



Heritage

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Journal of the Ottery St. Mary Heritage Society

Including:

The lives of Ottery Greats p3



The War of the Airwaves p4



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www.otteryheritage.org.uk

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Our August Exhibition “Ottery – a Parish at War” was an outstanding success with visitors packing the hall throughout the entire five-day period. A huge thank-you to everyone who contributed to the event – those who volunteered with research and design, the erectors and dismantlers, packers and providers of transport – and last, but not least the volunteers who came along to ensure the occasion was the best it could be.

Our Autumn programme of monthly meetings have been well attended; our guest speakers delivering some of the best and most professional presentations. In September, Barbara Farquharson of the Branscombe project introduced us to a new perspective on the ignominious end to the MSC Napoli. From her expanding library of pictures she took us behind the media headlines, dominated by environmental issues and salvage operations, to examine how the disaster affected local individuals and, through personal stories, the different ways villagers reacted to the disruption in their lives.

At our October meeting, Dr Robert Symes, OBE gave an illustrated presentation on the

history of the south west mining industry, showing through pictorial records how the landscapes of Cornwall and West Devon were radically reshaped during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by deep-lode mining for copper and tin, a vast industry that changed the landscape beyond recognition.

And then in November, a near-capacity audience showed up to listen to Chris Wakefield – the title of his talk, “How Ottery Began” certainly aroused the curiosity of many Ottregians, and they were not disappointed! His highly illustrated presentation covered the medieval period in the town’s history from the end of the Roman occupation through to the foundation of Grandisson’s ecclesiastical college in the 1330s. The stunning visual fly-through of a digital model of the college as it would have appeared when first completed brought gasps of astonishment from the audience and appreciative applause for an excellent presentation.

.../cont page 8

Letters, articles or any other submissions to the Journal can be emailed to otteryheritage@googlemail.com

Website

The Society has finally bitten the bullet and dragged itself into the 21st century with a website. It's a homemade affair, and will probably not win many prizes, except possibly for the resources that will eventually be available thereon for local and family historians interested in Ottery. It is recommended you try it out, and email the editor of this journal with comments and suggestions. Keep in mind, though, that it is once again the usual suspects who are operating the new website, so there may be a while between receipt of a marvellous idea and its eventual implementation. www.otteryheritage.org.uk

Publications

Not content with our adventures in new technology, the trustees are keen to step up our publications list, to include, amongst other things, some long overdue local record publishing, starting early in the New Year with the 1327 and 1332 Lay Subsidy returns (medieval tax lists detailing names and sometimes locations, of 14th century Ottregians) together with some interpretation and commentary to help you get the most from these fascinating documents. I still live in hopes of a revived record transcription group, which will make a start on the many records that lie untouched and unread in DRO and elsewhere. Just to whet your appetite, see the back page under the competition.

Letters

The journal is the place you can ask questions and send in notes and suggestions, at any time, of any length, in any medium, in any language, from anywhere on the planet. I want to know what you've seen on walks, bits of history you've heard about, what your Dad/Grandad told you, what you liked / disliked about a recent meeting - anything - really - just anything to offer comfort that we are actually doing what you, the membership, wants done. I was thinking we should quadruple subscriptions at the AGM. Any thoughts?

Coleridge

The Society has initiated a project to secure a more fitting commemoration of the most famous and accomplished Ottregian of all time (so far) - Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I say initiated, because the project is not to be solely a Heritage effort, and is designed to attract broad support, in Ottery and possibly further afield. The "Coleridge Memorial Garden" (or "Park" - it's not clear what the final choice will be) would be somewhere in the Land of Canaan, carefully designed to enhance the existing amenity areas, and with luck, and some funds yet to be raised, to include an inspirational memorial to the poet. More information from the TIC, or the Heritage Website.

Editor

Forthcoming Events

Unless otherwise noted, all the Society's meetings are held in the Institute, Yonder Street, Ottery St. Mary.

2010

• Jan. 12th 2010 (Tuesday) 7.30 pm

Exeter and its Medicine

An illustrated talk

Speaker: Christopher Gardner-Thorpe

• Feb. 16th (Tuesday) 7.30 pm

A Potted History of Wiggaton

A talk on aspects of the history of Wiggaton with artefacts crafted from local materials.

