

PLACE-NAMES OF COMPTON DANDO

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Many of the place and field names of Compton Dando are ancient and provide valuable clues to earlier landscapes, farming systems and land use. The study of place-names is highly-specialized, and is full of pitfalls for the unwary. It is particularly important to identify the earliest forms of names, since many have gradually changed over the centuries and are now quite different from their original form. In Compton Dando several names which originated in descriptive terms which were once common but later became obsolete have been slowly changed to words which are meaningless but sound familiar. The origin of other descriptive names such as New Farm, Bathford, Cherry Orchard, Nutgrove and Yew Tree Cottage is obvious and they are not included here. The following list discusses place-names with less obvious origins.

COMPTON DANDO The parish derives its name from the settlement or 'ton' in the valley or combe along the river Chew. It is distinguished from the many other Comptons by the name of its 12th century owners, the D'Alno or Dando family.

WICK FARM The earliest form of the name is Sewardswick. Wicks are common throughout the country and were specialized farms, often dairy farms. They were separate from other land-holdings in a manor which were subject to a common system of farming controlled by manorial customs and regulations. Seward was one of the original Saxon farmers.

GRUBBESWICK This is now known as Knowle Farm and like Sewardswick was a dairy farm, part of the manor but not subject to many of the manorial rules. The first element of the name comes from an early Saxon farmer.

PEPPERSHELLS The ancient name has been changed out of all recognition over the centuries. The earliest reference is in a document of 1327 although the name is several centuries earlier. In 1327 it was given as 'Pippeleshaye' made up of the personal name 'Pippel' and 'haye' meaning an enclosure from the Saxon 'haeg' meaning hedge (as in the French 'la haie'). The fields on the north side of the lane are still described as 'Pippelhayes' in the Compton Dando Tithe Map of 1842.

SLATE LANE The name is a corruption of 'Sleight or Stait' and the modern form is meaningless. It has nothing to do with slate stone. Sleight was a commonly used medieval word describing common grazing land for sheep and cattle. This was the lane along which livestock were driven to pasture on the high ground above the village.

SLEEP LANE This is in Whitchurch parish and is included here only because it is such a good example of the change from an obsolete medieval word to a meaningless but familiar modern term. The original name was 'Slype' which was commonly used to mean a narrow passageway such as between buildings in a town or in a church or monastery. Here it merely describes a narrow lane or thoroughfare.

CULVERHAYS A 'culver' or 'culverhouse' was the medieval name for a dovecote or pigeon-house. Keeping pigeons was a perquisite reserved to the lord of the manor, but since Compton Dando never had a resident lord the right passed to the tenant of the demesne or manor farm. The dove-house stood in the field east of the parish church. In some documents the field is described as a 'culverhay' and in others as 'dovehouse close'. It would have contained numerous nesting holes where the adults continued to feed the young birds or 'squabs' until they were almost full grown. Their flesh was prized as a source of meat.

FAIRY HILL No convincing explanation has been found for this name, although it has been used for several centuries and is listed in the Smyth family (of Ashton Court) archives from the early 17th century. Throughout the country there are names incorporating supernatural elements such as devil, goblin, giant, fairy etc., possibly to explain remarkable earthworks thought to be beyond human strength or to describe places thought to be haunted. The name may possibly be connected with the great earthwork of the Wansdyke which would have been such a remarkable feature along the lower part of the hill.

VICARAGE LANE This would have been a much used route since it leads to the mill. It takes its name from the vicarage beside the church. This is now called the Old Rectory although the incumbents of Compton Dando were vicars from the late 13th century when the D'Alno family gave the 'advowson' or ecclesiastical rights in the parish to Bath abbey. Thereafter the abbey became the rector and appointed successive vicars to minister to the spiritual needs of the parish. After the Reformation the 'advowson' passed to the Crown and in 1638 was given by Charles I to the bishops of Bath and Wells. The appointment of successive vicars of Compton Dando is recorded from 1318 to the present. The vicarage was a small, thatched building until 1845 when it was rebuilt on a grand scale

COURT HILL The road leading to the house in which the manorial court was held (now called Court Hill House). An upper room in which the court assembled retains its elaborate plaster ceiling. Manorial court records survive in the Smyth archives in Bristol Record Office (now Bristol Archives) for the period 1567-1664 and in the Popham archives in the Somerset Record Office (now Somerset Heritage Centre) for the period 1664 to the 19th century.

RANKERS LANE The earlier form of the name was Rank Cross Lane. An entry in the manorial court record for 1731 mentions that William Martin was fined 'for throwing dung in Rank Cross Lane. It is likely that the name originated because of a wayside cross or crucifix which once stood at the side of the lane. Such crosses were common during the Middle Ages but most were destroyed as idolatrous during the Reformation or by puritans during the 17th century. The base of another wayside cross stood close to the Wansdyke in Bathford Lane where a field called Stump Cross shows its location.

