

Ancient times

Our Parish has a very ancient history. People have lived on these hills for thousands of years. There are finds of Old Stone Age flint tools from 12,000 years ago on the Mendips.

Evidence of occupation is all around us. Just look at the burial mounds on the way to Wells, or Maesbury Hill Fort or Blacker's Hill Camp beside Gurney Slade.

Around 5-6,000 years ago, New Stone Age people arrived from Europe with agriculture and pottery. This revolutionised the lives of the hunter-gatherers who preceded them. The Neolithic people occupied higher land where they herded livestock and grew cereals.

One such place was at Dalleston where, in 1964, in the garden of No 1, Mr P. Dudden found 100 pieces of flint tools. It seems flint was scarce, as people had reworked some of the tools. The collection includes flat-end and disc-shaped scrapers, a knife and triangular arrowheads of the sort often used for hunting birds.

Mr Dudden also uncovered evidence of a Roman settlement, finding pieces of pottery dated to the 4th century CE (Common Era or AD as we used to be). There were the remains of 32 vessels – dishes, bead-rim bowls and more, some ware from kilns at Congresbury and the New Forest.

In 1955, a [Roman coin](#) was uncovered at Binegar Green. It is a copper alloy sestertius or dupondius of Faustina the younger or Lucilla dating to the period AD 147 - 175.

The land around Dalleston is now designated an *Area of Archaeological Importance*.

The Mendips were important for the Romans who mined them for metals. There was a major Roman road (now the B3135) from the mines near Charterhouse to Old Sarum in Wiltshire. Off this run Bennett's Lane, Turner's Court Lane and Portway Lane all still roughly in a straight line to the northeast. These lanes started life as a Roman road. Put a ruler on a map and you will see they line up with the Fosse Way – one of the most important Roman roads - on its approach to Peasdown St John.

It is a lot of work to build a Roman road, even a minor one. Before you start the road, you must clear a way through the forest that then covered the Mendips. There needed to be a good reason to do so. To have a Roman road running through our village and evidence of settlement testifies to Binegar's ancient origins.

Who, you wonder, lived here? Are their descendants alive now? Are you one? What did the Romans call this place? Did it have a name before the Romans came? A dictionary will tell you the name 'Binegar' comes from the Anglo-Saxon 'Begenhangra' – wooded slopes where berries (or beans) grow. However, 'Begenhangra' could just be a corruption of the earlier Celtic Brittonic name, which would make Binegar 'Love Hill'.

When the Romans departed, Somerset was again in the hands of the Celtic Britons. However, Saxons invaded around 650CE defeating the Britons at the Battle of Pensewood. In Saxon times, Binegar became part of a royal hunting estate.



Any links were probably with Wells, which became an ecclesiastical centre after a long history of pagan worship at the springs. King Ine of the West Saxons founded the church of St Andrew around 700AD - less than 100 years after the Saxon conversion to Christianity. It was a 'collegiate church' where canons (not monks) said the daily office of worship.

Wells might not have become a Cathedral except for the neglect of King Edward the Elder (son of Alfred the Great). For seven years, one story goes, there were no bishops in his West Saxon realm. An angry Pope Formosus threatened excommunication. The startled King called a Council and, in 909AD, created five new bishoprics. Wells was one of these.



An important figure for us is Giso. The *Saxon Chronicle* says he was a native of St Trudo, in the district of Hasban in Lorraine and chaplain to King Edward the Confessor.

The King elected Giso to become Bishop of Wells sending him to Rome to resolve some religious questions. There, Pope Nicholas II consecrated him a Bishop (Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury had been excommunicated). William of Malmesbury says Giso was 'not only learned but of good conversation and not guilty of simoniacal practices' - selling pardons, favours etc. - which distinguished him, apparently, from Ealdred, the Archbishop of York.

Returning, Giso found Wells a sorry state. Harold, Earl of Wessex had reduced the Cathedral canons to beggary. The King had banished Harold and given his Somerset estates to the Cathedral. Harold, however, in a lightning raid, taxed his former tenants and stole all the Cathedral's treasures.

Giso complained to the King without success. However, the Queen (Harold's sister) gave Giso some compensation. Then, in January 1066, the King died. Harold claimed the crown, seized all his former estates and, according to one story, Giso had to flee. Harold was not King for long and an arrow in the eye saw the end of him at Hastings.

The new King, William the Conqueror, restored Giso to his rightful position and gave back to the Cathedral all the lands that Harold had so violently taken away. With the income from the estate, Giso did great things for the Cathedral increasing the number of canons and building a cloister, hall and dormitory.

The Cathedral's estates now included two manors called Bezenhangra and Hwete Circe - Binegar and Whitchurch. These two would become the Parish of Binegar.

Whitchurch, you ask, Whitchurch? What has Whitchurch to do with Binegar and where is Gurney Slade in all this? Those are stories for another time. Meanwhile, see if you can find Whitchurch. Oh and where can you say hello to Giso personally?