

The Hole Family of Parke Bovey Tracey

Frances Billinge 2024

Introduction

The Hole family were one of the most prominent in the parish of Bovey Tracey from the early part of the 1700s until the gift of their Parke estate to the National Trust in 1974.¹ They started at Crownley/Crowndell farm, re-built nearby Stickwick, and moved to Parke in 1826 which they also re-built. By 1841 they owned some 1,103 acres in Bovey Tracey, five times more than any other land holder in the area. This is an example of gentleman farmers who contributed to local and county civic life and who through the exceptional qualities of one ancestor became wealthy, but eventually had to relinquish their estate as they could no longer pursue the lifestyle of the previous three centuries (Fig.1). Their generosity will continue to be remembered in Bovey Tracey because their legacy can be enjoyed by all.

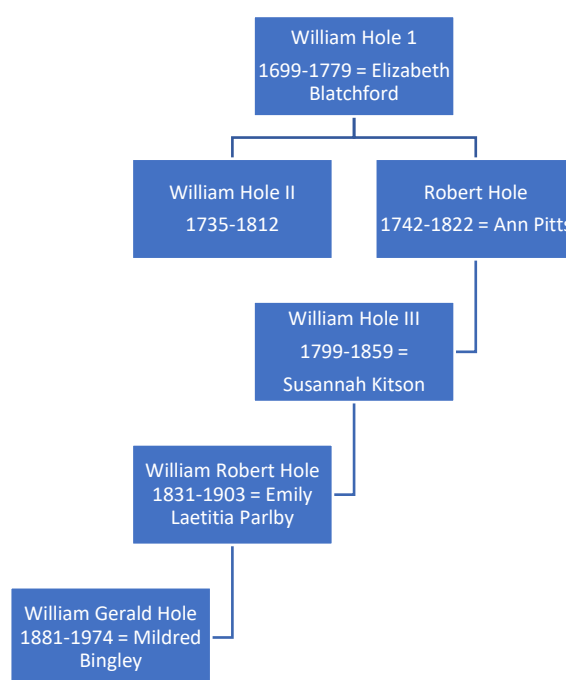


Figure 1. Hole Family Tree.

William Hole I of Crownley c.1699-1779

The first Hole to come to the parish was William Hole I. He was a gentleman farmer.² He married Elizabeth Blatchford at Exeter Cathedral in 1731.³ At the time of his marriage he was a gentleman living in Christow. He had perhaps

lived there since at least 1723 as a William Hole signed the Devon and Exeter Oath Rolls of that date. The oath rolls confirmed allegiance to the Church of England.⁴

William's wife Elizabeth Blatchford was born in Ashton in 1703. Her father was Theophilus Blatchford, a husbandman, who similarly had married in Exeter Cathedral. It is not known how William Hole I met Elizabeth. There is no record of William Hole I's birth at Christow. It is possible that he had been born in Sampford Peverell as a William Hole of the right age was born in there in 1699. Also a William Hole (possibly the father of William Hole I of Crownley) paid quit rent on Coome in Sampford Peverell in 1693 and this was a property which William Hole I later held.⁵

William Hole I is known to have had a connection with Sampford Courtenay, so maybe he was born there. His son Robert Hole's prayer book contains an inscription in the front stating it was from the library of William Hole of Sampford Courtenay [sic] dated 1727. Robert Hole, in a different hand, dated his ownership of the book as 1780, which was the year after his father's death, and on another page as 1783. The prayer book was the 1726 edition.⁶ Furthermore in his will William Hole I left money to the poor of Sampford Courtenay.⁷ As we learn from a later church memorial the mother of William Hole I of Crownley was called Mary and a previous William Hole had married Mary Risdon at Sampford Courtenay in 1699- the year before William Hole I's birth. Without knowing the maiden name of the mother of William Hole I of Crownley we cannot be sure if she was Mary Risdon, but if this was William Hole I's parents then the connection with Sampford Courtenay is explained.

On his marriage in 1731 William Hole I had Crownley Farm and other land holdings in Bovey Tracey, as outlined in the marriage settlement which was arranged with his father-in-law Theophilus Blatchford.⁸ As well as Crownley the settlement included five fields and claypits in the area behind the parish church called Bovetown, and the rights of common on nearby Furzeley Down.

The area called Crownley is on Trough Lane on the road from Bovey Tracey to Hennock, but the farmhouse in which William I lived no longer stands (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Site of Higher Crownley. Frances Billinge 2018.

The barn, now called Higher Crownley Farmhouse Barn is a Grade II listed 16th/17th century building which was described as badly ruined in 1975. The only old part left is one timber in a modern building.⁹ Nearby is Lower Crownley a Grade II 16th/17th century cob farm-house where the old chimney remains (Fig. 3).¹⁰



Figure 3. Lower Crownley 16th/17th Century Chimney. Frances Billinge 2018.

William Hole I had 5 children – Mary was born in 1732, Joanna in 1734, William II in 1735, Elizabeth in 1739 and Robert in 1742. The daughters married local farmers, and Robert married Ann Pitts of Drewsteignton. He was a man of high status locally as he was foreman of the jury of the lord of the manor's Court Baron and Court Leet when it met in between 1748 and 1753. He may have been foreman at other sittings but the records have not survived. The Court Leet punished petty offences and regulated economic life locally. The Court Baron dealt with property ownership and collection of dues and services owed to the lord of the manor. As foreman William Hole I held a highly prestigious local office.¹¹

