

Gill House, the History of a Dartmoor Longhouse in the Village of Brentor

by Carol Butson, 2020

Names connected with Gill House are Kinsman, Rice and Gill.

Was Kinsman the original occupant of Gill House, and was it originally called Undertown when it was built in the 1500s?

Protestation returns of Brentor 1641

This is a list drawn up by the House of Commons stating the names of people loyal to King Charles. The names for Brentor include:-

Michael Kinsman, Walter Batten - Overseer, William Doidge – Overseer, Nicholas Rundle, Georges Rundle - Constable, John Tooker – Churchwarden, Nicholas Doidge, Nicholas Marten, Roger Marten, Nicholas Blatchford and several others.

Comments and queries

Michael Kinsman is also mentioned in the Hearth Tax Returns 20 years later, this surname is repeated in Brentor residents from the 1800s. Edward Kinsman Rice, a farmer and butcher was living at what was by then known as Gill House. The surname Gill is also mentioned in the 1800s with reference to an occupant of Gill House and nearby Gill's Cottages. No address is given for Michael Kinsman, but was he living in the two room Dartmoor longhouse which was later enlarged to become Gill House? If so what was the house originally called. Two other houses dating from the medieval period existed nearby, Bonnaford and Lowertown, why did this house not have a name?

Brentor Parish - Hearth Tax 1662

Gill House stands in the centre of Brentor village near the war memorial. An early reference to a person who may have lived there is contained in the Hearth Tax record. There seems to be no record of the name of the building before it was called Gill House in the 1800s.

The hearth tax was introduced in England and Wales in 1662 to provide a regular source of income for the newly restored monarch, King Charles II. Parliament had accepted that the King required an annual income of £1.2 million to run the country, much of which came from customs and excise. By 1661 the sum was short by £300,000, a figure that the hearth tax was projected to yield but which proved to be a hopeless overestimate.

Sometimes referred to as chimney money, the hearth tax was essentially a property tax on dwellings graded according to the number of their fireplaces. The 1662 Act introducing the tax stated that 'every dwelling and other House and Edifice ...shall be chargeable ...for every fire-hearth and stove....the sum of two shillings by the yeare'. It continued to be levied until 1689.

The Devon Hearth Tax for “Brentarre” Parish (Brentor) shows the following names and the number of hearths in the house. At that time Gill House may have been a Dartmoor longhouse, having only two rooms downstairs, the one on the side nearest the road with a fire place, the other room used for animals and storage. The later two room extension at the front did not then exist being built some 200 years later.

The names on the Hearth Tax document for Brentor are as follows:-

Michael Kinsman - 1, Walter Nicholas - 3, Wilmott Tucker - 1, Thomas Kinsman - 1, Walter Batten - 3, John Colling - 5, May Hearne - 2, Rich'd Pike - 1, Henry Davy - 1, Mary Marten - 3, Nicho' Rundell - 2, Constantine Horrell - 2, John Cole - 3, Oliver Randell - 3, John Dodge - 4, Nicho' Marten - 3, Will'm Gregory - 2

Paupers

Oliver Blatchford - 1, Michael Tucker - 1, John Mettor - 2, Michael Steere - 1, Roger Gregory - 1, Joane With - 2, Allen Herryng - 1, Margr'tt Davys - 1

Comments and queries

It is not clear why some people are labelled paupers, maybe it was thought that they would be unable to pay. In Victorian times Gill House was occupied by Edward Kinsman Rice, could it be assumed that at the time of the Hearth Tax the house was known by a different name and the occupant was Michael Kinsman?

It is interesting to note that 200 years ago the Brentor Inn was known as the Herring Arms, is that where Allen Herryng lived in the 1600s? When the turnpike road from Tavistock to Lydford was opened in 1762, the Brentor Inn was a toll house it was called 'Riccard's House', it was on the crossroads with a pack horse trail from Mary Tavy via Wortha Mill to Coryton.

The Hearth Tax record is held at the Devon Rural Archive, Shilstone Manor, Modbury, Devon. .

Court of Lydford – 1586 - Extract from Worth's Dartmoor.

At the court sessions at Lydford Castle on 21 September 1586 Thomas Pitford sought remedy (compensation) against John Thorn and Maria his wife in the matter of “Quinque les Callicowe et Hullan bands, tres les Handkerchiefs et unum les woollen wastecoatt”, which roughly translates as “ A calico garment, three hankies and one woollen waistcoat”. The aforesaid John and Maria did not appear in person to answer in the matter of the complaint. It was ordered that the Forester (overseer of the Moor) appoint two honest and lawful men (Venville men) to value the aforesaid goods. He appointed William Gill and Thomas Batten, who, being sworn upon their oaths assessed the value of the goods at 6s 8d. Note a mix of Latin French and Old English in the complaint. It is not clear if the goods were stolen or just bought but not paid for. The court also considered the deaths of tenants and naming of the next heir, the decay of hedges and roads and “unclawed” mastiffs. Large dogs had to have their claws cut off so that they could not be used for hunting. This seems to be the first time the surname “Gill” is mentioned in the Brentor area. Batten and Gill must have been persons of some standing in the local community to be appointed as Venville men. Batten may have been living at Brinsabatch in South Brentor, but it is not known where Gill lived.

