Ancient Bridgwater and the River Parrett.

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THE legend that Bridgwater was so called from "Pons aquae" instead of "Pons Walteri" de Douai, the Domesday holder (1086), died hard. In Queen Elizabeth's time John of Bridgwater, *alias* Stone, a Jesuit exile and once canon of Wells is called "Johannes Aqua Pontanus." Even to-day many probably think that the old town is so called from a former bridge over the water of the Parrett. Where was the "Brugie" or "bridge" of Domesday, and how was it constructed? In Saxon charters there was the "trinoda necessitas" of a Pons, Arx and Expeditio. Probably the first "Pons" was of wood and of two or more spans with one of them as a drawbridge, all founded on "a hard," over which at low water the waters of the Parrett flowed in shallow fashion, just as to-day they flow over "the hard" of Combwich (Cynwith or Cynuit) Passage, across which, within recent memory, waggons were driven, connecting the old road from Bristol with Cannington and the "Herepath," westward, over the Quantocks.[1]

In a Cottonian MS.,[2] *temp.* Henry VIII, there is a sketch of Bridgwater and the mouth of the river Parrett (*see* accompanying illustration), showing a three-spanned bridge (not an arch), and also such interesting details as Bridgwater spire; two cannon guarding the mouth of the Parrett; a shorter approach of the river from Stolford; the "Botestall" itself

1. *See* Greswell's "Land of Quantock" (1903), p. 62.
2. Augustus I, Vol. I, no. 8.

at the mouth and Combwich anchorage. Combwich is shown because, as William of Worcester (1415–1482 ?) points out, it was reckoned as the port of Bridgwater. "Comwych per 3 miliaria de Brygewater est portus navium Brygwater. Pontis longitudo Brygewater est 70 steppys." This was probably what was known as "Trivet's Bridge," familiar to us in illustrations and along the line of the present bridge,—probably the line of all the bridges whether of wood or stone.



Bridgwater and the Mouth of the Parrett.
From a Cottonian MS.

Possibly the "Cottonian" bridge may really be only conventional. "Brugie" at Domesday was a five-hide unit, worth seven pounds; but Wembdon was worth four; Bradney one; Horsey four; and Huntspill eight; amongst the numerous holdings of Walter de Douai. At Domesday "Brugie," not being on the main line of communication near Combwich and the Parrett mouth, was not very important relatively. The bridge at Bridgwater was useful to those who wanted to reach the Poldens by the old causeway leading to Crane Bridge and so to Glaston. This bridge would probably have been in connection with the old packway, visible still in portions in Enmore Park, cleared by the late owner, Mr. W. B.

Broadmead : also visible along the side of the present road descending from Buncombe and not far from that Quantock stronghold, known as Ruborough Camp.[3] But here was only a packway. " Brugie " was for a long period a less valuable possession to the Paganels, the descendants of Walter de Douai, than Huntspill, probably because of the valuable *passagium* or ferry dues of the latter place on the trunk road.

In 1183 Fulk Paganel was fined for the vill of Bridgwater three marks ; for vill of Huntspill ten marks (*Staffordshire Pipe Rolls*) ; nor was " Brugie " on the nearest pilgrim route to Glaston for oversea and west-country pilgrims from Devon, Cornwall and Wales. This was apparently *viâ* the Parrett and Puriton and Downend. At Domesday Puriton Church is stated to have belonged to the Church of St. Peter at Rome, being given, in all probability, as a kind of hostelry by the Saxon Queen Edith. Puriton or " Peritona." *i.e.* the ton on the Parrett (to be distinguished from N. or S. Petherton), was worth twelve pounds rent p.a. Huntspill and Puriton formed anciently a separate hundred, as " libera maneria " or free manors.[4]

Langport (surely the Llongporth of Lywarch Hen, and the scene of battles between British and Saxon) attracted more trade and inland commerce than " Brugie," being a royal burgh at the date of the Conquest and the port of Somerton the ancient capital. From its geographical position it was, in Saxon days, a place of paramount importance, and this importance lasted up to the time of Richard I (d. 1199). Old Gerard, in his " Survey of Somerset," notes that the bridge was begun in Richard I's days at Bridgwater by William Brewer, the owner of it, and stopped all ships from passing any further to the great benefit of Bridgwater, but to the loss of Langport.[5] With the construction of this bridge, the erection of Bridgwater Castle and the foundation of St. John's Hospital, 1219 (as a possible pilgrim's rest to Glaston), the

3. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XLIX, 173–182.

