

East Devon Farmers

Hurley Family Origins

Origins of the name

There are two known origins of the name Hurley. One is that it is from the Irish O'hUirthile (anglicised to O'Hurlihy and O'Hurley), and Hurley is a common name around County Cork in Ireland today. The other origin is from the Old English hyrn-leah (meaning a clearing in a corner). Other variants are Higher Leigh, de Herley, de Erleigh, de Hurle, Hurlie, Hurly, Hurlye and Hearly, among many others. DNA tests carried out by Oxford Ancestors concluded that Hurleys are descended from the original Celts of Britain rather than any Nordic invaders.

Our Hurleys

In England our Hurley roots are found in Devon and Somerset. Individuals in our family tree can be traced at least back to the mid 18th century in East Devon, living in and around the village of Uffculme. **Thomas Hurley** (the father of **John Hurley** who emigrated to Australia in 1861) was born/baptised in Uffculme in 1788, the first child to **John Hurley**, a farmer, and **Jane Cork**. There are records of Hurleys in Uffculme going back to the 1500s and there were also several Cork families in the area. There are also many Hurleys to be found in the records from all over East Devon and Somerset.



Our Hurley origins:
Devon and Somerset.
Uffculme (spelt
Ufculm on map) about
centre, near border of
Devon and Somerset.
Source: Vision of
Britain



Above: Uffculme Square, south side, date unknown. Source: Blackdownarchives.org.uk



Above: Thatched open barn, Uffculme, date unknown. Source: Blackdownarchives.org.uk



Far left: Church of St Mary the Virgin, Uffculme
Source: Church of England Heritage Record 615114

Left: Interior of St Mary the Virgin Uffculme
Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014

Enduring the weather

The parish of Uffculme reached its economic peak in the mid 18th century when its local woollen industry was at its most productive, exporting Uffculme serges to Holland. John Hurley was born in 1765 soon after this peak. As he was growing up, Uffculme experienced some dramatic weather conditions. These were described in the parish registers by the local vicar, James Windsor, and I include some excerpts to give an idea of the difficulties an 18th century farming community had to endure:

'The Deep Snow in the Year 1776

.....Vast numbers of Sheep were buried under the Snow, particularly on the Kentisbeare Side of Whetstone Hill, many of which perished and Mr. Christopher Mountstephen of Hanland Farm had two dug out alive. One, the first died, but the last survived though it was incapable of standing and to be fed with Milk from a Spoon, and

as it began to recover strength the whole of its Fleece fell off & it became absolutely naked.

A great number of lives were lost in different parts of the Kingdom and one Man was frozen to Death as he was returning across the Hill from Wellington to Culmstock.....¹

The year before John's marriage to Jane Cork in 1788, and the birth of their first child Thomas, more violent weather was recorded:

'A Most destructive Frost in the Summer 1787

In the year 1787 on the evening of the sixth of June about an Hour before Sunset there was a Storm of Hail & Sleet. This was Succeeded by one of the severest frosty Nights ever known at so late a Period of the Year.

A preseedling [sic] Spring had been unusually mild, and Vegetation was remarkably forward a single Night blasted all the tender crops and destroyed the Fruits of the Earth. The tender Vegetables such as Kidney Beans & the pods of the common Pea together with the Berries which were large were entirely cut off....²

Then in April of 1790 a 'remarkably deep snow' was noted, and in 1798 constant rain in June for thirty days ruined the mown and unmown hay. This was followed by an 'unusually long and severe' winter. After a productive spring, at least noted for the good apple crop, the summer brought unusually cold nights and severe frosts: 'Many Sheep and more Lambs after being shorn either died or caught such violent Colds, as never to recover from them.' Further heavy wet periods throughout the summer and autumn ruined the crops, including corn, potatoes and wheat, creating a scarcity so by 1801 a consequent rise in prices caused much stress and tragedy:

'The Poor, were obliged to live on Milk, which at the Request of the Magistrates and Inhabitants, was sold to them by the Farmers and salted pilchards were delivered out to them weekly by the Overseers at the Workhouse instead of their Pay, as the usual Articles of Food, Bread, Cheese, Bacon, etc could not be purchased with Money and the Bakers were authorised to sell mixed Bread made of Potatoes, Peas, Wheat, Barley, Beans or Oats.

