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BRIXTON DEVERILL – DRAFT TEXT

By Virginia Bainbridge, John Chandler, Alex Craven and Dorothy Treasure

INTRODUCTION

Brixton Deverill is a small parish,¹ which includes the former tithing of Whitecliff.² It is the central one of five villages named Deverill standing on the banks of the Wylye. Together their territories made up the estate of Devrel, probably centred on Cold Kitchen Hill, which was broken up in the centuries around the Norman Conquest. Egbert's Stone, where Alfred halted his army before defeating the Danes at the battle of Edington in 878, was once thought to stand in the parish,³ but alternative sites in Selwood forest have been suggested.⁴ The parish was apparently named after Brictric, lord of the manor in 1066.⁵ Brixton Deverill village lies 7 km. south of Warminster and 8 km. north-east of Mere. In 1887 the parish covered 2,486 a. (1,006 ha).⁶

Boundaries

The parish is long and narrow and the boundaries of the modern civil parish are those of the ancient parish.⁷ The northern boundary is shared with the ancient parish

¹ This article was written in 2009. Maps used include OS Maps 6", Wilts. LVII (1887); 1:25,000, Explorer, 143 (2004); Geol. Surv. Map, 1", solid and drift, sheet 257 (1972); *Andrews' and Drury's Map 1773*, pl. 4.

² Hoare *Mod. Wilts.*, Heytesbury, 7.

³ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.*, Heytesbury, 3; *Wilts. N&Q*, II, 271; *VCH Wilts. IV*, 414–15.

⁴ W.C. Plenderleath, 'White Horse Jottings', *WAM*, 25 (1891), 59; M.E. Cunnington, 'Sarsen Stones at Kingston Deverill', *WAM*, 44 (1927–9), 261–62; E.A. Rawlence, 'Sarsen Stones at Kingston Deverill', *WAM*, 45 (1930–32), 86–87; G.B. Grundy, 'The Ancient Woodland of Wiltshire', *WAM*, 48 (1937–9), 595; A. Burne, 'Ancient Wiltshire Battlefields', *WAM*, 53 (1949–50), 400, 405–11; J. Peddie, 'And so was England born', in F. Myatt (ed.), *The Deverill Valley* (1982), 39–50.

⁵ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.* Heytesbury, 4; *PN Wilts.* (EPNS), 165.

⁶ OS Map 6", Wilts. LVII (1887).

⁷ OS Map 6", Wilts. LVII (1887); 1:25,000, Explorer, 143 (2004)



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of Hill Deverill: it runs down the southern escarpment of Bidcombe Hill and around Brimsdown to the Wylle, up in an arc to the tumulus on Summerslade Down, and south-east to the easternmost tip of the parish. This is the point at which eight ancient parishes converge at the junction of a Roman road and several downland tracks, and must formerly have been a significant landmark. Its name in 1838, Potley Oak, may be equated with *Pudelan Ham*, referred to in a charter of 968.⁸ The south-east boundary is shared with the ancient parish of Pertwood, now part of East Knoyle, and the southern boundary with the ancient parish of Monkton Deverill, following the present minor road for part of the way over Pen Hill. The boundary may cross the river at the site of the Roman road crossing.⁹ It climbs the valley north-east of Monkton Deverill, following some existing furlong boundaries, turning sharply to follow a prehistoric cross-ridge dyke and coinciding with a presumably ancient ridgeway track over Cold Kitchen Hill to the north-western tip of the parish.¹⁰

Landscape

The parish is bisected by the Wylle and extends from the valley to high downland on both sides.¹¹ Chalk outcrops across the entire parish, mantled by a small deposit of clay-with-flints along the north-east boundary. East of the river, a landscape of steep-sided dry coombes and rounded hills rises to 238 m. Middle Chalk deposits suitable for arable cultivation lie beneath the valley floor and sides, and around Woodcombe Farm north of Cold Kitchen Hill. West of the river a ridge with steep escarpments creates dramatic scenery, running *c.* 4 km. south-westwards from Brims Down to Cold Kitchen Hill and turning north-west up Whitecliff Down to a height of 280 m.

⁸ S.E. Kelly (ed.), *The Electronic Sawyer*, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk>, no. 766, accessed 24 Jan., 2012; *Arch. Jnl* (1920), 109–10.

⁹ J. Peddie, 'In Search of a Roman Road', *Hatcher Review*, III(30) (1990), 480–87.

¹⁰ OS Maps 6", Wilts. LVII NE, NW (1901).

