

THE HISTORY AND TRADITIONS OF THE PEEK FAMILY

Since the first half of the fourteenth century, when surnames started to come into use, the name Peek, with its variations Peeke, Peke, Pyke and Pike, has been borne by numerous families scattered throughout Devon and elsewhere in the West Country.

This edition of "Peek of Hazelwood", like the first compiled in 1964, deals mainly with the families descended from John Peek of Hazelwood (Halsenwood) (1753-1847). The branch of the Peek family to which he belonged had, however, been established in one small area of Devon since earliest recorded times, and the connection remains to this day. The area in question comprises the district of South Hams and the hundreds and divisions of Coleridge, Stanborough and Ermington; from Blackawton and its neighbouring parishes of Halwell and Cornworthy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and probably earlier), then to Modbury for the greater part of the eighteenth century and finally, in the 1770s, to Loddiswell and Kingsbridge. Members of the family have owned the Hazelwood estate at Loddiswell for over one hundred and fifty years.

On 25 February 1833 a document was submitted to the College of Arms and attested before Lancaster Herald by John Peek of Halsenwood Villa, Loddiswell, co. Devon, gent, and his second son, Richard Peek, High Sheriff of London and Middlesex 1832-33, to support the grant of Arms to the former on 28 June 1832. The document gave details of all John Peek's children and grandchildren born up to 1832, as well as his father and grandfather. The last-mentioned, Richard Peeke, was born in 1689/90 at Allely (now Allaleigh; originally AEI(I)a's leah, and first mentioned in 1238), a hamlet in the parish of Cornworthy near Dittisham, Devon, but lived for most of his life at Modbury, some ten miles away. He was married to Abigail Cowle at Modbury in January 1714/15 and died there in 1763.

John Peek of Hazelwood's great-grandfather, John Peeke, is stated in the 1833 pedigree to have had numerous children, to have possessed "great landed property in the parish of Cornworthy" and "to have once held the office of High Sheriff of Devon". The last of these statements appears to be completely untrue, as there is no evidence that any member of the Peek family or of those families closely related to the Peeks ever held the office of High Sheriff during the seventeenth century. It is, of course, possible that one of them may have held a minor office in the county of which there is no extant record.

John Peeke of Halwell and Cornworthy, who was born on 1 November 1657 at Halwell (two miles from Allaleigh), married twice. By his first wife Mary nee Robbins, whom he married at Harberton, near Ashprington, Devon, in April 1680, he had four children, the youngest of whom, Richard Peeke, grandfather of John Peek of Hazelwood, was baptised at Cornworthy in March 1689/90 a few months before his mother's death in August 1690. In April 1694 John Peeke married Mary White at Cornworthy and had at least two more children.

The "great landed property" no doubt refers to the forty-five acre Allaleigh Wood as well as other properties in the parish of Cornworthy associated with the families of John Peeke's two wives. Allaleigh Wood was owned by Henry Robbins of Ashprington, almost certainly grandfather of John Peeke's first wife Mary, and sold by Henry Robbins in September 1679 for E300. Gitcombe, which adjoined Allaleigh Wood in the south of Cornworthy parish, was sold in 1659 by John Parrett, who was closely related to Henry Robbins' wife Elizabeth nee Parrett. The family of John Peeke's second wife also possessed properties in Cornworthy. At least three Whites were assessed for hearth tax there in 1674, along with Edward Robbins and various members of the Parrett family. The above-mentioned John Parrett and Edward White had been assessors for the subsidy roll at Cornworthy in 1647. There is also a record dated 1704 referring to "land in Allely (Allaleigh) formerly of Edward White, senior, deceased". It is likely, therefore, that John Peeke enjoyed the inheritance of both his wives in Cornworthy.