William Hole I's family are listed on memorials in the parish church in Bovey Tracey and this confirms that his mother was Mary who died in 1753 aged eighty-two (Fig. 4). His wife Elizabeth died the same year aged fifty. William Hole I died in 1779 aged seventy-eight and left his estate between his sons William Hole II and Robert.¹² In his will he requested to be to be buried in the chancel at Bovey Tracey near to his wife. He made bequests to his daughter Joanne the widow of William Harris, and Mary the wife of George Wills. He left £20 to his servant Elizabeth. His son Robert Hole was left all of Luscombe and Lower and Higher Stickwick, both in Bovey Tracey, and 'an apple pound now on the premises with the Barrells and Keever thereto belonging.' It was noted that there was the need to pay the representatives of Mr Anthony Tripe

late of the city of Exon clerk the sum of £400 for a mortgage on Luscombe. William left all his goods in two equal shares to his sons William and Robert. He also left £5 to each of his grandsons George and Joseph Wills and £50 to each of his daughters Elizabeth, Joanna and Sarah Wills and Susannah; £5 each to his other grandsons William, John and George Harris; to each of his god daughters and his god sons Thomas and Joseph Harris he left £30. To his each of his granddaughters being Elizabeth, Mary, Joanna and Grace Harris he left £50. Everything else he left to his eldest son William. This is the will of a man who cared about all in his immediate family. He was also concerned about the poor of the parishes of both of Bovey Tracey and Sandford Courtenay to each of which he left £5.



Figure 4. Hole Memorial, Church of Saints Peter, Paul, and Thomas Beckett, Bovey Tracey. By kind permission of the Vicar and Churchwarden. Frances Billinge 2018.

William Hole II of Barnstaple and Crownley 1735- 1812

William Hole II was the eldest son of William Hole I. William Hole II had a highly successful career and was variously described as a land agent, steward, solicitor, banker, surveyor and cartographer. He built up a considerable business in the Barnstaple area and also acquired lands in both North and South Devon and North Cornwall.¹³ There are numerous records of William Hole II's land

and other financial dealings. For example he acted as a steward to Richard Coffin of Portledge and was a joint trustee of Coffin's will along with Sir John Chichester of Youlston and James Martin.¹⁴ He was also closely associated with Edward Rooe Yeo of Huish MP, who left William Hole I £900 which would be £50,500 in today's money. He had holdings in Newton Ferrers and Dornafeld near Newton Abbot.¹⁵ William was also linked with the Chichester family, particularly with Sir John Chichester of Youlston.¹⁶ Newspaper records also illustrate his land agent work.¹⁷

The family archive shows that he either inherited or bought land in North Devon and North Cornwall, that he had an office in Barnstaple and acted as an agent for other properties in North Devon. He was thought to have been a solicitor and his nephew Thomas Harris helped for twenty-eight years in his practice.¹⁸ The Hole family archive lists the extensive properties William owned, although his brother Robert owned part of some, being - Combe in Sampford Courtenay; Mullacott in Ilfordcombe; Touching Y Ryall, a quarter of West Ash, North Whiteley and Market Tolls in Bradworthy; Honeycroft in Holdsworthy; Babbacombe and Westacott[sic] in Allwington; Venton, Uppacott, North and South Down, Bridge Estate and Ridd Estate in Monkley; Higher Woolscott, and Stapledon Estate in Berryharbour; Evans' Teoement [sic] in Bishop's Tawton; Clannaborough, Stapledon, and Woolscott in Bittadon; Servys in Little Torrington; Dean at Darracott, Goulds at Croyde, and Clements in Georgham; Sheaf Tithes in Padstow; Lidgars in St. Pinnock; West Holwill in Parkham; the Buddle Estate in Broadwoodwidge; and two houses, one of them let, and an office in Barnstaple.¹⁹

William Hole II obtained even more land when his father died in 1779 as he inherited all of his father's holdings except two Bovey Tracey properties which went to his brother Robert.²⁰ A record three years later gives even more information on William Hole II's land holdings by that time. In order to encourage growth of hemp and flax and reduce the need to import linen, George III established a fund to pay a bounty to such growers.²¹ The 1782 list of Devon claimants gives further information on William Hole II's land holdings which were mainly in North Devon and included - Bishops Tawton; Ilfracombe; Barnstaple; Pilton; Bovey Tracey and Monkley. His was the largest claim for bounty and was based on 2,230 stones of hemp and flax, the next largest bounty claim was for Henry Broom and son of Uffculme who had 1,985 stones. Most claimants had far less than this.²²

William Hole II died intestate in 1812 and was described as of both Barnstaple and Crownley, 'a man of a very considerable practice'. His brother Robert inherited his lands which were valued at £60,000, which would now be the equivalent of over £ 2 million.²³

Robert Hole of Stickwick 1742-1822

Robert Hole was a man of standing and by 1776 he is thought to have been a JP and by 1782 he was an Overseer of the Poor for the parish.²⁴ Robert Hole had inherited Stickwick when his father William Hole I died in 1779 and by 1780 Robert he was rebuilding the farmhouse (Fig. 5). Records survive of the considerable work and expenses involved.²⁵



Figure 5. Stickwick Bovey Tracey.

Robert married Ann Pitts in 1794 when he was 52 years old. He had two daughters Mary Ann born in 1795 and Elizabeth 1798, and one son William Hole III born 1799. The Hole estate returned to one owner when Robert inherited his brother's estate in 1812. The family archives confirm that Robert sold his brother's lands between 1812 and 1814.²⁶

Robert did not enjoy his large inheritance for long as he died ten years later in 1822. His son William Hole III was his heir. Robert Hole was buried in Bovey Tracey church. His daughter Elizabeth was left £6,000, and £800 was shared by the younger children according to his marriage settlement. He gave all of his tenements to his daughter Elizabeth. He trusted his well-beloved friends James Pitts of Barkhall South Tawton, Gentleman and his nephew George Wills of Rudge Lustleigh Gentleman and William Ponsford esq. of Drewsteignton to look after all his estates until his only son William Hole [III] should attain the age of twenty-three. He also confirmed that on her marriage to John Gifford Croker he had already given his only other daughter Mary Ann £6,000. The will referred also to his granddaughter Mary Grace Croker. He left £10 to be distributed the Christmas after his death to 'the most honest and

industrious poor of Bovey Tracey who had the largest families, not in equal portions but in proportion to their requisites.’ He left a further £5 yearly to be distributed to the poor of the same parish until his son became in possession of his real estates a day or two before Christmas, and he left the same for the poor in Ipplepen and Abbots Carswell [sic]and Padstow. He left £20 each to his servant Edmund Elson, and to his housekeeper Mrs Lamacroft, and £10 to his servant Mary Cater £10.²⁷

Two of Robert’s children were to have significant parts in the development of Bovey Tracey in Victorian times. Mary Ann married John Gifford Croker the local surgeon and they lived at Cross Cottage in Mary Street. William Hole III married Susannah Kitson in 1822 and soon bought the prestigious Parke estate.