The scanty & bad quality of their Food, caused a putrid Fever among the Poor of whom great Numbers died, & the burials this Year were more numerous than in any other.'³

Through this period food riots and thieving occurred, brought about by desperation, and some rioters paid with their lives at the hands of the hangman.

Then in July 1808, extreme heat was experienced:

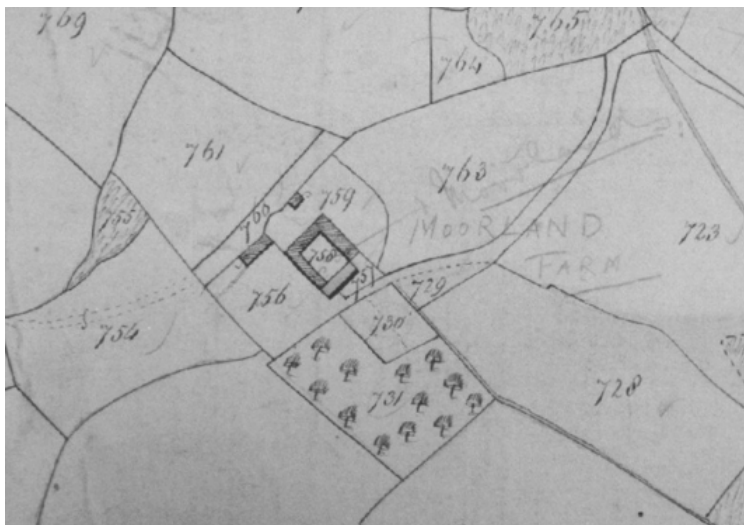
'The Weather for many Days previous to the 15th of July 1808 had been remarkably hot, the Sky for several Days preceeding [sic] was cloudless and the Labourers in the Hay Fields were greatly oppressed by the Heat, as there was not the least Breeze of Wind to refresh them, but it continued a dead calm.....⁴

This was followed by wild storms of hail and thunder and more heavy rain. Perhaps it was due to this harsh weather and its consequent economic effects that may have caused **John** and **Jane** to move around the area. Certainly not all of their children were born or baptised in Uffculme. They produced at least seven children: after Thomas in 1788 followed Mary b.1790 in Uffculme; Ann b.1794; John b.1796 at Kentisbeare;

Elizabeth b.1799; Jane b.1801 Clyst Hydon; Susanna b.1809 Uffculme; and James b.1812 in Uffculme.

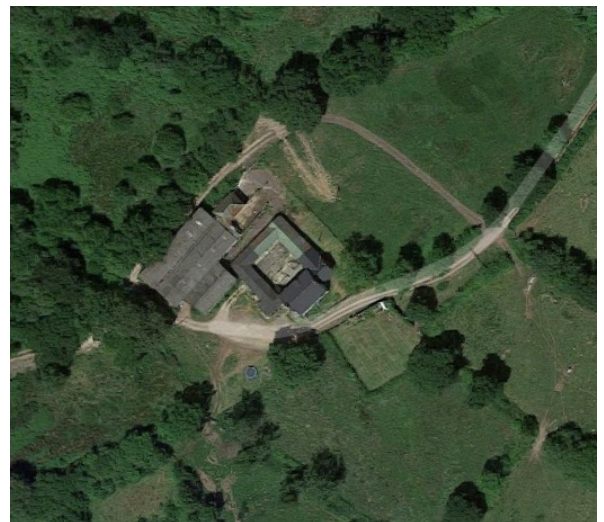
Farming in Luppitt

By the 1820s the Hurleys had settled a little further southeast in the parish of Luppitt where they farmed a property called *Moorlands*. A letter⁵ from the Lord of the Manor in 1827 listed all the estates of the parish and the number of sheep each of the 43 occupiers was permitted to graze on the common. John Hurley was allowed to graze 40 sheep, more than many. In the early 19th century this parish consisted of almost 800 people, mostly employed in agriculture. There were around 40 farms plus the village that included the 14th century St. Mary's church. John and Jane continued to farm in Luppitt until John's death in 1829 at the age of 64 years. Jane died in 1843 at the age of 72 years.



