

Parishes: Dodington

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A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 5. Originally published by Victoria County History, London, 1985.

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Citation:

A P Baggs, R J E Bush and M C Siraut, 'Parishes: Dodington', in *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 5*, ed. R W Dunning (London, 1985), pp. 65-69. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/som/vol5/pp65-69> [accessed 14 March 2017].

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DODINGTON

The ancient parish of Dodington, probably so named after the Domesday occupier, Dodo, ([fn. 1](#)) lies on the north-eastern slope of the Quantocks west of Nether Stowey, almost entirely surrounded by detached parts of the parishes of Holford and Strington. Irregular in shape, its north-west and south-east boundaries are marked by streams, its western by a road. The regularity of the boundaries on the Quantocks probably reflects the relatively modern formation of Dodington common, defined on the west by a pond called Wilmot's pool and on the south by a copse beneath Dowsborough hillfort. The ancient parish was estimated to be c. 585 a. in 1838. ([fn. 2](#)) Detached parts of Holford were added in 1884 and 1886 to give a total of 1,335 a. in 1891. The civil parish became part of the civil parish of Holford in 1933. ([fn. 3](#))

From the northern boundary at Barnsworthy farm to the southern edge of Dowsborough copse 3 km. away, the land rises gradually at first from below 76 m. to 138 m. on the Bridgwater-Minehead road, and then steeply to c. 305 m. below Dowsborough. Most of the northern part is marl and gravel, though faulting at the foot of the scarp between the village and the main road revealed sandstone, slate, and limestone, which yielded copper ore in the 18th and 19th centuries. The higher land on the Quantocks to the south lies on Hangman Grits. ([fn. 4](#))

Dodington village comprises the church, the former manor house known as Dodington Hall, and the former rectory house called Dodington House. It lies away from the Bridgwater-Minehead road, from which it is almost hidden by a spur of land. The growing use of the road from the late 17th century, confirmed by its adoption by the Minehead turnpike trust in 1765, ([fn. 5](#)) seems to have drawn settlement along the road near the Castle of Comfort inn and beside the Old Bowling Green; there were more houses there than in the village by 1791. ([fn. 6](#)) Barnsworthy Farm, mentioned in the late 13th century, ([fn. 7](#)) was probably always an isolated farmstead on the flatter land north of the village, beside the road linking Strington with its land at Dowsborough. ([fn. 8](#)) Perry, probably the site of the Domesday mill, gave its name to a manor largely in Stogursey by the early 16th century, but the settlement there may have been shrinking by 1521 ([fn. 9](#)) when several houses were reported to be ruinous.

There may have been open-field arable in the northern part of the parish, where a furlong was recorded c. 1200, ([fn. 10](#)) and a small piece of common pasture between Perry mill and Barnsworthy, called Furzegrove, survived until the mid 17th century or later. ([fn. 11](#)) Most of the common land lay on the Quantocks. Arable and grazing rights gave way to use only as a source of fuel by the mid 18th century, and from 1791 remaining common rights were bought out by

the lord of the manor to increase the areas already used as coppice and plantation. (fn. 12) Inclosure and planting continued in the 19th century. (fn. 13) Duke's plantation and Sir Alick's plantation were named respectively after Richard Grenville (cr. duke of Buckingham and Chandos 1822) and Sir Alexander Fuller-Acland-Hood (d. 1892). (fn. 14) Some planting involved the diversion of roads across the commons. (fn. 15)

A victualler was licensed in 1689 and his family established the Castle of Comfort inn by 1713. (fn. 16) It continued as an inn until the 1880s, (fn. 17) but was thereafter known as the Castle Coffee Tavern, with refreshment rooms and later a post office. Between the two world wars it was a boarding house, and was sold as a guest house by Lord St. Audries in 1952. (fn. 18) In 1980 it was a private house.

The Dodington Rit was a festival held near the Castle of Comfort on the Sunday before Midsummer to find the first whortleberry of the season, when stalls were erected by the roadside. (fn. 19) The local name Walford's Gibbet records the site where the murderer John Walford was hanged at Dodington Green in 1789. (fn. 20)

There were 73 taxpayers in 1667. (fn. 21) The population of the parish was 71 in 1801, and rose to 113 in 1821, the last year of mining. After fluctuations in the 1830s and 1840s the total fell rapidly in the 1860s, though by 1881 it had recovered to 91. Thereafter there was a steady decline, but no separate figures for the ecclesiastical parish are available after 1911, when the total was 60. In 1931 the population of the civil parish was 74. (fn. 22)

Dodington gave its name to the family which held the manor from the 12th century or earlier and came to prominence in the 17th. (fn. 23)

MANOR.