William Hole III of Parke 1799-1859

Soon after his marriage William Hole III became a tenant of Parke and by 1826, at the age of twenty-seven, he had purchased it. He then rebuilt Parke on the site of the earlier house and it is this Grade II listed building which stands today (Fig. 6).²⁸



Figure 6. Parke Bovey Tracey. By kind permission of the National Trust.

Although he was a wealthy man a year later William Hole III borrowed £1,300 from the rectors of Sampford Courtenay and Combeinteignhead.²⁹ The family oral history recalls that to save money a wooden floor from Higher Crownley was re-used in the entrance hall of Parke (Fig.7).



Figure 7. Entrance Hall of Parke with wood re-used from Higher Crownley. Frances Billinge 2018. By kind permission of DNPA.

In buying Parke William III had purchased one of the most prestigious estates in Bovey Tracey. It had been associated with the lord of the manor since 1614 when Nicholas Everleigh, who was living at Parke, purchased the lordship of the manor from the Crown.³⁰ Parke was a grand setting for the lord of the manor with its large deer park, a weir for fishing, hunting land reaching up to the moor, and possibly fish ponds the site of which can still be seen today in front of the house. Towards the end of the 1600s an avenue of trees had been planted giving Parke its impressive entrance. It was the sort of holding on which William Hole III and his descendants could pursue the hunting and shooting which they so enjoyed.³¹

William Hole III had five children - Susannah born in 1823, Caroline in 1825, Jaquette in 1827, William Robert in 1831, and Henrietta Elizabeth in 1832. On the 1841 Census William Hole III described himself as of independent means.³² The apportionment to the tithe map of the same year shows that he was spending his fortune on acquiring extensive holdings in Bovey Tracey parish. By that time he owned Higher and Lower Crownley, Bovtowns, Scotway, Meadow Pale and Barton, Bradley, Bucks Barn, Tracey's Pond, Varwells

Meadow, Bakers Meadow, Cucklers Park and Plantation, Higher and Lower Stickwick, Luscombe, Bovtowns, Mill Close and Gratner being part of Church Stile, Whitstone, Pippleton, part of Role Gate and Furzeley Common, Beera, Five Weeks and Soldridge, lands at Lower Down and other Commons, Parke, and Five Witches, Southbrook, Kingwell Meadows, one close of land late Halfyards, Soper's Meadow, a messuage late Hickmans and a close of land there to belonging; several cottage gardens, and sixty acres at Reeves Combe. In total William Hole III possessed 1163 acres.³³

The next largest landowner was Joseph Steer who owned 239 acres which included Challabrook and Wifford, followed by John Harris with 205 acres around Hawkmore. William Hole III's holdings were over five times larger than any other landowner's. This land provided William Hole III with an income and apart from obtaining rents he also sold timber from his estates.³⁴

In 1855 Charles Aldenburgh Bentinck, who was descended from Counts of the Holy Roman Empire and had a pedigree going back to William of Orange, purchased Indio in Bovey Tracey. He was the great, great grandson of the first earl of Portland, his mother was the daughter of an earl, and he was married to Harriet Fulford, daughter of Sir Francis Fulford of Great Fulford. Bentinck also purchased the lordship of the manor of Bovey Tracey from the Earl of Devon, but with owning only 100 acres at Indio and 86 acres of the adjacent farm of Wifford his holdings were not nearly as extensive as Hole's.³⁵ By this time lordship of a manor was reducing in civic importance and financial benefit and perhaps this is why William Hole III did not purchase it, or perhaps he did not have the funds available, or possibly the Earl did not offer it to him.

Throughout his time at Parke William Hole III contributed to local and County civic life. He sat on the parish Vestry at times being its chairman, and was also a local magistrate.³⁶ He was keen to promote the development of railways and became a provisional director of the Exeter, Plymouth and Devonport Railway in 1845.³⁷ He also attended charity balls and was on the Devon and Cornwall Archery committee, and on the committee of Teignbridge Cricket Club.³⁸ Along with the landed gentry of the County he supported Devon causes such as the Exeter and District Agricultural Protection Society.³⁹ His wife was recorded as supporting local cultural activities, hosting the horticultural show on her lawn and attending balls with her daughter.⁴⁰ The family willingness to be involved in local social duties was further shown by his daughter Henrietta being a judge at a local horticultural show as well as a prize winner.⁴¹ One of the daughters was elected to the Bath branch of the Selborne Music Society, showing her cultural interest but also the distance she was prepared to travel to follow it.⁴² Three generations of the Hole family are shown a photograph taken in 1871, Susan Hole is seated, and she is with Henrietta and Annie (Fig. 8).

When William Hole III died in 1859 he left under £4,000, a surprisingly small amount given his earlier inheritance. His wife had moved to Parke view on Fore Street by 1881.⁴³



Figure 8. Three Generation of the Hole family 1871. By kind permission of the Hole family.

