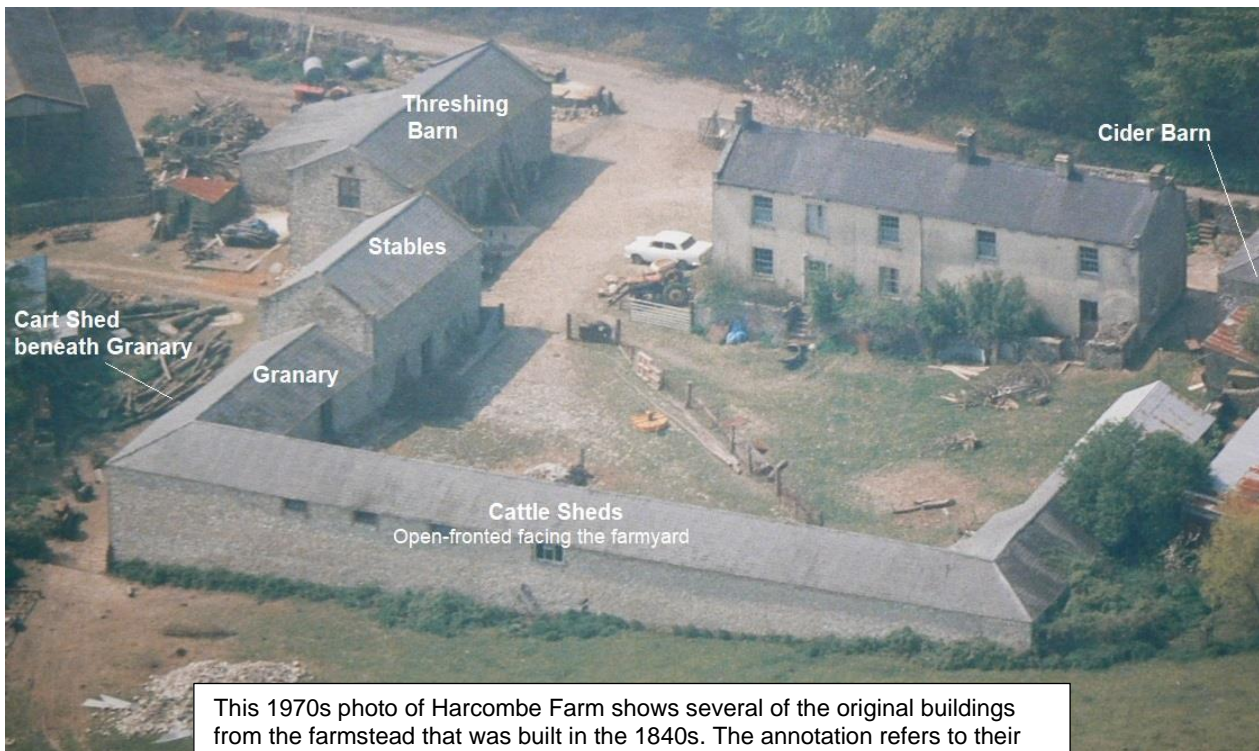


Harcombe Farm, Uplyme

Graham Davies, November 2020

<https://www.lymeregismuseumresearchteam.co.uk>

Harcombe Farm was included as one of the 70 display boards in the *Farming in the Lim Valley* exhibition held in Uplyme Village Hall in May 2008. The exhibition was researched and curated by Museum volunteers Ken Gollop, also a trustee, and Graham Davies, a retired veterinary surgeon. The author has carried out further research for this article.



This 1970s photo of Harcombe Farm shows several of the original buildings from the farmstead that was built in the 1840s. The annotation refers to their use at that time.

Timeline

1848-54	John Freeman Snr
1855-69	John Freeman Jnr
1869-73	John Wyatt
1874-81	George Spurle
1884-85	Walter Phippen
1887-88	Mr W H Spiller
1891	Richard Cole
1899	Cecil Cole
1901	John Pinney
1903-15	Thomas G Bowditch
1919-23	George Williams
1924-64	The Stobo family
1964-2018	Ron Alford

The above timeline refers to known dates that persons occupy a property. Unless stated, no distinction is made between owner or tenant. Occupations may well extend beyond the known timeline.

