

### **13. A Little Bit of History**

#### **Early history**

There are several suggestions to explain the origins of our name. "Stan" suggests a stone building. "Ley" suggests land that was cleared of woods. There are many places with "ley" in their name in this area. Our land belonged to the king for a while. This was the case in 1236, but before that we were simply "Stanley" (1160). Earlier still we were "Stantone" (1086) with only 18 men, 4 of whom were slaves. They did not count the women and children. Selsley was "Stanley's End" and Borough Close was "top of the burgh".

Apart from oolites, woolly rhinos & sabre-toothed tigers our earliest parishioners were here about 3,000 BC, in Neolithic times, and built the long barrow on Selsley Common. Crude 19<sup>th</sup> Century excavation divided it in two, without finding much of interest. Opinion is divided as to the meaning of "Toots". Similar county names suggest a look-out spot, but Crystal Harrison attributes it to a corruption from an ancient name for the god, Mercury. He was the patron of merchants and an old trade route lay over Selsley Common, linking the Humber to the Severn. The uneven ground may be due to quarrying, but some writers claimed that pit dwellers produced some of the lumps and bumps and created the "banky lots" as cultivation terraces. Such claims are strongly disputed, however. The earthwork on the Common, which was once claimed as a Roman defence, proved to be a medieval boundary. Other items are well founded, however. There were ancient trade routes including the "Jurassic (White) Way" connecting the Humber and Severn, plus the "Welshway" which led to Wales via Arlingham and a ferry. There is also Pen Hill Dyke. This is an Iron Age dyke between King's Stanley and Woodchester, which can be identified at Bown Hill. Captain Gracie's excavations on the Common found evidence of a military camp believed to be from an expedition in 1265 going to the battle of Evesham.

Selsley Common has had some interesting uses. In Napoleon's time it was used to stage a review of yeomanry. In 1839 the Chartists held a meeting there. In World War II it was cultivated and suffered "an attack by the Home Guard". Can you imagine what Captain Mainwaring could have made of that?

#### **17<sup>th</sup> Century wealth**

This area was prospering by the 17<sup>th</sup> Century gaining wealth from the cloth trade and from farming. Many fields were orchards at this time. Some of our fine old Cotswold houses date from this period. "The King's Head" dates to 1700. The Vestry Book records that the parish vestry started meetings in the church, but soon retired to "The King's Head". Court Farm was the site of the "Court Leet". Following the Norman Conquest The "court leet" would have dealt with everything concerned with local government and the maintenance of law and order. By 1600 the manor and burgh courts met in the recently converted barn. Opposite Borough Close is Burgh Farm in an area originally known as "the top of the burgh". Old Castle House is inscribed "1563 WS", which refers to the Selwyn Family, who built Selwyn College, Cambridge. Manor Farm is built on a Roman site, which grew into a medieval hamlet, but then faded away again. Red Hill Farm dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but changed its name from "Day House". Landowners had access to common land in the "free meadows" by the River Frome and on Selsley Hill. Many cottages were occupied by weavers and later these cottagers worked in the mills along the river and canal. The mills were not solely concerned with cloth, but worked timber & grain as well. A cloth mill has existed since Tudor times at Stanley Mill,

formerly Marling and Evans Mill. Old Church Farm, on Selsley Hill is a mystery as nobody has found a record of an old church here.

To find more of this period read "The Clutterbuck Diary" which describes walks through the woods, mills and villages of this time.

A painless way to absorb some of the history of this period is to read "John Halifax, Gentleman" by Mrs. Craik. In this "rags to riches" story, the characters start off in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Tewkesbury, but as they prosper they move to "Enderly", which was inspired by Amberley, just over the hill from us. Mrs. Craik lived for a while in "Rose Cottage", Amberley. Her novel's main character, John Halifax, owes much to the life-story of the man who built Dunkirk Mill and lived in Dunkirk Manor near Nailsworth.

The Marling family achieved wealth through industry and arrived at Stanley Park in 1851. Amongst other things they used the wealth from their mills to start local schools. They built All Saints Church at Selsley, based on a Tyrolean church. The tale is that they did this after enjoying a visit to Marlingo in the Tyrol, to which they were attracted by the similarity with their family name. It was built with the addition of Pre-Raphaelite features and is famous for its stained glass windows.

The Domesday Book had recorded King's Stanley's mills as the most valuable in the county, but the 20<sup>th</sup> Century brought an end to a great deal of manufacturing in this area. However, the mills, canal and railway are as much a part of "the Cotswolds experience" as the limestone hills, picturesque villages and evidence of wealth derived from wool.

