

# Earliest Eardisland.

from  
Prehistoric Times  
to A.D.1091.

## INTRODUCTION

The last Ice Age ended nearly 12000 years ago.<sup>1</sup>

Exactly when the landscape in the area later to be known as Eardisland became fit for human occupation and when early man came to/returned here is not possible to establish. Early human occupants of the area lying south of the ice sheets furthest expansion and its periglacial aftermath would have gradually moved north, together with certain varieties of flora and fauna as soon as climatic conditions permitted. Other humans would have begun to colonise the coastal fringes by sea from Europe. Of these races, Eardisland has very little trace, but local archaeologists found flint flakes in a field very near the village centre in 2007. These have been ascribed to the late Mesolithic or early Neolithic period, approximately 5000 to 4000 BC, but constitute merely debitage, i.e. waste from flint working in that area by inhabitants of that period. In addition, aerial photography of a field within 2km. of the village has revealed extensive crop marks which are listed as enclosures, and have been tentatively ascribed to the Romano-British period.

Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) lists 108 sites within the parish of Eardisland-but only two of these are ascribed to periods before "Medieval" [which they define as 'AD 1066 to 1539']- these two both being allocated to the Bronze Age [2500BC to 701BC].<sup>2</sup>

These two Bronze Age sites are SMR numbers 10384 and 31593. The latter refers to *Bronze Age Axe-Broadmarsh Coppice* the former to *Ring Ditch, S of Kirby Hall Cottages, Eardisland*. This is described as a *Barrow cemetery [Bronze age – 2400 BC? To 801 BC?]*

Not currently included in the SMR is a further Bronze Age item. In the year 2000 a metal-detectorist found in Admarsh Meadow, Burton, what turned out to be, according to expert advice<sup>3</sup>, a Middle Bronze Age Dirk/Dagger dating from the period c.1400 to c.1140 BC. Several shards of pottery were also found which were thought not..."to be medieval, but more likely late prehistoric, iron age or Bronze Age."<sup>4</sup> Dr Barber goes on to comment that "during the Bronze Age a small but significant proportion of objects were not finally deposited until some considerable time after they were made." The Dirk/Dagger is therefore not necessarily evidence of human activity in that part of what later became the Manor of Burton at such very early dates.

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<sup>1</sup> White,P. The Arrow Valley Herefordshire. Archaeology, Landscape Change & Conservation. Orphans Press Leominster, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the SMR also lists seventeen sites as "*Date not known*". The nature of several of these suggests that archaeological investigation might well establish pre-Roman or Romano-British dates .

<sup>3</sup> Dr Martyn Barber, English Heritage, Swindon. His Paper "A Middle Bronze Age Dirk/Dagger from Windmill Hill, Eardisland , Herefordshire" is to be found as Appendix 2 at page 124 of White, P "The Arrow Valley, Herefordshire: Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation", Orphans Press, Leominster, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> White,P. as in footnote number 3 above, page 126, via Selfe P. in "A Case Study of Burton Court" Saxon Press, 2006, page 86.

But all this does give a little more definition to the possible earliest date of human habitation in this area.

### *Time passed.....*

Evidence for the Roman period [Say 55BC to 410 AD] can only be expected to be of an archaeological nature. However, other than very sparse finds of Roman pottery shards in territory later to be the manor of Burton, the only item I can quote at present is the Roman road running approximately north to south forming much of the eastern boundary both of the manor of Burton and the parish of Eardisland.

Between the end of the Roman period and the start of the "TRE"<sup>5</sup> referred to in Domesday Book, lies a period of 632 years. Without putting forward details of what lay behind their thinking, previous writers have suggested what may have been going on in the Arrow Valley area for at least part of this time.

About the year 600AD., the valley of the river Arrow and its immediate environs were subject to occupation by "Anglians" led by the Mercian Prince Merewahl.<sup>6</sup> This is rather earlier than suggested by others. For example: "*c.650...Rowe Ditch probably dates from the earliest arrival of the English in numbers in the Arrow Valley.*"<sup>7</sup> and *c.675 "Anglian boundary at the Lugg; first settlement made in the Leon, on the site of what became Leominster."*<sup>8</sup> and then "*c.700 Occupation of the Kingsland, Eardisland and Monkland area, and first Dyke dug. Possibly there was an earthwork at Burton, at the east end of a wooded ridge.*"<sup>9</sup>

Whilst our area is many miles west of the part of England which came to be known as "Danelaw", there do exist mentions of Danish incursions into Herefordshire.<sup>10</sup> For example, referring to c.790-840 AD.: "*...incursions and ravages of the Danes... ..burned to the ground the Nunnery of Leominster...*"<sup>11</sup> and "*...from 858 to 866, the Danes ravaged the whole of England...Leominster, in common with the whole of Mercia suffered severely. In 980..., the Danes again penetrated to this part of England...*"<sup>12</sup> and "*Leominster had successfully weathered the Viking invasions of 866-95*"<sup>13</sup>.

