

8 Manor Common and Menacrin Downs

8.1 Situation

Blisland Manor Common is situated five and a half miles north-east of Bodmin, beside the north side of the A.30 highway leading from Bodmin to Launceston. Menacrin Downs is situated and adjoining the eastern side of Manor Common and is within the parish of Temple.

8.2 Landscape/topography

The common is a gently undulating broad ridge over which a minor road crosses from the A.30 towards Bradford and beyond. On the western side, Manor Common slopes down to a stream that divides the common from Newton Downs and Greenbarrow Downs and to the north-west, to the inbye land around the farms of Deacons and Treswigga. To the north, the common is divided by a boundary hedge from Carkees Down. The eastern boundary dividing the common from Menacrin Downs is marked by a stream that runs from the A.30, north past Hawk's Tor Farm, towards Carkees Down. This boundary is also the parish boundary between Blisland and Temple. On the south side, the A.30 highway acts as the boundary.

Manor Common is covered by short rough grass and heather with increasing areas of *Molinia* that turns the downland a soft gold in the autumn. The broad expanse of common is generally stone free, but on the western slopes towards Treswigga and Newton increasing amounts of surface granite occur. Distant hills catching the eye from the common include Greenbarrow to the south-west, Roughtor, Brown Willy and Hawkstor to the north-east, and Temple Tor to the south-east.

Menacrin Downs is a broad low spur of land with marsh forming its perimeter on two sides. The western boundary of Menacrin Downs with Manor Common is marked by a stream that runs through a marsh. The northern and eastern boundaries are marked by a stream forming a deep channel that divides Menacrin from Hawkstor Downs, while the southern boundary is marked by the A.30 highway. Thick *Molinia* and prospecting pits, on the eastern side near Hawks Tor quarry, make walking difficult and hazardous in places.

8.3 Archaeology/industry

Only one prominent archaeological feature exists on Manor Common and that is the Bronze Age stone circle known as the Trippet Stones.³⁵ The circle consists of seven irregularly placed stones (formerly eight during the nineteenth century), with a boundary stone set up in the centre. To the west of the stone circle are many shallow pits allegedly dug during the second World War to prevent enemy aircraft from landing on the moors.³⁶ On the edge of Menacrin Downs are the remains of a medieval field system that has been divided by the A.30 road and whose greater part lies on the slopes of Temple Tor. Within these fields are earth banks and clear signs of ridge and furrow ploughing. There is little evidence of industry on Manor Common other than a few prospecting pits at Naillybarrow.³⁷ On Menacrin Downs there are signs of prospecting near the eastern boundary and tin streaming along the stream of the northern boundary. The eastern boundary of Menacrin is at the old Hawkstor China Clay works.

8.4 Manor Common

Blisland Manor Common is registered as Common Land no 183 and is estimated to be 360 acres. The manor of Blisland is first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as *Glustone* and as *Bloiston* in the Pipe Rolls of 1186 (Gover, 1948, 92).

The western boundary stream is marked by a row of boundary stones, nos. 144/5, 144/6, 144/7, 144/8, 144/13 and 143/8, which are all recorded under Greenbarrow and Newton Downs. One additional boundary stone no.145/11, is recorded under Menacrin Downs marking the eastern boundary along the stream that also acts as the parish boundary. This stone is deeply sunk into the centre of marshland between Manor Common and Menacrin Downs.

³⁵ Preston-Jones, A. (2000) *The Trippet Stones Stone Circle*, Cornwall Archaeological Unit, Cornwall County Council.

³⁶ Harper, R. (1992) 'The Boys of the Moors' *Blisland: The Past*, no.10, January 2005.

³⁷ CRO/MA/box/13 Correspondence from J. Hampton of Holton, Bodmin to Messers Venning and Goldsmith, land agents for the Molesworth family, regarding a lease to prospect for iron on Blisland Manor Common. They already had an agreement to prospect for iron on Shallow Water Common. In the correspondence, Mr Hampton was also enquiring about China Clay on Blisland Manor Common, implying that Mr Parkin may have already been granted the lease, dated 14th August 1873.

Ten boundary stones have been recorded under Manor Common all dividing off smaller parcels within the common: five divide off a small area of the common at the Trippet Stones and five dividing off a larger tract of land on the western side of the common, known locally as Naillybarrow. (see fig. 27 and fig. 28). The area by the stone circle consists of boundary stones leading south from the northern boundary of the common to the stone circle, which has one boundary stone no.183/3 in its centre re-erected in March 1999;³⁸ and from here leads due east to the boundary with Hawk's Tor Farm. These stones have been numbered, 183/1, 183/2, 183/3, 183/4 and 183/5 in this report. All five boundary stones near the Trippet Stones display an **M** for Molesworth on one face and a **C** for Lord Clinton on the reverse face. The larger area to the west known as Naillybarrow is marked by stones nos. 183/6, 183/7, 183/8, 183/9 and 183/10. Today, all five of the boundary stones still exist, although boundary stones nos. 183/8, 183/9 and 183/10 were found lying down. All but one of these boundary stones are carved with an **H** for Hayward on their western face and an **MX** for the Manor of Blisland on their east face. Boundary stone no. 183/9 has no mark on its east face.

