

Life in Kingsbrompton - 1067 B.C.

An interpretation by Charlie Ballinger alias Saltways

Let us try to imagine what it was like in the Kingsbrompton area over 3000 years ago in 1067 BC. Most likely we had nearly as many people as now, for in those times it was the uplands which were most inhabited as the valleys were either dense forests or marshes and bogs. The people in our area were not savages but already becoming quite civilised for it was the very end of the Bronze Age in Britain and use of iron was just starting - minerals from a wide area around were being worked besides the tin of Cornwall. We should have, locally, a certain amount of lead, silver and gold; our people would be quite skilled potters and workers in bronze and enamel would be found.

Decidedly the trade routes called trackways or saltways crossed our parish. Along these went items of trade such as metals, the works of metal and bone workers, probably furs and other products of the land.

Wild life would be different. Some species have disappeared and others have arrived. The wolf, bear, wild boar and elk have gone - the rabbit and rat have arrived. We would miss some of the plants too "what - no primroses!". Beech would be a rare tree and no conifers, but a few English larch. Heather would be very rare.

The people would be living in huts or lean-to shacks. The huts were of pole framework on a bank of turf, stones or earth to about 5' high. The poles were then placed slanting upwards to the centre to give 5' to 6' clearance in the centre. They would be fastened either with strips of raw hide or twists of bramble, hazel or willow. The fastening at wall level on the bank would be to stakes previously driven into the ground, fastening as before. There would have been an opening of about 2' wide left in the bank, The roof was first brushwood and then a thatch of grass or rushes with a hole in the centre for smoke to escape. These huts would be from 12' to 15' in diameter. In the coombs the lean-tos would be placed against upright rock faces. Huts might have been grouped from 2 or 3 upwards. If more than 3 they would have a fence of sorts around them. brushwood, earth bank, or in the larger group, a stockade of logs. Inside there would be room for their cattle and other domestic animals at night. They would always be close to water.

The mode of life was hunting, fishing and gathering the fruits, berries, nuts and edible roots. They hunted deer, wild boar, bear, the native wild cattle and other animals; birds were snared. Fish caught would include salmon, trout and some other coarse fish. Hunting would be done with spears and bows and arrows by either lying in wait or stalking. They would also use traps or snares. One method would have been to dig a pit; place stakes in the bottom with point upwards and cover with brushwood. Game would either fall into this or could be driven with the aid of dogs. They were then killed with spears or clubs. One way of catching fish was with a spear. These spears and arrows would have had a barb of bone, flint or even bronze.

There would have been some cultivation on our uplands, herds of domestic cattle and horses, perhaps pigs and flocks of sheep. The reason for this was that the valleys would be heavily covered with oak, ash and other large forest trees which could not be cleared. On the top would be smaller scrub, white thorn, gorse, etc., with quite large areas of grass in between. These areas would have been cultivated. Crops would have been oats, barley, some edible roots and the larger seeded plants such as wild vetch which could be used for food so they were not dependant upon hunting and fishing. Growing crops had to be guarded against wild animals. Dogs would have helped in this for the dog is the oldest domesticated animal in Britain.

Cultivation and domestic animals meant storage or preservation was necessary. In the case of their grain this could have been in wicker work containers or earthenware jars. For larger quantities pits were used. These would be dug inside the fence, in a dry place, roofed over in the same way as the huts. Fish and meat would be salted or smoke dried.

Salt would have been a trade article moving along the salt or trackways. Salt for our area might have come from the salt pans at Blue Anchor or Dunster. The uplanders would barter fur and other articles. There was quite a trade going on so long as both sides had something the other wanted. Money had not come to Britain then.

The people would wear furs in the winter but there was also a cloth of sorts made of hair and wool. There would have been a little linen - all very rough. There would have been few blue painted people, except for war or religious purposes but woad was used to dye the cloth and furs.