This book is held at the Devon Rural Archive, Shilstone Manor, Modbury

Hand Drawn Map of Brentor (approx 1800)

This map is dated around 1800 and drawn up by a person who was rather snobbish and only included roads leading to richer houses. A road is shown to South Brentor (the Battens at Brinsabatch) but not to North Brentor. He obviously thought that no one of any consequence lived there! The village is only shown as a dot on the map. *This map is held at the Devon Rural Archive, Shilstone Manor, Modbury.*

1861 Census for Brentor

Reference RG9 1463 Milton Abbot area, Lamerton Parish, Folio 8, Page 9, Schedule 41

Address Gills Cottages, North Brentor. (Family of Edward Kinsman Rice)

Surname	Relation	Status	Sex	Age	Occupation	Born	Remarks
Rice, Edward K	Head,	Married,	Male,	53	Shoemaker/Preacher	Lamerton	Christian Preacher
Rice, Ann J	Wife	Married		50	Shoemakers wife	Lamerton	
Rice, Edward K	Son	Unmarried		14	Scholar	Lamerton	

Comments and queries

Edward's middle name is Kinsman, this name is already mentioned as a Brentor resident in the Hearth Tax records 200 years before. He states that he was born in Lamerton, however, is he naming the parish, Brentor was in Lamerton parish until 1887? In the 1891 census Edward junior states that he was born in Brentor. Edward was a Methodist preacher appointed to the Brentor Methodist Chapel which was founded in 1827 as Bible Christian then rebuilt in 1841.

Are Gills Cottages the row of dwellings to the southeast of Gill House?

1871 Census for Brentor

Reference North Brentor, Entry no 67, no house name given

Surname	Relation	Age	Occupation
Rice, Edward	Head	63	Farmer 27 acres
Rice, Ann	Wife	60	
Rice Edward	Son	24	Butcher
Rice, Mary	Dau in law	23	

Comments and queries

The place of birth is not given on this census. Where was Edward Rice's land?. The remaining land attached to Gill House when the house was sold in 1965 consisted of just 8 acres in four fields to the east of the Methodist graveyard now accessed by the gate above Jennys Field. Was the rest of the land adjacent? The extension to the house comprising two rooms and two storeys was possibly built around 1825/30, it is late Georgian. In the early 1900s it was used as a butchers shop. The small extension at the side adjoining the road was called the boneyard, it had a door onto the road, maybe for the unwanted bones to be collected by a horse and cart. Upstairs, in the wall of the bedroom which separates the original house and the Georgian/Victorian front extension, the owners in 1965 took off some damp plaster.

They discovered the original carved stone window frame from the old house, it must date from about 1500. They covered it up, it is still there.

A gruesome story connected to Gill house says that one of the butchers committed suicide by leaning over the bath and slashing his throat with a meat cleaver. The bathroom is said to be haunted by the stench of human blood. A tragic story, but it shows that the victim cared enough to ensure that the blood could easily be washed away. Very sad for his family, whoever they were.

1881 Census for Brentor

Residence is given as in Lamerton Parish, it is not named as Gill house.

Rice, Edward K - Parent, (Edward Rimsman (sic - Kinsman Born 1847)

Rice, Mary - Spouse

Rice, Annie Alice

Rice, Jessie

Rice, Albert Henry

Rice, Frederick James

Others, Susan Brooks, Mary Hortop.

Comments and queries

The 1881 census is very brief and does not give much detail. Edward's parents Edward and Ann are no longer at Gill House, they may have died. Susan Brooks and Mary Hortop may be boarders or servants. Brentor was in Lamerton parish until 1887 when the boundary changed.

1891 Census for Brentor

Reference RG12 1751 Tavistock Area, Brentor- Folio 5, Page 3, Schedule 16

Address – Gill House, Brentor (Family of Edward Kinsman Rice)

Surname	Relation	Status	Sex	Age	Occupation	Born	Remarks
Rice, Edward K	Head	Married	Male	44	Butcher	Brentor	
Rice, Mary M H	Wife	Married	Female	43		Bratton Clovelly	
Rice, Jessie J H	Daughter	Single		16		Brentor	
Rice, Edward J	Son	Single	Male	14	Ironmongers apprentice	Brentor	
Rice, William J	Son	Single	Male	13	Scholar	Brentor	
Rice, Albert H	Son	Single	Male	12	Scholar	Brentor	
Rice, Fred K	Son	Single	Male	10	Scholar	Brentor	
Rice, Edward S	Son	Single	Male	3		Brentor	
Scettrino Wallace,	Boarder	Single	Male	30	Station Master	Axminster	

1901 Census for Brentor

Entry 15 - Gill House

Surname	Relation	Status	Age	Occupation
Rice, Mary M	Head	Widow	53	Butcher
Rice, Jessie J	Dau	Single	26	
Rice, FredT C	Son	Single	18	Butcher
Rice, Edward S	Son	Single	13	

Rice, Stanley	Son	Single	9	
Penhale, Elizabeth	Boarder	Widow	77	Retired Nurse
Gill, Ethel	Visitor	Single	16	

Edward Kinsman Rice has died 1n 1899, Mary is now a widow.

