

LOCAL STUDIES EDUCATION SERIES

# COCKINGTON



Cockington Forge about 1910

## The Prettiest Village in England

# THE HISTORY

## of Cockington



Cockington Court

The name Cockington is thought to derive from Saxon terms meaning either 'the settlement near the springs' or 'the place of the red meadow'. Following the Norman Conquest, generations of three families were to control the destiny of the twin hamlets of Cockington and Chelston as Lords of the Manor. From 1130-1350 the lands were owned by the Fitzmartin family who took the surname De Cockington. It was the De Cockingtons, who, in 1196, allowed stone to be quarried from Corbyn Head to build Torre Abbey. On completion of the Abbey the monks were also granted access to water from Sherwell stream and the right to fish with nets at Livermead. In 1375 the property was sold to the Cary family who remained there, on and off, until 1654. Raising an army for Charles I,

during the Civil War, proved expensive and heavy fines were incurred when Oliver Cromwell gained power. In order to pay his debts, Henry Cary sold Cockington and Chelston to Exeter goldsmith Roger Mallock. His grandson Rawlyn Mallock was a member of Parliament and one of the small band of peers who

welcomed William of Orange when he landed at Brixham in 1688.

In 1900, Cockington owner and former Torquay MP, Richard Mallock collapsed and died whilst on a cycling holiday in Scotland. Later that year, Chelston and Livermead became part of Torquay and Cockington followed suit in 1928. The Mallock family retained ownership of Cockington Village until 1933, when the property was acquired by a Trust with the Cockington Court Estate coming under the control of Torquay Borough Council. After the Second World War (1939-45), an ice-cream factory and cafe opened in the manor house as Cockington's growing popularity with visitors confirmed its reputation as 'the prettiest village in England'.

## THE CARY FAMILY

Cockington came into the ownership of Sir John Cary in 1375, but he forfeited his lands when he opposed King Richard II in 1388 and was banished to Ireland. Forty years later the property was restored when Robert Cary earned the gratitude of Henry V by accepting the challenge of a French knight and defeating him in armed combat. During the War of the Roses the lands were again confiscated and later regained after Sir William Cary was beheaded following the Battle of Tewksbury in 1471. In 1521, another William Cary married Mary Boleyn, whose sister Anne became the second wife of Henry VIII. She gave birth to future Queen Elizabeth I, but failed to provide a male heir. The king ordered Anne's execution so that he could marry Jane Seymour, whose brother owned Torre Abbey. The Cary and Seymour families united when the Spanish Armada

threatened England in 1588. Queen Elizabeth I bestowed a knighthood on her kinsman George Cary, in recognition of his defence of South Devon which he organised with Sir Edward Seymour. Nearly 400 prisoners were taken from a galleon and held in the Tithe Barn, which is still popularly known as the 'Spanish Barn'. The last Cary of Cockington was Henry, a staunch Royalist during the Civil War who was knighted by King Charles I. Sir Henry commanded the garrison of Dartmouth and Kingswear, but was forced to surrender to the Roundheads after a long siege in 1646. The war left him a ruined man and he sold Cockington to the Mallock family. However, another branch of the family retained the manor of St Marychurch, which had been purchased by George Cary in 1596. The Carys also resided at Torre Abbey from 1662 until 1930, when they sold the property to Torquay Borough Council.



The Spanish Barn, Torre Abbey

# DID YOU KNOW?

Cockington Forge is thought to date from the 14th Century. Blacksmiths plied their trade there until 1971, latterly making miniature 'lucky horseshoes' for tourists.

Cockington seaman George Weymouth explored the coast of Maine in 1605 and caused a sensation when he returned to Plymouth with a group of Native Americans - previously seen by only a few Europeans.

In contrast to the famous painting of the Laughing Cavalier, a sad-looking one is said to haunt Cockington Court. The ghost is thought to be Sir Henry Cary bemoaning the loss of his ancestral home at the end of the Civil War.

The Mallocks built Livermead House on the seafront for visitors. One guest was Charles Kingsley, author of *The Water Babies*, who stayed there in 1854 and was inspired to write *The Wonders of the Shore*.

Naval architect William Froude was related to the Mallocks through the marriage of his sister to the Rev William Mallock. The family leased him land to build Chelston Cross (later the Manor Hotel) at Seaway Lane in 1867. There he

conducted pioneering research into the design of warships, testing scale models in a specially built water tank.

Cockington School in Old Mill Road was built in 1892 and paid for by Torquay MP, Richard Mallock.

Agatha Christie was a close friend of the Mallocks and in her youth she often took part in amateur dramatics with the family at their home Cockington Court (see Local Studies Education Series - Agatha Christie).

When the Drum Inn opened in 1936, local magistrates at first refused a license to sell alcohol as they thought a public house would 'alter the character of the neighbourhood'.

In 1943, two German bombs landed near Cockington Church and shattered many of its stained-glass windows.

In 1999, responsibility for protecting Cockington and other local wildlife and heritage sites passed from Torbay Council to Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust (for more information view their website [www.countryside-trust.org.uk](http://www.countryside-trust.org.uk)).

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

Books containing information about Cockington available from Torbay Library Services include:

*Old Cockington* by Joan F Lang (1971)

*Cockington* by Jo Connell (1993)

*Cockington Bygones* by Brian Read (Vol 1 - 1999 & Vol 2 - 2000)

For more about the history of Torbay - visit the Local History Collection at Torquay Central Library or view the website ([www.torbay.gov.uk](http://www.torbay.gov.uk)) for information on the following subjects:

History of Torbay/Torbay's Heritage/People and Places/Famous People. The site also contains opening times, news of forthcoming

events and general information about the following historic buildings and museums which are well worth a visit:

Torre Abbey Historic House & Gallery, King's Drive, Torquay. Torquay. Tel: 01803 293593

Torquay Museum, 529 Babbacombe Road, Torquay. Tel: 01803 293975

Oldway Mansion, Torquay Road, Paignton. Tel: 01803 201201

Brixham Heritage Museum, Bolton Cross, Brixham. Tel: 01803 856267



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