COCKERS HILL Although sounding as though it is derived from a personal name, the earliest reference so far found makes it more complex. The 12th and 13th century records of Bath abbey show that the monks were required to pray daily for Fulk d'Alno who gave them Compton Dando, land at Kokeredeshull and lands at Stortes 'between Wendesdich

(Wansdyke) and the devizes (boundary) with Corston'. The name Kokeredeshull could still be based on the name of an individual landowner.

LYE HILL The term 'lye' or 'leigh' denotes land reclaimed or brought into cultivation from woodland or waste ground. This hillside on the eastern edge of the parish was no doubt converted to arable during the 13th century when the population increased and the demand for foodstuffs rose accordingly.

CONEYGRE A large ancient warren or coneygre occupied the land at the edge of Lord's Wood. The production of coneyes or rabbits was a profitable business since they were in demand both for their flesh and for their fur which was used in the production of felt hats. They were known as 'coneyes' until the mid-18th century and the term 'rabbits' was used for the young ones. Some of the artificial burrows or 'pillow mounds' can still be seen and the foundations of the warrener's lodge are clearly visible when the field is ploughed. The Tithe Map of 1842 names several other fields in the parish as 'warren' or 'coneygre'.

TUCKING MILL Tucking was the west-country term for fulling, that is beating newly-woven cloth with heavy hammers powered by water in order to thicken or felt it. Such mills were once common throughout the district and by the use of a mill pond even small streams could be used to provide the necessary power. The name is a reminder of the former importance of cloth production in the economy of the region. The ruins of a former nonconformist chapel built by the miller, James Bince, and licensed for worship in 1807 survive nearby.

CLAYLEY An ancient name which is derived from the Saxon word 'cally' meaning bald, bare or treeless. The Saxon charter of AD 936 whereby King Athelstan granted lands at Marksbury to Ethelem and later to Glastonbury abbey described the land north of Hunstrete which eventually became part of the common grazing land of Compton Dando as Cally or Calwen Down. This landscape is still largely devoid of trees.

HUNSTRETE There have been several versions of this name over the centuries, possibly as the result of various scribes' attempts to record local speech in documents. Throughout the Middle Ages the hamlet and substantial manor house belonged to Glastonbury abbey and as early as 1028 a charter refers to the place as 'Hundesterte'. Later the name was recorded as 'Houndstreet'. The modern form of Hunstrete dates from the 19th century. The names all seem to be based on the fact that the land there included a deer park which is mentioned in the Charter of AD 936 as a 'Game Enclosure'.

THE HAW HAW This is a circular earthwork in a field on the north side of Hunstrete and is marked on Ordnance Survey maps. There has been much speculation about the origin of the name, but the explanation seems straightforward. When Francis Popham inherited the Hunstrete estate in 1772 he immediately began the building of a large new mansion on the grandest scale. He died in 1779 but his widow, Dorothy, continued work on the immense project and by the time of her death in 1797 the mansion was one of the largest in Somerset. Much work was also done on the landscape including an enlargement of the lake in front of the house, a chain of five smaller lakes, a formal garden and extensive tree-planting. A summer house or gazebo was built and provided a view

across the valley of the river Chew and beyond to Kelston Round Hill and the slopes of Lansdown. The gazebo was surrounded by a sunken fence known as a 'ha ha' or 'haw haw' which prevented access by cattle but gave uninterrupted views. After Dorothy's death the mansion was left empty for long periods. It eventually deteriorated so much that in 1836 it was demolished, leaving only the pillars from the front entrance as a romantic ruin in the landscape. The gazebo has long since gone but the surrounding earthwork survives.

PIGSMOOR This refers to the land on the right-hand side of the junction where Cockers Hill meets the road from Hunstrete to Woollard. It has nothing to do with pigs, but takes its name from a former owner named Pyke or Pykel. A lease granted by Alexander d'Alno (Dando) in 1380 described 'the wood called Pykelsmoor which extends lengthwise to the road which leads to the land of John de Woodborough and in breadth from the same road to the water called Chew'.

BLACKERS MEAD Another property named after a former owner. The 1851 census of Compton Dando records that the house was occupied by Hester Blacker and her family. She was described as 'a coal-carrier with three donkeys'.

SUMMERLEA An ancient name which appears on the Tithe Map of 1842 and on larger scale copies of the Ordnance Survey maps. It describes the land along the Wick Brook which was used for summer grazing and for producing the all-important hay crop to sustain cattle over the winter. The name of the house on the land has recently been changed to Charnwood House.

PRIORY FARM The name is a reminder that throughout the Middle Ages much of the land in Compton Dando belonged to the ancient Benedictine abbey of Bath. The abbey had at one time been a cathedral and the seat of the bishop of the diocese. Successive bishops were titular abbots of Bath abbey although the effective head was the prior. This continued after the bishops moved to Wells and many properties owned by the abbey took their names from the prior. Thus Priory Farm, Prior's Mead and Prior's Wood in Compton Dando, Stanton Prior and Prior Park in Bath.