The Story of Halsway Manor
By Graham Roberts

Sheltering in a small combe in the southern slopes of the Quantock hills in Somerset is Halsway Manor, the home today of the only permanent residential folk centre in Britain. How a group of folk dancers and singers was able to found the Halsway Manor Society is an interesting tale in itself but it is merely the latest episode in a history that begins before the Norman Conquest. It is a story of wealthy families and humble farmers, of a great bishop and a ruined chapel, of pilgrimages and pirates. It tells of the predicament of a rural curate, the devoted ministry of a preacher in a small Somerset town, a farmer's son from Devon who became a famous London organ builder, Victorian artists, and the granddaughter of a migrant to America who married an English businessman,

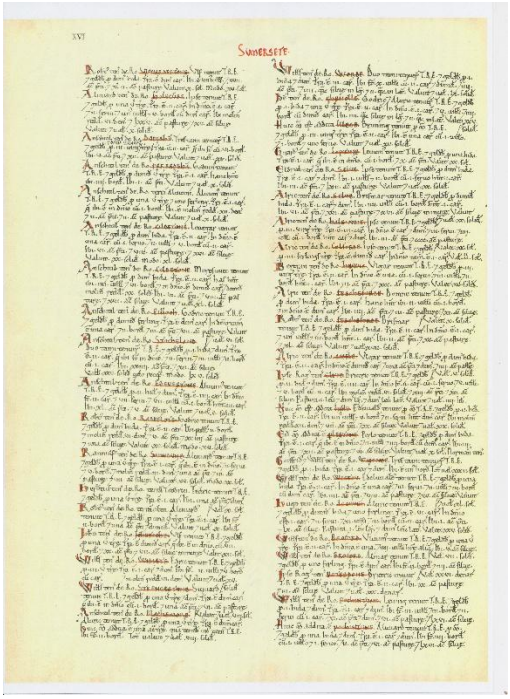
At first glance the house today presents a harmonious frontage of gables, towered porches and mullioned windows but closer examination quickly reveals a considerable difference between the west and east halves of the house. The eastern block dates from the fifteenth century when the manor house was rebuilt; no architectural features of any earlier building are apparent. Apart from subsequent repairs and minor additions the house remained unchanged until the late nineteenth century when there was considerable redevelopment and the western block was built. A comparison between drawings and photographs of the old house made in the early nineteenth century and the house today will clearly demonstrate the skilful work of the Victorian architect that, enhanced by the passing of time, has produced such a pleasant building.

Inside the house, in the early 1920s, additions of panelling and plasterwork from other old houses were made, together with other alterations. However, the Tudor ceiling and overmantel and some of the panelling in the library are part of the old house. The account of the transformation of the interior comes much later in Halsway Manor's story, a story that starts with the Domesday Book.

Contents

1. The Domesday Book

This comprehensive survey of England was commissioned by William the Conqueror in 1085. It listed all the lands granted to each overlord starting with the names of their tenants, recording the properties in detail, the land, the building, the people, the animals and the value at the time of Edward the Confessor and also at the time of the survey. This gave William, and future rulers, closer control over the barony and was used for taxation purposes and as a general government reference book for many years. The script is in Norman Latin and uses Roman numerals. It is extensively abbreviated, each item being separated from the next by a shorthand symbol for "and", similar to a large figure seven. Each individual heading is in red ink and a red line is drawn through each place name as a form of highlighting.



The manor of Halsway was part of the lands granted to Roger de Courcelles and the tenant's name was Alric. The Doomsday record states that Alric held Halsway from Roger de Courcelles, Alric ten(t) de Ro(ger) HALSWEIE and had held it in the time of King Edward, Ipse tenuit T.R.E. (tempore regis Edwardi) when he paid tax for three virgates of land, geld(a)b(at) pro iij virg(ates) t(er)ra, about 90 acres. Other items include land for three ploughs, e iij car, three slaves, iij servi, four villeins with one labourer, iiij villi cu i bord(ar), and four hundred acres of pasture, cccc ac pasturae. It was worth twenty shillings valete xx sol(idare). Alric also held the nearby manors of Bicknoller, Coleford, value four shillings, and part of the larger manor of Monksilver, Selve, valued at forty shillings. Land was held by him in other parts of Somerset including the manor of Combe Hawey, now Combe Hay.

In the Index of Personal Names in the modern translation of The Somerset Doomsday Book (Gen. Editor: John Morris) there are several areas of land listed under the name Alric and much of these he retained after the Conquest. In the Index of Place names we find in the entry for Combe Hay that the land is held by Algeric. The name Algeric is not in the personal names index, but from what else is known it can be assumed that Algeric was a variation of Algeric.

Collinson's History of Somerset of 1791 gives details of the de Halweia family who took the name from the manor of Combe Hawey (or Hay), where they lived. The de Haweias owned lands in England and Wales and Halsway was only eight miles from the port of Watchet, just across the Bristol Channel from their estate in St Donats.

2. Lords of the Manor

The first documentary record of the name de Haweia comes in 1166 when a Thomas de Haweia held a fee for the manor. In 1243 a dispute was recorded over the right to sell land to another Thomas de Halweia. This Thomas's son (also Thomas) inherited the estate in about 1275. His son, John of Halsway, is listed as owner in 1284/5, the property eventually being inherited by his sister Joan. It was about this time that the family, already owning Alric's estates in Somerset and Devon, inherited the estate of St Donat's, in Glamorgan. With the marriage of Joan de Haweia of St Donat's to Sir Peter Stradling the long Stradling association with Halsway Manor began.

The family originated in Straetlingen in Switzerland (hence the family name). Sir Peter's father came from Savoy with Sir Otto Grandison who was prominent in the campaign against the Welsh and subsequently became "Justiciar" or Viceroy of North Wales for Edward I. The Stradling's support was also recognised and Sir Peter himself was given command of Neath Castle in 1297 and acted as agent for lands in Ireland. Marrying this wealthy heiress put Sir Peter into the ranks of the gentry and the family on the road to prominence in the social and administrative life of Glamorgan, Somerset and Devon.

After Sir Peter's death in about 1300 Joan married John of Penbrigg, a half owner of Halsway. In 1316 Joan's younger son Sir Edward Stradling succeeded to the whole estate. This Sir Edward, the first of the five Edward Stradlings in the dynasty, fell out of favour with King Edward II in 1321, for his complicity in a power struggle in Glamorgan against the King's favourite, Hugh Despenser. He forfeited land and had to pay an annual tax on Halsway. In 1327 when the punishment was remitted he was made a knight of the Shire in Parliament and Justice of the Peace of Somerset and Dorset In 1337 he made homage to the King for Halsway "of a Great Knight's Fee."