4. *See* " Nomina Villarum."

5. " The Particular Description of Somerset," drawn up by Thomas Gerard of Trent, 1633 ; *Som. Rec. Soc.*, XV, 131.

era of Bridgwater prosperity began; that of Langport diminished. The Eastover and Westover of "Brugie" supplanted the Eastover and Westover of Langport. The great change was symbolised by the charter of King John to William Brewer, when he was allowed to build and fortify his castle as well as to collect *passagium* (ferry money), *pontagium* (bridge money), *tolnetum* (tolls), etc. The existence of the "Watergate" and of the "water bailiff" is a proof of these privileges. Brugie became also a free borough with a market and fair (June, 1201). In Henry VIII's time Leland noticed "a right auncient strong and high bridge of stone of three arches"—apparently the old bridge of Brewer and Trivet.

This bridge of Brewer's was not, as pointed out, already on a trunk line of communication. The present Bristol road to Polden did not exist till recently. "Brugie" linked on with that secondary route an old causeway between Bridgwater and the Poldens, so often in need of constant repairs. In Bishop Drokensford's Register, there is the following entry:

"Bishop to all faithful, &c. The Causey between Bridgwater and Polden hills being so decayed as to imperil travellers, Bp. offers to all who charitably aid its repair a ten-days' indulgence 'ab injunctis.' Banwell, March 27, 1326."[6]

This may be supplemented by a letter written by Sir Nicholas Halswell in 1593 more than 250 years afterwards:—"Forasmuch as we have been informed by divers of the inhabitants as well as of the town of Bridgwater as of other places near adjoining to the Causeway leading from Bridgwater to Cranebridge and so eastwards and that the said Causeway is very much decayed and ruinated and dangerous," etc.

In 1619 a Quarter Session report alludes to the great decay of the causeway between the east gate of Bridgwater and Cranebridge.[7]

From an examination of old documents and a comparison of their contents one thing seems clear, and it is that the trunk road from Combwich or Cynwith Passage was called a

6. *Som. Rec. Soc.*, I, 259.

7. "Quarter Sessions Records, James I"; *Som. Rec. Soc.*, XXIII, 256.

military road or a Saxon "herepath," *i.e.* the path along which the "hosts and perhaps too all travellers fared backwards and forwards." First and foremost, its name survived for centuries, and it turns up in old Stoke Courcy and Eton College charters (1100–1200) and also in the Gaunt's Hospital records about the same date.[8] At any rate the local name of "herepath" had a great persistency. A careful measurement of it at various points, where its original features can really be traced, as on the top of the Quantock ridge, and also along the Cutcombe boundary, where indeed the name itself exists to-day, makes it 60 feet in width. This measurement, if not laid down by the Romans in this part of Somerset, may have been taken over either by Britons or Saxons. The very ancient character of it is undoubted. It figures as a parish boundary to-day in numerous cases and, alongside of it, can be identified many an ancient fort or "castellum" and "castellarium," as at Over Stowey, where the "Vetus Castellarium," close to the church, was within a stone's throw of the Herepath.[9] The name of "Castle Ground" still survives,—to be distinguished from "Castle Hill" in Nether Stowey, as at present known, and down below.

In such a region as West Somerset, consisting of hill, marsh, forest, sea and tidal river, it may be well to distinguish between the various means of communication that existed in ancient days. It has been said that the history of a town or district hinges on its ways and waterways, and Bridgwater especially is a case in point.

A trunk road, such as that which existed on either side of Combwich Passage and used indeed as such as late as 1800, when the Rev. J. Warner made his explorations from Bristol westward, must be distinguished—

(1). From a mere "Causeway" or "Causey" such as existed between Bridgwater and Cranebridge. This word itself may be abbreviated from "Calciata Via," *i.e.* a trodden road (*calx*, a heel), or it may be akin to "Cautica,"[10] a word

8. MS. in Braikenridge Collection at Taunton Castle.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Ducange's "Glossary of Mediaeval Latin."

used by William of Malmesbury in the sense, perhaps, of a raised path to Athelney.

(2). From "Packways" which are generally deep and narrow, washed out by rain after endless traffic, such as the old packway already noticed in Enmore Park; or that leading from Halsway on the Quantocks in the direction of Willett Hill, forming now only a deep fern-covered ditch, also still discernible.

(3). From a "Portway" such as exists in the parishes of Stringston and Holford, still so-called, and known as "Portway Lane" leading from Holford and the Quantocks to Stoke Courcy and the Lower Parrett, probably connecting Watchet and Doniford *viâ* Quantock, with Combwich Passage and Cynuit Castle as a coast communication.

