Huish Episcopi.

Huyshe, Huishe, Hewish.

BY THE REV. J. STUBBS, M.A.

THE word Huish is variously derived. By some it is traced to the Celtic "Wych" (pronounced OO-ish), meaning "water"—and it is assigned as a reason why so many places bear this designation that they are to be found in those spots through which a small rivulet or stream trickles down between two rising grounds. By others, the origin of the name is to be found in the Anglo-Saxon "Hi-wisc"—"the homestead"—"the homestead farm," consisting of a "hide" of land, the territorial possession of a primitive Teutonic family—and we are pointed to the fact that each Huish is to be found near some larger town. And if this be the case we may infer that there has been a church upon the present site for many centuries. For, whatever be the origin of the word "Huish," the *name* carries us far back in history; but the actual origin of the church itself, its original foundation and dedication to God and to the memory of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord, are of course merely conjectural matters, lost in the dim and distant past.

We know nothing of the place during that hazy period when the Roman soldier, clad in his efficient armour, marched within a quarter-of-a-mile of the spot where Huish church now

stands, in close array along the road which he himself had most likely helped to make from Ilchester to Langport, on the way to Exeter; nor when the Roman citizen built his villa residence at Pitney, or at Stanchester, and the whole uplying district was thickly populated; but even then there was christianity in the land; for did not St. Alban suffer martyrdom in 305? and did not three British bishops attend the Council of Arles in 314?* We know nothing concerning the place at the time when the Somersætan, our Saxon forefathers in these parts, were emerging from heathenism under the enlightened influence that must have radiated from the abbeys at Athelney, Muchelney, and Glastonbury. But we may be sure that the inhabitants of Huish—within walking distance of each of these places—were believers in and worshippers of the true God. The Church of England was a definitely organised body in those far distant days. The Diocese of Wells was formed in 909, and there can be no doubt that provision was made for the constant observance of all christian ordinances in each separate parish. However, we have no facts regarding the history of Huish at that time: nor is the manor of Huish (says Collinson), distinguishable in the Domesday Book (1086). But the little village, or hamlet, of Pisbury, or Pibsbury, formerly sometimes written Epsebury and Episbury, was thus surveyed at the Conquest. "Ralph (de Limesi) himself holds Epse. Ælward held it in the time of King Edward, and gelded for half a hide. The arable is one carucate. There is one villane, and sixteen acres of meadow. It is worth three shillings." The manor of Wearne is also referred to in the same document. From Collinson, too, we learn that the manor of Huish was anciently ("and still is") parcel of revenues of the bishopric of this diocese, although it has several times, by some means or other, been alienated from it. The lands of the Bishop in this parish were rated in 1293 at

* Cf. Gildas, A.D. 511—571.

twenty pounds, and a charter of free-warren was granted for the same by King Henry III." We thus learn why this place was called Huish Episcopi, "Bishop's Huish," to distinguish it from others of a similar name.

When the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society visited Langport and district, in August, 1861, Mr. J. H. Parker pointed out to the members the various points of interest of the church as it then was. He said :—"It was a church of several dates. The doorway was of the time of Henry II, but the outer door of the porch was of the thirteenth century. The walls were of the fourteenth century, and the arches were of the same date. The windows generally were of the fourteenth century : in some the tracery had been cut out, and fifteenth century tracery put in. The chapel appeared to have been thrown out in the fifteenth century ; but in buildings of the Perpendicular style, it was difficult to fix dates. Accurate dates as to this style would be of the utmost service, and this was the county of all others to ascertain them in. The church towers of Somerset were magnificent, and the tower of this church was one of the finest specimens."

Such were the opinions of one of the foremost antiquarians of his day ; and we may be safe in agreeing with what he said. We may state, then, that the Norman doorway, a charm and a pleasure to every worshipper that passes through it, is the oldest portion of the building, erected in the reign of a sovereign who ruled from 1154 to 1189. It is built of Ham Hill stone—the redness being due to the action of fire ; the parts that are of a natural colour having been inserted in 1873. The projecting moulding, or string course, near the vestry door, is said to be of equal antiquity.

Now, in the reign of Henry II, there lived at Langport, in a castle said to have been built by him on the hill, a powerful baron, Sir Richard Revel or Rivel. He was a person of great note and influence. Sabina, his daughter and heiress, married Henry L'Orti, to whom belonged the hundred and manor of

Pitney. This Henry L'Orti was a great baron and landowner in the west of England : he died in 1241, and Sabina, his wife, survived him, and had livery of the lands of his inheritance. The issue of this marriage was a son, Henry, who became heir to the large estates of his father and mother. He is known to have been a patron and benefactor of the church. Is it not highly probable that the Huish church, of which the remaining beautiful doorway was a part, was built by one of these rich barons, aided by the residents of the neighbourhood, and endowed with tithes, if not already endowed by them? Collinson says that "in 1292 the living of Huish was valued at one hundred marks." The last-mentioned Henry L'Orti died in 1321, leaving issue, Henry, his son and heir. This member of a wealthy and distinguished family, died in 1342, being succeeded by John, his son and heir, who inherited the estate, but left no male issue.

