

HISTORY OF WADEFORD HOUSE

19th century

Wadeford House dates from 1810, although there is deed evidence going back to around 1780. It is thought that a much older farm house was previously on the site. It was extended in the late nineteenth century and later. It has been described as a "handsome Grade II listed stone property built predominantly of local stone". This stonework is "random rubble chert stone with Ham stone dressings and quoins" (English Heritage, Listing NGR: ST3093210372). The overall plan is a U shape facing West, with a service wing extension to the North.



The house is essentially of two storeys and four bays, with full height canted bays with hipped roofs flanking the main entrance, which has a flat-roofed pilaster porch with moulded cornice and a nineteenth century part-glazed door.

At the time of the EH survey in November 1985 there was a piece of carved stone with an armorial crest and the old motto "Sola fides sufficit" (Faith alone is enough) lying by the front door. The extension has quoin stones at the corner. Windows are three light mullioned stone casements with quadrant stays. The house has slate roofs and coped verges; there are brick chimney stacks with chamfered caps. The conservatory abuts the south gable end, while the service range on the north side continues East with outbuildings and the garden wall containing a gabled opening in brick wall, semi-circular headed opening and keystone.

The house has cellars, a courtyard and stable block as for a working farm, but has always been something more than just that, larger and with more sophisticated features such as the oval billiard room and conservatory.

Standing on a plinth on the brow of a hill facing the house is a temple folly or summer house, a circular eighteenth century *tempietto* of Ashlar red sandstone with six columns supporting a moulded entablature (Listing NGK ST3G7561G300). A Mr. Pike, a wool merchant, bought it at the Earl of Chatham's sale of the Burton Pynsent estate at the beginning of the 1800's and re-erected it at Wadeford,

It was also at this Regency period (1810) that the first two Roman mosaics were found on the site of villa near Wadeford House in a field which then belonged to a Mr. W. Lane. They were discovered when a ditch was being dug, and were originally bright and well-preserved, but they were left uncovered and were destroyed by frost damage. In 1861 some excavations were made revealing five more pavements and a hypocaust. Other finds included tiles, painted wall plaster, roof slates, a bronze hand, a ring fibula, and coins.

A notice in the Taunton Courier of 3 Jan 1811 confirms that Wadeford House existed, and was so named at that time. The occupant of the house was a Mr. John Herniman, although a Mr. Thomas Pyke is named as occupying "about 70 acres of orchard, pasture and arable land". Presumably this is the same man as the Mr. Pike who re-erected the Folly. The advertisement sought tenders for a lease for seven years of two contiguous agricultural estates, either separately or together. One consisted of a farmhouse, associated farm buildings and 32 acres at Higher Wadeford, then tenanted by a Mr. John Symons. The other was Wadeford House with 70 acres of cider orchard, pasture and arable land, currently occupied by Thomas Pyke. It was estimated that the joint estate would support about 70 dairy cows and produce up to 100 hogsheads of cider annually.

Tenders were to be submitted either to Thomas Pyke at Bridgewater, perhaps the Mayor of Bridgewater and foundryman of that name, or to John Herniman at Wadeford House who could also be approached for viewing the land. Herniman may have been a farm manager or bailiff, and Mr.

Pyke or Pike the owner or tenant.

Wadeford House next known occupant was John Brown, another successful wool merchant. He lived with his wife Sarah. Their son John was born in Combe St Nicholas, c 1825. The family is recorded as living at Wadeford in the census returns for at least forty years from 1861 to 1901.

In the 1861 census John Brown, senior, age 68 and described as a "gentleman" lived with his wife Sarah, age 58. Also shown was John, junior, age 36, and a Wool Stapler; his younger brother William, age 35, also born in Combe is listed as a "gentleman". At the next census in 1871 John Brown, Sr., now 78, is described as a "retired wool stapler". John Brown, Jr., is a "wool stapler". The elder John Brown died in 1880, aged 87.



The 1881 census lists the younger John Brown, age 56, as head of the house household and a "wool stapler". Also listed is his mother, age 78, a "wool staplers widow". She died in 1884, age 82. She and her late husband were both buried in the parish.

The 1891 census describes John Brown, age 66, unmarried and a "wool merchant". John Brown later lived at Higher Wadeford and died in 1918 at the age of 93. He was buried in the parish.

The photograph on the left was probably taken in the 1890s before the addition of a ballroom, later used as a billiard room, at the rear of the house. The photograph clearly shows the nearby temple referred to above.

20th century

In the nineteenth century Wadeford House had been occupied by wool merchants, but for much of the twentieth century its residents were associated with the armed forces.

Colonel Couchman was the first, probably between about 1901 and 1906. It seems very likely that this was Colonel George Henry Holbeche Couchman, DSO. He was born on the 7th December 1859, the son of Colonel Edward Holbeche Couchman of the Madras Artillery. He joined the 13th Light Infantry in 1878, aged about 20 and served in Burma. He was mentioned in dispatches and awarded the DSO in 1887. He married Helen Mary Chattock in 1890.

