

## History of Bromham, Wiltshire

Bromham has a long history as a settlement, with archaeological evidence stretching back to Mesolithic time. Details of this rich history are documented here. [Wiltshire Council](#) and the [Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre](#) have further information and archives available via their websites. Specific details on the history of the [Bromham churches](#), the [Social Centre](#), Tennis and Football clubs can be found at the end of this document along with historical map references.

Wiltshire Council has produced a potted history of the village which we reproduce in its entirety here with minor edits to reflect recent changes **‘The Bromham Story’**:

Bromham is a fairly large village containing several settlements, apart from the main village of Bromham itself. It lies four miles to the north-west of Devizes and four miles to the south-west of Calne, between the clay vale of the river Avon and the chalk downs. Much of the parish lies on the only extensive area of Lower Greensand in the county and this geology has greatly influenced the economic development of the area. In the west is Oxford clay with Corallian Limestone at Westbrook and Spye Park, while to the east the terrain rises on the chalklands. This latter area includes Oliver’s Castle and Beacon Hill at over 210 metres, while land at Spye Park is over 160 metres. The centre of the parish is around 90 to 100 metres above sea level.

The main road from Chippenham to Devizes runs from north to south through the parish. It is crossed by a more minor road from Melksham to Calne. The village of Bromham now lies on a minor road to the south of the Melksham road. There are five other settlements in the parish. Netherstreet lies to the east of the Devizes road and the main village; St Edith’s Marsh is on the main Devizes Road to the south of Netherstreet and includes the Haveli Indian restaurant (formerly the Oliver Cromwell and prior to that the Bell Inn and dated 1698); Hawkstreet is ½ mile west of St Edith’s Marsh; Westbrook is one mile north-west of the main village and includes early 17th century timber framed houses and cottages and the Westbrook, formerly the New Inn. Chittoe is a very shrunken village that was once part of Bishop’s Cannings but was transferred to Bromham in 1934.

This scattered settlement is the result of the three main economic strands in the local history. The light soils provided early cultivation and good crops but the early farming pattern had a settlement of domestic industry imposed upon it. Probably from the early 14th century there was a well established weaving industry here and by the early 16th century clothiers had emerged. It is possible that several settlements grew up on wasteland and along lanes where weavers built houses and workshops. In the mid 17th century the local weaving industry dramatically collapsed and never fully recovered, although cloth was woven here until the early 19th century. Instead agriculture, and later horticulture became dominant with many small holdings and market gardens. Houses tended to be built on these cultivated holdings thus giving an even more scattered pattern of settlement.

This is a very favoured site, as is evidenced by the archaeological record. On five sites Mesolithic tools and waste have been found, indicating that families stayed in this area for short periods of time. More permanent settlement came in Neolithic times and finds have included flint tools, worked blades, scrapers and an axe head, an arrowhead and pottery, while there is a possible long barrow in the parish. Apart from flint tools, a spearhead and pottery, Bronze Age finds have included domestic hearths while two bowl barrows have also been identified. The Iron Age is dominated by Oliver's Castle on Roundway Hill and there have been finds of hearths, pottery, coins, brooches, a finger ring, a corn quern and a whet stone.

It is impossible to say that there has been continuous occupation from Neolithic times but there must have been long periods of settlement on this easily worked land. There was certainly a long period of Roman occupation and four villa sites have been discovered in the parish. These are at West Park Field, Chittoe Heath, Silver Street, below Oliver's Castle. The focus would have been the small Roman town of Verlucio on the London to Bath Roman road; this would have straddled the modern boundaries of Bromham, Calne Without and Heddington parishes. There is also evidence of iron working and Romano-British finds have been numerous. Coins, from a single specimen to a hoard, have been found at 14 sites; pottery and tiles at 12 and jewellery and beads at 6. In Roman times this area was a very well managed and carefully cultivated landscape.

There is little evidence of Saxon settlement here, although finds such as a stirrup mount and a strap end have been made. Saxon building and utensils were of wood and this has disappeared but we know that there was a later Saxon settlement as it is recorded in the Domesday Book. The fact that there was also a priest, and therefore a church, would indicate that this was a community of some standing. It is most likely that there was continuous occupation from Romano British times.

In 1086 the Domesday Book gives us some idea of the size of the village. It was held by the king and had sufficient land for 10 plough teams. Modern interpretation of the numbers recorded would give a population of between 220 and 260. There were also 2 mills, meadowland, pasture and a small wood. Around 1087 Bromham was given to Battle Abbey, founded by William I to give thanks for his victory, and it retained it until the dissolution in 1538.

