**THE DIARY OF AARON PHILLIPS 1858**

My great grandfather Aaron Phillips was apprenticed to a linen factors in London in 1858 and in June the temperature rose to 48deg. the hottest ever recorded. It was at the time of the "Great Stink" when the Thames became an open sewer, which led to Joseph Bazalgette building the new sewerage system for London.

Because there was a strong likelihood of a Cholera outbreak, Aaron was sent back to West Down for the month of June to avoid the worst of the hot weather and he must have been told to write a diary of his days back home.

The village already has a copy of his diary as it was originally written, but it is difficult to follow because of the lack of punctuation and unusual wording. I have rewritten this diary using his own words but making it easier to understand.

I thought this might be of some interest as it gives an insight into life in West Down in the mid 19th Century. I have been able to identify most of the people he refers to in the diary and I have put these into brackets. Many of these names must still be familiar in the village as will be some of the places he visited. I hope this is of interest

The photograph of Aaron were taken in his early 20's.

**Tuesday 1st June.**

 I left with Samuel and Merendez and my boxes to Wood Street and then onto Paddington Station, arriving at 6.15am. I arrived at Exeter at 4 o’clock.

At Swindon Station, I went to have a little ale; on arriving at the bar, I saw an old gentleman and his son. I ordered a pint of ale, as I felt more inclined to know what was in the hotel than outside. There had been a sailor travelling with me from London with whom I had been having a conversation about the present government on which we agreed, which made me like him much better for it. I offered him ale if he had no objection to drink with me and I have reason to think he enjoyed drinking with another person judging from his countenance. However, he would not let me go until he had ordered more ale (just like a sailor) and make me drink.

In the meantime, I saw the old gentleman and his son drinking at the bar; it was the same as wine to us in the boiling hot sun. We started again in five minutes but before I could get myself seated, the gentleman and his son beckoned me to give an observation on the ale. They said it was not the kind of ale you get in London. I told them that it seemed very new to me considering the price. His son asked me to join them in their carriage, which I was willing to do, as there were three navies and a few other low characters in my carriage.

So, I left with pleasure after my observations on the ale, having told them I was not much of a judge of ale as I did not drink much. The son said ironically that I did not look as though I did, but I assured them that I really did not. They said I should not have thought it but they were teetotallers. I said I could scarcely believe it, but his son said he never took anything but water and he thought it much healthier. I told him I could not think that from experience. He enquired my age and I told him I was 17 or a little more but he would not believe it. The son I thought was fine being 21 years old.

We parted after a pleasant conversation at Exeter, he left for Plymouth and I for Exeter city centre. I went up the High Street and bought ¼lb tobacco, which I had forgotten to get for father and Mr. Howard in London. I passed the cathedral, which I thought was very beautiful, but I did not go inside although I have since heard that the entrance is free. I returned to the station and waited half an hour for the train to Barnstable, but the train kept going backwards and forwards and after 2½ hours I arrived in Barnstable, more dead than alive after sitting so long in one position. Samuel Coats, Tom Doll, Henry and George (Aaron’s brothers) were there to meet me, we all went to the Mermaid, where I left my boxes before going to Mrs. Howard‘s. Mrs. Howard made me stop and have something to eat, I chose bacon and eggs. I then left Barnstable with Henry for West Down and arrived at 12.30; much to my mother’s regret, I could not eat much.

**2nd June.**

Henrycame home with me at stayed overnight; we had bacon, eggs and potatoes for breakfast together before leaving for Barnstable. On our way, we stopped off at Higher Aylescott Farm (James Hartnoll’s farm) to see our uncle (not a related uncle) and drink a glass of ale. We continued our way to Marwoodand called on Mr. John Marshall to be measured for new clothes. While we were there, we had a glass of ale and biscuits, and after hearing Miss Maria Marshall play a few tunes on the harmonium, Henry left for Barnstable leaving me to spend the day at Marwood, where I had lunch and tea before returning to West Down across the common.

When I arrived back in West Down I saw John Peake (son of Susan Peake, widow farmer at Trimstone) at Betsey’s (Elizabeth Lewis, Sister of Aaron’s father)and was given a meal of potatoes, cold meat, pickles and onions.

**3rd June.**

I got up at 6 o’clock and went down with John Cornish (West Down, Blacksmith) to attend to father’s calves, and then home to a breakfast of bacon and fried onions etc. I then went to see John Lewis (his uncle) about my boots and shoes, when I returned home, I had a chat with Miss Elizabeth Gammon (the illegitimate daughter of Mary Gammon, born in April 1830), she invited me to go to tea in the afternoon at Prudence Hartnoll’s (James sister).Mary Caroline and Elizabeth Gammon and I with a bouquet of flowers, started at 3 o’clock for our tea engagement.

After crossing fields and styles for about 1½ miles, we arrived at Eastacott Farm (Thomas Challacombe’s Farm, married to Aaron’s mother’s sister) much to the surprise of Miss Mary Ann Hartnoll as she had not seen me.

We spent the afternoon chatting and insinuating about the lovers of West Down, which I could not join in much, as I should wish to keep up appearances. After a nice tea, there were some chickens, which needed to be smoked to cure a disease. After putting 20 to 25 chickens in a small hut and then light a pipe and blow away the smoke, unless they are quite intoxicated it is not enough to cure them. I managed to get a short pipe, the only one I could find, rather a nice colour for me, who had never done this kind of thing before. So I puffed away but could not keep it alight as much as I would have liked and was compelled after a hard fought battle to retreat feeling a little the worse for tobacco. I resigned it to one of the ladies, who succeeded in obtaining the object. The ladies laughed at me for being overcome by the pipe.

