and* the Rector, 'to avoid law-suits'.

Strong evidence came too from those who remembered men being found dead in different parts of the moor. The crux was who had been responsible for burying them. Henry Fray of Challacombe said that 'fifty years ago an unknown person was found dead on Challacombe Common, and was buried in Challacombe churchyard at the cost of the parish.'

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p130-1-2?

Oxen Ploughing in Challacombe

At Swincombe Farm, Challacombe, on the western border of the Forest, family memories go back a long way. Jack Huxtable, who retired from farming in the 1980's, and his brother George, recount what their father heard from an old countryman, Richard Jones, who had ploughed in Challacombe with draught-oxen when he was young. Early in the morning, he said, three pairs of the Red Devon steers would be herded quietly into a paddock near the road, yoked and led to the field. Then one man with a long goad piloted them on a straight course, encouraging them by name all the way, while another steadied the plough. Names the old man recalled were

Fortune, Beauty, Honey, Speedwell, Good Luck, Pretty Boy and Flower.

A similar memory handed down for three generations at Knighton Farm, Withypool, was that the ploughman had a kind of *chant*, in which all the names were used. Harry Reed, the farmer telling me this in 1950, could only call two lines to mind:

Good Luck come and Merry  
Pretty, Sparl and Cherry.

He explained that the use of names was essential. The owners chose names that would 'run well together', and if a bullock died, the newcomer must have the same name, or one that would slip equally easily into the verse. 'Whether it kep'm (sic) in a good temper, or whether they walked to the rhythm, I don't know. I don't know how the oxen got to know their names, but all the names had to be in- and that chanting was the essential thing.

According to Lionel Huxtable (Jack's son) the field by the road was the one west of Barton Gate cottages and more or less opposite the Old Smithy.

George Huxtable wrote about Ox Ploughing and droving in the Western Morning News 24<sup>th</sup> March 1983.

### Oxen Droving

p131-2

The Red Devons made very good meat, when their few years at the yoke were over. Richard Jones described how he helped to take a drove of 300 from several Challacombe farms to Blackwater Fair, nine miles from London, where they were all sold. For field work they would have been shod lightly - on both sides of the cloven hoof in front, because the shoulders were taking the half-shoes weight, but the hind feet outside only, or not at all. For long journeys all four feet might have on the outer side only allowing for splay. On the three weeks walk by primitive roads from Challacombe to Blackwater, the 300, divided into three equal groups for easier handling, were attended by a farrier, with his tools slung over a pack-horse's back, and at the evening halt he shod or re-shod any beast which might otherwise go lame. After the fair it took the Challacombe drover just a week to walk home. Recalling it all, long afterwards, he said they had passed close to 'one of the seven wonders' (Stonehenge, lonely and impressive, beside the ancient track). And he regretted that when he was so near London he had not 'been in to see it'. (Exmoor people until two or three generations ago said that if you had once been to London, you wouldn't die a fool).

Challacombe extracts continued.

### Droving horses to Bampton Fair p183

Journeys from Challacombe with about forty [ponies] are remembered after three or four generations. The ponies, unshod, could trot peacefully along the lanes through Simonsbath and nearly to Exford, then southward to Comer's Gate. But between there and Dulverton stretched Winsford Hill, open moorland where the Acland ponies grazed, and if the herds mingled out there it would be very difficult to separate them. So the drovers behaved as in pony gathering - surrounded their animals and galloped them across, one rider ahead, one behind, and two at each side to head off any escape. After Mounsey Hill gate, lanes led them easily to Bampton, and a night's food and rest before the sale.

### Lime Kiln in Challacombe p164

In the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century lime carts were far the commonest traffic on Exmoor roads. Carters would leave the farms early in the morning, in their horse-drawn butts, to fetch burnt lime from distant kilns. A few of these were inland; there were pockets of limestone, and at Exford and Challacombe the kilns were built near them. At Challacombe the soft rock of the quarry mouth collapsed one day, and a young carter was trapped inside with his horse and butt. A small hole let in air and light, and he could have crawled out through it, but he had to wait and mind the horse while the fall was cleared from outside. A later and worse collapse, luckily at night, put an end to these workings.