Speaker: Vaughan Glanville

• Mar. 16th (Tuesday) 7.30 pm

Slavery and Two Ottery Families

A talk on possible connections between Ottery families and the Slave Trade

Speaker: Gillian Allen

• Apr. 20th (Tuesday) 7.30 pm

The Plight of the Honeybee (in Devon)

An illustrated talk on the practicalities of present-day bee-keeping

Speaker: Roger Lacey

• May 18th (Tuesday) 7.30 pm

The Three Hares Emblem

An illustrated talk on the myths and mysteries surrounding this sign

Speaker: Sue Andrew

• June 15th (Tuesday) 7.30 pm

Annual General Meeting

• July 20th (Tuesday) 7.30 pm and onwards

Programme to be announced

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Outstanding Ottregians of the Past

Lucy Channon on the lives of Ottery worthies



left: The Beaumont memorial in Gittisham Church, commissioned by his wife, (who is also commemorated - kneeling behind Henry). Beaumont Cottages, north west of Alfrington, would have been named in his memory.

Henry Beaumont

Ottery St Mary has been the birthplace of, or closely associated with, several well known people who have made their mark in the world. Notable among these are of course the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the diplomat Sir Ernest Satow, and Joanna Southcott, the prophetess, all of whose stories have been told in previous editions of this journal. However, the history of Ottery traces back for centuries, and although records are few, shadowy figures emerge from those earlier centuries, of relatively rare people who made their mark locally, if not nationally. One such was Henry Beaumont. In the latter half of the 15th century the nephew of a Sir Thomas Beaumont inherited various lands and estates on the death of his uncle. Among these was the Estate of Gittisham. Three generations later Henry Beaumont, a direct descendent of Sir Thomas, came into possession

of this estate. Little is known of his life but after his death he is remembered for his generosity to the poor of Ottery. In March 1590 he made a will, He left £800 to purchase areas of land, 'the rents and profits deriving therefrom to be given to the poor of Ottery St Mary, Gittisham, Honiton and Sidbury'. Henry died a year later and his wishes were carried out. He was long remembered for his generous charity to the poor and a commemorative marble monument was erected on the wall of Gittisham church, where he lies buried in the south aisle.

Gervais Babington

In the 16th century, John Babington, 5th son of Sir John Babington of Nottinghamshire, came to dwell in Devon. He married Margaret, heir of Robert Knolle 'of Knolle, in or near Ottery St Mary'. They had three sons, one of whom was father to Gervais Babington. Gervais proved

to be a brilliant scholar. At Oxford University he devoted himself to the study of Divinity and gained a reputation as a 'worthy preacher'. He was first appointed as 'Domestick Chaplain' to Henry Earl of Pembroke and Knight of the Garter. One of his tasks was to assist the Earl's wife, Mary Sidney, in an exact translation of the psalms into English metre. His next move was to Wales, where he became Treasurer to the church of Llanduff. Thence in 1591 he was consecrated Bishop of Llanduff. His stay in Wales was fairly short, for in 1595 he was 'translated to the See in Exeter'. Two hundred years later John Prince, in writing a brief biography of Gervais, informs us that 'He continued no long time at Exeter, this long enough to do that church an irreparable injury; but, we hope, against his will, as being over-awed by avaricious greatness rather than biased by any private interest, which we cannot fairly suppose in so great a man'. The 'irreparable-injury' was to sell off 'the rich and noble manor of Crediton' thus reducing considerably the area of Exeter's property and influence. Despite, or perhaps because of this, Bishop Gervais was again 'translated' this time to Worcester. After three years in this office he was finally 'translated to Heaven'. He died of jaundice. He left his large and valuable library to the church of Worcester where he lies buried. Throughout his life he was noted for his preaching:- 'He was an excellent pulpit man, for having gotten up the affections of his auditory he would keep them to the end of his sermon'.

Lucy Channon

THE WAR OF THE AIRWAVES

Chris Saunders pursues the secrets of radio warfare in and around Ottery



The booklet *“Death on a Spring Night”* by Robin Stanes and Jim Watts, published in July 2006, formed the basis for the play *“Foresight”* performed by the Payhembury Community Theatre in 2007.

