

The Story of the

HUNTS

of Chelfham, Bratton Fleming



Caroline Anna Hunt, born at Chelfham

Caroline Hannah, wife of Thomas Cawsey and mother of Harold Charles, was the second daughter of William and Mary Ann Hunt, of Chelfham Farm, Bratton Fleming. She was born in 1871.

The Hunts of Bratton Fleming

6 generations of the Hunt family farmed at Chelfham, from 1687 through to the 1880's. The Hunt family was extremely complicated; even within this small village of Bratton Fleming there were many Hunts. The eldest sons were invariably called John, and there were at least 14 John Hunts; several Johns (5 of them) had wives called Elizabeth. Eight different John Hunts of Bratton Fleming made wills over the period 1668 to 1829.

The following pages will cover the known history of the Hunts of Chelfham, and, in less detail, of the Hunts of Haxton and of other local families related by marriage to the Chelfham Hunts.

A good deal of the story which follows comes from information in Whybrow's lengthy 'History of Bratton Fleming', housed in the North Devon Athenaeum. The Hunt family was clearly regarded as prominent. At one point Whybrow refers to a separate chapter on the Hunt genealogy, but this is missing; it may well be that he found it difficult to sort out.

Bratton Fleming was probably settled in about 700 AD, and was important by the time of the Conquest. The village lies on the western edge of Exmoor, six miles north-east of Barnstaple. The old route from Barnstaple left the Yeo valley near Chelfham, and passed by Chelfham farm, but the 'new' road to the north made Chelfham a quiet backwater. Chelfham's best known feature at one time was the massive Chelfham viaduct which carried the old Barnstaple-Lynton railway across the Yeo valley. This narrow-gauge railway was opened in 1898, but survived less than 40 years.

The Hunts in the seventeenth century

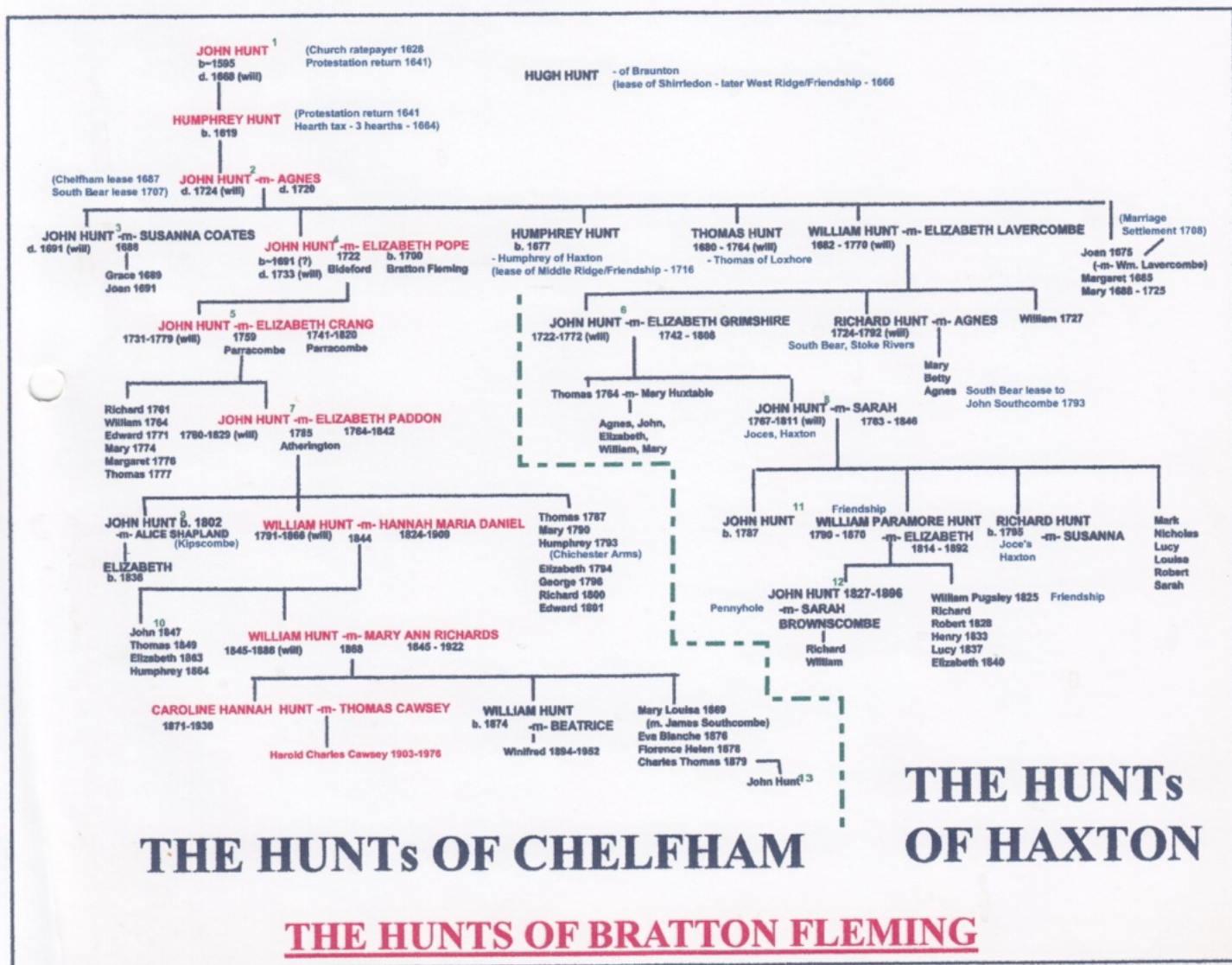
(note: No baptismal record have been discovered for the four John Hunts who we know lived in Bratton Fleming in the 17th century. However the relationships described in the following are consistent with references in the two lease documents (Chelfham-1687 and South Bear-1707), and the marriage settlement for Joan Hunt -1708.)

The earliest 'John Hunt' of Bratton Fleming that we can trace was probably born in about 1595. His son Humphrey was baptised in 1619 but no other members of his family are recorded. He was recorded as a 'Church Rate Payer' in 1628, sharing a 'Justment' levy of 1s 4d with Richard Allyne. The same document recorded a 'Barton Justment' for Chelfham, but there is no evidence of a connection with John Hunt at that time. In 1641 John and his son Humphrey were both signatories of the 'Protestation Return'. This John Hunt died in 1668, leaving a will; unfortunately this will, and all the later John Hunt wills except the last, were destroyed by the German bombing of Exeter, and only the indexes survive.

Humphrey Hunt was recorded in 1664 as a payer of 'Hearth Tax'. He paid on 3 hearths, an indication of his prosperity. We surmise that the next John Hunt (2) was his son. This John Hunt was the husband of Agnes and the father of John, Humphrey, William, Thomas and Joan. It is quite likely that he - or a close relation - was already farming at Haxton before 1687, when he leased Chelfham.