Two family traditions are mentioned in the 1833 document, but investigations have shown that neither has any basis in fact. One tradition held that the ancestors of the Peeks were members of the old Norman family of de Lucie (de Loiset) descended from an admiral in the service of William the Conqueror. Their first settlement in Devon is stated to have been the manor of Sutton Lucy in the parish of Widworthy, east Devon. This was held by the de Lucie family for several centuries, but the line eventually died out. The family arms bore two luces (from the Latin lucius, a full-grown pike), and it

was suggested that when the old Norman houses began to anglicise their names at the end of the thirteenth century de Lucie became Pyke or Pike and eventually Peek. Unfortunately, as will be explained further on, the name Peek almost certainly had a much more prosaic origin.

The second tradition held that the first member of the family to which John Peek of Hazelwood belonged came over from Holland with Prince William of Orange along with several hundred young gentlemen and yeomen and settled at Cornworthy. Prince William landed at Brixham on 5 November 1688, only seventeen months before John Peek's grandfather Richard Peeke was born at Allaleigh to John and Mary Peeke of Cornworthy.

The registers of Cornworthy and the neighbouring parishes of Halwell, Blackawton, Ashprington, Harberton, Moreleigh, East Allington and Dittisham (as well as others slightly further afield such as Ugborough, Modbury, Loddiswell and West Alvington) list the names of dozens of Pokes, Peekes, Pykes and Pikes whose families had been settled in the area without a break for two or more centuries before the landing of William of Orange, and this applies without any shadow of doubt to John Peek of Hazelwood's ancestors. As previously mentioned, his great-grandfather, John Peeke of Halwell and Cornworthy, was born at Halwell on 1 November 1657 and lived at Allaleigh in Cornworthy parish from his marriage onwards. Furthermore, this John Peeke's father, Richard Peeke of Abbotsleigh, was baptised at Halwell in 1618 the son of yet another Richard Peeke (Peke) and his wife Jane, who was herself a member of a well-known local family.

How then could John Peek of Hazelwood and his son Richard, when giving evidence of their ancestry to the College of Arms in 1833, suggest that their forbear of only three or four generations back had suddenly arrived in Cornworthy as a stranger from a foreign country when persons of the same name had been settled in that part of Devon for centuries past? By coincidence, however, there have long been families bearing the name Peek in Holland (there is to this day a well-known department store in Amsterdam named "Peek and Cloppenburg"), but the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie in The Hague has confirmed that this name is of purely German origin and that they have no record of any English Peeks associated with their country. The founder of the department store, Johann Theodor Peek, came from Gronheim.

A possible reason for the rise of the tradition mentioned in the 1833 document may be found in Macaulay's account of the landing of William of Orange in 1688. Both his army and his fleet, the latter commanded by an English admiral, contained, along with contingents of various other nationalities, many English gentlemen and yeomen all actively opposed to the religious policies of King James II.

William's armada was received with open arms. According to Macaulay, the peasantry of the coast of Devon crowded down to the seaside with provisions and offers of service. The day after the landing, Tuesday, 6 November, saw William's army marching up country, some regiments advancing as far as Newton Abbot. On 9 November Prince William and his army arrived in Exeter, and his reception was tremendous. Houses were decorated, and all the neighbouring villages poured forth their inhabitants to welcome the invaders with "loud huzzas, the ringing of bells and bonfires".

The people of Devon were "overwhelmed with delight and awe". They were eager to take up arms in William's cause, although Marshal Schomberg, second-in-command of the army, thought little of soldiers "fresh from the plough", and only picked recruits were enlisted.

This, then, was the Devon scene in November, 1688. Cornworthy and its neighbours near the estuary of the River Dart are only a few miles from Brixham, and it is but natural to suppose that among the many Peekes and Pikes who inhabited that part of the county there were at least some who actively rallied to Prince William's cause. Whether John Peek of Hazelwood's great-grandfather, John Peeke of Cornworthy, and the latter's friend and bondsman Leonard Wadland, both still in their early thirties in 1688, actually left their native villages to join William's triumphal march northwards is not known, but the former's descendant, when making his application to the College of Arms 144 years later, may have thought fit to embroider the story of his ancestor's life in order to impress Lancaster Herald.