The following passage was contained in the booklet:

“The Germans did not do much visual night navigation. Instead they flew along directional radio beams which transmitted a constant signal that the aircraft could pick up and stick to. This was called the Knickebein system. If the signal changed the plane was “off course” and the navigator had to search for and pick up the correct signal again. These beams also gave the plane the moment to drop its bombs. British radar counter measures to the Knickebein system could reflect or divert the radio beam to put the German bombers off course. There was one such “beam bending” unit near the former Fairmile Inn on the old A30. One German bomber so

diverted and running out of fuel landed near Deal in Kent believing the airfield to be in NE France. [A number of] JU 88s were not diverted on May 17th 1941, and eleven got through to Birmingham.”

(It was reported elsewhere that 15 took off, 2 turned back and 2 were shot down – one at Payhembury).

It was only with the approach of the Exhibition “Ottery – a Parish at War” – in August 2009 – that this snippet assumed a greater degree of importance for Ottery. Where was this station and just how did it perform the function for which it was constructed? The answer to the first question was quickly ascertained – a building just inside the boundary hedge of what is called the ‘14 acre field’ just at the top of the rise of the old A30 road above Fairmile has long been known locally as ‘the RAF hut’, and this seemed to be the only remaining evidence of the site (see Fig.1). Fortunately, there are still local residents who remember some details of the site, and it has thus been possible to build up a picture of its layout and purpose.

WAS IST KNICKEBEIN?

As WW2 grew in intensity from the time of the “Battle of Britain”, both Britain and Germany relied increasingly on night-time bombing operations. Whilst this lessened the risk of detection when compared with daytime missions, it increased the problems of accurately locating the intended target. Britain relied on astro-navigation, but Germany

Fig.1 - The RAF Hut at Fairmile



developed what became known as the “Knickebein” (this means literally ‘crooked leg’) System.

This technique involved two radio transmitters, situated possibly several hundred miles apart. The ‘main-beam’ transmitter output was switched between two halves of the antenna, sending a series of ‘dots’ from one side, alternating with a series of ‘dashes’ from the other side. The two radio beams were narrow, but had an area of overlap inside which the Luftwaffe pilots would only hear the equisignal - a continuous tone. This indicated that they were on course, and any deviation would be signalled by hearing either only dots or dashes (see Fig.2). The second transmitter broadcast the ‘cross-beam’ which was a continuous tone on a different radio frequency, and this was directed at the intended bombing target. The bomber pilots would be listening out for this second beam, and the point at which this beam crossed the ‘main-beam’ told them that they were over their target and should drop their deadly cargo. This technique was accurate for area bombing, but could not pin-point individual small targets. The first two transmitting stations were built in 1940 in Germany, one in the north and the other in southern Germany. Ten other sites followed later in the Low Countries and in France.

DEFENSIVE COUNTER-MEASURES

Whilst British Intelligence were aware of the existence of this technique, it was well into 1940 before any form of counter-measure could be deployed. Jamming the German radio beams was the first attempt to render them useless, but due to lack of equipment, this was a crude method and not very successful. It has been reported that jamming transmitters were located at Straightway Head and Gittisham Common.

A team led by the well-known scientist R.V. Jones developed a simple method of rendering the beam signals either ineffective or misleading. Thanks to the efforts of the Enigma code-breaking teams at Bletchley Park, advance warning of some bombing raids was already available. On such nights, a transmitter at a site in England would start transmitting the ‘dots’ signal and, as the distance increased between the bombers and the signal originating in Germany, the false signal would replace it and thence cause the incoming German bombers to follow a different course, hence the term ‘beam bending’. When the false signal met the cross-beam, it was intended that the bombs would be dropped well away from the target, hopefully in open country. It could even confuse the pilots into turning

