

The Wiltshire/Dorset border – from the A350 to the A30

Today this length of border – a distance of about 2.75km – divides the civil parish of Shaftesbury from the parish of Donhead St Mary in Wiltshire. Historically however this boundary was between the parish of Cann and Donhead St Mary. At some time before 1841, the date of the Cann tithe map, the northern part of this area had been lost to Shaftesbury. Older OS 6" maps show five boundary stones from Christy's Lane in the west to the county boundary in the east, which seem to be approximately where the boundary lay; much of this area is now covered by modern housing estates. The remaining area of Cann south of this boundary was taken over by Shaftesbury in 1933, in exchange for an extension of Cann parish to the south-west.

The parish of Donhead St Mary was once part of the larger estate of Donhead, which included the present parish of Donhead St Andrew; the two parishes were divided in the 11th century. Donhead was an estate held by Shaftesbury Abbey from an early date, with different areas being granted in a series of royal charters – the Handley charter of 956 (from which we got some of the Shire Rack landmarks) also included areas of Donhead St Andrew.

On the Dorset side of the border most of the area seems to have been part of Barton Manor, which was also owned by Shaftesbury Abbey. This may account for the significant lengths of the boundary which are now marked "undefined", but which clearly cut across at least five fields in a seemingly arbitrary manner. The Abbey might well have ignored the county boundary for its own purposes, and after its dissolution (in 1539) a 1545 survey makes it clear that Barton manor itself also included some lands in Wiltshire. Three of the boundary stones mentioned above are also shown in the middle of fields.

After the dissolution of the abbey all its properties in the town as well as the abbey manor or grange at Barton were purchased by the Arundell family of Wardour Castle; even prior to the dissolution the Arundells had been tenants of some of the Abbey's estates. In 1552 the estate was bought by the Earl of Pembroke but leased back to the Arundells. The Pembrokes as lords of the manor eventually sold the freeholds to various tenants and the manor had effectively gone out of existence by the 18th century.

I have notes of the field names, acreages etc of all fields adjacent to (or lying across) the county boundary, mentioned in the Tithe Awards for Cann and Shaftesbury. I have not however found any indication of when the existing pattern of fields is likely to have arisen. There was an Enclosure Award for Cann in 1812, but it only dealt with an area south of the A30.

New housing estates have steadily encroached on the area to the west of the county boundary, and building still continues, making the area increasingly urbanised since I first examined the boundary in September 2007. However a significant strip of land next to the boundary has for some years been reserved from development, as the location of a proposed bypass linking the A350 to the A30. A further planning application for housing has recently been turned down, partly it was proposed to link the development with a facility on the other side of the proposed bypass – in fact in Wiltshire – and it would also have adversely affected the view from the Cranborne Chase AONB. But it seemed to have considerable local support.

