



Teffont's Landscape & Geology



Teffont has a rich geology and ancient history. Set in a beautiful, verdant valley, a fast-moving stream runs its length. The stream pours out of springs beneath the chalk downs, where the gault clay meets the greensand; it then flows down to the end of the valley where it joins the River Nadder. The geology of Teffont underpins its unique beauty.

*Tef - old Freisian word for boundary
Fontana - Latin word for spring*

Over many millions of years there have been dramatic climate changes, from severe heat and arctic cold to milder warm periods. During these differing conditions the earth's geology has been laid down and equally dramatic changes have occurred. 150 million years ago, Teffont lay on the floor of a warm

sea. Quartz sand grains, shell fragments, and chalk were deposited on the sea floor. Over vast periods of time these turned to stone and now form the Portland stone formation. This stone is buried beneath the whole village and eventually its layers were brought to the surface in the Chilmark ravine, which is today partly in Teffont's parish where it is quarried and known as Chilmark stone.

At the end of the Jurassic period, the sea gave way to a low-lying area of dry land, lagoons, and mudflats. Shelly carbonate (chalky) deposits were laid down in the lagoons, hardening to create beds of grey shelly limestone. This Purbeck stone formed a later stratum beneath the village that has been quarried in Eviass since pre-Roman times.

During the Cretaceous period the sea returned and its deposits formed the gault clay, the upper greensand, and chalk, which is largely composed of microscopic skeletons of plankton. These marine conditions persisted until 65 million years ago; the many fossils, such as sea urchins, sponges and devil's toe nails (small oysters) that can be found in the gardens and fields of Teffont were all formed during this period.

As a result of global changes, the Atlantic Ocean widened, Europe and North America drifted apart and the African plate collided with the European plate. These stresses in the earth's crust subsequently uplifted the accumulated Jurassic and Cretaceous rocks, bringing them to the surface. Rocks were folded locally in an east-west direction; the weakened crest of an upward fold or anticline was eroded away by great rivers before the Ice Age. This formed and revealed what is now known as the Nadder Valley and Vale of Wardour, with the outer chalk

escarpments to the north and south and the upper greensand escarpment within them. The River Nadder meanders through the centre.

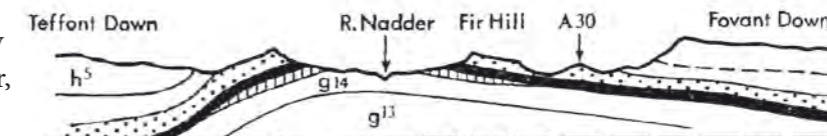
Tributary streams formed side valleys cutting through and across the grain of folded rocks. One of these valleys follows the watercourse from Springhead to the Nadder River, cutting through the upper greensand ridge in Teffont Magna by the Village Green. The boundary between the gault clay and the upper greensand

forms a natural spring line, where water percolating down through the chalk and greensand is finally forced to the surface by an impenetrable layer of clay, making Teffont a spring-line village.

The landscape today has been greatly influenced by the effects of the Ice Age. During the final glacial period, which ended about 10,000 years ago, the area now occupied by the village was in tundra. Water percolating down through the chalk was frozen by deep permafrost. The tundra had winter freezes and warm summer melts when the water flowed over the ice and formed dry valleys. The freeze-thaw action fragmented rocks beneath the soil to form head deposits; these slipped downhill during melt periods and rapidly accelerated erosion. By the end of the last Ice Age vast amounts of water and deposits were released from both the tundra and the ice sheet north of present-day Wiltshire, forming the Teffont valley that we know today.



Main image: the escarpment.
Below left: Chalkland fossils - two echinoids and a sponge.
Above right: Devil's toe nail.
Below right: Sectional view of rock strata in the escarpment.



Teffont's History



The light woodland above the chalk downs in Magna and dense woodland on the Jurassic soil in Evias and the stream have attracted man and beast to the valley from the earliest of times. There is evidence of settlements in Teffont since about 8000 BC, spanning the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages.

On the apex of the greensand escarpment, 180 metres above sea level, just on the Dinton side of the Parish boundary, there remain the ditches of an Iron Age fort known as Wick Ball Camp. It overlooks Teffont Common and is a vantage point for miles around. A small number of artefacts from the Iron Age have been found in Teffont, including a skeleton with a blue glass bead at its throat, which was unearthed at Springhead.