(4). From a "Priest-way," a kind of privileged road such as that at Crowcombe. There was a "Priest's Way," also in Pawlett, parish up Polden. The "Abbots' Way" to Glaston led from the Poldens to the old Abbey. Traces of an old log or corduroy road have been unearthed.[11]

(5). From mere Cattle-ways, called "Pray-ways" on Exmoor and in the old Forest terminology.[12] The "Droves" in Petherton or the marsh country would fall under this category. So, too, would such a lane as "Fifteen Foot" on the west side of Kilve parish, adjoining East Quantockshead, along which sheep and stock could be driven from the valley to the Quantock commons, and still so called.

(6). Under the old Forest laws a "Chiminus" was a forest pathway along which it was customary for foresters to exact "chiminagium" from passengers, a forest grievance. It was alleged as a great grievance that this "chiminagium" in Selwood and Exmoor should be levied "in the middle of the King's highway" on Exmoor by the foresters, possibly along the "herepath" which is also called "alta et regalis via."

The "Herepath" has a distinct position of its own. We do not suppose that there is, as yet, sufficient evidence to classify this western herepath with such a Roman work as "the

11. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XXVI, 107.

12. Greswell's "Forests and Deer Parks of Somerset."

Fosseway," but it was surely an important road whether for tribal demarcation or military purposes. This point needs further and closer investigation.

This western Herepath must be studied closely with reference to Cynwith Passage ; with Puriton and Downend and Chisley Mount ; with Brugie and the whole of the Lower Parrett. We cannot properly follow the Saxon and British fights or, indeed, the Alfred Danish campaign of 878 without it.

In a publication called " A Compleat History of Somersetshire " and dated 1742 at Sherborne (p. 85) there is the following entry under " Chidley-Mount " in Puriton.[13] It is there described as the lordship anciently of William de Brewer given him by King John, but afterwards by William de Montacute the son of Dru (Drogo) de Montacute, which is an argument not only of its antiquity but of the truth of the common saying " that it was once a large town and out of the ruins of it sprang the town of Bridgwater, which stands opposite to it on the other side of the Parret." Chisley or Chidley Mount lies in the parish of Puriton and as a hamlet of it. It was in the same hundred as Huntspill, possibly a significant point.

The following notes and extracts attest to the importance of Puriton, Downend, and Chisley Mount in former days.

(1). Exon. Domesday. " Romana Ecclesia Beati Petri has a manor which is called Peritona (Puriton) which Queen Edith held. In it are six hides. It did not return geld except for five hides. Arable, twelve carucae. Of these St. Peter's Church has eleven villani, four cotarii, four servi, two cows, sixty sheep, 150 acres of meadow, 150 acres of pasture. Value p. a. twelve librae."

(2). Puriton lapsed from the possession of St. Peter's at Rome, possibly after the death of Hildebrand, Gregory VII, who died 25th May, 1085. His successor Victor III was consecrated 9th May, 1087. The great Domesday Survey was made in 1086. Puriton (Peritona) having been Royal Saxon demesne King William may have taken it over and then given it to Alured de Hispania of Nether Stowey, who

13 *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, XXIII, i, 20, 27, 35 ; LV, 173–4.

had Quantock manors. Anyhow Alured's lineal successors for centuries held Puriton, Downend and Woolavington. Here was an important "burgh" called "Burgh de Capite Montis," surely a very ancient burgh—possibly a burgh in Saxon times.

In the Somerset Placita of Henry III mention is made of this "Burgh de Capite Montis." Here was the "Chedelmunt," the "munt" evidently being "mons" a word which reappears as late as Saxton's Elizabethan map (1570–1596). The spot at the end of Polden is called "Chiese Chettle of ye Mount." Perhaps "Cheldelmunt" should be "Chesdelmunt."

(3). In the Somerset Placita[14] a list of King's bailiffs and serjeants is given, amongst them those of "Chefdelmunt" (*sic*), and it is instructive to note also of Wachet (Watchet): for Watchet was a port of great resort in Saxon times boasting of a royal mint. The derivation of "Cheldelmunt" is rather an etymological puzzle. Is it "Castle of the Mount," just as the Norman fort at Nether Stowey is locally called "Castle Mount?" Close by Downend is a field or marsh called "Chislet." In the *Proceedings*, XXIII, i, 35, "Chisley Mount" is thus described:—"This mound appears to be a small hill-fort commanding the Parret, the course of the river being considerably nearer to the mound." It may be noted that the "Vikings pill" of the Gaunt's Hospital records was close by, and that this name was used in the fifteenth century, a considerable permanence of 600 years if the Vikings left it there in the ninth century. This adds to its deeply historical importance, especially with reference to the Alfred campaign of 878.