While we were leaving a young farmer came in unexpectedly, which was just the thing as we would make two couples, but the young ladies did not like him much, as he was a very low character. We returned to West Down and I saw both the ladies into their home and came through the churchyard to my own home (The Long House).

On arriving I saw Susan Peak (Mrs Susan Peake’s daughter**,** Trimstone), who had been waiting sometime to see me. As there was a chance of a storm, I thought it my duty to see her home with an umbrella, as she was quite unprepared for the storm. We had a pleasant conversation and reached the quiet village of Trimstone by 10 o’clock. The family had all gone to bed but Mrs Susan Peake as usual offered me something to eat and drink; I declined the food but had a glass of ale.

I then returned home only to find that all our people gone to bed with the exception of mother, who pressed me to have supper but of course, I refused as I had been eating all day. I was able to see grandmother (Mary Clougg, nee Watts) and drink their ale, I also saw Thomas Harding who would make me eat something. He did not care a button what I had as long as I had something, so I had a glass of ale and told him I would call on him to go a have a bathe.

**4th June.**

Today I decided to ride to Eastacott Farm, calling at Roadway on the way. I saw Mr. Hardingworking in a field; he did not recognise me at first, but on having a conversation I was soon able to make myself known to him. I told him I had met his two daughters in London and they had given me a parcel for Mrs. …….. at Roadway. He told me the field to turn down and I soon found myself at the farmhouse where I had previously spent a day shearing sheep. I put my horse in a field and waited for Thomas to arrive before we set off on foot for Eastacott Farm (Thomas Challacombe) where I stopped for lunch. After lunch, I walked for about an hour arriving at Wollacombe Sands and Barricane Beach, where I had a splendid bathe in a clear pool, which was separated from the sea. The water felt very chilly but after a while, I found it beautifully comfortable and so dived under the water.

I returned to Eastacott for tea before returning to Roadway, where I had left my horse, the weather was fearfully hot and I did not return to West Down until 7 o’clock. I went to grandmothers but soon after I arrived, I saw Mr. John Gammon with his pony and racer, so I ran after him at full speed and succeeded in stopping him. I mounted his pony without a saddle and we went up to the fold before walking home with him to see his sheep etc.

**June 5th.**

Father called me before I was out of bed and told me that farmer William wanted me to go to Buckland (Charles Henry Webber, Farmer) for some turnip seeds for him. I was glad of the job so at 9.30 I started out and arrived at Buckland after a most fearfully hot ride. I left the parcel of seed telling them I would collect it on my return and asked them how far it was to the sea. I was told it was about three miles and passed through Georgeham before arriving at Putsborough, where I called on uncle and aunt Barnes (Thomas and Jane), they insisted I come into their house and have something to eat and drink.

I was extremely hot so I preferred a glass of cider and a biscuit before continuing onto the sands but coming nearer to the sea the horse being young was frightened and I could hardly hold it. I could not get anyone to hold her so I tied her to a gate where she stood quietly while I had a very enjoyable bathe. I returned to Putsborough where I collected the seed and then onto the Foxhunters Inn were I had a glass of ale with Robert(Phillips, a cousin), who was not at all well.

After some lunch, a boy came into the inn to say some sheep were in the road. Therefore, I left but did not get far before I met John Peake with his horse and cart going to see Mr. Langdon at Braunton. My brother Henry and Samuel Coats were coming home from Barnstable at this time, so I waited a long time for them but they did not arrive so I returned home where we had a drop of ale together.

I then went to the church tower and rung two bells, after which I had very sore hands. Henry came home and we had supper and then played a tune or two on the flute before going to bed.

**Sunday June 6th.**

I was up at 7 o’clock this morning, went down to ‘Yellowways’ to check on the bullocks, and returned for a breakfast of bacon and eggs. I went to chapel and heard Mr. John Verney (Cheglinch, WestDown) preach.

In the afternoon I went again with John and William Peake (John’s Brother) to hear Mr. Gammon preach. When I returned home, we met Thomas Challacombe (married to Aaron’s grandmother’s sister) Maryand Matilda and had tea at grandmothers.

Thomas Challacombe**,** John and William Peake (Susan and John’s brother) came to our house for tea and then we walked down to ‘Two Meads’ to see if the ewe had had her lamb, but the Ewe had not so we returned home.

In the evening, I went to chapel where I saw Mrs. Peake and Susan, the Baments, the Gammons and Mr. and Mrs. John Coats. I walked with Mrs Peake and her daughter before returning home and bed.

**June 7th.**

After breakfast of bacon and eggs I went with Henry to check on the ewe and then onto Betsy’s (Betsey Phillips, Foxhunter Inn) where we had a conversation with Martha, Ann and William Coats. We returned to West Down for a slice or two of ham and pickles and a glass of ale and then after an hour or two had lunch at grandmothers.

After lunch, I set off to see Mr. John Marshall at Marwood (Post Master, Susan Marshall, his wife was a tailor). It was very hot so I was obliged to lay down twice and actually went to sleep, when I awoke I found there were some …….. crawling on me, which made me feel very uncomfortable. I arrived just in time for tea with Mr. and Mrs. Marshall and their daughter.

After tea I took Miss Marshall for a stroll in the garden, there were some weeds and other things that required to be burnt, so she fetched some matches and we made one heap and commenced the fire.

