

**History talk – September 2021 - "Place names and people"**

In this talk, I'm going to see what can be found about the names of the village and its parts, and then talk about a few of the families that have lived here. And where better to start than with the name of the village itself. The first mention of Sutton is in a Saxon deed, dated 891, whereby King Alfred became the possessor of the place referred to as "that the locals call Sutton next the sea shore in the territory called Dorset". Sutton, which means South farmstead, was also mentioned in the Domesday Book, but we can't establish any details as it is included in group or Royal Manors. So the name Sutton is quite old. Preston, by comparison, is much later - it means "Priest's farm" and the first known reference is in 1228. What this means, I think, is that the name Sutton originally applied to the whole of the parish of Preston with Sutton Poyntz. It's completely speculative but the parish could have been the same area as had been held by the Roman villa near the river Jordan in Preston.

The Poyntz family were granted the manor of Sutton some time early in 13th C. This family were based at Curry Mallet near Taunton, and never lived at Sutton. 5 generations held Sutton, named Nicholas, Hugh, Nicholas, Hugh and Nicholas. The last Nicholas did not inherit immediately, as Sutton was part of the dowry of his step-mother. Nicholas seemed to have been a criminal and spendthrift, and couldn't manage on the income from the four villages and other lands he inherited immediately. When eventually his step-mother died, he sold Sutton almost immediately, and he sold or mortgaged all his other properties, so that when he died he did not hold any lands. He left two daughters, one of whom married into the Newburgh family of Winfrith and Lulworth. The Newburghs later owned Sutton, and John Hutchings, an 18thC clergyman who wrote a wonderful and astonishingly well researched book on Dorset History, wrongly assumed they inherited it direct from the last of the Poyntz's.

This means that the Poyntz family only owned Sutton for 100 years. The first reference I have found to Sutton Poyntz as a name was near the end of that time in 1314, but it took another 100 years or so before the name became firmly stuck. Spelling was highly variable, but gradually settled on Pointz with an "i". Over the same period, the family's name gradually settled on Poyntz with a "y". There seems to have been a conscious decision some time early in the 19thC to change the village spelling - the watershed was about 1830 after which the spelling we're familiar with became universal.

Where did the Poyntz family name come from? In truth we really don't know. There was a man named Pons living at around the time of the Norman Conquest, mentioned in two documents, but any link between him and the Poyntz family is entirely speculative and anyway his name is as mysterious and rootless as the name of Poyntz. The origin of the name Poyntz seems to be lost.

If we now turn our attention to place names within the parish, there is an amazing set of books titled "Place Names of Dorset" by A D Mills, which goes through every parish in Dorset establishing ancient references to all the place names they can find, and so helping to establish the meanings. What a fantastic undertaking, part of a national project by the English Place Names Society. This book lists only a very few medieval name references before 1400 - Preston and Sutton, Lodmoor (marshland belonging to Lodda), Wyke (which signifies a dairy farm, later called Wyke Oliver adding the name of the farmer in the 1640's), and Chapple's Close (a field on the west side of Plaisters Lane from Sutton Court Lawns up to the bend). A host of familiar names appear in entries around 1440-1450, including Plaisters Lane (Mills refers to a 1452 document that calls this Playstreet), Chalbury, Rimbury, Bowleaze, Coombe Valley (originally la combe and at some time tautologised), Greenhill, Northdown, Cuckoo Park (originally le Parke), Love Lane (the old name for the far end of Puddledock), Jordan, as well as a number of field and furlong names. I shall come back to Jordan later.

The reason the main village was at Sutton rather than Preston may well have been because the fast-flowing stream there was ideal for milling. The first reference we have found to a mill is in 1273, in the Inquisition Post Mortem for the second Nicholas Poyntz. Inquisitions Post Mortem, incidentally, were records of enquiries held on the death of a landholder - nothing to do with cause of death and everything to do with carefully controlled transfer of land to the next heir. In 1435 there were two mills, one for grain and the other for fulling cloth. By 1750, there were three mills - the ones we now refer to as Preston Mill, Sutton Mill and the Upper Mill. At that time Sutton Mill was rather smaller than it is now, probably with an undershot wheel. The present mill, with its overshot wheel and therefore its need for a larger millpool, was built in about 1815, with the mill house a bit later. So although Thomas Hardy may have had this building partly in mind for Trumpet Major, it didn't exist at the time Hardy was writing about.

