

# YCCCAR T

Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter November 2024

## Chairman's chat

We have been struggling with the wet weather all year so we have made slow progress completing surveys. Maybe Thursdays will be dry and sunny next year! However, we have almost completed our work at Westbury-sub-Mendip, just a few grids that we will complete one week when the bull and cows move on to another field. Vince has been leading a group surveying on the North Marsh and in the immediate future this where we will concentrating our efforts. This newsletter is the first this year. There is a definite Roman theme, but other articles take us from traces of Neanderthal occupation to traces of WWII, Operation Overlord and Operation Pluto. Two of Richard's wonderful drone photographs have been included of survey sites at Westbury-sub-Mendip. Thank you to all who have contributed articles to this edition.

Arthur

## Thornbury Romano-British site -the finds so far

Since 2020 the Westbury Society Archaeology Group has been excavating a Romano-British farmhouse on the lower land south of the A371 near Westbury-sub-Mendip. The building measures approximately 36m x 13m, had stone walls and a stone-tiled roof, and has similarities with the "winged corridor" style of building that has been found on many other sites in southern England. A Bath stone finial and ridge cap stones along with painted wall plaster show that care was taken with the appearance of the building.



Drone view of site

Finds from the site so far support the initial belief that this building is the farmhouse for a small farmstead. Sixty-four coins, with a spread of dates from 268-361 CE suggest the likely main period of occupation, while other finds show the status of the building and how the occupants earned their money. A few of the coins were minted in London or outside Britain – Arles, Trier and Siscia in modern-day Croatia. It has not yet been possible to identify mints for the others.



Constantine I, Arles mint 330-335 CE

The largest single find so far is an almost complete 74cm diameter upper millstone, identified by an expert as Romano-British. The surface is worn, so at some point it was turned upside down and used as a hearth. A pair of millstones this size would have produced a year's supply of flour for around 200 people.



74cm worn upper millstone, re-used as a hearth  
 Preliminary analysis of animal bones and teeth from the site suggests around 50% of the farm's stock was sheep or goats, around 20% cattle and perhaps 4% equine. Other species include birds and rodents, plus a cat jaw.



Black burnished ware beaded and flanged bowl; Wareham 300-370 CE

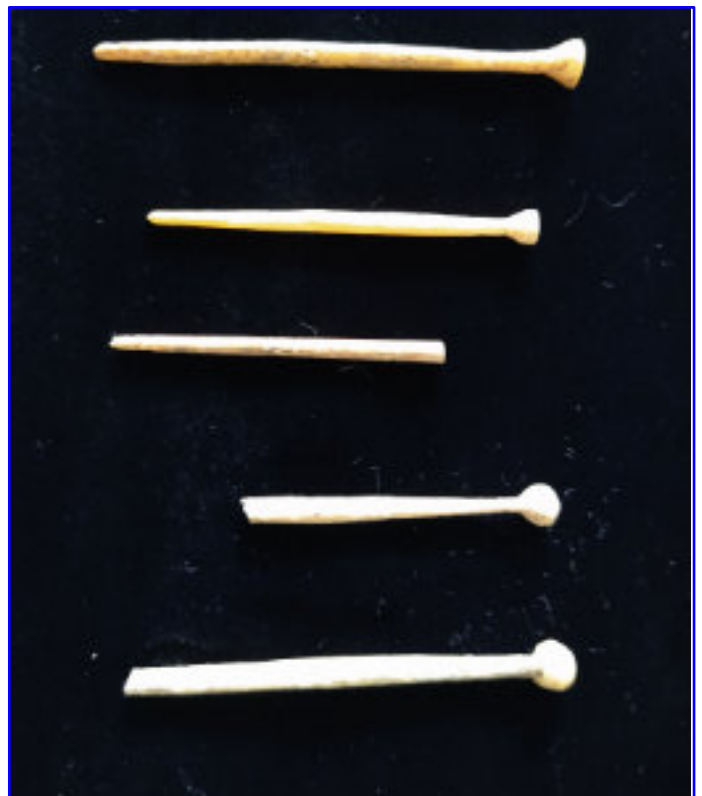
Among the metal finds, roof nails predominate – around 20kg thus far; 1kg of hobnails plus assorted other metal items have also been found. However, it is likely that much of the metal would have been removed from the site when the stone walls were robbed out, probably on the orders of a Norman bishop.