After seeing the chapel, at which Miss Marshall played the harmonium I returned to West Down calling at Aylescott Farm to invite aunt over to our house the next day. There was wrestling in the village and it had commenced when I arrived, I only stayed for a few minutes, as there were only servants and low characters. When I returned home I met Mrs Lewis (Aaron’s Aunt) and had a conversation with her, she is a very religious person so I gave her Mr. Brock’s funeral sermon for Havelock, which she was very pleased to see.

After she had left, I went down to Mrs. Settles where I again met the two Gammon sisters (Mary Jane and Maria) and Miss Harriet Coats.

**June 8th.**

This morning I met Thomas Gammon and John, so I asked them if they had water in which I could bathe. They proposed a pond at the bottom of one of their fields. I went down to examine the pool but found it to be two or three tons of mud, which of course disappointed me.

I was returning home when I met Mr. Harding, I had a glass of ale and a ginger beer with him and he asked me to have lunch with him. Before we had finished lunch, the band club were marching past, a sight that could not be seen in London every day of the week.

After seeing the band pass, I went to the church tower and enjoyed ringing the bells by myself. I became very hot and was perspiring freely, so I returned home, and changed into a clean shirt and collar.

I had tea and wanted to leave for Trimstone Farm but I could not get away because Dick Clougg (Richard Clougg, cousin of my mother from Combe Martin) was too friendly at our house; he said how like I was to their family and himself, that when he died he promised to leave me all his money.

I was glad to get away, so I shook hands and left for Trimstone Farm, but I saw William Phillips of Braunton going home, he asked me to have a drink with him, so we had a glass of peppermint together.

I met Robert on the Trimstone Road; he was an invalid so we walked very slowly until we arrived. Robert returned and I went to visit Mrs. Peake where I discovered Susanwas very poorly in bed. It was a great disappointment to me, but William had just finished his supper and Mrs. Coats had gone upstairs to see Susan.

We had a long conversation about London, which I have no doubt proved interesting to all present. As it was getting late I had a glass of ale, which as I have said before, I was never generally behind in talking in preference to eating. Mrs Coats and William came through Trimstone with me and William came with me towards West Down he in shirtsleeves and me in a thin coat, as we came near to the Great Tree there was a sharp shower and thunder and lightning so we returned much quicker than we came in the opposite directions.

When I got home, I was a little bit the worse for water. When I was dry, I had a supper of ham and small onions, which I enjoyed very much.

**June 9th.**

I was up early this morning, as I had to check the bullocks in ‘Yellowways’; all the walking had made me hungry so I was glad to have fried bacon and onions for breakfast. After breakfast I set out for the Foxhunter Inn (Aaron’s uncle John was the proprietor) where I had a glass or two of cider.

When I came home mother had made my favourite dish especially for me, but I was disappointed, as I could not eat it as I had been invited out to lunch.

After talking to father and the Excise man, I left for my Aunt Mary for lunch and tea. When I left there I went on to grandmother’s where I met Bob Coats who said I was to mind what I was up to; I was a fine young fellow, in fact the finest he had seen at the age of 17 years of age.

When I returned home, I went into the garden and dug up some weeds, which through inattention had grown to a fearful extent. The exertion had given me an appetite and I was able to enjoy the special meal my mother had made for me.

**June 10th.**

I was up early again this morning to prepare my pony, as I had to go to Barnstable. When I got to Ellscott Farm, I changed my saddle, as the one I had was rather shabby. I went on to Marwood to call on Miss Marshall**,** but found Mr. Marshall and his daughter were out, so I had a chat with one of the neighbours and asked if she knew where Mrs. Weston lived. I was told she lived about 10 minutes away, giving my reasons for inquiring as I was at school with her sons and they were good friends of mine.

I called at the farm and saw their little sister who told me they were ploughing one of the fields. I arrived at the field, where I saw Samuel and Alfred Weston with a team of horses ploughing; I waited and had chat with them. Alfred expressed his wish that he had left Devon when he was young, instead of stopping at home and working so hard. I wished them goodbye and told them I would very likely see them again.

I rode on to Barnstable and left my pony at the Mermaid Inn, I then went up to the school (Chaloner’s School) where my brother (Edwin) had been for six months. The examinations had been on Thursday so I went into the school and saw the prizes awarded to those most efficient in their various capacities. My brother had no idea that he had won a prize, so he left all his copybooks behind including his ciphering books. Edwin was awarded the prize for arithmetic; he was given a Bible Testament and Common Prayer Book all in one.

We had refreshments at the School before leaving for Mrs. Ackland in Joy Street; she invited us for tea so but we only stayed a few minutes. We visited Mrs. Howard and had a mutton chop or two for lunch before visiting some of my old friends I was at school with. Henry and I then started for home calling at Mrs. Marshall on the way and then onto Aylescott Farm to return the saddle to Uncle George.

I saw Elizabeth Gammon and she invited us to have supper with her, as she had John and Miss Harriet Coats also for supper. We had a long chat in the garden, but a storm was blowing in with thunder and lightning. The lightning really frightened Elizabeth Gammon, more than anyone I had seen in my life. We tried to pass it off but she would have none of it, the lightning was very severe. We left at about 10.30 and I went to bed but could not sleep until the storm was all over.

