

The Life of Archibald Grove (1854-1920)

Thomas Newcomen Archibald Grove, from the limited records available, seems to have been a forward thinking, entrepreneurial person with a charismatic personality complemented by an intellectual background. His ability charm people from all classes led to his being able to pursue the many projects he conceived through to fruition if not always long term success. He was clearly an exponent of public relations and spin long before they became so well-known as essential parts of the art of being a politician. He always sought advancement and his career trajectory was one many politicians have followed of law, journalism, and then seeking a parliamentary constituency.

It is often difficult to distinguish between the facts and the myths about him, many of which almost certainly emanated from Grove himself. Throughout his life there are ambiguities and uncertainties that reflected his character but almost certainly demonstrated his desire to rise up the social ladder as rapidly as possible.

Unfortunately it has not been possible yet to trace any living descendants or family memories so this biography has necessarily had to rely on the press and other documentary sources.

Throughout his life he always seemed to be seeking restlessly something new.

His politics were definitely to the left during his early and middle life. He was a "Gladstone radical", wanting to improve the lot of the working man. In our modern era he would be "New Labour" being well-off and using the capitalist system, but caring for the welfare of others. Whilst his radicalism appears genuine it does seem to be something he used to make himself stand out from others rather than being a prime motivator for his actions. He must have been quite charming and most comments seem to be positive and people found him friendly if argumentative.

His family background was of a late-Victorian group of reasonably wealthy, ex-Army and ex-East India Company people but who usually had little or no land. From Archibald's actions one suspects he always had ambitions to become one of the landed gentry, an ambition which he achieved in part, having properties in Chalfont St Giles and elsewhere and becoming a JP, but he did not establish a family line nor became part of the Buckinghamshire social upper class.

Throughout most of his life he appears to have been a good networker of people, building useful contacts and acquaintances wherever he went, particularly seeking out names that were well known or of high social status. For example those who contributed to the "New Review" and also those he was involved with during the establishment of a golf course at Harewood Downs. However for the last ten years of his life he seems have become more of a recluse which could have been due to the poor health from which he frequently suffered.

Thomas Newcomen Archibald Groves, (but virtually always called Archibald), was born on the 23 July 1854 in a fashionable part of Cheltenham at St James Villas Tivoli. He was only 3 when his father Edward Groves died. His mother Elizabeth had to bring up Archibald and his elder brother Edward alone. Whilst Edward was sent to school at Bedford, Archibald seems to have been educated at home and from the census records the family seems to have moved about frequently.

His grandfather Thomas Grove (1753-1827) was from Brossal Yorkshire but became an Excise officer and rose rapidly to become the Inspector of Excise for the Port of London, a position of importance and with the ability to make money. (*BL India Office L/MIL/9 Edward Grove application for commission*). At Thomas's death the considerable wealth he had amassed was

spread out over his family. His fourth son, Edward Groves, Archibald's father, inherited some of Thomas's money but no land. At the time Edward Groves (1799-1857) was in India as a Lieutenant in the East India Company Army from 1818 to 1830 but made little impact and soon after he married his first wife Olivia Crook, a widow with one son, he retired and returned to the UK with the rank of Captain. They had a further seven children and Olivia died in 1848. Edward Groves then married a second time to Elizabeth Montgomery, another widow whose maiden name was Watts. Thomas Newcomen Archibald Groves was the second son of this marriage, the first being Edward Aickin William Stewart Groves but there were no further children. Most of Archibald's traits seem to have come either from his grandfather or his mother Elizabeth who was the daughter of another East India army man Col Ponsonby Watts who had estates in Ireland.

Edward Groves died in 1857 but left no will and records of the administration of his estate have not been found.

In spite of his informal education Archibald entered Oriel College Oxford on 1875 where he obtained a second class degree in Modern History in 1878 followed by a second in Jurisprudence in 1879. (*Ref. Alumni Oxoniensis 1715-1886*)

His politics whilst at university are not known. He does not seem to have been politically active but that may be because of lack of records rather than lack of participation.