It seems that John Hunt(2) had an eldest son, John Hunt(3), probably born in the 1660s. He married Susanna Coates, and he is the son mentioned in the Chelfham lease (see below). He died in 1691, prior to the birth of his daughter Joan. His father, John Hunt(2) then chose to baptise another son with the name John. This was John Hunt(4), probably born in about 1691. He is the John Hunt the younger referred to in the Marriage settlement of Joan Hunt in 1708.

John Hunt(2) was an entrepreneur of his time; he increased his ownership of farms and lands around Bratton Fleming, and arranged for them to be divided between his sons. Haxton, Friendship, Middle Ridge and South Bear (or parts of them) all became Hunt properties, eventually moving from lease to ownership. Kipscombe also became a Hunt farm at some time before 1780.



4th July 1687 - Lease of Chelfham to John Hunt

Counterpart of Lease for 99 years or three lives (Original in North Devon Record Office)

This indenture made the fourth day of July in the Third year of the Reign of our sovrain Lord James the second by the grace of God of England Scotland France and Ireland my Defender of the Ffaith. Between Sir Arthur Chichester of Yolston in the County of Devon Barronett of the one part and John Hunt of Bratton Ffleming in the county aforesaid yeoman of the other part, witnesseth that the said Sir arthur Chichester for and in consideration of a surrender made of the premises hereafter named by the said John Hunt as for and in consideration of the full sum of ffifty pounds of good and lawful money of England in hand paid or to be paid by the said John Hunt at or before the sealling hereof: so herewith the said Sir Arthur Chichester is satisfied and doth acknowledge the granted and to farm and by these presents doth grant and to farm lott unto the said John Hunt all that his part property and portion that is to say two parts in three to be of all and singular that tenement with commonly called or known by the name of Chelfham lying in Bratton Ffleming aforesaid and was in the possession or occupation of one Joseph Courtice his assignee or assigned and now is and hath been in the possession of the said John Hunt, together with a quarter part of the towne place and common of pasture upon the Chelfham green according to ancient use and custom - all which said premises were in tenure and occupation of one John Courtice, father of said Joseph Courtice together with common of pasture upon Bratton Down yearly for 100 sheep, reserving to Sir Arthur Chichester all sale of woods growing or to grow on the premises which at any time heretofore have been taken and sold by the said Sir Arthur Chichester or John Chichester Bart his father deceased, to hold from the date hereof for 99 years if John Hunt and Humphrey Hunt sons of the said John Hunt, and Dowzabell Courtice now wife of the abovesaid Joseph Courtice or any one of them so long live, paying yearly 10s quarterly and 2 bushels and a half of good great marketable oats to be delivered yearly at Feast of All saints at Yolston where the said Sir Arthur lives and also paying after the deaths of John Hunt the younger, Humphrey Hunt and Dowzabell Courtice the best beast of said John Hunt in name of a heryot or £4 in lieu thereof at the election of Sir Arthur, provided, living the said John Hunt the younger, no such heryot to be paid upon the deaths of Humphrey and Dowzabell, or either of them, neither upon the death of Dowzabell, living the said John Hunt the younger or Humphrey or either of them. And also doing suit to the courts of the said Sir Arthur to be holden for his manor of Bratton Fleming as other tenants there do, or ought to have accustomed to do, and there in every of the courts shall and will be rictified ordered and justified by the steward and homage of the courts for the time being concerning all manner of causes and things arising during the said term concerning the premises and determinable in said courts and also doing suit to the mills of Sir Arthur within said manor and there shall grind all such corn and grain as shall be spent in the premises during such term and also well and sufficiently repairing the premises in houses, walls and coverings, hedges, ditches, gates and fences and towards the repairs thereof John Hunt may take sufficient houseboot upon the premises growing, by delivery of Sir Arthur or of his bailiff of the manor and ploughboot, fireboot, foldboot, hayboot and frithboot upon the premises growing freely to be taken without delivery as often as need shall be doing no waste

If the yearly rent is unpaid for one month in any quarter being lawfully demanded and no sufficient distress upon the premises can be found, or if John shall do any waste to the value of 20s or above and the same do not amend within 6 months next after notice being given for the amendement thereof then it shall be lawful for Sir Arthur to reenter the premises and the same to have again as his former estate.

Warranty against the high and chief lords of the fee of the premises concerning all the high and quit rents, suits and services

Seal of John Hunt

Witnesses Humphrey Coxe, John Wood, the marks of William Courtice, Roger Budd

Into the eighteenth century

In 1687 John Hunt(2) leased Chelfham ('two parts in three') from Sir Arthur Chichester. The lease (above) indicates that he was already occupying the property and he may have acquired it for his son, John Hunt(3), to farm. In 1707 there was another similar lease of property at South Bear, in Stoke Rivers -perhaps to set up his son William there. John Hunt(2) was then the nominal occupier of several farms, quite widely scattered around Bratton Fleming: Chelfham to the south-west, Haxton and South Bear to the south, Middle Ridge/Friendship to the north. On his death the farms were distributed between his sons. John Hunt(4) and his heirs farmed Chelfham; William Hunt and his son Richard farmed South Bear; land at Haxton, and in the Friendship area went to Humphrey, and subsequently to Humphrey's nephew John Hunt(6)

In the middle of the eighteenth century John and Elizabeth Hunt farmed at Chelfham and another John and Elizabeth Hunt farmed at Haxton. The two John Hunts(5 &6) were probably first cousins; both Johns were churchwardens; both died in the 1770s, and their widows, the two Elizabeth Hunts, continued as occupiers of their respective farms.

The Hunts of Chelfham occupied a prominent position in village society. At the top of the social hierarchy were the Lords of the Manor and aristocracy; next came the Yeomen farmers such as the Hunts; below this came the tradesmen, husbandmen and labourers. At Bratton Fleming, the Lord of the Manor (e.g. Sir Arthur Chichester) did not live in the parish, and hence the Yeomen farmers were the most important residents, running parish affairs. At church services these farmers and their families, would have occupied reserved pews at the front, with the tradesmen behind them and the labourers and poor at the back. At Bratton Fleming, the Hunts of Chelfham occupied Pew 1, no doubt the front pew, and this presumably reflected their status at the top of the pecking order.