Harcombe farm is situated in Harcombe Bottom, Uplyme, Devon, which is about 2 miles, across the parish and county boundaries, from Lyme Regis in Dorset. In most of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century, the land was part of the Rhode Hill estate owned by the Talbot family. In 1840 Admiral Sir John Talbot GCB owned 536 acres of land in the parish of Uplyme together with further 'right of access' to common land. There is no indication that 'Harcombe Farm' existed at that time. Over 300 acres of the land was farmed 'in-hand' by the estate.

A change in estate policy led to the creation of Harcombe Farm: a farmstead with over 300 acres of land. The author believes that John Freeman Snr was its first tenant in the late 1840s and that it might have taken up to 1-2 years to build the house and buildings beforehand.

1851 Census of a 309 acre farm at Harcombe

John Freeman (60), farmer employing 4 labourers; Catherine Freeman (58), farmer's wife; John Freeman (21), farmer's son: 2 female and 3 male indoor servants.

Taunton Courier, 25 January 1854

To be let, for a term of 7 or 14 years, from the 25th March, 1854

An Estate

in Uplyme, Devon, now in the occupation of Mr John Freeman (who, from ill health is about to decline the Farming business), consisting of a large newly erected Farm-house, with all convenient outbuildings, and 310 acres of good Meadow, Orchard, Pasture and Arable Land, in excellent Cultivation.

This is a very healthy Sheep Farm

The Freeman family came from Frithelstock in Devon. It appears that John Freeman Jnr took over the tenancy in 1855.

Catherine Freeman, widow, is recorded in the 1861 census as living at No. 1 Rhode Valley Cottages, Uplyme.

Note: The capitalisation in the newspaper cuttings is as transcribed from the original newspaper.

1861 Census of Harcombe Farm, 290 acres

John Freeman (31), farmer employing 4 men and 2 boys; Elizabeth Freeman (29), farmer's wife; 1 female servant (15), 1 male servant (13).

Taunton Courier, 14 April 1858

An extract from an advertisement by the Nitro-Phosphate or Blood Manure Company
Harcombe Farm, Uplyme, Feb 5th, 1858

Dear Sir – Having used the Blood manure on Wheat at the rate of 2 cwt per acre, the benefit I derived from it perfectly answered to my satisfaction. I would strongly recommend it to all my friends. I am, dear Sir, Yours very truly, John Freeman

John Freeman Jnr continued at Harcombe Farm until Lady Day (March 25th) 1869 when he took possession of Causeway Farm, Broadwindsor. In November of that year, while travelling to Axminster market, he was thrown from his horse and died a few days later from his injuries.

1871 Census of a 316 acre farm at Harcombe Bottom

John R Wyatt (31), farmer employing 3 men and 2 boys; Susan Wyatt (33), farmer's wife; 2 sons and 2 daughters (ages between 1 and 5); female servant (21).

Bridport News, 27 June 1868

UPLYME, DEVON

TO BE LET, BY TENDER, for 21 years

(determinable at 7 or 14) from the 25th March

next, that very desirable well-situated FARM

called HARCOTBE FARM, situate in the above

Parish, and now in the occupation of Mr John Freeman.

The Farm comprises 316 acres, more or less, of which about 173 acres are pasture.

Taunton Courier, 1 September 1869

BIRTHS

August 19, at Harcombe Farm, Uplyme, the wife of Mr Wyatt, of a twin – son and daughter.

John Wyatt took on a 21-year tenancy at Harcombe Farm on Lady Day 1869. However, his stay was short-lived: by consent the lease was surrendered at Michaelmas (September 29) 1873. Mr Wyatt disputed that he owed a final rental sum of £11.8s. In the Axminster County Court of April 1875, Judge Petersdorff found in favour of the plaintiff, the Talbot estate.

1881 Census of Harcombe Farm, 200 acres

George Spurle (59), farmer employing 4 men and 2 boys; **Mary Spurle** (61), wife; **Mary Spurle** (27), unmarried daughter; **Robert Spurle** (3), grandson; 2 male indoor servants (15 and 20).