Succession continued from father to son for over three hundred years through Sir Edward (2) 1363, Sir William 1394, Sir Edward (3) 1407, Sir Henry 1453, Sir Thomas (1) 1476, Sir Edward (4) 1480, Sir Thomas (2) 1535 and Sir Edward (5) 1571. In 1609 Sir John, a cousin, inherited. He died in 1637 and his widow, Elizabeth, sold the estate to a James only Cade of Devon

Sir Edward (2) was more oriented towards Glamorgan but his son, Sir William, although remaining a leading gentleman of Glamorgan, often resided in Somerset. After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem he became a knight of the Holy Sepulchre. It is with Sir William's son, Sir Edward (3), that the story of Halsway Manor becomes more real to us. The third Sir Edward's principal estate was St Donat's castle on the Bristol Channel coast but he spent much of his early time at his West Country manors. There is no trace of any building on the site prior to the fifteenth century. However, as mentioned before, Watchet, the most convenient landfall from Wales is only eight miles away from Halsway and it is reasonable to suppose that there must have been an earlier

family dwelling somewhere in the manor. In any event it was here that the new manor house was built.

Sir Edward's military career brought him into contact with influential members of the aristocracy. He fought at Agincourt in the retinue of the Duke of Gloucester. In about 1423 he married Joan, the natural daughter of Henry Beaufort, newly created Cardinal Bishop of Winchester and brother to King Henry. This royal patronage brought the family to its peak of wealth and influence. The new manor (there is no trace of the site of the earlier one) was probably built with the Bishop's money, in later years local legend would call it Duke Henry's hunting lodge.

Sir Edward held many profitable offices in his career suffering only one set-back when his son Henry, on a journey across the Bristol Channel from their manor of St Donat's, was captured by a notorious Breton pirate, Colyn Dauphin. The ransom demanded was 2200 marks and two manors in Oxfordshire were sold to raise the money. Retribution came swiftly. A watchtower was built at St Donat's and when the pirate ship next appeared it was captured. Family legend has it that Colyn Dauphin was buried alive up to his neck in the sand at low water leaving him to the mercy of the next tide.

Following the example of his father Sir Edward made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem but died there of the plague. Sir Henry in his turn made the pilgrimage also to succumb to the plague in Famagusta in Cyprus on the return journey. The family fulfilled its administrative duties in subsequent generations but with waning influence and inclining more to Welsh affairs. The last of the direct male line, the fifth Sir Edward, had an honoured place among Welsh scholars.

3. Royal Connections

Henry Beaufort was the grandson of Edward III. He was one of three half-brothers to King Henry IV through his father John of Gaunt's liaison, later legitimised, with Katherine Swynford. Despite his alleged riotous youth (we know he had an illegitimate daughter) he was learned in theology and became Chancellor of Oxford in 1397. He was created Bishop of Lincoln in 1398 and Cardinal Bishop of Winchester in 1407. He was a friend and adviser to King Henry V, his nephew, who appointed him Lord Chancellor of England. Before his death in 1422 the King had designated Bishop Henry as one of the guardians and tutors to his infant son and the Cardinal continued to play an important role in affairs of state and church. In 1431 he presided over the trial of Joan of Arc.

It has to be admitted that the only verifiable association of the Bishop with Halsway is in the marriage of his daughter to Sir Edward and a bequest to her in his will and there is no documentary evidence that he ever lived at the manor. Circumstantial evidence of his presence, however, is very convincing and is offered on three grounds, namely, certain features in the present building, long-standing legend and a couple of ghost stories.

One feature is the figure now set in the boundary wall of the present manor. It is the Yale of Beaufort, one of the ten heraldic creatures in the royal ancestry known as the Queen's Beasts. It is just possible to make out this mythical horse-like creature and the shield it holds. This figure was one of a pair that were placed on the pillars of the gateway when Sir Edward built the new manor house. One pillar was still in position in the 1860s and appears in paintings of that time, but was in a state of great dilapidation and removed in the renovations in the 1870s.

The name of a folly, the Beaufort Chapel, still to be seen in the grounds of nearby Crowcombe Court offers more evidence. In 1415 a licence to hear Mass in the chapel at Halsway Manor was granted to Sir Edward's grandmother. Whether a chapel existed in the old house is not known but with the rebuilding a chapel was built adjacent to the house. (This may also be the occasion when the family built an aisle on to the church at Stogumber, but we will hear more of the Stradling Aisle later in our story). Over the years the chapel fell into disuse and was, by the 1770s, in a ruinous state of repair. Part of the fabric was taken to build the cruciform "ruin" at Crowcombe Court.

Meanwhile at Halsway the rest of the chapel was used as an apple store from which, according to a story handed down from the family of the time, the Bishop's ghost would pelt the unwary visitor

with apples. Of the chapel today there is no trace but in some paintings of the manor made in the early 1800s a barn is seen beside the building. In one sketch the barn windows have a vaguely ecclesiastical appearance.

Another tangible piece of evidence can be seen in the hall where one of the ceiling bosses bears the Westminster portcullis which is part of the arms of the Beaufort family. The hall has ghostly evidence, too. At one time a gallery (known in the 1930s as the monk's gallery) led across the hall along which the ghost of a monk was said to walk on his way to say prayers in the chapel on the Bishop's behalf. With reference to legend, in the eighteenth century the house was known as Duke Henry's Hunting Lodge and it is said that the bishop's chaplain took his name, John of Stoke Gomer, from the name of the parish (now Stogumber) in which Halsway stood.

4. The Landed Gentry

Among the bosses in the hall ceiling at the manor is a gold shield with three black stripes tapering down to points that meet at the base of the shield. This is part of the arms of the Cade family who lived at Halsway for five generations. A similar device described as "Argent, three piles in point, wavey, sable," is recorded in the Visitations of the County of Devon as the arms of the Cades of Fremington in Devon. (That the shield at Halsway is gold rather than silver is probably due to a decorator's whim). The Cades were an old Devonshire family with a pedigree going back to the family of William the Conqueror.

William's cause was strongly supported by his father-in-law, Earl Baldwin, Count of Flanders and, in reward, the Earl was created Sheriff of Devon. A younger daughter of the Earl married a John Cahido or Cade in 1084. On Earl Baldwin's death, John, through his wife, became owner of the manor of Dunsland in North Devon. In 1637, a James Cade, a descendant of the Devonshire Cades, purchased Halsway Manor from Elizabeth Stradling. There is a reference to a James Cade of Stogumber among the sets of Devonshire wills lodged at the Exeter Probate office.