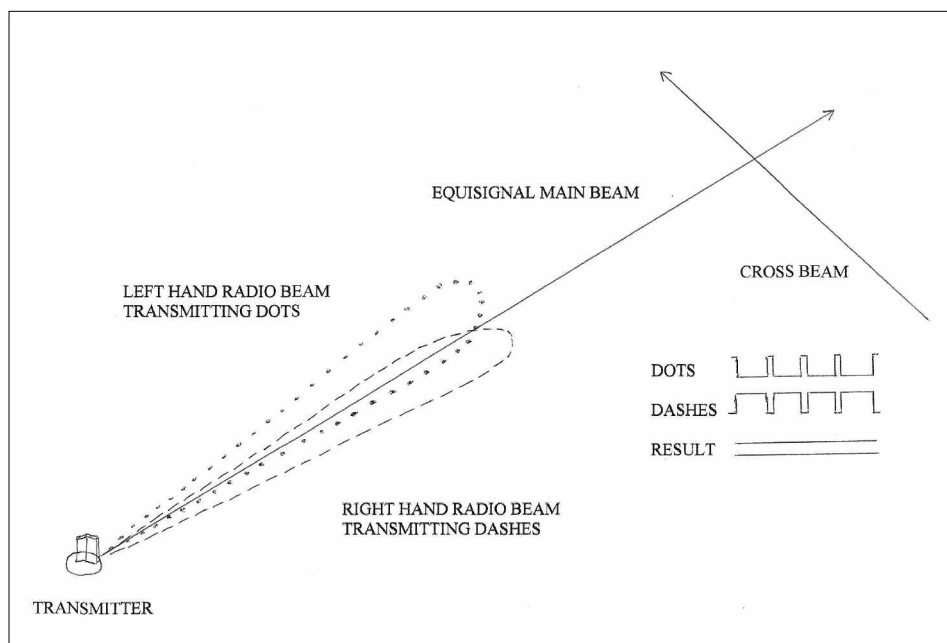
back, although this sometimes had the unfortunate result in bombs being dropped casually on other unsuspecting locations. Incidentally the German radio beams were code-named ‘Headaches’ whilst the British jamming transmitters were named ‘Aspirins’. Once the German High Command realised that their system had been compromised, and that the confidence and morale of their forces had slipped, they gave up the system, but not the struggle.

DEVELOPMENTS

In order to improve bombing accuracy, a more sophisticated system named “X-Gerät” (literally X-apparatus) was developed. Here, an aircraft flying along the main beam, would meet three cross-beams - the first was a get-ready signal, the second and third were met at exactly 10 and 5 Km respectively from the target. The radio operator would use a form of stopwatch which calculated the airspeed and automatically triggered the bomb-release at the designated time. Counter-measures were developed in which a false third beam was set to cross the main beam prematurely, so the automatic system dropped the bombs short of the target. Because different radio frequencies were used, new transmitters had to be designed and built - these were code-named ‘Bromides’.

The third round of this war of nerves found the British ready with counter-measures in place even before the Germans started up their new “Y-Gerät” system - this was due to a brilliant stroke of intuitive guesswork. A single, pulsed, radio beam was used in this system, which was received by the aircraft and immediately reflected back to a central control point in Germany. This enabled the aircraft’s position to be ascertained accurately, so information on any deviation from the planned course could be fed back to the bomber’s radio operator. The British transmitted random pulses back towards Germany, leaving their controllers unable to determine which was the true return signal from their aircraft.

Fig. 2 - The Knickebein System



At this point, the Germans decided that the British were just too smart for them, and no further developments took place of radio navigational aids for their bombing missions.

OFFENSIVE COUNTER- MEASURES

Whereas the beams described in the foregoing paragraphs were very narrow in width, radio beacons were also used to transmit navigational signals to assist German aircraft in finding their way back home after a bombing raid. These signals were very broad in width (or could even be omnidirectional). After jamming was tried and found not to be very successful, the technique was developed of receiving the signals in England and re-transmitting them on the identical frequency. The pilots would be unable to determine which was the correct signal, and therefore could be diverted from their course. There is evidence that beacon signals were picked up by a receiving station at Honiton and relayed to Fairmile from whence they would be re-transmitted.