Moorlands Farm, Luppitt, Devon

Left: on the 1840s tithe map. Below right: *Moorlands* today. Same layout but added buildings. This is where John and Jane Hurley farmed from the 1820s. Source: luppitt.net and Google Maps



Above: *Moorlands* farmhouse today
Source: *Stags Honiton Real Estate*

The lives of their children can be traced through the census and parish records: Mary married farmer Lawrence White at Uffculme in 1808 and they are identified in the 1851 Census at Holcombe Rogus farming 180 acres with their two sons, six labourers and three servants; Ann married farmer Richard Symons at Luppitt in 1829 and according to the 1841 Census they were living in the parish of Broad Clyst with three young children and Ann's mother Jane, now a widow; John was a farmer when he married Frances

Webber at Luppitt in 1823. They later moved to Bristol and he and his eldest son became bakers; Elizabeth is a mystery. She could have been the Elizabeth Hurley who married John Welland at Uffculme in 1830; Susannah married auctioneer Leonard Pocock at Ottery St. Mary in 1843 and lived there until her death in 1887. Her daughter emigrated to New Zealand; James married Alice Mills in Somerset in 1835. They had four children and he worked as an agricultural labourer in Payhembury, Devon, until his death in 1866. Some of his descendants also emigrated to New Zealand. Jane married farmer Clement Griffin at Luppitt in 1822, was widowed by the 1840s and lived on farms with her son John Hurley Griffin and his family until she died in 1883.



The church where many Hurleys were baptised, married and buried - St. Mary's Luppitt, Devon. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



St Mary's Luppitt contains this early Norman font discovered embedded in a buttress during restorations in the 1880s. What is going on here? Photo: Euan McGillivray 2007

Hogsheads and horse dung

The eldest son, **Thomas Hurley**, did not marry **Elizabeth Bradley** until the relatively late age of 42 (she was nearly 20 years his junior) after his father's death. They married at Luppitt in 1830. Elizabeth was the daughter of George Bradley, a local yeoman (small landholder, gentleman farmer). By 1832 Thomas, now also described as a yeoman farmer, with his father-in-law occupied *Beer Farm* and other smaller properties in the Payhembury/Broadhembury area. The indenture still survives and although it does not

give the acreage (in 1851 it was described as 20 acres) it sets out the allowable usage of the property – growing of crops such as corn, oats, peas, turnips, an apple orchard, as well as grazing cows, sheep and pigs. The indenture also specifies in detail how the land should be cared for:

'And also shall and will in a good husband-like manner dress every acre of the said premises which shall be converted to tillage and before the same shall be tilled and so proportionally with fourteen hogsheads of good lime or one hundred horse loads of good dung or a proportionable quantity of each and in respect of such dressing shall take but two crops of corn, pulse, vetches or grain and those successively one year after another'⁶

The property name *Beer* has nothing to do with the beverage, but is from the old English for forest, and was called *La Beare* in 1289 and *Great and Lytell Beer Hill* in the 1500s. The old farmhouse that the Hurleys lived in burnt down and was rebuilt in 1876, but other older outbuildings remain. Today, holiday cottages are offered for rent on the property as well as a caravan park.



One of the old stone outbuildings at *Beer Farm*, the property where Thomas and Elizabeth Hurley and their family lived. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2007



View from *Beer Farm* across the Blackdown Hills
Source: Caravan Club GB



Susannah Pocock (nee Hurley), Thomas Hurley's sister who helped raise his young children at *Beer Farm*. Source: Marie Dysart

Thomas and Elizabeth had five children between 1831 and 1837: Jane b.1831 at Luppitt, who married William Boundy; Elizabeth b.1833 at Payhembury, she may be the Elizabeth Hurley who became the second wife of farmer John Tidboald; **John** who emigrated to

Australia in 1861, b.1834 at Payhembury and baptised at Luppitt; Thomas b.1836 who may be the Thomas Hurley, agricultural labourer born/baptized at Feniton, who married Susan Bromfield; and Mary b.1837 at Payhembury who married Thomas Marke, a farmer, later a provisions dealer in the town of Taunton, in Somerset.