Four James Cades in succession owned the manor. The first James was mentioned in the Wilton Register when he was threatened with imprisonment for refusing to accept the office of Constable of the West division of the Wilton Hundred. He died in 1640. The second James died on January 10th, 1655 and is buried in Stogumber Church. The succeeding James died in 1702 and in 1733 his son, the fourth James, sold part of the manor estate to Richard Hembrow of Bicknoller. When, on his death in 1741, the estate passed to his eldest son Charles most of the property had been sold or was heavily mortgaged.

Charles, who had been a churchwarden at Stogumber in 1743, resumed this appointment from 1763 to 1767 and again in the year of his death in 1775. He is buried in the Halsway aisle of Stogumber Church. There is a bell in the church bearing the inscription "Cade 1775." Also in

1775, Charles was recorded as a Trustee of the Minehead Turnpike. The estate passed to his brother Nathaniel, James' youngest son, who was a joiner in Bristol. He sold the manor to one of the main creditors, William Snow of Porlock.

Over the years since the purchase from the Stradlings the estate had run down considerably and what was once the house and estate of a wealthy knight had become a farmhouse with a much reduced acreage and let to a succession of tenants. In 1817, when the estate was sold to Mary Stoate of Porlock, the tenant was a James Crang. She continued the lease and subsequently bequeathed it to him.

5. The Yeoman Farmers

The story of the Crangs at Halsway starts with John Crang, organ builder. He was the son of a Devonshire farmer. He learnt his trade with a well-established organ building family in North Devon. Having served his apprenticeship, he went to London in the early 18th century to workshops near St Clement Dane in the Strand. He may have been befriended by the elderly Handel and given work by him; it is a fact that the MP for Barnstaple, Sir George Amyand, Handel's executor, encouraged Crang and put commissions his way, including the servicing of Handel's organ in Great Coram Street. As time went on he became a leading figure in the organ world, installing new swell organs in St Paul's Cathedral and the churches of St Peter's, Cornhill and St Clement Dane. He was retained to repair and improve many other organs in the City of London and the Home Counties. His instruments can still be found at St Peter's, Barnstaple, commissioned by Sir George, at St Mark's, Godalming, in Surrey and at St Peter's, Pertenhall, Beds. One of his spinets is in the Victoria and Albert Museum. John Crang retired in the 1780s, the firm continuing as an organ maintenance business for another forty years.

Money from John's flourishing business had gone into farmland in Devon, much of it worked by his many brothers and sisters. Another beneficiary was a nephew, James Crang, the first of the Halsway Crangs. He was assisted by his uncle to set up at the manor as a tenant farmer around the turn of the century. When Mary Stoate bought the estate James' tenancy continued and on her death the manor was left to him in trust. The farming maintenance records from 1818 are still in existence in the possession of Mrs Meg Crang-Botting now living in Aldershot

The first James Crang at Halsway died in 1846, probably back in North Devon. His son, also James, continued to farm at Halsway and died a year later. His burial in Stogumber Church was contentious to say the least. The family's opinion was that ownership of Halsway Manor entitled burial in the Halsway Aisle in the church. The church in turn insisted that, although Halsway by name, the aisle had been built by the Stradling family and was really the Stradling Aisle, built for the gentry and not for a farmer who was in any case a very irregular churchgoer. Nevertheless, the coffin was brought to the church. The unfortunate curate had no vicar or churchwardens present to support him and with the threat that otherwise an opening would be made in the church wall, he was forced to allow the sexton to unlock the church door and allow the burial to take place.

Two years later, on the death of the late James' mother-in-law, the family adopted another tactic, using a solicitor to enquire as to the cost "if any" of her burial in "the family burying place." The reply came in no uncertain terms in an indignant letter from the same curate. His indignation was not lessened by the manner in which the request was presented to him, by hand in the street after morning service, with a curt verbal demand that if the request was not met the family would go to the bishop. After protesting about the peremptory attitude of the bearer, the reply detailed "the circumstances under which the measure of Mr Crang's sepulture in Stogumber was there extorted

and accomplished" The letter concluded, "we deny that Mr Crang or his family had any such burying place in Stogumber Church or any portion of it." The family did not pursue the matter and the old lady was buried elsewhere. The correspondence between the Crang's solicitor and the curate is attached to page 88 of the burial register for 1847, now in the County Archives in Taunton. The letter from the curate is masterly in its restraint and style and the use of the word "sepulture" is particularly relished.

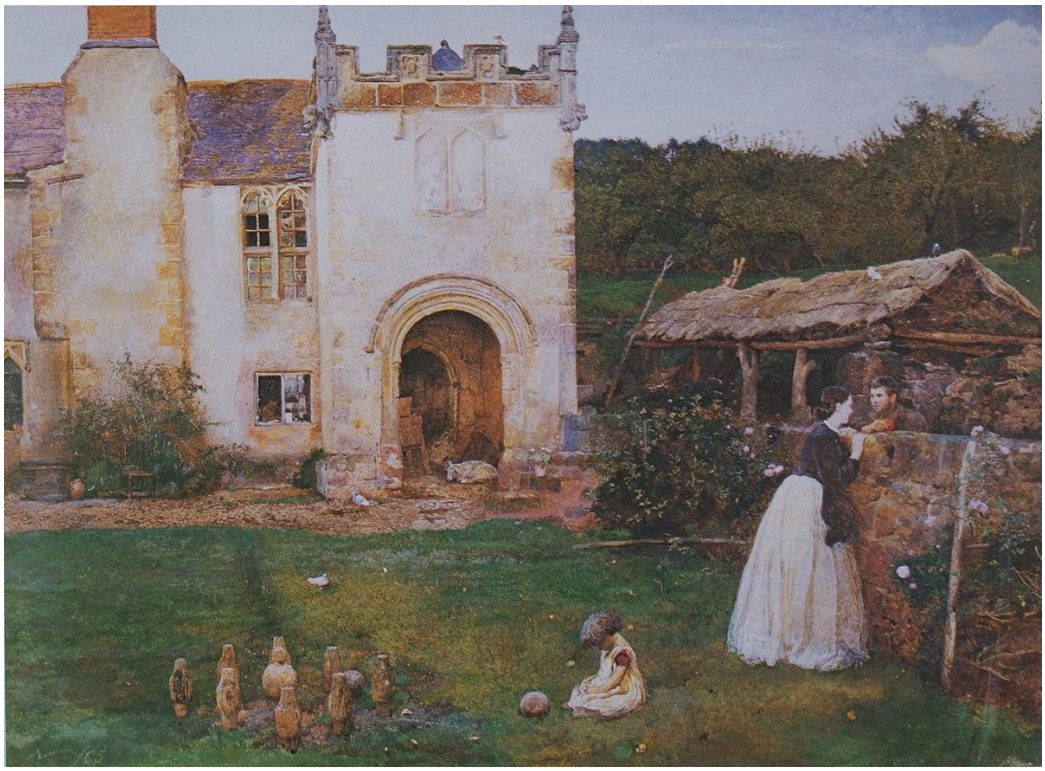
We may find this incident from the distant past amusing but it would be unfair to let it detract from the family's contribution to the manor's progress. The records show that the land was farmed efficiently and well, which is more than can be said for some of the previous owners. It is said that Elizabeth Stradling had to sell the property to meet gambling debts and we know that under the Cades, for whatever reason, the estate became heavily mortgaged.

