

DESCENT OF WELSHE'S TENEMENT IN PILTON 16TH/19TH CENTURY AS REVEALED IN DOCUMENTS IN THE NORTH DEVON RECORD OFFICE



The property named in Christopher Lethbridge's will of 1713 to be connected with a rent charge for the benefit of Pilton Church fabric was one third of approximately seven acres called Welshe's Tenement otherwise Shearford Head Weir Meadow, which is shown on the attached O.S. map surveyed in 1888, to be on the west side of the bottom of Shearford Lane (see map) and has, for many years, formed part of the lands attached to Westaway House. This meadow was divided into three more or less equal portions in the past, which were known as Temple's Close, the Hart Close and Cubilityburn alias Cubilitybone. This last piece is the one which carried the annual rent charge in perpetuity of five shillings for the maintenance of his memorial tablet on the south wall in Pilton Church and a further five shillings for the repair of the portion of church roof above it. [See the archive item on this tablet by clicking here.](#)

The Welsh alias Walsh family who owned this land before the seventeenth century were wealthy cloth merchants

in Barnstaple, holders of public office including civic leaders in Barnstaple, and named as Mayors from 1404. They also held land in Pilton, and were Trustees of the Charity Lands of the parish during that period. It is likely that the Welsh connection with this land went back a long way, as even in the 19th century it continued to be referred to in legal documents as 'formerly Welshe's Tenement'.

In the second half of the seventeenth century Christopher Lethbridge married the daughter of Philip Bowchier of Westaway House, and inherited the property in the 1680s on the death of his father-in-law. He soon acquired Shearford Head Weir Meadow from the three separate occupiers, and also other lands which were adjacent to the Westaway holdings, and it is in his will dated 1713 that the rent charge was set in place.

[N.D.Record Office ref Pearse Box 104/13, 19 & 23]

The Lethbridge family let Westaway House and the land following the death of Christopher's son in 1748, and in 1819 the whole estate was sold to James Whyte of Pilton House, together with other lands in the parish. In turn, thirty years later, James, advertised this and all his other properties in the parish for sale. Since then the Westaway lands have changed hands several times, and for some years have been in the occupation of members of the farming May family of Pilton. Needless to say, the rent charge totalling 50p has not been formally paid in living memory, although Christopher Lethbridge's memorial continues to be cared for by the Church authorities.

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