William Robert Hole of Parke 1831-1903

William Robert was the only son and heir of William Hole III. He was educated at Eton and attended University College Oxford.⁴⁴ In 1850 at the age of nineteen he became an articled clerk to his maternal uncle Charles Kitson who was an attorney.⁴⁵ By 1856 William Robert qualified as a magistrate and he was later to become a County Councillor and Deputy Lieutenant for Devon.⁴⁶

Like his father he was involved in civic duties. He subscribed to the local National (Church of England) School, was chairman of governors for the local endowed 'grammar' school and was instrumental in establishing a new grammar school for boys on land which he made available on Lower Down.⁴⁷

He was a man in favour of progress and supported the development of the local railway.⁴⁸ He sat on the parish Vestry (a forerunner of the Town Council), sometimes being its chairman and he was particularly concerned to improve the poor water supply and the highways in the town, and he was a churchwarden.⁴⁹

There was a strange story in connection with his proposals to improve the town's water supply because William Robert's aunt had married the local

surgeon Dr Croker. Dr Croker was against improving the water supply and also against improving the policing and lighting of the parish. At the vestry meetings Croker voted against his nephew by marriage when these issues were discussed.⁵⁰ Croker's contrariness was in connection with his not wishing to support the high church, Tractarian vicar.⁵¹

William Robert, like his father, was involved in many institutions and societies. In 1861 he took part in the Church Institution Meeting at Newton Abbot along with many of the local gentry including, from Bovey Tracey the Rev. the Hon. Courtenay, Rev. Anstice, and Charles Bentinck Lord of the Manor.⁵² He became president of the Chudleigh Agricultural Society, and was a keen committee member of the Teignbridge Cricket Club where he had regular contact with other important people such as John Divett who was co-owner of the local pottery, and James Buller Yard Buller of the landed gentry.⁵³ He and his wife supported local activities such as the horticultural show by allowing it to be held on their lawn, and they also attended County balls.⁵⁴

His daughter was involved in raising money for clothing for the poor of Manaton, and also for the Saddington Church appeal and she kept the list of subscribers for these causes. Why she was involved in this church in Leicestershire is not yet known but she managed to encourage several of her Kitson relatives, the Bovey Tracey curate and business men to also subscribe.⁵⁵

Like his forbears William Robert was keen on hunting, and not afraid to express his views even in face of criticism from other landowners (Fig. 9).⁵⁶



Figure 10. William Robert Hole on 'Baldface' 1871. By kind permission of the Hole family

William Robert inherited Parke on his father's death in 1859, and he married Emily Laetitia Parlby in 1875 when he was forty-four (Fig.10). They had one child, William Gerald who was born in 1881.



Figure 10. William Robert Hole and Emily Laetitia Parlby. By kind permission of the Hole Family.

Like his forbears William Robert acquired more land in Bovey Tracey.⁵⁷ By 1881 his mother Susan had moved out of Parke and was living in the middle of Bovey Tracey at Parke View.

The second half of the nineteenth century was a time of much change in Bovey Tracey with the development of the water supply and the local controversy about the vicar's introduction of high church Anglicanism. Mrs Adela Beaufort née Divett wrote a critical letter to the press about William Robert in 1885. She was the daughter of Edward Divett who had been Member of Parliament for Exeter, and she had moved to Bovey Tracey sometime after her father's death in 1852. Her guardian then was her uncle John Divett. At the time of writing her letter she and her husband were living in Surrey. She criticized William Robert for refusing to give up his seats in the chancel of Bovey Tracy parish church during discussions of a proposed restoration. The tone of the letter contains some quite surprising comments.

I should like to call attention to the fact that "Mr Hole's rights" which have been so repeatedly urged against this restoration, and which his family are supposed to have held "beyond the memory of law" are purely imaginary. Mr Hole only holds a small portion of the great tithes, the rest are held by a number of other farmers, so that he has no pretension to being lay rector. Furthermore, it was his grandfather only – "bailiff in the family of the Chichesters of Hall" – who

*made an arrangement with the other tithe owners to be allowed to sit in the chancel, paying down a certain sum, and undertaking to keep it in repair – an arrangement which the late Sir Robert Phillimore once pronounced entirely illegal. The opposition is a disgrace to the parish. The chancel is a very small and narrow one, and incapable of improvement whilst crowded by Mr Hole, his family, and domestic servants. Moreover, from a Christian point of view, it is, to say the least, unseemly that the “rights” of one man, whether real or imaginary, should take precedence of the glory of God, and prevent the adornment of His sanctuary’.*⁵⁸

This must be understood within the context of the anger in Bovey Tracey in connection with the aristocratic vicar, Rev. the Hon. Charles Leslie Courtenay, trying to change the parish church to become higher church. He was the brother of the Earl of Devon, his wife had been a lady in waiting to Queen Victoria, and he was a Canon of Windsor. The congregation had objected to him opening a holy water niche and other popish practices. Adela supported Courtenay’s high church ways and even had her house built adjacent to his new high church of St John the Evangelist. To criticise someone’s alleged low birth in the newspapers seems less than courteous, particularly as Adela was the grand-daughter of a London banker himself descended from a London merchant.⁵⁹ She had no more claim to being from the aristocracy than William Robert Hole and although her house was large for Bovey Tracey it was not in an impressive estate like Parke.

One week before Mrs Adela Beaufort wrote her critical letter about William Robert there had been ‘animated vestry proceedings’ at the Bovey Tracey parish church when the vicar had proposed an extensive renovation of the chancel that would provide seating for the clergy and a choir. He regretted that this would entail the removal of ‘seatings’ currently reserved for the Hole family and servant a few feet back into the southern enclosure although Mr Hole could retain his one seating in view of him being one amongst many ‘tithe owners’. Despite his diplomatic language the vicar made it clear that if this proposal was not accepted the funding he was offering would be withdrawn and he would resign his living after thirty-five years in Bovey Tracey.⁶⁰

There was some immediate support for the vicar’s plan to remove the seating but John Divett, a very diplomatic man, spoke strongly against it and he ‘characterised the proposal as a covert attack upon Mr Hole’s rights’. Divett praised Mr Hole’s family for having carried out past improvements to the church and Divett added that the family, ‘held possession of the seatings in the chancel beyond legal memory, and they had also shown their sense of responsibility by carrying out various alterations and improvements from time to time.’⁶¹

A further meeting took place in which William Robert

‘..maintained that misrepresentation, undue and unfair influence and pressure, retaliation for the conscientious discharge of his duty in a public capacity, spiteful and malicious publications, false allegations promulgated by Mrs Adela Hastings Beaufort, formerly Miss A. H. Divett, of the parish, and an entirely irrelevant and false issue contingent on the results

of an appeal to the parish, placed before the parishioners by the supporters of the resolution, had mainly contributed to the result of the poll. Means like these could scarcely be deemed creditable to those who used them. He entirely acquitted the vicar from any participation therein.’

