

# CLICKET, A CO-LOCATION OF HABITATION

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## SUMMARY

Clicket exists today as a collection of widely dispersed ruins. The history of the area suggests that this was not a single settlement although in Victorian times at least the inhabitants of the area probably identified themselves as a community. This article reports the results of a full survey of all the ruins and attempts to provide a composite review of the sparse historic record left behind by the separate holdings.

## INTRODUCTION

On the north-eastern slopes of Exmoor there are five sets of ruins, either side of a small valley whose stream runs north into Timberscombe (Aston 1983, 84) (Figs 1 and 2). These comprise, on the east bank, Thorn Farm (SS 963 398) (HER 33735), Bickham's Mill (SS 961 398) (HER 33736) and Mill Leat Cottage (SS 962 395) (HER 34123), and on the west bank a single cottage (SS 962 394) and a linhay (SS 961 397); the linhay is not considered further in this report because the tithe apportionment places it within the tenure of Allercott Farm. Both Timberscombe and Allercott are recorded in Domesday, the former held by Roger of Arundel, the latter as part of the holdings of William of Mohun, who held extensive lands in the local area and established his seat of power in the town of Dunster, just to the north of Clicket (Thorn and Thorn 1980). Clicket does not appear in Domesday, neither do the farm or the mill, and these latter were probably independent of the settlement.

## DESCRIPTION

Thorn Farm comprises four buildings, a farmhouse, a linhay, a cottage and one other structure whose specific role is unknown. The farmyard is almost level and lies north-south part way up the valley slope. The linhay is a classic south-western barn with an open front supported by six round pillars; it occupies the north-eastern side of the farmyard, just across from the cottage. Twentieth century improvements to the farm track have damaged one side of the small structure of unknown use and it is now difficult to discern with any precision either its position or dimensions. The farmhouse is unique in this study because it is the only building whose site was extensively levelled prior to construction; where the hillside impinged upon other buildings in Clicket valley they were merely dug back into it and hillwash now butts against these external walls, if not engulfing them. The farmhouse was built in two phases and from the manner in which walls are not bonded, but butt up against each other, it is possible to determine that the southern portion was the original building. The northern extension dates to 1673 and the two remaining windows in the west wall are reminiscent of Stuart stately homes, extending a full 4m from top to bottom, with wooden lintels marking the first floor. It is not possible to determine whether the original farmhouse was of one or two-storey construction but it now retains the most impressive piece of ruined masonry in Clicket valley, a gable end that still stands some 6m high (Fig. 3). The Victorian record shows two families living at the farm, presumably one in the farmhouse and the other in the cottage. Away to the north of the farm



*Fig. 1 Location map; contours at 100m intervals; black squares = holdings of William of Mohun 1086, triangles = other Domesday sites*

lies a well-constructed pond which probably represents the water source used by the farm.

The original trackway from farm to mill has, at the farm end, been subsumed by a spring; thus a nicely revetted holloway has become a 'waterway'. The mill, lower down the slope, comprises three buildings, the mill, mill-house and a linhay. This linhay had two round pillars supporting the front that appear to have been bricked in, maybe turning the open linhay into an enclosed outbuilding. The mill-house also shows evidence of two phases of construction with walls at the northern end not tied into those of the southern building. It is the northern portion that is secondary, and it may have been built as a bakery used to bake bread for the farmers whose grain had been ground (Graham Lockyer, pers. comm.). The mill had an overshot wheel, whose pit is still accessible, and was of at least two-storey construction; this would have placed the millstones upon the upper floor, with the machinery below. Two of the sockets used to support the beams of the first floor remain. Again Victorian records show two families living in the mill, presumably one in the

mill-house, while the other could have lived in any of the three buildings, assuming the mill had ceased to be operational (see discussion of census data below). The millpond and the stone portion of the launder that fed the wheel are still visible on the hill behind the mill, but the pond has been blocked at some stage, probably when the old sluice gate was in a state of collapse, perhaps to provide a water supply for the occupants, rather than for the mill. The line of the mill leat runs away to the south and can still be traced in places.