After College Archibald went touring around Europe, a cross between a "grand tour" and a gap year, although in this case it seems to have lasted almost 3 years. He must then have decided that a career at the bar was the way to go and applied for and was accepted at the Inner Temple in April 1883. Although he participated and attended the obligatory dinners there is no evidence that he ever finished his time there. He must have had a change of heart and decided that a legal career was not for him. Instead he turned to journalism and made himself well-known inside and outside Fleet Street. He worked at the "Daily News" for some time and eventually described himself as "Second Editor". He pursued the idea of syndicating reports from London to the provincial (and possibly colonial) papers and left the Daily News to pursue this syndication. This gave him a great opportunity to promulgate news and gossip including snippets about himself. ("The best dressed man in Fleet Street.") This venture was a success and a basis to eventually move to his next journalistic venture "The New Review". This was first published in June 1889 but the work to get contributors and a publisher must have started well before that date. It is this venture for which Archibald Groves is most well-known. The New Review was innovative in a number of ways. It aimed to bring high quality content in politics, science, and the arts at a price the growing educated mass market could afford. Its competitors were the traditional expensive monthlies aimed at "men of letters", the entertainment magazines such as the Pall Mall Gazette, and the popular religious monthlies. His contributors were well known or leaders in their fields and included Thomas Carlyle, Charles W Dilke, Millicent Fawcett, Rider Haggard, Henry Jones, Cardinal Manning, and Leo Tolstoy. The content was professional and balanced. Published by Longmans Green and Company and priced originally at six pence a copy it sold 39,000 copies in its first month. Even though it was way ahead of the competition it was not financially viable and the price was increased twice. Unfortunately the market was changing rapidly and Groves could not maintain his high intellectual and quality standards and so in 1894 he resigned as editor and sold the magazine. It survived under a new editor for only three years ceasing publication in December 1897. (*Sources McDonald 1997 and Brake 2009.*)

Turning now to his political career; having not become a barrister and furthered his career and social advancement through that route, he clearly decided that he should become an MP. Without land or good family background the only way he could realistically become one was by being adopted as a Liberal candidate. Somehow he managed to be accepted as the candidate for

Winchester South and stood in the 1886 election but lost by 336 votes, a 15% margin. At this time he called himself "N Archibald Groves" but after his defeat he dropped the N and the s from the end of his name and for the rest of his life he was always referred to as Archibald Grove. My suspicion is that he had become aware that the only "known" families were called Grove and by dropping the "s" he could imply a connection, one which he later expanded to claim descent and earlier family ownership of Grove Place Manor in Chalfont St Giles, a claim for which there is no evidence.

His elder brother Edward Aickin William Stewart Grove (1852-1932) who eventually became a Brigadier General in the British Army likewise adopted the name without the "s". (*See The Times 15 Oct 1932 and Oxford DNB 2004.*)

In 1889 Archibald sought another Parliamentary seat and eventually in August was selected as the liberal candidate for West Ham North. The press reports at the time are most illuminating. Whether in Essex, Manchester, Nottingham, or even New Zealand they all have the same elements and must have come from some form of press releases. The common message was that Archibald Grove is very clever, well travelled, handsome and well-dressed. Also he lost a vast heritage of one quarter of £1 million from an uncle who had made it a condition that Archibald become a clergyman. Archibald refused and as a result had to make his own way in the world on his wits alone!

If such a story were true it is not at all clear from his family history who such an uncle could possibly have been. It is most probable that this story was "spin" designed to appeal to the West Ham voters.

At the 1892 election he was successful but achieved only a narrow majority of 33 votes although there was a large swing away from the Conservatives. The Liberals only held power for 3 years and Grove lost his seat at the subsequent election in July 1895 when the country swung back to Unionism.

He sought a new seat and eventually found one at Northampton South where he was selected as the Liberal candidate in 1900 and won at the election in January 1906 but again he only held the seat for four years, losing office at the next election in January 1910.

He appears to have suffered from bouts of ill health for much of his later life and after losing his seat in 1910 he seems to have retired to Chalfont St Giles

As an MP he was fairly active and he certainly worked on behalf of the poor and particularly the dock workers. He contributed 44 times within the Commons over his period of two terms but these contributions were mainly as questions. He did not seem to seek government office, I suspect he was not good at the type of debating needed in Parliament although he did seem to be good at public speaking judging by some of the press descriptions of his constituency meetings.

In between his two spells as an MP he remained active in journalism but also commerce and was a director of Rhodesian mining companies.

The descriptions that exist tell of him as a short but very dapper well-dressed man. His wife was said many times to have been very beautiful but very tall, his wife and stepdaughter were said to tower over him.

He married his wife, Kate, on 14 November 1889. She had been previously married to a very earnest man, Edmund Gurney, and although this marriage was said to have been quite amiable, Edmund Gurney had been a leading light in the psychic movement but Kate does not seem to have been attracted to it. (*Obituary for Edmund Gurney. The Times 26 June 1888.*) Edmund Gurney

committed suicide in 1888 leaving all his money to his widow Kate. This was a substantial amount for the time, £17782. (*Probate index record*) After Edmund's death Kate was not prepared to put any of it into a memorial to Edmund's work.

Where and when Kate Gurney and Archibald Grove met is not known but he was clearly more to her liking and compatibility than Edmund Gurney.