There is much evidence of medieval settlement here, the church, house sites, earth-works, a deer park and more iron working. A medieval village also developed at Chittoe with its own mill and chapel of ease. By the early 14th century the chief animal husbandry was sheep and pigs, with much land (about 336 acres) used for growing cereals. Weaving was most likely to have been well established by this time. The late 15th century saw the building of Porch House, originally the Chantry, for the chantry priest of the Tocates chapel (1492).

In 1538 Bromham was purchased from the Crown by the Battle Abbey steward, Sir Edward Baynton. He was one of the great Wiltshire landowners and built Bromham House. This was

nearly as big as the royal palace of Whitehall and contained materials salvaged from Devizes Castle and a royal manor house at Corsham. In it Sir Edward entertained Henry VIII in 1535 and later James I visited on three occasions. The house was sited close to the present Bromham House Farm. Throughout this period there was considerable weaving activity and there were several small clothiers in the parish. This situation changed in 1622 when the coloured broadcloth trade was taking over from the old undyed broadcloths, as woven in Bromham. It was reported that 33 looms were idle and 800 people were unemployed – which would have included whole families of men, women and children. The industry never recovered from this and farming became as important to remaining clothiers as the cloth trade. Many weavers would have had to take farming jobs or move into local towns.

The economic situation was not helped by action here during the Civil War. Sir Edward Baynton of Bromham House was a Parliamentarian but was frequently in dispute with his own side, particularly Sir Edward Hungerford. Many on his own side thought him treacherous but this does not seem to have been the case as the Royalists burned his empty house in May 1645. The ordinary people would also have suffered with demands for money, food and accommodation made whenever troops were in the area. Two years earlier, in 1643, the Battle of Roundway would have also caused disruption and dismay in the area. Sir Edward Baynton abandoned the site of his burned out house and built a new house in Spye Park, by 1654, using building materials from the ruins of the old house. This was smaller and simpler being a long house of two low storeys, with no wings. John Evelyn, who stayed there described it as being ‘on the precipice of an incomparable prospect’.

The 18th century saw consolidation in the parish with a limited amount of new buildings. The finest was Nonsuch House, rebuilt by William Norris 1700. Local administration is represented by the building of the unusual timber blind house in the churchyard wall. This was used as a lock up for prisoners awaiting trial or as overnight accommodation for drunks. An eagerly anticipated local entertainment in 1735 caused the rebuilding of part of the church. A steeple flyer used a rope stretched from the top of the church spire to ‘fly’ down to the ground on a board. Unfortunately the steeple did not bear the strain and the excited crowds had the added spectacle of the spire falling apart. The steeple flyer survived.

The early 19th century saw many developments. During most of this time the village had its own brewery, below Church Hill, and weaving finally declined, to be replaced by more extensive market gardening. Allotments of land were made available for rent so those workers could take up this new occupation. The first half of the century is notable in the literary world because Thomas Moore, the Irish poet and lyricist, lived with his family at Sloperton Cottage from 1818 until his death in 1852. Moore was part of the Bowood circle of literary and scientific luminaries, under the patronage of the Marquess of Lansdowne. He would have taken advantage of the first post office being established in 1827, while in 1840 the introduction of the penny post brought letter sending within the scope of all villagers who could write and had a spare penny. Less settling were the local chartists activities. In 1839 there was a disturbance outside the church that had to be dispersed by magistrates, while there were other meetings in 1841 and 1842.

Chittoe was transformed from 1863 when an army officer, J.W.G. Spicer, bought the Spye Park Estate. In 1864 he demolished the early 17th century house and rebuilt it in red brick; it was greatly disliked by his neighbours. He rebuilt the farmhouses, moved and built cottages and also provided a school. Battle House was built as the dower house to Spye Park. Changes were occurring in agriculture throughout the parish and in the 1860s the last corn was ground at Chittoe Mill. Market gardening and the local cottage gardens formed the basis for a new event when the Bromham Flower show was established in the 1870s. This well regarded show became the Bromham, Chittoe and Sandridge Flower Show in 1890 and continued until 1931, with a couple of mini revivals in later years. Social and sports clubs were being created now and in the late 1880s the [Spye Park Cricket Club](#) was formed, originally for estate workers. Also toward the end of the century the Bromham Football Club was formed [more history on the Football Club can be found below].

A brush factory was set up in the late 19th century making long handled brooms for sale in the local towns. It employed 12 men and later made wooden spinning tops as toys for children and wooden rakes for haymaking. It continued until 1937. More allotments for land were created for market gardening; some of these were private ones of between one and three acres and were let at £3 an acre per year. In 1893 the telegraph came to Bromham Post Office and 1894 Bromham Parish Council was created as part of a new level of administration for the county.

