

Part 4.

The Smith and Fowell families

Richard Vanstone married a girl from the Devonport/Plymouth area, Elizabeth Smith. Elizabeth was the daughter of Alexander Smith, a journeyman tailor, and Elizabeth Fowell who were married in Devonport on 30 October 1785. Between 1787 and 1800 Alexander and Elizabeth Smith took seven children of their eight children for baptism to the Morrice St Wesleyan chapel, and one of them was Elizabeth, or to be strictly correct, Betty, baptised 26 Jan 1795. At a time when the vast majority of British were adherents of the mainline Church of England, the family's religious non-conformity has proved useful in establishing to which of the hundreds of Smith families Elizabeth belonged.

Alexander Smith was baptised at the Presbyterian Church in Plymouth's Norley St, near Bilbury St. on 9 October 1757. He was said in the register to be the son of Mr Smith. This slimness of leads into Alexander's antecedents has nevertheless offered up some possibilities. Every other baptism at this time gave the full name of the father, if not the mother as well, so it can be inferred perhaps that Mr Smith was a man of standing within the community of the church, a man who needed no further identification, at least to the one who was filling out the register. Fortunately, Alexander himself provided the strongest of clues to his parentage in naming his first daughter Sarah, and after her early death his second daughter Sarah Carne Smith. Alexander was the son of Alexander Smith of Topsham and Sarah Carne who were married at Woodbury in 1755. Topsham is a market-town and parish 3½ miles south-east of Exeter. According to Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of England (1844) this town, situated just above the influx of the river Clyst into the Exe, and about six miles from the sea, was so celebrated for the salubrity of its air that it was reported to have lost only one person when the plague was raging at Exeter and in the vicinity in the reign of Charles II; and during the desolation produced in the neighbourhood by the cholera, in 1832, it entirely escaped the contagion. The strand was said to contain some neat residences, fronted with gardens, extending to the water's edge, the view being justly admired for its variety and extent.

The elder Alexander Smith was a tidesman in Topsham - a customhouse officer who goes on board a merchant ship to secure payment of the duties. The foreign trade was very great in the early days of the town, but by the 1840s had gradually fallen away, and by then its vessels were chiefly employed in the coastal trade. In the time of William III (1689-1702), however, the number engaged in the Newfoundland fishery was said to exceed that of any port in the kingdom, with the exception of London, but these vessels were mostly taken in the American revolutionary war of the 1770s, and the little trade that remained was transferred to Teignmouth. Ship-building was carried on extensively; chain-cables, anchors, ropes, twine, and sacking, were manufactured; by 1844 a large paper-manufactory was in operation, and there was a considerable trade in coal and timber. In 1275, an annual fair for three days was granted to the inhabitants, and a Saturday market confirmed by Edward I. This market was still held on Saturday in the mid 1800s, and there was a small fair on the Thursday after the 20th of July.

Protestant non-conformist views have always tended to be strong in Devon, although until the mid C17 puritans in the county generally stayed within the established Church of England. During the Commonwealth, Presbyterianism became the official form of worship in the parish churches with Anglican clergy either conforming or being replaced by puritan ministers. However, with the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 the Anglican church was also restored and non-conformist puritan ministers were ejected from the parish churches. Despite official persecution, some ejected ministers almost immediately set up their own congregations - there was strong local support in Exeter and Plymouth in particular. The first Presbyterian congregations in Devon therefore effectively date from 1662, and this is the date the Topsham Presbyterian group was established. Plymouth was also an important staging-point for non-conformists emigrating to the American colonies, who joined local congregations whilst waiting for a ship. Nationally, the Presbyterians were the strongest non-conformist group in England in the early C18, with 637 congregations and some 180,000 members (3.3% of the population).

We the Minister and Church Warden
of the Parish and Parish Church of Holy Trinity
in the City and County of Exeter
Do hereby Certify that Alexander Switzer
Tiesman of Topsham in this port
on Sunday the Third - Day of July
did receive the Sacrament of the Lords Supper in the Parish
Church aforesaid immediately after Divine Service and
Sermon according to the Usage of the Church of England
In witness whereof we have herunto subscribed our
Hands the said Third - Day of July
1774

Wm. Broadwell Parson Minister of the Parish and
Parish Church aforesaid

John Lewis Church Warden of the said
Parish and Parish Church

William Harris and Henry Taylor
Do solemnly make Oath that they did see the said
Alexander Switzer in the
abovewritten Certificate named, and who now present
hath delivered the same into this Court Receive the
Sacrament of the Lords Supper in the Parish Church
aforesaid, and that they did see the said Certificate
subscribed by the said Minister and Church Warden.



