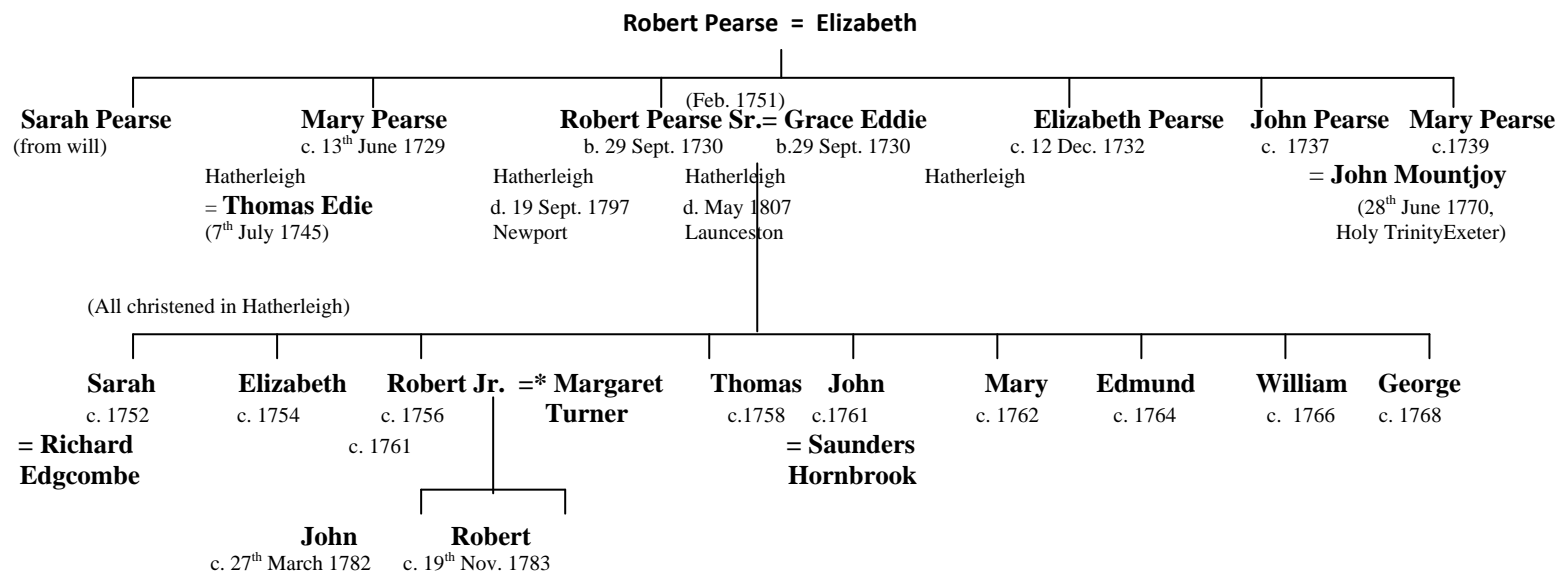


THE PEARSE FAMILY

Although there were several Pearse families in the Launceston area at the time of the diaries, it has been possible to construct a family tree for Robert Pearse, which is shown in figure 1. This is based on parish records, the will of Robert Pearse senior, and entries in the diaries. There is, however, one unresolved anomaly in that Robert Pearse senior is shown as having two sisters called Mary, which seems unlikely, although the Hatherleigh church register records two Marys born to Robert and Elizabeth as shown. Robert junior records dining in Exeter with 'Uncle Mountjoy' and a John Mountjoy did marry a Mary Pearse in 1770 in Exeter, so this would seem likely to be correct. The first Robert Pearse shown in the tree was probably born in Hatherleigh but there were a number of Pearse families there at the time, so tracing his parents has not been possible with any certainty. A possible marriage of a Robert Pearse to Elizabeth Physick was recorded in June 1728 in Luffincott, near Boyton and south of Holsworthy. If this is the correct marriage, it could account for the connections that Robert Pearse junior had with the spinning community in that area. More certain information about Robert Pearse senior (born 1730) is to be found on his gravestone in the churchyard of St. Stephen-by-Launceston. The inscription reads as follows:

