

From Miners' Track to Millionaires' Row, Haytor Vale
The Architect Thomas Henry Lyon of Ilsington 1869-1952, and the
Development of Second Homes for Torquay Gentry

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INTRODUCTION

Haytor Vale in the parish of Ilsington has not always been a quiet village and in Victorian times it was a busy mining centre. In 1864 Alfred Lyon had purchased the Smallacombe estate including the properties Middlecott and Oldertown. As mining became less profitable Alfred sold some of his land for guest houses and some to wealthy Torquay residents who wished to build second homes along the miners' track running from the mine in Haytor Vale to the Bovey Tracey road. Alfred's son Thomas Henry 'Harry' Lyon, later to become a well-known architect designed the holiday homes.

This article features the mines in and around Haytor Vale and provides a brief account of Thomas Lyon's career. The miners' track is featured and the houses built along it are introduced along with some of their more noteworthy residents. Alfred kept a daily diary which has been drawn upon for this research and dates referred to are from this.¹

HAYTOR VALE IN VICTORIAN TIMES

Before Alfred Lyon moved to Ilsington the only properties in and around Haytor Vale were the farms of Smallacombe, Middlecott and Oldertown, and the workers' settlements at Haytor Vale. The fields where the houses were to be built were numbered 1511 to 1523 on the 1838 Tithe Map and the miners' track is shown (Fig.1). The apportionment of these lands is listed in Table 1 and the names of the fields such as Blue Burn continue in the properties today although 'Shorts' has become 'Shotts'.²



Figure 1. 1838 Tithing Map Haytor Vale showing the Miners' Track in blue and the Bovey Tracey/Haytor Road in green. By kind permission of Devon Heritage Centre

Owner	Occupier	Plot No.	Estate	Plot Name	Use	Acres Roods Perches
Joseph Wills Jun	Joseph Wills jun & others	1515	Smallacombe	Little Blue Burn	arable	1 0 36
"	"	1519	"	Great Blue Burn	furze	3 1 18
"	"	1519.1	"	Great Blue Burn	Arable	5 0 38
"	"	1520	"	Great Short	"	9 1 12
"	"	1520.1	"	Great Short	Furze	8 0 14
"	"	1521	"	Middle Short	Arable	7 3 26
"	"	1522	"	Road and Waste	Waste etc	2 1 36
"	"	1523	"	Kiln Close	Furze	13 3 32

Table 1. Apportionment of Part of Haytor Vale

Up to the 1880s the area was the scene of mine working and the usual village life. The manor courts and associated dinners were held at the Rock Inn, Haytor Vale, and these were followed by the beating of the bounds of the parish which were occasions for village festivities.³ The 5th Devon (Haytor) Battalion of Rifle Volunteers had their annual summer camp near Haytor Vale.⁴ There were football matches between local parishes, together with cricket and bowling.⁵

Mines in Haytor Vale in Victorian Times

Haytor Vale was a small hamlet and in 1881 it consisted of nineteen back-to-back cottages and a public house built by George Templer for granite quarrymen sixty years beforehand (Figs 2 and 3). In 1881 there were eighty-three inhabitants including many iron miners.



HAYTOR ROCK HOTEL IN NEWTON ABBOT



Haytor Vale - Our Lodges in 1896. From the right, Charles, Mrs. Rose Ann - Mrs. R. B. - Mrs. Rest. - Lewis B. - Dorothy - Lawrence Hebble. 20/1/1896

Figures 2 and 3. The Rock Inn Haytor 1896. Dartmoortrust.org

There was a long history of mining and in 1858 Joseph Wills of Smallacombe granted rights to speculators to search for minerals in parts of the Smallacombe estate. Several small mines were in operation during the 1860s and 1870s including Rock Hill, Oldertown, Shotts and Hetherley.⁶ Figure 4 shows several mining shafts highlighted in blue.