RAF FAIRMILE

The field above the Fairmile Inn was one of several sites chosen in southern England for the siting of electronic counter-measures stations late in 1940. The field known as '14 acre field' was requisitioned by the Air Ministry, as was a portion of the next field to the west. Both fields were bounded on the north side by the A30 main road. The fields formed part of the Escot Estate, and have been in the hands of the Vinnicombe family as tenants since they moved to Taleford Farm from Farway on Christmas Day 1940. A former employee on the farm, Allan Tratt, well remembers arriving as a young lad at Christmas-time with the family. He described the RAF station as being under construction at that time, so it is presumed that the site became operational in the Spring of 1941. During the five-year tenure of the RAF, he was frequently detailed to trim the grass in the field, but found it

puzzling that he had to be signed in and out on every visit!

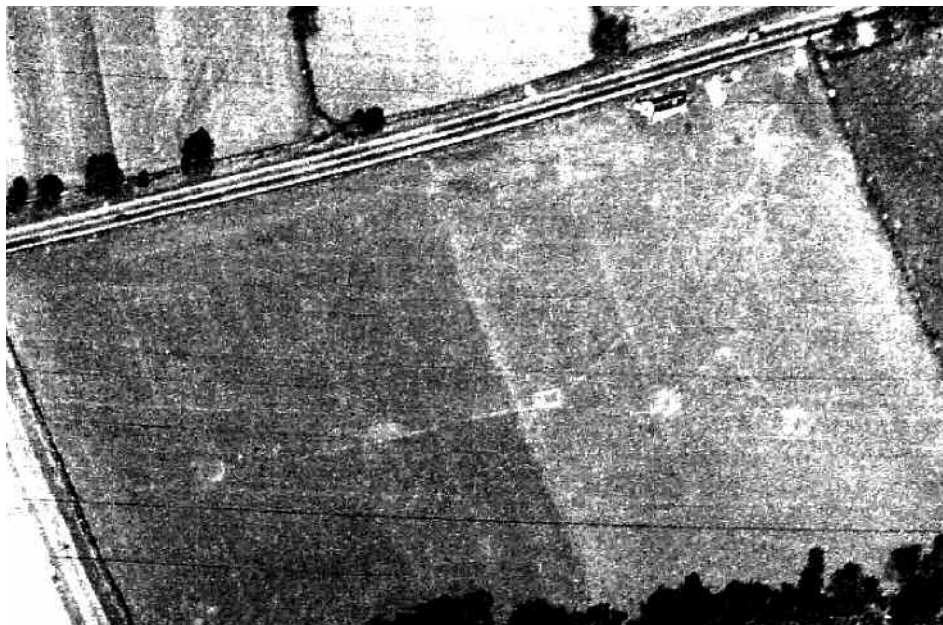
Six block huts were constructed in the main field, whilst the perimeter of the whole site was secured by a wire mesh fence. The one hut still in existence was the main administration building (visible in the top right corner of Fig.3), whilst the other five were constructed in an east-west line in the middle of the field to house the radio transmitters which it is reported were provided and installed by the Marconi Wireless Coy. Each hut was surrounded by an anti-blast wall, with little more than the roof visible from the field, and each transmitter hut had its own wooden and steel mast to support the antenna wires which radiated the false radio beams. The antennae would have been installed to radiate their beams in northerly direction. It is assumed that the white blocks visible on Fig.3 indicate the footprints of the five equipment huts, which measure about 15 by 12 ft. whilst the main (existing) hut was 30 by 15 ft. An additional small building to the southeast of the main building housed an emergency electrical generator driven by a diesel engine.

The operational flexibility of the site was enhanced by using mobile transmitting equipment installed in a converted bus. This vehicle has been described as having blacked-out windows and was normally parked in the field to the west.

An electrical supply was readily available from the High voltage line which ran north-south just above the quarry at Fairmile (over the football pitch which can be discerned to the east of the station!). Cables were laid underground to all the huts, and at the end of the RAF tenure of the field, the supply was disconnected from the transformer and cables were just left. This caused problems as soon as the farmer started to return the field to agricultural purposes - the plough would frequently become snarled up with lengths of cable, necessitating a halt to work whilst they were disentangled. A large pile of recovered cable and wire was taken away on a low-loader later. The huts and bases from the centre of the field were, however, broken up and the resulting debris dumped at the southern edge of the field; much of it remains there to this day. Allan Tratt remembered that the field had been ploughed after the RAF moved out (in 1945), so it interesting to note that the outline of the bases of the radio huts are still apparent on the aerial survey photograph (Fig. 3) which was taken in 1947. The photograph shows other (straight line) markings which cannot be explained at the present time.

