

HEBER VALE and the lost ALLERS

Post-Medieval Timberscombe Farmsteads

(and a forgotten soldier)



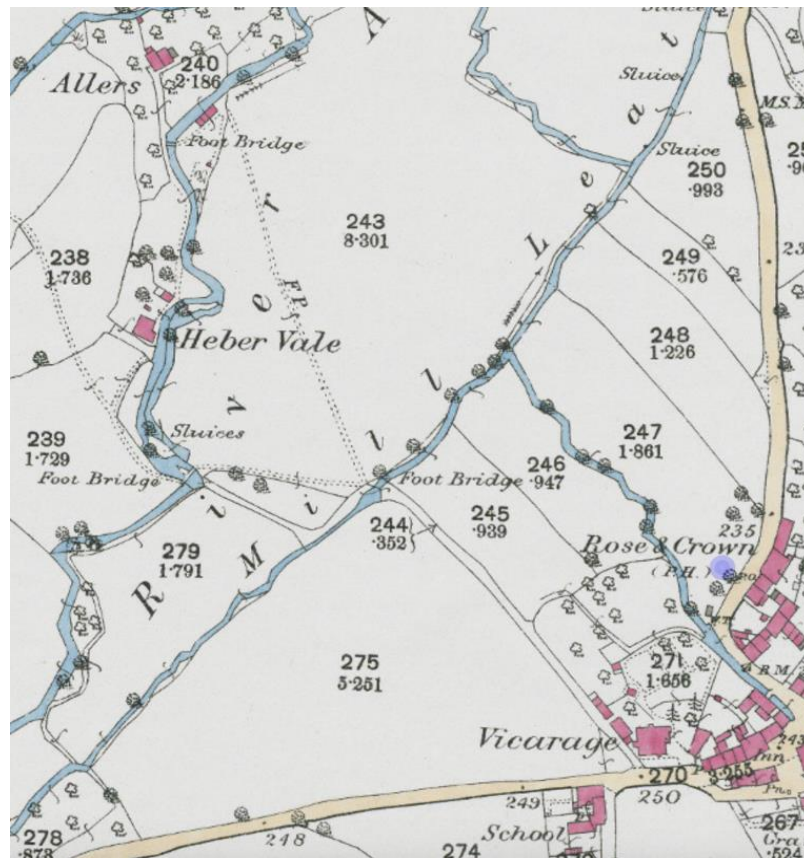
*HEBER VALE, TIMBERSCOMBE, original postcard donated in 2021 by Tim Collins,
published by "J. Jeffery, Newsagent & Stationer, Timberscombe, Dunster"*

The origin of *Heber Vale* is a derivation of the Anglo Saxon for “a corner of land left by the stream in a river valley” (1), which is pretty much what is captured by this early postcard of the area just northwest of Timberscombe, situated between Cowbridge Road and Wanneroo Farm.

“Heber Vale” and “Allers” (often called “Alders” and sometimes seen as “Allders”) became the names of two post-medieval farmsteads located here. It has been suggested that as early as 1347 they were former estates of Burrow (2), the current hamlet south of Wootton Courtenay, at a time when it would have been much larger.

Allers no longer exists. Historic England has written it was abandoned before 1889 and the Historic Environment Record of Exmoor National Park supposes it was deserted by 1900. If so, like a Somerset Brigadoon, Allers has reappeared from time to time with its dwellings populated by families still remembered in Timberscombe.

Both farmsteads are clearly indicated on the 1843 Tithe Map of Timberscombe and as seen here on this detail of the Ordnance Survey Map of 1844-1888. At Allers, two structures are visible (highlighted here in pink), a larger one set among trees and a rectangular one, divided into two halves, is situated alongside the River Avill and near a footbridge. Heber Vale is also close to the water, with a small out-building also indicated. The northern edges of Timberscombe are shown on the lower right to indicate the farmsteads' positions in relation to the village.