An important event in 1895 was the opening of Bromham Working Men's Club. The license from the recently closed Shoulder of Mutton public house was transferred to it. Another important institution was founded in 1897 when a pig club, to provide insurance cover for the cottagers' pig was formed. It continued until 1957. The first half of the 20th century saw the formation of several groups and institutions. The Chittoe Women's Institute was formed in 1923, with one for Bromham in 1930. The present village hall [Social Centre] was built as the British Legion Club in 1924; it was handed over to the parish council in 1940. Chittoe was added to Bromham parish in 1934, an administrative change that probably reflected long social and economic practice. Chittoe Girl Guides were formed in 1936 and were re-registered as Bromham Guides c.1945/6 when it was found that most of them lived in Bromham. In the late 1940s/early 1950s two playing fields were created in the village. One was at the rear of the village and one at the Pound; the latter had football and cricket grounds and, from 1958, a hard tennis court. A youth club, formed in September 1944, doubtless made good use of these.

Piped water was first brought to the village in 1955 and mains sewerage in 1961. From the mid-20th century the popular village carnival was set up to raise funds for the village hall. In 1960 a vegetable washing and packing station was established at the rear of St Edith's House, dealing at first mainly with potatoes and carrots. Duck rearing was carried on at Netherstreet Farm and in 1961 a duck packing station was opened there. The village car park, opposite the Greyhound, was constructed in 1963 from the proceeds of the Bromham Horse Show in a good self-sufficient venture. More contentious was the demolition of the

1612 almshouses and their replacement by old people's bungalows in 1964-5. Spye Park was also demolished in 1964 but this was after fire had badly damaged the building.

Today Bromham is unusual among Wiltshire villages because of the large amounts of vegetables and soft fruits that are grown here. This gives it an aspect of a Vale of Evesham Village rather than a Wiltshire one. There are also industries here with the most substantial one being furniture maker McCarron Furniture at Clackerbrook Farm on The Common.

### **Football Club History:**

Bromham Football Club was formed in 1897, with Harry Amor and Arthur Powney as co-founders. The team first played in front of the house at Nonsuch Park in a kit consisting of blue shirts and white collars. The team was forced to re-locate pitches five times for agricultural reasons, but eventually returned to Nonsuch. At first the team had no changing rooms and used an old pigsty, until they purchased an old army hut and installed a sunken bath around 1953/54. During 1923 the club forged ahead by forming a ladies football team - they were virtually unbeatable! The club did not play during the 1939-45 war years, but a youth side was formed in 1941 and Peter Amor, a grandson of the co-founder played in this side. In 1947 a football and supporters club was formed, made up mainly of women under the chairmanship of Ivor Gardiner. In the 1962/63 season the club was undefeated, and won the league outright. The following season the team became semi-professional.

The 1980's also brought considerable success winning the 'Parr' Trophy (league trophy) 1987/88, and the Chippenham Sunday League knockout cup two seasons in succession, 1988/89 and 1989/90. Bromham had its ups and downs in 2000/01. The club almost folded due to the lack of support and financial problems, but pulled through. Bromham 1st team enjoyed cup success during the 2001/2002 season winning the Fountain Trophies Junior Cup, the first silverware to be brought home for 15 years! The club regained senior football status for the 2004/2005 season with the 1st team playing in the Wiltshire Premier division, going on to 3rd place during the 2007/08 season.

Bromham FC have a sound financial footing and are looking forward to the future with the 2 Saturday men's teams and an expanding youth setup. This is all only possible thanks to the facilities made available to us by Bromham Parish Council and an enthusiastic management and club committee. The club maintains its family atmosphere and history and every year the club recognises the biggest contribution from a member with the 'Neil Amor' cup, dedicated to the memory of the co-founders great-grandson.

### **Tennis Club History:**

From about 1955 a Parish Council committee raised money until in 1958 a non-attention hard tennis court was laid at the Pound Field. The cost was £600.00. A contribution of £200.00 from Wiltshire Education Authority was received. The court was to be used by all, not restricted to Bromham residents, this is still the situation today. In 1987 to maintain and run the facility the Bromham Tennis Club was formed; a chairperson, treasurer, secretary and committee members were elected. This increased use of the court with

tournaments for adults and children organised. In 1992 the court was again refurbished at a cost of £7000.00 paid for by the Parish Council, Kennet District, Wilts County Council and a club contribution. A new surface was laid along with new fencing. In October 2005 the court surface was re-laid at a cost of £6000.00 half contribution by the Tennis Club and Parish Council. Over the years we have seen regular membership of 10-12 people.

Link to [Church history](#) and [Social Centre history](#)

Historical map references:

O.S. National Grid Reference ST 963652

O.S. 25 inch County Series 1870s-1940 33/4

O.S. 6 inch County Series 1870s-1940 33

O.S. 1:2500 metric edition; 1950s onward SU 9774-9764; 9665-9765

O.S. 1:10000 metric edition; 1950s onward SU 96 NE; SU 96 SE