Personal objects include bone hairpins, used by wealthier Romano-British women for elaborate hair-dos, parts of metal and shale bracelets, glass and bone beads, plus a blue glass gaming counter and shards from a number of small drinking glasses.



Animal teeth, bovine (one worn suggesting a dairy animal which survived to old age) cat & pig

Over 6,000 potsherds of 104 different fabric types have been excavated and identified, with around 75% being utilitarian greyware produced relatively locally, including Congresbury. Much of the remaining 25% is black burnished ware from Wareham, Dorset and other sites in southern Britain. Of particular interest are finer goblets and small bowls, some decorated, from kilns in the New Forest plus around 21kg of coarse sherds from at least three very large greyware storage containers.



Bone hairpins



Taken as a whole, the building and finds clearly show that this was the main dwelling of a relatively prosperous farmstead which produced grain and animals for sale in the local area, with the lead mining settlement at Charterhouse likely to be the most significant market. The wealth gained from this trade allowed the owners to build a substantial house and buy pottery, glass and other goods from elsewhere in southern Britain.

There are still many questions remaining to be answered, one in particular being how long after 361 CE the building and farmstead were occupied – hopefully further finds from the site might answer this.

Andrew Buchanan  
October 2024

*Blue glass gaming counter*

## A Scottish Crannog

On holiday this summer, we visited the Scottish Crannog Centre on Loch Tay, in Perthshire, which we had passed by many times in the past, but this year the time for a visit had come! Crannogs are common in Scotland and Ireland, but with counterparts in Europe. They are structurally varied sites with an extremely wide distribution in Scotland, occupied from the neolithic up until at least the 17th century AD (Henderson, J C, 1998). They were built at the edges of lakes, or, in the Scottish context, lochs, forming artificial islands formed of wood, stone or, sometimes, a platform with thatched roundhouse(s), over the water, supported by wooden posts. Their function seems to be a matter of some debate, but are interpreted as simple prehistoric farmsteads, refuges, or status symbols implying ownership of the surrounding landscape.

Loch Tay has about 17 – 20 known crannogs, one of which has been excavated on the south side of the loch by archaeologists at the Crannog Centre, since 1980. In 1997, a replica was constructed on the north side of the loch near the village of Kenmore, opposite the excavation site, but, unfortunately, it burnt down in 2021. However, the small museum was saved and a few replica iron age buildings have been constructed on the loch side.

We took the interesting, guided tour which included sampling the iron age experience of food, smithing, textile techniques and wood working. But the most interesting find, highlighted by our guide, was a small,

blue, glass bead, found at their excavation site (and here I accept the criticism of incompetence for failing to photograph it). Since it originated in the Middle East, the Iron-Age inhabitants weren't isolated on their loch, 2600 years ago, but had trade links with Europe and further afield!



By pure coincidence, after preparing this note, I saw an article in the current volume of *British Archaeology*, (Nov/Dec, 2024), describing the sustainable, community approach to the Scottish Crannog Centre project!

Reference:

Henderson, J. C. (1998). *Islets through Time: The Definition, Dating and Distribution of Scottish Crannogs*. Oxford J. Archaeol., 17, 227 – 244.

## Cave Art in England

Creswell Crags is an enclosed limestone gorge on the border between Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

The cliffs in the ravine contain several caves that were occupied during the last ice age, between around 43,000 and 10,000 years ago. Some of these caves contain the northernmost cave art in Europe and the only known cave art in the UK.



Creswell Crags

It would be fair to say that these images are very difficult to see as they are etched into the rock face rather than being painted, so nothing like those in Lascaux!

The caves were seasonally occupied by nomadic groups of people during the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. However, there is evidence of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Roman and post-medieval activity at the site.

