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Introduction

Dorstone lies at the end of the Golden Valley, fifteen miles south-west of Hereford and six miles east of Hay-on-Wye. The River Dore, which, in all probability, gave its name to both Dorstone and The Golden Valley, and which in Anglo-Saxon times formed part of the boundary between Mercia and Wales, rises in the west of the parish. A large, scattered, upland parish of 5,375 acres, encircled by hills rising to over 1,000 feet, Dorstone has an air of seclusion and remoteness.

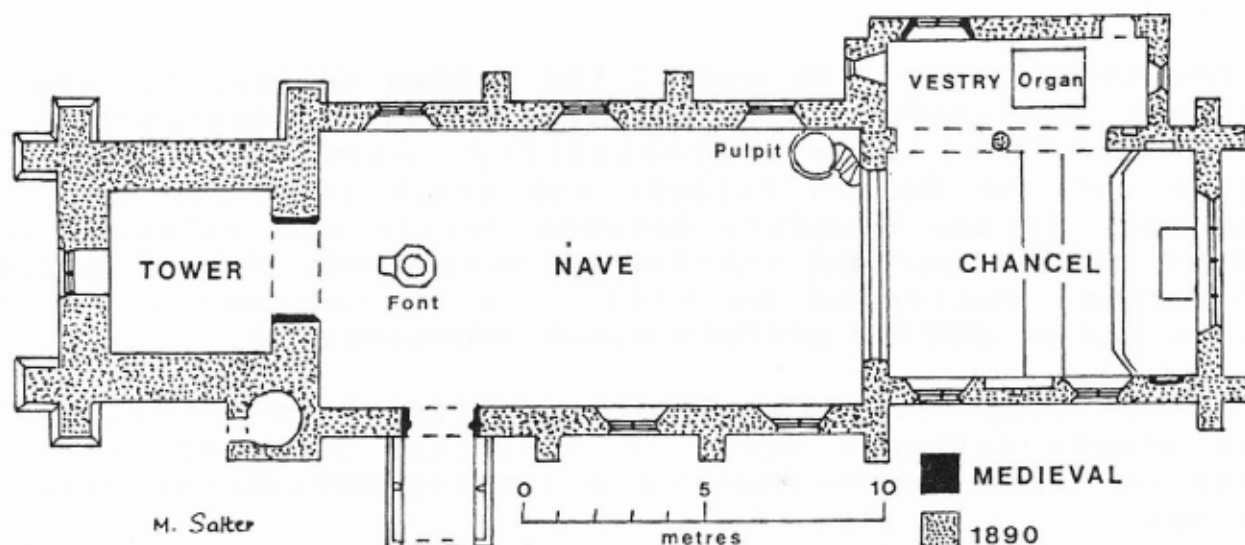
On the ridge of hills forming the northern boundary of the parish stands Arthur's Stone, a neolithic long-barrow, bearing witness to the presence here of a farming settlement over 4,000 years ago.

The place-names of the area are today predominantly Welsh and, in many cases, descriptive of the rough nature of the terrain (e.g. The Draen - thorny piece, Cwm Garrw - rough dingle and Mynydd Brith - speckled mountain). In his book "The Place-Names of Herefordshire", the Reverend A.T. Bannister remarks that at the time of Domesday, Dorstone's place-names were almost entirely Old English and suggests that this shows how the frontier here has fluctuated over the years. If you stand on the castle mound (which almost certainly predates the Norman Conquest) it is easy to imagine the border skirmishes that must have taken place around it.

Dorstone, then, is a place of great antiquity. For the purposes of this book, however, we have time only to research into the history of the last century. The book has been written to commemorate, firstly, the rebuilding of St. Faith's church in 1889/90, but also the lives of those people living at that time, and since, who have helped to make Dorstone the place it now is.

When our story begins, Queen Victoria had just celebrated her Golden Jubilee and "Peace and Plenty" was the country's watchword. The industrial towns were well-established and the "drift from the land" was well under way. Agricultural labourers had only just been given the vote - in 1884. The Golden Valley Railway had been opened as far as Dorstone in 1881, bringing with it news and ideas from the outside world.

ST FAITH'S CHURCH, DORSTONE



The Church

When the Reverend Thomas Prosser Powell became Rector of Dorstone in 1887, he inherited hundreds of years of family tradition in the pastoral care of the parish.

His father, the Reverend Thomas Powell, who had held the living from 1843 to 1886, had started out as a surgeon with the East India Company. On the advice of his father, Colonel Thomas Powell, then living in Hardwick, he had returned home, taken holy orders and married Clara Prosser, daughter of the Reverend Thomas Prosser, last of a long line of Prossers, who had held the living in Dorstone since, at least, the Restoration of 1660.

Over the years, the Prosser family had acquired a considerable amount of land in the area, so Thomas Prosser Powell found himself quite a large landowner as well as Rector of Dorstone.

