

West Dean History Trail

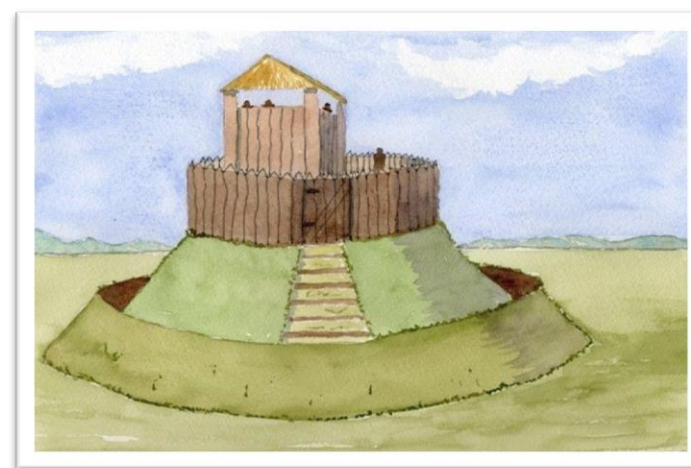
An introduction to the History of West Dean (Page 1)

NAME OF THE VILLAGE

In Saxon times, at least by 880, the village name was **Deone**. By the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 the name had become **Duene**, meaning quiet and sheltered. In 1265 the name was **Westdone** and by 1270 this had become **Westdune**. In the present name of **West Dean**, 'Dean' means a vale or the narrow wooded valley of a stream, still an accurate description and even more so in times past.

OWNERSHIP OF THE VILLAGE

At his death in 899 King Alfred left to his younger son Ambresbyrig (Amesbury) and Deone (West Dean). At that time the 29,000 acres of woodland of the royal manor of Amesbury included Bentley Wood, now part of the parish of West Dean. By the time of Edward the Confessor (reign 1042 – 1066), ownership of the village was divided between Boda, who held the Hampshire half, and Godric, who held the Wiltshire half. Following the Norman Conquest, both parts were held by Waleran the Hunter. In 1087 when the New Forest was created Waleran became its warden.



HOW THE NORMAN MOTTE MAY HAVE LOOKED
COURTESY OF PATRICK HARGRAVE

Mostly the estate passed to the next generation - only on five occasions did it pass by sale and purchase. In 1618 the Manor was sold to John Evelyn whose memorial and those of his descendants may be seen in the Borbach Chantry. Four generations later the estate was sold and thereafter it passed mostly by sale becoming in 1820 part of the Norman Court Estate. In 1903 the estate was bought by Washington Singer of the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Following his death in 1934 the estate passed to his son, Grant. Grant Singer was killed at El Alamein in 1942 and this led to the sale of the estate in 1945, by lots at public auction. Tenants in West Dean were then able for the first time to become owners of their homes.

THE VILLAGE IN THE DOMESDAY BOOK OF 1086

There are separate entries in the Domesday Book for the Wiltshire and Hampshire parts but, as they were both owned by Waleran, the entries have been added together here. Land was assessed in hides (roughly 120 acres) and virgates (4 to a hide). In Duene there were 4 hides and 2 virgates so approximately 540 acres. Of these 9 were meadows which were used for hay and grazing. The 6 ploughs of cultivated land (a plough being the amount of land which could be ploughed by 8 oxen) were divided between Waleran himself, 2½ ploughs retained, and his sub-tenants, 22 unfree peasants. There were 2½ mills for the grinding of corn. These were water powered by the River Dun, windmills not being introduced until the next century.

WEST DEAN IN THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR 1642 - 1646

Wiltshire was frequently traversed by both parliamentarians and royalists. Salisbury, largely by preference parliamentarian, changed hands six times. Sir John Evelyn, the then owner of the Manor and living at Deane House, was a leading parliamentarian locally. In July 1642 he executed the Military Ordinance for raising forces in Wiltshire. In October of that year he was appointed to lead the collection in Salisbury of voluntary contributions of money and the gifts of horses and arms. In March 1643 when a weekly contribution became compulsory (£725 for Wiltshire) he was one of the Committee appointed to raise it.

In 1644 Deane House was garrisoned by the parliamentary forces. It was from here that in September 1644 Major Dowett rode to Farleigh Castle in Somerset to carry off sixty horses which had been taken by the royalists from the local inhabitants. In December of that year Major Dowett and Major Wansey defeated the royalists and retired to Deane House with 80 prisoners. Major Wansey here found such good quarters that he declined to move on.

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CHURCHES AND PARISHES

Until 1473 there were two ecclesiastical parishes in West Dean, the Hampshire parish surrounding the Church of All Saints and the Wiltshire parish surrounding the Church of St Mary. The Church of All Saints stood on Moody's Hill to the left of the road and the then Church of St Mary adjoined the Borbach Chantry. In 1473 it was decided that the two parishes should be united for ecclesiastical purposes under the rector of St Mary's who would conduct services at both churches. The date at which All Saints church was destroyed is unknown. The old Church of St Mary later declined. In 1866 it was decided to replace it with the present Church of St Mary and the old church was demolished in 1868. Marking stones in the old churchyard show where it stood.

In 1860 the Wesleyan Methodist Church was built near the bottom of Moody's Hill and after many successful years it closed in 1971 when membership dwindled.

As regards civil parishes, it was not until 1883 that the Hampshire portion of West Dean parish was amalgamated with West Tytherley. It was then that the county boundary underwent slight change such that the site of the Church of All Saints became part of Wiltshire.

POPULATION AND HOUSES

The population of West Dean has changed little over three centuries. Bishop's counts showed the population to be 190 in 1676 and 185 in 1783. Regular ten year national censuses have been carried out from 1801. In 1801 the population stood at 222 and increased each census until 1871 when it reached 322. Later it decreased to a low of 249 in 1901. The Hampshire part of the village was included in the returns for West Tytherley from 1911 onwards and the census for that year shows 187 in Wiltshire and 64 in Hampshire a total of 251. As census returns are only open to the public 100 years after completion only the totals for the Wiltshire part are available from 1921. These show lows of 176 in that year and 177 in 1961 with the highest point being 291 in 1981. The figure for 2011 is 252, an overall increase of only 65 in 100 years.

In 1783 the number of houses stood at 43. By 1938 when work on the RNA Depot began the figure stood at 64. In 2018, taking into account the houses built for the Depot, new-builds since the Second World War, conversions of existing buildings for housing and cases where two houses have been converted into one, the number stands at 120.

OTHER MAJOR HAPPENINGS

- In 1350 twelve tenants died from the Black Plague and their holdings were left vacant and deteriorating. Only three tenants were alive.
- Between 1796 and 1802 the canal was built through the village and was in use until about 1808. In the 1840s construction work preceded the arrival of the railway which opened to both goods and passenger traffic in 1847.
- In the late 1930s miners came to dig the tunnels for the Royal Naval Armaments Depot and over 30 houses were built for the Naval Constabulary and other staff – a big increase for a village centre of only 64 houses.
- A camp for American Forces was built in the village and occupied during the later years of the Second World War.