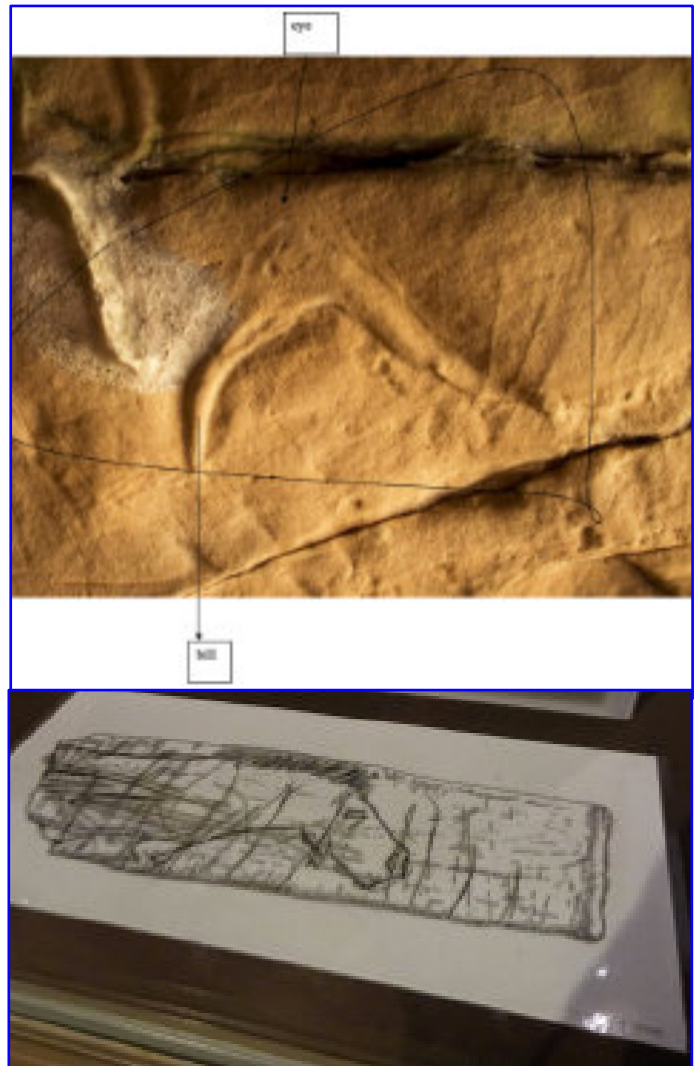
Even some traces of Neanderthal occupation 50,000–60,000 years ago have been found there. The cave art at Creswell was only discovered in April 2003, by Paul Bahn, Sergio Rippoll and Paul Pettitt.

Engravings and bas-reliefs were found on the walls and ceilings of some of the caves, an important find as it

had previously been thought that no British cave art existed.

These discoveries have made Creswell a site of international importance. Their subject matter includes representations of animals including reindeer, bison and several different bird species.

The engravers seem to have made use of the naturally uneven cave surface in their carvings and it is likely that they relied on the early-morning sunlight entering the caves to illuminate the art.



Janet Dickson

## Horse bone, dating from the Roman period, from Swildon's Hole.

A third metatarsal bone from a horse (*Equus caballus*) was found, by chance, in Swildon's Hole cave, Priddy, in the Mendips, in May 2017 (I and J Healy). It was on the stream bed, just beyond the feature known as the P40 drop. A sample of the bone was analysed at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC), AMS Laboratory, Glasgow, for radiocarbon dating, thanks to a grant from the Council for British Archaeology, Community Archaeology Radiocarbon Dating Fund.

The Radiocarbon Age BP was determined to be  $1823 \pm 24$ , representing a date between 130 and 322 calAD (95.4% probability;  $2 \sigma$ ), ie, in the Romano-British period. How the bone got into the cave, and when, cannot be determined.

A full report is currently in press in Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, with a possible publication time in the winter edition, 2024.