¹¹ This para. is based on Geol. Surv. Map, 1", solid and drift, sheet 257 (1972).



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Communications

Roads. Two Roman roads cross the parish. One, part of an early route from the Mendip Hills to Old Sarum and Southampton Water, survives as an earthwork across Pertwood Down.¹² Encountering the steep coomb north-west of Lower Pertwood farm it diverges from its straight alignment to follow the easier gradient of an earlier, prehistoric, trackway, before resuming its course towards a river crossing near Monkton Deverill.¹³ The line of the other road from Poole Harbour to Bath is uncertain, but it may have forded the river south of Whitecliff farm, and continued north-west to Woodcombe Bottom.¹⁴ If so, it would have served the Romano-British settlements on Cold Kitchen Hill.¹⁵ In the Middle Ages, a network of hollow ways converged on the village east of the present manor house and church.¹⁶ The only major route to cross the parish, one of several unenclosed tracks, was the road from Shaftesbury to Warminster over Pertwood Down;¹⁷ turnpiked in 1765 and disturnpiked in 1870,¹⁸ it forms part of the road linking the Bath and Bournemouth areas. Another downland track connecting Monkton Deverill and Chicklade across Pen Hill remains in use for motor traffic.

It is likely that valley roads ran through the parish on both sides of the river. That on the west bank, serving the settlement at Whitecliff, survives as a footpath and farm track; north of the river crossing at Brixton it continued to Hill Deverill in 1773 but had fallen out of use by 1808, probably in consequence of the 1788 enclosure.¹⁹ The road along the eastern side of the valley was said to be nothing

¹² *VCH Wilts. I(1), 274; VCH Wilts. IV, 254; I.D. Margary, Roman Roads in Britain (1973), 102.*

¹³ O.G.S. Crawford and A. Keiller, *Wessex from the Air* (1928), 158–60.

¹⁴ Peddie, 'Roman Road', 480–87; M. Rawlings, 'Archaeological Sites Along the Wiltshire Section of the Codford–Ilchester Water Pipeline', *WAM*, 88 (1995), 36–37.

¹⁵ Below, early settlement.

¹⁶ Wiltshire Archaeological Service, SMR, ST83NE450, M. Heaton, *The Manor House, Brixton Deverill* (unpublished transcript, 1998) (copy in WSHC).

¹⁷ King's College, Cambridge, BRD/90–91; *Andrews' and Drury's Map 1773*, pl. 4.

¹⁸ *VCH Wilts. IV, 267–68; A. Houghton, Before the Warminster Bypass* (1988), 64, 77, 79.

¹⁹ WSA, 1180/4; *Andrews' and Drury's Map 1773*, pl. 4; BL, Maps OSD 63, Warminster.



more than the bed of the river until Edward Frowd, diverted it to its present course in *c.* 1773.²⁰ The present road north from Brixton village to Hill and Longbridge Deverill was proposed *c.* 1847 and completed by public subscription in 1854–5. It replaced a steeper road over Badbury Hill to Warminster, which survives as a bridleway.²¹ A road bridge crossed the river on its present site in the 18th century.²² It was restored in 1841 and a third arch made; and thereafter maintained as a county bridge.²³

Comment [ajc1]: ST83NE 5/46 – Is this a reference to a map?

Population

In 1676 the parish had 76 adult inhabitants.²⁴ There were 20 families in 1760,²⁵ and *c.* 150 inhabitants in 1797.²⁶ In 1801 the population was 144, which rose to 197 by the middle of the century, peaking at 227 in 1871, before declining quickly. By 1901 there were 69 inhabitants,²⁷ and by 1991 just 62.²⁸

Settlement

Early Settlement. Two Neolithic long barrows, on Cold Kitchen Hill and Summerslade Down, stand on either side of the valley.²⁹ Three bowl barrows on Cold Kitchen Hill and seven on Summerslade Down and Pertwood Down, all largely ploughed out, probably date from the Bronze Age.³⁰ Extensive conjoined field systems surround Lower Pertwood farm and extend beyond the parish boundaries. These are visible on aerial photographs, and in some places survive as

²⁰ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.* Heytesbury, 6.

²¹ WSA, A 1/110/1855M; 1020/61a; 1961/59; King's College, Cambridge, BRD/89; *Warminster Miscellany*, July 1854.

²² DOE, 'Bldgs List', Brixton Deverill, 30.

²³ WSA, A 1/533/40, 79; 1180/3.

²⁴ *Compton Census*, ed. Wightman, 125.

