

◆ Chronicle ◆

Journal of Yeovil Archæological and Local History Society

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Plate 4 The Britannia Inn - Facing p.28

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NETHER ADBER

The Western Gazette for March 8th 1985 carried a front page report of a threat from ploughing to the site of the deserted mediaeval village of Nether Adber. It is situated approximately a mile south of Marston Magna, astride Thorny Lane, which links Marston Magna and Trent. The report quoted Dr. Ian Burrow as saying of the site, "It is the best example of its kind in Somerset and of extreme importance both locally and nationally". This opinion is re-inforced by Mr. M. Aston, who says "(Nether Adber) is one of the most impressive sites in the county". Such enthusiasm from professional archaeologists, a body of people not noted for empty rhetoric, perhaps deserves some explanation.

The site is divided principally between two fields, Thorny Lane running between them. Both north and south fields contain earthworks. Most of the south field is divided into very roughly rectangular blocks of land, representing individual crofts. They are divided by what appear to be ditches but in reality represent the roads and footpaths of the village. A number of these croft-platforms contain rectangular banks. These are the grass covered remnants of the cottage walls and in some cases it is still possible to enter the cottage through its doorways. These single cell dwellings, with opposing doorways are extremely small. The north field contains the site of the moated hall, its attendant system of fishponds and watercourses, and possibly the church. About ten years ago some work was carried out in this field to flatten the most prominent of the earthworks. However, it is still possible to relate the earlier aerial photographs to the remains on the ground. The fishponds in particular remain clear. Until recently, the village was surrounded by an almost complete field system of ridge and furrow. Unfortunately, much of this has now been obliterated by ploughing, as have parts of the settlement lying outside the two main fields.

The site is now occupied by a barn, a modern bungalow and a cottage bearing the name "Thorny House", the sole remnant of the original village. The "Thorny" in the names of both the lane and the cottage have led the site sometimes to be referred to as the village of Thorny. However, mediaeval documents refer to it by variations of the name Nether Adber. The village was first mentioned in Domesday when it was worth 20 shillings "formerly and now". This formula means that its value was the same in 1086 as before the conquest - indicating that the village existed in Saxon times. However, in 1562 it is recorded that the "common fields had disappeared before any record exists". Documents from both 16th and 17th centuries record land in Nether Adber as being pasture. The traditional view of deserted villages has been that the population was wiped out by the Black Death in 1349. The work of Beresford and Hurst in particular has shown that this is not the case. The majority disappeared in the 15th and not the 14th century. Perhaps economically weakened by the Black Death, they finally fell victim to the deliberate enclosure of the common fields in order to form sheep pasture. There seems,

as yet, no direct evidence in the case of Nether Adber, but references to land as pasture and the disappearance of the common fields may point to this reason here.

Nether Adber has not been excavated. Knowledge of its layout has been gained from aerial photography and the visible evidence in the fields. The importance of the site lies in the exceptionally good preservation of the earthworks, showing land boundaries, water courses, lanes and actual dwellings. The open nature of the site makes it possible to relate individual components to each other and the whole village to its field system. The site is one of a select list of 60, covering the whole country which was submitted to the Ancient Monuments Board by the Deserted Village Research Group in 1980, as being worthy of preservation.²

1. Proc. Som. Arch. Nat. Hist. Soc., 121, 1977, Aston M. "Deserted Settlements in Mudford Parish Yeovil".
2. Deserted Village Research Group, 29th Annual Report, 1981.

Moira Gittos.

HAM HILL SOCIETY.

On 25th February 1985 the inaugural meeting of the Ham Hill Society took place at the "Prince of Wales" on Ham Hill. A representative of the Y.A.L.H.S. was present. A draft constitution had been drawn up by the Steering Committee and it was discussed and voted upon by the gathering of interested parties. Having agreed a constitution, officers of the new society were elected and it was officially launched. The objectives of the society were to be threefold:-

- (1) To advise statutory bodies on the conservation of Ham Hill.
- (2) To give practical assistance with conservation.
- (3) To encourage more advantageous use of Ham Hill.

Membership was set at a minimum of £2. per annum with associate members (under 16 years) being charged £1. Corporate membership would be charged at the same rate as individual members. Mr. Clarke of Montacute was elected the first Chairman. Further details from the Secretary, Mr. Peter Baker, of 40. High Street, Stoke-sub-Hamdon.

B.C. Gittos