Geoff Pearson and Iain Healy

## D-Day - Mulberry Harbours and Operation Pluto

As part of the commemorations for D-Day, I went to Lepe Country Park, on the Hampshire coast, literally opposite the Isle of Wight. From this part of the coast, troops embarked for Normandy, these included the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards, and their memorial is in English and French.



The two metal structures in the water are 'dolphins', and are the remains of the jetty, from which ships loaded troops and supplies, for Operation Overlord.



However, Lepe was heavily involved in the construction of the Mulberry Harbours. After 21 days, these harbours had to be capable of handling up to 12,000 tons of supplies and 2,500 vehicles each day. The beach at Lepe, ( then called Stanswood Bay ), was one of the sites used for the manufacture of six, of the concrete caissons. Each one was 203 ft, 6 inches x 44ft x 35ft, and weighed up to 6,000 tons. The track bed is still there, where the completed caissons were winched along the beach, and then floated into the water at high tide. Then they were

towed away and 'parked' with caissons made elsewhere, either at Selsey or Dungeness, before being towed across the Channel.



## Operation Pluto

The Army needed a constant supply of fuel and so Operation Pluto was developed. PLUTO - Pipe Line Under The Ocean. At Lepe the yellow marker shows where the pipeline is underground, even now. From Lepe the pipeline ran across the Solent to the Isle of Wight, then under the Channel to France. The pipe was flexible enough to be wound on large drums, called HMS Conundrums. Each drum was 52 feet in diameter and 90 feet long, and carried 70 miles of piping. Eventually the pipeline was 770 miles long in length and supplied 172 million gallons of fuel to the army.



A few weeks later I stopped at Marden, a village in Kent, for a coffee break, walking across the car park, back to my car, there was a monument that was a section of the PLUTO pipeline. It was part of the 1944 pipeline that crossed Marden, from the Isle of Grain to Dungeness. After Dungeness the pipeline was laid on the seabed, and petrol was pumped from East Peckham pumping station across the Channel to Boulogne.

Philippa

*Section of the PLUTO pipeline at Marden*



## Wall Roman site near Lichfield, Staffs

Wall or to give it its Roman name Letocetum was the first visit of the study tour.

Not only were we lucky enough to be taken round by one of the archaeologists involved in the excavation but were also given an excellent English Heritage booklet covering the site and museum. Prior to Roman times the immediate area was called Letocaiton or Gray wood. This name may link to Lichfield only two miles away of which the parish of Wall was once a part and possibly where the building stone came from.

Wall is on Watling Street near the junction with Ryknield Street. It is on the route from London to Wroxeter so it is not surprising that there were marching camps used for a short while when troops moved around the

Country and a fort (seen on aerial photos). These are yet to be fully explored. However a staging post alongside a

civilian settlement with the considerable sized baths served by a local stream and a mansio (guest house) has been excavated.

Built towards the end of the first century it provided overnight accommodation for official travellers and messengers where they could also change their horses and wagons. It served the Cursus Publicus or Imperial Roman Postal service. There would have been mansios at 50 mile intervals all the way to Dumfriesshire with mutationes or changing stations for horses and wagons in between. The attached artists impression shows how large the buildings were compared to the civilian settlement that surrounded it after AD 70 when Watling Street was metalled.

The site is complemented by a small museum containing artefacts including one of a pair of cloak fasteners shaped like a duck which captivated our group.

Marianne Pitman



## Toll Road, Bredin, Gloucestershire.

The main road which runs near to St. Giles Church, Bredin has two reminders of the toll road or turnpike that ran through the village. The first is an Obelisk in a small triangle of grass that indicates to the various places along the road.



In order to improve the roads in the 18th century the government authorised private trusts to charge people to use their improved highways. The engineers employed by these trusts became famous names, probably the most famous, Thomas Telford, is associated with these reminders like the obelisk.

As people often tried to avoid the tolls by taking to the fields or even jumping over any gate in their way, the trusts provided sturdy gates with spikes on the top resembling pikes, a weapon of the time. (Some historians believe that the trusts were called turnpikes after the shape of the gates.)