Western Times, 25 May 1877

HYDROPHOBIA – Mr G Spurle of Harcombe Farm, Uplyme, write us that there is a plant growing in that neighbourhood which has been administered with perfect success in cases of hydrophobia.

In the Axminster County Court case, Talbot vs Wyatt, in April 1875, it was stated that the farm was re-let, and part was taken possession of at Midsummer 1874. The author believes that George Spurle was this new tenant and that the census describes the reduced size of the farm.

Bridport News, 21 November 1884

HARCOMBE FARM, UPLYME
MESSRS SWAIN & SNELL beg to announce that they are instructed by Mr Walter Phippen, who is giving up the farm, to SELL by AUCTION, on FRIDAY the 21st day of November, 1884, undermentioned ROOTS and GRASS KEEP, comprising about 6 acres of Swedes, and about 6 acres of Turnips in ground, about 50 acres of Grass Keep up to Lady-day next and several dozen Gate Hurdles
.... Roots will be found an abundant Crop and will be sold in Lots to suit purchasers, either to be carried off or fed on the ground, and the Grass Keep being healthy for sheep ...

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 25 March 1887

TO LET, in a Farm-house near the sea, SIX ROOMS (unfurnished), suitable for a gentleman's family; pleasant situation. – Apply Mr Spiller, Harcombe Farm, Uplyme, Lyme Regis.

Western Gazette, 29 June 1888

BIRTHS

SPILLER – June 21, at Harcombe Farm, Uplyme, Devon, the wife of Mr W H Spiller, of a daughter.

The 1880s at Harcombe Farm was characterised by short tenancies for Walter Phippen and W H Spiller.

1891 Census of Harcombe Farm

Richard Cole (42), farmer: **Millicent Cole** (39), wife; **Cecil** (19), **John** (4) and **Frances** (9) Cole, sons and daughter.

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 25 January 1895

FARM LABOURER Wanted, cottage and garden. Apply, RICHARD COLE, Harcombe, Uplyme, Lyme Regis

Richard Cole would seem to have had little experience of farming before taking on the tenancy of Harcombe Farm. Born in Bideford, Devon he married Millicent Capel in 1870. They first lived in Islington, London, where their son Cecil was born. Richard was a clerk at a wine merchants. They later moved to East Wickham, Kent where Richard worked as a brewery collector. His children Frances and John were born here, from where the family subsequently moved to Harcombe Farm. Cecil Cole took over the tenancy of the farm from his father after 1895.

Taunton Courier, 19 July 1899

HARCOMBE FARM UPLYME DEVON

SALE of 43 ACRES of OATES in ground, which may be Cut and Carried off. B & J GAGE are instructed by Mr Cecil Cole (quitting) to SELL by AUCTION, on the Premises, on FRIDAY, the 21st JULY, 1899, the undermentioned excellent OATS, in the following or such other Lots as may be determined at time of Sale:

Lot	Name of Field	Description	Acreage
1	Sixteen Acres	Oats	16
2	Fourteen Acres	Ditto	14
3	Twelve Acres	Ditto	5
4	Holman's Close	Ditto	8

The above CORN will be found an exceedingly good crop, very clean, and well situated for removal, being close to good roads. The usual CREDIT will be given.

For Viewing apply at the Farm-house. Sale at Three o'clock.

Auction Offices, Axminster, 11th July, 1899

1901 Census of Harcombe Farm

John Pinney (50), farmer: Fanny Pinney (52), wife; Elizabeth (57), sister and widow.

1911 Census of Harcombe Farm

Thomas George Bowditch (44). general farmer: Bessie Joyce (44), wife; Elizabeth G Bowditch (22), daughter and dairy maid; Florence (14) and Edith (10) Bowditch, daughters and school girls.

At the time of the census the large farmhouse also housed Joseph Gudge (66), his wife, Ellen (61), and unmarried daughter Florence (24). Joseph worked at the 31 acre Rhode Hill Garden Nursery which had been leased to Mr W Connelly for 10 years from December 1910. The Gudge's 21 year old boarder, William White, also worked at the nursery.

Thomas Bowditch had the tenancy of Harcombe Farm from about 1903 to 1915. Before taking on the farm Thomas had been a gamekeeper on the Rhode Hill/Talbot Estate for several years.