**June 11th.**

I had bacon and eggs for breakfast as I do every morning before leaving to see farmer Gammon, John and Elizabeth Gammon were there milking with John Settles. I returned home and went with father and Henry to ‘Lower Barton’ (one of fields belonging to father) to attend to a lamb with worms, it was treated with a staff made expressly made for a cure.

When I got home, I changed my clothes, as I wanted to go to Ilfracombe, being the first time I had been there. I started at about 11 o’clock for the Foxhunter Inn, as Robert Phillips wanted to go with me; we went up Dean Road chatting all the way to Trimstone Farm, where we called for a glass of ale with Mrs. Susan Peake and her daughter Susan.

We had not been there long when there was a clap of thunder and flashes of lightning, the natives had never seen the like before, in fact I had never seen such large hail stones in all my life, they were the size of beans. That was a settler for my going to Ilfracombe, so I stayed for lunch and tea and had a few dances with Miss Susan and William Peake, who was a complete failure, but Susan got on really well.

The rain was so severe that nearly all the stones in the courtyard had been pulled up or loosened. William was obliged to go out and take in a one week old colt when he noticed some wheat that was on the floor of the barn was being rained on, so off he ran with me after him with two oil coats over my head. My appearance was more like that of a wandering Jew than a trueborn Englishman; when we arrived at the barn we found that it was not as damaged as we had expected.

After tea William Peake and I rode back to West Down and after arriving home, I had a wash andput on a collar.

I then went to have a chat with a few of the “nobs” and aristocrats in the village before returning home to play a few tunes.

 **June 12th.**

After breakfast, I decided that I would go to Ilfracombe and take my sister Ellen with me, when we got to Chicklings we were joined by Miss Ann Coats. I said that I would have to leave them, as they were very slow as they had their market baskets to carry. I came to a broken wall, which had been washed into the road by the downpour yesterday.

When I reached Mullacott, a wall there had also been washed into the road taking a tree with it. The courtyard was so full of water a boat could have been floated on it. After leaving Mullacott, Mr Henry Varney caught up with me and we walked into Ilfracombe together.

I called on Mr. Avery’s and his daughter Elizabeth and had a chat until Aunt Jane arrived, she was surprised to see me there. We all went down to Runnymede House and had a glass or two of ale and lunch before leaving for Rock Cottage where we saw grandmother (Mary Clougg, née Watts) and Uncle Humphrey Leworthy, where we had more ale.

We then left for the Pier Head with uncle and aunt ( Jane Leworthey, née Clougg) to meet some people who were arriving by steamer, we called in at Sam Knight’s where we had a slice of bread and butter and a glass of pale ale.

We walked around Lantern Hill waiting for the steamer to arrive but it was delayed because there was fog out to sea. We waited for about an hour for the steamer to arrive and the people we had been waiting for. We took them to their places of residence.

We then went for tea of Bacon and eggs with Mary and Ann Avery and had a long chat on various topics on London and the people of London. I told her that her intention was to come to London again but she only said she did not think she should.

After about two hours of conversation Aunt Jane, Aunt Susan (Clougg) and Mrs M.A. Coats of Trimstone Farm kindly waited for me to ride home with them, an invitation I accepted with some degree of pleasure. After calling at a few other places in Ilfracombe with Susan Peake and Mrs Coats, nothing particular occurred more than my singing of the “Spanish Cavalier” a song that I believe gave general satisfaction.

The ride was very comfortable until we reached the pleasant lane at Trimstone, where I turned away and headed for West Down and a meal of bacon and fried onions, which I enjoyed very much. I had accepted an invitation for Henry and myself to go to Ilfracombe tomorrow, and guaranteed that Henry and I would go if father and mother could not.

**Sunday June 13th.**

Before breakfast I set off with Samuel Coats to see the bullock in ‘Yellowways’ (a field of Aaron’s father), we also checked on the sheep before returning for a good breakfast.

I was compelled to press father on account of his having ……… but after a little time he consented to go to Ilfracombe on condition that we walk as he could not sit, which disappointed my expectations. We all started and after a long and tedious walk through roads being rough with floods, we arrived, but too late to go to any place of worship.

We had a glass of ale and Henry and I went to see the rabbits running about in the garden. We had lunch with the ladies, who then wanted to go for a walk. Aunt Susan (Clougg)and Jane(Leworthy), Henry and I got as far as the Parade when we met with Miss Elizabeth Avery and the Bamfield sisters, who I did not know.

The older ladies left us and Miss Elizabeth Avery took my arm and we walked around the Parade and up to the Capstone to the top, where we took seats and chatted for about one hour and a half, while we were there we met Miss Avery’s sister (Mary Anne) and another lady. I told them they were two old maids, which did not go down too well and I soon found out my mistake from them.

We came down from the Capstone, round the Parade and into the High Street, the Bamfields left us but Miss Elizabeth Avery hung on to me until we stopped for tea at the Rock Cottage. That morning my brother and I had arranged to meet some young men and as far as I knew young ladies as well so we apologised for leaving, but certainly rather against my will.

I came out towards the chapel with Henry and we were walking waiting for our friends when we saw Miss Avery and the other ladies by themselves, much to their regret. They wanted to go to church but we refused as we had decided to go to the chapel, where we met our friends from West Down. The ladies asked if when we came out of the chapel were we going with them. We said we would not.

We returned to Rock Cottage where we had supper before returning to West Down with Mother, Father and Henry, which we reached at 11.30 o’clock.