Also on the east bank, lies the site that the present owners have christened 'Mill Leat Cottage', and which is recorded in Victorian times as being 'three cottages under one roof'. Although the two easterly 'rooms' are in a poor condition it is still discernible that there were no internal doorways connecting these 'rooms', and this, coupled with the fact that all three buildings retain evidence of separate external doors, suggests that the three cottages under one roof were designed in just that manner. Again it is possible to discover the places where the walls are not bonded correctly, certainly between the

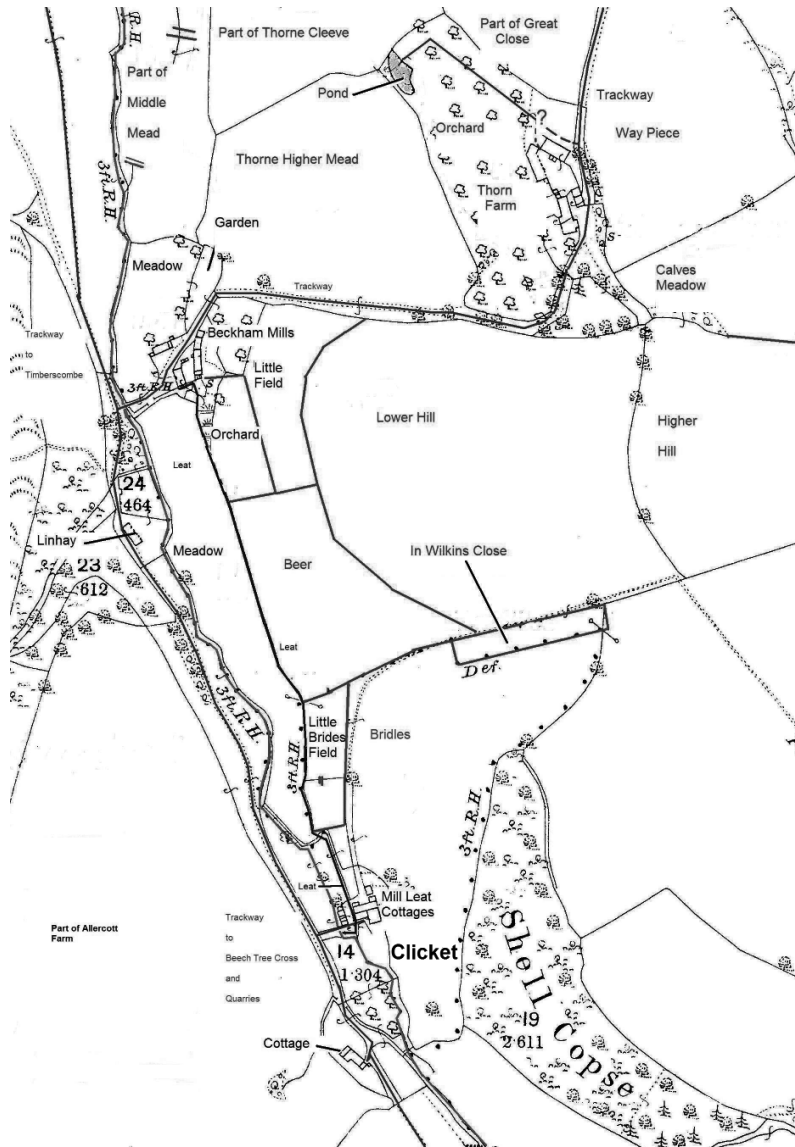


Fig. 2 Clicket valley 1840 (OS 25 inch 1st edn and data from Tithe map)

original building and both the 'extensions', although it is difficult to interpret the relationship between these two latter. Thus the cottages definitely exhibit evidence of two phases of construction; a third phase is less certain. The western cottage is in better condition than the others and it is probably this one that the present owners have been told was still roofed c. 1955. This cottage has a large buttress that

arches over the mill leat (hence the name) and thus establishes a relative chronology between cottage/s and leat, and by association mill. The leat used to join the stream a scant 3m from the buttress, where the stonework of the sluice gate is extant. The two extensions were not of such robust construction, but there remains evidence of a fireplace with a bread oven in the corner of the south-eastern extension.



Fig. 3 Exterior south wall of Thorn Farm farmhouse (photo Brian Fox)

Both 'extensions' have the remnants of a possible six by three foot 'alcove' which may have been sleeping compartments as in Irish cottages (Brian Fox, pers. comm.).

Finally, crossing the stream to the western bank, a single cottage stands apart from its three neighbours. Again just a single-room building this cottage is of particularly robust construction. In an interview (reported in the West Somerset Free Press, 12 August 1944) with a former resident of Clicket there is mention of a chapel in the 'town'. This suggestion has been reinforced by the present owner of Thorn Farm who reports being told that 'two of the tombstones from the chapel have been used as a revetment along the stream north of the mill'. There is no mention of a chapel in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (Caley and Hunter 1810), which suggests that if a chapel did exist it was more likely to have been Non-Conformist. This isolated cottage may have enjoyed such a secondary use.