In the years that followed, Henry Poole, Robert Evered and William Thorne in turn farmed for the Crangs at Halsway. During the Thorne's tenancy the artist John North, his friend Frederick Walker and others lodged there, finding inspiration in the manor and the surrounding countryside. Their work can be found in many collections and the Somerset School has a place in the history of Victorian art.

The third James Crang resumed residence in 1869 and the Thornes with Walker and North moved to another farm at Woolston a few miles from Halsway. The Crang connection ended in 1873 when the manor was sold to Charles Rowcliffe.

6. The Somerset School of Victorian Artists

During the tenancy of the Thornes the manor, known then as Halsway Court, became the centre of a group of painters sometimes referred to as the Somerset School although the association was shortlived and did not develop. An artist, John North, found Halsway in 1860. He lodged with Mrs Thorne for long periods over the following years.



Illustrations by North in various books of poems and prose as well as other paintings contain scenes that include the manor and its surroundings. At times other artists joined North, among them were George Pinwell and Robert Macbeth, but probably the most distinguished of the group was his close friend, Frederick Walker. In letters to his family and friends Walker wrote fondly of the manor and obviously enjoyed being there. When the house was sold North moved with the Thornes to Woolston Moor with Walker a frequent visitor.

It was while living at Woolston, in February 1870, that Walker painted what is considered to be his finest work, The Plough. Now in the Tate, the work was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1870. Painted direct in the open, often in appalling weather, it dramatically depicts the rigours of winter ploughing. Against the background of an old quarry the ploughman steers the heavy wooden plough, two plough horses lean into the harness while the ploughboy urges them on.

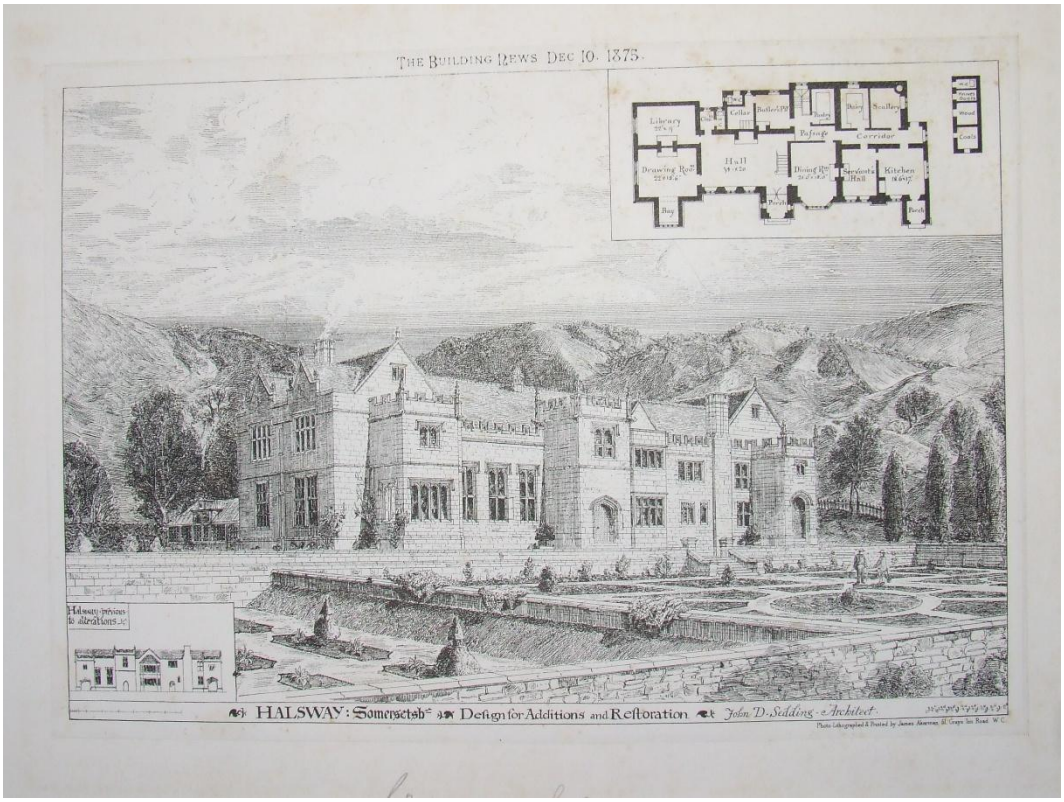
Frederick Walker's death in 1874, in the prime of his career was a great loss to the art world and the Somerset school developed no further.

North remained in Somerset, marrying a local girl in 1884. He painted many scenes of the Somerset landscape, often adapting them for book illustrations, and was greatly respected as a colourist by the critics of the day, who considered him a master of watercolour technique. The manor, as background, featured in many of his illustrations and was the subject of many works, among them The Haystack: Halsway Manor Farm (1864), A Young Lover (1867), Halsway Court and The Gardens at Halsway Manor. A familiar figure in the district for over fifty years, he died, aged 78 in 1924. His grave is in the churchyard at Nettlecombe.

7. The Manor Rebuilt

In a letter to his sister, Frederick Walker described Halsway Manor as a "dear old house" with a "jolly old crumbly aged look." He loved the house as it was and wrote ruefully that he supposed that the owner would eventually "proceed to make it into a 'modern residence' (!)." Despite these romantic sentiments he would not have been able to deny that the building was in a very dilapidated condition and badly in need of repair. Rescue for the house came in the person of Charles Edward Rowcliffe. He was a local solicitor, his family had lived in Somerset for many years and an earlier member of the family had been churchwarden at Stogumber at the time of the dispute over James Crang's burial.