In 1843, the larger building, at Allers was owned by William and Elizabeth (nee Callaway) Floyde and was leased to John Bale, a stone mason (3). Mr. Floyde was also a stone mason and he and his wife were the proprietors of (and lived at) The Lion Inn in Timberscombe (4). In 1846, Mr. Floyde sold the Allers house (while keeping the gardens) to John and Elizabeth (nee White) Hurford. Mr. Hurford was a shoe maker (5) and continued to lease at least part of the house to Mr. Bale.

At the same time, John Tudball owned the smaller rectangular property at Allers, occupying one half and renting the other to James White, a thatcher born in Luxborough in 1786. White had married Elizabeth Hole of Timberscombe in 1811 (6). The 1843 owner and occupier of Heber Vale was James Webber, a tailor and newlywed who married Maria Yeandle at St. Petrock's the September before (7).

By 1861, both Heber Vale and Allers had become part of the Knowle Estate, purchased by the wealthy Hole family. Now all occupiers at both properties would pay their rent to the Knowle Estate. At Heber Vale, the new tenant was a gardener, William Brown and his wife Mary, originally from Dulverton (8).

Now 62 years old, John Bale was still listed on the 1861 Census as “Head” of the household at Alders--as Allers was becoming more commonly called—but it must have felt more crowded to him. He had been joined by Timberscombe’s new 36 year old Police Constable, George Bartram, arriving with his wife, Charlotte Grace (nee Davey) Bartram and what would eventually be 14 daughters and 1 son. Perhaps not surprisingly, by the 1871 Census, Mr. Bale had left Alders and for the rest of his life lodged at other households in the village (9).



Heber Vale in 2020

Possibly by 1871, the Bartram family had left Alders. They relocated down the track to Heber Vale, where Constable Bartram and his wife lived for the rest of his career. Charlotte died in 1898, and listed as “retired Police Constable”, Bartram was still at Heber Vale in 1901, with just Henrietta, his youngest daughter. He died in 1909 and was buried at St. Petrock’s with Charlotte.

In 1876, a 54 year old widower and farm labourer, Thomas Mogford, married a 48 year old widow, Eliza (nee Clatworthy) Webber and they moved into the upper house at Alders. At the lower house was Mary (nee Cowling) Portman, a 52-year-old widow who worked as a laundress. Born at Wootton Courtenay in 1829, she had married Henry Portman, a farm labourer in 1851 (10). Mr. Portman died in 1858, by which time there were three children, Jane, Emma and Thomas (11). Doubtlessly, life was never easy for Mary after her husband’s death. In 1861, she and her children lodged in Timberscombe with Martha Huxtable, listed as a pauper. By 1871, Mary was at Ford Cottage with her 66-year-old father, Nicolas Cowling, a shepherd. She was listed in 1881 as living by herself at Alders, although her son used it as his address when he registered his son, Henry, for school in 1893 (12). And Mary Portman’s daughter, Jane, born in 1853, must have been with her. On the 1891 Census, Jane Portman, who never married, was now listed as the laundress at Alders. Her mother, Mary died 21 December 1897. Jane died six days later (13).

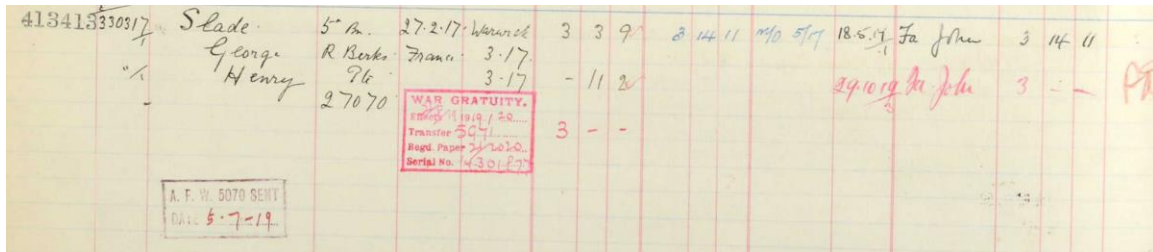
Moving from Cutcombe, John Slade, born in Luxborough, followed Thomas and Eliza Mogford at Alder. Mr. Slade had married Eliza Webber, born in Timberscombe, the daughter of Robert Webber (14), in November 1886 (15). By the 1891 Census they are at the upper house at Alders with 2 year old Lucy Slade and William John Slade, aged 11 months, as well as 5 year old Clara Webber, listed as stepdaughter. In 1892, a second son, George Henry Slade, was born at Alders and baptised at St. Petrock's on 14 February (16). Lucy, William and George Henry all attended Timberscombe School, all three admitted on the first of April 1896 (17).