The Romans settled in the area soon after AD43. 100 stone cist coffins were discovered in Teffont Evias quarry, suggesting they were well established; one coffin was also found in Magna. In the Upper Holt there

is a registered ancient monument classed as a building or shrine of that period. Archaeologists have recently found remains of the walls and floor of a Roman building. A number of metal artefacts and high-quality Roman pottery have also been unearthed. One of the first Roman roads in Britain runs along the top of the parish near the more ancient Ox drove and Grimm's Ditch.

The first written reference to the Village is in a Saxon charter of AD860 granting 14 hides of land 'Be Teffunte' to Osmond the Thegn by Aethelwulf King of the West Saxons. Teffont was on the border of West Saxon territory at that time, Tef being the old Frisian word for boundary. There are carved Saxon stones in Magna church.

In AD966 the land was split up: the upper part of the village and Dinton were gifted to Shaftesbury Abbey, while the lower part was independently owned.

After the Norman invasion in 1066, upper Teffont was still owned by the Abbey but according to the Domesday Book, in 1086 the lower village was now in the

hands of a powerful noble, 'Alfred of Marlborough'. His main seat was Ewyas in Herefordshire and it is from here the name 'Evias' is derived. Since 1086 Teffont Evias has been a manorial estate and has remained so to the present day. It has passed through the hands of many families, including the Hungerfords and the Leys. The Keatinge family have owned it since 1692, although some parts of the estate—Ley Farm and a few cottages, including Three Hands Cottage—were sold in the 20th century.

Upper Teffont was leased out by Shaftesbury Abbey to peasants: villeins who cultivated the land under the strip farming system, and bordars who were small-holders and grazed their animals on the Common, which was lost to the village at the time of the 18th-century Enclosure Acts.

In 1539 Shaftesbury Abbey was dissolved and King Henry VIII gave Teffont Magna to the Duke of Somerset. Falling from grace, the Duke was executed in 1552 and Magna was granted to the Earl of Pembroke at Wilton.

In the mid-17th century the Fitz family moved to Teffont. They were prosperous sheep farmers and wool merchants and became the largest freeholders of land in Teffont. This land was taken over by John Wyndham of Dinton in 1840.

In the 19th century Lord Pembroke reclaimed and enclosed much of his land in Teffont, including common land. Villagers who depended on the land for their livelihoods suffered. However some smallholders were allowed to keep their plots while others took up trades: they became coopers, drapers, grocers and maltsters. Barley was sprouted to make malt in an A-framed Medieval cottage next to the present day Malthouse, which had a small mill. Beer was served through a hatch known as 'the hole in the wall'.

There were now two main farms in Magna, Fitz and Manor Farm, and two in Evias, Home and Ley Farm. Two schools were opened. Teffont Evias had clean spring water piped from Springhead so people no longer had to rely on wells and the stream; Magna had to wait a while longer for this amenity.

In the 20th century mechanisation caused profound and rapid changes in farming. In the 1930s enterprising farmers at Manor Farm in Teffont Magna were at the forefront of this

process of agricultural modernisation with their thousand-acre farm. Species rich chalk downland that had previously been grazed was ploughed, and the poor chalk land soils were chemically fertilized for crop production. In conjunction with 'Dunns', a seed merchant in Salisbury, the farmers produced a short straw variety of wheat better suited to machines but no good for thatching. They employed about 20 men who lived in the farm cottages with their families. In 1951, the remainder of the Pembroke Estate was broken up. Some of the land, houses and cottages were sold to sitting tenants, while other property was sold on the open market.

Teffont remained a working agricultural community until the last quarter of the 20th century, when agri-business led to mono-cropping and contract farming. By the turn of the 21st century, the farm workers' stone cottages had been modernised and were no longer inhabited by people who worked the land.



Top left clockwise: Painting by the Teffont artist Harry Fidler 1856 - 1935

Saxon fragment from St Edward's church.

Middle to Late Bronze age axehead, Neolithic polished axehead and a pair of Roman brooches

Teffont Evias in 1960 from the Frith collection

Wick Ball Camp shown on the Teffont/Dinton Parish boundary