July 19. 1774
Honor. Court

Wm. Harris
Henry Taylor

No 17723, *Alexander Smith* of this Parish a *Taylor*
Elizabeth Howell of this Parish a *Spinster* were
 Married in this Church by *Banns*
 this *Thirtieth* Day of *October* in the Year One Thousand *Seven* Hundred
 and *Eighty Five* By me *Henry King Curate*
Alexander Smith
Elizabeth Howell
 This Marriage was solemnized between Us
 In the Presence of *Alex^{der} Smith*
John Howell

STOKE DAMEREL MARRIAGE ENTRY



Map of Stoke Damerel parish

It has to be said that identifying a particular congregation as "Presbyterian" is not always certain. In Scotland, the Presbyterian church established a federal structure: each congregation appointed its own minister, who would meet with the other local ministers in district synods, which in turn would send delegates to the central governing body of the church. This system was not maintained in England after 1660, and individual congregations could use the term Presbyterian without necessarily being part of a national church with consistent theology and regulations. Presbyterians also had fairly close links with the Independents (Congregationalists), with whom they shared a common Calvinist theology, and the two churches came close to union in the 1690's; even after this failed, there was often a degree of local co-operation, and some Presbyterian congregations later became Independent. During the C18, Presbyterianism was certainly in decline, perhaps losing members to other - more Evangelical - denominations such as the Baptists and later the Methodists. To add to the confusion, a substantial number of Presbyterian ministers and congregations went over to a Unitarian theology, though many still called themselves "Presbyterian" into the 19th C. In Devon, over 80 Presbyterian congregations were established in the 1660's and 70's, though more than half of these ceased within a few years, and others died out during the C18. Some became Independents, and several of the survivors became Unitarian. Only a handful continued as Presbyterian to 1837.

The younger Alexander Smith's wife, Elizabeth Fowell, was descended from the Fowells of Calstock, Cornwall, themselves probably a junior branch of the Fowells of Fowelscombe in Ugborough, south Devon. The Fowells rose to prominence as lawyers - a common link with many other family fortunes founded around this time. William Fowell was MP for Totnes in 1455 and died in Ugborough parish in 1507. He is described as "of Fowellscombe" as are the three preceding generations, beginning with Thomas Fowell of Fowelscombe who married a Miss Trevaige of Cornwall (Vivians Visitations of Devon, 1895). Kelly's directory of 1890 states that Fowelscombe was the residence of the Fowells before the Conquest and rebuilt by Sir Thomas Fowell in 1537. Lysons (Magna Britannica 1822) tells us that "Fowelscombe belonged for many descents to the family of Fowell and the first on record was an attorney in the reign of Henry IV" (1399-1413); Sir Edmond was created a baron in 1661 and died in 1674, aged 81. A junior branch of this family made their home across the border into Cornwall at Calstock, first appearing in the registers in 1692 with the baptism of Edmond Fowell, son of Edmond and Catherine.

According to Burkes Commoners Edmond Fowell of Plymouth, born in 1596, was a member of the House of Commons through the period of the British civil war and Commonwealth, and at the Restoration, MP for Tavistock in 1540 and 1658-59, and for Plymouth in 1660. He was a frequent speaker in the House during debates in the Protector Oliver Cromwell's parliaments. He married twice, first to Alice, eldest daughter and co-heir of Sir Francis Glanville, knight, of Killworthy in Devon, eldest son and heir, by his wife Alice, relict of Sir Francis Godolphin, knight of Cornwall, of Sir John Glanville, knight of Killworthy, justice of the Common Pleas in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and secondly he married Jane, daughter of Sir Anthony Barker, knight of Sunning in Berkshire, MP for that shire. By Jane he had issue Henry (Henry Fowell esq of Abbots-Anne in Devon, who had his property confiscated by the Parliamentary Commissioners for that county for his attachment to the royal cause), William, Edmond (this Edmond Fowell was MP for Plymouth in 1672), John, Anne and Grace.