counter-measure such as those described were the responsibility of No.80 (Signals) Wing of the RAF. For many years, the operations of this formation were highly classified, and

Fig.3 - Aerial Photo of Site of RAF Fairmile



even today information is not easy to access. This is understandable in view of the fact that Fairmile was designated as the Southwest Regional HQ for other stations operated by No.80 Wing, RAF. Other out-stations (each with a single hut and mast) were located at Salcombe Regis, Gittisham Common (where the two radio masts are now), Rockbeare Straight, and possibly others locally which gathered, and fed information back, to Fairmile.

Other WW2 military sites were located at Highbridge and Watchet in Somerset, which were possibly part of the SW network. In addition, the southern approaches to Britain were protected by a chain of radar stations which gave early warning of the approach of German aircraft. The nearest one to Ottery was located at Beer. Other military sites in this area included searchlight units positioned at Talaton and on Gittisham Common, presumably for the defence of RAF Exeter airfield.

Some local residents of the time remember certain details of the Fairmile station. The C.O. of the unit was Squadron Leader Thompson, who was billeted at Fairmile Vicarage. Flight Sgt. Roy Lane was the maintenance technician for all sites within the local area; he was billeted with the family of Edgar Peek, whose parents then lived in Riverside Cottage in Gosford Lane. He was called out to rectify faults at all hours of the day and night. Unusually, he was allowed to drive his van with unhooded headlamps, to expedite his travelling.

Taleford Farm was the temporary home for two of the guards responsible for the physical security of the Station. The first two were reported as Basil Rowe (from Bromley in Kent) and Lewis Richardson (from Lancashire). After a couple of years, these two were posted to another site, and were replaced by Percy Grebham and Bob Shire (both from the Taunton area). Ottery residents remembered

some names of other RAF personnel who had been billeted at #10 Yonder Street during WW2. They included Les Darton, 'Arry Harrap (despatch rider) and George Nesbitt.

A surviving member of No.80 (Signals) Wing, Peter Giles (who lives in Ottery), remembers the Fairmile station when he was temporarily stationed at the (then) Long Range Hotel at Straightway Head in 1944, but knew little about the operations there, such as the security surrounding such operational sites. He was allocated to No.62 Mobile Signals Unit, which followed the Allied advance across Europe after the Normandy Invasion. The only person traced to date who was known to have worked at RAF Fairmile, as a radio operator, Cpl. Ray Westerway, regrettably died two weeks before the author had hoped to interview him. The search continues for a surviving member of the many RAF personnel posted to the Station during its 5 years existence who may be able to add to the current stock of knowledge.

Although many details remain to be confirmed (for example, operational changes to, and the perceived effectiveness of, the Station) it is clear that Ottery St Mary played an important role during WW2 by hosting a military facility which made a significant contribution towards the thwarting of Germany's wartime plans.

Chris Saunders

References:

"Death on a Spring Night" by Robin Stanes and Jim Watts

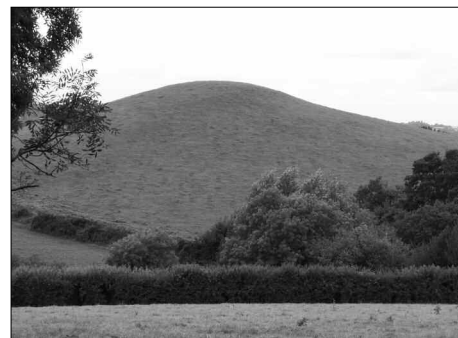
"Most Secret War" by Dr. R.V.Jones

"Beam Benders" by Laurent Brettingham

Acknowledgements:

For their invaluable assistance with this article, the author wishes to thank Philippe Planel of the EDDC/AONB Partnership, Marina Neophytou of the Historic Environment Register section at DCC, Peter Giles, Mike Passmore, Edgar Peek, Allan Tratt, Maurice and Adrian Vinnicombe and Jim Watts.

Is This Not a Motte?