**June 14th.**

Monday morning, so I was up early to get some lambs for Mr. Watkins, the Bristol butcher, he had bought 34 lambs and I had the pleasure of driving them to Ilfracombe to put on board the steamer for Bristol. After lunch, I went down to Bob Coats as he had lambs as well for Mr Watkins. After a glass of ale, we started for Ilfracombe with 46 lambs and one good sheep dog.

On arriving at Twitchen, we met a Mr. Hicks who thought I was Mr. Watkin’s son; he said I saw your father just now. I told him I was not his son, so he soon found out his mistake. We arrived at the Barnstable Inn and met Mr. Watkins who had been looking out for us. Mr Watkins had a short pipe in his mouth, which was not unusual as I never saw the man without a pipe in his mouth or his hand.

When we arrived at the quay, we learnt that one of the lambs had fallen into the quay and was killed instantly. Mr Watkins was offered ten shillings for the lamb, then raised his offer to 22 shilling expecting to make a profit on the lamb after taking it to Bristol. The old man only met him with a few oaths, which frightened the poor fellow to death, but after that bought him a pint of ale.

After putting the lambs on board we met Old Watkins and he asked us to come to the Packet Hotel for a drink, I had whisky and water and Samuel had a glass of ale. I then bought 12 views of Ilfracombe. Then onto Aunt Leworthy, where I bought a comb, I then went down to Wildersmouth to have a bathe, after traversing the rocks we arrived at Sir B Pond, a large place about 4 feet deep and never did I enjoy a bathe as much as that before.

When we came back into town Samuel Coats went to Summers to have a watch repaired and I wanted to Miss Elizabeth Avery, as she had seen me down the street driving the lambs. We both called to see Elizabeth and Mary Ann Avery but could not stay long as Samuel was waiting for me.

We called at the Lamb Inn (Ilfracombe) and had a couple of glasses of ale and a chat with Miss Susan King and her mother (the proprietor of the Lamb Inn). Miss King invited me to meet her next Sunday; I did not give her a decisive answer for which I was very glad later.

We started back to West Down, but we had not gone very far when I realised I wanted to make a transaction at the bank, so we returned only to find the bank was closed. We again left for West Down but before we got very far we had to lie down, we repeated this about six times before we reached home.

I was told that Robert Coats of Dean Farm, West Down (landed Proprietor) was at grandmother’s, as I had not seen him since I left London; I went to Grandmother’s before supper and Robert asked me to have a drink. He said grandmother ought to be proud of such a grandson, and I told him I was really much obliged for his compliments, but at the same time thought it would make me more ambitious, as everyone was of the same opinion.

We talked for about three hours and if I had not refused to stay any longer, I would have been there until well after midnight. I accepted an invitation to help with the shearing on Saturday and apologised for leaving his company. I arrived home to find that my supper had been waiting for me for some time.

**June 15th.**

After breakfast father asked me to come with him to the turnip field to wheel the turnip drill. When I arrived, I saw that they had commenced the sowing, I led the mare for about five rounds and told them I was done with work and left the field a lot warmer that when I had arrived.

When I got to Mrs. Betsy Coats, she noticed I was hot, so she invited me in for a glass of cider. After I left I went down to Farmer Gammon’s fresh water pond and had a bathe but I did not enjoy it as much as the salt water bathe the day before. I returned home for lunch and in the afternoon left for Trimstone to tell Mr. John Coats to come to West Down, as he was a Way Warden with my father.

When I arrived, Mrs. Coats told me he had intended to go to West Down that day. I had a glass of ale and then went to Mrs. Susan Peake’s and found them all rather busy. After having a little chat I read the diary of Miss Susan Peake while she was in London, which I found to be very interesting.

During the afternoon, Mrs. Coats sent me to Mrs. Peake to say she was going to West Down with the horse and Spring Cart at 5 o’clock, but was told that would be too soon and Mrs Peake had decided to go on her own.

I returned to the Coats’s to tell them that Mrs. Peake would not be going with them and returned to have tea with the Peakes. After tea we had a very pleasant walk and chat down Dean Road and arrived at the small and quiet village of West Down.

Miss Susan Peake’s grandfather was ill so she went to see him and then came to our house. I got the key to the Long Room so we could practice our dancing, after having an enjoyable dance we returned home. I had pleasure in offering Miss Peake a linen handkerchief to be hemmed and initialled but she would not take it.

**June 16th.**

A wet day, so after breakfast I went up to ‘Peards Field’ where a cow had given birth to a calf. I was obliged to carry an umbrella with me and we had a tremendous job bringing the cow and calf home.

I had something to eat with uncle Barnes and went to see Harry Shearing and Mrs Gear, where I had a jug of cider and a piece of cake, which was like pudding and much too heavy for me to touch.

After having a chat, I returned home for lunch. I then changed my clothes as I was having tea with Mrs Jenny Coats, where I met Catherine who I had not seen before.

Robert and I had a couple of jugs of good old ale and then tea and a chat out on the front porch. We then went into the barn to dance, after dancing the Schottische and the Polka we tried to dance the Varsoviana (A Polish dance from Warsaw), which we succeeded in doing very well but got extremely hot; we came in for supper with Mr Robert Coats, Mrs Jenny Coats and their daughters Catherine and Harriet.

It was a very nice supper, we had a jug or two of ale, I told them I had lost my voice but they insisted that I sing , so I sang the Spanish Cavalier,” Yes tis a spell to rove if ide the will”, they appeared to be very pleased with my singing.

