

History of the Troyte Family

THE EARLY YEARS

Little is yet known about the early history of the Huntsham estate. At the end of the twelfth century it seems that the property was owned by the Punchardon family, and from 1272 until 1394 by the Stantons and Dunslands. Robert de Wodeton, Member of Parliament for Somerset and Dorset, was said to have lived there. In the early part of the fifteenth century it went, probably by sale, to the Beares or Beres. In the early part of the eighteenth century it was owned by a family named Lucas, and after the Lucas family came the Troytes.

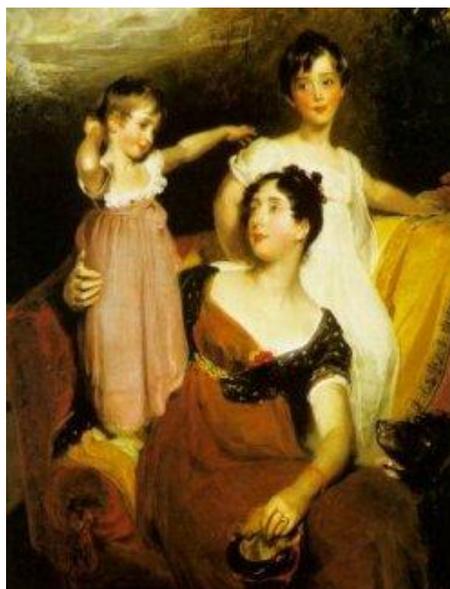
THE EARLY TROYTE CONNECTIONS WITH HUNTSHAM

The Huntsham Estate was bought in July 1760 by William Troyte. He was the second surviving son of the Rev. Thomas Troyte, the domestic chaplain at Killerton, who had married Lady Cecily Acland, the widow of the sixth baronet, Sir Hugh Acland of Killerton, in 1729. William Troyte married Arundel Berkeley and although there were seven children of the marriage, the Troytes died out in that generation. Arundel Troyte was buried at Huntsham in 1773 and William in 1807. Thomas Berkeley Troyte inherited the estate on his father's death, but died five years later and was buried at Huntsham in 1812. Thomas was succeeded by his younger brother, Edward Berkeley Troyte, who had been baptised at Huntsham in 1763. After attending Oriel College Oxford, he was ordained in 1787 and instituted to Pilkington, Somerset in 1787, which living he held until his death, and to Huntsham on presentation of his father on 2 March 1796. He added an estate at Corscombe, Dorset and further farms at Bampton, Tiverton, Huntsham and Hockworthy to those he inherited. He died unmarried in 1852 at the age of 88. There is a brass plaque to his memory in the floor of the chancel in Huntsham church.

The Rev. Dr Edward Troyte enjoyed a sporting life of fox hunting and cock fighting at the expense of land management which meant that the Huntsham estate was in an extreme state of neglect and decay with a scarcely habitable Tudor mansion and a severely dilapidated church just a few yards away. All of which the Rev. Dr. Troyte felt obliged to leave back to the Acland family upon his death in 1852, presumably because it was Acland money which was used to purchase the estate in 1760. The estate was left to Arthur Henry Dyke Acland (see below), born 27 May 1811, and son of Sir Thomas Dyke Acland of Killerton. It was a condition of his inheritance that Arthur Acland took the name of Troyte and resided there for six months of every year. By Royal Licence dated 13 August 1852 Arthur Acland assumed the surname and arms of Troyte.



Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, 10th Baronet



Lady Acland and her children

(Sir Thomas Dyke Acland of Killerton, Devon married Lydia Elizabeth Hoare, only daughter of Henry Hoare of Mitcham. Standing behind Lady Acland, is their elder boy, also called Thomas Dyke Acland, who succeeded his father as 11th baronet. She has her arm around Arthur Henry Dyke Acland who added the name of Troyte after he succeeded to the estates of the Rev. Edward Berkeley Troyte.)

ARTHUR HENRY DYKE ACLAND TROYTE

Arthur Acland had married Frances Williams, daughter of Robert Williams of Bridehead, on 15 September 1835 and their three sons and some of their daughters were born at Killerton before they took possession of Huntsham.

In 1852, when Arthur, aged 41, arrived with his family to take possession of Huntsham, there were no roads, only overgrown tracks; the estate contained about 12,000 acres spread over at least ten parishes. The land was boggy, wet and unproductive and his children thought they had come to the end of the world! Except for about £2,000 left specifically to build a new Rectory, Dr Troyte left his money to other relatives together with the first year's rent from the Huntsham tenants. Thus there was no course open to Arthur but to borrow money to improve the estate. The loan he obtained from the South West Land and Drainage Company remained a millstone around the necks of the Acland Troytes until it was finally paid off in 1930.

