

A step back in Tyme at Trimstone

Saxons, Normans and Roger's murder in 1236

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Trimstone – a history fragment, including a murder!

Our journey at Trimstone might begin with the Vikings over there in Normandy. However, it is almost certain that Trimstone was one of the eleven Saxon 'villein holdings' of the manor of Bradwell almost a thousand years ago, when William the Conqueror made his sister's son, Ralph de Limesy, his tenant-in-chief there. We are confident there has been a settlement here from well before the Normans (the 'Northmen's') arrival and their subduing of the Saxons in 1066 but yes, Trimstone is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Edric the Saxon held it and there were five smallholders and eleven villagers before the Conquest.

We hope that as you come down the lane you can imagine that you are going back in history. The track would pre-date any construction and your imagination can create this lovely little settlement, well protected from the north winds by the hills behind it and even now, a tranquil place to come and rest. Despite the main road and its mile-stone at the junction being only 300 yards away, it doesn't seem like that and the noise of traffic is non-existent for the vast majority of the time.

You can wander around the swimming pool area and see the original water wheel in place with its leat which fed it from the quarry pond on the higher side of the road. It can still rotate and one day it may be a project... all the workings are still in place in the Mill Room in the hallway to the Pool. Have a wander around the south facing gardens and go into the front door and through into the lounge and bar area, the oldest part of the original house and with its inglenook fireplace and bread oven. You can see the original servants' bells on the wall too – repositioned from their original site. The water supply came/comes from 'higher up' and we found one of the original tree-trunks which would have been used for this purpose, traditionally elm. One day we shall have that on display too.

There is plenty of naturally available water (too much sometimes but we're still on our own purified supply, with a small South West Water top-up when that runs low). We are at the head of a valley with a good defensive position, plenty of stone nearby and lush, fertile, well-draining pasture around us. The property is south facing, protected by the surrounding hills from the worst of the prevailing winds and enjoying a lovely natural vista down the valley as well, one that is free for guests - the envy of many. They mined tin and silver (probably) at nearby Spreacombe (only two miles away) and Combe Martin, suspected to be well before the Romans too. Of course, I suspect we had some of those unconquered Celts 'round these yer parts'.... and it is suggested that it is true that it was our forbears - Miltons (Myltons/Meltons de Meltons) who went off to help found the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well (the Roanoak Island Project makes fascinating reading incidentally, especially for those keen to prove that it was North Devonians and not Plymouthians who founded the earliest settlements on the East Coast!). Our Milton forebears can be traced back to those times in North Devon – we haven't travelled far!

The Name

However, back to what we do know! "Trimstone", the corner stone or the keystone/'trim' stone? Well, probably not in this instance. It's fun being the only one in the world and this helps tremendously when googling the word for Hotel or Restaurant information, let alone destination details but actually we suggest it is named after the Trempestone Family who appear to have lived here – chicken and egg style, were they named because of the place they lived – perhaps the siting of a large stone or a meeting place where animals

may have been traded or traversed some natural boundaries. The beginnings of the river Caen run through the property too, as a small fresh stream originating further up towards Ilfracombe. There's nothing more likely than Norman influences there, as well as 'ver La Tour' for Velator in Braunton ('Brantone' in the Domesday Book with its named church for St Brannock built on the River Caen and which runs through our property as a small stream!).

Studies say that the ancient syllables might point to the first use of an important British institution – the stile that ramblers use to traverse a hedge or wall. The earliest written records (1238) suggest a Thirteenth Century word – Trepelstan (see, it's different from the murdered fellow!). This is where the romantics find their way – the antique English word for stone is 'stan' and 'trepel' appears to have meant 'to tread' (as in 'trample' and 'tramp'). The hamlet may have been named in the seventh century or possibly after the arrival of the Normans in the eleventh, the tramping stone, or the stone you tread upon. Was this the useful rock which men from the early ages used to jump over a wall into a pen where they kept their animals – it's all a bit fanciful that one!

What about 'trempe' – to temper or soak is the French translation and it may be as simple as that in view of the water we can have here sometimes! Aah for 'Google Translate' and the new research tool this provides us now!