The title deeds show that the purchase of Halsway Manor by Rowcliffe and others was made in 1873. This other interest was short-lived, changing hands by sale or inheritance until 1877 when Charles's brother, William Rowcliffe, became the outright owner and moved into the manor. Charles had instigated an extensive programme of restoration and repair to the house and William continued the process, work on the house continuing on and off for many years.



A survey by the Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England in 1991 brought to light details of earlier constructions in the old building. The core of the house contains remnants of a medieval open hall house with a cross wing at the eastern end and a tower which today houses the main entrance. What other earlier medieval extension eastward may have occurred is unknown, the survey found nothing predating the 15th century, but two rooms to the east of the

cross wing built in the years following may have replaced earlier construction. In about 1600 a barrel roof had replaced the open roof.

The manor was a favourite subject of several 19th century artists and there is also a drawing of the house made in 1835 by the architect, John Buckler. Comparing the house with these, together with photographs taken in the 1860s, the exterior changes to the old building are clear to see. Its length was doubled by the addition of a two storeyed extension to the west; a second floor was added at the eastern end and the western tower was moved to make a balanced frontage. The gable over the bay window was removed; this was the window of Frederick Walker's bedroom of which he wrote, "as big as a chapel with a sort of vaulted ceiling."

William died in 1912 and the manor passed to his son, William Charles Rowcliffe. It appears that at some time part of the house was let. An account of a visit to the house by members of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society in 1908 names a Mr Charles Booth as the tenant. The account refers to the present library as a newly panelled room with "a ceiling tastefully restored in the old pattern of the plaster moulding found at Halsway," which confirms a recent expert opinion that the ceiling is original, dating from Tudor time. The property was sold to W.N.Mitchell in 1924.

8. The Reverend John Gunn (1789-1836)

At this point the spotlight swings across Somerset to the little town of Chard. A notable figure in the story of that town and indirectly in the story of Halsway was the Minister of the Independent Chapel there in the difficult years following the Napoleonic Wars.

John Gunn could trace his ancestry back to the Norse Earls of Orkney. He was born in Caithness, the son of a carpenter, and was educated in Edinburgh and at Homerton College in London. He preached at Glastonbury for a year and then, in 1816, took over the ministry of the chapel in Chard from his brother Daniel. His vigorous enthusiasm and his pleasing style of preaching brought a rapid growth in attendance and three new galleries were built in the chapel. Tireless in his work among the youth of the town, he encouraged young men to study at a time when little education was available. His Sunday School became the largest in Chard and remained so for many years after his death.

His ministry had begun in the years of the severe post-war trade depression. This, combined with the effect of the Corn Laws which kept the price of bread unduly high, caused great hardship and poverty among working people. He was very active in community affairs and encouraged his congregation's support of many Christian societies. In his support for the many public movements of the time for civil and religious liberties his positive attitude was a steadying effect and his influence did much to reduce civil disorder in the town during this time of national unrest. He organised work for the unemployed and was instrumental in the building of Hope Terrace in Combe Street, still standing in Chard today.

The sudden death of this popular minister at the age of forty-seven deeply affected the whole town. Many went into mourning and most shops were closed until after his burial. Within six months a memorial had been raised in his honour and years later his picture could still be found in many parlours in Chard. When the old chapel was demolished in 1986 his memorial was moved to the churchyard of St Mary's, Chard.

His widow, Rebecca, who died in 1864, was left at the age of forty-four with eight children whose ages ranged from two to nineteen years. The eldest son, Henry, then at college, subsequently became a Congregational minister in Chard. He married Isabella Wills, daughter of the tobacco manufacturer. Two sons emigrated to America where the elder, John Thaddeus, became a lawyer. His brother,Jabez Howard, became a doctor and it is with his granddaughter, Tryphena, that the story of Halsway is resumed. She came to England and met William Mitchell of the Imperial Tobacco Company. They married and in 1924 they bought the manor.

9. The Story of Tryphena Gunn Mitchell

Jabez Howard Gunn, better known as Howard or J. Howard, the sixth son of the Reverend John Gunn, was only ten years old when his father died. At seventeen, in 1843, Howard emigrated to America where he worked for two years in Philadelphia before apprenticing himself to a doctor in Bloomington, Indiana. After serving his apprenticeship he set up his own practice in the neighbouring town of Springville where he courted the fifteen year old Lucinda Gainey. He was allowed to marry her only on condition that he came to live in her father's house. They married in 1853 and he lived there until his death in 1904. Howard and Lucinda had eight children, only two surviving to adulthood, John and Margaret.

Margaret was always known as Craigie. She graduated from St Mary of the Woods College, Terre Haute, Indiana. In 1875, on the eve of her twenty-first birthday, she married a railroad man, W. A. Mitchell. She kept up an active and influential interest in her college for much of her life and her two daughters, Tryphena and Alice, also graduated from there. Tryphena, born in 1877, was a studious person while her younger sister was more domestically inclined, or, to quote Alice's grandson, while Tryphena read books her sister made cookies. Alice, he said, was a homebody type waiting to hear a horse and buggy cross the bridge as the boys came to call. Tryphena went on to library school and took up the post of librarian in Madison, Wisconsin.

Links with the home country had always been maintained and in the early 1900s Tryphena with her mother attended a Gunn family reunion in Bristol, where one branch of the family were tobacco manufacturers. To combat the American tobacco industry's attempt to monopolise the world market for a new smoking device, the cigarette, the Gunn Tobacco Company and other companies had merged into the Imperial Tobacco Company. It was natural that the visitors would meet some of the other tobacco people in Bristol and one such was the vice-chairman of the merger. He was William Nelson Mitchell, of the Stephen Mitchell Tobacco Company, coincidentally another Mitchell but of no relation.

William and his four sons were smitten by this young lady from America and one son declared he would marry her. William, himself a widower, was equally positive that Tryphena would be his. William triumphed, marrying her in July 1910. She was warmly welcomed into the family; all accounts of the lady underline her own recollections in later years of an ideal marriage. It was a busy life, for together with her duties as hostess in her husband's social world she had a grown-up household to supervise and soon a growing child of her own to care for. Her only son, John Howard Mitchell, was born in December 1911.