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 23 February 1903

TO LET, PART of FARMHOUSE, situated at Harcombe, Uplyme.
Kitchen, sitting-room, and three good bedrooms, with box-room.
Apply T Bowditch, Harcombe Farm, Uplyme,
Lyme Regis, Dorset.



Thomas Bowditch and family at Harcombe

In 1912, the Rhode Hill Estate was put up for sale by auction. **The Devon and Exeter Gazette, 29 June, 1912** reported:

Yesterday afternoon Mr J F Glasse, of the firm of Messrs Osborn and Mercer, auctioneers, Albemarle House, Albemarle Street, Piccadilly, London, offered for sale by auction, at the Rougemont Hotel, Exeter, the Rhode Hill Estate, situate between Lyme Regis and Axminster, comprising about 1,320 acres. The estate occupies both sides of a wooded valley, through which the county boundary of Devon and Dorset runs the outstanding feature being its hilly and wooded character, and commanding extensive views of the sea. The estate was split into thirty-seven lots, including residences, small and cottage holdings, building sites and farms. There was not a large attendance, bidding was far from brisk and only twelve lots changed hands publicly Harcombe Farm, Lot 23, let at £57 16s per annum, comprising about 119a 2r 19p of pasture and woodland, with farmhouse, farm buildings, cottage, and including building sites on the main road from Axminster to Bridport. (Bidding) was commenced at £1,500, but withdrawn at £1,950

A pause to review the story of Harcombe Farm from its beginning, circa 1848, to the day of the auction in June 1912. In 1882, Harcombe (237 acres) was described as a corn, sheep and dairy farm. The corn, wheat and oats, may well have exceeded a third of the acreage in the early days. The author suspects the dairy herd to be small, about 10 cows and followers, providing family and local needs for milk consumption and butter production, with some cattle reared for beef. Roots, such as turnips and swedes, would have been grown in addition to corn. The orchards supplied apples for eating, cooking and cider making. A few pigs would have been reared. Letting part of the large farmhouse provided further income.

Plan
OF
THE RHODE HILL ESTATE.
LYME REGIS.

For Sale by Auction, by
MESSES OSBORN & MERCER,
Auctioneers, Surveyors & Estate Agents,
ALBEMARLE HOUSE,
ALBEMARLE STREET, PICCADILLY,
LONDON, W.



In 1903 John Reginald Charles Talbot's youngest daughter, Laura, married Mr Alban Woodroffe who owned the Ware Estate in Uplyme. She persuaded her husband to buy the remaining part of the Rhode Hill estate, not sold at the auction, 'to keep it in the family': an area of about 940 acres. Harcombe Farm was part of this purchase.

LYME REGIS MUSEUM
Farming in the Lim Valley

Rhode Hill

The 1912 Rhode Hill sale plan has been used to show the estate, bordered in red, owned by Alban Woodroffe in 1920.

The sale catalogue of 1912 described the farm buildings at **Harcombe Farm** (Lot 23) as well arranged, enclosing three spacious yards, and comprise barn, lean-to shed, waggon house with loft over, cart horse stable of four stalls and loose box, cow house for eight, and bull house, root house, bullock house for 11 with feeding passage, fodder store, calf pen, two loose boxes with loft over, and four piggeries.

Of the almost 120 acre sale lot, described as pasture and woodland, about 24 acres of wood/rough/rough pasture was 'in hand', the cottage was let to Mr Boys for £7 16s a year, with the remainder let, with other lands, to **Mr T Bowditch** on a yearly Lady Day tenancy at a rental apportioned to this Lot for purposes of sale of £50.

The acreage had reduced from 316 acres (1868) to 119 acres in 1912. This might have been a response to the high turnover of tenants, between 1869 and 1903, creating a more manageable farm unit, but the acreage of Lot 23 would also be a reflection of the common practice, when whole estates were put up for sale, to reconfigure the layout of farms producing sale lots more attractive to the buyers. This may have been the case with Lot 23: it contained 'in-hand' wood and rough pasture, and the sitting tenant, Mr T Bowditch was also renting land from adjacent lots in the sale catalogue.