Reference was made earlier to Richard Peeke of Abbotsleigh, John Peeke of Cornworthy's father and John Peek of Hazelwood's great-great-grandfather. Abbotsleigh, which was sometimes called Yabsley ("Ye abbot's ley") and is not to be confused with Allaleigh in the parish of

Cornworthy, is the name of an estate within a detached portion, also called Abbotsleigh on modern maps, of the parish of Halwell where was formerly situated the Grange or Barn of the Abbots of Torre for their Blackawton property. The farmhouse of the present (Lower) Abbotsleigh Farm bears the date 1679 and must have been known to the contemporary Richard Peeke and his family. A few yards from the farmhouse are the remains of an even more ancient barn, which, although rebuilt, may have originally been the Torre Abbey Grange. The remains of the old Middle Abbotsleigh farmhouse still existed a few years ago, but they have now been demolished. The present Higher Abbotsleigh is Victorian.

Abbotsleigh was one of a number of estates which formed the Manor of Blackawton, given to the Premonstratensian Abbey of Torre by John Fitzmatthew. After the Abbey had been dissolved by Henry VIII in 1538 Blackawton Manor was acquired on 4 July 1539 by Lord John Russell, who became first earl of Bedford of the second creation in 1550. The Bedford family held the manor until the death of the third earl in 1627.

Blackawton Church is much closer to Abbotsleigh than the official parish church of Halwell, and the result has been that the names of many of the Peeks whose baptisms, marriages and burials should more properly have taken place at Halwell are to be found in the Blackawton registers. This tendency prevails to the present day among the residents of Abbotsleigh and has been the cause of some dissension between the incumbents of the two parishes.

The Blackawton Manor Court Rolls held at the Devon Record Office in Exeter mention a Richard Pyke as paying the lord of the manor in 1517/18 for a licence to occupy a tenement in "Abbotysley". An earlier Richard Peke, whose name appears in the court rolls between 1437 and 1442, may well have been a member of the same family. In a survey of Blackawton Manor dated 1585 a Richard Pyke is stated to have appeared before the manorial court on 23 March 1543/44 and claimed, as the second of three lives, the reversion to the Abbotsleigh tenement on the death of one Joan Pyke, who was almost certainly his mother and the widow of the Richard Pyke who had obtained the licence in 1517/18. Under the three lives system, a widespread Devon custom, the tenancy of a property passed from one member of a family to another by lineal inheritance. It is probable that Joan Pyke obtained the copyhold tenancy of the Abbotsleigh farm (and therefore became the first of the three lives) from Simon Rede, the last Abbot of Torre, after her husband's death.

The 1585 survey also shows that on the death in 1570 of the younger Richard Pyke his second son John Pyke (Peke) succeeded as the third of three lives at Abbotsleigh. In 1597 the last-mentioned surrendered his reversion to the Abbotsleigh farm in favour of his eldest son Richard Peke (born 1572), who was immediately admitted to the tenancy. A later Richard Peke (Peeke), born in 1618, was described in the Blackawton parish registers between 1647 and 1668 as "of Abbotsleigh", while another survey made around 1700 refers to "the widow Peeke's tenement" at Abbotsleigh.

From all the above we can assume that the Peek family held the tenancy of Abbotsleigh for nearly 200 years. Unfortunately, however, although it is likely that the direct ancestral line goes back as far as the Joan Pyke who died in 1543/44 and her probable husband Richard, it is impossible to prove this because of lack of supporting information and a weak line in the pedigree.

The Blackawton and Halwell registers record the baptisms of several children born to one or more Richard Pokes between 1596 and 1613, and the Richard Peke who inherited the Abbotsleigh tenancy in 1597 was almost certainly the father of at least one or two of these children. No trace can be found, however, of his marriage, nor is there any evidence that he had a son named Richard.