The Friendship Inn and Lime Transport p165-6

[Fetching lime from Combe Martin via Blackmore (sic) Gate]. The old ridgeway along Bratton Down became the 'Liming Road'. Where the Challacombe road leaves it, the old Friendship Inn, now a farmhouse, had and still has a little window through its eastern wall, at about shoulder height from the road. This was the carters' bar; they could pay their pence and drain their tankards without letting go of the horses' reins.

Snowstorm at Friendship Inn p166

It is a high and exposed corner (Friendship Corner). Once a young farmer returning home to Challacombe was caught there by a sudden snowstorm, and when he turned east into the blizzard he could see nothing at all. Drifts hid road and hedge alike. All he could do was crouch down in his butt for shelter and leave the horse to find the way home - which it did.

Lime Road through Challacombe p147

The westward route, turning north along the 'Liming Road' at Friendship Inn was not made good until Frederick Knight (of Simonsbath) bargained with Challacombe parish council? [vestry] for a road from his boundary. Once that was in use, the tenant of Driver regularly took a three-horse waggon along it to fetch his lime from Combe Martin.

Enclosures p155-6

South-west of the Forest, in very different country to the Somerset coastal strip, the outstanding change came in mid-century, with the enclosure of the commons. The Challacombe commons, close to Fortescue farms, were apportioned in 1862, and Shoulsbury Castle not until ten years after that. 'Now the moor can only be seen from this distance, the heather has disappeared, all has been fenced in, and wide roads have taken the place of the packhorse tracks'. (The Rev J.F. Chanter, Rector of Parracombe, end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The loss of the commons was the cottagers' and small farmers' loss. For centuries they had had some ploughing rights, and were entitled to graze a few animals out on the common, and to cut peat or turf for fuel. More than two dozen cottages in Challacombe held these common rights. The commons formed much of the greater part of the parish, so the apportionment in lieu of rights might be a

couple of acres in a remote corner, too far away to be worth enclosing. A new pattern of life had to be devised.

#### Water Wheels p196

[Speaking of mid C19th] Some of the water wheels ceased work, but their great wheels were seldom wasted; they were taken away and used elsewhere. (One which drove farm machinery at the Glebe in Challacombe was not required there when the rector stopped farming, and it was removed to Lower Hole In Brayford. Not long ago its owners relinquished it to Hudley Mill, Charles, where it is now used to generate electricity.

#### Milk production & 1930's problems p219

[1930's] Farmers were paid very little for beef or mutton. In the higher hills lambs sold for only a few shillings; the lime starved pastures could not fatten them. Then in 1937, a 50% liming subsidy was a great relief. Old quarries and kilns were reopened, old skills retrieved, and gradually the arable land and some of the better leys were refertilised. Meanwhile many farmers had gone over to milk production. When a firm from the Torridge valley began collecting milk from Challacombe, in the 1930's, nearly every farmer in the parish jumped at the chance to sell. Though the payment offered, in summer, was only 5d or 6d a gallon, that was more profitable than other dairy work.

#### School Transport p221

Each village was its own little world, and most of the children would belong to it all their lives and never forget the schooldays they shared. Some of them would go on to secondary school, extending the moorland friendships further. Two girls from Simonsbath, farmers' daughters, were sent as termly boarders to Barnstaple because it was so far away. Somebody would drive them in the pony and trap to Blackmoor Gate, where they climbed into the slow good-tempered train from Lynton. 'So slow, we used to say we could pick flowers on the way!' Others from Challacombe, went daily by school car to Bratton Fleming, and hence on to Barnstaple Grammar School by that same train.

#### Squatting Rights p195

If between sunset and sunrise a landless man, working on common ground with the help of family or friends, could erect something with four walls and a roof, and all important - 'a chimbley smoking', and could call four witnesses, he was entitled to keep it. The hearth made it a home; details could come later. At Challacombe in the 1850's, on a boundary up against Pixy Rocks, one Joe Nicholls tried to give himself longer by beginning in foggy weather and using the rock face as one wall, but the mist cleared and he was stopped. It was probably his last bid for independence; later his name appeared on the poor-house roll.