The Rhode Hill estate had increased in size from circa 536 acres (1840) to 1320 acres (1912), much of which was due to the purchase of land, such as Rhode Barton Farm and Hole Common, from the Henley family in the adjoining parish of Lyme Regis.

After 1912, Thomas Bowditch's new landlord was Alban Woodroffe. Thomas George Bowditch died in 1916, aged 49.

George Williams: 1919-23

Western Times, 15 October 1920
Hayrick Destroyed by Fire at Uplyme

At about 4.30 on Wednesday afternoon it was discovered that a fire had broken out in the rick yard of Harcombe Farm, Uplyme. The owner, Mr George Williams, was attending Axminster Fair. The Lyme Regis Fire Brigade was summoned, but was cancelled later, it being thought there was not sufficient water to operate. PC Clements (Axminster) and PC Leach (Uplyme) were quickly on the scene, and were greatly assisted by Mr Tibbles, and other employees of Mr Woodroffe and the ladies from Harcombe Bank, who carried water a distance of a quarter-mile. By their efforts two ricks of corn and one of hay were saved. A rick of new hay about 18 tons, and about one ton of old hay were destroyed. The damage is not covered by insurance

Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 16 June 1922

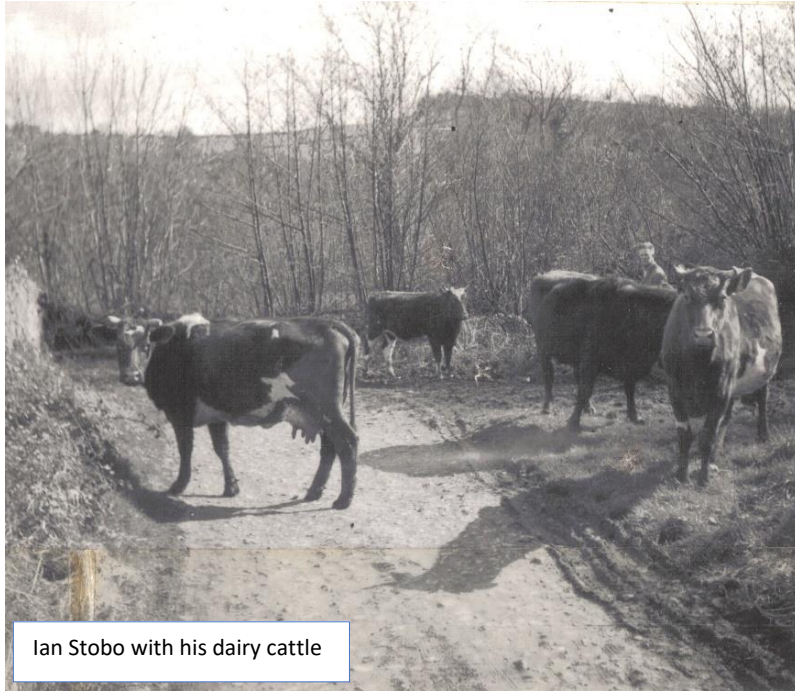
At the Petty Sessions, Lyme Regis, Clifford George Williams, 20, of Harcombe Farm, Uplyme, was summoned for riding a bicycle so as to endanger the lives of passengers on the highway, on the 21st ulto. Williams, who pleaded not guilty, was defended by Mr C F Saunders, Crewkerne. The case hinged on whether defendant could or could not have avoided knocking down the little son of William Rice, caretaker of the cemetery. The police contended that, irrespective of the accident, defendant was riding too fast. The defence was that the boy ran into the cycle, and it was impossible to avoid him. The Bench, by a majority, imposed a fine of £1.

George Williams was a lay preacher at the nearby Baptist chapel, and preached the doctrine of not working on a Sunday.

The Stobo Family: 1924-64

In 1924, John Stobo (44) brought his family to Harcombe farm, wife Blanche (41), and children Ian (14) and Agnes (9). He purchased the farm from Alban Woodroffe.

John Stobo was born in Douglas, Lanarkshire, Scotland. With the experience of being a forester, John came to East Devon in the early 1900s and became the bailiff of the 930 acre Pinhay estate owned by Wilton Allhusen, a position he held until 1919, living in one of the Pinhay cottages. In 1907, he married Blanche Bradford of Underhill Farm, situated on the Ware cliffs, Uplyme, Devon . They lived at Pilsdon Manor, north of Bridport in Dorset, in 1921 before moving to Harcombe farm.