In 1616 a Richard Peke (born c.1594) was married at Blackawton to Jane Tucker, a member of an old local family which was already closely linked to the Pykes and Pokes of Abbotsleigh. The Halwell and Blackawton records show that he was a man of some wealth and that he played his part in the local community. It is very likely that this Richard Peke was a son (and the eldest at that) of the Richard Peke mentioned in the previous paragraph, but no record can be found of the younger Richard Peke's birth, baptism or parentage. In the circumstances, therefore, the link between the two Richard Pokes cannot be assumed, and until further evidence is forthcoming the Richard Peke who

married Jane Tucker must be recognised as the earliest proved ancestor of the Hazelwood branch of the Peek family.

The origin of the name Peek may be uncertain, but, as mentioned earlier, there is no evidence that it was derived via Pike and Pyke from the Norman family of de Lucie. In Devon a "peek" is a three-pronged pitch or hay fork. There can be no doubt that the inclusion of three shakeforks in the armorial bearings granted to John Peek of Hazelwood in 1832 was a heraldic pun on the family name. It is noted that one Christian name has prevailed in each of some seventeen generations of the Peek family; from Richard Peke of Abbotsleigh in 1517 (or even Richard Peke of Aveton in 1440) to the latest Richard Peek born in Zimbabwe in 1977.

The tree which forms the main part of this work gives the names of all John Peek of Hazelwood's known forbears and most of his descendants in the male and female lines to the present day. The whole comprises some 1500 known individuals, although all trace has now been lost of a number of families (nearly all Australian), of which nothing has been heard for very many years.

With the exception of one branch the majority of John Peek's descendants have remained in Great Britain. The exception is the large and flourishing branch descended from several of the fifteen children of Samuel Peek, John Peek's third son. These children emigrated to Australia between 1830 and 1860, and most of their descendants live in either Sydney (and elsewhere in New South Wales) or Queensland. Several who first arrived in Sydney over a hundred and twenty years ago played a prominent part in the development of that city and were known as the "Pioneer" Peeks. They brought with them to Australia some relics of John Peek of Hazelwood and their Devon forbears.

Owing to the preponderance of the female lines only a few of the present-day descendants of John Peek actually bear the name Peek, and the majority of these are in Australia. In Great Britain there remain only about five such individuals and one family with male descendants through whom the name may be carried on, while there is a similar family now domiciled in Zimbabwe. The first of these two families is descended from John Peek's youngest son, James, and the other from his fourth son, William (1791-1870). So far as is known, the rest of those who bear the name Peek all reside in Australia and comprise five families who are descended from John Peek's third son, Samuel Peek, and one from his fourth son, William Peek.

Two of John Peek of Hazelwood's descendants have been Members of Parliament. A baronetcy was conferred on Sir Henry William Peek, M.P., in 1874, while Sir Cedric Drewe, M.P., Treasurer of H.M. Household, was created K.C.V.O. Sir Dugald Stewart, K.C.V.O., C.M.G., 17th Chief of Appin, Lorn and Ardshiel, was British Ambassador to Yugoslavia 1971-77. There have been three High Sheriffs, a bishop and a Q.C. Eight members of the family have married into the peerage. The present Earl of Leicester is a descendant of William Peek, John Peek's fourth son, while the Williams of Bridehead baronetcy is held by a descendant of James Peek.

The tea trade may be said to have been one source of the family fortunes. In or about 1800, when he was eighteen, Richard Peek, John Peek of Hazelwood's second son, decided to leave the family home at Kingsbridge and walk to London. On arrival there, following a chance introduction, he joined the tea firm of Sanderson & Barclay in Old Jewry. After some years he achieved promotion, and his brother William emerged from Devon to take his place. Round about 1810, however, the latter decided to launch out on his own as a wholesale tea dealer in the City of London under the style of William Peek & Co.

A few years later Richard Peek joined his brother, as also did their youngest brother James. In 1821 a partnership agreement was signed between the three brothers, two of whom, Richard and William, are described in "Tea for the British" by Denys Forest (published in 1973) as "the remarkable brothers Peek".