This is no doubt the reason why many Hunt marriages were made with 'outsiders', and took place in other parishes. Marriages 200 years ago would have been 'arranged' to at least some degree, and the parents would have sought 'suitable' partners for their sons and daughters - partners from prosperous families, preferably with prospects of inheritance. Within Bratton Fleming there would have been few families, with eligible daughters, as prosperous as the Hunts. But farmers from a fairly wide area would have known each other, meeting at market, and this could have been a basis for 'arrangements' for sons and daughters who would themselves have little opportunity to meet regularly. Indeed customs may have changed little from those described by Henry Best in 1641 regarding the fashions of (well-to-do) country weddings, the steps being taken as follows:

- 1. The young man's father, or he himself, writes to the father of the maid to see if he shall be welcome in the house.*
- 2. If the motion be thought well of, then the young man goeth perhaps twice to see how the maid standeth affected.*
- 3. If he see that she be tractable, then the third time that he visiteth, he perhaps giveth her a ten shilling piece of gold.*
- 4. They visit usually every three weeks or a month, usually for half a year from the first going to a conclusion.*
- 5. The fathers meet to treat of a dower, and of a jointure or feoffment for the woman, and appoint the day of the marriage.*

Hence John Hunt(5) married a Parracombe girl, Elizabeth Crang. John Hunt(7) married an Atherington girl, Elizabeth Paddon. Their son William married in Bratton Fleming, but his wife Hannah Maria Daniel was born in Loxhore where her father farmed. Her mother Betsey came from the Southcombe family whose origins were in East Buckland. All these families were prosperous farmers with disposable property (many of the men in these families left wills).

The Crangs farmed at Parracombe, north-east of Bratton Fleming; however Elizabeth seems to have had an uncle, Richard Crang junior, who farmed at Stoke Rivers according to a 1738 lease. Richard Crang senior, and John Crang both left wills. Elizabeth Crang's great-grandfather, Walter Lock, Yeoman, was a party to a number of leases during the period 1685 to 1704, 3 at Parracombe and one at Martinhoe.

The Kipscombe farm was probably acquired by the Hunts at this time. Kipscombe is on the Parracombe side of Bratton Fleming, and it could be that it was part of the marriage settlement.

For some years in the 1750s to 1770s there were two John Hunts whose lives were very similar; both had wives called Elizabeth; both were yeoman farmers, farming at Chelfham and Haxton respectively; both held the posts of Church-warden and of Surveyor of the Highways.



Bratton Fleming church

John Hunt was church-warden in 1752; this was more likely to have been John of Haxton as the older of the two. From 1770 to 1775 John of Chelfham held the post, and during this period many church papers survive. In 1770 John of Chelfham was a signatory of 'Acts of Vestrys', and John of Haxton also signed as an 'overseer'. From 1771 a series of papers relates to the replacement of the church bells, the worthies of Bratton Fleming desiring to replace the old peal of four bells by a peal of six. John Hunt of Chelfham seems to have been a strong supporter of this project. There was however strong local opposition since the £500 cost would have been borne by the ratepayers of the parish; because of this the bells were not replaced until 1789.

John of Haxton was Surveyor of the Highways in 1766, and John of Chelfham held this post in 1769. John Hunt (of Haxton?) was Overseer of the Poor in 1766, and John of Chelfham held this post in 1770. John of Haxton died in 1772, and John of Chelfham in 1779, both leaving wills, which like the others do not survive. Both left widows Elizabeth and sons John. The Chelfham Hunts may have had some financial difficulties from the time when John was dying; from 1778 the Chelfham church-rates were in arrears, and by 1783 a sum of £14 10s was owing.

The next documentary references to Chelfham are the Land Tax Assessments from 1780 onwards. They fail to distinguish between the Chelfham Hunts and the Haxton Hunts, but the conclusions are fairly evident. Elizabeth of Chelfham was the 'proprietor' not only of 'Chilpham', but also of North Land, and West Barton. Her son John (now aged 20) was 'proprietor' of Kipscombe, another farm which remained in the family for some time. Elizabeth of Haxton was the 'proprietor' of Haxton, Middle Ridge, Peaspark Chumhill Meadow, and 'occupier' of 'Joce's Haxton'.

The LTAs reveal that at some time between 1687 and 1780 the Hunts relinquished half of Chelfham, and their farm was now the smaller farm at Chelfham, the larger one being Chelfham Barton owned by Rev Pine.

Elizabeth Hunt remarried in 1784, to James Sciance; later Land Tax Assessments refer to James or Elizabeth Sciance, and later still to Widow Sciance. In 1785 her son John married Elizabeth Paddon of Atherington. The Paddons farmed at Atherington, many miles to the south of Bratton Fleming. In 1780, properties at 'Snows', 'Bridge' and 'Bridge End' were occupied by John Paddon, who may have been George Paddon's father. The 'Snows' property eventually passed into the hands of John Hunt in about 1820, being one of the properties left in his will.

Elizabeth Paddon's mother came from the Graddon family. John Graddon and William Graddon both left wills. Another John Graddon (of Chittlehampton) is mentioned in John Hunt's will.

By 1788 John was 'occupier' of Chelfham as well as 'proprietor' and 'occupier' of Kipscombe. At much the same time the Haxton properties passed into the name of Elizabeth of Haxton's son John.

By about 1809 all the Chelfham and Kipscombe properties were held by John Hunt of Chelfham, though Elizabeth Sciance lived until 1820. Two years later John of Haxton died and his wife Sarah inherited Haxton and 'Joces, Haxton'.

An event in Bratton Fleming in 1820 was the setting up of the Bratton Fleming Friendly Society, a death benefit society. The Chelfham Hunts and the Haxton Hunts were all signatories; the Society prospered and membership was to extend far beyond Bratton Fleming.

In 1828, John Hunt took steps to free his properties from their entailment at that time. His object was almost certainly to re-establish a new entailment, since it had become accepted that old entailments lapsed 21 years after the death of the last survivor of those beneficiaries living at the time of the original entailment. Freeing from entailment could be achieved by an artifice involving collusive legal action over a fictitious lease to a third party. The lease exists in the North Devon Record Office. One point which is confirmed by this lease is that the Chelfham property had been reduced to 'one-third of the Chelfham tenement' rather than the two-thirds of the 1687 lease. The dis-entailment was presumably completed leaving the way clear for John Hunt to re-entail the properties in his will.

John Hunt of Chelfham died in 1829 and his substantial memorial is in Bratton Fleming churchyard.



In memory of John Hunt Snr of Chilpham in this parish. He departed this life on January 8th 1829 in the 69th year of his age.

Affliction sore long time I bore
Physicians were in vain
Till God did please my life to seize
And ease me of my pain

Also to the memory of Elizabeth wife of the above who departed this life the 5th day of September in the year of our Lord 1842 age 78

In loving memory of William Hunt grandson of the above who died at Chelfham in this parish September 28th 1886 age 41

The languishing head is at rest
Its thinkings and achings are oer
The quiet immovable breast
Is heaved by affliction no more

The will of this John Hunt survives; it is a long document of remarkable complexity intended to preserve Chelfham and Kipscombe for his heirs in perpetuity through carefully defined entailment; it did not succeed! It also refers to 'Snows tenement' and other unnamed properties at Atherington, a 'Freehold Little House called the Buttery', a piece of land taken out of North Park, a Dwelling House or Cottage and Blacksmith's shop. This reflected the position of the Hunts at the peak of their prosperity; life was already becoming harder for the small farmers.