²⁵ WSA, D 1/61/4/22.

²⁶ WSA, 1961/51.

²⁷ *VCH Wilts. IV*, 346.

²⁸ *Census*, 1991.

²⁹ *VCH Wilts. I(1)*, 47–49, 162, 139, 253, 274.

³⁰ Wilts. Archaeology Service, SMR, ST83NW621–3; ST83NE611–17.



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well preserved field monuments.³¹ Although not necessarily contemporary, they are all characteristic of Bronze Age arable cultivation within small, rectilinear fields and their lynchets all align NE–SW and NW–SE irrespective of terrain.³² They must predate the Roman road, which cuts across them.

On Cold Kitchen Hill and Whitecliff Down were two important centres of Iron Age and Romano-British activity. Pottery, bone and metal finds suggest a settlement site west of the long barrow on Cold Kitchen Hill, although the position is very exposed.³³ On Whitecliff Down a Romano-British shrine or temple stood within a square precinct. Excavations in 1800, 1893, 1924, and since, have recovered building materials, including painted wall plaster, human bone, coins, jewellery and votive objects, notably a figurine of Mercury. This important site, in use in late prehistory and through the Roman period, stood at one of the highest and most commanding points in the region, but a destructive excavation in 1924 left its precise nature and chronology uncertain.³⁴ A field system and earthworks on nearby slopes, which have yielded Romano-British material, are probably related. A hoard of 120 late-Roman coins was reported in 1903 from Whitecliff farm.³⁵

Medieval settlement was concentrated in the river valley. At Brixton Deverill village on the east bank, the manor house and church are surviving elements of a shrunken village which once extended further to the south and east, where house

³¹ Eg. Wilts. Archaeology Service, Aerial Photograph, 19 Aug., 1991, 121 91 179.

³² *VCH Wilts. I(1)*, 47–49, 139, 162, 274; Wilts. Archaeological Service, SMR, ST83NE621, 667.

³³ *Antiq. Jnl.* XI, 161–62; 'Accessions to the Museum', *WAM*, 63 (1968), 118–19.

³⁴ E.H. Goddard, 'Notes on the Opening of a Tumulus on Cold Kitchen Hill', *WAM*, 27 (1894), 279–93; R.C. Nan Kivel, 'Objects Found During Excavations on the Romano-British Site at Cold Kitchen Hill', *WAM*, 43 (1925–7), 180–91, 327–332; H. de S. Shortt, 'A La Tene I Fibula from Cold Kitchen Hill', *WAM*, 53 (1949–50), 134–35; A. Burchard, 'A Bronze Terret from Cold Kitchen Hill', *WAM*, 67 (1972), 159–61; R. Hattatt, 'An Open-Work Brooch of the British La Tene Period from Cold Kitchen Hill', *WAM*, 79 (1984), 228–31; M. Henig, 'A Figurine of Mercury from Brixton Deverill', *WAM*, 90 (1997), 143–45.

³⁵ Wilts. Archaeology Service, SMR, ST83NE307; *VCH Wilts. I(1)*, 49.



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platforms and earthworks are visible on aerial photographs.³⁶ The topography of the village suggests a planned, linear settlement aligned N–S along both sides of a street, now represented south of the churchyard by a footpath. At Whitecliff on the west bank, there were several medieval farmsteads,³⁷ now represented by a single farm. Village earthworks may have been identified north of the farm complex and further east alongside the river, and possibly to the south-west.³⁸ By the mid 13th century there were already outlying farmsteads at Woodcombe, and at Lower Pertwood.³⁹

Brixton Deverill village has apparently changed little since the late 18th century.⁴⁰ Many of the buildings survive from the 17th century with later alterations.⁴¹ The village consists of a number of former farmsteads and cottages clustered around the manor house and church, extending across the bridge and along the road to Hill Deverill. To the south of the church stand the Old Rectory and its former outbuildings, barn and cottage. Manor Farm Cottage dates from the 17th century, and Dredges farmhouse from the 18th century; Little Mead, originally a malthouse, and Long Mead were both built c. 1800.⁴² To the north of Manor farm stands Dairy Cottage, an intact 17th-century cottage with a sympathetic 20th-century addition. Over the bridge, the late 17th-century core of Riversdale Cottage was greatly extended c. 2000. Langleys, formerly Coopers farmstead, a much altered 18th-century building west of the road, retains a chamfered mullioned window and a similar window with its mullions removed, suggesting earlier origins. Opposite

³⁶ Wilts. Archaeology Service, SMR, ST83NE450; TNA: PRO, C 139/77/36; 'Excavation and Fieldwork in Wiltshire, 1998', *WAM*, 93 (2000), 257; English Heritage SMR, Brixton Deverill, Manor House, ST 8640 3865, cited in Heaton, *Manor House*.