Thus was founded the famous firm of Peek Brothers and Co., which was eventually to become the top firm of wholesale tea brokers and dealers in the country; in 1865 it paid duty on over five million pounds of tea. Richard Peek, who had for several years played a prominent part in public affairs in the City of London, left the partnership in 1832 after being elected High Sheriff of London and Middlesex. In 1834 William Peek opened up in Liverpool with a partner named Winch,

and his youngest son Francis Peek and Winch's nephew joined them in 1855. In the same year the firm of Peek Brothers and Winch of Liverpool opened a branch in the City of London in direct competition with the original Peek Brothers and Co. Another firm, Francis Peek, Winch & Co. of London and Liverpool, also came into being. Other members of the family who, in addition to the three original brothers, became partners in Peek Brothers and Co. or one of the other associated firms were Sir Henry William Peek, Bart, and William Peek of London (1822-1886), eldest son of William Peek, senior.

In May 1895 a new company, Peek Brothers and Winch, Ltd, was formed to take over the long-established businesses of Peek Brothers and Co. and Francis Peek, Winch and Co., both of London, and Peek Brothers and Winch of Liverpool. It was said at the time that the combination of the three previous businesses would make the new company the largest wholesale dealer in tea and coffee in the world. The company had agencies in China, Europe, the U.S.A. and Canada.

The original firm of Peek Brothers and Co. had been established at No.20 Eastcheap in the City of London since c. 1842, and when Peek Brothers and Winch Ltd was founded these premises, which had been known as Peek House since 1874, were reconstructed in their present form. The first Chairman of Peek Brothers and Winch, Ltd, was Francis Peek, youngest son of old William Peek who had died in 1870. Other directors of the new company were Francis Peek's son, Francis Hedley Peek, and his son-in-law, Francis Saxham Elwes Drury. Peek House, which no longer has any connection with Peek businesses, still bears over its entrance Sir Henry Peek's family motto "Le maitre vient". The Board Room formerly contained portraits of Sir Henry Peek, Francis Peek, Francis Hedley Peek and F.S.E. Drury.

In the early 1900s, and particularly during the rubber boom of 1909, Peek Brothers & Winch, Ltd acquired a number of rubber, coffee, tea and other plantation companies in the Dutch East Indies, mainly in Java and Sumatra, and the company acted as secretaries and managing agents for all the new companies. In 1913, however, they decided to divest themselves of their plantation agency business, and a new company, Francis Peek & Co., Ltd, was formed to take over this business. Two of the original directors were Francis Peek's son-in-law, F.S.E. Drury (already mentioned as an original director of Peek Brothers & Winch, Ltd) and one of Francis Peek's grandsons. The company is still in existence today in the City of London as a subsidiary of Brooke Bond Liebig, Ltd.

As for Peek Brothers & Winch, Ltd, this company continued under its original name until April 1962, when following a merger it became Peek, Winch & Tod, Ltd, and moved shortly afterwards to Newhaven, Sussex. Some years later the company was taken over by a large group.

In 1857 James Peek, still a partner in Peek Brothers & Co., which he had helped to establish, decided to set up two of his sons, Charles and Edward, then aged seventeen and sixteen respectively, in a business of their own, since to his great disappointment they refused to follow him in the family tea business. He therefore invited a West Country miller and biscuit-maker, George Hender Freat, who had married his niece Hannah Peek, to come up to London and start a biscuit factory for his sons. Freat was to manage the factory and be a partner, the finance being provided by James Peek. This was how the firm of Peek, Freat began. In 1957 it celebrated its centenary, and the booklet which was produced to commemorate the occasion contains photographs and descriptions of James Peek and George Hender Freat.

At first nothing went right with the business. Both Charles and Edward Peek decided that they had no more liking for the biscuit industry than for the tea trade. They left accordingly, Charles returning to Devon and dying soon afterwards, while Edward forsook trade for the Church. Nevertheless James Peek and his co-partner, George Hender Freat, persevered, and in time the firm began to prosper.

