

# Horton: A brief history

## THE VILLAGE PLUS SOME BUILDINGS OF INTEREST

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**Preamble: Horton is an ancient settlement but a relatively new village.**

The Horton name is Anglo-Saxon in origin meaning **'The muddy settlement'** reflecting its Late Bronze Age origins alongside the River Isle at Hort Bridge. In Saxon times it was just one of the five tithings of the Manor of Iminster which was gifted to the Abbey of Muchelney. The timing of this gift is disputed (earliest suggested date being 725AD) but it was unequivocally rededicated to the monks by King Aethelraed [or Ethelred] in 995AD. The first written example of its name is in 1242 but independent parish status only granted on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1974.

Over the centuries, Horton's own centre has 'travelled' some 2 miles west from its original site alongside the River Isle where archaeological evidence of an early settlement was found in 2002. The dig centred on one of the earliest and most notable landmarks of the area, namely Hortbridge Mill (c 10<sup>th</sup> century -19<sup>th</sup> century) which would later be demolished by Horlicks for a dairy production centre, itself demolished in 2002). The oldest cluster of residential stone buildings (archaeology suggests the earliest, now lost, as perhaps 11<sup>th</sup> century) are primarily around Horton Cross. Any Saxon buildings, being wooden, would not have survived.

Iminster touched tangentially two important routes – the old Tudor Post Road between London and Exeter which went via Axminster (i.e. the A30) just beyond its eastern edge and a regional North/South coastal connection for the Channel which linked the clothiers of Bristol & Taunton to the coast at Lyme Regis. Horton Cross was on the western point where this trading route intersected with local Iminster roads.

Iminster/Horton were active in the cloth making industry of the southwest between the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was the source of wealth for both the region and England itself.

Earliest of the durable buildings built further westward (i.e. beyond any simple wooden structures) is the Tudor (or possibly earlier) residence - now called **Horton House**; four others (in the Puddlebridge area) are from the latter end mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century or later.

**Four dates were critical in Horton's westward development:**

- 1066 - William the Conqueror designated the extensive grounds of the Neroche Anomaly or Forest as a 'Royal Forest' (Earnshill to Donyatt). Already treated as Common land for several adjoining settlements, this added further complications to those local Manors policing the Broadway Hill area.
- 1638 - Charles I's decision to disafforest and sell off the Neroche land for exploitation and development to the Portman family of Orchard Portman (the contemporary Royal Foresters). Piecemeal development first recorded c 1660s.
- 1759 - A Turnpike Act widened the important 'clothier road' at Horton Cross between Taunton and the South Coast specifically the section between Peasemars Lane and Horton Elm. This latter landmark is long gone but is believed to have been near the junction of Hanning Road & the A358 [adjacent to the now demolished Lamb Inn]
- 1807 – A second Turnpike Act permitted a new road linking Iminster to the Honiton Turnpike Road at Up-Ottery. This new road created a new and viable **'Somerset section'** to the existing Devonport (Plymouth) to London coach route and Horton, with regular London coach traffic, was irrevocably changed.

Despite being near neighbours and sharing in the common land of the Neroche Forest, the Manor of Broadway evolved separately to that of Horton/Iminster, although clearly the locals intermingled at every level.

## Hanning Road, The Five Dials & the Five Dials Inn, Horton

- In 1768 the map of the Broadway Hill area was largely blank but for a few small, enclosed plots dotted about and the hint of a N-S drover track from Chard to Taunton and an E-W track described as '*The King's Highway from Iminster to Neroche Forest*' which passed through approx. 4-5 dwellings dotted around the Puddlebridge area only to end on reaching open Iminster Common land.
- By 1809 this 'no through road to' the Forest of [Ne]Roche' had become the East-West Turnpike Road aka the 'Somerset Section' of Exeter & Devonport to London Road and a new coaching route. It would later become a major trunk road before ending up as the Hanning Road we know it today.
- Prior to this new connection the *old* Mail Coach route from the far west travelled through Honiton, Axminster, over the Dorset hills, Salisbury, and Andover. The new Somerset section parted with the old at Honiton, passing through Horton/Iminster, Wincanton, Hindon, Deptford Bridge, Amesbury, to re-join the old at Andover. It was straighter, more level, more direct and so faster. By 1811, *The Taunton Courier* reported the new Somerset section between Honiton and Andover cut the old Mail Coach route by 3-4 hours\*. A new Subscription coach service was installed which left London at 6pm and to be in Exeter in 26 hours, or with a 12-hour rest, in Plymouth in 48 hours. So Horton was suddenly directly connected to both London and Devonport with its stream of life and daily traffic.