Going back to place names, there are three significant later documents that include lists of names of land areas. A survey was carried out in 1788 for Admiral Eliab Harvey who then owned the manor. He had captained HMS Temeraire ("Fighting Temeraire") at Trafalgar and had not endeared himself by trying to overtake HMS Victory in the line of battle. The surveyor pointed out (quite correctly) how agricultural yields could be improved by inclosing the manor. The survey

showed a still medieval farming pattern for much of the manor, with two huge fields (a 400 acre West Field and a 200 acre East Field) divided into smaller "furlongs" and then divided into strips, with each tenant having strips scattered around the manor. The exceptions were Northdown Farm, Jordan Farm and Wyke Oliver where more modern field patterns were in evidence. This survey includes many names that have disappeared, a few still in use such as Rimbury, and one or two just clinging on such as Mawdy Walls which has been preserved in the name of the side road off Preston Road just west of Sutton Road, and Duckcombe whose name has now contracted to the rather less evocative Duckham.

Admiral Hardy sold Sutton to Thomas Weld of Lulworth soon after the date of that survey, and Thomas Weld took the necessary steps to have the parish inclosed. An Inclosure Report, dated 1798, allocates land in bigger, more manageable units - the Report and attached map include a number of field and furlong names. Many existing field boundaries and hedges date back to this division. This Report also dealt with the laying out and maintenance of roads. I rather fear that Plaisters Lane, for example, is nowhere near the 40 feet width that the Report specified. The Report also stipulated a number of quarries for the supply of road maintenance materials. The two most obvious of these are half way up Plaisters Lane and just south of Chalbury on Combe Valley Road, Less obvious until you look is behind Sunnyside Cottages on the left at the south end of Sutton Road.

Thomas Weld had a new Survey done early in the 19thC, with an excellent map (good enough to be able to overlay on a modern OS map); in terms of land units, not much had changed, but the picture for land occupancy for the manor was completely different as a result of Inclosure. It shows 14 main tenants, mostly farming contiguous areas of land rather than the scattered bits in the medieval pattern. Northdown Farm, Southdown Farm, Jordan Farm and Wyke Oliver Farm were pre-existing units, but for the very first time this Survey includes a Home Farm, later known as Sutton Farm, with about 900 acres to the west of the village and down to the sea.

After that, there is the 1838 Tithe Survey, and then the 25" Ordnance Survey Series 2 maps created around 1900, with very detailed lists of field names and (in the case of the Tithe Survey) tenants; these give a good reliable connection down to the present day.

These documents give us a detailed history of field boundaries and names over the last 230 years. There has been a lot of change, and tracking it is complex. Many fields had names like "Ten Acres", and often the actual size was not far from the name, although quite how the name "Seven Acres" came to be used, sometime early in the 19thC for the 41 acres between what is now Seven Acres Road and Combe Valley Road is beyond me. The name did not exist before – this area was part of the Great West Field. Other names seem to me inexplicable other than as some bizarre rural sense of humour, such as "Cream Bags" and "Two Planks". Others still preserve memories of the village's history, such as a small field called "Winsload cut off by road" which shows, almost certainly, a rerouting of the road east out of Preston when the Turnpike Road was created in 1781. I promised to tell the story of Batter's Plot, and maybe you're hoping to hear of some Dorset attempt to restore the Catholic faith, perhaps knowing that the Howard family, and also the Welds, were Catholics. So sorry to disappoint, but Batter's Plot, or Batter's Tenement, was the name of a tiny field referred to in documents around 1780, which then disappeared from the record. We know its size and roughly where it was, but no more than that. But it would probably be possible to find the exact location of Batter's Plot, and other field names that have disappeared, by collating with later surveys. Possible but not easy.

The maps I have talked about have no street names in Sutton Poyntz. The Series 2 Ordnance Survey maps had street names in conurbations such as Weymouth, but not in villages. In the 1911 Census, the latest I have examined, people for the main part still just gave their addresses as "Sutton Poyntz", although a few added a house name. By 1926, street names had been added, for example in planning applications I have seen, but I don't know exactly when this was done. We know Plaisters Lane and Puddledock Lane are older names, but others, including Sutton Road and Mission Hall Lane, are probably only about 100 years old. As I have said before, Silver Street is newer than that - Sue Wintle was told by her mother that the village children made the name up some time in the late 1930's or early 1940's.