The people were Celts and one must remember that when one race over-ran another they always left alive some of the vanquished, probably more in numbers than themselves, for slaves. Inter-marriage would follow and in the end the race would be closer to the vanquished than the victors. This means that old families in this area were more Celtic than Saxon. These Celtic ancestors were from 5'6" to 5'8" in height and sturdily built with dark hair and eyes, though there would be a few fairer people amongst them. Characteristics were fighting qualities, love of home, and they were good organisers!

Religion was important to the people as it has always been a source of art. Our people would have been sun worshippers - Stonehenge and Avebury being the cathedrals of those days.

Though these temples were for sun worship, stone was also worshipped there and probably the moon. Stonehenge was built from 1600 to 1400 BC. One thing we do know, is that the stones of the inner house there were brought from the Prescelly Mountains in Pembrokeshire. These stones must have been sacred to have worked so hard to get them. We must remember there was no mechanized transport - just the muscle and brawn of the people. From the high ground in the north east of our parish it would have been possible to see, in clear weather, either rafts or rough boats, going across and down the Bristol Channel. The blocks each weighed several tons.

In remote districts such as ours, there would be small stone circles or sacred oak groves. Some scholars think that our word 'church' is derived from the Celtic for circle, meaning a place of worship. The art of that day was portrayed by the workers in bronze and the people had to learn the best proportions of copper and tin to get the best quality. Bronze shields, broaches etc were decorated with coloured enamels in various designs. Broaches were an article of trade. Some must have been exported as one has been found in Crete and dated at least 1000 BC.

Music was a 'must'. Primitive music was horns, whistles, stringed instruments. Horns were the natural horns, whistles were made of horn or wood and the strings would be strips of rawhide or gut on wooden frames, these being plucked with the fingers or scraped with bone or wood or even struck. Drums would have skins over hollow wood logs.

Now for a few place names and trackways, much of which must now be surmised but with a fair amount of factual base. We have several ways which must have been in use then, the most important of which is that running from Upton to Bury. This was the road coming from Cadbury (Camalot) and Stonehenge and going on toward Mounsey Castle and Tarr Steps. Another came off this same way at Barlynch up the present Stags Head Lane and across the top to come down Sanctuary Lane to the village and Combeland Lane to cross over to the Woolcotts side above Bryants Bridge; then up to Blagdon Lane and Kingsland Lane to Castle Hill and on over to Treborough. Many of the valleys were swamps and bogs and composed of heavy forest and under-growth giving good cover to enemies and beasts of prey, thus many roads took the higher land which was open and firm.

The name 'Castle Hill' refers to our biggest known Celtic settlement. Lynch was the name given to the cultivated strips on the sides of hills, so we can conclude there was such a strip around here on

account of the name - Barlynch. Sanctuary Lane would have been the lane down which people came to find 'sanctuary' at the Church. There are other spellings, Century and Cemetery, but I would say all are derived from Celtic sources, for words change over the years.

Now Let Us Look at 567 BC

The climate since about 750 BC had been getting worse, so people were going down into the valleys. But iron had come in as an aid to combat this. Iron in itself meant a great advance in the mode of life, this would be seen in the dwellings and huts; new methods of construction were now seen. For the ordinary people, wattle and daub still with a hole in the middle for smoke. This is a frame of poles driven into the ground with smaller poles woven in like basket work and plastered over with mud or clay. The chief's hut would be larger with a stone chimney at one end for a hearth so that the smoke went out without coming into the room, though it was still very smoky.

With iron it was easier to flatten and work wood, so there would be rough doors, hung on raw-hide or leather hinges. The defensive stockades of logs could be bigger and stronger, and iron tools made a difference to most things. Weaving, spinning, enamel goods and pottery would be of better finish and texture, and finer workmanship generally.

The tracks had now become rough roads on which might have been seen wheeled chariots, the wheels being iron shod. The people were now dependant on agriculture for most of their food with fishing and hunting now more of a sport and a supplementary source of food.