(4). In an Inquisition p.m., 9 Edward I (1281),[15] Thomas Trivet held of the King in chief Crandon. Also Puriton, of John de Columbers, the lineal successor of Alfred de Hispania at Nether Stowey barony. Also, la Donende (Downend); 18*s*. of land and a burgage held of the said John de Columbers in socage: Cruk, the Domesday manor, still surviving in Great Crook, etc., six bovates land and a windmill held of John de Horsey.

14. "Somersetshire Pleas," *Som. Rec. Soc.*, XI, p. 67.

15. *Calendar*, Vol. II, p. 238.

(5). In an Inq. p.m. at Somerton, 16 Ed. III (1343),[16] Philip de Columbers held Nether Stowey barony and Puriton with hamlet of Downend; also Stockland Lovell, Crandon and Woolavington. Puriton and Downend were held of the King in chief by service of a quarter of a barony, an indication of their relative importance at that date.

(6). In 1394, Nether Stowey, Downend, Puriton, Woolavington, Stockland Lovell, Crandon, Honibere, Wolmersdon (N. Petherton) are all mentioned in the Somerset *Feet of Fines*[17] as part of the Touchet or Audley lands, inherited from the Columbers family, thus indicating the chief "membra" of the Nether Stowey barony in this region of the Parrett as it originally was formed. Now and then Stowey is called "Stowey Columbers."

(7). In an Inq. p.m. of Elizabeth, wife of Nicholas de Audley, 2 Henry IV (1403), Nether Stowey, Downend and Puriton were held by the service of one barony. Wolmersdon in North Petherton was held "as of the manor of Downend," here again proving the old-world importance of Downend.

(8). In an Inq. p.m. of John Audley de Audley, 12th Nov., 6 Henry VII (1491),[18] the manor of Nether Stowey was worth 40 marks; manor of Downend worth 60*s.*; manor of Puriton worth 20*l.*; all held of the King, by service of the moiety of a barony.

(9). In 1470 the King granted the Manor of Puriton, ten messuages and Downend: 20 acres of land, 10 acres of meadow, and 160 acres of land in Bawderyppe (Bawdrip) and Croke (Domesday, *Crecca* or *Creek*) within the parish of Bawdrip, together with 15 burgages in Downend to John Lambard.[19] The grant of 15 burgages in Downend in 1470 testifies to the importance of the "Burgh de Capite Montis" up to this date.

The question is, was it a very old burgh? From the Pipe Rolls of Henry II Philip de Columbers holds and accounts for x*s.* in Burgriht. This appears in several years of Henry II,

16. *Calendar of Inq.*, Edw. III, Vol. VIII, p. 268.
17. *Som. Rec. Soc.*, XVII, p. 209.
18. *Calendar of Inq.*, Hen. VII, Vol. I, p. 247.
19. *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1467–1477*, p. 187.

viz. the 4th, 13th, 18th, 19th, etc.; apparently the only burgh then held by Philip de Columbers was at Puriton and Downend. The Burgus or old borough of Nether Stowey did not exist at that early date.

To begin with, Puriton and Downend were the most important possessions of the barons of Nether Stowey and they must have overshadowed Bridgwater as a port of call at any rate for 150 years after the Conquest. The existence of the old burgh (perhaps Saxon as hinted) survives on "Burrow Mead" opposite. In the Pipe Rolls Philip de Columbers and the Burgriht disappear, perhaps, because, as Gerard says, the Bridgwater bridge, built or begun in Richard I's days by William Brewer, attracted if it did not compel traffic to Bridgwater. But the greatest blow to Puriton and Downend was when, in 1677, the "New Cut" formed in the Parrett loop, including 150 acres of land, was obliterated.[20]

Bridgwater, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up all pills, anchorages and creeks on the Lower Parrett and estuary.

In a charter of Henry VII, confirming a previous charter of Edward IV and granting privileges to Bridgwater, the boundaries of the borough are thus given according to a copy of a Bridgwater document at Enmore Castle, formerly in the possession of the late Mr. W. B. Broadmead.