At that time, William de Baldyngton was vicar of Huish, having been instituted to the living in 1333 : his successor was Johannes , instituted in 1340. Johannes Gerard followed, in 1349. The fact that a list of the vicars of Huish has been preserved from that time onward, would seem to add weight to the suggestion that this original church was built during the early Plantagenet days, when there lived in the neighbourhood a powerful feudal lord, who cared for his vassals, and was not unmindful of their spiritual wants. "The walls," Mr. Parker says, "are of the fourteenth century." Now, the Norman door at the south-west corner of the north transept (discovered during the prosecution of the work of restoration, in 1872), would appear to have led to the rood loft of what was at the time a cruciform church : or, this said door with its spiral steps, may have led to a central tower, "which existed at some remote period." And, as further evidence of this doorway leading either to a rood loft or to a tower, one of the moulding ribs in the nave roof was moulded only on one side, showing that it had evidently been fixed

against an arch. But we have no means of knowing the date or period when that cruciform church ceased to be. Probably it was burnt down—for whilst the work of restoration was in progress, in 1872 and 1873, many indications were found of some great fire that had devastated a previous building. A quantity of calcined metal, containing brass, copper, and lead, was unearthed, as much as a hundredweight in one spot. Charred stones were also found beneath the plaster. These effects could only have been produced by some terrible conflagration. Parts of the walls would, of course, be left standing, as was the case at Huntspill: the injured parts would be rebuilt, and the church once again made fit for use.

This rebuilding may very likely have been done, as Mr. Parker points out, in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It is impossible to fix an exact date. If these inferences be correct, the present chancel arch was built at that time, and the doorway and staircase behind the pulpit constructed to lead to a (fresh?) rood loft. A window—a gable-end window, to give light to this rood loft—was in existence until the rebuilding of the chancel in recent years. It is worthy of note that this staircase entrance to the rood loft is ornamented. In most churches a rood loft door is plain. The chancel screen, or "partition" (as it is called in the minute book), was taken down in 1774, in accordance with the decision of a vestry meeting, held on December 21st, 1774.

Originally there were two chantry chapels, one in the north transept and the other in the south transept. A corbel still remains in the north transept, and the positions of the others are visible. In the wall of what is now the south aisle, near the east end, a vault, or a recess, large enough to receive a coffin, was discovered. Beneath the floor, close to the entrance of this recess, were picked up some of the metal furniture of a coffin, including handles, hinges with primitive fastenings, metal ornaments, and four thick brass rings, about two-and-a-quarter inches in diameter. These rings, and the brass nails

with which the ornaments were attached to the coffin, were in good preservation: I am not aware of their present whereabouts. The other relics, although much decayed, are described by men who saw them, as bearing traces of workmanship of a highly ornamental nature, indicating that the coffin, the pre-existence of which was verified by evidences of decayed wood, held the remains of some distinguished person, probably the founder of the chapel referred to above. It is conjectured that at some remote date the vault had been broken open and rifled of anything of value it might have contained. Among further interesting discoveries, several incised slabs, including Early English crosses and foliage, were found beneath the flooring.

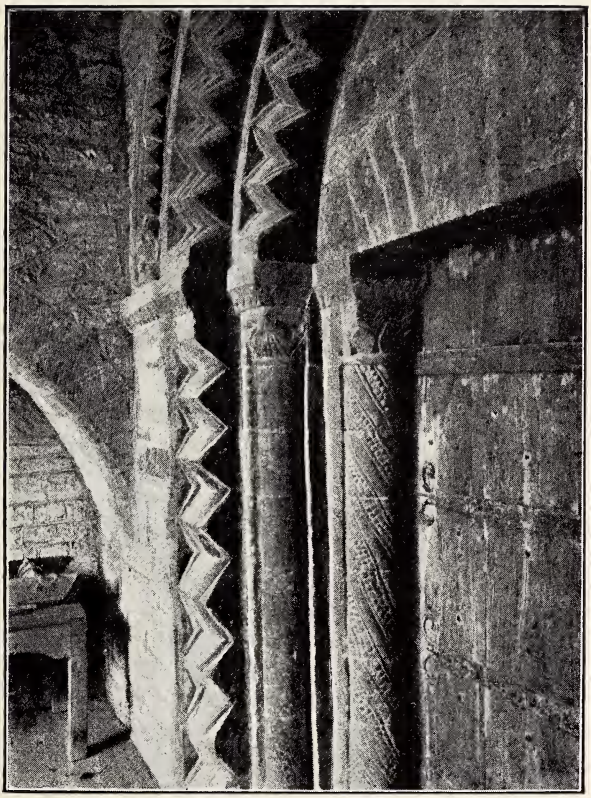
The south transept corresponds to the one immediately opposite, and the end (towards the south), would be originally a gable end, surmounted with a battlement. But there came a time when it seemed good to some one to enlarge the church, by taking down the west wall of this transept, and extending the south wall as far as the porch: forming the south aisle as it now is. The stonework of the battlement of the gable end would seem to have been used as far as it would go, that at the east end not being horizontal. The south-west portion would be inserted new, and is clearly of different design from the other. The small parvise window was left in its old position, thus becoming an inside window, and still remains unaltered. Some pieces of old stained glass in these south transept windows are worthy of careful observation. One piece contains a red rose, resting upon rays of light coming from behind it. Another, a white rose upon rays of light. Another contains the fleur-de-lys, the badge of the Black Prince. Can these facts give us any clue to the date? The thought arises in one's mind that John L'Orti was the great feudal baron in this neighbourhood in the time of Edward III, having succeeded to the estate in 1342. He may have been present at Creçy, in 1345.

