



STRETE HISTORY

The first documented mention of the village was as Streta in 1194. In 1244 it became known as Street and remained so until the late 19th century when it was renamed Strete.

The change to the spelling in the 1850s seems quite trivial to us now, but it was a matter of major significance to the villagers over a century and a half ago.

It was only in the mid-19th century that a reliable nationwide postal service began to be established in England. Before that communication by letter was a pretty haphazard affair. From the 1840s onwards the volume of mail rapidly increased, and in doing so caused new problems for the inhabitants of our village. They found that letters addressed to them were increasingly being directed to Street in Somerset - a town of over 10,000 inhabitants, and vastly better known than our little community on the South Devon coast.

The problem was discussed by the villagers and eventually a decision was taken to officially change the spelling of the village's name – from Street to Strete.

If we go back another 100 years, to the mid-18th century, the village was then in effect spread over two locations. There was the farming community of Strete, located on the top of the cliffs where the village stands today, and there was also a fishing community down on the beach by Strete Gate.

Tales of this second Strete village, the village of Undercliff - of which there is now no trace – fascinated historians for several years. Did it really exist, or was it just a myth? Some serious historical research eventually produced the truth.

In the archives of Devon County Council there are several 17th and 18th century maps, and also maritime charts, which clearly show the village by the sea. The most conclusive piece of evidence is a survey carried out in the 1740s – the original document still exists – which provides full details of “...*the cottages att Streate Sands...*”. Seventeen cottages are listed, with two new ones being built at the time of the survey. There are also several ‘cellars’, or store houses, but only one garden is specifically mentioned. The count of the inhabitants is a bit imprecise, but there were certainly more than thirty permanent residents at the time. And some of their names – Tucker and Mitchelmore for example – are still familiar in the area today.

Such evidence that exists points towards the destruction of the village taking place in the early 1780s. As with Hallsands, a century or more later, the village probably met its fate as the result of a number of storms over a period of years, rather than disappearing completely in one cataclysmic event. What has been proved, however, is that Undercliff survived the Great Storm of 1703 which had previously been believed to be the date of its demise.

The village was mainly concerned with farming, there being three working farms, Cox's, Manor and Strete Barton. Many of the cottages, such as Glen Cottage, built in the 1600s, would have housed the farm workers.

Strete no longer has working farms within the village, but all three original farmhouses still exist. The Long House of Manor Farm, sometimes known as Higher Farm, was probably built in the 14th or 15th century. Strete Barton Farm barns were eventually sold for redevelopment and much of the stone from these was used to construct the new bungalows in Start Bay Park in the 1970s.

Farming is now located around the edges of the village, although there is still grazing of livestock on some of the fields within the village.

Strete was a relatively self-sufficient and self-contained community.

There were two shops, a butcher, two bakers, blacksmith, carpenter, cobbler, fish hawker and a tailor all living within the village. The farms supplied eggs, vegetables, fruit and milk that was delivered to the door.

There were two family building firms and in the 1920s and 30s a car hire business was run from the local shop as well as a petrol pump outside the shop for passing motorists.

The Church, Chapel, Kings Arms Public House with Clifton House, The New Inn, now Sunny View, Caudells (originally called Spion Kop) and Roxburgh House (the village post office in the 1880s and 90s) were built between 1820 and 1838.

Asherne, perched on the top of the cliff, is an imposing house built in the 1820s and substantially extended in the 1840s. Since 1864 the house has remained in the ownership of several branches of the same family. Beyond Asherne's drive is Strete Lodge, possibly built in the early 19th century, with its coach house, stables and servants' quarters next door in The Mews.

The school was built in 1838, opening in 1839, with 90 children on the roll. The main playground was in what is now the church car park.

In 1965 the school closed and was converted into the Stable Door Restaurant, later to be re-christened the Laughing Monk. In 2019 the restaurant closed and the property was converted into residential during 2020.

In 1943 the Government issued a high-level order to clear an area of 25 square miles, including the village of Strete, of civilians and farm animals. The local people were told they had six weeks to pack up and leave.

The American army moved in to train for the D-Day landings. In April 1944 the tragedy of Exercise Tiger took place in Start Bay when German E-Boats ambushed several US Boats at night resulting in over 700 US soldiers being lost. This has been commemorated each year with American survivors or their family members returning to Slapton Sands.

In late May 1944, when the huge numbers of military vehicles in the area were joined by an ever-increasing armada of warships in Start Bay, Operation Overlord began.

Many months passed before the villagers were permitted to return to their homes, some never did. Much work was needed to repair, clean and clear the area of large amounts of unexploded ammunition.

One of the prettiest old thatched buildings had been burnt down. It stood where the King's Arms car park is today and housed the Women's Institute reading room, in which there was

a small library, the Young Men's Club, a cottage, and a blacksmith's forge.

More recently there have been new dwellings built at Start Bay Park, Hynetown Road, The Plat, Crestway and Crestfields. There have been older properties demolished and rebuilt, some in context with their surroundings, others setting a precedent of modern dwellings. There has been a change of use of some buildings. The amount and speed of traffic passing through the village, especially at peak times, has increased as has the number of visitors from home and abroad.