#### Radworthy p166 & 195

Times changing in the 1880's; mines failed, shepherds' cots were going and so were remote farmsteads like Radworthy in Swincombe, where Saxons had

farmed an isolated patch of good ground before Domesday, and later field boundaries still show clearly on the hillside. Its last inhabitant, John Harris, moved away to a cottage in the village in the 1860's, leaving the walls to crumble and the beeches of the garden hedge to grow into fine tall trees. He was not the only farmer to be forced out by financial cramp.

Additional information on Radworthy can be found in Roger A. Burton's *The Heritage of Exmoor* p25-26

Driver p240 note 10.

The C19th farm name Driver may preserve a hint of a dry ford. In the C17th Drye and Dryslade are recorded three times as lying in the south-west of the forest; 'a way leading from Brayford to Drye', entered at Moles Chamber and must have been the old bridle path. By the C18th the Forest books were calling the grazing areas Drysale and Dreford or Dryford; perhaps when the Knight farm was carved out, the name Driver was a protest against the idea of a dry ford.

*Slade* in Saxon means valley.

*Dru/dry* are variants on a widespread Indo-European word for tree, especially oak. In the *Exmoor Review* 1983 she goes into this. See also Snell's 'A Book of Exmoor' 1903, where the writer was shown bog oak found in deep peat nearby=ancient forest.

Whitefield p18 & note 12, p238

A Robert de Whitering contributed 12d levy for Edward III's subsidy for Calais and Crecy expedition. Said that a Roger de Whitefield paid only 8d-perhaps from Challacombe's Whitefield Barton (or its namesake in High Bray).

Old Words p161

A cluster of names at Swincombe near Challacombe, used long after their meaning was forgotten, tells of Saxon farmers working against the odds; Yarbury Combe, Armeshead, and Woodbarrow Arms come from the Old English *earm*, poor or wretched, and so does Airey field which the Huxtables who have farmed there for nearly two hundred years call 'Starvation Field'. Yelland Cross, nearby is the crossroads on *eald* land, old land, and the permanent pastures at Swincombe Farm, before improvement 'were like a pot-bound plant'. Challacombe=cold valley, rising to 1500? Feet. Sheep and cattle were grazed here in bad times or good.

The Huxtable Family & Emigration. p168-70

In 1851 James Huxtable with his second wife and six children set off for North America. He was one of a family of eight, five of them boys. In 1856 James wrote 'I can truly say that I consider it very fortunate that I came to America, as I could never have done for my family in England what I can here; we have to work hard, but we enjoy the fruits of our labours'. They came in a sailing vessel which took five weeks to cross as it was blown from its course and was among icebergs two weeks off the coast of Labrador.

Another Nonconformist Challacombe family, the Piles, dispersed at the end of the sixties. By 1878 one son, John, was farming in Wisconsin, and two, Philip and James were in Australia. Now their 94 year old mother was bedridden in a Union workhouse living on 2/6 a week. John in a letter to Philip speaks of his Methodist Devonian neighbours in the New World, including a Dallyn from Buscombe, his wife from Bratton and Richard Huxtable from Brayford.

#### Challacombe Mill p203

In 1852 Richard Huxtable retired and sold up at the Mill. He had on the list: Mill gear (including a cast iron Water Wheel), Iron Pot and Boilers, 2 Brass Kettles, Milk Scalders, Copper Tea Kettle, Salters and Trundles and 2 Cheese Presses.

#### Blackmoor Gate p50

The original gateway was south of the present one, where the Loxhore road now crosses the South Molton to Combe Martin road. This led on to an ancient track that went up to Chapman Barrows and on over the barrow studded ridge to Exe Head.