John Hunt left many surviving children. William and Edward inherited Chelfham jointly after their mother's death in 1842, and the 1843 Tithe Assessment gives considerable detail on the meadows and orchards etc forming the Chelfham estates.

In 1844, William Hunt married Hannah Maria Daniel from another farming family and their first child William (Caroline Cawsey's father) was born in 1845.

Hannah Daniel and her family background

Hannah Maria Daniel was born in Loxhore, where the family originated, though by the time of her marriage her family was farming in Bratton Fleming. A good deal of confusion arises from the many spellings used by the Daniels - Daniel, Danil, Dinnil, Dinel, Dinnalls, Dendle. Edward Daniel, and 3 generations of John Daniels all left wills (1715, 1786, 1808, 1874).

In 1780 Hannah's great-grandfather, John Danil was farming a substantial acreage at Loxhore; part of this continued to be held by his widow Sarah after his death, and part by his son, a new lease having been taken in 1786. John, Elizabeth and Sarah Danil are all buried in Loxhore churchyard.

Hannah's father, John Daniel, farmed at Bratton Fleming. In 1840 he was one buyer of land on Bratton Down which was sold to pay the costs of enclosure; he bought Plot 14, or 'Ridge Gate'. He had married Betsey Southcombe, daughter of John Southcombe about whom there is an interesting tale to tell!

John Southcombe himself came from East Buckland, where his father John, and uncle William were Yeomen farmers. John Southcombe's grandfather Anthony was designated 'Mr' in the burial register - recognising him as a 'gentleman' of means. Anthony Southcombe's forebears can be traced back to the 15th century .

The Southcombes were landowners of substance, and there are many records in the Devon Record Office which relate to their land transactions in the period 1493 to 1607. Many of them left wills, and transcripts of some of these survive in the Moger collection. A particularly prominent branch of the family settled at Rose Ash, descending from one George Southcombe. This George Southcombe married well; his second wife was Jane Paulet of the aristocratic family. George Southcombe died in 1595 as a result of being thrown by a horse when he was attempting to stop a sword fight between two men.

The 'Southcombes of Rose Ash' had an entry in Burke's Landed Gentry (1858) and at Rose Ash there was an unbroken line of Southcombe rectors from 1675 to 1949.

John Southcombe junior married at Bratton Fleming, and the Southcombes settled at South Bear in Stoke Rivers, where Betsey and James were born. Also at Stoke Rivers, one William Southcombe, probably a cousin, was occupying 'Lower Davies' farm. In around 1803 John Southcombe moved to Bratton Fleming and farmed more and more land over the next few years, though by about 1810 he seems to have reduced his acreage substantially. In 1814 his death was reported in a London paper, the 'Courier', as follows.

SERIOUS ACCIDENT BY THE MAILS

On Saturday, a Coroner's Inquest was held at the Hand and Flower Inn, Hammersmith Road, on the body of John Southcombe of Bratton Fleming, near Barnstaple, Devonshire, farmer. The deceased was travelling in a chaise cart accompanied by his brother towards London. They were met by 3 mail coaches, and notwithstanding the hallooing of the deceased, he was run foul of, the shafts broken, and he was thrown into the road and killed by one of the mails passing over his body. The accident happened on the 22nd inst. but the Inquest was deferred to procure witnesses from Bath etc.

George Southcombe, half-brother to the deceased, was travelling with his brother who was driving to London, when they were met by 3 or 4 mails at the two and a half mile stone. His brother was on the proper side of the road; but they both hallooed to the mail coachmen to take care, besides pulling as much out of the way as possible. This however was vain, for one of the mails ran against them, broke the shafts, and disengaged the horse, threw him on one side of the chaise and his brother on the other next the coaches. His brother was driving on the left hand side of the road, with three feet of the ditch and eight feet of the centre of the road, it being on the whole more than 35 feet wide, exclusive of the foot-path.

[continues with several more paragraphs, ending as follows]

The Coroner observed that the evidence was of the most conflicting character; but unless they would believe the guard and coachman and chose to disbelieve all the evidence on the other side, ther could be no doubt. One party must have been guilty of perjury; but he thought beyond dispute that the mails were on the wrong side; that they had further violated the law by driving at such a rate, regardless of the safety of every body on the road. Such conduct in the mail drivers on that road has become a crying evil and general complaint. He went that road often, and he never met the mails without terror. They totally neglected the legal side of the road and scorned caution. Because they were employed on Government business they seemed to deem themselves licensed to regard nobody. The abuse would not be corrected till the public took it up. They might make a deodand of the horses etc. the property of Waterhouse and Co, or return murder or manslaughter against the Bath mail coachman. The widow would have her action against the proprietors. He would not allow the coachman, Akerman, to be examined, as the evidence affected him and the verdict might do the same. - A verdict of manslaughter against Joseph Akerman.

The deceased has left a wife, six children, and an infirm mother.

Note A 'deodand' in old English law was a personal chattel which had been the immediate accidental cause of the death of a human being, forfeited to the Crown for pious uses.

Whybrow's work on the history of Bratton Fleming refers to the death of John Southcombe. He speculated on why this small farmer should visit London with his brother in the year of Napoleon's detention at Elba. Perhaps there were 'junketings' going on in London, and the Southcombes wanted to see a bit of life!

The six Southcombe children referred to above included Betsey and James. James was to move, first to West Buckland, and then to Canada, emigrating with his family. John W. Southcombe of Blanchester, Ohio has published his family history.

There was also a later connection between the Hunts and the Southcombes; Mary Hunt, grand-daughter of William and Hannah, married Jim Southcombe; the connection with the earlier Southcombes is not known. Jim Southcombe was a railwayman, and Jim and Mary (Polly) Southcombe moved to south-west London.

This is the Coat-of-Arms granted to the Southcombes of Rose Ash.

Blazon of Arms: Argent a chevron ermine between three rose gules

The Hunt story continues

Five of the Hunts, including William senior, and his brother John, were signatories of the 1840 Turnpike Petition. At that time there were 5 Hunt households in Bratton Fleming, totalling 21 people. These were the farmers at Chelfham, Kipscombe and Haxton, the innkeeper at the Chichester Arms, and the farmer/innkeeper at Friendship. In 1846 both William and Edward Hunt raised money through mortgages on the Hunt properties and there were further mortgages in 1850 and 1859.

It is recorded that Pew 1 in Bratton Fleming church was assigned to the Hunts of Chelfham (1862). William senior died in 1866 leaving Hannah and William junior to continue farming at Chelfham.

