

## Early History of the Parish of Landrake with St Erney

King Edmund (921-946) had granted Landerhtun (Landrake) to Bishop Burhwold, then the Bishop of the see of St Germans (Cornwall), King Canute confirmed this in a Charter of 1018 instructing that, at the Bishop's death, Landerhtun was to pass to St Germans Priory which had been founded by Leofric (Livingus) when he was the Abbot of Tavistock.

Bishop Burhwold was also granted land for a church at Landrake for his life and then it to be passed to "the holy Germanies". Thus the Parish of Landrake became the property of the Priory and remained so until its dissolution in 1539.

The monks at St Germans were responsible for taking the services at Landrake and presumably at St Erney as well.

Leofric was appointed by King Canute to be Bishop of Crediton (Devon) in 1027 and on the death of his Uncle, Bishop Burhwold, also in 1027, the two dioceses, Cornwall and Devon, were consolidated. In 1046 the see was moved to Exeter where it remained until 1876 when it was split again and the Cornwall see was moved to Truro

The church at St Erney was first recorded in 1269 when a vicar was appointed for the churches of Landrake and St Erney in one Parish, it is located on a much earlier site; it probably originated as a chapel belonging to the Priory and upgraded to a church as the population of the area increased due to the expansion of farming and the importance of the route from the sea and the other side of the River Tamar into Cornwall.

There are a number of quay sites along the Rivers Tiddy and Lynher and at low tide it was possible to ford across the Tiddy to Markwell allowing easy access from the Priory This route was of commercial importance and was used by the monks and pilgrims travelling north to the Abbey at Tavistock and to Launceston, then the County town of Cornwall, which itself was on the main east-west route between Devon and Cornwall. This east-west route provided the only crossing points of the River Tamar for several centuries using a number of arch bridges financed by the Abbot of the Abbey at Tavistock. Launceston also had a Priory dedicated to St Stephen.

The church at Landrake is of Saxon origin and would have been constructed of wood and wattle. It was rebuilt in stone in about 1100 and has Norman features and was extensively rebuilt in the 15th century. The church is shown on 19th century maps as St Peters and was known as such until the early 20th century but it has since been confirmed that it is dedicated to St Michael. It is thought that it became known as St Peters because of the holding of the local main fair on St Peter's Day, June 29th, for many years.

There used to be three annual fairs at Landrake which is not surprising considering the number of large farms in the Parish and the quarries at Tartendown all of which have been active since the Priory days. These must

have supported a large number of families with a requirement for trade in bread, meat, shoes and boots, milk and clothing all provided locally or imported via the rivers from elsewhere.

There is evidence of early chapels in the Markwell area presumably for the use of travellers having safely made the sea voyage to Cornwall or leaving for the next stage of their journey by river.

A Holy Well was recorded here in 1018, probably known as St Mark's Well, hence the name of a settlement there named Markwell. A chapel is also recorded at Markwell in 1308 and this is near the Holy Well site.

A large pond is located to the south of the existing farmhouse fed from a spring and dug out to provide storage for water in order to irrigate potatoes in an adjacent field. This is an obvious site for another Holy Well and, although there seems to be no archaeological record of this, dowsing here indicates that this is a Holy Well site and that there was probably a chapel associated with it. This theory is strengthened by the finding of a large number of ley lines passing through this site.

Prehistoric settlements in the Markwell and St Erney areas are likely as worked flint tools and Iron Age stone spindle weights or whorls have been found there.

The bulk of the Priory estate lay in the Parish of Landrake, and was entitled the Manor of Landrake. It included "Landrake Barton (250 acres), Talvan (72 acres), Cutlinwith (110 acres), Penquite, Tortan Down with its quarries, (stone from these quarries was used to build St Germans Priory) Pencaver Mill, Brighter, Poldrissick, Trewint, Trebighan, Lantullock and Trewandra". See the map showing the Parish boundary with the Priory farms highlighted.

In 1564 the Priory and the estate in St Germans were purchased by John Ellyot and it became known as Port-Eliot; it has remained in his family ever since. The Eliot Estate now owns Markwell farm, which is still in Landrake Parish, across the river from St Germans. The other farms and property in the villages in the Parish have been owned variously by the Eliots, the Hobarts, the Edgecumbes and the Carew- Poles. In 1918 the Earl of Mount Edgecombe sold his farms and much of his other properties in the Parish to pay for death duties.

## Notes

\*The word Lan implies a monastic enclosure. The parish of Landrake and the farm of Lanbest, both near St Germans, were, in all probability, small independent monasteries in Celtic times, though they were afterwards absorbed by the priory at St Germans and remained its property until the Reformation.

\*Barton is an old English word meaning the land of a Manor

\*tun is an old English word for a farmstead

\* The Cornish name for Landrake is said to come from “lannergh”, a clearing, the 1605 form “Larrack” has given rise to the local pronunciation of Larrick commonly used for Landrake

\*a see is the domain of authority of a bishop

References:

Records of the Church and Priory of St Germans in Cornwall by Charles Henderson M.A.

Cornwall County Council Historic Environment Service Truro

Acknowledgements are made to the work of local historians Brian Walton and Frank Stevens and published in Memories of Landrake and St Erney in September 2000

Dowsing for a Holy Well in Cornwall by Peter Gibson dated January 2008

Michael Gibson

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