By 1901, the Slade family had moved to Great House Street in Timberscombe, seemingly living at the cottage later named Slade Cottage. Both William and George Henry were still there with their parents in 1911, aged 20 and 19, and working as general labourers. Around the time of the outbreak of World War I, both young men had relocated. William enlisted with the Royal Garrison Artillery, where his address was given as Grove, Elcombe, Minehead (18). George Henry was listed as living at Alcombe, when he became a member of the Princess Charlotte of Wales, Royal Berkshire Regiment (19). William survived the war and his name is listed as serving on the World War I Memorial Plaque at St. Petrock's Church in Timberscombe. George Henry was killed in battle on 27 February 1917, aged 25. He was buried at Fauberg- d'Amiens Cemetary at Arras, France (20). His name is not included on the plaque at St. Petrock's.



"Slade, GH" is inscribed on the War Memorial at Michael's Hill, Martlet Road, Minehead. Yet as a boy born in Timberscombe, raised there until his brief adulthood, who never married, had his effects returned to his father in Timberscombe (as seen on page 5) and whose brother is rightfully listed on the Timberscombe Memorial, the name of "George Henry Slade" missing, seems an oversight.

There is no known photograph of George Henry Slade. This photograph taken in 1945 or 1946, was shared on 19 March 2021 by Matthew Curtis. The man with the white hair is John Slade, George's father. The woman is George's stepsister, Clara Webber, seated in front of her husband, Albert and her son, Reginald, the father of the baby, Jennifer Webber, later the mother of Mr. Curtis.



*A detail provided by the **UK, Army Register of Soldier's Effects, 1914-1923** of the receipt of any belongings of George Henry Slade being returned to his father, John Slade, in Timberscombe. George's mother, Elizabeth (nee Webber) Slade died in 1929 (21). John Slade died on 20 May 1947, having moved to 37 Quay-street in Minehead (22)*

After the deaths of Mary and Jane Portman at the lower dwelling of Alders, 68-year-old Mary Hole lived there with her 25-year-old son, John, a farm labourer. They had formerly lived at Beasley Farm, where Mrs. Hole's husband, George Hole, had worked as a farm labourer, before his death in 1896 (23).

The upper house was then leased by 66-year-old Robert Sedgbeer. He lived there alone, although he listed himself on the 1901 Census as "Married". His wife, Ann (nee Hooper) Sedgbeer, was alive and in Bristol where she lived with their son, Henry—and listed herself on the same census as "Widowed". Their other son, Herbert, had moved to Neath, Glamorgan, Wales but returned to Timberscombe in 1903 to register his daughter, the wonderfully named Vivo May Annie Sedgbeer at the Timberscombe School, where her address was given as "Alders". Herbert Sedgbeer returned in 1905 to register another daughter, Jessie, also listed as living at Alders. In 1909 the school records Jessie as having "Left Village", presumably moving to Minehead, where her father now worked as a building labourer (24).

By the 1911 Census, Mary Hole and her son had moved to Cowbridge, where John now worked as a fish monger. Interestingly, living next door was Robert Sedgbeer, also moved to Cowbridge, still alone and still listed as "Married". Mrs. Hole died in 1914 (25) and Mr. Sedgbeer died in 1917 (26).