The original gates and the toll house were on the Eckington road but at some stage the gates were moved to their present position at the entrance to a large house to the west of the obelisk. These are distinctive Telford gates, identifiable by the pattern of the suns rays, which were a feature of his designs, and by the imitation cannon pillars.



Dave Long



## Drone Photography

*Drone photograph of the excavation of the Romano-British farmstead at Thornbury, Westbury-sub-Mendip.*

This excavation has been carried out by members of the Westbury Society.

This superb image is by Richard, our resident LiDAR, GPS and drone expert.

It is almost criminal to reduce the size of this image to fit it into the newsletter format, as the original is so rich in detail.

## Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport

When visiting Cumbria most people stick to the tourist areas of the Lake District and ignore the coast. Many of the Cumbrian coastal towns are not exactly picturesque, but it is worth visiting Maryport for this delightful little museum. It houses the largest collection of Roman Military altars in the whole of Britain. The collection, which was begun by the Senhouse family in the 1570s, is the oldest in the country. It was started by John Senhouse, Lord of the Manor of Ellenborough. He collected inscribed stones from the Roman fort and civilian town lying along the coastal ridge above the Manor House. These inscribed stones were set within the walls of the family mansion, Netherhall.



Much of this carved stone came to light as they removed the stone from the Roman fort (Alauna) for reuse in the town, although a great deal is probably in the port's breakwater.



*Aerial view of fort with museum top, middle*

The museum sits beside the site of the Roman fort, but there is little to see apart for lumps and bumps in the ground. This site overlooks the Solway Firth and there are the remains of a Roman mile castle just a mile north up the coast. This site is not far from the western end of Hadrian's Wall. Excavations of an area believed to be temples enclosed by a ditch began in 2010 and finished in 2015.

The photographs show just a small number of the military altars on display. Some of the inscriptions are beautifully carved and others rather crude.



*Altars dedicated by Commanders of the first Cohort of Baetasians AD 160 to AD 180 at Alauna.*

The museum collection is based in the building known as the Battery. It was a Royal Naval Artillery Volunteer Drill Hall built in 1885 to train naval gunners.

Other Roman finds from the fort and surrounding area are also on display including this pot shown below. It was about 200mm high and although probably locally produced it reminded me of Congresbury ware.



I did have a tour of the fort with an excellent guide who explained all the lumps and bumps along with the history of the fort. A couple of large stones were visible. Some idea of the quantity of stone involved can be gained from a visit to Crosscanonby Church. Here, forming the chancel arch, you will see the complete archway to the northeast gate of the fort, re-erected in the church at Humphrey Senhouse's behest.



# Narbonne

The Via Domitia was the first Roman road built in Gaul and linked Italy and Spain across what is now Southern France. The construction of the road was commissioned by Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, following the defeat of the Allobroges and Averni in 122 BCE. Domitius also established a fortified garrison at Narbo (modern Narbonne) on the coast, to guard the construction of the road.



Part of the Via Domitia in the centre of Narbonne



Such was its strategic importance as a crossroads with the Via Aquitania (the route to Toulouse and Bordeaux) that it soon developed into a full Roman colony Colonia Narbo Martius.

In between the cities that it linked, the Via Domitia was provided with a series of mansiones at distances of a day's journey for a loaded cart, at which shelter, food and fresh horses could be obtained for travellers on official business.

Also in Narbonne is a network of underground tunnels which were once a Roman Horreum.

Although the Latin term is often used to refer to granaries, Roman horrea were used to store many other types of consumables. The Horreum in Narbonne consists of several galleries, and cellars of various sizes. This complex is some five meters below street level and stretches across a large area of the central city although only a small fragment is accessible. None the less the very well preserved walls are evidence of the general architectural expertise and engineering know-how of the ancient Romans.

