

NOTE

WIGBOROUGH, SOUTH PETHERTON

Wigborough, in the parish of South Petherton, was a manorial centre by the mid 11th century.¹ Today there is an Elizabethan house (Wigborough House) and farm, and a small scatter of houses.

The only examples of the name Wigborough given in Ekwall's *Dictionary of English Place-Names*² are the adjoining settlements of Great and Little Wigborough in Essex which, he suggests, are analogous to the *Wicganbeorg* referred to in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the year 851.³ He interprets the name as meaning 'Wicga's hill or barrow'.

It was suggested by F.P. Magoun³ and W.H. Stevenson⁴ that the Somerset Wigborough was the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's *Wicganbeorg*, the site of a battle between the Saxons of Devon and the Danes. This view was followed by A.G.C. Turner.⁴ Whitelock, in her edition of the Chronicle, concedes that Magoun was 'perhaps' correct in identifying *Wicganbeorg* as the Somerset settlement, but points out that the latter is 'not very near the Devon border, and the name Wicga is so common in Devon that a 'Wicga's Hill' may once have existed there.'³ In defence of a Somerset identification, however, it should be stated that Wigborough is near the Fosse Way and only about 12 miles from Devon.

Dunning¹ accepts Whitelock's effective rejection of the identification of *Wicganbeorg* as Wigborough, and casts doubt on an interpretation of the place-name as 'Wicga's hill'. He argues that such a derivation 'is at variance with the gentle contours' – in other words that there is no hill. But there is indeed a hill. It is a few hundred yards almost due east of Wigborough House on a public footpath from the house to Creedy Bridge on the River Parrett. It is not a very significant hill but is clearly visible whether approached from the east or the west. It resembles a well-eroded round barrow and is situated immediately above what appear to be ancient river terraces of the Parrett. Mr Robert Vaux (pers. comm.), whose family has farmed this land for many years, states that the irregular topography between the hill and the river has not been caused by any farming activity. On the contrary, efforts have been made to preserve these features undisturbed. An obelisk recently erected on top of the hill commemorates four members of the Vaux family who died within a period of six years (1982–8).

The identification of Wigborough as the site of the battle in 851 must continue to be speculative, but the derivation of the place-name (Wicga's hill or barrow) appears to be correct.

REFERENCES

1. *VCH Somerset*, **4**, 171.
2. Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (1989), 493.
3. Dorothy Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents, I, c. 500–1042* (1955), 173.
4. A.G.C. Turner, 'Notes on Some Somerset Place-Names', *SANH*, **95** (1950), 124.

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