Bradwell Manor – over Trimstone

In 1303, Bradwell was held by Augustinus de Pyn and in 1316 it passed to Baldewinus Flemmyg. Personal names on tax rolls from 1332 and 1524 give no clues to the hamlet's name but in 1564 Richard Eyre transferred certain properties including Trimstone. Eyre became Ayre and there are still many of them around!

In 1332, there were twenty-five tax-payers in Bradwell (probably more than there are now....!) so the manor was quite prosperous. After The Black Death, the old feudal land system changed and taxes were levied on parishes and by then, it was £4.16/8.

In 1428, the tenant was Johannes Yeo and yes, there are still Yeos around today and I know a John!

Ghosts and ghoulies?

So what do else we know? We do know that in the "Crown Pleas" of 1238 (see the Devon and Cornwall Record Society, volume 28) that Walter Russel and his son Richard killed Roger de Trempestone and fled. They were in the Bradwell Titheing 'which was in mercy' and so they were 'exacted and outlawed'. Later it is testified that they were outlawed at the suit of Adam de Morthow (Mortehoe, near Woolacombe).

'They were in Bradwell tithing, which is in mercy and he had chattels worth five shillings, that titheing, etc. Trimstone titheing is in mercy for not arresting these criminals.'

"Eyes" were periodic visitations by royal justices for hearing when the King's Peace had been broken and a felony committed. Trimstone would have been a titheing' or hamlet of ten households in the Domesday Book. The Crown Pleas mentioned the manor of Bradwell and Trimstone, both of which were 'blamed' for not arresting Walter Russel and his son. The Lord of the Manor had the responsibility of policing his patch so I wonder why he didn't act.

One day we'll find out more about this crime, the miscreants and the victim but for now, is Roger the ghost who some say they have seen in some of the earlier parts of the property – or is that just some marketing romance added by owners over the years? We haven't sensed any premonitions here ourselves though sometimes things do go 'wrong' all at the same time and someone gets the blame – perhaps it's all 'Roger's

fault'.... A chamber-maid suggests she sensed an apparition on one of the beds and one of our recent guests said there was lots of creaking from overhead and wondered if it was floorboards or footfall – but all that is above the room now is a roof space..... Some of the occurrences are eerie..... but most visitors feel the Place is tranquil and really relaxing, helping to give them just the break they wanted and we assure you of a warm welcome to refresh your spirits!

The Property

Well, Trimstone Manor Country House Hotel 'started' as a yeoman farmer's abode and related farm buildings (and the cottages opposite and up the road were farm workers' abodes) and parts of the centre of the building go back at least three to four hundred years. The occupant was quite wealthy in that he afforded 'three hearths'.

There aren't too many original features of note still (though we did reposition the servants' bells when we undertook substantial improvement works in 2007/8) and the Hotel was created in 1976 and then extended in 1986 by amalgamating a cottage at the western end of the main property and an extension to the east as well, which now houses the owners' accommodation.

The shippen, granary and other farm buildings were converted to holiday accommodation and the original owners' accommodation (some without planning permission as things seemed easier 'back then' although all now secured formally of course!). We do have the original water wheel fed by the leat from our mill pond across the Lane – one day we shall have to make this work again. All the workings are there and intact and can be seen from the swimming pool area.

Names

We have touched upon Richard Eyre from 1564 before and on 2 March 1669, Robert Isaac sold "Trimstone" to Thomas Crascomb, a yeoman farmer from Braunton for £30. It was tenanted by Thomas Estaway and then Susan Blaney. Susan's sons had a tenancy as well – they were called James and David Wyot of Marwood – no doubt the Family of Barnstaple's Town Clerk who recorded that Town's history at about the same time. In 1669, the Hearth Tax return showed that she had those three hearths. In theory, it was better to have as few as possible as the least tax would be paid but of course, if you wanted to reflect your wealth and stature, what better than to be able to afford three hearths when 'everyone else' only had the one.... Robert Isaac, in one of the West Down manor houses and who sold Trimstone in 1669, had nine hearths...! The introduction to the Returns says: "a three hearth house had 6-8 rooms and people with more than that were almost certain to be yeomen or extremely prosperous craftsmen". In the same return, poor John Estaway only had the one and was he a relative of Thomas or John, lately of Trimstone?