Thomas's young wife Elizabeth died 'in child bed' (i.e. giving birth) in 1838 at the age of only 28 years. It seems the baby died also. Thomas now had to bring up his 5 children that were between the ages of 1 and 7 years old. Census records show that other family members were there to help. Before she married in 1843, Thomas's sister Susannah lived at *Beer Farm* with Thomas and his three eldest children. No doubt she was the housekeeper and mother to the family. The youngest child, Mary lived with her maternal grandparents George and Jane Bradley on nearby farms until her marriage in the 1860s. Son Thomas, only two when his mother died, is unaccounted for in the 1841 census, but may be the agricultural labourer found in the 1851 and 1891 census returns.

Ancient Payhembury

The parish of Payhembury consisted of six or seven farming estates, as well as Hembury Fort (an iron-age hill fort), the village itself and St. Mary's church. People were drawn to Payhembury because it was the only village in the area that had no squire and therefore residents had greater freedom than in nearby places such as Broadhembury, Talaton and Feniton. In 1850, Payhembury's population was 545, mostly employed in agriculture but also many in trades and crafts, more so than other places.

The church of St. Mary is on an ancient religious site in the village and in the churchyard there is arguably the oldest yew tree in England (said to be at least between 1200 and 1300 years old). The present church building was begun in the 14th century and has had many parts added and restored over the centuries since.



St.Mary's Payhembury Above: Part of the ancient yew tree is visible to the right. Right: Interior showing the ornate rood screen and painted ceiling
Photo: Euan McGillivray 2007



Luppitt ancestors

John Hurley's mother's ancestors, the farming families Bradleys, Griffins, Piles and Bakers were common names around Luppitt in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Elizabeth's parents were **George Bradley** b.1784 and **Jane Pile** b.1787 both baptised at St. Mary's Luppitt and married there in December 1806. Luppitt is the baptism, marriage and burial place of several earlier generations of these families. The churchyard contains a large tomb of the Bradley family. Jane Pile's parents were **James Pile** b.1742 and **Mary Griffin** b.1751. The Griffins were a very large family of Luppitt landholders as well as farm labourers. They ran local properties such as *Calhays* (also known as *Calways*), *Gulley Lane*, *Red Doors*, *Greenway*, *Overday* and *Mathays* at various times. The Bradleys, a smaller family, had also been farmers and landholders around Luppitt at least since the early 18th century, and by the mid 19th century farmed properties such as *Rowlays* and *Scotshays*.



Left: A glimpse of Luppitt from the churchyard. Photo: Euan McGillivray 2014



Left: Bradley family tomb in Luppitt churchyard - a Grade II listed building. Only legible name and date inscribed is of George Bradley c1685-1758. Source: British Listed Buildings



Properties in Luppitt that were run by the Griffin family:

Top left: *Overday*
 Top right: *Calways/Calhays*
 Left: *Greenway*
 Source: English Heritage

Ann Hurley

2020

See my story **A New Life at Ceres** for more about their descendant John Hurley.

hurleyskidmorehistory.com.au

Notes:

¹ Uffculme Parish Registers - Devon and Cornwall Record Society (1927) & Devon Family Historian, vol. 56 May 1990 (pp 10-16)

² Uffculme Parish Registers - Devon and Cornwall Record Society (1927) & Devon Family Historian, vol. 56 May 1990 (pp 10-16)

³ Uffculme Parish Registers - Devon and Cornwall Record Society (1927) & Devon Family Historian, vol. 56 May 1990 (pp 10-16)

⁴ Uffculme Parish Registers - Devon and Cornwall Record Society (1927) & Devon Family Historian, vol. 56 May 1990 (pp 10-16)

⁵ Luppitt - Parish, Church and People luppitt.net

⁶ Original indenture copied by Barbara Stephenson with the permission of the owner of *Beer Farm* Gerald Isaac.

Other resources:

Blackdown Archives UK

Devon County Council

Devon Family History Society <http://www.devonfhs.org.uk>

Devon, England, Extracted Parish Records (Ancestry.com)

Dysart, Marie -New Zealand, Hurley descendant

England and Wales census records

Hurley, Mike - Tiverton UK, Hurley descendant and researcher

Stanes, Robin ed. *Payhembury Millennium Book* 2000