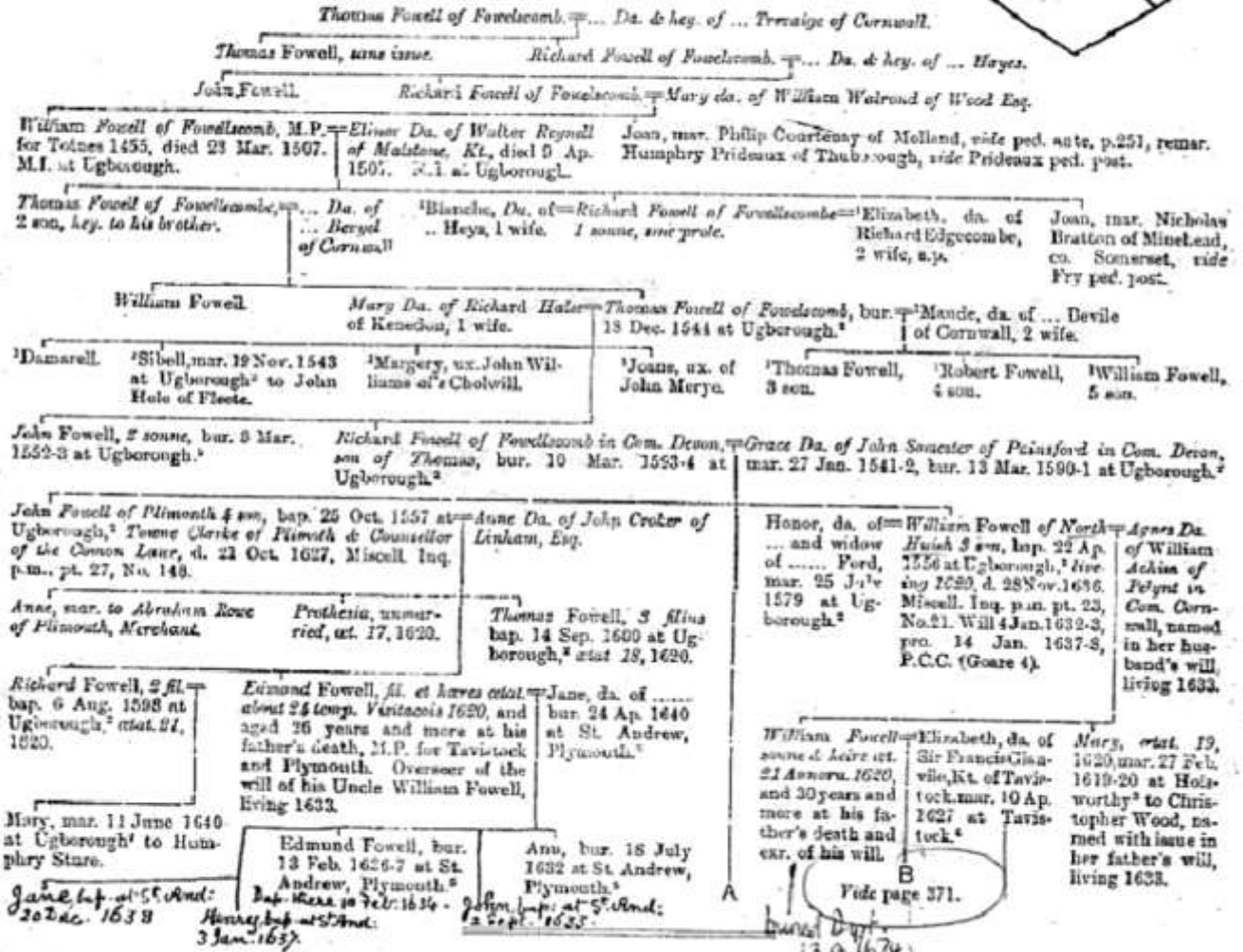
The descendant and heir of one of the sons, if not the fourth son himself was John Fowell esq, living at Harewood House in the parish of Calstock, Cornwall in the reign of Charles II, and at Plymouth in 1702. He was the father of Edmond Fowell esq of Letchley, near Calstock, living there in the beginning of the reign of George I, the last male of the branch recorded in the Fowelscombe and Blackhall pedigrees of the Devon visitations.



HOWELL OF FOWELSCOMBE.



ARMS:—Arg., a chevron Sa., on a chief Gu. three mullets pierced of the first.
CREST:—Out of a mural crown iss. an antelope's head Arg. attired Gu.
MOTTO:—Non ostento sed ostendo.