Rolling forwards, owners of land at Trimstone in 1780 were John Peake, Peter Coats, Richard Chugg (we assume from the tax assessed, in the main House), James Parminter, John Coats and Robert Chugg. Names that appeared include Snow and Brimley and Mary Cloug owned a parcel, rented to John Chugg, in 1820.

1822

In 1822, the Rolle Estate had a significant sum of Estate Duty to find and the well-known inheriting Clinton, Hall and Fortescue families were forced to sell significant land interests, through its own Act of Parliament. These tenanted properties included the Manor at Bradwell and comprising the best part of 1200 acres stretching up to Willingcott, Buttercombe and Trimstone as well. Well-known local names such as Avery, Challacombe, Chugg, Symons and Heddon were included in the tenants' list at the time. Back prior to this

in 1802, the Trimstone tenants were called Wilkinson – I wonder if any relative of Reverend Wilkinson noted in 1832?

Trimstone was mentioned specifically in this Act, with some delightful sounding small parcels of land named, no doubt, after previous tenants. These were seventy-eight small fields allocated into parcels named:- Parminters, Kellys, Moores, Peakes, Chuggs and Hancocks. One day it would be good to trace which were which! This came to about 220 acres and for which an aggregate rent of about £6.75 was payable every year! This was six small-holdings so quite small amounts of ground for each tenant but of course, some of them may have had other ground elsewhere too. There was also a forty-eight acre wood – which we assume is the one stretching down to Bradwell from Trimstone even now. George Langdon ended-up as the purchaser of the majority of the ground around Trimstone.

In the 1841 census, there was an amazing number of people living at Trimstone and working the land. Counting all the children too, there were forty-seven – far more than now! The names then included:- Williams, Snow, Howard (perhaps the same ones connected to my mother's Family and in Georgeham, it's a small world), Coats, Beer, Langdon, Kift, Parkin, Cocking, Ley, Hocombe, Crudge, Gerrard, Burgess and Bray. By 1851, Verney, Pile, Walter, Yeo and Tucker and Watby had arrived and in 1871, Russell, Pugsley and Geen were here and 1881, Worth, Street, Seldon, Anderton, Greenwood, Phillips, Jones, Arscott, Copp, Brace, Deakins, Manning and Mock. In the 1901 census, the population had fallen to thirty-one and new names were Denham, Parkhouse, Compton, Greenslade, Joslin, Clarke and Hodge. I am sorry to list all these names but do so for the local readers who may well begin to recognise some of their relatives – or descendants of these names still living in the vicinity!

Starting with William, the Langdon family who popped-up in the 1841 census farmed at Trimstone for probably the longest consecutive period since the Eyres. William was succeeded by George who was then succeeded by his son William, seeing the farm increase to 330 acres by 1861 and employing four men and two boys. All of this then was bought by Edward Anderton, who came to live here and in 1910 and he had 379 acres altogether.

The 'Trimstone Estate' was sold by the Langdons (who had acquired it from William Yeo it seems) at auction in the 1870s using well-know local firm Messrs Sanders and Son (now absorbed into the present Messrs Phillips, Smith and Dunn). It was described as a "highly valuable and attractive freehold residence and agricultural property known as Trimstone and lying on a lovely position on the southern slope including a charming old fashioned house containing Hall, three sitting rooms, billiard room, nine bedrooms, bathroom, complete offices, acetylene gas and water by gravitation, stables and garage with terrace, tennis lawn, etc". It had a "productive kitchen garden, a pair of cottages, extensive farm buildings and valuable pasture lands. This took place at the Kings Arms in Georgeham at "three o'clock on August 19th". Mr Edward Anderton was the successful purchaser.