The structure of society had changed from the family or small tribe to tribes covering the area of one of our counties, roughly. The head chief or king would have local chiefs under him.

Looking at the organisation of our people, first we must see to which tribe our natives belonged to. We were in the frontier area of the Dumonia and Somereteases, but probably under the Dumonia because of the hill forts or castles on the Barle and the outlying hill fort or camp at Elworthy. Our own settlement at Withiel Florey could have been the connecting link between. The more one looks around the more one can understand the connections and routes taken by the old trackways; many are modern roads. Our local chief would have been at Castle Hill with a head man at Barlynch or Bury for guarding the Exe river for crossings by enemies and friends alike. The whole would be under the king of the tribe who had his headquarters in mid Devon.

Outside influences were being brought to bear on the natives. Events were taking place in Europe, North Africa and Asia which affected us here. First, however, we will make a rough outline of tribal boundaries.

The most local tribes were the Dumonia (all Devon and West Somerset), the Somereteases (central South and East Somerset, nearly all Dorset and S.W. Wiltshire), the Dubonni (North Somerset, Gloucestershire east of the Severn and parts of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire). In passing I would like to say that west of the Severn in the Forest of Dean were the Silures who were never completely subjected by the Romans or Normans. The Foresters had their own laws, and customs, till well into the century. Some of these customs still linger on.

Somewhere about this time, coins were first made and used in Britain by the Dubonni. Other coins were filtering in from the traders on both coasts but most trade was still by barter.

The British were quite civilised by then, for as pressures in East and Southern Europe built up, people tended to move north and west carrying new knowledge and ideas. The metal seekers and traders on returning home would tell what was to be seen and would fire others to wander and see for themselves, or emigrate to fresh lands. We were in the height of the Greek era which was also

feeling pressure from the Egyptian and Assyrian cultures which, in turn, had been influenced by Indian and Chinese cultures.

Let us remember Britain has always been a rich country. We have, therefore, attracted wave after wave of invaders, who were always absorbed, and it is this fact which makes English so expressive. We often have three or more words for which most tongues have but one.

We know that in 567 BC the Iron Age had arrived and with it, the Druids, the priests of their religion. It was a cruel cult, so we must trace where the successive waves of Celts came from, for they brought the religion with them. Roughly to-day's Hungary and surrounding area is called the Celtic cradle, but originally these people came from much further East - the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. In that region the ancient religion was the worship of Zoroaster. That was the cruellest religion of the ancient world but with time and distance the name and rites of worship would have changed. Observe here that both the churchyards at Brompton and Withiel have a circular shape, but now blunted to a straight side by the encroachment of other buildings. Before the Christian era in this country, all worship was inside circles. We may well be using the same sites for worship that were used 2000 years ago.

The minor defended camps at Withiel and probably at Barlynch were part of the outer defences of Dumnonia. It looks as if the plan was to place small defences from Elworthy to the Barle, thus delaying the enemy advance or to reduce them. The chief king would then have time to collect his men to repel the enemy for at this time there must often have been fighting.

67BC to 467 AD

We will go into a new era - the Roman. Their forces are on the Channel coast of Gaul (France), the Celtic Gauls are all subdued, or fled to Britain, the dictator Julius Caesar rules Rome and is casting his eyes on the prize across the Channel, for the land is rich in minerals and agricultural produce. At this time the climate was drier and warmer than to-day, especially in summer. There were 500 years from the coming of the Romans till their withdrawal.

During the first few years before the Roman conquest started, fleeing Gauls would bring tales of Roman discipline and invincibility of the Legions. This was causing native princes and chiefs to look to their defences, in order to meet an invasion by the Romans. There was little co-operation between British chiefs, the reason for this being jealousy and unwillingness to let someone else have head place. We know this from Roman writers and also Welsh manuscripts which survived until 800-900 AD.

