

# The history of Place Farm



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## PLACE FARM

Place Farm lies to the east of Tisbury, where visitors can witness the remarkable survival of a farmhouse, barns and outbuildings that were built for the Abbesses of Shaftesbury in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Place Farm has a magnificent outer gatehouse, accompanied by an inner

gatehouse and within, a complex that was originally designed to incorporate large and elaborate buildings for residence, worship, agriculture and tithe collection. The grange, or administrative headquarters, of the estate was at Place Farm, where the medieval buildings of Shaftesbury's farming operations can still be seen.

During the 15th century Tisbury had expanded. Quarrying was still taking place throughout the parish and weaving was a local industry. By c.1500 all the arable land had been enclosed enabling more efficient farming to be carried out. This was part of a modernisation programme by Shaftesbury Abbey, whose grange at Place Farm had two larger houses, stables, houses for oxen, hay sheds, charcoal sheds and a fishpond within its walls, with the present great barn and three fishponds without. In autumn 2005, DPAS moved into the renovated barns at Place Farm, giving this part of the old estate a new lease of life for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Many of the fourteenth and fifteenth century buildings at Place Farm still survive today, including the outer gatehouse (top right) which features two entrances, for pedestrian visitors and carts, respectively. In 2005 many of the barns were renovated (pictured right) ready for the arrival of DPAS, whose presence has once again turned Place Farm into a hive of activity (above).



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## THE TITHE BARN

For the purpose of collecting tithes, a barn was built in the farmyard during the late fifteenth century. Tithe barns were commonplace in England and Germany during the middle ages and were used to store a tenth of a given farm's produce, which had to be given to the church. These were then taken to large, warehouse-like barns found on Abbey estates. The tithe barn in Tisbury is the largest of its kind in England, although not the longest, even at an impressive two hundred feet.

Despite being the largest thatched barn in the country, its vast structure of local stone previously supported a roof entirely constructed of stone tiles. Internally, the barn is made up of thirteen bays. One large porch entrance in the middle of each side of the building supply its two main access routes, with each of these doors being supplemented by two smaller entrances on each side. The barn was re-thatched in 1971 and it was calculated that this job represented around 1,450 square yards of thatching.

## DPAS

Since 1996 DPAS ([www.dpas.co.uk](http://www.dpas.co.uk)) has been a leading provider of cost effective administration services for dentists wishing to offer 'practice branded' dental plans, including supplementary insurance cover, for their patients.

Instrumental in the establishment and growth of private dental plans in the UK, the DPAS team is expert at supporting forward-thinking dental practices in offering a range of dental plans under the practice's own identity and control.

DPAS has unrivalled experience in helping NHS dentists coming under increasing pressure from their primary care trusts as a result of under-delivering their contractually agreed units of dental activity. Similarly, DPAS has a proven track record in helping practices move from other plans to its own, more cost-effective plans.

Place Farm's tithe barn, (above), is the largest thatched barn in the country. The village of Tisbury dates back to the eighth century and occupies a prominent position on this local map, (right) drawn up in 1773.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF TISBURY

### Ancient Tisbury

The village of Tisbury is located in a secluded and beautiful patch of the Wiltshire countryside and is often referred to as the capital of the Nadder Valley. Despite being set among the chalk downs, the underlying limestone has been exposed, providing a rich supply of oolitic limestone for building purposes. Unusually, there is also a type of coral named *Isastraea oblonga* to be found in the village, which does not appear anywhere else in England.



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Unfortunately, evidence of prehistoric activity has largely been removed, but there appears to have been some sort of henge monument, stone circle or chambered tomb near Place Farm, where DPAS is located today. The three central stones, probably of Neolithic date, were removed to form part of the grotto at old Wardour Castle in 1792, with workers uncovering a skeleton beneath the centre stone when it was moved. Furthermore, there is also evidence of a Bronze Age occupation between 3,000 and 4,000 years ago.

Castle Ditches, to the south east of the village, is an Iron Age multivallate hill fort of 24.5 acres. The ramparts still remain up to 10 metres high, with evidence of an inner ditch. A substantial hill fort such as this would indicate a reasonable sized settlement, which would have probably been used by the surrounding population in troubled times. Mixed farming would have been practiced in small rectangular fields with a wide range of cereals grown, along with livestock including sheep, goats, oxen and pigs. Doubtless this way of life remained little changed during the Roman period, although the hill fort would have fallen into disuse shortly after 43 A.D. as this area came under Roman control at an early stage of the invasion.