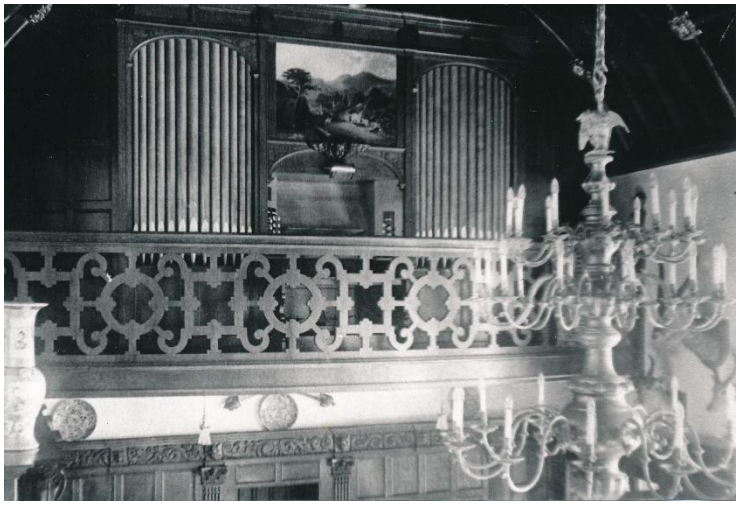
When John was thirteen another chapter in her story opened with the purchase of Halsway Manor. Several houses had been considered in the Mendips and the Cotswolds but she was drawn to the warm secluded comfort of the manor. Frederick Walker had written of a feeling of repose about the old house and had been apprehensive that future reconstruction would reduce

its charm. He had no need of such fears, the skilful rebuilding of the nineteenth century had produced a harmonious exterior of gables, towers and mullioned windows combining with the mellow stonework that could not be improved upon. We owe it to the lady's good taste that her work on the interior also did nothing to detract from that atmosphere; to this day visitors often remark on the manor's welcoming air.

With William's encouragement she selected panelling, plasterwork and ornamentation from other country houses that were undergoing demolition or rebuilding, using the material to transform the old house. One major reconstruction was in the lounge where the whole upper floor level had to be raised in order to accommodate the taller panelling and plaster ceiling from Standish Hall in Lancashire. This in turn made it necessary to construct steps in the upstairs corridor to the raised floors of the rooms above. She installed a chamber organ in the strengthened minstrel gallery in the hall and commissioned new plasterwork in many parts of the house. The Mitchell crest and a thistle and rose emblem were added to the Tudor ceiling in the library and the Gunn badge replaced one of the bosses in the hall roof.

During the years at Halsway Manor the transformed house saw many important guests, not the least of these being members of her American family. Her mother would visit and in 1936 her niece, Margaret Mead, with her husband Raymond, brought their three small children. This visit made a deep impression on the youngsters from whom, as adults, this story has been gleaned. It was an idyllic summer holiday and their cousin John is remembered as being full of fun and although in his twenties quite prepared to play with the children. He, sadly, was to die in World War II.

Her upbringing and education had not allowed Tryphena to be content with a life of social pleasure. She had always kept an interest in her Indiana college and continued to contribute to it for the rest of her life. She and William supported the Fairbridge Society, an organisation that helped deprived children to emigrate to under-populated Commonwealth countries and get a new start in life. The Prince of Wales Farm School at Duncan on Vancouver Island was of special interest to them and they also supported an orphanage in Kent for Fairbridge children.



In 1936 the Halsway chapter came to an end. After twenty-six years of a happy marriage, at the age of eighty-seven, William died and was buried in the churchyard in Bicknoller. The manor was sold and Tryphena moved to Severn House, near Bath. The chamber organ from the gallery in the hall was given to the Farm School at Duncan. Weighing four and a half tons and packed in ten cases the organ had an eventful journey to the docks being repacked twice, firstly because Canadian health regulations banned the use of the original packing material; then, if that were not enough, accidental exposure to damp when on the railway required a complete overhaul of the consignment.

Dedicated as the Mitchell organ in memory of William it continued to be used for many years. In Britain the Children Act of 1948 and subsequent measures put restrictions on child emigration and by 1975 the Fairbridge Society could make no further use of the school. The site was sold and with the permission of the eldest grandson, the organ was donated to the University of Victoria. On May 16th, 1976 it was installed in Christchurch Cathedral, Victoria. Completely rebuilt ten years later it was installed at the head of the south aisle. It is now the Cathedral's second organ and is known as the Harrison organ, the name of the maker, although the authorities may have since agreed to a request that the original name be re-adopted.

During the pre-war years Tryphena's son John had joined the Territorial Army. When the war began he was a lieutenant in the North Somerset Yeomanry. The regiment was sent to Palestine where John's unit was transferred to Z Force. He served with a New Zealand Army Survey Unit through the campaigns in Greece, Crete and Egypt, first with the rank of Captain and later promoted to Major. Following the victories in Egypt his unit was stationed in Cairo. On September 2nd, 1941, on leave in Mersah Matruh, John was drowned while swimming in the sea.

After the war, having lost both husband and son, Tryphena went back to her family in Indiana, but she often returned to visit the orphanage in Kent. She lived with her sister until Alice's death in 1961 and then moved to Carmel, California where she ended her days. She died in 1971 at the age of ninety-four. She had never forgotten her beloved William and today just two miles from Halsway Manor in Bicknoller churchyard, beneath a memorial cross, her ashes lie beside him, "united now for all time."

10. The War Years and After

Lieutenant-Colonel John Mardon of New Court, Topsham bought the Manor from Mrs Mitchell in 1938 and the family lived there until his death in 1958. It could be said that Halsway played its part in World War II as all but one end of the house was taken over by the Ministry of Health for nursery evacuees from Bristol. Up to thirty babies under two years old were accommodated, children of mothers working in the factories and fathers in the armed forces. At the age of two the children went to Chapel Cleeve Manor which was run as an Anglo-American nursery home. This must have been one of the liveliest periods in Halsway's history to date, because apart from the daily routine of a large nursery and the coming and going of mothers and babies, parties with local British and American servicemen were held regularly in the Great Hall.

Miss Betty Mardon looked after her father following his wife's death in 1950. On her father's death she took a small cottage in Crowcombe. She led a full life and had a long association with the British Red Cross Society. She was awarded Life Membership in recognition of thirty years' service to the society and on her retirement was made an Honorary Vice President of the County.

She had a great affection for the manor and held her birthday party there more than once in her later years. On its 25th anniversary she presented the Halsway Manor Society with a sundial. She had many interesting tales to tell and from her effects the society received several photographs of the house and her life there. She died in 1991.

In 1959 the Manor was sold to a property company and the estate was broken up, the land going to a local farmer, the nursery to a Mr Tom Bushen and other houses to the sitting tenants. The house, mews building and some acreage was bought by Mr Harold Johns. He wished to develop the property by building holiday chalets but planning permission was refused on two occasions and eventually, in 1962, Halsway was sold to Miss Francis Gair Wilkinson.