Entry 16 - Brentor Village

Gill, Norman	Head	Married	34	Arsenic Miner
Gill, Annie	Wife	Married	28	

Is Ethel Gill, visitor at Entry 15 Gill House, the daughter of Norman and Annie?

Burials for Brentor Parish - 1837 to 1897

Kinsman, Caleb age 50 buried 18 October 1841.

Rice, Jane age 45 buried 17 Jan 1867

Rice, Jane Ann age 7 buried 25 April 1867

Kinsman, Grace age 91 buried 18 March 1881

Comments and queries

Do these people have any connection with Gill House?

Kellys Directory 1902

Brentor Post Office - Robert Rice is sub postmaster. Letters arrive from Tavistock at 8am and are despatched at 1pm and 7.35pm. Postal orders are issued but not paid.

Residents of Brentor include:-

Batten, Daniel, Shopkeeper

Rice, Roger , carpenter, Burn Lane

Rice, Samuel, carpenter, Burnlane

Glover, Walter, Herring Arms Public House

Gill, William (no occupation given)

Rice, Mary, farmer and butcher

Rice, Edward and John, farmers

Rice, Thomas, farmer

Comments and queries

Mary, the widow of Edward Kinsman Rice is still at Gill House running the butchers shop with meat from animals provided by her farmer son Edward. In 1891 he was a 14 year old ironmonger's apprentice, but since his father's death he must have taken over the running of the family farm. Does his still farm the 27 acres previously mention in census? John Rice does not appear to be his brother, is he a cousin?

Tavistock Directory 1918

Rice, R and S, Burn Lane, Brentor

Rice E J, Butcher, Brentor village.

Rice, T H, farmer, Brentor village

Rice Mrs T Lowertown, Brentor.

Morris Directory of Tavistock 1870

Roger Rice – Farmer

Harrods Directory 1878

Edward Rice Junior – Butcher. Robert Rice – Grocer and sub-postmaster

Kellys Directory 1883

Rice, Robert and Samuel, carpenters, Burn Lane

Rice, Edward, Farmer and butcher

Rice, Robert, farmer

Kellys directory 1889

Rice, Robert and Samuel, carpenters, Burn Lane

Rice, Edward, farmer and butcher

Rice, Robert, Farmer

Rice Thomas, Farmer

Kellys Directory 1902

Rice , Edward and John, farmers

Rice, Mary, farmer and butcher

Rice, Thomas, farmer

Brentor Tithe Maps 1842 – Page 16

Land held by Thomas Rice, Land Owner Rt Hon Hugh Fortescue (Earl)

1481 - Undertown Meadow

1512 – Cottage and garden

1541 - Garden

1543 – Long Undertown Meadow

1545 – Undertown Field Pasture

1547 – Garden

1549 – House and Yard

1550 – Garden

1551 – Garden

1553 – Meadow

1557 – Marka's Meadow

1559 – Lower second Field

1560 – Higher Second Field

1561 – Third second field

1562 – Lower Bunters

1563 – Higher Bunters

1564 – Markes Meadow

1565 Bunters Meadow

1566 – Little Bunters

Land held by Joseph Powell as owner/occupier

1499 – Gills Meadow (also 7 fields, 4 houses, 2 gardens, total 19acres)

Land held by David Cundy – North Brentor

1755 – Gills Meadow 1756 - Lower Gills Meadow

Land held by Daniel Kinsman – North Brentor

Holyeat Farm 99 acres

Land held by Grace Coram owner/occupier North Brentor

1467 Gale Field, 1468 Jenny's Field Meadow 1 acre

Land held by Daniel Cundy at Forder Mills
249 acres including Lower Gills Meadow

Land held by William Kinsman South Brentor
Various fields, pasture and meadow, numbers 1200, 1356, 1345, 1390, total 122
acres

Daniel Kinsman 13 acres at Heathfield

Held in West Devon Record Office, Cattedown, Plymouth

Also see and obtain -

Brentor Parish Records from 1720

Bishops Transcripts 1606,

Brentor Parochial Records Churchwardens accounts 1726 to 1829

Rural Deans Visitation Book 1823 to 1874

Brentor Archive Project

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