In this neighbourhood the hill forts and defences on the Exe crossings were put in good order as was the stockade at the Withiel village. Places were prepared for ambushes, whilst the training of the young men would be intensified. Another point concerning our Kingsbrompton natives was that their own tribe would be trying to grab land from the Somereteases, and they in their turn trying to get Dumnonia lands. As a frontier area, there would have been a lot of skirmishes and small local battles. This, in modern terms would be an attempt to get defence in depth. All this was weakening to the British attempt to meet the Roman threat.

These activities brought others locally - the lead mining on the eastern border of our parish and iron within would be worked hard; the oaks in the coombes were cut for smelting these metals; weapons and utensils would be made. Getting ready for war is always a time of great industry for all, besides the fighting men.

During the 500 years we are now reviewing great changes took place in the lives of our natives. The Romans introduced new things and methods in all spheres. In this area it would have been in the

way of farming and food production with new and improved crops, and new strains of domestic animals as well as wild animals: Two of these became natives and part of our countryside - the wild rabbit and fallow deer. Amongst trees and plants we have elms and improved varieties of apples, pears and plums. Until then these would have been in the form of crab apples, wild quince (pear) and sloes (black-thorn). There would have been medlars and grape vines, with the garden rose and wheat and onions. Outstanding in domestic animals would be the new and improved sheep and horses.

Obviously, food and drink became much more varied - grapes meant wine and wheat an improved bread meal whilst the fruits and vegetables gave a greater range of diet.

There was an improvement in roads, tracks and communications generally. The Romans had a system of telegraphy by means of semaphores. A machine with wooden arms was placed on hills which by swivels and pivots, and worked by ropes and levers could send messages faster than by runner or horse. A flag code was an improvement on the smoke and fire signals.

Building was with stone and in most larger houses there was a system of central heating by means of hot air passages under floors from heating chambers below ground. In towns there was piped water from springs on hills above, carried through wooden pipes made by making a hole through the middle of logs. Some of these in oak were found during excavations in the 1920's. Sometimes water was carried across a valley by means of aqueducts raised on stone piers.

It is hard to realise the change the Romans made to agriculture, and the difference in climate from what it is to-day. The summers were hotter and drier and winters colder with more frost but less rainfall. Crops could be grown which would be impracticable to-day. Grapes could have been grown on the south and west slopes, with the red soils at Barlynch. Even to-day the best vineyards are on poor soils at from 600' to 850' above sea level. The hill tops with drier climate would have been ideal for wheat for iron had then come into use for plough shares, axes, spades and hoes.

Roman buildings were often of brick, also stone. Roman villas were copied by wealthier Britons and were really big farmsteads. Many sites are known, and others being found. Try to think of possible sites in our own parish. Even the sites of the manors of Brompton end Withiel are nearly guesswork. My guess for Roman villa sites are - 1. South of Withiel Church where there is a site of buildings on a fairly large scale which could have been the manor or also a Roman villa 2. East of Barlynch and North of Baronsdown House. In both cases there was a small British settlement close by which would have provided more labour if required. The coming of the Romans brought about a cessation of tribal warfare with more peaceful conditions, and the lot of the common people was much improved.

It was between AD50 and AD100 that Christianity arrived in our area. We have legends of Glastonbury but we should also look to the Caractacus Stone on Winsford Hill. In Celtic, Caradoc, or to-day - Charles. The church in Britain was separate from Rome until the coming of St. Augustine 500 years later. There was quite a difference in doctrine the British being closer to the Greek Orthodox. When St Augustine conferred with the British bishops they did not reach agreement. This meeting took place at either Aust, the lowest easy boat passage or Broadoak near Newnham on Severn the lowest ford on the Severn.

Roman Occupation and Coming of Christianity

For the month of April and the Easter season we will discuss the coming of Christianity to Britain. Reading up for these notes I came on some very little known facts regarding this, and how close are the British connections with Calvary.