Figure 4. OS Map 1885 Mining Shafts in Haytor Vale

The three main mines in the area were Haytor iron Mine, Smallacombe Cutting and the Atlas Tin Mine:

Haytor Iron Mine

Prior to 1828 there was opencast working of iron ore but later an adit was driven from the valley bottom in order to access the four layers of brown haematite, magnetite and specular iron ore. The mine was worked thus between the years 1864 and 1883 and Hamilton Jenkin reported that there was an output of 26,500 tons of iron ore during the years 1868-61 and 1869-82.⁷

Smallacombe Cutting

To the south of Haytor Iron Mine beds of limonite, another form of iron ore was mined and then quarried in an extensive open quarry. As in the Haytor iron Mine, an adit was driven into the hillside in order to access the magnetite beds. An attempt to smelt the iron ore using lignite from the Bovey Tracey

'Coal Pit' was unsuccessful and in 1883 ore was carried by overhead wire-rope way to the Haytor iron Mine entrance for onward transportation by traction engine (see below). Hamilton Jenkin reported that 73 tons of magnetite were retrieved in 1868 and 11,770 tons of brown haematite, ochre and umber in 1874-9.⁸

Atlas Mine

In 1858 work resumed under the Atlas Iron and Tin Mines and this mine had three tin lodes and two beds of iron ore. The mine utilised an adit and at least three mine shafts and it produced black tin and also bismuth. A tramway was laid to Middlecott Wood where a water-wheel powered stamps to crush the ore which was then roasted in the nearby calciners which remain in a very good state of preservation. In 1862 forty people were employed in this venture and Hamilton Jenkin reported that in 1864 there was an output of 1,300 tons of brown haematite but only 60 tons of time between 1890 and 1902.⁹

THE MINERS' TRACK AND THE SALE OF LAND BY ALFRED LYON 1881-1898

The Old Miners' Track and the Liquidation of the Haytor Mine Company

In May 1880 Alfred's two sons waited an hour to see the traction engine used to haul iron ore from Haytor Mine returning up the Haytor Road from Bovey railway station. A track for the traction engines had been laid by Alfred along the old miners' track which is now the lane giving access to prestigious houses including The Shotts, Bel Alp and Blueburn. On 13 April 1881 Alfred 'Walked to Haytor Mine for the first time since Xmas last and found great alterations have been made also a road made for the Traction Engine and the Trucks across the fields on a line with the old Tramway and the Engine is expected to go over it tomorrow'.¹⁰

The use of traction engines on public roads caused controversy and in 1882 Dr Hodson of Bovey Tracey was involved in a legal dispute. He had been driving a horse and carriage on the Bovey to Haytor road and a traction engine owned by the Haytor Mining Company travelling at six miles per hour would not stop for him. There was a proposal to prohibit the use of traction engines between 10.00 a.m. and 6 p.m. and Alfred attended a meeting at the Dolphin Hotel, Bovey Tracey at which several local dignitaries including Rev. Hon. Charles Lesley Courtney, the Lord of the Manor Charles Aldenburgh Bentinck, Mr Joll the of the Dolphin Hotel who arranged horse-drawn charabanc trips, Mr John Divett of the Bovey Tracey Pottery Company and Mr William Hole of Parke all supported the restrictive-use proposal.¹¹

This proposal does not appear to have been actioned, but in the event the Haytor Iron Mine Company was liquidated by 1884. In May there was a 'Highly Important Sale of Mining Machinery and Plant' the late property of the Haytor Mining Company.¹²

Alfred Lyon began to sell land for housing along and near the miners' track

In November 1884 Alfred granted land to Edwin Cumming (13 November) and in 1885 he made several references to clearing Shotts of brambles and felling trees. The only buildings near the miners' track on the 1885 OS map were Oldertown, and Smallacombe (Fig. 4).