Since 1875, Thomas Prosser Powell had been Vicar of Peterchurch, living at Hinton Hall (then Peterchurch Vicarage). Married to Jessie Caroline Davies, daughter of Mr. Percy Davies of Crickhowell, he had raised a family of five children, two sons and three daughters. His second son was George Henry, later to become, in his turn, the Rector of Dorstone who is so well remembered by the village people today.

Before his marriage, Thomas Prosser Powell had been part of the local gentry's lively social round, vividly described in Francis Kilvert's diary.

In that diary, Kilvert relates an incident which makes him seem a very human individual and not just a dry-as-dust historical figure. He describes a picnic at Snodhill on a hot day in June, after which they all go to dinner at Dorstone Rectory.

"After dinner, the carpet was taken up in the drawing room and there was a dance on the slippery oak floor which was sadly scratched and scored by the nailed boots of the gentlemen and some of the ladies. Tom Powell slipped and fell" [Kilvert's Diary 21 June 1870]

In 1887, however, such youthful escapades were well behind him and we see 'Tom' Powell, installed in Dorstone Rectory with his young family, taking up his pastoral duties with dedication and enthusiasm

The School

Dorstone was very fortunate to have a school as early as the beginning of the 17th century, as it undoubtedly did. Such early schools are quite rare and most village schools in England were not established until the 19th century.

It would seem that we are indebted for the benefit of this early education to the Rev. Meredith Maddy, a gentleman in Holy Orders with a living in London, but whose family origins were at the Cwm Farm in Dorstone which was owned by the family until the late 19th Century. He was part of a large family, many of them buried in Dorstone churchyard.

The Reverend Meredith Maddy died in 1643 and left provision in his will (dated August 1642) for the building of a school in Dorstone and the salary of a master.

"and whereas I have determined and resolved to erect a free school in the parish of Dorstone which I trust is in good forwardness already for the building thereof and to endow the sd. school with 20 1 p. ann. for the maintenance of the master there forever...."

The property belonging to the charity and the income therefrom was as follows:-

A rent charge of £38 issuing out of two houses in Garlick Hill, and a cooperage and four houses in Sugar-loaf Court, in the city of London, the property of the governors and guardians of the Founding Hospital.

A yearly deduction of £7.12s. is made from this rent-charge, which we presume to be in respect of land tax.

Farming

Sometimes the corn has failed us,
Sometimes the harvest is good,
One year is a year of rain,
Another a year of dryness,
One year the apples are abundant,
Another year the plums are lacking,
Yet we have gone on living.

T. S. Eliot.

A hundred years ago, Dorstone was an entirely agricultural community. Everyone who lived here had some connection with the land either directly as farmers, or indirectly in ancillary trades, such as blacksmith, wheelwright or shopkeeper.

There were about forty-three agricultural holdings (out of ninety-eight households recorded in the 1881 census) ranging from as little as four acres to the five hundred and sixty acres of Cwm Farm (which then included Nant-y-bar). Fourteen of them were over one hundred acres, seven were between thirty and one hundred acres and the rest were fewer than thirty acres. Not only did these vary in size, but also in quality of land, from Grade 1 agricultural land in the valley to poor, bracken-covered land rising to over one thousand feet

DORSTONE, HEREFORDSHIRE.

SMALL FREEHOLD FARM.

MR. J. H. SUNDERLAND, SEN.,

WILL SELL BY AUCTION,

On Tuesday, the 11th day of April, 1876,

At 2 o'clock p.m., subject to Conditions.

AT THE PANDY INN, DORSTONE,

ALL THAT

FARM HOUSE,

BUILDINGS AND FARM,

CALLED "PENLAND,"

In the Parish of Dorstone, in the County of Hereford, 11 Miles from the Village of Dorstone and 6 Miles from the Market Town of Hay, consisting of a substantial Stone-built Dwelling House, with Range of Buildings and Enclosed Fold Yard, adjoining the Highway; together with

50 ACRES

MORE OR LESS OF

PRODUCTIVE LAND,

30 Acres of which are Arable, and the remainder Pasture, now and for many years past in the occupation of Mr. Andrew Davies. The Buildings consist of a Barn, Stable, Cow House, Shed and Piggy, Cider Mill and Dart House.

For further Particulars apply to Mr. Llanwern, Solicitor, or the Auctioneer both of Hereford.

Cider Making

Cider making was another annual ritual involving a great many people, an event which was part work and part social. Apple orchards were a notable feature of Dorstone's landscape until quite recently. Mrs. G. Probert (Olive Perry's mother) wrote eloquently in the W.I. Diary for 1965 of her regret at the disappearance of the Bell orchards, which had formed an outstanding part of her view from Little Penllan.

The abundant produce of these orchards provided Dorstone's staple drink, for tea was expensive in those days.