IN MEMORY OF
ROBERT PEARSE
UPWARDS OF 40 YEARS
RESIDENT AT NEWPORT IN THIS PARISH
BORN AT HATHERLEIGH
29TH SEPTEMBER 1730
DIED AT NEWPORT
19TH DECEMBER 1797
Also of GRACE THE WIFE
OF SAID ROBERT PEARSE
AND DAUGHTER OF EDMUNDE EDYE
BORN AT HATHERLEIGH
29TH SEPTEMBER 1730
DIED AT LAUNCESTON
MAY 1807
Blessed are the dead which died
in the Lord.



*Date of marriage 1st Dec. 1780,
St. Stephens-by-Launceston.

Figure 1

This implies that Robert and Grace moved from Hatherleigh to Newport sometime before 1757, so, although all of their children were baptised at the Dissenting Church in Hatherleigh, most of them were probably born at Newport. Robert had been apprenticed to Edmund Edye in 1744 and later married his daughter. Hatherleigh had thrived as a wool town in the seventeenth century but there had been a downward trend after an outbreak of smallpox in 1741, when Robert and Grace (both born on the same day) would have been ten. The Pearse family had probably also been involved in the wool trade in the town but it may have been the case that there was not enough business locally to provide enough of a living for all of them. Whatever the reasons for the move to Newport, it certainly worked out well for them as Robert senior evidently built up a substantial business and his will¹⁸ written on the 15th September, 1797, just four days before he died at the age of 67, shows that he had become quite a wealthy man. In his will, Robert Pearse senior left his house to Robert junior, noting that the latter was already living there (“partly in his occupation”). After various other bequests to his other children and several grandchildren, the residue of his estate, which must have included his business, was left to his sons William and George. Perhaps Robert Jr. was already unwell and not fit enough to run the business.

The children of Robert senior all seem to have done well:

Sarah. Died aged 18 in 1770.

Elizabeth. Married Richard Edgcombe 1st January 1775 at St. Stephens-by-Launceston. He may have been a Launceston resident¹⁹ but there was also another Edgcombe family which lived at Tavistock. They had nine children, who were all christened at The Abbey Presbyterian Chapel in Tavistock.

Robert Jr. (the diarist) married Margaret Turner, at St. Stephens, 1st December 1780. They had only two children who were both christened at The Abbey Presbyterian Chapel in Tavistock, John 27th March 1782 and Robert 19th November 1783. Only John is mentioned in the 1785 diary (17th August) but the entry for 24th March 1790 mentions them both being included in a family outing to see Werrington House. Robert Pearse Jr. died in May 1801, less than four years after his father. His wife Margaret died in 1827.

Returning to Robert and Margaret’s children, firstly John, the birth registrations recorded for the Castle Street (Launceston) Independent Chapel include one for Elizabeth Pearse, 19th August 1804, daughter of John Pearse and Jenny. A possible marriage is one in Tavistock in 1803, to Jenny Bickell but John Pearse is a common name. An Elizabeth Pearse was buried at St. Stephens in 1805 (no date of birth), and a John Pearse, aged 34, on the 29th December 1816. This must be the John Pearse that was the diarist’s son but it is not certain that the Elizabeth was his daughter. There seem to have been no other children, so John probably died without any surviving offspring. His brother Robert married Jane Derry on the 5th December 1809 at St. Mary Magdelene, Launceston. They had three children, John Turner Pearse, born 1810, Robert, born 1812 and William Derry Pearse, born 1814. Robert died at the age of four. John T. Pearse was a grocer in Broad Street, Launceston, in the 1851 census, living with his mother Jane, then married Mary Hawkins of Bradstone in 1858 and later, by the time of the 1871 census, became manager of the White Hart Hotel in Launceston. John and Mary had two children, Mary, born 1859, and Robert, born 1865. After John died in 1878, the family moved to London.