11. Ghostly Interlude

A history of an old house like Halsway, to be worth its salt, needs to include three ingredients: entry in the Doomsday Book, a connection with Royalty and some ghosts. Two ingredients have already been established and of the third ingredient Halsway also has its share. The story of the Bishop, resenting the desecration of his chapel, haunting the building and pelting any unwary visitor with apples, has been told earlier and was a favourite legend of the Crang family. A letter in the Country Life of October 1977 from Meg Crang Botting tells how she heard it from her grandmother who was granddaughter to old James Crang. He loved to regale his grandchildren with the story.

The other story, of the monk on his ghostly way to the chapel, has also been told earlier. Later tales put him in the upper corridor since the monks' gallery was removed. There is no first-hand account of his being seen but there is record of his footsteps being heard by Miss Mardon, her nurse and the housemaid. The maid, now an elderly lady, recalls that they, the only people in the house at the time and sleeping in separate bedrooms, heard the sound of footsteps passing along the corridor. Each thought that it was one of the others until the morning's conversation disclosed that none of them had left their rooms that night.

Other manifestations continue into the present day. A young woman, known as the White Lady, but affectionately called Elizabeth by previous staff members, appears in the lounge by a window which, prior to alterations in 1870, was a doorway. Sometimes doors will open and close of their own accord. On one occasion when guests were in the lounge the door from the hall opened and the manageress jokingly told Elizabeth to come in, telling the guests that she was on her way to the library. To everybody's shocked surprise the hall door swung shut followed by the opening and closing of the library door. A small boy saw her walk through the wall into the library and once she appeared beside him when he was playing in the lounge.

The identity of the White Lady is a mystery. One account says she is a Crowcombe girl who married a Bicknoller man who died soon after the wedding. The young widow returned to Crowcombe and died a few years later. Despite her deathbed wish to be buried beside her husband she was buried at Crowcombe and passes through Halsway on her way to be with him. An alternative story tells of a deserted village high on the Quantocks whose dead were re-interred in consecrated ground at Crowcombe, the white lady being one who cannot rest in the narrow valley and seeks her grave in the hills.

A Crowcombe man told of seeing a barefoot young woman at the churchyard gate in the village. She seemed in some distress but as he went across to offer help she disappeared. Perhaps she was Halsway's Elizabeth.

Quite recently a guest at the manor awoke in the night and was aware of something that looked like a face high on the wall opposite his bed. He thought it was trick of the light in the corridor but as he watched it developed into the figure of an old woman dressed in black with a very white face who descended, as if down a staircase, to the floor. She turned and with an intent gaze and an expression of deep concern looked towards him. The guest recalls that by then he found he was sitting up in bed with his back pressed hard against the headboard. He was about to make a dash for the door when she turned again and crossed the room and continued her descent, disappearing down through the wall. To be certain that it was not a dream he remained awake for the rest of the night sustaining himself with coffee and cigarettes.

A guest on an artists' weekend was painting by the derelict pavilion of the old tennis court. As she worked, she experienced the strong feeling that she was not alone and her artistry was being critically examined. Later the pavilion door, which was very stiff, closed of its own accord. She also told that on another occasion, when in the district, she took a friend to see the manor. This friend became greatly troubled as they entered the grounds and stopped, explaining that because of the emanations that she felt coming from the building she was unable to bring herself to approach any closer.

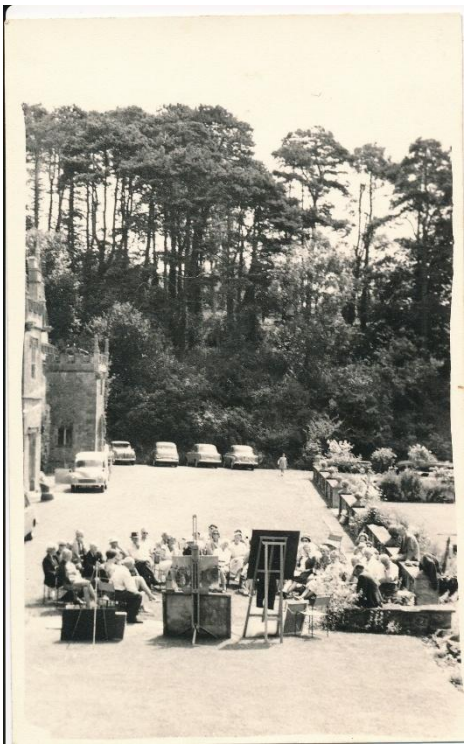
12. Frances Gair Wilkinson

Without Frances Gair Wilkinson the Halsway Manor Society would never have come into being. She was the daughter of two talented artists and herself an accomplished artist and teacher. Her parents, Arthur and Lily Gair Wilkinson, were free-thinking idealists who endeavoured to live close to nature. Frances and her brother received no formal education, their parents wishing them to learn by experiencing the very best in arts and crafts from the source. They travelled about England in a horse-drawn caravan living very simply. For about half of each year they rented a villa in Tuscany from where they could visit the great works of Italian art and architecture, attending operas and concerts. The children were encouraged to study for themselves from the excellent books they were given. The whole family practised amateur theatricals and were expert puppeteers.

Frances studied art at the Slade School of Art, her brother studied music in Budapest. The family had moved to Spaxton, a little village in the northern slopes of the Quantocks a few miles over the hills from Halsway. They had converted a barn into a simple theatre and produced plays with people of the village and had a studio for spinning, weaving and painting.

Although Arthur and Lily were pacifists their son had joined the Royal Air Force at the outbreak of war and was killed early in the conflict. Frances, who was teaching art near Ilfracombe, looked after her parents. They died within a short time of each other.

Ten miles from Halsway, at Huish Champflower in the Brendon Hills, Marjorie Hunt farmed with her husband, Donald. As secretary of her local Women's Institute she organised evening classes in painting and Frances came to teach the class. It was then that Marjorie realised that the two had met in Ilfracombe during the war. The classes ran for several years and the two ladies became well acquainted. In 1962 Frances Gair Wilkinson's financial position improved considerably and she decided to buy a big house and use it as home for herself and as a centre for the visual arts. Halsway Manor was bought and Donald and Marjorie Hunt were asked to run the house for her as bailiff and secretary. The centre flourished with regular weekly painting days, art holidays, classes and exhibitions until in 1964 she became engaged to a long-time friend and fellow artist, Frederick (Dusty) Miller.



