

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTCOVE HOUSE

Westcove harbour provides shelter and year round access on a treacherous coast where many other local harbours face west rather than south, and as such are redundant for much of the year when strong westerly gales are common. Before the mid-nineteenth century the only roads to reach this remote part of Kerry took tortuous routes over the mountain to avoid the bog near the coast, and the sea would have been the easiest way of reaching the property. During the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries smuggling to the continent was common amongst Irish land owners to avoid crippling taxes from the English, and it seems highly probable that Westcove would have been a perfect landing point for the widespread illicit trade in wool and alcohol. For all these reasons it is likely that there was a house on this site for many centuries before the existing one was built.

Westcove was confirmed by Charles I as the property of the Siggerson family of Ballinskelligs, and restored to them again in 1697 after all property was confiscated by Cromwell in his brutal Irish campaigns.

The current house follows a typically eighteenth century plan, the main staircase dividing from a central hall to various wings and probably dates from around 1740. John Cade Siggerson often did business with Daniel O'Connell, who wrote to him hoping that Cade was, "safe at home in his castle" -a figure of speech showing that Westcove was considered a handsome residence at the time.

In the nineteenth century the house passed into the hands of the Hartop family who owned extensive lands which stretched from Waterville to the river at Castlecove. The estate and house were managed and - much to the irritation of Colonel Hartop - occupied by the O'Sullivan family in his absence.

In 1914 the Rev. William Spotswood Green and his family came to live at Westcove, and it is to this fascinating and truly versatile man that we owe much of the mature planting (the avenue of limes and firs leading to the main gate, and the two large Monterey pines that frame the house from the sea). Hugely well travelled, the Reverend Green was a keen mountaineer and the first man to climb Mount Cook, the highest peak in the New Zealand Alps - this feat being accomplished while supposedly on a rest cure from a recent illness! He earned a great reputation in marine research, leading several cruises to study the ocean-floor through extensive dredging, which led to his appointment in 1900 as the Chief Inspector of Fisheries, and a member of the Congested Districts Board. As if this extraordinary list of achievements was not enough, he was also a keen botanist and talented draughtsman, and in 1895 wrote a novel, "Grania Waile". It was under his management of the Congested Districts Board that the current pier and works to Westcove Harbour were carried out. He was a Companion of the Order of the Bath, a fellow of the Royal Irish Academy, and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. His eldest daughter, Miss Green inherited Westcove from her mother (née Butler from the Waterville House family), and lived into her late 90s. By the mid twentieth century the fishing industry from the pier was all but dead. Miss Green bought the smoking house and four cottages on the pier, which were uninhabited and unsightly, in order to pull them down. At the time of her death in the 1950s, emigration in the area was already widespread, and both the house and the local economy were in a state of serious disrepair.

The house was bought from Miss Green's estate by an Austrian psychiatrist, Baron Wolfgang Bock-Greissau and his beautiful young Yugoslavian wife Eva. This eccentric couple fell totally in love with the undeniably, romantic setting of Westcove, intending to create a retreat /guesthouse for stressed Europeans. Stories about the Baron and Baroness abound; how she swam naked, or appeared at dinner wearing nothing but a long blue silk cloak, how the six

hour round trip to Cork was undertaken twice weekly for the Baroness's hairdo, and dinner was served outside, at either end of a long table by "servants" who were made to wear long white gloves. The Baron brought over a large quantity of painted eighteenth century hunting lodge furniture – some of which had been in his family's possession for many generations - most of this is still at Westcove today - and totally redesigned the interior of the house. Sadly, combined debts and marital problems forced them to sell the property just as their ambitious projects were nearing completion.

In 1963 Hugh Barton, his wife and daughter Susannah, were on a fishing holiday in Connemara. Blazing sunshine having put an end to any angling ambitions, they were touring the ring of Kerry when they noticed the 'For Sale' sign at Westcove; it was love at first sight and a week later the deal had been done.

The Bartons came to Ireland from Lancashire in 1599 with the Earl of Essex, gaining lands in County Fermanagh, but the fortune which established them with estates throughout the country was made by Tom Barton trading wine from Bordeaux, leading to the purchase of Chateau Langoa-Barton in the Medoc (where his descendants still make some of the finest wine in France), and Straffan House, now the home of the world famous K Club. Hugh Barton's father, Sir Sidney Barton, was at one time British Consul-General in Shanghai, and he was brought up in China, before joining the firm of Jardine Matheson, of which he was to become chairman, before his retirement to Westcove. His Danish wife Rosemarie was also brought up in Shanghai, and the many Chinese paintings and artefacts in the house come from both families. Their daughter Susannah Adlington and her husband Michael are the current owners of Westcove House which has been, and still is, a much loved family home. Susannah has been the driving force behind much essential modernisation and redecoration in recent years, and has continued planting the garden lovingly started by her mother. The decision, to let the House and converted Stable Block when the family are away, was essential to help fund the unusually high maintenance of a property surrounded by sea and battered by dramatic Atlantic storms in the winter, but they are also delighted that other families and visitors will be able to enjoy its unique beauty when the houses might otherwise stand empty.

The Soay sheep grazing the fields between the house and sea, come from St. Kilda, the most remote of Britain and Ireland's islands, and are closely related to the Mouflon or wild sheep still found in parts of Europe. It is likely that wild sheep in Britain and Ireland in the bronze age were extremely similar. They are tough, independent spirited, and talented swimmers, as we discovered when one of the first to arrive at West Cove was found on the beach opposite Pier Cottage – quite a feat considering the strong tides and currents!