In 1890 Alfred placed an advertisement in the Torquay press, 'Building sites in Hayter [sic] Vale and land adjoining, may be obtained at moderate rates. Stone for building on the spot, and plenty of pure water. Apply to Alfred Lyon, Middlecott House, Ilsington, or Grogan Bros, Torquay Times'.¹³

By the time of the 1891 Census there were still no houses recorded along the miners' track. Later that year Oldertown Cottage below the miners' track, see Figure 2, caught fire and Alfred decided to convert a lincay rather than re-build the cottage (18 July). As yet no mention was made of his son Thomas being involved in designing new buildings. In October 1891 Mr Wyatt, builder, was 'begining building the cottage at Oldertown' and his name appeared later in connection with the local houses which were to be designed by Thomas (26 October).

In the 1890s the first house to be built along the miners' track was The Cott. This was designed by Thomas Lyon.

Alfred died in November 1898 and to the end he was busy with land transactions. A plot at the west end of the miners' track was given to his daughter and her husband Rev. Pearce and this was where The Shotts was to be built. This house was also designed by Thomas. Further information on Alfred's life and work can be found in Malcolm and Frances Billinge, 2019.¹⁴

Haytor Vale – A Desirable Place

As the mining industry in the Haytor Vale declined the area became a tourist attraction. Advertisements listed the hunting, shooting and fishing opportunities available locally. In 1880 people living in towns were urged to visit Dartmoor 'and about as good a spot as any in which to relax and rustigate

is Haytor and the region round about. Those who take this hint will find excellent lodgings at Haytor Vale'.¹⁵

Wealthy people chose to build holiday homes in this former mining area and in 1895 a journalist writing about 'Some Devonshire Villages' reported that 'My Quarters were, as usual, at the Rock Hotel, in Haytor Vale, a neighbourhood becoming quite aristocratic, since two Torquay solicitors have cottages there, and the Vicar of All Saints', Babbacombe, has just built himself a very modest, unpretentious moorland retreat'.¹⁶

By selling some of his land Alfred was able to capitalise on this gentrification and his son Thomas was on hand to design some of the houses during this early stage in his renowned architectural career. Before listing the houses and mentioning some of the more interesting residents Thomas will be introduced.

THOMAS LYON'S FORMATIVE YEARS 1867 - 1895

Alfred was a successful businessman who moved to the area from Staffordshire in 1864 to aid the health of his first wife Deborah. They lived at Middlecott (Fig. 5).



Figure. 5. Middlecott in Alfred Lyon's day. By kind permission of Susan Rands.

Deborah died a year later and Alfred married Fanny Beresford who had been governess to his three children. Alfred and Fanny had several children including Thomas Henry 'Harry' who was born at Middlecott in 1869. Thomas had a seemingly idyllic childhood fishing, riding on the moor, ferreting for rabbits, nutting, visiting local families, attending the parish church, walking long distances with his father and brother and sometimes with other siblings. His

father's diary always referred to his children as 'dear' or 'darling' - clearly a family man. Thomas accompanied his father on visits to his mines, meeting the managers and employees so gaining a good grounding in business matters.

Thomas attended Miss Viner's preparatory school in Weston-super-Mare (30 September).¹⁷ There was no indication why this school was chosen as schools in nearby Torquay offered a similar curriculum. Thomas then transferred to Trent College in Derbyshire in 1881. This had been founded by Francis Wright, chairman of the Midland Clerical and Lay Association and its founding principles were in opposition to the high church Oxford Movement, sometimes known as Tractarianism.¹⁸ Paradoxically, Thomas would later become a supporter of the Oxford Movement which had gained some popularity in Devon, and particularly in the neighbouring parish of Bovey Tracey. We know from later entries in Alfred's diary that he did not like 'Popish' or 'Jesuitical' ceremony in parish churches and Thomas would have been well aware of this. Later father and son differed in this respect.