An estate known as Stawe, held in 1086 by Dodo in succession to Siwold, is identified as the later manor of *DODINGTON*. (fn. 24) The early name suggests a connexion with at least one of the other neighbouring estates called Stowey. (fn. 25) The name Dodington was used in the later 12th century when Henry II confirmed to Baldwin son of Harding 3 virgates of land which his father and his ancestors had held in Dodington of the order of St. John of Jerusalem. (fn. 26) The prior of the order of St. John was the overlord in 1444, (fn. 27) and the manor continued to be so held until the order was dissolved in 1540. (fn. 28) Thereafter Dodington was held as of the Hospitallers' former manor of Halse, in 1559 of William Hawley, and in 1620 of Sir Henry Hawley. (fn. 29)

Frodo of Preston, said to have been lord in Henry II's reign, may have held other land in the later parish. The terre tenant under him was Adam de Cunteville. (fn. 30) Adam's son William, succeeding to land at Dodington and Perry, became thereafter known as William of Dodington. (fn. 31) A Roger of Dodington was owner of land in Dodington in the late 12th century, (fn. 32) and was followed by another William. (fn. 33) By 1225 William had been succeeded by Roger of Dodington, (fn. 34) who was followed probably by his son William. Roger of Dodington, son of William and recorded in 1285-6, (fn. 35) was perhaps followed by Philip of Dodington. (fn. 36) Thomas of Dodington, son of Philip, is said to have died before 1361, and to have been followed by another Thomas. (fn. 37) A Thomas Dodington occurs in 1380 and survived until after 1415. (fn. 38) He was succeeded by his son John (d. 1444), and then by his grandson, also John. (fn. 39) A third John Dodington, married c. 1485, (fn. 40) may be the man who was knighted in 1505 (fn. 41) and died in 1514. (fn. 42)

Sir John's son Richard (d. 1559) was followed by Richard's son John. (fn. 43) Under an agreement made in 1568 the manor passed on John's death in 1573 to his second son, George, who survived until 1620. (fn. 44) George's heir was his young grandson Francis Dodington, knighted by 1627, who for his ardent support of the royalist cause in the Civil War lost his estates in 1649. (fn. 45) The manor, with other family property, passed from the Treason Trustees to the Committee for Compounding, but in 1652 was formally conveyed to trustees for the benefit of John Dodington, Sir Francis's heir, himself a parliamentary sympathizer. (fn. 46) John was in control of the manor by 1653. (fn. 47) From 1660 the property was under a group of trustees led by Sir Richard Temple (d. 1697) of Stowe (Bucks.), John Dodington's brother-in-law. (fn. 48) John died c. 1673, and was succeeded by his son George. (fn. 49)

George Dodington, later of Eastbury (Dors.), (fn. 50) amassed a fortune in government service, but died childless in 1720, leaving as his heir his nephew, also George, son of his sister Alicia Bubb. (fn. 51) George Bubb, the politician and wit, who took the additional name Dodington in 1717, was created Lord Melcombe in 1761 and died without children in the following year. (fn. 52) Under his uncle's will his property, including Dodington, passed to Richard Grenville, Earl Temple, grandson of Sir Richard Temple and greatnephew of John Dodington. Richard, Earl Temple, was succeeded in 1779 by his nephew George Grenville (cr. marquess of Buckingham 1784) and in 1813 by George's son Richard, from 1822 duke of Buckingham and Chandos. (fn. 53) The duke sold the heavily mortgaged manor and adjoining properties to Sir Peregrine Fuller-Palmer-Acland in 1837. (fn. 54)

Sir Peregrine (d. 1871) was succeeded by his daughter Isabel (d. 1903), wife of Sir Alexander Fuller-Acland-Hood (d. 1892), and then by his grandson Alexander Acland-Hood (cr. Baron St. Audries 1911, d. 1917). (fn. 55) Alexander

Peregrine, the 2nd baron, died in 1971, leaving as his heir his niece Elizabeth, later wife of Sir Michael D. I. Gass, K.C.M.G., (fn. 56) lady of the manor in 1980.

The manor house, known in the 20th century as Dodington Hall, stands close beside the church. Although let as a farmhouse probably from the mid 17th century, much of the late medieval house is preserved, notably the open hall with a richly decorated roof, the archway into the oriel, and the plan of the screens passage and the parlour wing, where at least one of the beamed ceilings may be contemporary with the hall. Heraldic glass in the parlour wing dates from c. 1485. (fn. 57) Reconstruction took place in 1581, when the parlour wing was extended westward, the oriel was rebuilt to provide rooms on two floors, and most of the windows, including those in the hall, were renewed. (fn. 58) A large carved stone overmantel dated 1581 was put into the west wall of the hall. Alterations were made in the mid 18th century. (fn. 59) In the later 19th century the house was extensively restored, the service end to the east of the screen being completely rebuilt and extended. The mechanism of a waterdriven spit is preserved in the cellar below the kitchen.