## The First Settlers

The first known settlement on the village site of Tisbury came in Saxon times, possibly as part of King Alfred's Burghal Hidage, forming a complex of fortresses prepared for defence against the Danes. By the year 759, the village had been named Tissebiri (Tysse's Burh) by the occupying West Saxons and by the year 700 a monastery was established. The significance of this monastery is attested to by the fact that the Synod of the Nadder was held

there in 705, which was attended by St Boniface. However, the monastic life in Tisbury came to a horrific end, as all the monks were slain by the early Norse raids of the ninth century, with the monastery itself being razed to the ground.

The lands of Tisbury were handed over to Shaftesbury Abbey when it was founded by King Alfred c.880. This is when the village is first mentioned, although it is likely to have already existed for 150-200 years. In 984 King Ethelred confirmed the grant of the Tisbury estate to the Abbess of Shaftesbury. The grange, or administrative headquarters, of the estate was at Place Farm, where the medieval buildings of Shaftesbury's farming operations can still be seen.

It appears that by the time of the Norman Conquest, Tisbury was growing and the Domesday Book (written in 1086) suggests that around 300 people lived on the estate, with no serfs listed. By the late 11th century there were four mills, along with meadow, pasture and woodland on the estate, which had enough land to support forty plough teams. It is believed that in the twelfth century stone quarried from Tisbury was used to build Salisbury Cathedral. By the early fourteenth century cloth production and weavers were at work in the village and in 1334 Tisbury was awarded the fifth highest assessment for wealth in the country.

## Troubled Times

It seems that Tisbury suffered badly in the Black Death of 1348-9, which cut the population drastically and caused much land to remain uncultivated. It was especially bad in Hatch, West Tisbury. In 1349 around 75 deaths of customary tenants, and doubtless their families, were recorded by

Shaftesbury Abbey. However the village and estate recovered well, as by 1377 there were 433 poll tax payers, making this one of the most populous parishes in the county.



Construction began on Wardour Castle in 1392 (above top) and features a beautiful folly (above) within its grounds.

The original Wardour Castle was built by Lord Lovell, who was granted permission for the project by Richard II in 1392. It was modelled on a French design and was not intended for defence. The castle was confiscated from the Lovells in 1461 and was bought by Sir Thomas Arundell of Lanherne in 1544. The Catholicism of the Arundells had enabled their servants, estate workers and others in the local area to remain true to the old faith and they were therefore natural Royalists during the Civil War. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1643, Wardour Castle was taken by the Parliamentary forces serving under Sir Edward Hungerford. Following the death of his father, Lord Arundell III laid siege to his own castle, destroying much of it and causing the Parliamentary garrison to surrender by March 1644.

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## New Beginnings

In the late seventeenth century the Arundells built Wardour House near the castle and new Wardour Castle was built in the 1770s. Further building was also taking place in the village including a workhouse by 1769. This development continued into the early 19th century with larger houses, such as Tisbury House, constructed by 1838, as well as the short-lived venture of a cloth factory south of Fonthill Lake between 1825-1830. Tisbury was divided into three parishes in 1835 (East Tisbury, West Tisbury and Wardour) and by 1846 there were forty stone quarries, mainly used for local buildings. However, with the opening of the Exeter to London railway line in 1859 and the later addition of a stone yard at the station, Tisbury stone became less expensive for Londoners and increasingly the village found a receptive market in the capital.

The Rev. R. E. Hutchinson became vicar in 1858 and along with his wife, he had a great influence. They built churches and schools and helped with the welfare of many villagers. Furthermore, in 1868 Archibald Beckett bought the old workhouse and converted it into a brewery. In 1869 Beckett purchased a large part of the area called Paradise (now the lower end of the High Street) and built the lower part of High Street, the Benett Arms Hotel (1875) and 4 shops. New Road, now The Avenue, was built in 1881 and this took much traffic away from The Cross at the top of the High Street. In 1889 a police station was built in New Road and if you turned the corner from there in 1900 you would have found, rising before you, the High Street now lined with shops. The Wilton



In 1868 the old workhouse was converted into a brewery by Archibald Beckett, but the premises had to be completely rebuilt in 1885 (below) following a serious fire. Today Tisbury's High Street (left) and the surrounding area support a wide range of business and small shops.



Royal Carpet Factory established a branch in the former assembly rooms of the Benett Arms in 1911.

During the First World War Tisbury Hospital opened at the Vicarage (1915-19) providing 15 beds (later increased to 40) for soldiers. In the four years it was open it cared for 1380 patients. In 1930 a health clinic was opened, and in 1939 a new fire station erected in Park Road. The years following the end of the Second World War also saw a large number of new houses erected and these were accompanied by a combined fire and police station built in The Avenue in 1974. Today, Tisbury has a population of around 2,000

and the High Street still has a wide range of shops, while several new businesses, including DPAS, have been attracted to the village.

## SOURCES

Domesday Book (1086).

Pevsner, N., *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Yale University Press; 1971).

[www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/community)