**June 17th.**

It was wet again this morning so I went down to see John Lewis about my boots and had a chat with old Ganger, a Somerset man who I think would attract more attention in London than the Great Exhibition of 1851 if only by his talk.

While I was out Henry and I had an invitation for tea at Mrs Gammon’s, but Henry was unable to go to tea as he had a great many sheep to milk. I arrived for tea at 3 o’clock and there was only Mrs Gammon and her daughter Elizabeth, so I made myself quite at home.

We then went out to tend to the ducks in the garden and then swept the barn with a broom, before having a dance or two. We then went to see the calves in ‘Sailors Meadow’ and gave them some milk before putting them out in the meadow. We then went to check on the cows, we drove them away for milking and were just in time to save their milk.

It appears that Robert Coats was late milking the cows as a result of drinking too much beer. Robert Coats from Dean Farm went past with some of his lambs, he warned us to take care of what the Methodist preachers say. While we were milking the cows, Miss Prudence Coats came into the milking shed and we proposed going to Borough Combe Holt for a walk where we could have a beautiful view of the country.

So, after receiving a Bouquet des Fleurs we left with my brother Henry and Samuel Coats. Henry Phillips went with Prudence Hartnoll and me with Miss Mary Caroline Gammon (daughter of John Gammon, farmer); Samuel acted as post boy, much to his regret but we enjoyed to joke. We certainly enjoyed the views of the countryside and as we returned, we attracted much attention in the village.

We came through the main street in West Down, which does not bear any resemblance to Regent Street in London. The Coats returned home, Henry and I had supper at the Gammon’s; Miss Gammon’s parents had gone to bed so we had a very nice supper. John, Henry, Elizabeth and I returned home at about 11 o’clock, rather a late hour for West Down.

**June 18th.**

This morning I went up the Gammons and found them milking, I went up to ‘Easter Grounds’ to collect some sheep that Mr John Gammon was going to drive to Barnstable, I caught a colt of Mr Gammon’s that had broken free. After breakfast, I went to kill a duck that mother was going to send to Ilfracombe the next day.

After lunch, I went with the parson’s son and rang the different church bells. Henry called for me, as he wanted me to go to Higher Aylescott Farm to shear 10 fat sheep, including a ram.

After lunch, I thought I might walk to Marwood, but James Hartnoll offered me his colt to ride, which I accepted. I first rode to West Down and asked father to come with me; we left together, we called on Aunt Ann to tell her to go to Aylescott for tea but she said she would not.

We arrived at Guineaford, Marwood the home of the Marshall’s; I took the bridle off and put my horse in their paddock for 2 to 3 hours, where there was an abundance of grass. Mr Marshall was in Barnstable but his wife and Maria their daughter were at home. I was rather dirty after riding from West Down so I had a good wash to freshen myself up for tea.

I then went into the garden with Maria to see the gooseberries and the cherries, they really did look beautiful and many of them were ripe so we helped ourselves and had a nice chat for about ½ an hour. As we returned to the house I saw Maria cooling her hands in a water butt, she told me she was washing her hands when all of a sudden I received a sheet of water, I was very surprised as I was not prepared, she ran to the house. I stood by the water butt rather wet, so I dipped my handkerchief into water, thinking I would return the complement.

Maria had run upstairs and would not come down until Mrs Marshall stood at the bottom of the stairs and said there was not any dramatics to be made. So I dried my handkerchief and was given a Bouquet de Fleurs before leaving for Ellscott Farm where I arrived about 7 o’clock.

I weighed myself at the farm and found I was 10 stone 11 lbs and Henry was 10 stone 1lb. We stayed for supper, and came home with father and after a walk around the village went to bed.

**June 19th.**

I went to fetch some eggs from the Court and returned for breakfast, where I said I would be going to Eastacott and Woolacombe to have a bathe.

I took Edward with me and we called at Trimstone Farm on the way, where I was introduced to Miss Ellen Peake, we were asked to stay for lunch. After lunch, we continued to Eastacott, when we arrived, we heard from Aunt Susan that they had no hope for their youngest son (John Callacombe) who was very ill.

I had brought a bladder at grandmothers but I got another at Eastacott; we continued to the sea and found the tide just right for my pond. Edward did not bathe but stood by the side of the pool with my clothes, never did I enjoy a bathe so much in all my life and I was in the water for ½ an Hour.

After getting dressed, we went down to the Sand Beach and gathered some shells. It came on to rain, so we went through the village of Morthoe and onto my see my uncle at Henswell Farm and they invited me to join them for shearing on the following Tuesday.

I felt determined to go but I had to return to London. I planned to ask my governor if I could stop in the country for two extra days.

We did not know where we were until we came to the beautiful village of Lee, situated in a valley by the sea, where we saw two young ladies who we thought were from London. We came back through several farms we did not know where we were until we arrived at Trimstone.

We continued to West Down and called on Mr John Geer who was sheep shearing, he offered us some cider. John Gammon, John Settles, John Coats of Dean Farm and my brother were there.

We all stayed for supper.

**Sunday June 20th.**

It was Sunday, so I arose at 8 o’clock and went to the church to ring two peals of the bells, I then returned for breakfast and changed in time for chapel.

When I came out of the chapel, I met Mr Robert Coats, more commonly known as Farmer Bob Coats. He asked me to come down to his house for lunch. After lunch Samuel and I had a glass of gin and water and then went out into the field before deciding to go down to Woolacombe to have a bathe, we told Henry where we were going.