Janet Dickson



## DronePhotography

*Drone photograph of the 'Straits', Westbury-sub-Mendip.*

In this photograph you can see Richard piloting the drone camera. This is a field we have recently surveyed with the 601 Bartington gradiometer, on behalf of the Westbury Society. The field has been divided into two with a new fence, kissing gate and a wildlife pond at the far end (southern end) amongst the trees

## A magnificent map - Bourton in 1738

Sadly, Bourton is today most likely seen from the window of a speeding car desperately heading across country to avoid the morning nightmare of traffic jams (and all too often, motorway closures) that is M5 Junction 21, north of Weston-super-Mare. That's a terrible shame: the high hedges on either side of the narrow lanes are full of pink and white dog roses in spring, meadowsweet in summer, and bushes heavy with red hips and haws in autumn.



Fig 1: The Bourton map, in wash on parchment, with many views of local buildings

Bourton today is a 'blink-and-you'll-miss-it' hamlet in the parish of Wick St Lawrence, a couple of miles from the estates of Worle. But it was once a bustling small village, with working farms and even a windmill, most of which have long gone.

But then, consider working in the Record Office, in the Somerset Heritage Centre in Norton Fitzwarren, west of Taunton. I visit fairly frequently to consult historic documents there (and have deposited some myself for their keeping). You just never know what gems will emerge when you look at the compendious indices (now

available on-line). Visiting to look at documents concerned with the parish of Wick St Lawrence (for centuries, an integral part of Congresbury), I noticed a map of the 'Manor of Bourton', and ordered it to look at.

Now understand that maps of estates, like this one, were not early OS maps: although they were maps in the modern sense, they were largely made for recording privately owned land, often for display on the wall of estate offices (like the one I saw in a south midland office, which the owner assured me had been on the wall since his ancestor put it there 250 years ago!)

The Bourton map is of the manor (land holding based on..) rather than a map confined to the village, so some outlying lands in Weston-super-Mare (the oldest currently known maps of that village), Banwell, Kingston Seymour and elsewhere are included as marginal plans

The map depicts the windmill (now completely disappeared) on Wick Lane, which is shown as a four-sail postmill standing on a round mound: this windmill featured in a 1630 document looking at the misdemeanours of a miller from Cleeve, a few miles up the road, who spent a night staying with the miller at Bourton while 'on the run' (see YCCCART web site for the full story!). The mill is referred to in the Schedule attached to the map (Fig 4)