Relatively large families inhabited the still occupied (though supposedly demolished) Alders and Heber Vale on the 1911 Census. On 9 May 1911, W. William Webber brought his four-year-old daughter, Mabel to register her at Timberscombe School, where her address was listed as "Alders bot." (27), indicating the smaller house by the river. Mr. Webber was a 32-year-old farm labourer, born in Timberscombe. His wife was the former Alice Gould and Mabel was the fifth of six children. At Alders' larger dwelling was Thomas Yeandle, 55 years, also born in Timberscombe, although he and his wife, Frances (nee Jones) Yeandle, had been living in Allerford, where he had been working as a general labourer. They had five children with them at Alders on the 1911 Census.

In 1911, at Heber Vale was the Gooding family. Walter Gooding was also born in Timberscombe. He and his wife, Emma (nee Winter), had seven children. The youngest of these, Elsie, was admitted to the Timberscombe School in May 1915. The Gooding family had moved by August 1915, when 5-year-old Harry Prole was admitted to the school, with Heber Vale now listed as his family's abode (28). Harry's father, also Harry Prole, like Walter Gooding, was a farm labourer, men who often had to move their families from one job to another, sometimes quickly.

On the 20th of July 1916, the Knowle Estate was divided into lots and sold at Public Auction. The published Sales Particulars offer description of these properties. Heber Vale was Lot 25, described as "A Stone and Slate Cottage with a Kitchen with a grate, a Back kitchen and Pump House, Two Bedrooms and a large Attic Room". A large garden was in the back, with assorted "Out-Buildings, Two Closes of Meadow and an Orchard". At the time of the auction, a Mr. Baker was letting the house and garden. Heber Vale sold for £135. Mr. Baker was likely Robert Baker, who briefly moved his family into the new apartment house, Rosemont on Brook Street in Timberscombe in 1917 or early 1918 (29)—likely a result of Heber Vale being sold.



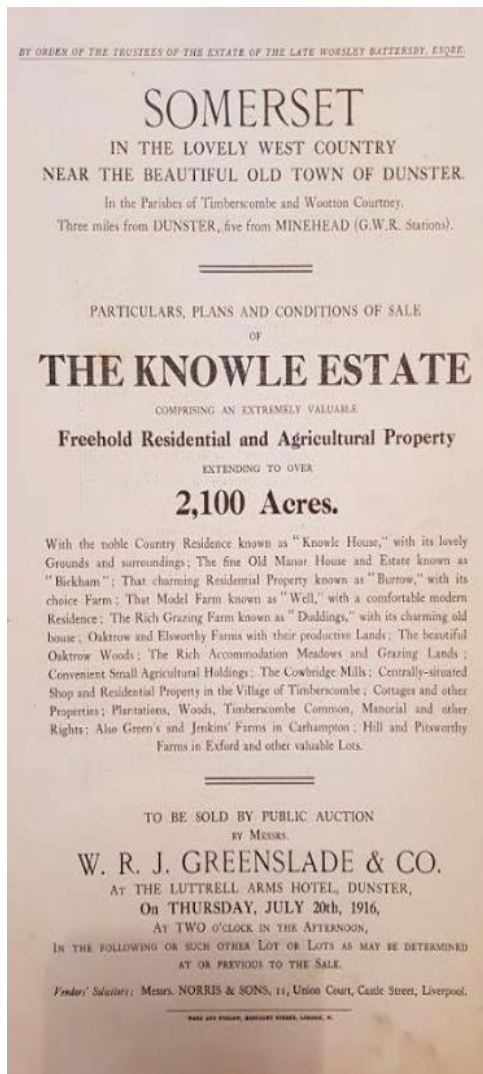
The footbridge in 2020, possibly where the original footbridge in Allers was located.

Lot 26 at the auction was “Two Detached Freehold Cottages”—and was again identified as “Allers”. “No. 1 Cottage” was built of stone with a slate roof, “Four Rooms with a Wash House and furnace and Large Garden”. It was currently being let to “Mr. R Yandle”. “No. 2 Cottage” was similarly built with “Four Rooms and Large Garden” and was currently “void”. Both houses were bought for £100 (30).