Nothing about Archibald Grove is straightforward and that applies to his wife! When they married on 14th November 1889 at St Michael's Chester Square London it was a very low key affair with only close friends and family. The bride was given away by her mother, there is no mention in the press of her father, presumed dead. (*Daily News, London 15/11/1889.*) Looking at her previous marriage to Edmund Gurney in 1877 she was recorded as of full age and her father is given as Henry James Sibley, a solicitor. (*GRO Marriage Certificate.*) The records show such a person but he was 71 at the time and Kate was 23. Although he had eight children there is no record of a Kate Sara Sibley, in fact she cannot be found in any record prior to her marriage. It is curious that there are many people researching families that include Sibley and although Henry James comes up frequently there is not a single reference to Kate Sara.

The other point of interest is that there was a Kate Sophia Sibley born to a William Sibley at the correct time, 1854, in Wheathampsted, Herts. This is where Henry James Sibley was born in 1805 and William is young enough to be Henry James's son. Any connection is pure speculation without more research.

During her first marriage Kate was often unwell and "went north for the hill air". This could have been to the Chilterns, to Wheathampstead. (*Epperson, G 1997.*)

Although in early life Archibald Grove cannot have been poor since he went to University and then spent some time traveling, his marriage to Kate Sara Gurney brought a substantial amount of capital. They almost immediately embarked on a number of projects in addition to those on which he was already embarked.

In 1891 he undertook a property development by acquiring land on both sides of Hans Road in Kensington. (One side is now Harrods.) This development is described in detail in *Sheppard (Ed.) 1983.* but Archibald personally had only three of the houses built. These were 12, 14, and 16 the original designs for which were by C F A Vosey, but Archibald had a row with Vosey over fees and only 14 and 16 were built by Vosey the other eventually being built by A H Mackmurdo. (*Hilchmough, W. 1995*)

Around this time Georgina Grove, the wife of Archibald's brother Edward, started keeping a diary which is deposited at the Bodleian library. (*Shelfmark MS. Eng. e.3821.*)

From her comments Archibald and his brother Edward seem to have been quite close at this period and socialised quite frequently. Georgina was a strong woman and traveled on her own in Europe, Russia and India. Edward her husband was an Army man all his life and at this time was a captain in the Royal Kent Regiment and spent a lot of time in barracks. Archibald comes across as a cheerful and amusing companion and his wife seems to have got on well with Georgina who however comments "Kate has a terrible want of tact". It was during this period that Archibald and Kate's only child was born, Edward Thomas Newcomen Grove born in 1891 and who eventually died in 1945 having had no children. Kate already had a child from her first marriage called Helen May Gurney, born 1882.

In April 1892 Georgina comments that she paid a visit to Kate and Archie where the atmosphere is oppressive because they are both ill and hard up.

Around this time Archibald started building a substantial house, Berry Down Court at Overton near Andover in Hampshire. It was designed by Edwin Lutyens who at this time would be in his late twenties and just starting on his career (*Hussey 1950, Brown 1986, Brown 1992*). There were apparently continual problems besetting this house and its garden because of differences of opinion between Lutyens and the Groves and so completion did not happen until 1897. They did not keep it for long and with some difficulty it was eventually sold in 1902. Archibald is reputed to be in financial difficulties again around this time.

Why did Archibald Grove build Berry Down Court in Overton Hampshire when both he and his wife appear to have been “townies”. It may be because in 1886 his first contested election was for Winchester and even though he did not win he would have been in the area and could have become aware of the availability of the land when the Ashe Park estate was sold. Overton is on the way to Winchester.

However the more likely reason is that he bought the land on which the house is built from Ashe Park in 1889 because it became available and Kate his new wife had the money. (*Ref; Hants RO 10M57/SPI.*) Also Overton is only about 12 miles from where her mother was born in Charlton near Andover. There were clearly close links to the area since Kate eventually died in 1929 at Binley in a cottage next to an estate that their son Edward Thomas Newcomen Grove owned close to Overton.

Archibald had started discussions with Edwin Lutyens in about 1890 but these dragged on for some time before the house started. The timing of the start of Berry Down and the completion of the Hans Road project is unclear. They probably lived at Berry Down until 1902 when the house was sold. (They are recorded there in the 1901 census.) It was a long way from London where his activities were based and from West Ham where he was the constituency MP from 1892-95.

Archibald comes across as one of those people who always wants a project. Initially the Bar, then journalism, then seeking to becoming an MP in Winchester, the “New Review”, then a building project in Knightsbridge, then the building of Berry Down Court , then becoming an MP for West Ham, a company director, an MP again then developing a golf club, then building Pollards Park.