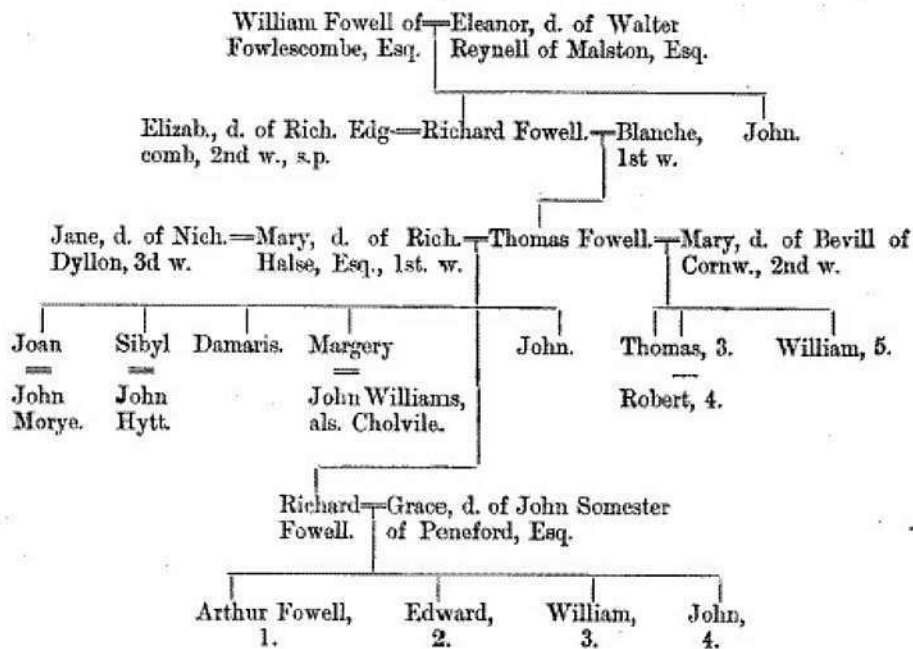
* The portion of this pedigree printed in *italic* is a copy of the Original Visitation of Devon 1620, Harl. MS. 1163, fo. 87 b, not signed, 146 b, signed John Fowell, and 178, not signed, being incorporated. The additions from Harl. MS. 1080, fo. 423 b, noted 1, must be accepted as doubtful. Blanche, da. of ... Heys, given as 1 wife to Richard Fowell in the 5th descent was no doubt the wife of Richard in the second descent; while Maude, da. of ... Beville, wife of Thomas, in the sixth descent, was most probably the da. of ... Beryl given as wife of Thomas his father.

1 Harl. MS. 1080, fo. 423, b. 2 Ugborough Parish Register. 3 Holworthy Parish Register. 4 Tavistock Parish Register. 5 St. Andrew, Plymouth, Parish Register.

Fowell.

Vide Visitation of 1620, p. 113.

ARMS. *Argent, a chevron sable and on a chief gules three mullets argent.*



Richard Fowell of Fohelscoome, Devon. = Grace, dau. of John Somaster of Paynsford, Esq., m. 27 Jan 1541

John Fowell, Bar.-at-Law, = Anne, dau. of John b. 1557. Descended from Sir Richard Fowell, 1470

William Fowell of Black Hall and Diptford, Devon, b. 1556.

= Agnes, dau. of William Achym of Plenyuth, Cornwall (2 wife).

Alice Glanville, dau. of Sir Francis Glanville, and sister to Elizabeth, the wife of William Fowell of Black Hall, Devon Esq.

= Edmund Fowell of Plymouth, b. 1596. M.P. for Tavistock in 1640 and 1658-9, and for Plymouth 1660.

William Fowell of Black Hall and Diptford Devon J.P., b. 1559; m. 1627; ob. 1674.

= Elizabeth, dau. of Sir Francis Glanville, niece of Sir John Glanviller, Speaker of House of Commons 1640, and granddaughter of Sir John Glanville, Judge C.P. 1598

Richard Fowel, b. 1628; m. 1655. = Elizabeth, dau. of Sir Thomas Hele, Bart. Francis, ob. 1706