During the summer of 1882 thirteen-year old Thomas with his younger brother Herbert were 'very busy putting up a fowl house'. This might signal Thomas' early interest in design and practical accomplishment (Fig. 6).

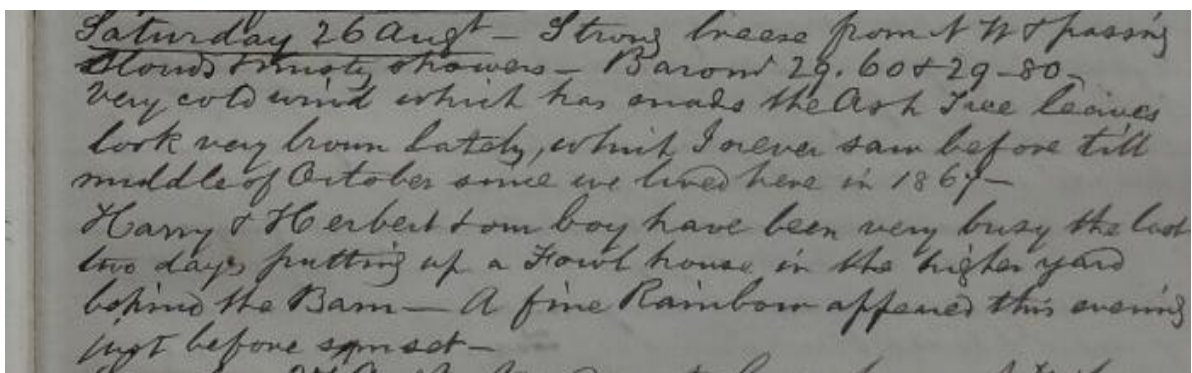


Figure 6. Thomas Built a Fowl House, Diary 28 August 1882.

Thomas was away at school when his mother Fanny died in 1883 and the following year his father married her cousin Sarah.

After leaving Trent College Thomas obtained a first-class award in elementary architecture at the 1889 Torquay Schools of Science and Arts prize-giving.¹⁹ In later life Thomas was to publish a book on architecture which referred to his at one time being an apprentice architect in Torquay, 'I was an articled pupil in an office where I saw nothing that was not quite hopeless from an aesthetic point of view'.²⁰ This was at the firm of Watson & Watson.²¹

Despite this early flair for architecture Thomas went up to Corpus Christi College in Cambridge in 1890 to read theology (7 October), later changing to read law.²² He graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1893, and in November was elected to be a member of the Architects' Association.²³ After this Thomas spent two years in London with the church architects firm of W. D. Caroe.²⁴ It was during this time that Alfred sold building plots on Shotts fields with Thomas designing some of the houses. Thomas continued this endeavour following his father's death but before itemising these houses, a brief account of Thomas' adult life and career is presented.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ADULT LIFE AND CAREER OF THOMAS LYON 1895-1952

Sisters and University Friends

In 1895 Thomas' sister Caroline married Rev. Percy William Wise, one of Thomas' Cambridge friends. This led to Thomas working in Australia as an architect and being engaged in the completion St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide. Caroline died in 1902 and her husband commissioned Thomas to design a reredos in her memory for Ilington parish church. In addition 'Harry Lyon is about to replace the present cross and candlesticks with some of his design together with an antique Persian sanctuary carpet in memory of his sister. Also a hymn board signed by Mr Lyon and carved by Mr Read'.²⁵ Thomas also designed the rebuilding of the church's Western Gate Way Reading Room and Bearne was used as the builder.²⁶

In 1896 Margaret married another of Thomas' Cambridge friends, John Cowper Powys, the renowned writer, poet and philosopher.

In 1899 Fanny Constance married a third university friend the Rev. Edmund Courtenay Pearce for whom Thomas designed The Shotts.