When we got down to the bottom of the village, we met two of the Peake family and asked them to come with us. After some time deciding what to do, Henry said it was too far so we all decided to go to the chapel instead.

When we came out of chapel Samuel, William Peake and I went to Mr Coats for tea where we met Miss Ann Coats and after many jokes, we all went out into the courtyard where we practiced jumping. Samuel and I were a good match.

We then went up to Chicklings for a walk and met Mrs Verney. We came home for supper and afterwards we went down to see old Mr Peake, but he had gone to bed, so I chatted to Ellen Peake for about half an hour before returning home and to bed myself.

**June21st**

After breakfast, I took one of our cows up to Shefing Farm to be introduced to their bull, I then returned to grandmother’s for lunch.

After lunch Master Stephen came to have a wrestling match with me, so we Henry we went to Salem Mead and invited Samuel Coats to join us. There were hurdles in the field so we started jumping them. As I jumped one of the hurdles, I heard a crack and discovered I had split my trousers across the seat.

It was hot weather and we had a few wrestling matches, I was able to defeat Samuel Coats in spite of him being very strong. I had a couple of turns with Master Stephen but he knew little about wrestling and he was able to find the sky with little difficulty.

I had tea at home and changed, as I had decided to go for a swim. I went with a couple of small boys who took bladders to swim with; we found a nice pool where I laid to cool a little.

Henry arrived but he would not come into the pool with me. On our way home and called at Mrs Betsey’s and had a jug of cider.

I returned with Henry and called at grandmother’s Long Room where we danced the Schottische before meeting with William, John and Susan Peake, Elizabeth Gammon and Ann and Prudence Coats. We all chatted together, Prudence had a jug of cider and we were all determined for a taste, so we all had a glass and talked together for a very long time with the ladies and parted for home at 11.30.

**June 22nd’**

After breakfast I went to see Farmer Gammon before leaving for Putsborough Farm where they were shearing sheep. Aunt Ann arrived with Mrs M. A. Ackland and Miss Carter.

After lunch, we all went down to Barricane Beach and after putting the ladies in a place of safety, I went in for a bathe, which I enjoyed very much.

After a long walk back of about six miles, I had tea with Miss Carter, which the others had done many times. We then went to see the horse ‘Finishing Stroke’ come home, and had a ride on Gallico and took him over the jumps, which rather surprised the natives.

After supper, we left for home calling at Aylescott Farm on the way and found Aunt was rather nervous. When we got home, everyone had gone to bed.

**June 23rd.**

Tremendously late getting up this morning, in fact I missed breakfast and hurried to Dean Farm for the shearing; John Gammon, James and Robert Coats were there waiting for me and Henry to arrive. It was frightfully hot so we took off some of our clothes.

We were able to join them for breakfast and Farmer William presided at the table.

After breakfast I received my orders from headquarters; I was to be the butler, which I did to the best of my ability as I was expected to do. I did not hear one comment from anybody that the sheep cut was too close.

We stopped work at 7 o’clock and after trying several games, such as knocking pennies from a place with your arm and only one eye. We went into the meadow and played leapfrog, ladies included, which we enjoyed very much.

After supper, we had a couple of jugs of ale and started for West Down with the two Miss Coats, Robert and William.

**June 24th.**

This morning I built part of a rabbit hutch before leaving with mother and Henry for Woolacombe for the funeral of Aunt Susan’s son (John Callacombe, aged 16 years). I was to be a bearer of the coffin along with Henry, Thomas Harding and William Callacombe of Yard Farm.

We carried the coffin for about two miles to Morthoe Church, an ancient and historical building.

After the service, I was invited to have tea with Thomas Harding and from there we both went for a wonderful bathe in my regular pool at Barricane Beach, which we enjoyed very much.

On our way back to West Down we called for tea at Bradwell Mills, where they were holding a tea party, we were too late for tea but we heard some of the speeches. I took a handkerchief from Elizabeth Gammon and return home with the ladies, both young and old.

**June 25th.**

In the morning, I saw father off to market with a cow and a calf. Henry had left for the Peakes at Trimstone Farm, where they were shearing sheep. I had been invited as well but unknown to father I spent half the day cutting down thistles, after lunch, I completed the rabbit hutch for Edwin (His brother). I then washed, changed, and went to the Gammons to see if Elizabeth was ready as we were going for tea at Trimstone, I waited a while as she was not quite ready and walked to Trimstone together.

After tea, we went out to watch the men shearing the sheep and did some jumping with the ponies while the young men shearing suffered from their hard work.

We came home for supper and sang a few songs and enjoyed ourselves dancing together and finished at one or 1.30 o’clock in the morning.

I gave the handkerchief back to Elizabeth Gammon and Henry and I saw John Settles and Elizabeth back to their homes returning through the churchyard.

**June 26th.**

Again, I was late getting up in the morning, it was my intention to ride to Ilfracombe but as I had lain in bed too long so I was obliged to walk.

I met John Leworthy and together we called to see Miss Elizabeth Avery, her father asked me to stay for the day. I was dressed in my old clothes and everything that would be contrary to the style of a gentleman on a Sunday.

I told them I had already arranged for lunch at home so I had to refuse, but did say I would stay the night, which would be handy for bathing the next day. I went down to the market and saw my sister Ellen; I asked her if she would send my clothes, and she said she would.

Mrs Hartnoll and Prudence were also at the market and, they asked me if I had permission to stay a further two days and I told them that I had. On our way to have a bathe, John and I bumped into Mary Caroline Gammon and Elizabeth and we had a bit of a chat.