First the Second or Augustan Legion which was founded by Caesar Augustus who called the census mentioned in St. Luke's Gospel. This Legion was one of three which carried out the conquest of Britain under the Roman commander and first Governor Aulus Plautius. It was this second Legion who were the guards at the Crucifixion, coming to Britain ten years later. The Legion veterans, therefore, could have been amongst those on duty at Calvary. It was this Legion who took the conquest into Western England no doubt visiting the settlements at Withiel and Barlynch. Could those on duty at Calvary have visited our Parish?

Aulus Plautius married a lady called Pomponia. Some writers say she was a Briton but on his return to Rome she was arrested and tried for being a Christian. When Aulus Plautius held Court at Glevum (Gloucester) or Corinium (Cirencester) there was amongst the court ladies one called Claudia, relative of a British chieftain. According to early writers she married a Roman officer and had a son called Linus. The family later went to Rome and there became friendly with St. Paul who mentions them in the Second Epistle to Timothy. Linus is said to have become the first Bishop of Rome; If so, Pope Paul is a direct successor of a half British bishop.

I think a little reflection will show how deep are the links of our nation to the Christian Church. Those I have mentioned are within 20 years of Christ's death - there could have been Christian worship taking place at Withiel within those 20 years, perhaps on the site of the present Church.

I referred in an earlier issue to the nearly circular shape of the churchyard as showing religious use before the Christian.

550 AD to Circa 900 AD

It was during this period that the Saxon conquest was complete, the Anglo-Saxon kingdom being set up, finally becoming King Alfred's kingdom.

The last big battle east of the Severn was fought at Dyrham, 7 miles north of Bath, in 725, in which three British kings were killed, these of Bath, Gloucester and Cirencester in today's names. Our parish was in the Saxon Kingdom of Wessex and there must have been many minor battles and skirmishes in our area.

This district was widely settled by the Saxons but we must remember that the British were not exterminated; women were kept as slaves and concubines and the men to till the land. The Saxon tongue became the common language because it was that of the rulers and we find much evidence of this in our local place. 'Brompton' coming from the Saxon 'braun' not the German of today. Bury, in those days, was Nether Brompton. At that period there were three Bromptons - High Brompton at the present Kings Brompton Farm, Over Brompton at the site of the present village and Nether Brompton. Other Saxon names survive in Combeshead, Hiccombe, Shircombe and Lyncombe; 'combe' is from the Old English 'cumb' meaning 'a valley' while the prefix would be a man's name - for example Hiccus at Hiccombe. Storridge, Haddeo, Heydon (now called Haddon) and Swansey (spelled thus until mid-19th century) are also Saxon relics. 'Worthy' is a Danish word meaning 'farm' or 'homestead' - e.g. Holworthy, which is probably Hula's farm. Venn and Barlynch are British in origin while nearly all cotts, slades and fords are derived from the Norman.

During the period 800 AD to 1600 AD, the Danes were either raiding our shores or attempting the conquest of the island. We know of raids on both Porlork and Watchet. In fine weather raiding parties could get quite a distance inland and back to their ships within twelve hours. At the end of the 9th Century Alfred was making his stand at Athelney and was most likely raising men for his army from West Somerset and Devon, The Danes would have harassed this by sending raiding parties in their

long-boats to the lower parts of the coast of Central Somerset and then by going on foot for some distance from the coast. This is probably how some of our Danish place names arose.

The Witan, that is, the chief council of state in Saxon England, met at Brompton under King Ethelred in about 935 A.D. and made the Laws of Brompton. These were related to money, more particularly the "ore", a money piece or weight. One of these laws said "Let those who overlook the ports see every weight by which money is received and let each of them be so marked so that 15 ore make a pound."

(A 'pound' was a pound of silver by weight; 'ports' means 'entrances', 'gates' or 'doors' - presumably to markets etc., and not just 'harbours' as we use the word today)

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