## **Bibliography**

The libraries' local history sections have much to offer. A few of those books available are:

Victoria County History

H.Beard "Stonehouse, the Stanleys, & Selsley"

S.Mills "Glos. at Work"

C. Harrison "Ebley, Glos., Historical Notes & Memories"

N. Kingsley "Country Houses of Gloucestershire"

S. Bown "Old Selsley"

J. Sibley "Dragon and Donkey"

D.Viner "Stroudwater & Thames-Severn Canals: Towpath Guide"

S.Smith "Midland Railway"

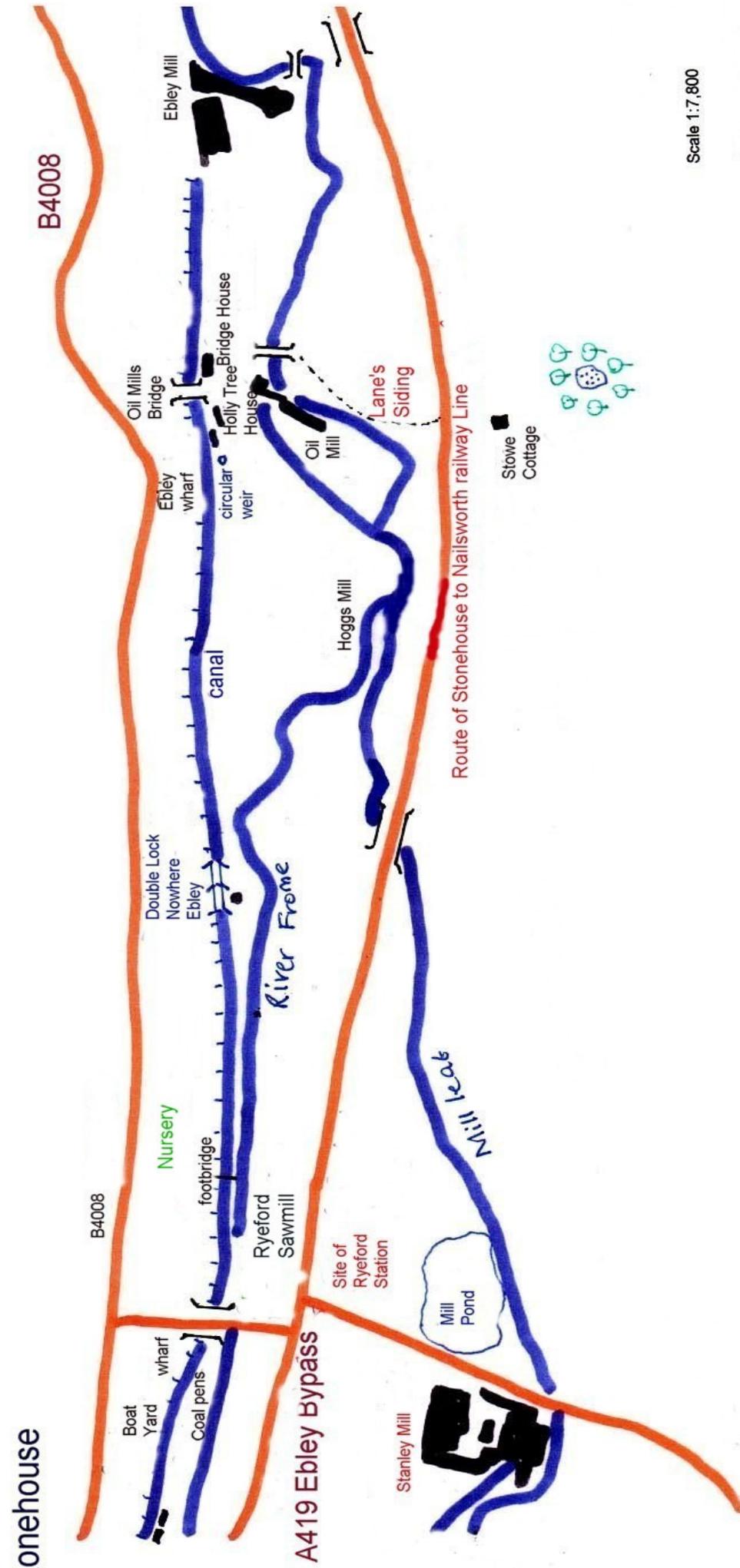
"The Clutterbuck Diary" (1773), diary of a rich Londoner visiting country cousins and watching work in the mill.

Percival Marling "Rifleman and Hussar"

In contrast are the works of King's Stanley's village poet, Jephtha Young (1812 – 93), a woollen cloth weaver, always near poverty.

A fascinating map of field names of the 1830s is available from [geoffgwatkin@supanet.com](mailto:geoffgwatkin@supanet.com).

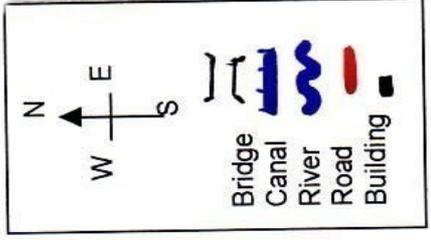
Stonehouse



King's Stanley

Scale 1:7,800

Key



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