William Robert was clearly angry with Adela for maligning his family’s credentials and left the meeting, still adamant that the process had been unfair, but nevertheless shaking hands with the vicar and assuring him of their continuing friendship.⁶² The following year the renovations were in progress.⁶³ He continued to be involved in County and local civic affairs and in 1890 helped improve the town’s water supply by selling rights over his land for pipes to be laid.⁶⁴

He lived at Parke until he died in 1903, six months after his son’s coming of age. His obituary praised his civic work. He left £48,000 which was not going to be enough for the family to maintain the estate. By 1911 his widow was living at Parke View just as her widowed mother-in-law before her.⁶⁵ William Robert had been a gentleman farmer as well as all his other activities. A photograph of him with his tenants at Southbrook farm shows him as a man contented with life on a country estate (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. William Robert Hole at Southbrook Farm. By Kind Permission of the Hole Family.

Major William Gerald Hole of Parke 1881- 1974

William Gerald was educated at Winchester and Merton College Oxford.⁶⁶ He inherited Parke in 1903 at the age of twenty-one when his father died. His diary while at university contained frequent references to hunting and visiting.⁶⁷

William Gerald was a keen country sports man. From an early age he loved riding and later meticulously kept game books indicate how frequently he went shooting (Fig. 12).⁶⁸

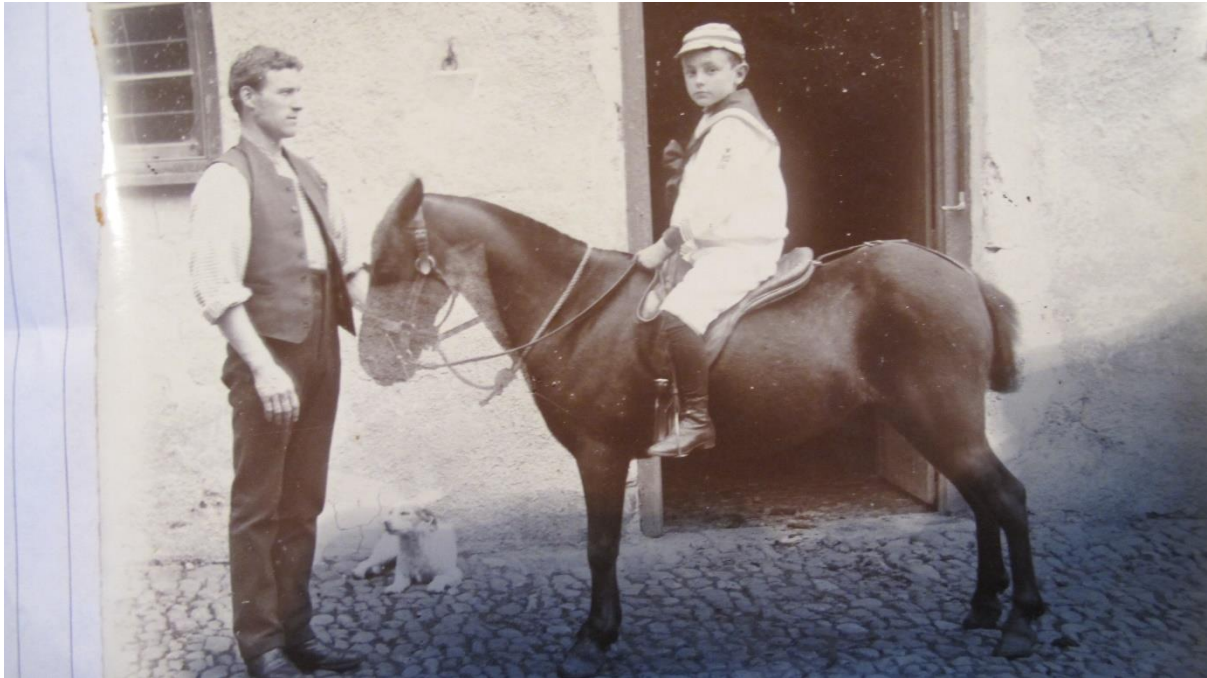


Figure 12. William Gerald Hole as a boy on his horse. By kind permission of the Hole family.

In 1904 he was a trainee at Rolle Estate Office. He married Mildred Ada Bingley in 1905 and they had one child, Geraldine Mildred, who was born in 1908. Initially after his marriage William Gerald spent his time managing his own estate. There is a photograph of him and his wife Mildred with their young daughter Geraldine in an automobile at Parke which illustrates the family's life-style (Fig.13).

William Gerald soon qualified with the Surveyors' Institute and became an inspector in the diseases of Animals Branch of the Board of Agriculture.⁶⁹ William Gerald Hole started to sell some lands and dwellings of the Parke estate in 1912 when Whitestone and quarry, Beara, Lower Crownley, Furzeley Plantations and Beara Cleave Wood, Church Style, and Atway Cottages were all for sale.⁷⁰

In WWI he served in Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine and obtained the rank of Major in the 1st Devon Yeomanry.⁷¹



Figure 13. William Gerald Hole, Mildred and Geraldine. By Kind Permission of the Hole Family