"Round Ball Hill", as it is on the OS maps, or "Tit Hill" in the local vernacular, is another Ottery-based landscape history puzzle awaiting solution. The shape of this hill, which sits behind Round Ball Farm in Wiggaton (SY107937), has inspired historians and archaeologists over more than a generation to speculate about its significance.

Frances Rose-Troupe, a distinguished historian and sometime resident of Ottery St Mary in the 1930s (she lived in Bradleigh End - on Longdogs Lane), put forward an argument that it is an artificially heightened mound, and was formerly known as "Wicganbeorg", being the site of the King Alfred's Army HQ from which he sallied forth to the Battle of Wicganbeorg mentioned in Asser's "Life of King Alfred" (851AD). It is a fascinating piece of speculative history, but relies on a vision of the landscape shaped by purely military requirements, and of the conflict between the English and Danes as a continuously running large scale war, neither of which scenarios are now credible in the light of recent historical and archaeological discoveries.

Even so, Round Ball Hill may have a secret to tell us. It is unlikely such a promontory would have been totally ignored as a potential pied-a-terre for someone at sometime, but who? and when?

Matthew Brewer, the archaeologist who was technical adviser to our 2008 Goveton dig was very keen to press on with an investigation, but time and lack of cash foreclosed any opportunity to pursue it. A great shame - and another puzzle parked up for the time being.

cw

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Competition spot

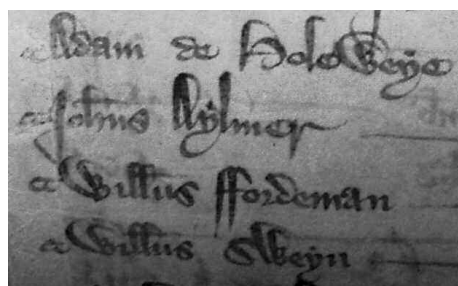
After a rest from the exertions of Competition No.1 (Journal No. 30), the comp is back just in time for Christmas. So while you stew in seasonal post-prandial torpor, cast a bleary eye over this picture. It is in Ottery, and existed within living memory. Your job is simply to identify it, and send word, as fast as you can, to the editor, by mail ("Melbury", Longdogs Lane, Ottery St Mary EX11 1HX), by email (otteryheritage@gmail.com) or whispered quietly to me in person (make sure in all cases I have a note of your name and address!).

If sufficient interest arises (unless I get at least 10 replies, all bets are off), correct answers will go into a hat and the winner drawn from said hat at a meeting in the new year. Prize is a full bottle of passable Chardonnay or similar. I need not remind you that your chances of victory are improved if you keep your solution to yourself. *Adeste fidelis*, let's see what you can do.
Merry Christmas!

My thanks to Peter Harris for the picture (and its no use asking him - he's sworn to silence!)

NOT the competition

Below are 4 names from the 1327 Lay Subsidy. If the top one is Adam de Holoweye, and the third William Fordeman, what are the other two? If you can work them out, or would like to be able to, then you should belong to the record transcription group. Work at your own pace in your own home, all you need is a PC. email otteryheritage@gmail.com for more details.



From the Chairman (continued from page 1)

Honouring Ottery's Famous Son

Our Annual Coleridge Anniversary Lunch was held at the Tumbling Weir Hotel, Ottery St Mary on Saturday October 24. Heritage Society trustee Betty Williams recited her poem 'STC' before proposing the Toast to 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge'.

Guest speaker was the distinguished author Graham Davidson MA, who chose as his subject 'Coleridge's Early Years', the subject of his next book, now nearing publication. Graham is secretary to the 'Friends of Coleridge', and editor of the 'Coleridge Bulletin'.

Photo below:
Pictured at the 2009 Coleridge Anniversary Lunch are (L to R) Lord Coleridge, Mayor of Ottery Glyn Dobson, speaker Graham Davidson, trustee Jim Woolley, Perdita Davidson, trustee Chris Wakefield, Heritage chairman Robert Neal.



Articles or letters to the editor can be posted to Chris Wakefield, "Melbury" Longdogs Lane, Ottery St Mary EX11 1HX or emailed to otteryheritage@googlemail.com. Published by The Ottery St Mary Heritage Society.

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