Great Ambrook, Ipplepen

Thomas established his architectural business in Kensington High Street and he was awarded a bronze medal by the Architects' Association in 1896, however he maintained a strong presence in Devon.²⁷

In the early 1900s Thomas designed an Italiante garden at Great Ambrook near Ipplepen whilst at the time designing further houses at Haytor Vale (Fig. 7). He contracted Lewis Bearne, builder and clay merchant of Newton Abbot to assist him. Bearne was the agent for the Stover Canal Company used by Alfred for

shipment of iron ore to Teignmouth docks which was before Bovey Station opened in 1866 (15 October 1864). Bearne built Castle Drogo and W. H. Smith's mansion now called *Bovey Castle* near Moretonhampstead.²⁸ Designing the Great Ambrook garden was an out of the ordinary commission for Thomas. It would be interesting to learn if any gardens in Ilington were designed by him.



Figure 7. Garden at Great Ambrook. Frances Billinge 2020.

Thomas in Cambridge

In 1919 Thomas was appointed Director of Design at Cambridge University School of Architecture.²⁹ In 1920 his memorial for the men of the church of St Andrew the Great, Ely who had died in WWI was dedicated.³⁰

In 1921 a selection of Thomas' architectural lectures were published.³¹ Thomas continued at Cambridge and re-designed Sydney Sussex Chapel which was described as, 'A moving spirit in our university architecture'.³² He had been working on this since 1910 and because of the war, it was finally dedicated in 1923.³³ In 1926 he designed the hostel at Peterhouse in Cambridge.

Thomas also designed some houses in Cambridge in the 1920s but church architecture remained his prime concern.³⁴ In 1931 his Lady Chapel at Little St Mary's was dedicated.³⁵ St George's in Chesterton was built to his design in 1938.³⁶

In 1937 Thomas resigned his post at Cambridge School of Architecture and retired to Middlecott.³⁷ However, he continued with church restoration at the church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Ashill, Somerset.³⁸ Thomas died at Middlecott in 1952 at the age of eighty-three. Despite his success as an architect Thomas only left £1,255.

Houses built along the miners' track and designed by Thomas Lyon

The 1906 O.S. map shows only *The Shotts* and *The Cot* on opposite sides of the old miners' track, presumably some houses were not far enough advanced to be included when the original mapping was undertaken two years previously (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. O S Map Haytor Vale 1906

In 1894 Rev. Hewett, the vicar of Babbacombe bought a plot of land on the old miners' track (25-27 August). Thomas designed his house which was built by Mr Dart (1 and 27 June 1895). The Lyon and Hewett families became friendly enough for Rev. Hewett to be one of the three celebrants at Caroline Lyon's wedding in Ilington (16 July 1895). A photograph of the wedding party

includes some residents from the miners' track (Fig. 9). Named *The Cott*, it was the first house to be built on the miners' track, and was a holiday home for Rev. Hewett (Fig. 10). He died in 1911 and unlike later residents he was not a wealthy man leaving £1,771 the equivalent of £138,442 in 2020.



Figure 9. Wedding of Caroline Lyon and Rev. Percy W.C. Wise, 1895.



Figure 10. *The Cott* - later *Alpiglen* and now *Fox Hill House*. Frances Billinge 2025.

Hellens House* - later *Bel Alp

Hellens House, later *Bel Alp* designed by Thomas was built in 1904 as a holiday residence for John Lancaster Shaw of Torquay, managing director and later chairman the Bentley and Shaw brewing company of Huddersfield. He was Commodore of the Royal Torquay Yacht Club and had a boat house constructed in the garden.³⁹

Shaw died in 1912 leaving £113,155 which would be just under £9,000,000 in 2020. He was the first millionaire to live on the miners' track. Shaw did not support socialism and his will stated 'I declare that in consequence of the Socialistic tendency of national finance at the present time, I omit the legacies to charities given by my former will.'⁴⁰

Hellens Cottage now Rose Cottage, and Firwood

These were two out-buildings of *Hellens* designed by Thomas for staff. In 1911 *Hellens Cottage* had five rooms and was lived in by the gardener.