In 1851 a member of William Hunt's household was Jane Lewis, termed 'Pauper / House Servant (idiotic)' in the census return. She was still with the Hunts in 1861, but in 1863 the record of a Parish Meeting stated that "The girl, Jane Lewis, now with Mr Hunt, Chelham, to be transferred to Mr Brownscombe. Mr Brownscombe to receive 1/6d a week with her". Whybrow commented (though he had not apparently seen the census return) that Jane Lewis was 35, and that the nature of the transfer implies a sub-normal mentality.



William Hunt

William and Mary Ann Hunt

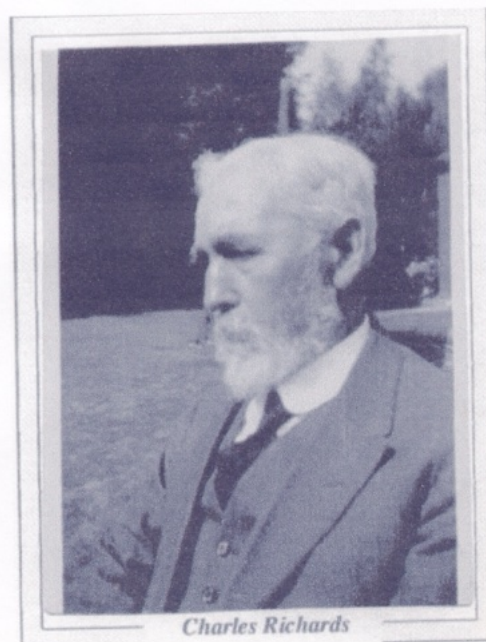
William Hunt junior, on the left, married Mary Ann Richards in 1868. She was the daughter of John and Caroline Richards, farmers at Hakeford, Stoke Rivers, and she was the granddaughter of Mary Quance of Waytown Farm Shirwell.

The Richards family

We know very little about John Richards who married Caroline Quance. He was certainly born in Petrockstowe in about 1814, but his parentage is uncertain. He came to work at the Quance's farm at some time before 1841 and became the "Bailiff" at Waytown farm. After he married Caroline Quance he continued at Waytown for at least another 10 years and three children were born to the Richards in this period - William, Mary Ann, and Charles.

This probably lasted until the Quance sons became old enough to run the farm. By 1861 the Richards family had moved to a nearby farm of their own (Hakeford, Stoke Rivers) leaving James Quance to support Mary Quance at Shirwell.

Mary Ann Richards was married to William Hunt in 1868. Charles Richards also married a few years later, and a grandson was Humphrey David Smith who produced an extensive family tree some 30 years ago. Much of the genealogy in the next section is due to him.



Charles Richards

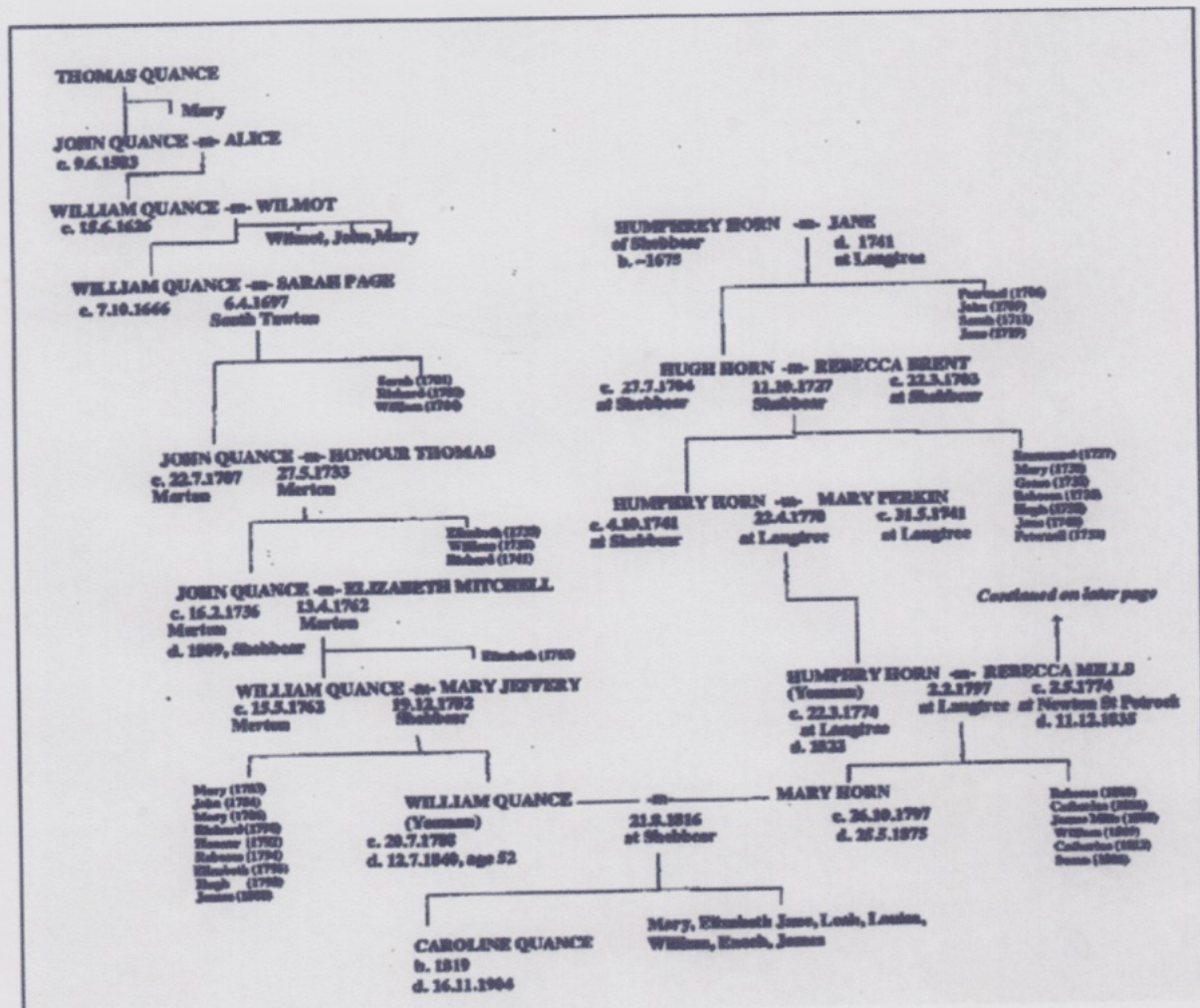
John Richards died in 1880, but his widow Caroline and son William continued farming at Hakeford for a few more years. Caroline died in 1904.

The Quance family

Caroline Richards, grandmother of Caroline Cawsey, was a daughter of William and Mary Quance, originally from Shebbear. The tale of the Quances and their forebears has interesting aspects, primarily because of the involvement of the Quances and the Horns with the Bible Christian movement which spread from Shebbear.

The surviving photograph of Mary Quance makes her more interesting; photographs of ordinary people who were born before 1800 are not common.

