

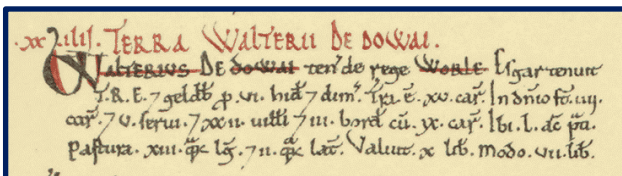


Worle

Worle people will tell you that their village used to be larger than Weston. Throughout much of history this was true but from the early 1800s Weston expanded at a faster rate as it became a popular resort.

Both villages developed on the southern slopes of Worlebury or Worle Hill. Weston lies at the western end, and Worle lies some three miles away at the eastern end. Worlebury Hill was surrounded by poorly drained land but the hill's south slope was fertile. It also offered level ground at about 25 metres above sea level which was ideal for building on.

We learn from archaeology that the area was occupied in the Iron Age and the Roman period. There is even evidence of humans living here in the Mesolithic (the period following the last Ice Age).



Worle's entry in the Domesday Book

The name Worle first appears in the Domesday Book (1086) and its spelling has not changed since then. The origin of the name is not clear but it gave its name to the hill on which it stands. It also appears in the name of the nearby priory of Woodspring (originally *Worspring*) with which it was once associated.

Worle being at the inland end of the hill meant that it was less protected than other parts of what is today Weston-super-Mare.

Following the Norman Conquest two castles were built to help pacify the area – one at Castle Batch and one at Locking Head just over the Parish boundary. Castle Batch is open to the public and it is worth a visit to understand the commanding position that it occupied.



St Martin's church © Dave Kelly

Worle Parish Church (dedicated to St. Martin) is thought to date from about AD 1125. Early features include the South doorway and the octagonal font. Rebuilding took place at intervals throughout its history, and the church re-opened after its most recent overhaul in 1870.

The architect of the rebuilding was John Norton. He carried out a number of Church restorations in the area and is perhaps best known for his work re-designing Tyntesfield, now a major National Trust destination. Whilst engaged on Worle Church John Norton also designed the neighbouring school, opened as a "National School" in 1865. He modelled the school around the ruins of an ancient barn, once connected with Woodspring Priory.

The location of both buildings is quite dramatic, built as they are on the same platform on which the early village developed. Church Road leads to the main focus of the early Village at the point where it joins the Scours.

For several centuries after the Norman invasion, Worle continued as an agricultural community, based on the rich pasture land of the surrounding Levels. In the 1500s calamine ore was discovered on Worle Hill. When calamine is crushed, it produces the mineral zinc. Blending zinc with copper produces brass, a metal which was highly prized for making cannons.

Deposits lasted for a couple of hundred years and there is both historical and archaeological evidence for mining in Worle itself and on the hill above.



Worle High Street © Adrian and Janet Quantock

The opening of the New Inn (now known as the Woodspring) around 1810 marked the beginning of developments along the lower part of the village. Known originally as Lower Street, it is now called High Street. Its success as a shopping centre led to the eventual closure of the shops in the old Upper Village, the last (Gunning's Stores) closing in 1985.

In the early years of Weston's development Worle acted as something of a service centre with a newly built brewery producing necessary refreshment. The building was later converted to a laundry guaranteeing fresh linen for Weston's visitors.

The High Street is home to Worle's distinctive War Memorial, which was dedicated in 1922.

A parish committee, chaired by the Vicar, undertook the building work which cost £500. Worle residents were determined to raise a memorial independently of their larger neighbour Weston-super-Mare and it was paid for by local subscription.



Worle War Memorial © Peter Johnson

Worle's southern slopes were noted for their productive market gardens, but these were built over in the post war period. The tide of development swept on past Worle with housing covering most of north Worle, West Wick and St George's.

Worle no longer has a separate Parish Council and is represented by Weston Town Council. But take a walk around its old streets, which are listed as a Conservation Area, and you will get a sense of its distinctive character.



Weston-super-Mare
Town Council