*\*Captain Carnac, bringing despatches from the Peninsular, arrived in Honiton where he was taken unwell, the Mail coach by the Old Road left without him; 40 minutes afterwards, he continued his journey by the NEW route. At the 'George' in Iminster he spent 30 minutes looking over despatches; he rested at Ilchester, dined at Wincanton, yet reached Andover some three hours before his earlier Mail which had lumbered on over the Dorset hills. [Taunton Courier 1811]. This story, attested, secured the success of the new road. It is said that the Devonport mail nearly went over at Horton when a bullock strayed and got entangled with the leaders.*

- At this early juncture *The Five Dials Inn* did not exist, so coaches called at *The Swan* or *The George* (where horses were changed in 90 seconds apparently) in Iminster.
- The arrival of the rail travel would cut out the horse-drawn coaches, although Iminster station was a spur rather than a mainline. But with the advent of cars, Horton regained its previous status. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the village welcomed the advent of the new A303-Bypass to stop the village from being cut in two by a now unending stream of cars.
- In 1830 the Neroche Forest Enclosure Act brought a commissioner to define the 'forest' boundaries which had by now been eroded further even than its previous smallest delimitation during the reign of Edward I.
- This commissioner also planted the '**Five Dials**' (dial = fingerpost) in that he marked out the 5 roads which radiate in different directions from the top of Broadway Hill.
- This spot is reputedly 243 feet above sea level & level with the weathercock of St Mary's Church.
- The '*Five Dials Inn*' was built – possibly as early as 1825, certainly after 1830. Mr Farthing was the first inn keeper. It was by then one of several public houses in Horton e.g. The Lamb, the New Inn... the former demolished in the early 2000s, the latter converted to a private dwelling years before. The Butchers Arms another such, off-Pottery Road/Channells Lane area, burnt but re-erected - where? Gone by 1940s

### **Ilminster Without School, Horton (Pound Road)**

- Some education was given in the village before the school existed. A room in Corner Cottage was a school (possibly Sunday School or a Dames School ) for a small number of children.
- Another house, *Kennycott*, next to the Old Victory Hall was a school run by Misses Cannicott & their brother.
- The school opened on **July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1877**, after an Act of 1870 made schooling compulsory. The fact that such schooling was not yet free necessarily limited the number of children attending.
- Miss Stoodley was the first headmistress and daughter of a local plumber living near **The Five Dials**. The census of 1881 described her as a 29-year-old certified teacher. She became Mrs Westlake in 1891. She retired in 1916 as head of Higher Horton School after 39 years in post.
- An average attendance over its life of 34 pupils. Maximum numbers in the early years were 80, although later 60 was said to be overcrowded. Infants were taken at the age of 3.
- In 1954 the school became Horton Primary School but closed when Neroche School was opened in 1973.
- In 1891 fees (2d per week) were abolished. Children's absences were marked for many reasons, often for staying home helping their parents: haymaking, picking stones, planting potatoes, teasel cutting, picking blackberries. The latter in 1918 for the government, the highest picking in the month being 1,242 lbs ostensibly for soldiers' jam but could have been for dyes.
- Official holidays were for: Broadway Club, Broadway Fair (Sept) & the Donyatt Club.
- In 1944 absent seeing soldiers at Jordans; on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1904, they attended the opening of new organ in Horton Church & May 5<sup>th</sup> for the laying of the foundation stone by Col. Vincent Upton Langworthy for the new Sunday School and its opening May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1907.
- Now 2 private dwellings.

### **Broadway Hill Methodist Church erected – 1838, extended 1858**

- A Wesleyan mission built with Board School Education until overtaken by the new School House. A William Beall was reputedly instrumental in its creation.
- A Sunday School Room was built in 1895 by J Layzell and Sons. The Sunday School was already thriving at that date. Jerimiah Layzell is the first name on the Cradle Roll which notes the births of local children attending the chapel.

### **Horton Victory Cottage (previously the Village Hall)**

- Built in 1822 as a 'Mission Room' during the vicariate of John Hawkes Mules (he held Ilminster, Isle Abbots and Kingstone from 1822 - 1858) and was also Curate in Broadway. It was known locally as 'Vicar Mules Church Room'.
- Before this Horton depended on the increasingly distant St Mary's Minster church. A belated recognition that Horton has not had the same facilities for worship enjoyed by other outlying tithings. A basic room it was the forerunner of the small, consecrated Church of St Peter.
- Renamed Victory Hall after the Great War, it was used until 2008 as Horton Village Hall before the new Hall was opened in 2009.
- Now converted to a private dwelling.

### **St Peter's Church, Horton**

- In March 1899 Reverend James Street, as Vicar of Ilminster, attended a meeting in Horton's Mission Room to consider building a proper church on a different site. Plans were approved.

Built on land donated by Mr Samuel Baker after he had inherited '*The Firs*' (now '*Horton House*') from his late Aunt Susannah Baker Osborne. She and her husband (the previous owner) had had no issue.