³⁷ Below, Manors.

³⁸ 'Excavation and Fieldwork in Wiltshire, 1996' *WAM*, 91 (1998), 154.

³⁹ M. Chibnall (ed.), *Select Docs. of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Camden Soc. 3rd. ser. 73, 1951), 69; J.R. Pierrepont, 'The Manor of Brixton Deverill: a Custumal and an Extent of the Thirteenth Century', *WAM*, 78 (1983), 56–57.

⁴⁰ *Andrews' and Drury's Map 1773*, pl. 4; OS Map, 1:2500, Wilts. LVII 7–8 (1887); OS Map, 6", Wilts. LVII NE. (1887); 1:25,000, Explorer, 143 (2004).

⁴¹ This para. is based on DOE, 'Bldgs List', Brixton Deverill, 24–31; below for descriptions of the manor, rectory and church.

⁴² WSA, TA/Brixton Deverill; *ibid.* G 12/760/220–5.



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stands Humphries House, built of reconstituted stone with a roman tile roof on the site of an earlier farmhouse which burnt down c. 1962.⁴³ Also opposite are Langley Farm Barn, of at least the early 19th century and recently converted to two dwellings, and Brimsdown Cottage, a thatched house of possible 17th-century origin. Another cluster of buildings standing further west, where two lanes leading to the arable fields once crossed, includes Cross Cottage dating from the late 17th century and Cliff House from the mid 18th century.

In *Whitecliff* tithing there were only two dwelling houses in 1824, the farmhouse and a cottage,⁴⁴ presumably George's Barn, which dates from the late 17th century.⁴⁵ A house south of the track to the farm originated as a pair of mid 19th-century stone and brick farm workers' cottages. *Pertwood* farm consists mainly of earlier 18th-century buildings arranged around a yard. Standing to the east of the yard and facing south, the farmhouse is of roughly squared coursed rubblestone and some flint and brick, with a slate roof extending to cover a rear outshut. To the west of the yard stands a fine aisled timber barn roughly contemporary with the house. It is of five bays, and had been little altered by 1981. A long range of stables to the north represents at least three periods of building: the eastern pantiled section nearest to the farmhouse and now converted into offices appears to be the oldest and the 19th-century middle section the most recent. A timber-framed and weather-boarded granary of a type common to 18th-century Wiltshire also survives.⁴⁶ By 1887 two pairs of cottages stood at the junction of the farm lane and the **Warminster-Shaftesbury road**.⁴⁷ A stone circle was erected on Summerslade Down, in the later 20th century.⁴⁸

Comment [ajc2]: Change to 'main road'?

⁴³ Information from Mr S. Allard of Woodcombe Farm, Brixton Deverill, July 2009.

⁴⁴ Hoare, *Mod. Wilts.* Heytesbury, 7.

⁴⁵ DOE, 'Bldgs List', Brixton Deverill, 24.

⁴⁶ WBR, B663, unpublished survey by Pamela Slocombe, 1981 (copy in WSHC); OS Map, 1:2500, Wilts. LVII 12 (1887).

⁴⁷ OS Map, 1:2500, Wilts. LVIII 9 (1886).

⁴⁸ OS Map, 1:25,000, Explorer, 143 (2004).



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The Built Character

With the exception of the church and Whitecliff farmhouse, both of dressed stone, most of the buildings are of local rubblestone. Many buildings survive from the 17th and 18th centuries, originally thatched with later alterations and extensions such as Langleys. The later buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries include brickwork in the construction, or are wholly of brick such as Cliff House. Roofing materials vary: some dwellings remain thatched whilst others are roofed with slate or with stone or clay tiles. The buildings are all of vernacular style and the predominance of rubblestone and the mixture of other building materials give a rustic character to the village.⁴⁹ The village has few 20th- or 21st-century buildings: immediately north-west of Cliff House stand 20th-century steel-framed farm buildings of Woodcombe farm and some modern buildings have been erected on Pertwood farm, on Pertwood and Summerslade Downs. In the last decades of the 20th century, redundant farm buildings were converted to dwelling houses, notably Manor farm barn and outbuildings.

⁴⁹ Pevsner, *Wilts.* (2nd edn), 144.