In 1866 James Peek left Peek, Freat and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Thomas Stone, a silk manufacturer. The latter, a man of vigorous personality, quarrelled with Freat, with the result that the firm's co-founder retired in 1887. By this time Freat's two sons were also out of the business, and Stone's two sons, Huntington and Ralph Erskine Stone, grandsons of James Peek, had taken their places. In 1901 the firm became a limited company, and Francis Hedley Peek, a

great-nephew of James Peek, was appointed the first Chairman. He died in 1904, however, and since then no Peeks or Freans have been connected with the business.

Francis Peek, father of Francis Hedley Peek, has been mentioned earlier on as a figure prominent in the tea trade and as the first Chairman of Peek Brothers and Winch, Ltd. He was also an active Church worker and built no fewer than four churches for his sons-in-law in Holy Orders. One of these was Holy Trinity, Beckenham, Kent, erected in 1877 as a memorial to his parents, William (1791-1870) and Mary Peek. Francis Peek's grandson, the Rt Rev. Francis Whitfield Daukes, was Bishop of Plymouth from 1934 to 1950.

In conclusion, mention may be made of the estates in Devon owned by the Peeks. As stated earlier, Hazelwood at Loddiswell near Kingsbridge has been in the family for over one hundred and fifty years; the present owner is Captain William Grenville Peek, heir presumptive to the Peek baronetcy. The estate was bought by Richard Peek, second son of John Peek, in 1830. At that time the main estate residence was known as Halsenwood Villa, and John Peek was himself living there in 1832 when he received his grant of Arms.

It is not, however, clear when John Peek first took up residence at the villa. He was married at Loddiswell, his wife's parish, in 1779 and certainly came to live there shortly afterwards. His first four children were all born at Loddiswell between 1779 and 1787, but only Richard, who was to buy the Hazelwood estate nearly fifty years later after making his fortune in London, is stated to have been born (in October 1782) actually at Halsenwood Villa, the other three being born either in the village or at an outlying farm. John Peek's four youngest children, however, were all born at Dodbrook, part of Kingsbridge, or in Kingsbridge itself, between 1791 and 1800 and christened at the Independent Chapel at Kingsbridge. It was there, too, that John Peek's wife Susannah was buried; she died at Dodbrook in August 1802.

It would seem, therefore, that John Peek left Loddiswell for Kingsbridge around 1790, and it may have been many years before he returned to Loddiswell to take up residence at Halsenwood Villa. His son Richard, although born at Loddiswell, is known to have spent at least part of his youth at Kingsbridge before moving up to London in 1800 at the age of eighteen.

It is to Richard Peek that Hazelwood owes most of its development and present appearance. Although he bought the estate in 1830, he did not give up his partnership in Peek Brothers and Co. and his other interests in London until shortly after he had completed his year of office (1832/33) as High Sheriff of London and Middlesex.

After retiring to Loddiswell he devoted the rest of his life to the estate and to furthering charitable and religious causes in his native county. He was an ardent member of the Independent Body, or what is better known now as the Congregationalists, and erected a number of chapels and schools.

John Peek and many of his close relatives were buried in the grounds of Hazelwood, most of them in what are known as the Peek Catacombs. In nearby Loddiswell Church the pulpit was erected to the memory of Richard Peek, while the east window was presented by William Peek (1791-1870) as a memorial to their mother, Susannah Ann Peek, wife of John Peek of Hazelwood.

Rousdon, near Seaton in south Devon, was built for Sir Henry William Peek, Bart, by Sir Ernest George, R.A., P.R.I.B.A., the well-known Victorian architect. Sir Henry was Sir Ernest George's first important patron, and Rousdon was the first of a long series of great country houses built by the latter, who also built Southwark Bridge in London and many important public buildings. Among Sir Ernest's pupils was the even more famous architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, who many years later designed and built Castle Drogo for Julius Drewe, whose mother was a first cousin of Sir Henry Peek.

Rousdon passed out of the possession of Sir Henry's family in 1938 and has since been occupied by Allhallows School, which moved from Honiton, where it had been established for several centuries. Many members of Sir Henry Peek's family are buried in the churchyard at Rousdon and in the family vault. The church contains monuments to Sir Henry's father, James Peek, and his father-in-law, William Edgar.