"That the Liberties and Franchises of that Town or Borough shall extend out of the said Town or Borough by the Limits, moots and Bounds following. To wit by Land—On the East part to a certain Cross called Kelyng Cross and from there to a certain field called Matthews Field on the West; and from thence to a certain place called Cropille on the north part and from thence to the said Cross called Kelyng Cross."

"And by water from the Bridge called Lyme Bridge to Leuclyve (Heuclif ?) or clyse and from there to Brendown (Breandown), together with the Rode called Seynt Andrews pole (apparently the anchorage opposite St. Andrew's Church, Burnham). The pool, at Highbridge; the Hed of Comwiche; Wiynpenyes dokke (where wine was landed ?); Millpille; Prioras pille (the pill of the Prioress of Cannington

20. *See* Gough MSS., Somerset, at the Bodleian Library.

Nunnery ?) ; har fulle pill (harpod or harepath pill ?) ; Saxpole (perhaps the pill of the Saxons) ; Paulet pille ; Dowend pille ; Pegenspill (Pegenese was a separate Domesday manor) ; Crowpille, with all other pools creeks and places in the same water for ships and other vessels to lie and rest there."

These pills were places where the small shallow craft and "trows" might rest, not much larger than big rhines or ditches. Barges might have been used for local distribution from the head of Combwich. William of Worcester (*c.* 1482) describes the ships of Bristol as naves, naviculae, cymbae, wodbryshys, cacheys, pycardes coming from the ports of Wales. The Abbey of Glaston had probably its barges plying along the Pill-row cut and elsewhere, and so linking with the Parrett mouth.

There was one pool or pill surviving in the place-name "Walpole," which may have been the pill of the Waelas or Welsh as opposed to "Saxpole," the pool of the Saxons. In the documents of Gaunt's Hospital[21] there is mention several times of "Wykyngspill," historically perhaps, the most significant pill of all, as showing the lodgment there of the Vikings dating back to Saxon times and, presumably, to the reign of King Alfred (A.D. 878). This place-name should be carefully studied in connection with Cynwith, or Cymwich just below.

The very early church history of Bridgwater and district seems to point to the fact that the first activities were outside the old town as it used to exist. Horsey Chapel, close to Polden, has a story of its own ; so have Idstoke (or Edstock) and Hunstile. Collinson (vol. III, 86) hands down the tradition that at Horsey-Pignes was the mother church to Chilton, where at Domesday there is said to have been "a priest with one carucate and two cottagers." St. Saviour's may have its own story. Both Chilton-Trinity and Chilton-Polden have a long history. No one knows where the church or chapel of St. Bridget, mentioned in an old Bridgwater document, was situated. But just as the port of Bridgwater swallowed up all pills and anchorages on the Parrett from Lymbridge to

21. Braikenridge Collection at Taunton Castle.

Brean Down, so St. Mary's swallowed up Chilton, Idstock, Hunstile, Horsey and the rest. But this does not diminish the archæological interest of the first little outposts of the church in the Lower Parrett. That chapel at Downend is still a puzzle, alluded to in Collinson (vol. II, 396). Could St. Bridget have founded this ?

The whole question of the ancient geography of the Parrett is interesting, not only from the light which particular researches throw upon the early annals of Bridgwater, but also upon obscure historical events in British and especially Saxon times. Until we call up again and reconstitute the original features of the levels, fens, marshes, ports, anchorages (such as Downend or the head of Combwich), castles, forts (such as Ruborough Camp, Danesborough, Cannington and Combwich), we cannot follow military campaigns. Much depends upon old roads and packways and herepaths. Strategy rests upon geography. The relative importance of the Parrett valley, especially in the time of King Alfred, may be found to be greater than at first sight appears. As I have already pointed out in my " Story of the Battle of Edington " (878–901) new light may be thrown upon the site of this famous battle-field and the circumstances surrounding King Alfred's crowning victory.

Further (and this is a very important point), the proximity of the Welsh coast; the Islands of Steep and Flat Holmes, as pirate observation points; the sallying advantages of the Taff, Wye and Usk; the existence of such old Welsh ports as Porth-Kerry; the occupation of the Forest of Dean (*Danica silva*); the command of the Aust Passage with uninterrupted lines of Severn and Avon communication with Bristol, Bath and Chippenham, *viâ* Avonmouth—all suggest a sea and land concentration in A.D. 878 upon the Parrett mouth, and so upon Combwich or Cynwith Castle and Passage, and then upon the Poldens. This concentration explains Vikings Pill, and gives colour to the sea and land attacks which the Wiltshire military terrain by itself cannot afford.