

On the map: A look at genuine and not-so-genuine Bratton place-names

by Alison Maddock

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Sooner or later, anyone delving into property histories in Bratton is bound to want to consult the relevant tithe map. There is no denying that such maps are an immensely useful source of 19th-century topographical information, and we are amazingly lucky to have them readily available to us. However, I would just like to sound a note of caution about placing too uncritical a reliance on details in the accompanying schedule when it comes to content such as minor place-names. Unfortunately, this has led to the dissemination of a few names, such as Solcombe, that are totally without historical basis in the context of our village.

Produced for the Tithe Commissioners implementing the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, the resulting maps varied in quality and scale due to pressure of time and expense, and only those sealed as well as signed off as accurate by the Commissioners could be termed 'first class' maps. The excellent map produced for Westbury was deemed first class. (Among other things, this meant that when there was disagreement over the line of surrounding parish boundaries being mapped by the Ordnance Survey in the early 1880s, the Westbury tithe map had the last word.)

Mapping of Westbury parish, including Dilton, Heywood, Bratton and part of Chapman-slade, was carried out by the surveyors Cotterells & Cooper of Bath. There are two versions of the accompanying schedule, one handwritten and one printed in booklet form, copies of both being held by Wiltshire & Swindon Archives (WSA) at the History Centre in Chippenham, together with the map dated 1840 which is currently being digitised. The printed version of the schedule, in turn, exists in two forms – one in numerical order of land parcels and one arranged alphabetically by 'proprietor'. (To aid Bratton researchers, I have prepared a combined key for our part of the area, and a copy is available at the History Centre.)

My first qualms about field names in the schedule arose after I came to live in Bratton and began to research the plot of land on which my 1970s house had been built. I was fascinated to find it listed in the schedule as Balders Close. Some connection with the Norse god of light, Baldur, perhaps? But when I pursued the close back through a wide range of other records, particularly Longleat estate leases and surveys and the enclosure map (1808) which are fortunately available, I found absolutely no other instance of this name or any version of it. Subsequent appearances of the name all occur in documents that obviously used the tithe records as their basis, such as the Inland Revenue's Valuation Office Survey of 1910–15.

The close is easily identifiable as a small element of the scattered Bratton tenement known over a long period of time as Ballard's Home Living after the prominent local family, and is never given any precise name in pre-tithe leases etc other than

sometimes to locate it (e.g. 'a close in Stradbrook'). I have come to the conclusion that Balders *must* be a garbled version of Ballards. It is not, by the way, a printing error, as the form of the name is the same in both the printed and the handwritten schedule.

We know, of course, that names do become corrupted and changed over time, and that spellings will vary from document to document, but if this were the simple explanation for this and several other examples from the Bratton area in the tithe schedule, the alternative versions or something close to them should crop up in 'independent' property records before and after the tithe survey date. In fact the only occurrences are in sources directly derived from the tithe survey. Research around this problem has made it abundantly clear that, once the invaluable baseline information of tithe maps was available, it became the universal practice to quote the schedule identity numbers in property transfer and sale documents of all kinds, and that – crucially – this led to administrative staff automatically using the 'official' plot names from the survey (if given) in their paperwork, even when their own local knowledge must have made them aware of the inaccuracy. One major source of local history information, the Longleat estate archives, falls into this category, as witness the 20th-century Estates Sold records, for example, where demonstrable errors of name are perpetuated.

Leaving aside some discrepancies detected in details such as acreages, and sticking to names, here are some more examples from Bratton. A simple mistake has been to register two parcels of land as Flickers Acre and Flickers Marsh, when the local family name was in fact Fricker. The ground called Pissett, with a long history behind it (Pysside in the 16th century and Pusside in the early 13th) has been effectively bowdlerised to Possett. These names continue to occur in their correct form in other, later records, and further examples could be given. The close called Liggins's Leaze, which had carried through the name of an earlier owner or tenant barely changed through occurrences in records including Liggances (c.1699), Liggin's (1764) and Leggances (1812), at the hands of the scheduler was sadly mangled to appear as Lilkins. There is further confusion with a separate but nearby close whose name appears (with some lack of precision!) as Lickins in the handwritten schedule, Lickens in one printed schedule and Litkins in the other.