Yet in every project he had arguments with others involved. This seems to have been because he was always looking to make changes in the design, the objectives or the contractual terms. Despite this he generally remained on friendly terms with others, particularly Lutyens although Lutyens refused to get involved with any projects after Berry Down.

One curious affectation was the use of the name Grove instead of Groves which is how all his family had spelt the surname. This was clearly deliberate as was the later avoidance of his other Christian names, Thomas and Newcomen. This was possibly because there are landed families who all spell their name Grove and none who spells it Groves. Also Archibald could be perceived as a much “better“ name than Thomas or Newcomen.

Once he was living in Chalfont St Giles, owned Pollards Park and had been instrumental in setting up Harewood Downs golf club, the story got put about that he was returning to his roots and that Harewood Downs and Grove Manor were previously owned by his family. There is absolutely no evidence that this is true; they were owned by quite separate families but with the same relatively common name. The Grove family of Grove Manor Chalfont St Giles died out in the early 16th century. The Grove family who owned Harewood Downs from 1835 to 1892 were members of the ancient Grove family of Penn. Archibald Grove’s ancestors came from Yorkshire. Similarly his wife's first husband Edmund Gurney’s family were well known from Essex and were not related at all to the Gurney family who were farmers in Chalfont St Giles and originated in North Buckinghamshire. Having the same surname as we all are aware does not necessarily mean there

is any family connection.

Which brings up the question of why did Archibald come to Chalfont St Giles. Which came first, the concept of developing a golf club, or the buying of land? The first is more likely because The Vache estate including Harewood Downs farm, the land that was eventually bought for the golf club, was put up for auction at short notice in 1902 and if the idea of an exclusive golf club had not already been in his mind and that of his partners especially Busack Pemberton a rich lawyer, it is unlikely there would have been sufficient time to set it up.

The railway had come to the area a short time before, the station at Little Chalfont had opened in 1889. So when suitable land became available nearby there would be a potentially viable case for a golf course for use by London people. Also there would be plenty of building development opportunity.

Like many things about Archibald Grove's projects there are curious features over the way the land was purchased. There is often an assumption that Grove purchased all of the Vache lands and all of Pollards Wood as a single block. This is definitely not the case. The 350 acre Vache estate (including 110 acres of Harewood Downs farm) was a separate landholding inherited by Florence Stevens in 1899 from her stepfather, Thomas Allen. On the other hand the 190 acres of Pollard's Wood had been in separate ownership from the Vache since 1777 and was owned by two of the Rafferty family of High Wycombe. The Vache came up for auction in 1902 in 21 lots, (*CBS Chalfont St Giles Sales Brochures*) whereas Pollard Wood was sold by the Raffetys in various separate blocks from 1904 onwards. The 12 acre part of the Vache estate that Archibald Grove bought personally was quite small but lay alongside Harewood Downs farm which actually seems to have been bought by a Henry Smith, who may or may not have been an agent acting on behalf of Grove and his partners, but is listed as its legal owner after the auction. (*CBS 1904 valuation listings*.) When we come to Pollard Wood, Archibald Grove bought the 88 acres of land on which Pollards Park House was built. In the case of Pollards Wood House which is also reputed to have been bought by him, the evidence at present is that this was not bought by Grove but by a Thomas Alexander Allan, (not related to Thomas Allen of the Vache).

It is said (*Barker. 2007*) that Archibald was in financial trouble around this time and so his wife purchased the land. There is no doubt that she was the legal owner of certain plots in Pollards Wood at this time (*Land Register entries*) but unfortunately none of the original title deeds have so far become available to establish any details.

Pollards Park was built by Grove for his own use, It was said by Nicholas Pevsner to have been designed by Edwin Lutyens (*Pevsner 1960*) and as a result has been Grade 2 listed. Pevsner was wrong. There is clear evidence that it was designed and built by James Forbes, (*Ref: "Country Life" 'Looking Like A Lutyens' by Michael Hanson 3rd November 1983 page 1251*).

Archibald Grove seems to have had some impact nationally but, in spite of being a JP in 1907 and a founder of Harewood Downs Golf Club, he does not seem to have made any significant impact on the local community or society during the 13 years he lived in Chalfont St Giles (*Local press reports*). There are indications that he was never in good health in the last few years of his life. He died 4 June 1920 at Woodhouse, St Georges Avenue, Weybridge, Surrey leaving his wife Kate and son Edward, executors of his substantial estate. She died in 1929. His son married but separated, had no children and died in 1945.

The lack of traceable direct descendants has meant there are no direct family sources so this article has had to depend on public documents. Any information which can expand the knowledge of Archibald Grove would be appreciated. Please contact the author via the website.

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Sources other than those given in the body of the text include the birth marriage and death registers and some certificates and the 10 yearly national census up to 1911.

P J Dodd September 2014