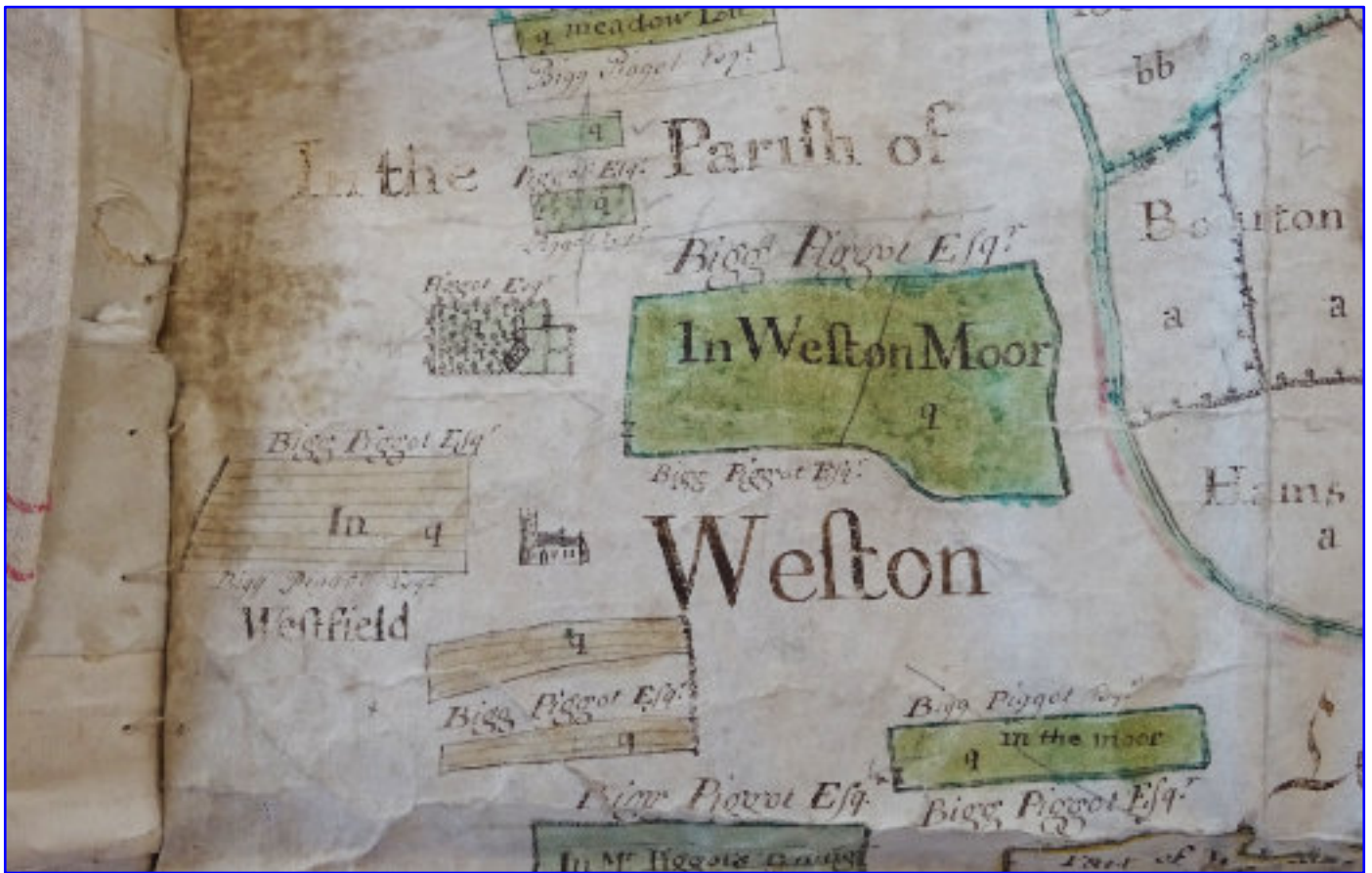


Fig 2:  
The oldest known plans of anywhere in Weston-super-Mare,  
part of Bourton manor.



Fig 3:  
The windmill at Bourton, by the side of the lane to Wick and the parish church

It also shows the centre of the village: some farmhouses  
still survive, some have since disappeared.

Total 28 = 3 = 28		1 = 2 = 25	11 = 0 = 0	
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	The 3 Acres	2 = 2 = 05	20	2 = 10 = 0
	Acre & half by Colston	1 = 0 = 35	15	0 = 0 = 0
	half acre joyning Tuckers	0 = 1 = 32	20	1 = 9 = 0
	Greenmore acre	0 = 2 = 38	20	2 = 14 = 0
	Three acres by Windmill		2 = 1 = 01	10 1 = 2 = 0
	Five Acres above Wales	3 = 0 = 25		15 2 = 18 = 0
	Total	10 = 3 = 13		£ 14 = 19 = 0

Fig 4:  
References to 'Miln close' and 'Three acres by Windmill' in the map schedule



Fig 5:  
The centre of Bourton village in 1738

Look at the details of the houses as shown: each house is depicted individually: some have one chimney, some two: some have extensions: some are right on the road, some set back in gardens and orchards. Some are still recognisable on the ground: some no longer exist. These seem likely to be real differences on the ground: maps with imagined buildings are usually much more regimented and have 'cloned' images.

Not every village or manor will be fortunate enough to have such a wonderful map as this: it helps if your place of interest was once owned by a wealthy land owner

(who is more likely to have invested in such an estate map), and on how well documents have survived, which frankly, is in the lap of the gods.

As historians and archaeologists, we are sometimes inclined, in our pursuit of historic data, to miss just how these professionally-produced and often colourful maps are attractive and interesting documents in their own right.

Vince 2024-10-10