He commanded the second battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry in 1906-10, probably just after leaving Wadeford and the South Western Light Infantry Brigade in 1910-13, before retiring in 1913. He then returned to active service for the duration of the Great War, becoming a Brigadier-General, commanding the 107th Infantry Brigade, Royal Ulster Rifles on the Western Front until October 1915. He was again mentioned in dispatches. He retired finally after the War, and died at Budleigh Salterton in February 1936, aged 76.

From at least 1906 to April 1916, the householder at Wadeford House was Mr. George Barrow Darby. He was an affluent Edwardian country gentleman who owned property in Yorkshire. He was born in 1852, the eldest son of the Reverend George William Darby MA, rector of St Andrews, Fersfield in Norfolk. Darby went up to St John's College Cambridge, received his BA in 1876 and in due course the nominal Cambridge MA. He had been admitted at the Inner Temple but was never called to the Bar.

He married before the turn of the century, but had no children. A few years after that, swept up in the patriotic enthusiasm during the Boer War, he volunteered to join the Imperial Yeomanry and

fight the Boers. The Imperial Yeomanry was a force of gentlemen volunteers, mounted infantry who provided their own horses and uniforms. Army records list him as 'Darby, George Barrow, 14205, Trooper, 47th Company, 13th Battalion, Imperial Yeomanry'. This company and this battalion are significant. The 13th Battalion was officially known as the "Duke of Cambridge's Own", but unofficially as the "Millionaires' Own" because of "the number of hugely wealthy men in its ranks". Unfortunately the Millionaires' Own promptly got almost all of themselves captured when they rode into the small town of Lindley at the end of May 1900. George Barrow Darby's particular company, the 47th, played an especially undistinguished part in this.

Darby survived Boer captivity and is shown in the 1906 Kelly's Directory as residing at Wadeford House. It was at Wadeford House that Darby died on April 25 1916, age 64. He is buried in the parish, as was Ellen Darby, who died in 1930, age 62. She was probably his widow. George married in his mid-40s when Ellen would have been about 30.

Admiral the Honourable Sir Alexander Edward Bethell, known to his close friends as "Ted", moved to Wadeford House with his wife, Hilda, and daughter when he retired from the Navy at the end of the Great War. This was not a happy time for them, as both their sons had been killed in the War (the younger son heroically but in circumstances which distressed his father), and Admiral Bethell himself, after a long and successful career, had been pressured into giving up his post as Commander in Chief at Plymouth prematurely for reasons of internal naval politics. When he was the Director of Naval Intelligence in 1909 he was responsible for finding a suitable naval candidate to head the Foreign Section of the newly created Secret Service Bureau, later to be the Secret Intelligence Service.

It seems, however, that Admiral and Lady Bethell found contentment at Wadeford House, where they both took a very active part in the local community. They may also have had their minds taken off past sadness by their daughter Agatha's wedding to an eligible naval officer, Lieutenant Commander Marsden-Smedley, in 1922.

During his Wadeford House years, Bethell was a church warden and a J.P. His obituary in the Times adds that he did much work for the British Legion, becoming president of the county branch. After his wife's death in 1928 he spent many months of every year on the Continent. He was also a member of the Naval and Military Club. Admiral Bethell died at a London nursing home in 1932, aged 77. He and his wife are buried near the south porch of Combe church.



After the Bethells, the next resident of Wadeford House, as recorded in Kelly's Directory of Somerset in 1931-35, was Lt-Col. John Sandbach Noel Harrison DSO, who would have been in his fifties. He had been born near Liverpool in November 1877, the second son of a Lancashire cotton broker Cuthbert Harrison.

By the time Lieutenant Colonel Harrison was at Wadeford House in the Thirties, and very probably earlier, there would have been electricity, a telephone, radio and other twentieth century appliances.

The next residents of Wadeford House in the Thirties and Forties were the brothers Colonel R. Scott-Hopkins DSO, MC. and Major Scott-Hopkins, together with the son of Col. Scott-Hopkins, the late Sir James Sidney Rawdon Scott-Hopkins, born 29 Nov 1921. Jim had been to Eton, and would have been 18 when Britain went to war with Germany in 1939.

He was in the Army from 1939 until 1950 reaching the rank of Major. He married after the War and was an officer in MI6. After leaving the Army he went into farming in the Fifties and later was successively Conservative MP for North Cornwall and Derbyshire West and MEP for Hereford and Worcester, winning with large majorities in the 1979 to 1989 European elections and becoming Leader of the Conservative MEPs. He was at one point, because of his Intelligence connections, asked by Sir Alec Douglas-Hume to conduct an independent enquiry into MI5's suspicions that Harold Wilson was a security risk. He was knighted in 1981.

There were evacuee children at Wadeford House during the War.

From the 1950s Wadeford House was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Garton. Following the death of Mrs. Garton and later Charles Garton in 2004 the property was purchased by Malcolm and Carolyn Butler.