The Shotts

In 1898 Alfred arranged for his daughter Fanny and prospective son in law Rev. Edmund Courtenay Pearce, to have a plot on which *The Shotts* would be built (29 September 1898). The Rev. Pearce was Master of Corpus Christi College and Mayor of Cambridge, and in 1919 he became the Bishop of Worcester with his country residence at *The Shotts* proudly noted in the local newspaper.⁴¹ In 1927 he became Bishop of Derby and he died at *The Shotts* in 1935.⁴²

Oldertown Shotts - now Shotts House

Oldertown was a farm on a lane running downhill from the miners' track. This is where there was a fire, see above. *Oldertown Shotts* was built on the corner of this lane where it meets the miners' track and Thomas was, once again the architect.

Both Miss Violet Wills and her sister Mrs Ella Rowcroft lived here before moving to *Bel Alp* and *Blueburn* respectively. They feature in section below on notable residents.

Haytor Brae -now Blueburn

Haytor Brae was built some time after the 1901 Census. On the 1911 Census John Maddock was the caretaker and it had eleven rooms. It was referred to in an advertisement of 1915 where Maddock, the resident gardener, was seeking a new post.⁴³ The advertisement claimed that he had a 'thorough knowledge of private electric plant'.

Miss Katherine Amy Cary (c1870-1934)

The first reference to this house as *Blueburn* was in 1922 with Miss Katherine Amy Cary in residence.⁴⁴ Violet Wills and Ella Rowcroft were living along the lane at *Oldertown Shotts*. Katherine's father was the vicar of Trusham and they were both involved in organizing the Teign Valley Benefit Nursing Association which was run along the lines of the Holt-Ockley system.⁴⁵ At a meeting arranged by Dr and Mrs Goodwyn at Church Stile House, Bovey Tracey in 1906, 'Dr Stewart referred to the energetic manner in which Miss Kathleen Cary had organized the Teign Valley Benefit Nursing Association'.⁴⁶ Three years' later the

Louisa Cary Children's Ward was opened in Torquay. Lt-Col Lucius Cary and his wife Louisa, renowned local philanthropists, were Lord and Lady of the manor of Torre Abbey but a family connection with Miss Katherine Cary has not been established.

By 1929 Miss Cary had left *Blueburn* and Ella Rowcroft had moved in from *Oldertown Shotts*.

Some Notable Residents

A small group of eminent ladies used these Haytor Vale houses as their holiday homes during the earlier years of the twentieth century. They were Dame Violet Wills, her sister Mrs Ella Rowcroft, Dame Christabel Pankhurst and Mrs Catherine Booth-Clibborn. They were supported in their philanthropic work by Lord Mamhead, another visitor to their house. The Misses Eleanor and Beryl Tracey may not have been a part of this exclusive social group but their presence helps to establish the link between Haytor Vale and Bovey Tracey.

Dame Violet Edith Wills (1867-1964) and her sister Mrs Ella Marian Rowcroft (1860-1941) were daughters of Sir Edward Payson Wills, 1st Baronet of Hazelwood, director of the Imperial Tobacco Company who died in 1910 leaving £2,580,095 which would equate to approximately £202 million in 2020.

Dame Christabel Harriette Pankhurst (1880-1958) was the eldest daughter of Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst and sister of Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst of the famous suffragette family.

Mrs Catherine Booth-Clibborn (1858-1955) was the eldest daughter of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army.

Lord Mamhead, Sir Robert Newman (1871-1945) was the Conservative M.P. for Exeter and a devout Anglo-Catholic.