As I said a moment ago, Sutton Farm was created as a result of Inclosure in around 1800. The first tenant was Thomas Willis about whom I know nothing, but in 1829 Robert and Thomas Scutt came from Affpuddle to take over the farm, with another brother John as dairyman. Their partnership broke up in 1849. John Scutt later farmed Southdown Farm, followed by his son Charles and then his grandson Angus who farmed at Jordan Farm. The Scutt Memorial Hall was a memorial to Charles, put up by his widow.

It was probably in their time at Sutton Farm that some exciting pre-historic artefacts were found. The farmers send some labourers up to the hillside called Rimbury, to clear the field for ploughing. The field was full of quite large irregular stones, and as they shifted the stones, they found many of them had clay pots hidden beneath. They knew that

some years before a local carter had unearthed a horde of Roman coins which had made him wealthy, so "Ahah" they said, "these crocks'll be full of gold, and we'll be rich, rich as old King Creosote". So imagine their disappointment when they found nothing but bone and ash. In frustration, they set a number of the pots up in the field, and used them as stone-throwing targets. The farmers heard about it and got them to stop. They then called in a group of local "Antiquarians", led by one Charles Warne who later included the story in his book "Celtic Tumuli of Dorset". The Rimbury urn-burial field became quite well known, and in 1912 a Lord Abercrombie wrote a paper linking this site with another Dorset site as evidence for an influx of people from the continent in around 750BC. The pottery type became known as Deverel-Rimbury. Later evidence has shown that Lord Abercrombie was almost completely wrong, but the name for the pottery, now dated to about 500 years earlier, is still in use.

In 1849, John Allen Pope took over Sutton Farm, and indeed for a time farmed the astonishing area of 1950 acres, most of the Parish. He had 40 labourers working for him, not counting youths. Soon after he arrived in Sutton Poyntz, he had the farmhouse rebuilt, with Puddledock Lane diverted to run south of the farmhouse rather than north, and a grand driveway crossing an artificial lake. John had a large family, 7 sons and 4 daughters. His two oldest sons took over the farming from him, one at Sutton Farm and the other at Northdown. Two of his other sons did rather better for themselves - in 1870, still in their 20's, they bought a half share of the Mason Eldridge brewery in Dorchester, renaming it Eldridge Pope. A few years later they were joined by yet another brother and bought the other 50% share; they then built a new brewery on the site now called Brewery Square.

I promised to come back to the question of the Jordan, hill, farm and river, which I'm sure you will agree is one of the more interesting names in the parish. The name Jordan, applied to the farm, was well established by 1650. The Tithe survey of 1838 is the earliest reference I have found to Jordan Hill, and also has entries for Jordan Cliff and Jordan Beach. I have not found any references to Jordan as a name for the river before the 1890's Ordnance Survey maps, although the 1855 Weymouth Waterworks Act may have included the name. Mills related Jordan to a name in a 1452 document, which he said was written as Churdoneslade. I had seen a slightly older document in which the place is written Cherchedonysslade, which threw me off the scent but I now realise is probably the 15thC equivalent of a typo. Slade is an area of valley and don is a hill or down. Mills took Chur either to be the name of the river (giving valley under the hill by the river Chur) or an old English word for bend (so valley under the hill at the river bend). In truth, there is not much of a bend in the river below Jordan Hill, so the second hypothesis seems less likely. This is an excellent example of a common process called "folk etymology", where old names lose their meanings as the language changes, and are simplified into more familiar forms with different significance. Here, "hill by the river Chur", Churdon, came to be associated with the river itself (a process called back formation) and was mangled to the present Jordan. If the old name of the river was indeed "Chur", it would be the third river in Dorset with the same derivation, since the Char at Charmouth and the Cerne at Cerne Abbas and Charminster also derive from the Old English "carne" or "cearne" meaning stony or pebbly. But in any case, the idea that the name Jordan was not itself the old name of the river, but contains the river's old name hidden, so to speak in open view, just seems to me to be beautifully elegantly ironic.

That's all for now, but there is lots of unfinished village history research waiting to be done. I have gathered quite a lot of the available sources but by no means all, and if anyone wants to tackle any village history projects, I would be delighted to discuss and to pass on the information I have collected.