8.5 Menacrin Downs

Menacrin Downs is registered as Common Land no 145 and estimated as being 151 acres. The settlement of Menacrin is first recorded in 1520 (Gover: 1948, 133) in the Early Chancery Proceedings as *Menacryn*, containing the Cornish place-name elements *men* 'stone' + *cryn* 'dry' or 'withered' (Padel: 1985, 70-1).

Out of a total of sixteen boundary stones that once marked the perimeter of Menacrin Downs, only nine survive. Two boundary stones on the northern boundary, nos. 145/8 and 145/9 are missing. A further four stones that marked the southern boundary along the A.30 highway, nos. 145/2, 145/3, 145/5 and 145/16, have been lost, probably when the highway was widened. Finally, another three boundary stones have been lost at the eastern end of the Downs, close to the entrance of the old Hawk's Tor China Clay Works. The channel of the stream cuts deep into the ground here and there appears to have been some subsidence, which might possibly explain the loss of the missing boundary stones. However, all the area on the east side of Menacrin Downs is undulating and uneven, full of prospecting pits and excavations, with large areas of marshland in which it is difficult to locate boundary stones.

³⁸ Preston-Jones, A. (2000) p. 18

A boundary stone, no. 145/11, that stands in the centre of the marsh, marking the parish boundary between Blisland and Temple, also acts as the boundary between Manor Common and Menacrin Downs, and has sunk so far down that only 0.64 metres is now visible. This stone displays an **M** for Molesworth on the west face and **H** for Hayward on its eastern face.

Only one stone survives on the northern boundary with Hawkstor Downs: no. 145/10 which displays an **O** for Onslow on its north face and an **H** for Hayward on the southern face.

Two boundary stones near the A.30 mark the medieval field system that has been partially destroyed by road widening. The new road, bypassing Temple was built in 1828, and the boundary of the common shifted to the new line of the road and the remains of the fields on the northern side of the road were absorbed into the common. Both stones, nos. 145/4 and 145/12, display the letter **C** on one face.

At Temple crossroads, where the minor road from Temple village on the old A.30 crosses the present A.30 highway to Manor Common, stands boundary stone no.145/1, to the west of the cattle grid. This stone is on the boundary of Manor Common with Menacrin Downs and is also on the parish boundary between Blisland and Temple. The stone displays an **H** on its northern face and an **MX** on the south face. There is evidence that at some time the lettering has been altered on the northern face, with cement disguising an earlier mark. Two stones stand on opposite side (south) of the A.30. One displays a letter **H** and stands on the eastern side of the minor road to Temple, some 100 metres from the highway.

The second stone no. 145/15 was discovered lying on the wastrel on the western side of the road junction and is dated 1893. This stone has since been re-erected by contractors working for the Highways Agency.

8.6 Analysis

Ten boundary stones or sites were identified on Manor Common and another sixteen on Menacrin Downs. Of these all ten boundary stones survive on Manor Common and a further nine on Menacrin Downs.

All ten of the boundary stones on Manor Common are shown on the Blisland tithe map, indicating that they were set up before 1840. However, only one boundary stone recorded

under Menacrin Downs is shown on the tithe map for Temple. Interestingly, the ten boundary stones on Manor Common mark two discreet parcels of land that were cut out of the common.

In 1840, Sir William Molesworth was lord of the manor of Blisland and therefore owned Blisland Manor Common; but he does not appear to have owned these two discreet parcels of land which were separately assessed for tithes. The section on the north-east side of Manor Common, including part of the bronze age stone circle known as the Trippet Stones is an area recorded as parcel no.1301 on the TA map and schedule which was attached to Bedwithiel and owned by Lord Clinton, while leased to Zechariah Rogers. This rectangular area is recorded on the tithe map as being 65 acres, 1 perch and 12 rods (see fig. 27). The stones on the boundary of this plot have a letter **M** for Molesworth on the outside, and a letter **C** for Clinton on the inside indicating that Lord Clinton owned the area of land inside the boundary stones.

Lord Clinton was a title of the Trefusis family whose family seat was at Trefusis in the parish of Mylor near Penryn. Although recorded as Lord Clinton, he was usually referred to as Baron Clinton during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The letter **C** on each boundary stone could represent either the 15th, 16th, or 17th Baron Clinton (see chapter 11 for notes on the family).