Apart from these Danish incursions, whether or not they touched life in the Eardisland vicinity directly, it is safe to imagine an "Anglo Saxon" lifestyle developing and flourishing here from about 700 AD. until 1066, being the end of the reign of King Edward 'The Confessor', which is later referred to in Domesday Book, (1086) the earliest documentary source for Eardisland.

In addition to what is to be learned from Domesday Book, local Place-Names provide ample evidence of 'AngloSaxon' activity, both in the parish and this part of Herefordshire in general. [eg. Burton; and several/many other '-ton', places].

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<sup>5</sup> *Tempore regis Edwardi.* Edward the Confessor reigned from 1042 to 1066.

<sup>6</sup> Reeves, N. "...Leon Valley...", pages 1 and 128.

<sup>7</sup> White, P. et al "The Arrow Valley, Herefordshire: Archaeology, Landscape, Change and Conservation" Orphans Press, Leominster, 2003, page 47.

<sup>8</sup> Whitehead J.G.O. "Early Anglian Defense Works in the Arrow Valley." WFC 1936, page 56.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pages 53 and 56.

<sup>10</sup> One local property name suggests the remote possibility of a Danish presence here over a long enough period of time for the name to stick. See my Paper on "Seaside".

<sup>11</sup> Williams, Reverend J. "History of Radnorshire". 1905.

<sup>12</sup> Blacklock, F.G. "The Suppressed Benedictine Minster and other Ancient & Modern Institutions of the Borough of Leominster", Leominster, The Mortimer Press, [1902 or 1907].

<sup>13</sup> Hillaby J & C. "Leominster Minster, Priory and Borough c660-1539" Publ. The Friends of Leominster Priory in association with Logaston Press. 2006.

Whilst it is not my general intention to include archaeological matters in my various Papers, it would be wrong not to mention the considerable amount of early pottery excavated at Burton Court in recent years. Expert opinion puts it within a date range of AD. 1050-1160.<sup>14</sup>

Whether or not Burton was within the area "Lene" held by Earl Morcar between c.1066 and c.1071 is to be discussed in my Papers about Morcar and/or the Lordship of the Manor of Burton.

Earl Morcar is well recorded.<sup>15</sup> In 1066 he was holding the lands which later came to be known as Eardisland although still a teenager. Irrespective of his age he had been elected Earl of the Northumbrians in October 1065.

1066 saw a succession of Royal changes. "The Confessor" died..... "(January) *Death of King Edward; Earl Harold becomes king (September) King Harold of England defeats and kills King Harold of Norway at Stamford Bridge (October) Duke William of Normandy defeats and kills King Harold of England at Hastings*"<sup>16</sup> Not a good year to be a king in England unless your name was William.

1066 was also an important year for Morcar and his brother Edwin. They were defeated in battle at Gate Fulford which preceded Stamford Bridge. They were not at Stamford Bridge; nor Hastings - following which their initial support for Edgar Aetheling wavered.

Morcar, after 1066, was in and out of favour with King William 'The Conqueror'. He is well recorded by eminent historians: it would take the story of Eardisland no further forward to attempt to summarise his life after 1066. However, suffice it to say that in 1071 he was imprisoned by William the Conqueror and it is likely that this was when his lands were confiscated and taken into Royal control.<sup>17</sup> This would have included Lene/Eardisland. It must however be added that my present understanding of the period 1066-1091 includes some troubling inconsistencies.

After 1091 my files split and I deal separately with each of the four manors within the parish. This is based on very detailed notes prepared by a notable historian of Herefordshire<sup>18</sup> in 2004 for a Local Historian working on the Pembridge area. Although prepared with Pembridge firmly in mind the notes contain quite a lot about Eardisland. Of particular importance is the fact that he records that in 1091, following a grant of land to him by King William II (Rufus), William (i) Braose of Bramber in Sussex settled a certain Gilbert<sup>19</sup> at Burton Court.<sup>20</sup> A little later he says: *William...[Braose]...may also have brought two other knights (ancestors of the des Yveteaux and le Poitevin families) from Sussex. To the first of these he gave lands.....and at Hinton in Eardisland.....To the latter he gave lands.....and Twyford in Eardisland...* Impliedly he kept Eardisland itself for himself, and much else besides.

The Papers which follow address in more detail aspects of some of the various pre-1091 topics which I have touched on in this Introduction.

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<sup>14</sup> See Selfe, P. "A Case Study of Burton Court in the Parish of Eardisland". Saxon Press, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> For example in the Dictionary of National Biography.

<sup>16</sup> The Sphere Illustrated History of Britain. Ed. Kenneth O. Morgan; derived from The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain. 1984. OUP.

<sup>17</sup> Dictionary of National Biography. OUP. 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Coplestone-Crow, B.

<sup>19</sup> Who he later identifies as Gilbert St Ouen.

<sup>20</sup> Also granting him other lands in the general area.



