

The Parish of Longhope

Longhope is a rural parish lying on the Gloucestershire/Herefordshire border, between May Hill and the Forest of Dean. The name 'Longhope' comes from Old English and means a long, enclosed valley. Longhope is mentioned in the Domesday Book, which records that the village had a mill by the village stream. The Parish topography is typified by long valleys enclosed by steep-sided, wooded hills. The highest point in the Parish is May Hill, which rises to around 972 feet (296 meters) and is a significant landmark with its distinctive crown of trees. The Parish is bisected by two main roads, the A40 and the A4136. A few small lanes complete the rather sparse road network. The Parish has an extensive network of public foot paths, which provide access to the surrounding landscape. The two main roads divide the Parish into three sections, each of which will now be described in more detail.

The A4136 corridor and the area to the South (Mill Lane/Velthouse Lane/Hopes Hill/Old Hill/Little London/The Slad) comprises linear 'ribbon' settlement along the main road itself, with a scatter of dwellings situated down small (often 'dead end') lanes. The land bordering the A4136 comprises undulating and often very steep open fields and wooded areas. Away from the main road, the buildings are often separated by large distances. The Slad and some parts of Old Hill are extremely steep.

Many of the buildings in this area are pre-twentieth century and one building at Harts Barn is reputed to date back to the thirteenth century. Close to Harts Barn on the A4136 is the Old Parish Mill, which was built in 1649 and continued to produce flour up until 1946. The older buildings are interspersed with more modern properties and at Royal Springs there is a group of former council houses, which are now either privately owned or let by a housing association.

In addition to dwellings, there are a number of commercial enterprises in this area of the Parish, mainly located along the A4136 corridor. These include Harts Barn Craft Centre, The Yew Tree pub, Richard Read Commercials, The Dick Whittington Farm Park and an alpaca farm. The Severn Trent water sewage works is sited off of Velthouse Lane, as are the empty sheds of John Smith's former chicken business and the more dilapidated buildings of a former piggery.

The vast majority of the land in this area is farmed (mainly arable or sheep grazing) or wooded. There are panoramic views out towards Gloucester from the ridge between Longhope and Little London and, in the other direction, across the Longhope valley and main settlement area. There are several land marks in this part of the Parish, including Harts Barn, the war memorial at foot of Old Hill

and some listed buildings (including an old village shop no longer in use in Little London). The area has not, in the main, lent itself to any extensive new building due to the steep terrain, difficulty of access due to narrow lanes and safety concerns relating to the A4136.

Between the A4136 and the A40 (and connecting the two via Church Road) lies Longhope Village, the main settlement of the Parish. The village itself is located in an enclosed linear valley which is aligned roughly North/South. The valley bottom rises gently to the North. The steep valley sides create a sense of enclosure around the village, although the valley widens out somewhat towards the South. The Longhope Brook runs along the valley floor and is fed by several small tributaries. The village itself is strung out along the valley floor for over a mile. Village amenities include a Post Office, village shop, bakery, primary school, retirement home, nursing home, three public houses and a recreation ground.

A large part of the village is designated as a conservation area, which contains several notable buildings and features. Examples include the twelfth century Church, Court Farm, Longhope Manor, the Old Rectory, several timber-framed buildings (some dating back to the seventeenth century, such as Court Leet), the 'Lion' water trough (dated 1904), the Latchen Rooms, Tan House and Pound House.

Close to the church is Rectory Meadows, a group of 16 former council houses built in the 1960s which are now either privately owned or let by a housing association. Over the past 40 years or so, residential development in Longhope has mostly been confined to a 1970s housing estate and two smaller developments off Latchen (Bathams Close and Latchen Orchard), with additional infilling of single or small groups of houses between existing buildings.

Towards the North end of the valley, the village is very linear in form, with often only a single line of dwellings between Church Road and the fields behind. Historic buildings stand alongside more modern houses. The Church of All Saints dates back to the twelfth century and is a grade two (star) listed building. From Church Road, Chesgrove Lane and School Lane provide access to the fields, woods and farmsteads of the valley side. Public footpaths run parallel to Church Road along the sides of the valley and also run up into the surrounding hills. These paths provide access to the surrounding countryside and afford a variety of alternative views into the village.

Towards the South end of the valley the village becomes more compact and dense, with a huge diversity of building forms, styles and settings. Domestic houses share space with a school, a post office, a shop, the recreation ground (with pavilion), the village hall, a small lorry park and a light industrial estate (on the site of a former saw mill). The layout is somewhat organic and haphazard, having grown gradually from linear development along Church Road, Latchen and Old Monmouth Road with later 'infill' development between the older buildings. Although the settlement is denser and more compact here than in other parts of the village, there is no sense of crowding. This is due in part to various open spaces interspersed among the buildings. Such open spaces include the recreation ground (home to the local football team and tennis club), the allotments, the lorry park and the 'wildlife meadow'.

The whole village has a rural setting, with views out to the surrounding hills and woods which helps to create a sense of space within the settlement area. Several fields and paddocks penetrate the built environment, and these form important green spaces which enhance the area. Trees form an important aspect of the local 'greenery', both in the distant views from the village and, more intimately, among the buildings themselves (e.g. Old Monmouth Road). The 'rural' aspect of the village and surrounding area is emphasised by the presence of a variety of bird life (including black cap, treecreeper, nuthatch and long-tailed tit) and small mammals (including hedgehogs and dormice). Japanese knotweed is present quite close to the main settlement area.

High up on a ridge overlooking Longhope village is Hobbs Quarry, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI). The old quarry exposes sections through ancient coral reefs from the Silurian period (400 million years ago) and the Wenlock limestone of the quarry face contains various fossils (including brachiopods, trilobites, crinoids and corals).

The area to the North of the A40 contains May Hill, a geological outlier of the Malvern Hills. May Hill is a famous landmark and can be seen from miles around, with its distinctive 'crown' of trees. The summit of May Hill is an SSSI, and offers panoramic views in all directions. The vast majority of this area consists of hilly agricultural land or woodland. It has diverse flora and fauna and is largely untouched by modern infrastructure.

In the shadow of May Hill lies the settlement of May Hill village, scattered among small fields, orchards and woodland. The vernacular architecture of this area typically involves small-scale local stone

construction, with slate or tiled roofs. More recent ribbon development includes several buildings of brick or brick and render construction.

A nineteenth century government surveyor once described the local inhabitants of May Hill as a “wild and uncivilised people, quite beyond the pale of civilisation”. This observation might no longer hold true, but the current inhabitants are known for their tenacity in defending May Hill from the predations of others who would seek to diminish the unique character of the area.