In 1854 preparations were made to rebuild Huntsham church, a project close to Arthur's heart. The church had been in a very poor condition for some time and, standing so close to his home, a constant eyesore. He had some experience of church building, having helped restore other churches and chapels on his father's estate; he had been restoring a small chapel at Killerton when he heard that Dr Troyte's life was about to end. His advice had also been sought when St Peter's Tiverton was being repaired and when St Michael's Bampton was restored.

The rebuilding of the east end of the chancel was completed first. The tower was partly rebuilt and the chancel and nave provided with new open cradle roofs of local oak. The boarding over the sacarium differs from that of other parts and would have been coloured blue with silver stars had Arthur lived to complete the work. All the windows are filled with stained glass by Wailes, the gift of Robert Williams of Bridehead in Dorset, who was the brother of Fanny, Arthur's wife.

The west window has illustrations of bell flowers, campanulas, designed by Arthur Troyte to represent the three bells then in the Huntsham tower. One of these three bells was an Exeter bell cast in about 1400 and one was dated 1663 and cast by John Pennington of Exeter. These bells summoned the parishioners to worship in their restored church on Sunday 2 November 1856.



Frances Troyte died in August 1856 and Arthur died of diphtheria on 19 June 1857, at the age of 46, leaving nine children. Two iron crosses with the letters F and A mark their resting places in Huntsham churchyard. No memorial stone records Arthur's work; the restoration of the church is his monument. After their deaths, and in order to perpetuate their memory, friends and parishioners gave a stained glass window in memory of Arthur and Fanny and one of their daughters; a candelabrum in the nave was installed in memory of Arthur and the font given in memory of Fanny was inscribed 'In token of the deep regard in which the memory of Fanny, wife of Arthur Troyte, is held among them, and in gratitude for her unwearied exertions in promoting the welfare of those about her, and her special love for little children'.

Of the nine children born to Arthur and Frances, three were male and all became change ringers. These were Charles Arthur William Troyte born 11 May 1842, John Edward Troyte born 20 February 1849, and Reginald Henry Dyke Acland Troyte born 8 June 1851.

It is understood that John and Reginald Troyte learnt to ring as undergraduates at Oxford University. It is not clear what gave Charles Troyte his interest in change ringing, or how he learnt to ring. In the preface to one of the editions of his book on Change Ringing, Charles Troyte states that he was largely self-taught with help from John Taylor, the Loughborough bell founder.

CHARLES TROYTE

Charles Arthur William Troyte, the eldest son of Arthur and Frances, born on 11 May 1842, was 15 when he inherited the estate and continued making improvements under the watchful eye of his father's elder brother Thomas who, on the death of his father, inherited Killerton.

In 1863, at the age of 21, Charles married eighteen year old Katherine Walrond of Bradfield near Cullompton. Her family did not think that the derelict old Tudor house was fit for their daughter, and during 1868-70 the new Huntsham Court, with twenty bedrooms, was built. The old house, standing close to the church, was demolished and some elements, including the carved oak mantelpiece and panelling were incorporated into the new house.



It is not clear how Charles acquired a taste for change-ringing but in 1866, at the age of 24, he arranged for John Taylor of Loughborough to recast the smallest of the existing three bells and add three new bells to make a ring of six. On these bells Charles taught some of his estate workers the art of change-ringing. The bells were hung in an oak frame with all the bells swinging in the same N-S direction. The Rev. H.T. Ellacombe, the leading authority on bells and ringing in Devon at that time, and a friend of Charles Troyte, held the misguided opinion that it was best for all the bells to swing in the same direction. It was even less wise to have them swinging in the weakest direction of an un-buttressed tower, so it is surprising that the tower has not suffered more over the years.

In 1870 the Huntsham band rang an extent of 120 changes of Grandsire Doubles and this is recorded on a plate in the original ringing room, which was located one floor higher in the tower than the present ringing floor. A plaque in the new ringing gallery records that on 15 September 1870 this band rang their first true and complete extent of Grandsire Minor on these bells and on 16 December 1871 another plaque records that they rang an extent of Kent Treble Bob Minor. The extents of Grandsire were conducted by John Edward Troyte and the extent of Kent treble Bob by Charles Acland Troyte.

