

#### 4. Discovering the Ridgeway - West Bexington

29.03.18



Postcard reproduced from Bridport History Centre Gundry Lane.

#### Key Features

West Bexington was prominent for its C20 development aspirations. In the 1930s, farmland was divided into one-acre plots and sold to people to build their own bungalows. There were plans for it to become a holiday resort - Bexington-on-Sea. During the Second World War, troops were stationed here and submarines tested off the beach. After the war, a few more homes were built but the lack of water restricted development. Then in the late 1960s, mains water and mains sewage treatment were installed and with it came the second building boom. In the last ten years the settlement has changed again as the original bungalows have been rebuilt and extended.



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Fifty years ago, to protect the landscape, the National Trust bought land on the coast, including much around West Bexington. Many properties are still in the ownership of the National Trust and are rented to local people and businesses. There is a nature reserve with a reed bed and a rich population of birds, a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and Site of Nature Conservation Interest.

### **Origins And Settlement Pattern**

The meaning of Bexington was 'farm where the box trees grow' – hence the reason for the change of name from West Bexington Farm to Tamarisk Farm perhaps?

There was a large settlement here according to the Domesday Book. In 1086 there were 20 households and it was owned by Roger Arundel, but by the C17 this had been reduced to a single farm.

West Bexington is a small coastal settlement in the parish of Puncknowle but was a parish in its own right until the destruction of the Chapel of St Giles and the Saxon village by French pirates in 1440. From this point it would appear that the church of St Giles fell into disrepair and only a small part of a wall remained as recorded by John Hutchins (who was rector of Swyre) in 1723 and author of History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset (which was published in 1774 after his death). He records that the chapel stood near to the sea, on the site of the terrace of 1980/90s houses behind The Manor Hotel.

At the dissolution of the monasteries, John Caryl was granted the manor at Bexington together with the church at Puncknowle with Bexington, but it was Robert Napier, a former High Sheriff of Dorset, who built the original manor house and farm in Bexington. His monument and those of his family can be found in Puncknowle church. Two farms were seized from his grandson (also Robert Napier) in 1645, one in

Bexington and one in Puncknowle although the Napier family is attributed to the building of the 'model farm' including the granary and water mill.

Beside the road running south from the farm to the beach are the earthworks of the deserted mediaeval village. Thomas Gerard (1625) records that French pirates attacked a village in decline and carried off the inhabitants. The present houses date from 1919 and 1939 on plots that had become agriculturally derelict.



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Attempts were made to develop Bexington as a holiday destination, for summer and weekends and for people wishing to retire to Dorset. The chalets (beach bungalows) are the result of this attempt. Jo Draper in her article *Losing the Plot* describes how the owner of West Bexington in 1932 decided to create a new seaside resort that would combine unspoilt countryside (until the development) with the sea. Many shacks were being constructed at Eype for holidaymakers. Up until 1932 there was no road connecting the village to the beach, although the track along the back of the beach was a thoroughfare from Burton Bradstock to Abbotsbury. The road was built and the car park extended onto the beach. The swimming pool, tennis courts, café and summer bungalows were built. The summer bungalows were timber sheds divided into two, like large beach huts but without water or drainage. They were let unfurnished for £2.10 (two guineas) a week. Bexington-on-Sea provided a kind of improvised camping, presumably not dissimilar to today's beach huts along the West Dorset coast. There was no communal facility for bad weather. In September 1934 the whole resort was put up for auction.

The beach chalets were rented out for £23 and £26 per year. The sale suggests that Bexington-on-Sea was not a financial success. The resort and all except five

bungalows and three building plots were offered for sale (the Manor House, café and beach bungalows, and 12 bungalows). About one third of the 400 acres was laid out on the sale plan in 1,000 building plots mostly listed in batches of four to seven sites for houses but these failed to sell. The auction generated so little interest that only a few individual plots were sold.

It could be considered a comfort that that Bexington was not developed, as it would have become larger than Lyme Regis. Fortunately, until the mid-60s when mains water and sewage was connected, the village remained unchanged and even now there are many acres of wild countryside.

### **Listed Buildings**

There are six Grade II listed building entries including a lime kiln, one of two shown on the tithe map.

The Manor Hotel – early C19 former farmhouse with mid C19 wing.

Corn barn – C17 with some C19 remodelling.

Granary at Tamarisk Farm – C17 with C19 heightening.

Manor Cottage - late C18 formerly four cottages.

Range of farm buildings (stables, saddlery and forge) at Tamarisk Farm – early C19 incorporating masonry from the former church.

Limekiln – early C19.

### **Summary Of Other Quality Buildings And Spaces**

Labour in Vain Farm buildings and cottages are all part of the same collection of farm buildings. The K6 telephone box, still in working order in an area of poor mobile coverage. The Long House, the only other building identified on the tithe map apart from the farmhouse, barns and related cottages.

### **Key Views**

The village is on a hill that slopes down to Chesil Beach. Views extend from Portland Bill in the east, around Lyme Bay including Golden Cap, past the red cliffs of Devon, across to Dartmoor and right round to Start Point in the west.