The second parcel of land cut out of Manor Common, locally known as Nailbarrow or Nailborough,³⁹ is on the western side adjoining Greenbarrow and Newton Downs. This parcel is a rectangular area running south-east from Treswigga, marked by six boundary stones, five on Manor Common and one under Newton Downs (see fig. 28).

In 1840, this parcel of land, recorded as no.1608 on the TA map and schedule, was attached to Deacons and owned by John Cole; it measured 75 acres, 0 rods. 4 perches. It was occupied by the tenants of Barlendew. Four of the existing five boundary stones leading south-east from Treswigga have an **MX** for the manor of Blisland carved on their east face indicating that Sir William Molesworth, the lord of the manor of Blisland owned the Manor Common, while on the west face all five have an **H** for Hayward, indicating that at one time Hayward

³⁹ Recorded as Nailborough in the manor of Barlendew, 1754, Maclean, 1873, I p.39.

owned this parcel of land. Boundary stone no.183/9 does not have a mark on its east face, suggesting that either it was set up as a replacement stone by Hayward to replace an earlier stone, or the manor of Blisland mark has been erased.

However, as Hayward did not gain ownership of this area until after the date of the tithe map, his mark must have been added to the boundary stones already erected by Molesworth for the manor of Blisland. Although John Cole is recorded as the owner of this area of land in 1840, John Wallis was the lord of the manor of Barlendew, and eventually the land was acquired by Hayward when he purchased the manor. Today, both these tracts of land on Manor Common which are divided by boundary stones, are still in separate ownership. Furthermore, the boundary stones marking Naillybarrow were also adopted as the boundary of grazing rights in the 1965 Commons Registration.

It is perhaps surprising to find a west Cornish family, heavily involved in mining, owning land on Bodmin Moor. Hence it is interesting to note that there are letters in the Molesworth Archive in the County Record Office suggesting that prospecting for Iron ore and China Clay were proposed and did take place on Manor Common.⁴⁰ There is also physical evidence of prospecting in the Naillybarrow area of Manor Common where several pits can be identified.

On Menacrin Downs, only one of sixteen boundary stones is recorded on the Temple parish tithe map of 1839. This stone, no. 145/1, stands inside a cattle grid and fencing at the entrance to Manor Common and Menacrin from the A.30 highway. The stone marks the boundary between the two commons and also the parish boundary. The stone displays an **M** on the south face for Molesworth and a **W** for Wallis later cemented over and altered to a **H** for Hayward on the north face. The boundary stone appears to be in the wrong alignment, with the **M** for Molesworth facing away from Manor Common, but being so close to the entrance off the A.30 and with the installation of a cattle grid and fencing it is probable that the stone at some time has been relocated.

Only one boundary stone, no. 145/10, survives on the northern boundary of Menacrin Downs beside the stream that also acts as a boundary between Menacrin and Hawkstor

⁴⁰ CRO MA/Box/13, Correspondence from J. Hampton of Holton, Bodmin to J.J.E. Venning, Devonport, land agent for the Molesworth Estate.

Downs. This stone displays an **H** for Hayward on the Menacrin (south) side and an **O** for Onslow on the north side. At the time of the TA map, John Wallis owned Hawkstor Downs, although later it was acquired by Onslow. The transcription of the Trehudreth Court Case records a book that was presented as evidence labelled 'John Hayward Esq. Common Lands'.⁴¹ In this book, Hayward records that a Josiah Stevens (probably his land agent) erected boundary posts against Hawks Tor Common in or about 1866.

In the middle of the marsh dividing Menacrin Downs from Manor Common stone 145/11 displays an **M** for Molesworth facing west towards Manor Common and an **H** for Hayward facing inwards towards Menacrin. From the book presented at the Trehudreth Court Case it is clear that James Hayward was the instigator of many of these boundary stones.

However, close to the A.30, where the southern boundary of Menacrin Downs meets the old earth banks of some medieval fields, two boundary stones (nos. 145/4 and 145/12) survive with the letter **C** carved on one face only, which could represent either Lord Clinton or the Collins family of Trewardale. Their appearance and style would suggest that they are somewhat later than those near the Trippet Stones. Boundary stone 145/12 faces north towards Menacrin Downs while stone 145/4 that was discovered lying down appeared to have been facing east. Were they both intended to indicate the ownership of the enclosed medieval fields or did Lord Clinton or the Collins family at one time also own Menacrin Downs? On the parish tithe map for Temple, these small areas of fields are recorded under the ownership of Sir William Molesworth and leased to John Tilley.

⁴¹ Today, the whereabouts of this small book is unknown.