It should finally be noted that, although the parish boundary between Luxborough and Timberscombe generally follows the stream in the valley bottom, when it gets near Mill Leat cottage it deviates from

the stream, placing all the cottages that represent Clicket in the parish of Timberscombe, while the mill and the farm remain within that of Luxborough (Fig. 4).

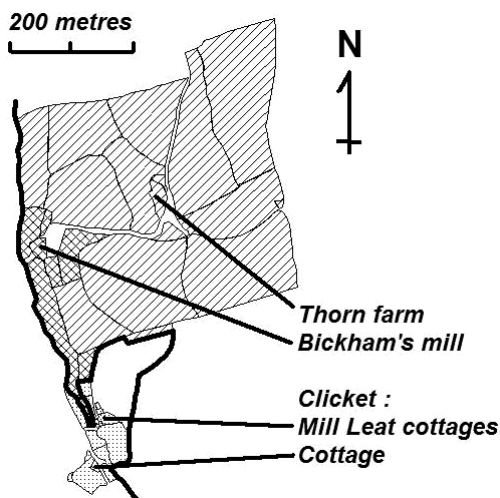


Fig. 4 Thorn Farm holdings (hatched), Bickham's Mill holdings (cross-hatched), and Clicket (stippled); heavy line = parish boundary. From tithe map and OS 25 inch 1st edn

## HISTORY

Domesday records what may be seen as a 'central core' to the lands of William of Mohun existing in the general area around Clicket (Fig. 1). While Clicket does not appear in Domesday it may have existed as part of another manor, and this would most probably be Allercott. Allercott at Domesday was recorded as 240 acres, while the tithe assessment of 1840 gives 220 acres and this may suggest continuity. It is probable that the area that was to become Clicket was part of Mohun's holdings but this has not been established. One Durand held the manors of Oaktrow, Allercott, Old Stowey and Brown from Mohun and he may have had aspirations in the valley. A more likely candidate, however, is Richard who held the single manor of Bickham just to the north, near Timberscombe.

No source consulted for the place-name Clicket contained any relevant reference (eg Ekwall 1960; Mills 2003). Click Mill, on Orkney, derives its name from the clacking of the clapper against the tray or armature, and this name is reported three times in Scotland (Cruden 1949). However Orkney is a long



way from Somerset and the name refers to a mill, rather than a settlement. The Aller element of Allercott is drawn from an alder tree and there are six places in Somerset recorded in Domesday with this derivative, three of which are in Carhampton Hundred (which holds both Luxborough and Timberscombe parishes). Similarly Thorn is derived from a thorn tree and there are four such sites in Somerset at Domesday, none of which lie in Carhampton Hundred. Bickham, on the other hand, is unusual and singular in Somerset at that time. Extensive search of all available editions of various place-name dictionaries produced Bicton as the nearest contender to Bickham/Beckham. The dearth of places named Bickham, coupled with the existence of Bickham Manor in Domesday, the ruins of Bickham's Mill and the existence of Bickham Wood (c. 0.5km from the modern farm) (SS 944 411) present a strong, cumulative argument in favour of Richard of Bickham, or a scion, establishing both mill and wood in the area, presumably with the permission of the Mohun family.

There is however a second contender for aspirations in the valley; Timberscombe derives its name from a 'narrow valley in which timber was grown'. Domesday records a mere two acres of woodland for Allercott, none for Bickham and some 64 acres for Timberscombe Manor; while recorded areas in Domesday are sometimes inaccurate, the relative difference in holding between these sites is considerable. Assuming that the dimensions reported in Domesday are, in this instance, reasonably accurate, 64 acres is a small parcel of land when compared to the size of the combe and so it is considered that the proposed connection between Bickham Manor and Bickham's Mill stands (Mills 2003; Thorn and Thorn 1980).