#### The Acland Arms at Moles Chamber p166-7

Another lonely inn, not built until after the sale of the Royal Forest in 1819 was the Acland Arms at Moles Chamber, where the Lynton-South Molton road (county boundary at this point) joined the tracks from Dulverton, Barnstaple and Porlock. It had a bad reputation, and its border position was attractive, it is believed, to smugglers, because of the easy escape from either county's police, but law-abiding carters young and old, returning with laden butts from the coast used it too. They would need a pause and a drink on their day long journey; they 'had just about time for supper and bed before starting out again', said the grandson of one of them. All the journeys began very early in the morning; from Challacombe it was at three o'clock and, said my informant grimly, 'the carter had got to be there'. Liming came to a halt in the 1880's. Vigorous temperance movements also meant less demand for inns in the Forest and hence the Acland Arms lost its custom and its ill fame, and became a farmhouse. Later it was abandoned.

#### Moles Chamber-Telling House p24-8

Another kind of misdemeanour is recorded of one Anthony Jennings. On a June day in 1677 John Sloley of High Bray was with Boevey's agent at the top of Melcombe Hill, near Moles Chamber and just outside the boundary, 'in the King's highway leading from the Forest to South Molton' (from Lynton) when he met Jennings 'with persons unknown', driving a large flock of sheep. The agent tried to stop the flock of sheep so that Sloley could count them, and 'notwithstanding interruption by the said persons, this deponent told 16 score and upwards. What became of them afterwards or where they were shorn, he knows not but he has heard they came from Woolhanger'. It was supposed that Jennings was trying to avoid paying for their summer keep in the north of the Forest.

Consequently telling houses were erected at convenient points to count sheep entering or leaving the Forest.

Day and Masters, mapping Somerset in 1782, showed another telling house beside the Barnstaple bridle path which entered the Forest at Moles Chamber and crossed the Barle at Driver on its way to Exe Head and Porlock. This one seemed lost, but a North Devon farmer recently recalled his father had spoken of sheep being parted 'somewhere near Moles Chamber'. Long search for it failed, until Roger Burton, doing fieldwork for his Heritage of Exmoor 1989, found a convincing little ruin much further along the path towards Driver than anyone had supposed, on a ridge where the hill begins to drop towards the Barle valley, and opens a wide view of the southern slope of the Chains. The grass-grown footing of stone like the nearby outcrop is interrupted by an entrance facing north-east, the direction from which agisted sheep would come homeward for shearing. The position is ideal.

#### Telling House at Yelland Cross p27

There seems to have been other telling houses outside the Forest.... The position of another survives in the name 'Telling House Field' at Yelland Cross, west of Challacombe.

#### Mediaeval Tracks across the Moor.

Track 1 Pilton to Combwich via Exe Head.

Similar to Track C: Loxhore-Blackmoor Gate-Chapman Barrows-Exe Head. (Here it met another track coming from the Barle). This time she worked out that it continued on undrained land on West Pinford. The track from the ridge went down past Blackpits and kept along the contour, above the combe heads, to the site of the later Larkbarrow farmhouse. Then, probably crossing Chalk Walk at Three Combes Foot, it climbed back to Black Barrow and went on by Periam's Way to join the old highway from the Brendons (which she considers to be the Harepath) at Hawkcombe Head.

Her evidence for this is (a) In 1628 Hugh de Wichehalse, leaving Barnstaple for Lynton in a time of plague, tried going via [the old] Blackmoor Gate and then an easier way via Parracombe, but this branch ended at Parracombe. The other branch went right over the top, past the various barrows to Exehead. She found evidence of this in a journey in the 1820's taken by John Clarke. But shortly after this the moorland track was lost. She found some two miles of its course, including a length of old rutted road and then a ditched pathway like a dry bank, out on West Pinford in undrained land.

#### Track 2 Lynton-South Molton via Moles Chamber.

A road which then becomes a lane, a track, then a path runs direct from Lynton via Barbrook and Woodbarrow to Moles Chamber. This 5 mile stretch passes Shallowford and Saddle Gate, where the Saddle Stone is a three-parish meare stone. Beyond Woodbarrow it passes the Twizzlemark Stone, now immured in an enclosure bank. Then it goes through Broadmead where some of the lesser meare stones which preceded the fence can still be seen. Then for a short distance road and boundary part, the road going west of the boundary and its marker, the Edgerley Stone, curving round a stream head (which both avoid) and

climbing Roosthitchen to rejoin the boundary at Broadbarrow Stone. At Lewcombe an unimpressive but named meare stone almost in the stream bed is another three parish boundary.

