

# CHURSTON FERRERS



A passenger steamer passing Greenway Ferry about 1935

# and GALMPTON

# THE HISTORY

## of Churston Ferrers and Galmpton



Churston Church and old Manor House about 1910

The ancient manors of Churston and Galmpton were both recorded in the Domesday Book, a population survey initiated by William the Conqueror in 1086. Churston was then known as Ceretone, a saxon phrase meaning 'the farm by, or belonging to the church'. Galmpton was known as Galmetona, derived from 'gafolsman' - an old English term for a peasant who rented a smallholding.

Four families have dominated the history of Churston - Bozun, Ferrers, Yarde and Buller - and their heraldic shields are featured on a stained-glass window of St Mary the Virgin church. It was built alongside the manor house as a private chapel for the Ferrers family who handed it over to local parishioners in 1490. Galmpton like Churston was largely

agricultural in feudal times, but by the Tudor age other important industries had developed. Stone and lime quarrying, together with sand dredged from the River Dart and stored at Sandquay, produced building materials for export from the nearby ports of Totnes

and Dartmouth. For over four centuries, shipbuilding yards flourished on both sides of Galmpton Creek providing trawlers for the Brixham fishing fleet. When the railroad arrived at Churston in 1864, Richard Harvey had acquired the manor of Galmpton and lived at Greenway House. The landowner refused permission for the railway to cross the Dart with a bridge to Dittisham which would have enabled the trains to run to Kingsbridge and Plymouth. He did however transform Galmpton by providing better housing for its inhabitants and made a generous donation towards the restoration of Churston's medieval church. A century later, another Greenway owner worshipped there and from the proceeds of one of her novels, Agatha Christie paid for a new stained-glass window in 1955, which depicts the Christmas story and life at Greenway.

# HUMPHREY GILBERT AND WALTER RALEIGH OF GREENWAY

Greenway Court, Galmpton, was the birthplace of Sir Humphrey Gilbert (1539-1583). His half-brother Sir Walter Raleigh (c1554-1618) also lived there and is said to have frequently taken his ease on the Anchor Stone in the middle of the River Dart. In 1578, Humphrey and Walter took part in a joint venture plundering Spanish vessels for treasure. They both achieved greatness before meeting tragic deaths. Gilbert, regarded as the 'Father of Colonisation', claimed Newfoundland for the Crown in 1583, but lost three of his ships on the outward voyage. Forced to return with the survivors, his own vessel, the 'Squirrel', foundered off the Azores. Sir Humphrey was last seen on deck calmly reading a book and reassuring his crew as a terrible storm raged: 'We are as

near to heaven by seas as by land'.

Virginia was named in honour of Queen Elizabeth I by Walter Raleigh who organised an expedition to America in 1585. It was led by his cousin Richard Grenville - destined to lose his life six years later in an heroic sea battle against the Spanish whilst commanding the 'Revenge'. Raleigh popularised the use of tobacco in England and according to a colourful legend lit his first pipe at Greenway, causing a concerned servant to throw a jug of ale over him believing his master was on fire! Found guilty of treason and held in the Tower of London for fifteen years, Raleigh was then beheaded. Two swings of the axe were required to sever the neck when the executioner became unnerved by Raleigh's calm refusal to wear a blindfold. The prisoner's last words to the headsman were: 'Think you I fear the shadow of the axe, when I fear not the axe itself'.



Greenway Court (right), home of the Gilbert family overlooking the River Dart

# DID YOU KNOW?

In 1958, archaeologists excavated a neolithic tomb found in a field near Broadsands Viaduct. They discovered the bones of a young male who had died during the Stone Age.

Lime was used to make building mortar and a fine example of an 18th Century kiln can be viewed off the Stoke Gabriel Road near Galmpton Creek

In 1920, a granite memorial was erected on Galmpton Warborough to the twelve men of Churston and Galmpton who gave their lives in the First World War (1914-18). A landowner also donated the recreation ground opposite the Churston Golf Club as a parish war memorial.

Lupton House, the home of Lord Churston, was destroyed by fire in 1926. Valuable art treasures were salvaged and stored in a barn, but were lost two years later when that building also burned down.

Crime novelist Agatha Christie owned Greenway from 1938 until her death in 1976. Local settings were used in many of her books, notably; *The ABC Murders* where detective Hercule Poirot alights at Churston Station to

investigate a murder at Elbury Cove; *Ordeal by Innocence* where the handbell on Greenway Quay is rung by Dr Calgary to summon the ferry to Dittisham.

Muslim leader Ali Khan, known as 'the playboy prince', married the daughter of Lord Churston and their son the Aga Khan was born in 1936. The couple divorced and the prince later married Hollywood actress Rita Hayworth.

During the Second World War (1939-45), boats were built for the Royal Navy at Galmpton Creek. Four of these were later converted to form the Western Lady passenger service.

Lord Churston had the honour of carrying one of the monarch's ceremonial Golden Spurs - at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Galmpton's 300 year-old Gooseberry Pie Feast was revived in 1951 for the Festival of Britain - held to boost the morale of the nation still suffering from post-war shortages of food and goods.

Galmpton residents formed a 'Pick and Shovel Brigade' to convert a cider barn into the Chapel of the Good Shepherd in 1961.

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

Books containing information about Churston & Galmpton available from Torbay Library Services include:

*Churston Story 1088-1988* by Jean Tregaskis (1988)

*Paignton* - John Pike (1997)

*Along the River Dart* - Mike Holgate (1999)

For more about the history of Torbay - visit the Local History Collection at Torquay Central Library or view the Torbay Council 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