In 1874, Charles Troyte's enthusiasm led him to have the ring augmented to eight. At that time it was accepted that a full 'peal' must consist of 5,000 true and complete changes without repetition, and this could not be achieved on a ring of six bells. As the tenor of the Huntsham six was only about 10 cwt in weight, Troyte chose to add a new tenor bell and a new treble to create a ring with a 12.5 cwt tenor. Unfortunately this also involved recasting the early 15th century fourth bell. It also necessitated some fairly drastic cutting away of parts of the 1866 oak frame to accommodate the larger bells and building a hoisted frame above the third and tenor bells to house the new treble and the second bell. The space in the bell chamber was so restricted that the treble rope had to be taken down inside the thickness of the tower wall. This arrangement, when seen for the first time by Alan Hughes of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, was called a 'triumph of enthusiasm over common sense' and Andrew Nicholson in his report on the bells says '... It would be difficult to imagine a worse design and layout for a bell frame, almost everything being wrong. The roping down through the tower, in particular that to the treble, is the worst we have yet seen and simply does not work. The fact that all eight bells swing the same way and the weakest way of the tower merely compounds the matter'.



However, it is important to remember that on this ring of bells at Huntsham, Charles Troyte, on 2 February 1875, rang in the first full peal of 5040 Grandsire Triples conducted by John Acland Troyte, with a resident Devon band mostly taught by Charles Troyte from scratch. A plaque in the ringing chamber records that this peal was rung for the Huntsham Society of Change Ringers.

The Huntsham Change Ringing Society Attendance and Fine Book dates from 1874-1881 containing a fully detailed account for the ringing activities at Huntsham, every weekly meeting, including, named attendance, amount of individual fine for absence and tardiness, touches and methods rung on each occasion along with conductors and a final yearly total page. There are entries for all the major and significant dates including the 2nd February 1875 5040 Grandshire triples. The name C Troyte occurs quite frequently as a conductor, along with the signatures of Charles Troyte and other family members.

In J. E. Acland Troyte's notebook he has a record of the peal rung on 2 February 1875, he states that the composition was 'Taylors peal, 3rd the observation'. So there we have the exact composition. Taylor's composition was first published in Shipway's Art of Ringing in 1816, but it has been claimed that it was first produced by Ben Pugh, an old Birmingham ringer. The figures, with the sixth bell observation, are given in Grandsire in the Snowdon series, 1972 reprint. They can be transposed to make the third bell observation.

Also in 1874, on 21 March in Exeter, was formed the Guild of Devonshire Ringers with Charles Troyte as President from its inception until his death in 1896. The first peal for the Guild was rung at Huntsham on 2 February 1875. In 1884 Troyte urged Devon change-ringers to look beyond Grandsire as a method as well as to concentrate on good striking. However only Troyte's Huntsham band is recorded as capable of ringing

Treble Bob. On 20 August 1878 the Ancient Society of College Youths rang a peal of Kent Treble Bob Major at Huntsham. The peal was conducted by J. W. Snowdon and included Charles Troyte and H. Payne, who rang in the February 1875 peal of Grandsire Triples, and Richard Acland Troyte. There may have been an earlier peal of Kent Treble Bob Major at Huntsham in March 1875 but again the details have not yet been verified.

In 1890 Charles Troyte and H. Willett, both representing The Guild of Devonshire Ringers, went to London to assist in forming the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers.

Charles Troyte in 1896 wrote one of the standard text books on change-ringing and, as recorded by Prebendary John Scott, indirectly contributed to English literature because long after his death a young woman writer was to find a copy of Troyte's '*Change-Ringing*' in the bargain box of a second-hand bookshop, take it home and write 'The Nine Tailors'. Her name was Dorothy L Sayers !

In 1896 Charles died, aged 54, having owned the estate for 39 years. A new organ was installed in the church in that year and the painted decoration on the pipes is in his memory. Charles' wife, Katherine, born on 18 April 1846, survived her husband by 38 years and died on 5 June 1934 at the age of 88.

THE YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF CHARLES ACLAND TROYTE

Hugh Acland Troyte, born 18 December 1865, the second son of Troyte's five children, inherited the estate in 1896. He was an army man. He married a woman much older than himself; in fact only two years younger than his mother. His wife was a Methodist and had no time for the church and was never known to have attended a service there. If the bells were rung Mrs Troyte complained that they made her head ache.

On 17 April 1918 Hugh Acland Troyte was killed in action in France and memorials to him were placed in Huntsham and Bampton churches. There were no children and Hugh's brother Gilbert Acland Troyte, born 4 September 1876, inherited the estate. Sadly they also had no children. Sir Gilbert died on 27 April 1964 aged 88; and Lady Acland Troyte died on her birthday, 21 October 1968, aged 85.

Over the years the estate has been whittled away by death duties and ownership passed to trustees following the death of Sir Gilbert. John Acland Troyte became a beneficiary of the estate and lived for some time in the Rectory built by his great-grandfather. He died on 6 August 1988 and is buried in Huntsham churchyard. A memorial to him has been erected in Huntsham church. There being no other male descendants, the Troyte connection with Huntsham was then lost. The descendants of one of Charles Acland Troyte's daughters are also beneficiaries of the estate but currently have no involvement in Huntsham or its church.