Ian Stobo with his dairy cattle

Newspaper reports indicate the interest of John Stobo, and his son Ian, in exhibiting flowers and vegetables at the local horticultural shows in Axminster and Uplyme from the 1920s onwards. In 1936, John Stobo was vice-chairman of the Uplyme and Lyme Regis horticultural society committee.

John Stobo was also a judge for fruit and flowers in the 1947 Melplash show, held at Bridport, Dorset.

1939 England and Wales Register Harcombe Farm

Stobo, John	29 May 1880 (m)	Farmer, heavy worker
Stobo, Blanche	29 June 1883 (m)	unpaid domestic duties
Stobo, Ian B	18 April 1910 (s)	assisting father
Stobo, Agnes	23 May 1915 (s)	unpaid domestic duties

Ian Stobo bought an Allis Chalmers tractor at the 1938 Devon County Show held that year in Axminster, one of the first tractors in Harcombe.

At that time, Harcombe Farm extended in area to nearly 108 acres, mainly pasture land, with a small area of orchard, coppice and rough pasture. The buildings provided 14 cowstalls for the dairy cattle, 8 tyings in the stock shed and two calf pens in the former stable. There was also a poultry house. This was a mixed farm, as would have been for the former Bowditch and Williams tenants, but specific details are not available. John Stobo did keep pigs in the earlier days and Ian Stobo had a small milk round for the local community in the 1950s. John Stobo died in 1949; Blanche, his widow, in 1960. Ian's sister, Agnes Pincott, and her husband Edward, lived at the farm with Ian and his mother, 1951-61. Ian and Agnes sold the farm in 1964.



Ian Stobo

To commemorate Peter Perry's 36 years in Veterinary Practice at Axminster, at the time of his retirement in 1985, his colleagues presented him with a photograph album of his farm clients. Ian Stobo had retired from farming for over 20 years but was included in the album.

Ronald F Alford: 1964-2018

Ron and Jean Alford bought Harcombe Farm in 1964. They had previously lived at nearby Beech Farm.

Over the years, enterprises on this mixed farm included dairy and beef cattle, sheep, poultry/egg production, rearing of turkeys and farmhouse accommodation. In addition, Ron Alford offered his services as an agricultural contractor to other farmers in the area, doing such jobs as hay making and hedging. He also sold logs, delivering them to customers in the local area including Lyme Regis.

The Farm House

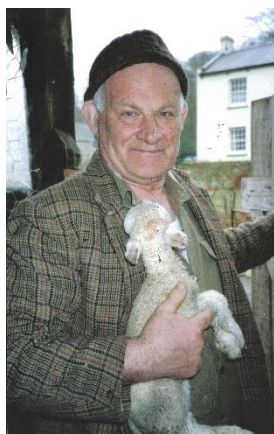
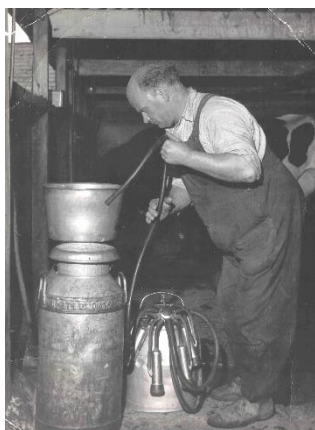
1912: Two sitting rooms, kitchen, wash house, large dairy on the ground floor and seven bedrooms and box room

on first floor. Ample water supply from a spring.

Kitchen garden and large prolific orchard.

1964: Ground floor: entrance hall and passage, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, scullery, larder, bathroom, rear hall and dairy. First floor approached by two staircases: seven bedrooms and box room.

A productive walled kitchen garden. Mains electric and water, with secondary water supply by gravitation from the orchard to the dairy for cooling purposes.



This article has been researched from several sources: newspaper cuttings, tithe maps, trade directories, census records, sale catalogues, ordnance survey maps, *Farming in the Lim Valley* exhibition archives and conversations with the farming and local communities.