

### **3: The Archaeology and Heritage of Chivelstone Parish**

#### **Geology and Topography**

Chivelstone is the most southerly parish in Devon, and one of the most sparsely populated. East Prawle is now the largest nucleated settlement; otherwise it is characterised by thinly scattered farms and hamlets. Topographically, the greater part of the parish is a plateau that is cut by a series of combes extending down to the coast.

Geologically, the bulk of the parish is made up of metamorphic schists, while the northern fringe consists of Lower Devonian slates. Stone is plentiful, so field walls are a distinctive feature of the parish. In places field boundaries are constructed with single large upright slate slabs.

Ancient wave cut platforms, left stranded by falling sea levels are a feature of the coast.

#### **The Prehistoric Period**

The parish is very rich in prehistoric archaeological sites and finds, particularly from the Bronze Age. This is probably due in part to the low intensity of farming activity and the absence of development in the historic period.

A large number of flint tools have been recovered. Mesolithic tools were found around Woodcote Sand (HER 12427); a scatter of flint, chert and quartzite tools (HER 7054) dating from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age was found between Prawle coastguard station and Langerstone Point in the 1950s; and flint artefacts, including a Neolithic white flint axe (HER 62878) were found to the north-east of South Allington. In recent times a collection of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age objects unique in South Devon was ploughed up (CV 092) in the parish. It consisted of a flint knife, two polished greenstone maceheads and a small green hornblende schist slab with cupmarks on both faces. It seems likely from their character and quality that these objects had been deposited with a high status burial, possibly in a round barrow; a circular cropmark was observed afterwards in the same location. Two other possible round barrows have been identified by aerial photography to the north-east and south-east of Cousins Cross (HER 37099 & 56043). Sherds of decorated late Bronze Age pottery were found at Malcombe (HER 7050). A Bronze Age field system (HER 63607) survives to the north of Prawle Point.

Rare finds of Bronze Age metalwork have been found by divers in two locations off the coast of Chivelstone and off of Salcombe (HER 7065 & 71802). They are all believed to come from a trading vessel that was wrecked while attempting to enter Salcombe Harbour. The objects recovered, which date to the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, include swords, rapiers and daggers, palstaves, an adze, a chisel and a gold bracelet. The swords are some of the earliest found in north-west Europe, and some of the objects were made in northern France. A Bronze Age axe was also found on Lannacombe Beach (HER 14444).

## **The Roman Period**

A rectangular ditched enclosure was identified from the air to the east of Cousins Cross (HER 37098). This would have been a settlement of Iron Age or possibly Romano-British date. No other sites or finds are known from the Roman period in Chivelstone.

## **The Medieval Period**

Chivelstone, Prawle, South Allington and Ford were all Domesday estates that developed into hamlets, with Prawle already the largest by the late 14th century. Although these settlements are medieval in origin, no domestic buildings of this date survive. St Sylvester's Church (HER 7056) at Chivelstone is the only survival from the medieval period. It is mainly 15th century in date with some restoration in the late 19th or early 20th century. It contains a fine medieval rood screen with painted figures. A cross head re-positioned on the gable of a building near South Allington House (HER 7058) is thought to be medieval, although its original location is unknown. The basis of the economy was farming, but there is also evidence for sea fishing at Woodcombe in the late 15th century.

## **The Post-Medieval Period**

A large number of the farmhouses and cottages now existing in the parish were built or rebuilt in this period, of which the following, all Listed Buildings, are examples. In East Prawle, the earliest building is Fushia Cottage (CV 075), which is a small 16th-century house that was altered in the 17th century and extended in the 19th century. Stures Court (CV 080) is late 17th- or early 18th-century. The Thatches and Coolings Farmhouse (CV 079), now a pair of houses, was originally a single 17th-century house that was extended in the 18th century and altered in the early 20th century. Examples outside East Prawle include Ford Farmhouse (CV 073), which is late 18th- or early 19th-century, and at South Allington, Manor Farmhouse (CV 083), which is early 18th-century and South Allington House (CV 081), which was built around 1830.

A Congregational chapel, now ruinous, was built at Ford (HER 35351) in the 18th century, and a Bible Christian (Methodist) chapel was built at East Prawle in 1848 (HER 7063).

There were three mills in the parish in this period. Two were on the Lannacombe stream: one at South Allington (HER 62663), shown as 'corn mill' on the 1890 Ordnance Survey map (and still shown as 'mill' on the 1963 map); the other was located on the cliff above Lannacombe Beach (CV 086), and was described as Lower Lannacombe Corn Mill (disused)' on the same map. It is also mentioned c. 1755 in the Dean Milles' Questionnaire for the parish, and was in use at that time. The third mill was at Ford, and is shown on the 1890 map as 'Ford Corn Mill'. It is also described on the 1847 Tithe Map. It is possible that some of these mills, particularly South Allington and Ford, were medieval in origin.

There is another possible reference to sea fishing at Woodcombe in the late 16th century, and an early 17th-century survey of maritime manpower named 21 sailors and three shipwrights in the parish. In 1854 an account of a walking tour of the South West described Woodcombe Sand being used as a harbour for 'some half a dozen fishing boats'.

The southerly location of the parish has from early times given it a strategic importance in terms of defence and the protection and surveillance of merchant shipping. A flag signalling station (HER 7053), one of a chain along the south coast, was built at Signalhouse Point in the late 18th century in the build up to war with France. A civilian signal station (HER 43349), later contracted to Lloyds, was established at Prawle Point in the same period, and a coastguard station (CV 090) was built at East Prawle.

The dangerous nature of the coastline has resulted in a large number of wrecks from all centuries during this period. Of particular interest is the wreck of a 17th-century Barbary pirate ship (HER 58271), with a cargo that included Moroccan gold dinars, gold ingots and jewellery.

### **The Modern Period**

The strategic importance of the parish gave it a significant role during World War 1 and World War 2, and on into the Cold War period. In World War 1 a RNAS, later RAF, airfield (CV 167) was established outside East Prawle village. During World War 2, a radar station was built at West Prawle with a subsidiary station to the east of Prawle Point (HER 55108). Other smaller installations included gun emplacements at Prawle Point (HER 21139) and a searchlight position at South Allington (HER 71969). All these installations were ephemeral in their construction and have left little physical evidence behind. There was also a radar station at West Prawle in the Cold War period, with accommodation for staff in refurbished World War 2 buildings to the north of East Prawle village (HER 72102).

### **Sources Consulted**

Collings, A.G. 2008 *History of Chivelstone Parish* (Exeter Archaeology).

#### Sites of Interest

(N.B. Public access to these sites needs to be checked)

Bronze Age field system (HER 63607)  
Parish church of St Sylvester, Chivelstone (HER 7056)  
Fushia Cottage, (CV 075)  
Stures Court, East Prawle (CV 080)  
The Thatches and Coolings Farmhouse, East Prawle (CV 079)  
Ford Farmhouse (CV 073)  
Manor Farmhouse, South Allington (CV 083)  
South Allington House (CV 081)  
Remains of flag signalling station (HER 7053)  
Former signal station, now coastguard station, Prawle Point (HER 43349)  
Coastguard station (CV 090)  
East Prawle chapel, (HER 7063)  
Ford chapel (HER 35351)  
South Allington Mill (HER 62663)  
WW1 airfield (CV 167)  
WW2 radar station (HER 55108)  
WW2 gun emplacements at Prawle Point (HER 21139)