More borderline is to change Casways Orchard, an occasionally-encountered corruption of the surname Causeway that nevertheless preserves the hard 's', to the subtly different 'Cassways' – a version now perpetuated in the modern housing development off Court Lane. The naming of new streets is a frequent channel for errors or misunderstandings of tithe schedules to become fixed in today's world.

Other examples could be given, but I will conclude with a telling case study regarding another likely error that always bothered me. It concerns the name of the stream that arises in Church Springs below St James' Church and runs through the small valley between Church Road and Millditch, flowing into the Stradbrook shortly beyond. This is now quite widely quoted in Bratton history circles as Solcombe Water (as in plot no. 2358 of the Westbury tithe map, which lies adjacent to the stream), and its place of origin as Solcombe Bottom (nos. 2396–8 on the tithe map), using the names attributed in the schedule. Here again I can find absolutely no other use of this name in any prior

records, and there is an abundance of such records from quite early dates. The springs emerge at the mouth of the combe formerly known as Stoke Combe. (Stoke or Little Stoke was the lost settlement around the church, one of three hamlets comprising Bratton as we know it today.) The springs constituted a public watering place for livestock under the terms of the Inclosure Act implemented in 1808, where they were referred to as Stoke Water. Land in the area is named in numerous pre- and post-tithe records as plain Stokecombe or as Stokecombe Bottom, sometimes in the corrupted forms Stoakham and Stockham. A sale document of 1611 mentions 'land by the church called Stoake Combe Water', an early 18th-century list of Ballard family freeholds includes land 'below Millditch at Stoke Coomb Water', and another deed of 1790 includes a plot called 'Under Church Rails' described as adjacent to Stockham Water. These surely provide ample evidence for the true name of the stream being Stokecombe or one of its shortened derivatives. While post-tithe administrative documents become locked into the schedule numbers and consequently to their nomenclature, proof of the persistence of the genuine local name comes from the surviving church rate book of 1851, recording the assessment for a holding called Stockham Water (and also, incidentally, for the Pissett and Causeways tenements).

In the interests of honest and open-minded research, I should just mention something that at first sight could contradict my assertion. There is an 1864 loan agreement covering a number of parcels of land in Bratton that recites an 1809 lease as including 'the property in the attached schedule', in which is to be found a parcel called Solcombe Water. This seems to imply that the name Solcombe was in use well before the date of the tithe map. In fact the original 1809 lease is still in existence and does *not* include this name: the 1864 schedule proves to be a new one based on tithe descriptions. In 1809 the parcel was called Millditch Hanging.

How has it come about that the Westbury tithe schedule has these examples of unreliability, when the map itself is such an excellent one? Did someone taking notes on the ground misinterpret names told him in a strong local accent, or have such untidy handwriting that it was repeatedly misread? Neither of these seem satisfactory as explanations. When I used to research people's family history for a living, I noted a tendency for some incumbents to alter the customary spellings of the personal names they were entering in the parish register to fit their idea of correctness – could someone on the survey team have had a similar attitude (as with Pissett)?

So, Bratton researchers, never fail to include the tithe map in your enquiries but do adopt a suitably careful approach when you use the accompanying schedule.

Selected references, all in the Wiltshire & Swindon Archives at Chippenham

- WSA T/A Westbury: Tithe map and schedule
- WSA EA76: Westbury enclosure map
- WSA 212B/604: Deed of bargain and sale, 1611
- WSA 212B/6968: Lord Weymouth's lease to James Finch, 1809
- WSA 1195/22: Terrier of Mr Ballard's land, early 18th cent.
- WSA 1219/1: Survey of Westbury, 1812
- WSA 1872/15: Bratton church rate book, 1851
- WSA 2221/2/29/17: Mortgage agreement, Callaway-Bachellor, 1864