

## Musbury Heritage – News

In February Michael Pritchard and I had some interesting chats with past residents of Musbury. We visited Brian Craig in his Seaton home and he regaled us with many stories



*Derek & Stephen Salter*

about life in the village after WW2. Later in the month, Derek Salter, who was visiting from his home in South Africa, and his brother Stephen joined us for a chat about the Salter family of Yew Tree House, particularly their grandfather Hedley Herbert Henley Salter who was a real character. These conversations have been recorded and I hope to find time to make notes and eventually incorporate these into stories on Musbury Heritage.

We mustn't lose the memories of the elders of Musbury, even if they no longer reside here, so if you know of someone we should talk to and record for posterity please let me know. Perhaps you would like to be involved?

In April I made another trip to Devon Heritage Centre and came away with some useful information, but it will take many trips to find time to investigate over the 1000 items in their archives that mention Musbury!

Later in April, I was visited by two delightful sisters who had told me they were descended from the Partridges who lived in Musbury in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I was surprised to hear they were both adopted shortly after birth to separate families. They only found out about each other when they were investigating their ancestry! They told a very heart-warming story and it's nice to think that their birth father's family from Musbury brought them together.



*Julie Schofield & Alison Davies*

Next month (10 June) I will be guiding a history walk around the village for the Musbury Community Club and you can find more details on the MCC page in this magazine. If by any chance it fills up or is over-subscribed, I will fix another date. Although not specific to that period, the walk will concentrate on the 19th-century era when Musbury was a bustling self-sufficient village.

Last month I mentioned we failed in our bid for postcards of Musbury in an eBay auction. We've had some success with more postcards this month, but we are still losing out sometimes to another bidder. Such is life, but we would like to know if this is someone in the village. Please, let us know if it is you or someone you know. We just need to know if the pictures are safe and who we should contact regarding them.

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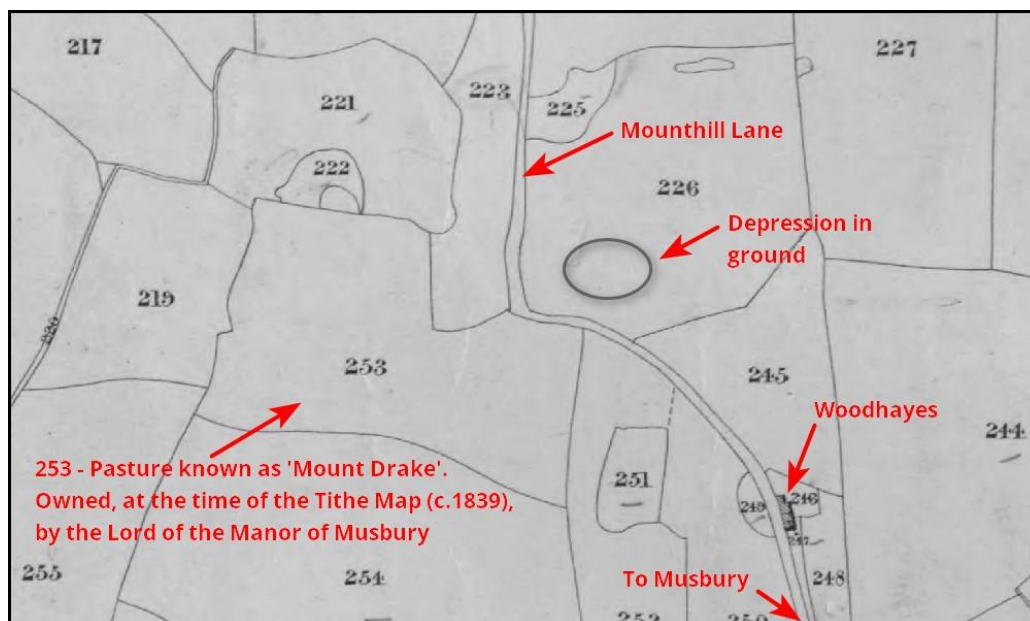
## Musbury Heritage – Mount Drake

For the first time in this publication, I am going to delve into the ancient history of our village. There are many contradictory stories about Musbury's early history. Most of us know about Musbury Castle being an Iron-Age hillfort and later possibly a Roman encampment followed by an Anglo-Saxon settlement. But what happened in the succeeding years?

Mount Drake may not mean much to many villagers, but it is important, being the historical stepping-stone between the hillfort and the establishment of the village we have today. Unfortunately, we know little of its past or when it existed, therefore much of the following is based on the scant information we have and plenty of my conjecture.

**What was Mount Drake?** The evidence seems to suggest it was a large house or estate that the Drake family built sometime between AD 1000 and 1400. The Drakes were already in Musbury, as they were believed to have been an Anglo-Saxon clan [Dragos or Dracos] who were probably the last inhabitants of the hillfort. In more settled times there was likely to be less need to live in such an inhospitable environment. Perhaps they also needed to be nearer the valley with its plentiful supply of water and land more suitable for livestock or growing crops. Some writers refer to it being a fortified residence, but no source has been found to support this.

**Where was Mount Drake?** On the Tithe Map [c. 1839 – see map extract] there is a pasture named Mount Drake. As you come down Mounthill Lane from the Castle there is a sharp left bend after a steep descent. The field is to the right of this bend, where there is a gate and the start of a public footpath. What is noticeable is that the pasture, whilst not flat is probably the first reasonably level area as you descend the hill. To the left of the lane as you get to the bend there is also a large depression in the field. This could easily be where the stone came from to build Mount Drake. Reverend H W Cockerton, the rector of St Michaels from 1920 to 1932, stated that “traces of a mansion known as Mount Drake” could be found in the field of the same name.



**When did Mount Drake exist?** No evidence has been found to date its origin, but we know it was occupied in 1415, so it seems fair to assume it dates from at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Reverend Cockerton states that Mount Drake was “the property of the same family of Drake from before the time of William the Conqueror” [1066 CE]. There is evidence that Mount Drake was no longer the residence of the Drakes by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. After this Ashe House became their preferred residence.

**What became of Mount Drake?** Today there are no obvious signs of the remains of a building when walking along the public footpath in the field called Mount Drake. It is possible with further investigation something may be found, but 500 years of farming can cover up a lot!

**What would we like to know about Mount Drake?** It would be nice to have some evidence that it existed and an approximation of how big it was. Some artefacts or relics from the settlement would be a bonus. An archaeological dig is unlikely to happen as it is difficult to imagine where the impetus and finance would come from to proceed. Musbury Castle has never had an archaeological investigation to my knowledge.

Musbury has an interesting history and was a more influential community in Devon than it is today. We had an Iron Age Hillfort, a Roman road and possibly an encampment, plus in the 1086 CE Domesday Book, we were in the largest 40% of recorded settlements. It is a shame therefore that we have very little knowledge about Musbury’s early history and practically no physical evidence to help us.

*For more information, details of sources and the chance to comment please go to [www.musburyheritage.co.uk](http://www.musburyheritage.co.uk) and search for “Mount Drake” on the Home Page.*