After my bathe, we returned home for lunch, afterwards John and I intended to go to Watermouth but we got just past Hele and had to lay down so many times, we decided to return for tea and a glass of cider.

Aunt Eliza came to the house and said it was not convenient to stay with Aunt Jane (Clougg sister to Aaron’s mother) but I could stay with her instead. John and I left for Coronation Terrace in Combe Martin where Aunt Eliza (Clougg) lives and found Miss Elizabeth Avery there. I decided not to stay and left with Miss Avery and returned to West Down.

**Sunday June 27th.**

I arose at 7.30 and went to have breakfast with Aunt Jane, and after to Wildersmouth with John and Billy, where we had an excellent bathe before returning to West Down for lunch, which we all enjoyed but not in such abundance as the Newcastle Rider.

After lunch, we went to Pebble Bay and found and brought home specimens of rock, which I intended to carry to London. When I got home I discovered that Miss Avery had called to ask me to come for tea, I was very sorry as I had not received my clothes, but they would not hear of any excuses, so I was compelled to go.

After tea, we left for Coronation Terrace to wish farewell to Aunt Eliza and Aunt Susan. I came back to the Leworthys and had supper with them and after wishing them goodbye set off for home meeting four persons on the way. I reached home about 11 o’clock.

**June 28th.**

I arose, had my usual breakfast, and intended to go to Mrs. Betsey’s for lunch and to see Mr Marshall in the afternoon. But John Settles came to borrow a bridle, so instead I went with John to Eastacott Farm where they were shearing sheep.

Mother and Mrs Lewis rode horses, John and Mrs Lewis’s son (John) and I walked, and when we arrived we had lunch.

I managed to get some shearing clothes so I joined in the shearing and I must say I worked much harder than any of the others.

We finished about 8 o’clock and had supper. It was now time to enjoy ourselves so we tried to imitate a dance, a dance I believe would not be appreciated much by Mr Julien (Julien, the orchestral conductor) in London. I think the fiddler knew the way to play and was supposed to play four tunes, but they all resembled each other so much that we had to keep dancing the same dance all night.

When the fiddler changed the tune, your feet would dance just the same. I asked if he could play a Schottische or Polka but he was rather nervous to play anything different, but we were excited and continued to dance until 7 o’clock in the morning.

It was too late to go home so we went back to Eastacott Farm, Thomas Challacombe gave us beds to lie on and I slept for about three hours. My sleep was so sweet that I did not know I had slept at all.

Our appearance you can imagine after working hard all day and even more so dancing all night. Our eyes had completely sunk into our heads; we picked up our shears and left for Uncle Hartnoll at Woolacombe but first we had a bathe, which we enjoyed and felt somewhat revived.

We returned to the farm but had a poor reception as my collar looked like a ragged piece of white calico, I was ordered into the house, which I was glad to do as Elizabeth Gammon from West Down was there.

They asked me how I was and I told them my appearance would tell them better than I could tell them. I had a slice or two of ham and a cup of tea, which freshened me up nicely; I had a wash and put on a clean shirt and collar but I was not able to talk with them, as I was not fit for the butler.

I stuck to the ladies whom I thought would be my best friends as the chaps were joking that I was not able to stand the previous night. After lunch I arranged with Miss Gammon to go down to the beach, which we did and collected a great quantity of pebbles, which I was unfortunate to leave at my Aunt’s house instead of bringing them to London as was my intention.

We had a dance or two on the Beach and came home for tea where we met another young lady from Morthoe, a governess whom I did not know. I did not make myself known to her but I was eventually introduced to her.

We took tea out to the gentlemen in the garden and with the ladies collected some gooseberries and flowers, but when I came in from the garden I was once again soaked with water, but I was able to get my own back this time.

After supper, we sang songs and danced until two in the morning. I rode behind John Settles on the way home, as I did not have a horse of my own; I suffered and was obliged to put up with a ride between a trot and a gallop until we reach Dean Farm.

I asked the ladies to have compassion on a Londoner and walked back to West Down with Miss Gammon. Miss Gammon’s brother took the horse down to the bottom of the village and I took the saddle. It was the last time I was to see Miss Gammon, so I wished her goodbye and made for home.

**June 29th.**

I had to be up at 5 o o’clock to get everything ready for my return to London. I set off for Trimstone Farm and was given a cup of tea by Mr and Miss Toms who were to take me to the train in Barnstable and thereon to London.



I think Aaron was a little conceited when he returned to West Down and certainly tried to impress the ladies of the village.

You will have read in Aaron's diary that Dick Clougg said, "how like his family he was and when he died he would leave him his money". He did, which allowed Aaron to set up a drapery and furnishing business in Northampton and Kettering, which was in business for 114 years.

Richard Clougg was the cousin of Aaron's mother. His brother Henry had a woollen serge business in North Tawton; and Aaron had his clothes made from his brother's cloth, as shown in this photo.

I have been researching the family for over 20 years and I am still finding more information, even now. There were many killed in the First World War, but I have recently discovered that a member of the family was killed in the bloodiest battle of the American Civil War, the Battle of Cold Harbour in Virginia, fighting for the Union.

Matthew Phillips and Susanna Symons had a daughter Ann who married Richard Collins in 1802, they had a daughter Jane who married Thomas Passmore; they emigrated to America and it was their son, also named Thomas that was killed on 10 June 1864.

I hope this is of interest .... Robin Phillips