Shebbear is a remote parish some 10 miles south-west of Great Torrington in a large agricultural area which has changed little over the centuries. The 18th century yeoman farmers were quite prosperous, and marriages took place between the sons and daughters of farmers across the area.



The name Quance is found in Shebbear in 1647, when Humphrey Quance married Mary Thorne, but there is no established connection between him and the later Quances in Shebbear. It seems that these Quances were originally a South Tawton family and that William and Sarah Quance, married in South Tawton, settled in Merton in about 1700. Their grandson, John Quance, born in 1736, married Elizabeth Mitchell in 1762 and moved from Merton to Shebbear with his family in around 1770. John Quance's brother Richard remained in Merton and farmed extensively.

By 1780 John Quance at Shebbear was farming at Durpley farm, but by 1787, he had moved to Down farm, only half a mile away, but across the parish boundary in Newton St Petrock. By this time his son William had married Mary Jeffery; their first three children had been baptised at Shebbear between 1783 and 1786. 5 children were baptised at Newton St Petrock between 1788 and 1794, including their son William. All these were called 'Squance'. By 1791, William Quance senior had taken over the farm, though his father lived for many more years. William and Mary Quance (senior) then moved again, to Vaddicott farm, two miles south, and back in Shebbear parish. Another child, Elizabeth, was baptised in Shebbear in 1796. The will of John Quance (of Shebbear, gentleman), who died in 1809, provided further information. This will itself does not survive, but the summary for Estate Duty purposes is in the Public Record Office. The legatees include the son William (and no other children), and the nine grand-children listed in order of age. The 5 eldest were left the sum of £30, and the 4 youngest £20. These grandchildren included William Quance junior who would soon marry Mary Horn. Other grandchildren included John, Richard and Rebecca who will be mentioned later.

At Vaddicott, the Quances were neighbours of the Horns, who had been long established in Shebbear. The first known document referring to the Horn family (apart from the baptismal records) is a lease held in the North Devon Record Office, the summary being as follows:

25th March 1752

- Lease 1) Abraham Barnfield of Mambrey Esq.
2) Hugh Horn of Shebbear, Yeoman**

Messuage and tenement in the village of Moortown late in the possession of Leonard Pope, deceased, reserving to 1) the dwellinghouses and other buildings, except the barn and shippen, and all the orchards (except one at the lower end of the south ground.

Term 7 or 14 years

Rent £13

Agricultural covenant

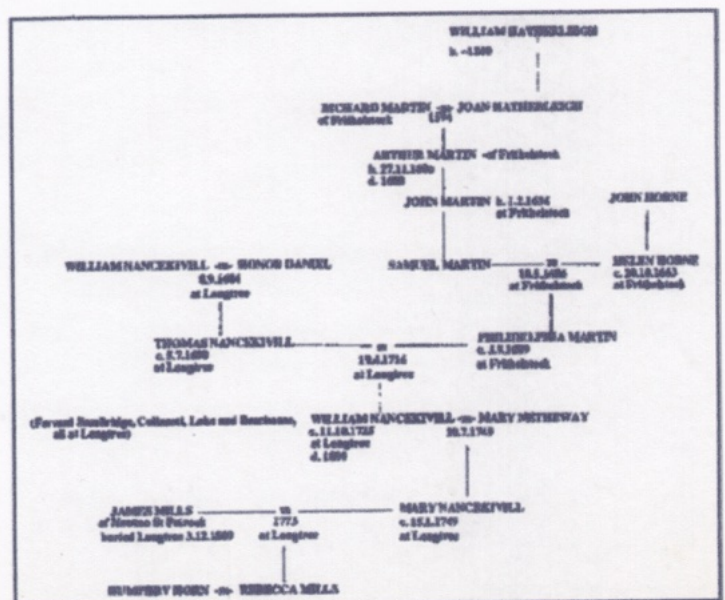
In 1780 John Quance at Durpley was a near neighbour of Hugh Horn. Hugh Horn's son, Humphry farmed at Ashbury, Langtree, and was a church-warden. His son Humphry returned to Shebbear at the age of 20 under the following lease:

3rd May 1794

Article of Agreement

- 1) Hooper Morrison of Alwington and John Phillips of East Putford, clerks
2) Humphrey Horne of Langtree, Yeoman
For the conveyance to 2) of messuages or tenements called Cothill, Alins Ladford, Bears Ladford and Moortown, with appurtenances, for £236**

Humphry Horn junior married Rebecca Mills in 1797, and Mary was born later that year.



Not much is known about Rebecca's father, James Mills; much more has been discovered about her mother's family, the Nancekivills of Langtree, as the diagram on the last page shows.

The following lease was granted to Thomas Nancekivill, great-grandfather of Rebecca Mills:

Langtree 6 December 1726

Lease for 99 years, or three lives.

- 1) John Rolle of Stevenstone, Esquire.**
- 2) Thomas Nanskivill of Langtree, Yeoman**

Tenement called Smalridge and Blackilake, with common of pasture upon the waste called Horridge.

Consideration £181 1s

Rent £2 3s 6d

Heriot Best beast, or £4 at lessors election

Lives Lessee, his wife Philadelphia and his son William.

Philadelphia Nancekivill came from Frithelstock, where her family can be traced back to before the year 600.

As determined by the lease, William Nancekivill followed his father at 'Smallridge' and 'Blackilake', but also farmed at Collacott, Bearhouse and Lake. He live to the age of 83, and a copy of his will is in the Rolle papers in the DRO. The will was 'signed with the mark of William Nankivill, after being distinctly read to him' - dated 2 October 1807. The will left 'Smallbridge and Brakealakes, together with £50, to his son Thomas; sums of £150 and £20 to his grandson, William, son of Thomas. £10 was left to his daughter, Catherine Reed (almost certainly of Holwell, Buckland Brewer, the mother of Catherine Thorne who was to figure in the Bible Christian movement - see below). His grandchildren were each left sums of 5/-. Susannah Heal, another daughter, was left 'my small brass kettle and the small bed performed in the pantry chamber of my dwelling house. Finally the property 'Beerhouse' was left to his son John who was charged with the administration of the will.

The Beerhouse (Bearhouse) property is also the subject of a box of Rolle Estate papers in the DRO dating from the 1740's. William Namcekivill is referred to, but the main subject is John Horn(e), the son of Humphry and Jane Horn and brother of Hugh. He, and many descendants, lived at Black Torrington.

There are other connections between the Nancekivills and the Reeds of Buckland Brewer; Thomas's son William married Rebecca Reed, and one John Nancekivill married Betsy Reed.

We now return to the story of Humphry and Rebecca Horn, and of William and Mary Quance (junior); they became closely involved with the Bible Christian movement which swept through Devon and Cornwall in the first half of the 19th century.