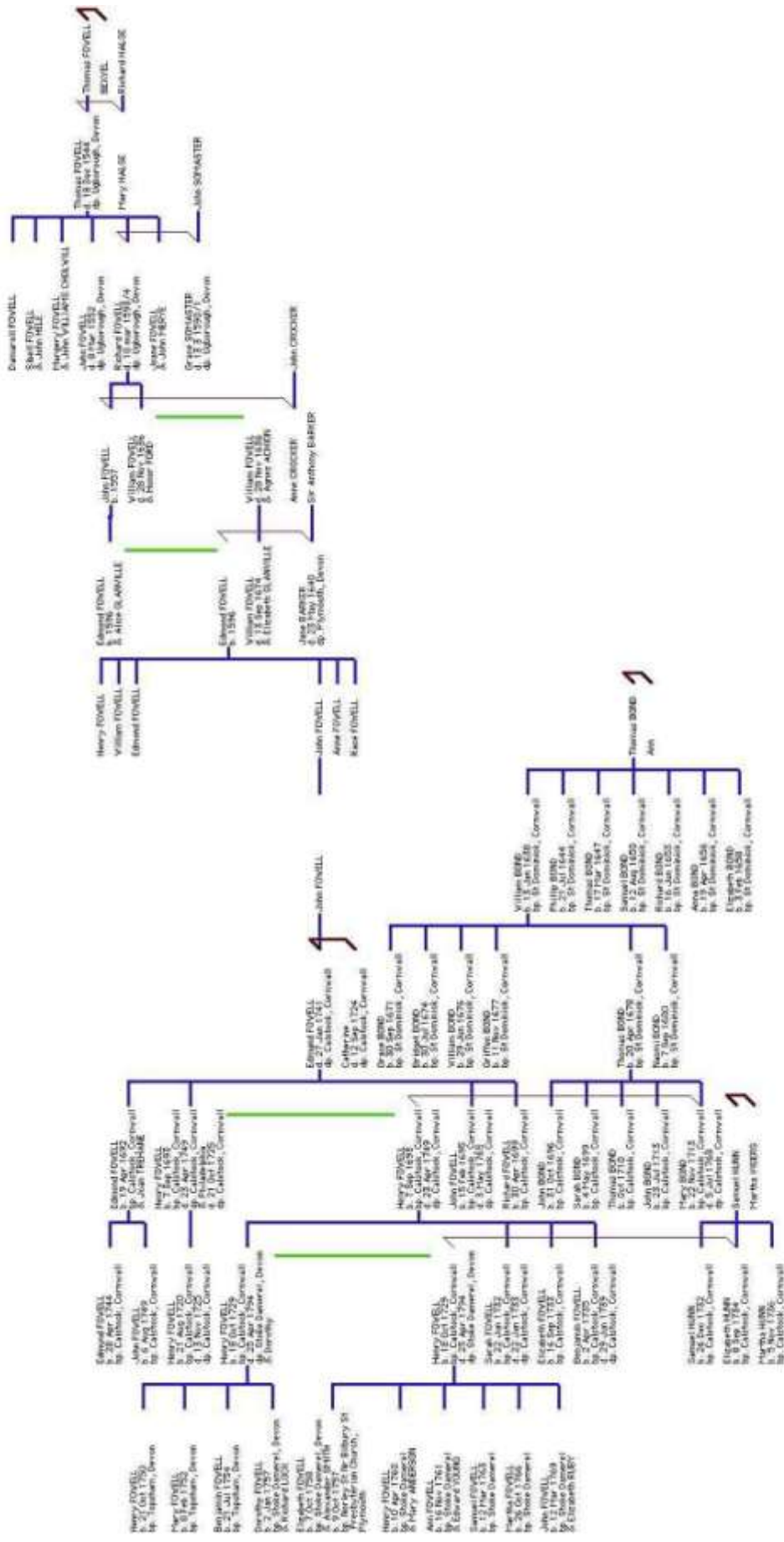
William Fowell of Black Hall and Diptford, Devon, J.P., b. 1659; ob. 1714

Elizabeth b. 1658.

Honoria b. 1661.

From whom descended John Digby Fowell of Black Hall, Devon, Esq., 1838.

Ancestors of Elizabeth Fowell



FOWLESCOMBE



Fowlescombe as it was in 1890



Fowlescombe on a T.R Gray postcard, approximately 1900 to 1910



The inner roof can be seen in this picture as can the walled garden terraces to the left, slightly up the hill. Two walled gardens were used for vegetables and apples.



The view along the causeway



A summer party outside the ruined mansion - early 20th century



The west elevation

FOWELSCOMBE June 2004



The gatehouse



The farmhouse



Looking down the valley to the mansion



The mansion, now covered by vines



Farm buildings



Farm buildings