Following the example of Aston (1983) a search was conducted of all available Lay Subsidies and Court Rolls for relevant surnames. Nicholas Clicket, of Porlock, is one of those recorded as paying the Lay Subsidy of 1327 (Dickinson, 1889, 245–7). Porlock is a mere 8km from Clicket and so, given the unusual nature of the name, it is considered that a connection can be made. This represents the earliest mention of Clicket located. Assize records from Yvelchester (Ilchester) dated 1243 record Adam de la Thurne from the Carhampton Hundred (Chadwyck Healey 1897, 302), the *Nomina Villarum* records Robert de Bictone, at Bictone in Timberscombe parish (Dickinson, 1889, 53–78), while the Lay Subsidy of 1327 records Ade atte Thorne in Luxborough parish, Thoma atte Torre in

Timberscombe parish, and Walter de Bikome in Carhampton parish (Aston 1983, 84; Dickinson 1889, 245–7). This means that the earlier, 1243, record from Carhampton Hundred may be the same as the later, 1327, record from either Luxborough or Timberscombe, or indeed, neither of them. However, it is worthy of note that the 1327 Lay Subsidy for both parishes appears not only to establish the existence of Thorn Farm at that time, but also that the lack of reference to any of the other farms in the area (especially Allercott) may represent an ascendancy for Thorn Farm, culminating in the 'grandiose' extension late in the 17th century. A similar measure of importance may be construed from the records associated with Bickham.

Later records are equally barren; Spurr (2005, 1–2) states that Thorn Farm was probably conveyed to George Escot (Wyllye) in 1557, while Hydron Mill was probably conveyed to Sir John Wyndham the following year; in both cases possession moved from the Everard family. It should be noted that Bickham's Mill has enjoyed a variety of names during its existence – Beckham, Bickham, Hydron, Hything and Bridles have been noted. Beckham or Bickham may be seen as a corruption of the other, Bridles may be a case of mistaken identity for the field just to the north of Mill Leat Cottage (Fig. 2), while Hydron and Hything may be references to other (now lost) tenements in the area – this possibility is discussed for Brompton Regis in Aston (1983, 78–81). The first, definitive listing of the settlement of Clicket does not occur until publication, in 1809, of the OS 1" to 1 mile 1st edn, at which time the name is clearly associated with the cottages, while the mill and the farm are both named separately.

If the farm and the mill appear to have been successful during the medieval period, as may be evidenced above, then by c. 1840 fortunes had been reversed. In 1843 the Revd Henry John Taylor was the landowner of all the land of interest, including Allercott, but with the exception of Bickham mill, which he rented from Lord Egremont and sub-let. At the mill Ursula Tarr was recorded as 'the miller' but at the subsequent census (1851) she has disappeared; William Langdon (her son in law?) is the new lessee, but is not recorded as the miller. The implication is that the mill had ceased to grind flour, probably before 1843; why else would Egremont lease it out, presumably knowing that it would be further sub-let? The farm was rented by John Joyce, who also rented Allercott and in the census he is recorded as living in the latter. This suggests that Thorn Farm had ceased to be a viable entity and had

become part of a larger unit. Between the first census in 1841 and that of 1881 all of the eight habitations within the area, Clicket, the mill and the farm are occupied and, with the exception of Ursula Tarr, the employment of the occupants is invariably recorded as farm labourer, shepherd and the like. Between 1881 and the subsequent census of 1891 all the buildings are vacated and only one, a cottage in Clicket, is reoccupied in 1901. The agricultural depression of the late Victorian period (c. 1870 onwards) is the most probable cause of contemporary emigration, with the most probable destinations being the colonies, USA or the coalfields of South Wales (Dr R.W. Dunning, pers. comm.). The evidence from the OS County Series 1st Edition map of the site, dated 1883, may indicate that Bickham's Mill was the first to be vacated, for this site alone is recorded as being 'disused' on the map (Bradford 1911, 333–6; Hewitt 1911, 405–25).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is little evidence to suggest that Clicket was a single settlement which spread over two parishes; it is more probable that it was an, almost random, assortment of buildings that sprang up over time. Thorn Farm and Bickham's Mill may be dated to the medieval period, the former through tax/court records, the latter through name association – both were in existence in the mid 16th century, when they were sold. Clicket probably existed at the beginning of the 14th century, again through name association, but nothing definite is recorded until 1809. Within the area it is possible, through the census, to track the movements of the later inhabitants around the various buildings. This latter, coupled with the, apparent, mass desertion would suggest that, while Clicket per se was a motley collection of diverse buildings, at its close the inhabitants regarded themselves as a single community.

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Digitised OS 1:25000 mapping was used to create the topographic underlay for Fig. 1. This data was obtained under licence through the Edina Digimap® service via the University of Exeter acting as sub-licensee. See <http://digimap.ac.uk/main/copyright.jsp>.

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