William O'Bryan, founder of the movement, was an Evangelist who learned in 1815 that there were parishes in the Shebbear area that had not received any Methodist preaching. In August he preached his way through several parishes, and at Cookbury he met James and John Thorne of Shebbear. They met again on October 5th, and the Thornes invited O'Bryan to preach at their father's farm, Lake Farm, Shebbear, on October 9th. On that day the farm house was packed, and he offered his eager audience a full and free salvation. The Horn family were near neighbours and may well have been present. (Mary married William Quance in the following year, 1816)



William O'Bryan

This was the start of the 'Arminian Bible Christians', or 'Bryanites'. For some years this was centred on Shebbear. James Thorne believed that he had a strong call to follow O'Bryan and in 1816 he became a full-time itinerant Minister. 10 years later there was dissent in the movement, and in 1829 James Thorne became the leader in place of O'Bryan.



James Thorne

James Mills was Humphry Horn's father-in-law.

William Cobbledick was a young man who was to marry Rebecca Horn, daughter of Humphry and Rebecca. The Cobbledick's later christened their first child Humphry Horn Cobbledick, and it received a Bible Christian baptism.

We know of the Horn family's certain involvement from 'The West Country Preachers (p.27). This reports that the first burial at Lake chapel shown in a surviving register was of Humphrey Horn, on December 11th, 1821. He must have died on that very day, since this is also the date of his final will, 'declared by word of mouth'. That will was attested by 7 witnesses, who included John Thorne Junior, the brother of James.

Humphry Horn's will read as follows:

I give and bequeath to my daughter Mary Quance ££5 of lawful money of England to be paid by my executors hereinafter named within 12 months after my decease. Also I give and bequeath unto my daughter Rebecca Cobbledick £ 10 of lawful money of England. (Then similar bequests to Catterin, Caroline & Susan)

Also I give and bequeath unto my daughters Carolin Horn and Susan Horn my two best feather beds and two pillows.

Also I give and bequeath unto my 5 daughters all my wearing apparel of every kind.

Lastly all the residue and remainder of my goods, chattels, freehold and leasehold messuages, tenements, lands and hereditaments situated in the Parish of Shebbear or elsewhere that I shall be possessed of at the time of my death, I give, devise and bequeath all the same and every part and parcel thereof unto my two sons James Mills Horn and William Horn.

I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 1st Day of December 1835

The mark of Rebecca Horn

Witnesses James Mills, John Jeffery, Phillip Ball

Bartholomew Fowler's name appears in the 1843 Tithe Apportionment as farmer at 'Martins, Moortown'.

Humphry's property passed to his wife Rebecca according to his will above.

In 1823 James Thorne married Catherine Reed of Holwell Farm, Buckland Brewer (Rebecca Horn's cousin). Holwell became another bastion of the Bible Christians. William and Mary Quance moved to Buckland Brewer at around this date and 5 of their 9 children were baptised as Bible Christians between 1827 and 1834. In 1835, Rebecca Horn died and her will, made a week before she died, reads as follows:

I give and bequeath to my daughter Mary Quance £5 of lawful money of England to be paid by my executors hereinafter named within 12 months after my decease. Also I give and bequeath unto my daughter Rebecca Cobbledick £ 10 of lawful money of England. (Then similar bequests to Catterin, Caroline & Susan)

Also I give and bequeath unto my daughters Carolin Horn and Susan Horn my two best feather beds and two pillows.

Also I give and bequeath unto my 5 daughters all my wearing apparel of every kind.

Lastly all the residue and remainder of my goods, chattels, freehold and leasehold messuages, tenements, lands and hereditaments situated in the Parish of Shebbear or elsewhere that I shall be possessed of at the time of my death, I give, devise and bequeath all the same and every part and parcel thereof unto my two sons James Mills Horn and William Horn.

I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 1st Day of December 1835

The mark of Rebecca Horn

Witnesses James Mills, John Jeffery, Phillip Ball

After a few years at Buckland Brewer, William and Mary Quance moved to Waytown, Shirwell, a farm of some 230 acres.



The Quance family now consisted of William and Mary, together with three sons, William, Enoch and James, and six daughters, Becksey (Rebecca), Caroline, Mary, Elizabeth Jane, Leah, and Louisa.

However William Quance died in July 1840, only 52 years old. Mary Quance became the farmer at Waytown for more than 20 years. In 1841 there were 5 farm-servants living at Shirwell, and the most senior was John Richards, then 27 years old. In September that year John Richards and Caroline Quance were married.

In 1851, the census return for Waytown shows Mary Quance as a farmer of 200 acres, and John Richards as "Bailiff". John and Caroline Richards by then had three children, William, Mary Ann and Charles. Of Mary Quance's other children, we find Mary, now Mary Edwards, Louisa, William, Enoch and James. Later that same year, a daughter Eliza was born to the unmarried Louisa. Louisa remained unmarried for a further 20 years, and remained at Waytown with her daughter Eliza.

The other daughters married: Becksey married Peter Dayman in 1833 before the family left Buckland Brewer. They farmed at Ashmansworthy near Bideford; they had two sons, James and William who both became farmers. In 1881 James was farming at New Barns, Shirwell; his father Peter, aged 76, was living there, and also his niece, Mary Quance Dayman (William's daughter). Her picture appears on a later page.

Elizabeth Jane married John Gould, a carpenter. Leah married James Parkhouse, a farmer at Stoke Rivers. Mary married William Edwards in 1846.

Mary Quance had left the farm by 1871, probably spending her last years with Mary Edwards. In 1870, the 39 year old Louisa married a young farm-labourer, Thomas Horn and 7 months later they had a son James who did not survive childhood. Louisa's daughter, Eliza, married William Newcombe in 1871.

Mary Quance died at Pilton in 1875, but was buried at Shirwell church.

Her will dated October 1871 included bequests to her daughters and to some of the grandchildren. Eliza seems to have been her favourite grandchild, receiving £40, together with Mary's bedstead, bed and bedding. The grandchildren Henry Gould, William and John Quance each received £10, but other grandchildren were omitted. Everything else went to the daughters through specific bequests, and the division of the residue. Eliza was probably favoured because she had married in September - just before the date of the will. Though the will calls her Eliza Quance, she had in fact married William Newcombe.

James remained unmarried, and he continued farming at Waytown for many more years. The other sons moved to other farms. In 1881 William was farming 110 acres at Braunton; Enoch was farming 157 acres at Berryarbor.

There are many Quances in Canada who are descendants of brothers of William Quance. The "West Country Preachers" tells of Bible Christian emigration to Canada. In Ontario, the first Bible Christian settlers arrived in about 1833 with many more arriving in the next 20 years. Part of the Quance family emigrated to Canada in this period, and there is certainly a strong Bible Christian connection.

William Quance had 4 brothers and 4 sisters; one or two brothers and one sister emigrated to Canada.