At Moles Chamber the road turned left along the southern ridgeway, and climbed with it for a little way, but at the top of the steep, when the boundary went straight on to Setta Barrow, the north-south road curved away to the right, along the sunny side of the hill. (Hereabouts Anthony Jennings was caught driving his flock from Woolhanger, to escape grazing dues, in 1677). After rounding the boggy stream head east of Whitefield Down it swung south into Devon, down through pastures enclosed in the C19th, and across another long medieval road at Yarde Down Cross near the Telling House. The ghost of it can sometimes be seen on the slope, in slanting sunlight when the grass is short, and south of Molland Cross there are signs of a wider driveway on either side of the modern South Molton road.

#### Track 3 Barnstaple-Hawkcombe Head (& Porlock/Coast)

This follows ancient track A: Barnstaple-Bratton Fleming-Leworthy-Fullaford Cross-Moles Chamber. At this point it differed, by striking east along the clear tracks at Moles Chamber, crossing the Barle, and then continued towards Exe Head past Driver. From here it would follow the course of Track 1 to Hawkcombe Head and thence to the coast.

#### Track 4 Dunster-Barnstaple.

The main diagonal route across the moor. This route is described by John Leyland on his way home from Bridgwater to Barnstaple in the 1540's. Dunster - just short of Timberscombe, taking the right fork which goes up through Snowdrop Valley. It joined the present B3224 at Blagdon Cross, and more or less followed its course to Simonsbath, where it turned right following close to the present South Molton road as far as Kinsford Cross. The road downhill from here was east of today's road; it was the hollow way past the Telling House, and onward behind the Poltimore Arms to the convergence of the massive Beara hedgewith the modern highway to Brayford. From there it followed the present road to Barnstaple, but at Stone Cross (near Gunn) the most direct route to Barnstaple would be to take the lane down to Sandick-Harford-Four Oak Cross on the old A361 and so to Barnstaple.

#### Track 4A Dunster-Bampton.

Where the track above forked right before Timberscombe, this route went through the village, and then took the old ridge road to Bampton, still there and metalled all the way.

#### Track 4B Exford-South Molton (a branch off Track 4 above)

Crossing west over the Exe (by a small wooden bridge) at Exford, an old lane between high hedges leads straight up to Chibbet Cross, avoiding the present sharp bend on the metalled road. From here, the present road to Landacre Bridge was followed (the bridge was already old in 1610). From the bridge the road is

now metalled all the way past Sandyway, and on to North Molton. From North Molton the older ridge road would have been used to South Molton. The people of Williton and Carhampton paid for the upkeep of Landacre Bridge, underlining how important this route must have been to them.

Track 5 Porlock-Winsford Hill-Ansteys & Beyond.

This included the ancient track from Porlock to Pittcombe Head. Following the Harepath until the turning to Alderman's Barrow (E) then linking with (F) over Winsford Hill and on.

Track 6 Dunster-Bridgwater-the present A39.

This was in use for wheeled traffic in 1422, and may have been a Saxon link. It is also covered by much of ancient track D.

Track 7 Oldways End-Chulmleigh & Cornwall

See ancient track G.

Track A: Five Crosses (Anstey) to Five Crosses (Fullaford) near Challacombe. Part of the Combwich-Barnstaple route.

This follows the metalled roads from Anstey's Five Crosses-Sandyway-Kinsford Gate-Moles Chamber-Fullaford Cross. From there it continues on clear modern roads from Leworthy via Bratton Fleming to the Taw. An obvious ridge route with lots of antiquities along the way. The two five crosses, the meeting of so many roads in open country signifies great age.

Track B: E/W Buckland-Combe Martin

Again this is now nearly all metalled roads. It incorporates the modern road over Bratton Down, but at the south end went straight on where the present road bends before its descent towards Brayford. This old road goes on more or less straight to the Bucklands. A few miles northwards beyond Blackmoor Gate, the old road would have turned to the right at Coulsworthy and taken the ridge road down to Combe Martin.