### **Palette Of Materials**

Stone walls laid coursed in boundary walls and local Purbeck stone rubble with slate roofs. Permanent bungalows were built along the new road to the sea and the old road to the Manor House mostly of cement or rendered brick with promenade tiles and asbestos wall panels. Even the Manor Cottage has been repaired with promenade tiles and it is certainly distinctive.



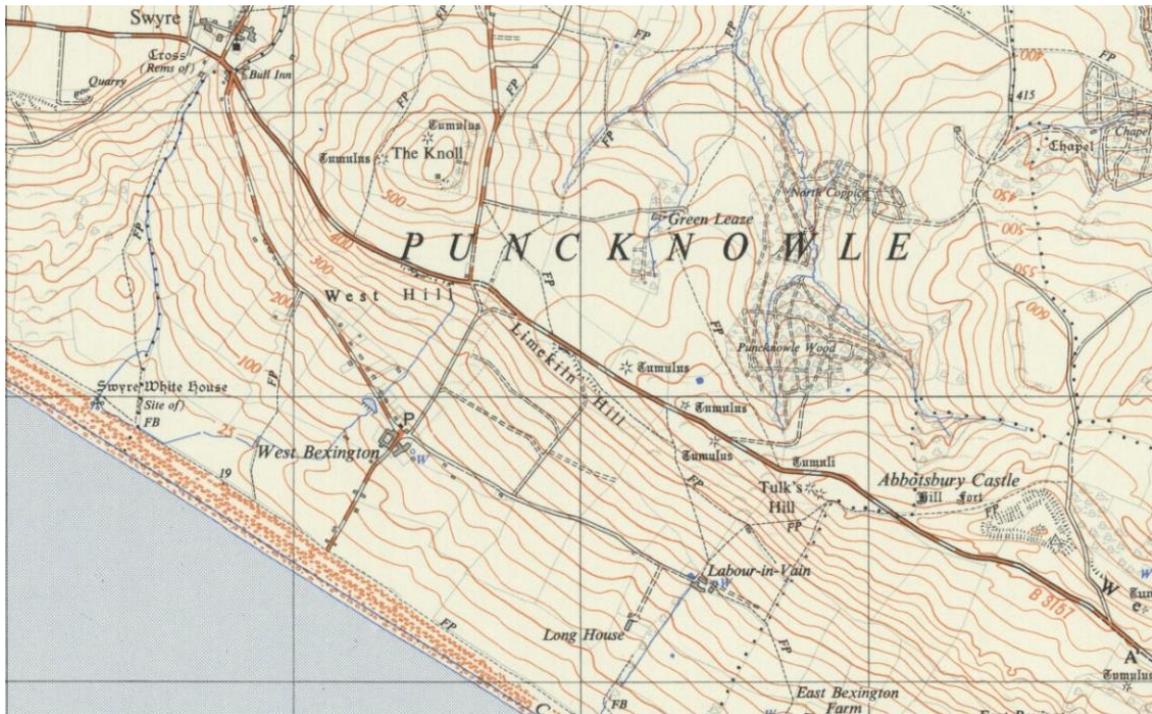
Promenade tiled roof on the original bungalow with veranda and Manor Cottage.



Corn Barn and fire damaged columns from St Giles used in the cow barn at Tamarisk Farm



Water wheel housing in front of the Corn Barn and three storey Granary



Extract from 1958 map



The Manor Hotel, West Bexington.

According to the Tithe Map and Apportionment most of the buildings in the village were in the possession of the Reverend Edmund Holland of Benhall Lodge, Suffolk. At that time it consisted of two farms, Labour in Vain and West Bexington Farm, ten cottages (four of which are Manor Cottage), a coastguard station or preventive house and gardens that were in the ownership of Her Majesty The Queen Victoria.



Tamarisk Farm, West Bexington.

By the time of the map of 1890/91, the only inhabited area was still that of the farm.

It is quite likely that the chapel of St Giles was close by The Manor House and the mill opposite. The latter two were built on the site of Napier's original farm buildings.

An extract from Puncknowle Tithe Map and Apportionment of 1841 records the ownership and land use details for the following plots:

- 160 (Manor House Hotel) – Reverend Edmund Holland, occupied Benjamin Legg, Barton & Buildings;
- 161 – (Manor Cottage Tamarisk Farm) Reverend Edmund Holland, occupied Benjamin Legg, Cottages & Gardens;
- 162 - Reverend Edmund Holland, occupied Benjamin Legg, House, Garden & Yard;
- 176 – (Long House) Reverend Edmund Holland, occupied Benjamin Legg, Lower Garden & House;
- 183 – Labour -in Vain Barns) Reverend Edmund Holland, occupied Benjamin Legg, Barton & Buildings;
- 184 – Labour-in-Vain Cottages) Reverend Edmund Holland, occupied Benjamin Legg, Cottages & Gardens;
- 186 – The Right Honourable Earl of Ilchester Estate, occupied Joseph Kellaway, 8 acres arable;
- 187 - The Right Honourable Earl of Ilchester Estate, occupied Joseph Kellaway, homestead;
- 192 – HM The Queen Victoria, occupied by Lieutenant Robert Lowern, preventative houses & gardens.