- It cost £500 to build, designed to seat 150. Foundation stone laid 29<sup>th</sup> June 1899 by Mr William Speke of Jordan. April 1900 a collection for furnishings started at St Mary's Ilminster and 400 people gave donations ranging from 1d to £20. The church's dedication in 1901 was done by the Bishop of Bath & Wells, the Right Reverend Dr Kennion. Opened free of debt and a balance of £3 14s 9d for the cost of a bell (subsequently donated by Mr John Schenck of South Petherton and dedicated in August. It is believed he donated the pulpit too).
- Church building erected by the Layzell builders.
- In 1906 a meeting discussed the provision of a Church Room; within 6 months, Colonel Langworthy of '*Southfields House*' (AKA '*Hares*') laid the foundation stone. The room was dedicated by the Bishop of Taunton 25 February 1907. Later improved/reconstructed.

### **Horton House**

- Current name of probably one of the oldest surviving houses in Higher Horton, it is known to be Tudor but there have been suggestions that part of it might date back to 11<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly it was inhabited before 1536 by gentry-born John Balche & his descendants. The last direct male heir was George Balche II who died intestate in 1658 but it continued in the family through his surviving sister's female Roynon line until 1717.
- The family originated in High Ham; had interests in Horton and other sites in Somerset thanks it seems to their links to Muchelney Abbey. These were conceivably derived from an earlier Balche who acted as lawyer to a London bishop. John Balche of Horton (& his brother George) both became founder trustees of the Edward VI's Ilminster Grammar School (later the Ilminster School).
- It is believed that a connection of this Balche family (also named John) along with Peter Palfrey of Horton, Ilminster, were 2 of the 5 founding fathers of the town of Beverley in Massachusetts. They crossed the Atlantic in 1623/4, shortly after the Plymouth fathers. A wooden house built by John Balche in 1638 still stands in Beverley, MA as a museum to these men; over 40,000 people are descended from this John Balche. The Palfrey line, however, has been extinguished in fact, although in print he is immortalised by Nathaniel Hawthorne's stories of New England.
- The Balche family connection ended when the building passed into the hands of the Lord Portman/Portman family estate with the name '*Higher Horton Farm*, later it became *The Firs* (based on the avenue of trees planted by Sam Palmer who bought it in 1864). Renamed '*Horton House*' late in the last century
- Please note there are currently 2 (were 3) *Horton Houses* in Horton. The second is an 1880 Grade 2 listed house alongside the Horton Cross nursing home, still so named. Horton Manor (current home of Monks Yard) was once also known by this name (& was sold at auction as such in 1862).

### **Horton Cottage – the old Post Office**

- This was the site of the old Post Office run by the Channell family for decades. The house at the lower end of the building apparently had a two-seater wooden toilet which remained in use, with newspaper on a string for loo-paper, until the mid-1940s!
- Channell's Lane is so spelt because when Mrs Channell was widowed and retired, she lived in a bungalow at the end of it.

- The little Horton Post Office figured in St Martin's-Le-Grand Letter Bag in 1898 as a country post office which had been in the same Channell family for 50 years.

#### **Broadway Chapel/Meeting house, Broadway, opposite Broadway Memorial**

- Active from 1759 to 1870, records available 1770-1840. Worship was 'Independent' i.e. non-conformist Protestant: advocated local congregation control of religious & church matters & freedom of religion for all non-Catholics. This non-conformist religion's heyday seems to have been during English Civil War (1642-1660). Oliver Cromwell was an Independent and as were many in the Parliamentary Army.
- Mr John Collins senior, clothier of Horton was appointed a trustee in 1791. All his 5 children were baptised there... the Cleales of Horton and Broadway also members.
- Now a private dwelling.

#### **Broadway Church: St Aldhelm and St Eadburgha**

- Broadway comes from Old English 'brad' = broad or extensive & 'weg' = way or road; intersects the Neroche Forest; thought be Roman. Documented in Domesday Book (1086) as 'Bradewie'. Settlement grew up around this road. Capland & Rapps are tythings of the Parish. Every's Alms-houses 'for 7 poor people' dates from late 16c/early 17c following litigation over the 1558 Will of Alexander Every.
- The *Bell Inn* reputed to be 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Recently refurbished.
- Church built in 13<sup>th</sup> Century (although origins possibly earlier); churchyard has part of 13<sup>th</sup> century Cross; Aldhelm (c639-709) was Saxon bishop of Sherborne appointed by King Ine. Eadburgha after a daughter of King Alfred (possibly). Grade 1 listed building. An unusual pairing of names.
- Some say that church's distance from the village was a factor of the Plague, but the late Hilary Bolitho (local historian & friend of the late Mick Aston) argued it was more likely built as adjunct to a large residence (now ruined/demolished). This theory is based on the 'overly dressed stones' used to create bridges over nearby water channels.

*This information has been gathered from various sources. If you have any additional information on the above, please contact The Editor of the Horton Gazette.*