¹⁸ Cornwall Record Office (CRO) AP/P/4036

¹⁹ CRO AP/E/1077 Will of Richard Edgcombe of Launceston 1807, CRO AP/E/812 Will of John Edgcombe, gentleman, of St. Stephen-by-Launceston Cargentell, 1750)

There is gravestone in St. Stephens churchyard recording the deaths of Robert Pearse on December 27th 1820, aged 37, Jane Pearse November 16th 1870, aged 89, and their son, John Turner Pearse February 5th 1878, aged 67.

William Derry Pearse became a surgeon, practising at Castle Street in Launceston. He married Mary Catherine Morris Spry in Launceston in 1839 and they had three children, William Henry, Ernest and Mary Elizabeth. All three seem to have later left the Launceston area.

Thomas (christened 1758) set up in the wool business at Lanteglos, near Camelford, probably around the time of his marriage to Susannah Brendon in 1782, in Lawhitton. The diaries record visits to his brother Robert - the entry for 18th March 1785 says 'Thos. went to Camelford'. Thomas and Susannah had ten children, of whom Edmund (woollen manufacturer) and Grace were still in Lanteglos in the 1841 census, living with their mother, then aged 79. In the 1851 census, an older son, Robert, was listed as a woollen manufacturer employing 25 people.

John (christened 1761). Robert's diary entry for 4th July 1785 records the marriage of his younger brother John to Nancy (Ann) Bate. Unfortunately there was another couple called John and Ann Pearse in the area and it is difficult to distinguish their children. However, they had at least three sons and probably two daughters: George (christened 1786), Edmund (1788), Ann or Mary (1791), Thomas (1793) and Grace (1796). George and Edmund were mentioned in their grandfather's will and in the 1851 census George was to be found in Sticklepath, near Okehampton, where he had set up a woollen manufacturing business with his brother Thomas after buying a mill there in 1810 [Sticklepath web history]. Edmund was then a surgeon in Tavistock.

Mary married Saunders Hornbrook 8 July 1794. Saunders was a woollen manufacturer in Tavistock, where their nine children were christened at the Abbey Presbyterian Chapel. In about 1818 most, if not all, of the family emigrated to Indiana in the United States, where Saunders became a prominent citizen of Scott township in Vanderburgh county (History of Vanderburgh County Indiana, Brant and Fuller, 1889). Saunders Hornbrook used his manufacturing skills to set up a carding machine and also the first cotton gin in that part of the country.

Edmund b. 1764, died in 1766.

William and his brother George inherited their father's business in 1797 and, according to Robbins, it continued to prosper for some time. William married Elizabeth Dymond in 1788 and they had two daughters and five sons. The eldest son, William died at the age of 19 in 1811. Another son, John, also predeceased his father but the latter's will mentions 'John's children'. James was listed in the 1841 census in Exeter as a fuller but it was a younger son, Thomas who seems to have been running the family business in Newport, where he was listed as 'tanner and woolstapler'. By 1851, however it would seem that the business in Newport had finally collapsed in the face of competition from Yorkshire and elsewhere, as Thomas was then to be found visiting Birkenhead, listed as a wine merchant, with one of his sons, Thomas Henry.

George b. 1768, married Susannah Cradacott in 1791. They had six children, three of whom died young. The remaining three, Susannah, Grace and George were living together in Newport at the time of the 1851 and 1861 censuses, all unmarried and listed as landed proprietors.

To sum up, within eleven years from the end of the 1790 diary, four of the main people mentioned had died – William Saltren in 1795, Robert Pearse senior and his wife both in 1797 and Robert Pearse junior in 1801. The family wool business continued for another thirty or forty years but would seem to have stopped altogether by 1851. The Independent congregation was

much affected by the early death of William Saltren, who was succeeded by Jonas Lewis. He, however, left in 1799, to be replaced by Mr. Richard Cope whose ministry at Launceston was the start of a period of considerable growth of the congregation.