Misses Beryl (1872-1954) and Eleanor Tracey (1871-1954) were nieces of Miss Maria Tracey (1852-1939) of *The Manor House*, East Street, Bovey Tracey. This was a family of independent means based on slavery and south African diamond mining.⁴⁷

In 1911 Ella Rowcroft, aged fifty-one and her younger sister Violet Wills were living at *Barcombe Hall* in Paignton. Unlike John Lancaster Shaw they were significant philanthropists. Their first known association with Haytor Vale was

in 1916 when Miss Delve, a lady's maid from *Barcombe Hall* was staying at *Oldertown Shotts*, presumably with Ella and/or Violet. Miss Delve forwarded £6 to Miss Buller's WWI Hostel Fund.⁴⁸ Miss 'Georgiana' Buller, daughter of General Sir Redvers Buller was the administrator of the Central Military Hospital Exeter during WW1.

In 1920 *Barcombe Hall* was for sale and Ella and Violet moved to Pilmuir, an imposing residence situated near Torre Station, Torquay.⁴⁹

Between 1921 and 1927 Ella and Violet named Oldertown Shotts, but also Pilmuir as their residence on separate lists of electors. In 1929 and 1930 Violet gave Bel Alp as her residence but her abode as Woodside, Stoke Bishop, Bristol. Ella gave Blueburn as her residence but Pilmuir, as her abode.

Despite maintaining a residence at *Oldertown Shotts* throughout the 1920s Violet was also recorded as living at *Hellens*, now renamed *Bel Alp* in 1924. Violet was the founder of *Tranquility*, a refuge for clergy in Torquay.⁵⁰

In 1926 the foundation stone for the new Torbay Hospital was laid by Ella. 'The site was given by Mrs Rowcroft, who with her sister, Miss Wills, of Haytor, also subscribed £23,000. But it was her [Ella Rowcroft] final gift of £100,000 which ultimately made the scheme a certainty.'⁵¹

Violet was also a benefactor of the chapel at Hawkmoor Hospital and also Bovey Tracey's new Cottage Hospital.⁵²

Violet continued staying at *Bel Alp* throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In 1931 she was involved in the Devon and Exeter horticultural Society's Exhibition.⁵³ In 1933 she allowed a Bible class to meet in her home.⁵⁴

In 1934 Mrs Catherine Booth-Clibborn, who styled herself Marechale, meaning the marshall's wife, was in Devon lecturing on Salvation Army themes such as 'Dangers to the Community - Systems Which Leave God Out'. Violet facilitated one such meeting: 'The many arrangements for the visit to Exeter of the Marechale, Mrs Booth-Clibborn, eldest daughter of the late Gen. William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, began to bear fruition this week when she commenced her meetings. Miss Violet Wills, of Haytor, gave a reception at St. Luke's College on Tuesday, which was attended by a most distinguished and representative audience. Among those present were the Bishop of Exeter ... and Lord Mamhead.'⁵⁵

Three years later Dame Christabel Pankhurst spoke at a Christian Proclamation Campaign meeting at the Civic Hall, Exeter and this was chaired by Lord Mamhead.⁵⁶

In 1939 Dame Christabel Pankhurst was staying at *Bel Alp* with Dame Violet Wills and in July Christabel attended the funeral, as one of the family mourners, of Miss Clara Andrew, founder of the National Children's Adoption Association which was held at Exeter Cathedral.⁵⁷

Mrs Catherine-Booth Clibborn in 1939 was staying/living at *The Haven* which was part of the original *Oldertown*.⁵⁸ She was to die at this address in 1955 leaving £3,696 or approximately £68,000 in 2020. Ella Rowcroft supported the Salvation Army (as well as numerous other Christian causes) and in his later years Alfred Lyon also turned to the Salvation Army.