Likely part of the land of Allers in 2020. All colour photographs were taken by Tom Sperling.

It is not clear when Allers was truly abandoned. It appears that in 1918 it was at least partly occupied by the gipsy families of James and John Holland, who would later live at Hole’s Square in Timberscombe. It also seems that Ernest and Rosina (nee Chapman) Clatworthy were living at Allers in 1918 when their son, William Ernest Clatworthy started school at Timberscombe. (31). In both 1947 and 1971, aerial photographs still showed remains of buildings and traces of the track that linked Allers to Heber Vale (32). In 2020, the track could still be imagined but there were no signs of buildings. The area appeared beautiful but damp, which apparently was always a concern. Over the years, the Timberscombe School Log Book has many entries of children from Heber Vale and Allers not able to attend school because of their flooded meadows. An example is the 18th of October 1872, when Schoolmaster Thomas Charles Packer wrote “Two Bartrams not able to attend--the water being overflowed from the river” (33).



The front page of the Sales Particulars for the Knowle Estate Auction held at the Luttrell Arms Hotel in Dunster on 20 July 1916. There were 67 lots of properties and lands listed including Heber Vale and Allers. This original copy was saved by Sam Grabham (1887-1911), who likely attended the auction and wrote on it how much money each property fetched and who bought it. Mr. Grabham left this to his son, Kenneth Grabham (1920-2007), who gave it to his friend, Derek Poole (1942-2011). Mr. Poole's daughter, Angie Gummer, generously shared it with the St. Petrock's History Group in 2019.

NOTES: (1) Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: H-N-Project Gutenberg (2) Historic Environment Record, Exmoor National Park, MS08310, 1844 Tithe Map of Wootton Courtenay & "Deserted Farms on Exmoor and the Lay Subsidy of 1327 in West Somerset", by Mick Aston, 1983, Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (3) HER, MS08310 (4) 1851 and 1861 England Censuses (5) UK, Poll Books and Electoral Registers, 1538-1893 & 1851 England Census (6) HER, MS08310, UK Poll Books and Registers, England, Select Births and Christenings, 1538-1975 & Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations, 1752-1914 (7) Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations (8) 1861 England Census (9) 1871 and 1881 England Censuses (10) Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bond & Allegations, 1861 England Census & 1891 England Census (11) UK and Ireland, Find A Grave Index, 1300s-Current & 1861 England Census (12) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, 1892-1944, No. 1 (13) England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995 & England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 (14) 1861, 1871 and 1881 England Censuses (15) Somerset, England, Marriage Registers, Bonds and Allegations (16) Somerset, England, Church of England Baptisms, 1813-1914 (17) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, Nos. 45, 52 and 60 (18) UK, World War I Pension Ledgers and Index Cards, 1914-1923 (19) UK, World War I Pension Registers and Index Cards, 1914-1923 (20) Global, Find A Grave Index for Burials at Sea and other Select Burials Locations, 1300s-Current (21) Find My Past.com, England and Wales Deaths, 1837-2007 (22) England & Wales, National Probate Calendar, (Index of Wills & Administrations), 1858-1995 (23) Somerset, England, Church of England Burials, 1813-1914 (24) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, No. 168 (25) England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915 (26) England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007 (27) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, No. 283 (28) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, Nos. 318 and 321 (29) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, No. 347 (30) "THE KNOWLE ESTATE, DUNSTER, SOMERSET", the Sales Particulars booklet prepared by Messrs. W.R.J. Greenslade & Co. of Taunton and Wellington, Thursday, July 20th, 1916, Lot 25 on page 41 and Lot 26 on page 42 (31) Timberscombe School ADMISSION REGISTER, No. 369 (32) Historic Environment Register, Exmoor National Park, MS08331 (33) Timberscombe School LOG BOOK, 8 March 1871-31 August 1892, page 11