The eldest brother, John Quance, had farmed at Thorn, not far from Shebbear, but in Thornbury Parish. However in 1843 he emigrated to Canada with his wife and 6 of his 10 children. John Quance and his son Richard purchased land at Binbrook Ontario, and this property remained in the Quance family until 1966. A sister, Rebecca Quance, married Thomas Lang and had a large family. They and some of their family also emigrated to Canada at the same time as John Quance. Two marriages took place between cousins; Alice Lang married John Quance's son Robert; Jane Lang married John Quance's son John.

In the 1870s, the Rev. William Quance, of London Ontario was a prominent Bible Christian minister. He was the son of another Quance brother, Richard, who presumably had been another emigrant.

William and Mary Ann Hunt continued

The children of William and Mary Ann Hunt were Mary Louisa, Caroline Anna, William, Blanche, Florence and Charles.

Caroline Anna was born in 1871 and this card survives from Christmas 1871; it is inscribed

"Caroline Anna Hunt. A present from Aunt Martha. December 25th 1871"

Martha was undoubtedly Caroline's great-aunt, Martha Clarke, daughter of John and Betsey Daniel.

Caroline Hunt was admitted to Bratton Fleming school on 26th October 1875 when she was only 4 years old. A school photograph dated about 1876 includes Mary (second row, behind rightmost girl in white apron), and Caroline (second in, on left of front row).



At the back is John Henry Baker, Master. He had joined the school in 1875 at the age of 23 and remained for some 40 years. The girl at the back may be a pupil-teacher, perhaps Mary Elizabeth White. An odd feature of this photograph is the lady amongst the schoolchildren who is holding a baby. This is probably Mrs Sarah Baker, then aged 21.



We have two later photographs, a boys' group containing William Hunt and a girls' group containing Blanche and Florence. Both contain Mr Baker, and the latter also contains a lady who is almost certainly Sarah Baker, who is listed in the 1883 Trade Directory as 'Mistress' at the National School, John Baker being 'Master'.

In 1881, Caroline Hunt, then 9 years old, and a 'scholar', was lodging in Bratton Fleming village. Perhaps this was to avoid the long walk to school from Chelfham?

Whybrow gives many entertaining extracts from the Bratton Fleming school log-book 1863-1875. In 1875, at about the time when the Hunt children started their schooling, the Inspector reported:

"This school has improved in the numbers, in attendance, and in attainments. Arithmetic is much better than it was last year, but is still far from being perfect. Sewing and knitting are very fair. Singing is very fair. The special subjects Grammar and Analysis give evidence of careful preparation. The ventilation and warming of the room require immediate attention. Two full sets of reading books, and a sufficient supply of slates must be provided for each class. A new admission book is required"

The school log book itself is held in the North Devon Record Office (Ref 849 add 2/1). There are a few references to the Hunt children.

The 1883 report of the Diocesan Inspector read

"The religious instruction is very efficiently conducted; the spirit prevailing in the school appears to be exceedingly good, and the children, especially of the Head Class, have passed a highly commendable examination in spite of the drawback of the Master's illness. The school is classed as // Very Good'. Best papers: Eva Parkin, Caroline Hunt, Ida Webb, Cyrus Parkin, Charles Lavercombe."

On 17th November 1884 an entry read

"Have had to send William, Blanche and Florrie Hunt home from school this morning as there is a serious case of diphtheria in their house ."

The log book refers to the prevalence of diphtheria in the village - and four days later another pupil, Alfred Lavercombe, was struck off the school register having died of diphtheria. It may well be that the case at the Hunts was William Hunt senior, leading to his early death.

The North Devon Journal has a few references to the Hunt's of Chelfham between 1850 and 1870. In 1852 'Mary Gibbs' stole apples from William Hunt's orchard. In 1861 there was a sale of farm stock. In 1868, William Richards, employee of William Hunt and probably Mary Ann's brother, fell from a cart.

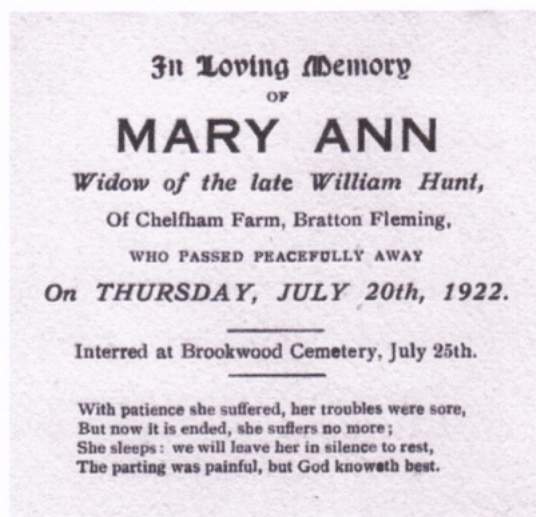
William Hunt died young in 1886, and the Hunt family does not seem to have stayed much longer at Chelfham.

Mary Ann Hunt moved to 10 Grosvenor Street, Barnstaple, and in 1891 she was living there with William, Eva Blanche, Florence Helen, and Charles Thomas. William was by then a cabinet-maker.

To the right is a photograph of Mary Ann Hunt, together with her daughters Florence and Mary, and (in the hat) Mary Quance Dayman who was the granddaughter of Betsey Dayman and great-granddaughter of Mary Quance. The photograph was taken at Mary Ann Hunt's home at Grosvenor Street, Barnstaple.



Also in 1891 the two eldest girls were lodging in Barnstaple. Mary Louisa was at 'Swiss Cottage', Sunflower Road, and was a dress-maker. Caroline was living at 41 Higher Maudlin Street, working as a domestic servant in the home of the 81 year old Sarah Rade. Higher Maudlin Street was just around the corner from Vicarage Street, where Thomas Cawsey was living with his uncle and aunt.



Mary Ann Hunt died in 1922 as the funeral card above shows.

All the Hunts of Chelfham left Bratton Fleming, and there are very few descendants.

William Hunt junior (cabinet-maker in 1891) set up a furniture shop in Barnstaple High Street. He married (Beatrice Jones) and their only child was a daughter Winifred who married Robert Denny; their children were Denise and Godric Denny. William Hunt and Winifred Denny are buried with the Hunts at Bratton Fleming, memorials having been attached to the main Hunt tomb pictured earlier.

Charles, a gas-fitter, married Kate Ridd. They had a son William John, of whom nothing is known

Mary Louisa Hunt married James Southcombe, a Southern Railway worker. James was born in Swimbridge, Devon and in 1911 he was a Railway Guard boarding with a family in Wandsworth. Mary and James married at Barnstaple later in 1911, but set up home in Wandsworth where their only child, Evelyn, was born in 1912. She married Cyril Spenser; they had no children.

Florence and Blanche remained single. In 1911 Blanche was Servant to an 84 year old widower in Ilfracombe. Blanche was housekeeper to Charles late in their lives.