This was not an easy time to be the owner of a large country estate. David Canadine in his study of the decline and fall of the British aristocracy explained how landed riches were eroded through increased foreign trade and cheaper imports of meat and cereal.⁷² Oscar Wilde's *Lady Bracknell* summed up the problem '...land has ceased to be a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position and prevents one from keeping it up.'⁷³ William Gerald was by no means alone in finding that a large estate was becoming unprofitable. He started to sell part of his holdings but by the mid-1930s land was selling for a third of what it had been worth in Victorian times.⁷⁴ This was also explained by Thompson in his presidential address to the Royal Historical Society in 1990. He described how many of the landed gentry had experienced collapse of their wealth in the twentieth century, but that some, mainly the ancient nobility, had been able to maintain their estates. Low agricultural rents, the inability to employ servants, and rising death duties all played their part.⁷⁵

Despite his dwindling fortune William Gerald never lost sight of the importance of his relationship with local people. In 1969 he showed his appreciation of the Mann family when they discontinued their eighty-year old lease of some of his lands. To their surprise he presented them with a silver wine coaster which the family still treasures.⁷⁶ He hosted an annual dinner for his tradespeople and workmen and their wives at his own residence, and for this he was praised as being 'The Moving Spirit of Bovey Tracey.'⁷⁷

Managing an estate as large as Parke was a considerable financial commitment and William Gerald sometimes leased out Parke, but he remained in Bovey Tracey until his death in 1974. It was his generosity and community

spirit which led him to bequeath Parke to the National Trust.⁷⁸ The house was subsequently leased to Dartmoor National Park Authority and is used as their headquarters.⁷⁹ The estate grounds are managed by The National Trust for everyone to enjoy. This is a lasting legacy from the Hole family which is appreciated and well-used by the people of Bovey Tracey.

The Hole family are commemorated in the parish church and also by the naming of Hole Bridge which from the 1980s has carried the A382 over the River Bovey on the Parke estate. Some of his local workforce and their families will tell you of the kindness of the Major and of their gratitude for his providing them with homes in which they still live.

Discussion

This has been the story of a family which acquired considerable land in Bovey Tracey from the start of the 1700s, who built themselves a prestigious country house there in 1826, made a significant contribution to local civic life, but finally gave up their estate to the National Trust in 1974. This was not unusual. In his description of the Powderham estate Jackson explained why estates declined in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century because of the changes in land value and the reduction in the availability of workers.⁸⁰ The Courtenay family of Powderham managed to diversify by concentrating their land holdings, speculating in town developments, investing wisely, and latterly marketing their castle. Thompson has described the various reasons for the ‘collapse and survival’ of English landed society in the twentieth century, in particular the change in the social status of the landed aristocracy and gentry, and the experience of the Hole estate mirrors that of others.⁸¹

William Gerald Hole’s decision that Parke would best be preserved by the National Trust continued the family’s commitment to contributing to the well-being of the locality. 22

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Major Hole’s grand-daughter and her husband for their interest in this research, for giving me access to the family archive which was consulted in February and March 2018, and giving me permission to use family photographs.

References

Abbreviations

TNA The National Archives

DHC Devon Heritage Centre

¹ TNA 312M *Hole of Parke* catalogue description www.thenationalarchives.gov.uk accessed 21 March 2018; Devon Heritage Centre 6684M, The National Trust 17th Century-20th Century;

312M/7/Z/1/12 Letters and Brochure R.E. Meyrick, *National Trust*, to Major W.G. Hole Proposals for the future of "Parke" and brochure on Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans, 1970.

² TNA 312M, see note ¹.

³ Exeter Cathedral Marriage Register 1731 www.findmypast.co.uk accessed 18 March 2018.

⁴ Friends of Devon Archives, Devon and Exeter Oath Rolls 1723. QS 17/2/5/1a www.foda.org.uk/oaths accessed 18 March 2018.

⁵ Hole family archive notes on Coome Sampford Peverell with transcription of a survey of the manor 1693 describes that William Hole aged 50 paid quit rent for Coome.

⁶ DHC 6684M-0 The National Trust, 17th century- 20th century. *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*, 1726 (13th ed., London, R. and J. Bonwicke and R. Wilkin, St Paul's Churchyard) inscribed by William Hole and Robert Hole.

⁷ DHC312M/3/F/2/1-14 1782 FI Probate of the will of William Hole Bovey Tracey proved in 1782.

⁸ DHC312M/3/F/1/1, 1731 Marriage Settlement Bovey Tracey between William Hole gent of Christow the first part; Theophilus Blatchford the second part.

⁹ English Heritage, Higher Crownley Farmhouse Barn, ID 1096644 www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk accessed 18 March 2018; Eric Mercer, 1975. *English vernacular houses* (HMSO) described the house as badly ruined, pp.56, 148.

¹⁰ English Heritage Lower Crownley ID1096645 www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk accessed 18 March 2018.

¹¹ DHC 3861M/ 169 Manor of Bovey Tracey Court Book 1748- 1753.

¹² Probate of William Hole's will 1782, see note 7.

¹³ M. Ravenhill and M. Rowe. 2008. 'One of the Most Profitable and Genteel Professions.' *The Lives and Works of three eighteenth -century Devon surveyors, William Hole, Robert Ballment and Alexander Law*, Trans Devon. Assoc. Advmt Sci., 140, 91- 110, pp.92-107; Joseph Gribble, 1830. *Memories of Barnstaple* (Barnstaple, J. Avery), p 314, described William Hole as a land surveyor; accessed 21 March 2018; The National Archives 312M Hole of Parke catalogue description states that the Hole family also owned the Dornafeld estate (Ipplepen and adjoining parishes) and the rectorial Tithes of the parish of Padstow www.thenationalarchives.gov.uk

¹⁴ Will of Richard Coffin 1796, Prerogatory Court of Canterbury www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 21 March 2018, Sir John Chichester of Youlston Baronet Devon, William Hole gent. of Barnstaple, and James Martin named as joint trustees; North Devon record Office B459M/F/3/1/8, 1796, letter from Charles Chichester snr of Youlston to William Hole steward requesting £30; Devon Heritage Centre 13599M/T/1, 1799, Deed of partition concerning Portledge and other estates, for the sixth part Sir John Chichester of Youlston, William Hole of Barnstaple gent and James Martin.