ECONOMIC HISTORY.

There were 3 ploughteams on the 3-virgate holding at Dodington in 1086. The demesne virgate had a team and there were 3 a. of meadow, 30 a. of pasture, and 3 a. of woodland. There were 3 serfs on the demesne, and 6 villeins and 2 bordars worked the rest of the land. (fn. 60) By the end of the 12th century open-field arable had evidently been established at Barnsworthy, (fn. 61) which was a tenant farm in the 13th century, and by 1380 included some manorial demesne. (fn. 62) By 1635 Barnsworthy's land extended into Stringston and amounted to some 60 a., (fn. 63) though from 1654 the farm was divided. (fn. 64) It was reconstituted and extended early in the 18th century and by 1713 amounted to 163 a. The demesne farm at Dodington, occupied by successive lords of the manor until the mid 17th century, amounted to 158 a. in 1713. The two other main holdings in the manor in that year were Dodington Barton (223 a.) and Dyche farm (73 a.), both including land outside the parish. All were let at rack rents. (fn. 65)

Common rights in the parish included areas of pasture at Furzegrove, near Barnsworthy, and on the Quantocks, where the Barnsworthy tenant in 1654 could plough or graze cattle and cut heath and furze. (fn. 66) The tenant of Dodington farm in the 1750s could cut heath, furze, and fern for brewing and baking. (fn. 67) Wheat and barley seem to have been the principal crops in the late 17th century, with farmers owning only a few cows and sheep. (fn. 68) The parish, however, included a shop selling fabrics, haberdashery, tobacco, soap, candles, sugar, figs, and spice, the owner presumably taking advantage of the traffic on the developing route between Bridgwater and Minehead. (fn. 69) Farming covenants in the mid 18th century included the use of lime on all Bubb Dodington's property in the area and the stipulation that no more than 70 a. of Dodington farm were to be ploughed, half for wheat and peas, half for barley and oats. (fn. 70) There was already some consolidation of fields and holdings, and by 1774 Barnsworthy farm included part of the former Furzegrove common. (fn. 71)

Dodington (393 a.) and Barnsworthy (196 a.) farms were the two largest holdings on the marquess of Buckingham's estate by 1812, the latter 'greatly improved' by its first 'respectable' tenant. (fn. 72) Further improvements had already taken place on the Quantocks, where in 1791 Buckingham bought out the common right of Durborough (fn. 73) and Dodington tenants, excluding rights in existing woods and coppices (fn. 74) and the 'most distant' commons. (fn. 75) For some time before 1812 more than 100,000 trees were planted annually; in 1812 the whole of Buckingham's estate, including Holford commons, had 90 a. of coppice, 74 a. of forest trees, 106 a. of other plantations, and 40 a. in course of inclosure. (fn. 76) By 1838 nearly a fifth of the parish was under plantations. Arable land, amounting to 264 a., took nearly half the parish. (fn. 77)

Some reorganization of farms included the addition of land in Holford to Perry Mill farm in 1830. (fn. 78) By 1851 Dodington farm measured 350 a. and the tenant employed 25 labourers; Barnsworthy and Perry Mill farms were 205 a. and 135 a. respectively. (fn. 79) A gradual increase in the amount of grassland from the later 19th century continued in the 20th, accompanied by a contraction in population.

Mining for copper began in the parish before 1712, (fn. 80) and miners from Cornwall and Derbyshire were employed at various times in the early 18th century. (fn. 81) The lease of Dodington farm in 1755 reserved mining and quarrying on 'the downs' and elsewhere, (fn. 82) and an exploration lease of 1757 involved a copper-mine agent from Over Stowey and a Taunton tobacconist. (fn. 83) From the 1780s until 1802 ore was regularly mined and some was shipped through Combwich. (fn. 84) Work was abandoned by 1812 because the rector refused to come to terms for building a steam pumping engine on the glebe. (fn. 85) Miners were again employed regularly from 1817 under a scheme sponsored largely by Thomas Poole of Nether Stowey. (fn. 86) Work ceased in 1821 after heavy losses, though the prospect of success had been 'certain'. (fn. 87) Equipment was offered for sale in 1822, and the assay office, the counting house, and the house of the captain of the mines were among properties unsold in 1827. (fn. 88) The counting house and the remains of the engine house remained in 1980.