The Hunts, on tour in Poland with a folk dance group, gave the news to the tour organiser, Bill Rutter, a leading figure in the Southwest folk scene. When they added that Frances would be

moving to Dusty's home in Kingston St Mary and wanted to find a use for the house the idea of a folk centre was born. Frances, pleased that the manor would still be used for an artistic and creative purpose, readily agreed to the sale, and offered it to the proposers on extremely generous terms. A debenture issue was opened supported by folk enthusiasts from all over the country. The Halsway Manor Society Limited was founded and the manor purchased on June 11th 1965.

Frances and her husband had moved into the Mews building temporarily. When they were ready to move the Mews was offered to the Society which regretfully felt unable to enter into further commitment. The Mews was bought by Miss Marion Twigg and four friends and converted into five communicating flats.

13. National Centre for Folk Arts

As Bill Rutter, who became the driving force behind the venture, was to write later, Frances Gair Miller, nee Wilkinson, was the society's greatest benefactor. Similarly tribute must be paid to Marjorie Hunt whose imagination inspired the ultimate purchase of the manor. The support, also, that came from all over the country must be applauded as a real act of faith. There would be no Folk Arts centre without them.

The Society was incorporated in May 1965, its purpose to promote and preserve traditional English folk dance, music and song and to operate the manor as a residential centre to that end. It was limited to 250 members who had also to be members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society (a condition that has since been rescinded).

The original Council of Management included prominent active members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society both in the Southwest and nationally. Mr P. W. (Gay) Gayler, another active folk enthusiast, was elected chairman and Mr W. A. (Bill) Rutter was appointed Company Secretary. Their wives, Hilda Gayler and Terry Rutter, were equally active and supportive, as were Mr Geoff and Mrs Bessie Rye who with Mrs M. Bradbury, Dr L. Luckwill and Mr. F. C. B. Fleetwood Hesketh were signatories to the original incorporation.

Donald and Marjorie Hunt were appointed wardens, a position they held for the next seven years, to be succeeded by David Whewell who died

three years later. Ruth Cavill, a council member and one time assistant to the Hunts at the manor, relinquishing her council membership, served as manager until 1981. Bruce Green was manager until 1988 and a series of short term management periods followed. Malcolm Bowman, a retired businessman, gave up his membership of Halsway Manor Council and took up the post in 1992, the combination of his management skills and folk enthusiasm laying a foundation for the Society's continuing success.

In the early days as a folk centre activities at the manor ran on a cost covering participatory basis, assistance with some domestic chores being considered an enjoyable part of the event. Day and weekend courses were organised by the Society or by individual groups from around the country; dances and concerts were held and used as a weekly venue for local clubs; social dance, morris and sword dance and other traditional activities. Summer holiday weeks and Christmas, New Year, Easter and Bank Holiday House Parties took place during each year. This pattern of activity has continued for nearly thirty years although many factors, especially financial, have made a more formal and controlled management structure necessary.

Folk activities alone, even with the generous fund-raising support of the Friends of Halsway, would not have provided sufficient income. It was necessary to generate income from weekday lettings to commercial and other institutions for seminars and conferences. These organisations expect a good standard of catering and accommodation, a demand which has been echoed increasingly over the years by the folk participants. Considerable expense is needed for the upkeep of this historic building and the drastic rise in costs generally coupled with government regulations concerning the health and safety of staff and patrons make a steady charge on income.

In 1982 the Mews was offered to the Society by Miss Twigg and Miss Anna Bennington, the other remaining occupant. Once again with the issue of debentures and countrywide support the purchase was made. Increased accommodation, though welcome, has also led to an increase in responsibilities.

It is a tribute to the many people who have supported the manor during the last sixty five years that we have been able to meet these challenges without losing sight of the aims of the Society. A separate trading company has been formed to run the manor and all profits are covenanted to the Society thus satisfying the requirements of the Inland Revenue. What was once a communal hostel now can claim as high a standard of service as any small hotel and Halsway Manor, as the only residential folk centre in Britain, stands as a surety that traditional English folk dance music and song remains a living part of our national heritage.

History of Ownership

Prior to 1066, the manor was part of the lands granted by King Edward to his wife Edith. Alric held several tenancies, including Halsway, Bicknoller, Monksilver and Combe Hawey.

1066	William conquers England. Crowned king on Christmas Day.
1086	Roger de Courcelle. Alric remained tenant.
1166c	Thomas de Haweia (of Combe Hawey).
1275	Thomas II de Haweia.
1284-5	John de Haweia, younger son of Thomas II (died before 1295).
1297c	Joan, John's daughter married Sir Peter Stradling (died circa 1300).
1303c	John of Penbrigg is recorded as holding a half fee to the Manor.
1310c	Joan married John of Penbrigg, She died circa 1313, at John's death whole estate passed to her younger son.
1316	Sir Edward Stradling I.
1363	Sir Edward Stradling II.
1394	Sir William Stradling.
1407	Sir Edward Stradling III, married Joan, daughter of Henry Beaufort, Chancellor of England. New manor house built.
1453	Sir Henry Stradling, as a young man captured by Breton pirates in the Bristol Channel costing his father a substantial ransom.
1476	Sir Thomas Stradling I.
1480	Sir Edward Stradling IV.
1535	Sir Thomas Stradling II.

1571	Sir Edward Stradling V.
1609	Sir John Stradling, a cousin, after 300 years of father to son descent.
1637	James Cade of Devon, bought estate from Elizabeth Stradling.
1640	James Cade II.
1655	James Cade III.
1702	James Cade IV, sold part of the manor to Richard Hembrow.
1741	Charles Cade, Stogumber churchwarden. Manor heavily mortgaged. Nathaniel Cade, younger brother. Manor sold to William Snow. Sold to Mary Stoate of Porlock, tenant James Crang farmed for him by Henry Poole Richard Evered, William Thorne On her death Manor left in trust to James Crang. James Crang II
1847	James Crang III. Thornes moved to Woolston.
1873	Charles Rowcliffe and others bought manor from James Crang. William Rowcliffe, brother, outright owner. Restoration begins. Charles Booth tenant in 1908.
1912	William Rowcliffe II.
1924	William Nelson Mitchell (died 1937).
1938	Lt.Col John Mardon bought manor from Mrs Tryphena Mitchell.
1959	Ashdale Land and Property Company.
1960	Harold Johns.
1962	Francis Gair Wilkinson.
1965	Halsway Manor Society bought the manor house.
1982	Halsway Manor Society bought the Mews.