¹⁵ Mary M. Drummond. *Edward Rooe Yeo of Huish MP*, www.historyofparliamentonline.org accessed 9 March 2018; Devon Heritage Centre 312M Hole of Parke Yeo of Huish papers with William Hole as guardian of Edward Rooe Yeo's natural children; Devon Heritage Centre 6684M uncatalogued documents of William Hole's land holdings and legacies; *ibid.* The National Trust 17th Century- 18th Century Paul T. Presswell genealogy of the Devonshire family of Hole correspondence 11 November 1970 relating to deeds inherited from Edward Rooe Yeo – being Broadpark and Wheat Park Berryarbor purchased in 1803, Ash West and one quarter part of the Manor and fair in Bradworth, North in Whitley purchased in 1809, Buddle or Nethercote Lower in Broadwoodwidge purchased in 1809, Croyde and Goulds in Georgham, Clements in Darracott, Edulphs purchased 1809, Mullacott in Illfracombe date of purchase not known, also copyhold tenancy 3 lives on Combe[farm] Sampford Courtenay in a list of properties owned c.1800; DRO 312M/0/TY/467, 1784 Declaration of uses William Harris of Barnstaple leases with Richard Brown of Westminster and William Harris and inheritance of Edward Rooe the latter appointing William Hole gent of Barnstaple executor; *ibid.* 312M/0/FY/135, 1768-1778 Estate Accounts William Hole to Edward Rooe Yeo; *Ibid.* 160-161, copy of probate of Edward Rooe Yeo with final instructions to William Hole; *ibid.* 3865M/E 1-10 letters from William Hole to Richard Coffin re management of Coffin estates.

¹⁶ North Devon Record Office 3704M/FC/7, 1785, suggestion of having William Hole as a partner in Barnstaple bank on the death of Sir John Chichester.

¹⁷ *London Courier and Evening Gazette* 11 March 1806, p.4, advertisement of rectory in Bideford, for further particulars contact William Hole esq.

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- ¹⁸ DH312M/7/Z1/9-13, Family Pedigree Papers re Thomas Harris.
- ¹⁹ DHC 312M/7/Z1/9 Hole Family pedigree papers; Plymouth Record Office 308/182/8 Lease and release Wm Hole Barnstaple gent. and Samuel Algar of Newton Ferrers gent. 1775.
- ²⁰ Probate of the will of William Hole see note 7
- ²¹ TNA Q/RLh Hemp and Flax Bounties www.discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk accessed 9 March 2018.
- ²² DHC QS/43/1, **1782** Hemp and Flax Bounty Papers. 'A State of the Claims for Raising and Dressing Hemp and Flax' in Devon.
- ²³ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 9 January **1812**, p. 4, death report of 'a man of very considerable practice'; *ibid.* 13 August **1812**, p. 1, details regarding the estate of late William Hole of Crownley and Barnstaple; DHC 312M/F2/4, **1812** William Hole II's estate sworn under £60k.
- ²⁴ Hole family archive; Devon Heritage Centre 2160A/PO/165, **1782**, William Wills apprenticeship indenture.
- ²⁵ DHC 312M EH3-5, 1780-1785 An account of the expence [sic]of building Stickwick House.
- ²⁶ DHC 312M/7/Z1/9 Hole Family pedigree papers sale 1812-14
- ²⁷ TNA, Prerogatory Court of Canterbury Wills, 23 September 1820 Robert Hole of Stickwick, proved 1822.
- ²⁸ Heritage Gateway Parke MDV8949; Sheila Molland, 1996. *Historical Summary of Parke Bovey Tracey*. (Killerton, The National Trust report) typescript;
- ²⁹ DHC 312M/F2/7, 1827, Bond for £2,600 for purchase of Parke (1) Wm Hole esq (2) Rev William Ponsford of Sampford Courtenay and Rev Thomass Kitson Combeinteignhead.
- ³⁰ R.W. Hoyle, ED., 1992. *The Estates of the English Crown 1558-1640* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p.254.
- ³¹ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 13 January **1827**, p.3; *ibid.* 29 November **1828**, p.3; *North Devon Journal* 14 September **1837**, p. 1, Game List; *The Western Times* 27 December **1845**, p. 5 examples of references to hunting.
- ³² TNA **1841** Census www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 21 March 2018.
- ³³ DHCTithe Map **1841**, DEX/4/a/TM/Bovey Tracey 1; *ibid.* Tithe Apportionment **1839** DEX/4/a/TA/50 Bovey Tracey.
- ³⁴ *The Western Times* 5 February **1853**, p.4, for sale 300 prime oak timber trees on Parke Barton and other estates. Apply W[illiam] H[ole].
- ³⁵ Burke, R. 1882. *History of the Landed Gentry* (London, Harrison) Bentinck family tree; *The Western Times* 7 July **1855**, p. 5, purchase of the lordship of the manor and Indio.
- ³⁶ DHC 2160A/PVI and 2 Bovey Tracey Vestry minute books 1850-94; *The Western Times* 10 April **1847**, p. 3 Devon County Sessions magistrate; *The Western Times* 6 January **1849**, p. 7, Devon County Assizes magistrate; *West of England and Trewman's Exeter Pocket Journal* **1859** (Exeter, Besley), p.167, list of Teignbridge magistrates, as examples.
- ³⁷ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 11 October **1845**, p.2, railway director.
- ³⁸ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 6 January **1849**, p. 5, Christmas Ball; *Western Courier* 22 June 1853, p.5, archery; Committee member of Teignbridge Cricket Club 1842-61, Hole family archive.
- ³⁹ *The Western Times* 8 June **1844**, p. 2 Exeter District Agricultural Protection Society subscribers.
- ⁴⁰ *The Western Times* 4 February **1837**, p.1, Mrs Hole of Park, subscriber to a musical manuscript; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 19 July **1867**, p7, horticultural show; *The Western Times* 4 October **1851**, p.4 Cricket Ball.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* 2 June 1870, p.3 Art and Industrial Exhibition Newton Abbot Miss Henrietta Hole bronze medal for flowers; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 28 March **1873**, p.6, Miss Henrietta Hole judge at the Torquay Horticultural Society).
- ⁴² *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette* 4 October **1888**, p.8, Selborne Society.
- ⁴³ TN **1881** Census www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 21 March 2018.
- ⁴⁴ UK, Articles of Clerkship, 1756-1874, 1850 entry; Eton School list 1771-1850 , 1847 entry refers to Upper School Fifth Form and attendance at University College Oxford, p. 214 www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 21 March 2018.
- ⁴⁵ Hole family archive; TNA1851 Census confirms www.ancestry.co.uk accessed 21 March 2018.