This crosses Track A at Fourways Cross (by the Steam Railway). It is a clear straight line all the way, avoiding steep hills. Above the Bucklands it passes three barrows on Stoodleigh Down and an Iron Age fort at Mockham Down.

Track C: Barnstaple/Loxhore-Exe Head.

This follows the now metalled roads from Loxhore past Wistlandpound to the present A399 Blackmoor Gate road; it crossed it at what was the original Blackmoor Gate, leading to open moorland beyond. A little way over here it branched, with one section leading to Parracombe (but no further), the other went up over Challacombe Common, passing Chapman Barrows, Longstone, Woodbarrows, the Chains to Exe Head, where it seems to end, but would join other tracks here.

#### Track D:Lynmouth-Combwich

This is the present A39 coast road. There are plenty of antiquities along it. She does not say which route it took to Porlock Hill. My guess is the toll road, which would mean it also included Porlock Weir.

Track E:Pittcombe Head(Above Porlock on the A39 & Track D above)to Elworthy Burrows-far east end of national park and way into Vale of Taunton.....the Harepath,or her version of it.

The metalled road from Pittcombe Head to Lucott Cross(with short detour west to Alderman's Barrow)but ignore that and keep on the metalled road as far as Hillhead Cross,where it becomes a track(with right of way)until it meets the Exford-Wheddon Cross road (B3224)at Stone Cross.It continues east along this for a short way as far as Langdon's Way.Here it becomes the metalled road which turns right and is known as 'Thornes Lane'.It crosses the Quarme at Bushel Bridge,and shortly after the Dunster/Tiverton road A39 at Harepath Cross.This lane joins the B3224(Wheddon Cross/Raleghs Cross road) at Quarme Hill.It then follows the metalled road all the way to Elworthy Barrows(and on into England).

Hazel Eardley-Wilmot disagrees with those historians who maintain that the Harepath followed roughly the present road to Simonsbath,and then on to Moles Chamber,joining Track A to reach the Barnstaple area(or on to North Cornwall).She does this on the basis that between Stone Cross to Moles Chamber there are no antiquities along the way,and no definite proof of its going this way.She considers the tracks at Moles Chamber to go back no further than the middle ages as they are still so clear.She also points out that old quarry tracks between Stone Cross and Hillhead Cross have confused other researchers,and that she has now found the true track.

Harepath-from the German *heer* means an army.In Old English *here* meant raiders.The reason for the name is not clear-no doubt both armies and raiders used it from time to time.

Track F:The link between the Exe and the Barle via Winsford Hill.

This track seems to begin along the B3224 at White Cross where this road turns right for Winsford Hill.It follows the present road to Mounsey Hill Gate where it probably took the right hand lane,leading down to crossings over the Barle? and Danesbrook,and eventually leading up to Five Crosses,near Anstey Common,then perhaps going to Oldways End and onto Chulmleigh by the ridge road.

My comment on this track:It seems to begin nowhere,by Hazel's reckoning.It also seems to fade out in an odd sort of way,dipping down very steep hills.with two rivers to ford at the bottom,and then a very sharp climb up to Five Crosses.If the Harepath really went roughly along the route of the B3224(which a lot of the way is along a ridgeway),then here is an obvious junction.At the southern end,there is another possibility-might it have linked with Tarr Steps?Hazel finds the presence of these steps a complete mystery.She considers pack horses would have been afraid to go over them.But beside them there is a perfectly good ford.It is true that

the hill to the south is steep, but it could be used, and would link up with Track A at White Post, where again there is a significant meeting of five roads in a remote spot.

Track G: Humber via fringe of Exmoor to Cornwall.

This includes the section between Oldways End and Chulmleigh passing over Knowstone Moor, with a branch off known as Rattle Street which went to Raose Ash (Munson) etc. It may have gone via Eggesford, Winkleigh, Bradbury Down and crossed the Tamar and Carey rivers just north of Launceston. From there on it would have taken the ancient route now used by the A30.