

An extract from 'Through the Ages in Framfield & Blackboys'

Local Place-Names

From ancient documents in the archives, it is known that the name of the Parish has been spelt variously through the ages as Framelle, Fredfeld, Fremishfeld, Fremdfeld, Fremefeud, Frantfield etc etc. The interpretation of the place-name being dependent largely upon the whim of the scribe and his ability to understand the local Sussex dialect, rather than any change of title.

Nearly always the name is written with the second element 'feld' and this indicates Saxon origins. Generally thought to mean light woodland or open country – like a clearing in the forest. As for the first element 'Fram', this is thought by the English Place-Name Society to have derived from a personal name such as Fremma or Fremme. Probably that of the Saxon leader who first settled his people in this region. Hence 'Fremma's open land' was eventually to become 'Framfield'.

Herbert W Keef, the local historian who once lived at Hilbre Mount (now South Hill) did much research into the name of Framfield in the 1920's and came up with some interesting theories of his own. Having read of the ancestors of the Saxons who used for a weapon, a javelin tipped with iron, which was known as a Fram, he found it significant that our region should have been chosen by the Saxons for a settlement. It was his contention that Framfield may have been the place where Saxon weapons were once made from the iron which was readily available.

Another of his theories concerned the old Saxon and modern German word Fremde (a stranger or foreigner) which would be a natural word to apply to a clearing in the forest which was already inhabited. A name which would become Fremdfeld – the field of the stranger. It is certainly possible that there were some descendants of earlier settlers living in our locality. We know that the region was inhabited in former times and that a certain amount of deforestation had taken place in prehistoric times which would account for Framfield being referred to as a clearing in the forest. People fleeing from the earlier Saxon raids which took place around Pevensey may also have settled in the area.

Whilst these stories are plausible, there is also the possibility that Framfield was named after an Archbishop of Canterbury or even one of his retainers. An explanation which supports the theory of the English Place-Name Society that it derives from a personal name. It also explains why the area came to be inhabited in Saxon times because the Primate would have established his own people here to cater for his needs.

As for the actual person who might have given his name to the district, this is rather more difficult. The reader will understand why when it is explained that Uckfield is said to take its name from 'Ucca' – the personal name of a Kentish man called Wulfstan.

We shall probably never know for certain but if the origins of the name of Framfield are concealed by the mists of time, an even greater mystery surrounds the hamlet of Blackboys. By the way, it is referred to as a hamlet because, unlike a village, it has no church.

The only certainty about the appellation of Blackboys is that it dates from later times. There has been talk of the name deriving from the black faces of the ironworkers or charcoal-burners; associations with the Black Prince and an allusion to the dense forests which once covered the region.

The latter theory concerns a term taken from the hybridisation of words from two different languages – the Saxon 'blaec' and the French 'bois', meaning the dark wood. A name which is thought to date from Norman times. Then there are those who say that it is taken from 'blanc bois' – the white wood!

Extensive searches in the records reveal that the first mention of the name of Blackboys is not until much later. A certain Richard Blakeboy is known to have witnessed an ecclesiastical document in 1398 at the Deanery of South Malling, which concerned many local parishes, including our own. Whether he was a local man is uncertain because no further mention could be found of his name in the South Malling records. Neither is the name mentioned in the Subsidy (or Tax) Rolls of 1296, 1327 and 1332.

The reference to the Black Prince is interesting but it should be borne in mind that this was a name which was given to the eldest son of King Edward III nearly two hundred years after his death. The name is thought to be taken from the colour of his armour.

The Black Prince – Edward, Prince of Wales (1330-1376) – is reputed to have once stayed in Blackboys. This could be true because he did have connections with this part of Sussex and the Blackboys Inn (formerly a farmhouse) is thought to have been built on the site of a former hunting lodge, but as with all the theories concerning the name of Blackboys, the facts simply do not fit in with the dates.

Some people think that the unusual name of the hamlet might be derived from the armorial bearings of a local family. When selecting heraldry it was not unusual to make a pun on a surname. Hence a Blackamoor was often used to depict a name with the prefix 'Black'. Equally, some family crests depicted a Blackamoor because of their connections with the Crusades.

A search through the major reference works on heraldry has failed to reveal an indisputable link with the local community but we do know that the Stapley family of Framfield had a Blackamoor surmounting their coat of arms. They also had extensive land holdings in the Parish.

So many contradictions, but in the records, the name is usually written as Blakeboyes. An indication that when houses became known by the surname of the people who lived in them, a farmhouse (on the site of a former hunting lodge) known originally as Blakeboyes gave its name to the surrounding district. That farmhouse eventually opening its doors as a hostelry. But since this is the most mundane of all the possible explanations, the search for a more romantic derivation of the name of Blackboys will doubtless continue. No-one disputes that the Blackboys Inn is a very ancient hostelry but whether it holds the secret of the origin of the name of the district, we shall probably never know.

If, from all these name theories, it seems that Blackboys is completely devoid of Saxon origins, nothing could be further from the truth because there is a region in the area which may pre-date the settlement of Framfield in Saxon times. The area is Tickerage, a name deriving from 'Tickeridge' meaning a ridge of land on which an early Saxon enclosure for goats was created.

Palehouse Common takes its name from the pales of wood, pointed pieces of fencing which were used to enclose common land.

Before leaving the interesting subject of local place-names, we must not forget that, until recently, part of Halland was also situated within the Parish boundaries. The first mention of this name is in 1375 and it derives from one, Richard ate Halle of Lullington, who acquired certain lands in East Hoathly in 1343. Part of that land was known later as Hall Land.

In more recent times it was called 'The Nurseries' from the Chichester Estate Nurseries which were situated there. (The Earl of Chichester lived in a house on the site of Halland Park Farm). But the postal address for letters was considered to be confusing in that they were addressed to 'The Nursery, Lewes'. The district thus reverted to its former title but it continued to be known locally as Nursery Hamlet, Framfield, for some considerable time.

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Copies of the book are available from the Parish Clerk – clerk@framfieldcouncil.org.uk.

As a council we are wholly committed to equality, diversity and inclusion reflecting our workforce and the communities we serve. We continue to do all we can to confront and address all forms of racism and discrimination in Wealden. However the historic roots of the name Blackboys derives from the local charcoal industry which was prevalent in this part of the Weald and has no connection, as far as we are aware, with the slave trade.

FRAMFIELD PARISH COUNCIL