- ⁴⁶ *North Devon Journal* 26 June **1856**, p.5 magistrate; *The Western Times* 24 December **1886**, p.9, county magistrate; *The Western Times* 20 December **1889**, p.9, Devon County Councillor; *Kelly's Directory of Devon 1902* (London, Kelly's Directories Ltd) p. 818, Deputy Lieutenant.
- ⁴⁷ DHC 2160A/P1 and 2 Vestry minute book, 1 March **1873** Vestry proposed way of funding a second grade boys school; *The Western Times* 5 March **1878**, p. 1, Chair of Governors Bovey Tracey Endowed School.
- ⁴⁸ *The Western Times* 3 September **1867**, p.8.
- ⁴⁹ DHC 2160A/P1 and 2 Vestry Minute Book 4 November **1854** Chairman of the Vestry; *ibid.*, 24 September **1853** water supply improvement; *ibid.* 16 December **1871** proposed a Sewer Authority for the town; *ibid.* 7 April **1877** highway improvements; *ibid.* 10 December **1879** proposed further measures to assist water supply ; *ibid.* 9 September **1865** churchwarden -are some examples of his local civic work
- ⁵⁰ DHC 2160A/P1 and 2 Vestry Minute Book Dr J.G. Corker voted against civic improvements proposed by W.R. Hole
- ⁵¹ *The Western Times* 24 June **1854**, p.7.
- ⁵² *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 1 March **1861**, p. 6.
- ⁵³ *The Western Times* 18 December **1885**, p.5, Agricultural Society; Cricket Club 1857-1884, Hole family archive.
- ⁵⁴ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 9 September **1864**, p.7 show on lawn; *Western Morning News* 31 August **1865**, p. 2, ditto.; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* 19 July **1867**, p.7. ditto.; *ibid.*; 9 January 1869, p. 1 County Ball Globe Hotel; *ibid.* 29 December **1887**, p.6. Ball *Dolphin Hotel*.
- ⁵⁵ DHC 6684M-0 see note 4, ledger of subscriptions; *Leicester Journal* 26 July **1872**, p. 4, Miss Hole subscriber to Saddington Church appeal; *Leicester Journal* 4 October **1872**, p.5 Hole cousins and other local subscribers.
- ⁵⁶ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 2 August **1882**, p. 8.
- ⁵⁷ DHC 312M/3/T/2/8 Sale and purchase Wills to Hole, The Rolls and Harts Meadow 1878.
- ⁵⁸ *Western Morning News* 29 April **1885**, p. 6.
- ⁵⁹ April Marjoram, 2016. *Edward Divett, MP for Exeter, and the Bystock Estate, Exmouth* Trans Devon. Assoc. 148, pp. 165-190.
- ⁶⁰ *Western Morning News* 20 April **1885**, p.6.
- ⁶¹ *The Western Times* 21 April **1885**, p.3.
- ⁶² *ibid.* 5 May 1885, p.2.
- ⁶³ *East and South Devon Advertiser* 24 July **1886**, p.8.
- ⁶⁴ DHC 312M/EH/245-246, **1890** Agreement and Map Bovey Tracey Water Supply with Guardians of the Poor Newton Abbot.
- ⁶⁵ *East and South Devon Advertiser* 14 February **1903**, p.4
- ⁶⁶ Hole Family Archive, Winchester College report **1894**.
- ⁶⁷ DHC 6348M/F/I Diary of W R Hole Merton College Oxford.
- ⁶⁸ DHC 6684 M Game lists **1907**, 9 partridges, 248 pheasants, 4 wild duck, 3 woodcock, rabbits, pigeons and moorhens as an example.
- ⁶⁹ W. G. Hole , **1970**. *W. G. Hole, B.A., ARICS., Journal of the Chartered Land Agents Society* vol. 69, June 1970 . Hole Family Archive.
- ⁷⁰ Sale Catalogue **1912** , Hole family archive.
- ⁷¹ Mark Bailey, **2016**. *Smitten Down Yet Not Destroyed* (Bovey Tracey, Bovey Tracey Heritage Trust) p. 63.
- ⁷² David Canadine, 1990. *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (Newhaven and London, Yale University Press) p.90.
- ⁷³ Oscar Wilde, 1895. *The Importance of Being Ernest* p.28 Act 1. (Boston, Walker H.Baker) Act I, p.28. www.archive.org accessed 7 July 2019..
- ⁷⁴ Canadine, 1990. See note 72, p.94.
- ⁷⁵ F.M.L. Thompson, 1990. Presidential Address: English Landed Society in the Twentieth Century I, Property: Collapse and Survival in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 40, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)pp. 1-24, p.22.

⁷⁶ *Mid Devon Advertiser* 14 June **1969** and personal communication with Mr and Mrs Mann.

⁷⁷ *Western Morning News* 5 January **1969**, p. 2.

⁷⁸ See note 1.

⁷⁹ *History and Development of Parke*, A Dartmoor National Park Authority Factsheet 1979

www.dartmoor.gov.uk accessed 28 March 2018.

⁸⁰ A.J.H.Jackson, 1996. Managing Decline: The Economy of the Powderham Estate in Devon, 1870-1939 *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, **128**, 197-215, p.213.

⁸¹ Thompson, 1990, pp. 3, 5, 22, see note 75.