Mr Anderton resided there for some years and died on 22 October 1923 and his three daughters, as executrixes, sold Trimstone by auction using Hampton & Sons, London. It was described then as a "highly valuable and attractive freehold residential and agricultural property known as Trimstone and lying most compactly in a lovely position on a Southern slope and including a charming old fashioned house containing Hall, three sitting rooms, billiard room, nine bedrooms, bathroom, complete offices, acetylene gas and water by gravitation, stabling and garage, attractive pleasure grounds with terrace, tennis lawn, etc". It had a "productive kitchen garden, a pair of cottages, extensive farm buildings for large head of cattle, corn mill with water power with highly valuable pasture lands of about 139 acres. The conveyance was signed by the beneficiaries of his estate, it seems, on 29 September that year when William Dudley (Dullam?) Pugsley of

Arlington bought it for the sum of £8995. This comprised 156 acres, 37 perches, two ‘messuages’ or cottages with the gardens and premises and lastly the House itself containing one rood and five perches. The buyer agreed to pay the ‘chancery rent’ too – a princely sum of £5 every year to the “Dissenting Minister” at Braunton. – we’re back to St Brannock’s again. Mr Pugsley used Lloyds Bank for a £6000 mortgage and Mr Anderton had used National and Provincial Bank. We have an original of the sales’ particulars now, with some charming photographs and showing the ladder to the lower lawn!

Estate Agency was doing well, even then. “The District is notably bracing and healthy, whilst the Scenery of Incomparable beauty to be found along this stretch of the North Devon Coast is too famous to need description.”

The last large sale was when the Pugsleys sold the House and 126 acres and since that date, small parcels of land were sold-off by subsequent owners. The Bigge Family lived in the property as a family home up till Dougie and Mary Turner bought the place in 1976 and created the beginnings of the Hotel from it. Remember that after the Second World war the average farmstead was only about fifty acres so it was still of some comparative size.

Up-to-Date

We acquired Trimstone and forty-four acres from the Balfours in 2007 who themselves had bought it from the Turners in 1998, with partners who subsequently they bought-out. The property was very ‘tired’ and our plans were to move-in quickly and over a period of years gradually and systematically repair, maintain and improve it.

However, in creating our history we have had our own unfortunate experiences involving family, fraud, criminal damage, defending against one of those no-win-no-fee defamation suites (which was just ‘dropped’), a political campaign, inability to move so unable to sell our old house and in a falling market and heart bypass surgery.... the consolation (well, making us feel better about our awful experiences too) is that we’ve improved the Hotel and facilities far quicker but we never planned to lose all the trade and close for fifteen months into the bargain, having to start from scratch in the depths of the recession in February 2009. One day there may be a book of its own and ghosts to bury..... However, here’s to the future, making history for all the right reasons and happy holidays and meals for all our visitors – and for us, as we are just guardians upon this walk of history for those who follow in our footsteps – however long in the future that might be.

We may be here a while – and we’ve planted 100 extra trees including a few indigenous flowering variants and one or two more exotic to enhance the parkland feel – including an endangered Woolemi Pine, only discovered in South Australia in 1994 and with only 100 adult specimens in the world. We’re keen to protect the heritage and enhance the property whilst we are here – it’s a property which deserves and demands to be used and if we can build on the already attractive gardens, that would be good too.

The Manor to which it has become accustomed?

Is there evidence of the property being a Manor House? Who knows. Certainly it has been referred to as ‘Trimstone Manor’ since it became a Hotel and way back in the early twentieth Century, the owner was referred to as “Squire” but was that just endearingly and without formal substance? It wasn’t one of the four manors and came under Bradwell, just down the valley, which became the parish of West Down – the others being Aylescott, Stowford and West Down itself. Certainly in 1910, Edward Anderton was the most important landowner in West Down with 379 acres and he lived here, so yes, Squire!

We hope you've enjoyed your tour through the pages of time, bringing you all up to date with Trimstone Manor and Tyme Restaurant here. We hope that we shall be good custodians of the Place for the next occupants, however many years ahead before they take the reins and in the meantime, we shall try our hardest to ensure it is a good place for people to come to stay and indeed just to seek refreshment in our Restaurant so they can enjoy the House, the gardens and grounds. If you'd like to savour some of what we're trying to offer and some of its history too, we'd love to have you come and share with us! If you know any of the extra history, we'd be glad to correct any inaccuracies and add some more!

Our very best wishes

Philip and Helen Milton and Staff

www.trimstone.co.uk