1933 Ella R left *Pilmuir* to live in *The Rainbow*, a chalet in her grounds.

1939 was the year in which 'Lord Mamhead officially opened *Rowcroft Convalescent Home, Pilmuir, Torquay*' which had been donated by Ella Rowcroft. She was unable to be present but her sister Violet 'thanked Lord Mamhead on behalf of her sister, for becoming president of the committee.'⁵⁹ In 1937 Ella had decided to open *Pilmuir* as a convalescent home – now the Rowcroft Hospice⁶⁰ Her memory continues today in Bovey Tracey with the *Rowcroft hospice shop*. Ella, like Alfred Lyon, was said to be a generous supporter of the Salvation Army when she died 1941.⁶¹

Also in 1939 there was the members of Exeter Federation, Church of England Men's Society's char-a-banc outing to *Bel Alp* for tea provided by Violet Wills, before they continued to Widecombe church.⁶²

Ella Rowcroft died in 1941 leaving £1,688,138 worth approximately £6 million in 2020 with probate granted to her sister Violet of *Bel Alp*. Ella left numerous bequests to charities and also £3,000 to Princess Marie Louise, 'in grateful recognition of her friendship and many kindnesses.'⁶³

In 1945 Lord Mamhead was taken ill and died at the age of seventy-four while visiting Violet Wills at *Bel Alp*.⁶⁴

Dame Christabel Pankhurst died in 1958 in California leaving an unknown estate.

Bel Alp was for sale in 1959 with the following details: It was rather grandly headlined as 'Princess House' because 'Princess Marie Louise [of Schleswig-Holstein and granddaughter of Queen Victoria] was a frequent guest. *Bel Alp* owned by Dame Violet Wills tobacco millionairess. The house was built in 1904 by Hugh Mills and sons of Newton Abbot. It was originally a bungalow but the architect Thomas Henry Lyon made provision for rooms to be added above and when Dame Violet bought the house she added them on.⁶⁵

In 1964 Violet Wills of *Sungleam* Park Road, Clevedon and Woodside, Stoke Bishop died leaving £915,040 with a 2020 value of approximately £13 million. There is now a house named *Sungleam* in the former grounds of *Bel Alp*, and this continues the link with Violet's life.

Returning to *Oldertown Shotts* where Ella Rowcroft and Violet Wills were living in 1927 before moving to *Blueburn* and *Bel Alp* respectively, in 1928 Misses Eleanor and Beryl Tracey became the new residents. Beryl had been a VAD nurse during WW1 and Eleanor's name appeared on the Physiotherapy and Masseuse Registers 1920-1938. Their aunt Miss Maria Tracey of *The Manor House*, East Street, Bovey Tracey [but manor house in name only] died in 1939 by which time Eleanor and Beryl were living next door at *Heathcot*, East Street. Both sisters died at *The Manor House* in 1954. Eleanor's estate was £5,996 or £115,000 in 2020 and Beryl's was £13,318 or £255,000 today.

Conclusion

There is a photo circa 1939 showing the five houses along the old miners' track: *The Shotts*, *Bel Alp*, *Alpiglen*, *Blueburn* and *Oldertown Shotts* (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. *The Shotts Bel Alp Alpiglen Blueburn Oldertown Shotts c. 1939*

www.dartmoortrust.org.

The area around Shotts was originally peaceful countryside and moorland before becoming an area with many mines and open works. Alfred Lyon developed some of the mines after he came to the area in 1864. He was a businessman who used the developing technology of traction engines to assist with his mine works. His son Thomas was brought up to understand the local mining industry but his interest lay in architecture and in particular church architecture. Thomas' growing interest in architecture coincided with his father's selling of land as building plots.

Before Thomas' houses were built the only nearby dwellings were for farm labourers and miners, together with the large farm houses of *Smallacombe* and *Middlecott*, the Lyon family home. The sale of plots initially attracted a south Devon Reverend and a successful millionaire businessman brewer. More houses were built and the area attracted people of considerable wealth such as the Wills sisters who were philanthropists who used their wealth to support health care in Bovey Tracey as well as Torquay. Because of the splendid views across South Devon it is no surprise that the houses have been enlarged considerably and today this sought-after location, once a busy miners' track is now known colloquially as Millionaires' Row.

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