The letters IHŨS shew that the Latin form of the Name of Our Saviour was used instead of the Greek. But this is not considered a reliable guide as to date. The stained glass originally in these windows was doubtless destroyed by the Roundheads, after the battle of Langport. The screen under the tower was brought from Enmore church, in 1873.

The ceiling of the nave is noticeable : it is the original one, and the present colouring of the panels is a faithful copy of the original colouring found when the white-washing was removed.

The present chancel was restored in 1872 and 1873, the windows of the old chancel being carefully preserved and repaired. That portion of the walls which was found to be decayed, and unsafe, was rebuilt, the sounder parts being repaired. A credence was found in the north wall, but was plastered up again. The two windows within the chancel rails are of the Transition period (*i.e.* between the Decorated and the Perpendicular) : the other two belong to a different period, the "Late Decorated."

The piscina retains its ancient position, and probably was not touched at the restoration already referred to : in fact it is to be borne in mind that the whole chancel was merely renovated, the foundations and most of the stone-work remaining undisturbed. Here we may notice that the central line of the chancel is not in a straight line with the central line of the nave : the chancel has a slight inclination towards the north—a position intended to indicate the drooping head of our Lord upon the cross. The expense of restoring this portion of the church was borne by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who hold the parsonage and rectorial tithes. The organ chamber was built in 1892, and is the generous gift of Mr. James Kelway, of Huish Episcopi, the churchwarden of the parish. The foundation stone was laid on July 25th, 1892, and it was dedicated at a special service, on December 28th of the same year. A gift like this, designed and carried out in our very



DETAILS OF NORMAN DOORWAY, HUISH EPISCOPI.

presence, illustrates in the fullest and best manner how the churches of our land have been built and enlarged from time to time. The exact date of erection of many a part of the church is now lost in oblivion, and we have no means of ever discovering who bore the cost of building any particular portion besides this; but we may rest assured the parish churches were built or improved in former times much as they are now, by private generosity or by public subscription. It may be that the investigations of wills and other documents will bring to light at some time or other, a great deal of incidental and interesting information on these subjects; and if such shall be the case, it will often lead to the fixing of dates respecting the fabrics of old churches, and in that way will set at rest many a disputed and doubtful point.

How glad should we be to know how, and when, and by whom, the tower of Huish was built! Who bore the cost of that magnificent piece of structure? Was that knightly architect, Sir Reginald Bray, the designer? Did Henry VII subscribe to the fund? How delighted would every lover of his church be to obtain satisfactory answers to these and many other questions! Some writers aver that the magnificent towers of Somerset were built by the monks, in the time of Henry VIII, when they found that the current of public opinion was against them, and that the spendthrift king was about to lay his sacrilegious hands upon the church's property for his own base purposes; the monks preferring that the money bequeathed in former years for sacred objects should be spent for the glory of God, rather than for the good of the state or for the enrichment of private individuals. But that idea, pretty and plausible though it be, is imaginary, inasmuch as the naves and towers of the churches never did belong to the monasteries.

We must look, then, to another cause than the fear of an impending spoliation for the origin of the beautiful Somerset churches and towers. They are rather the outcome of love

and spiritual zeal than of alarm and dread. Men do not readily spend money on what may soon be confiscated or destroyed.

> "They dreamt not of a perishable home
> Who thus could build."

And we do find that there was no neglect of duty, no lack of earnest devotion, on the part of the Church of England during the reigns of the Lancastrian, Yorkist, and early Tudor monarchs. Her members, lay and clerical alike, gave of their best to God ; and the larger parish churches, with their stately towers, commanding wide views across the level flats bounded by the picturesque hills, which diversify the face of Somerset, rose up as a standing indication and proof of the wealth and generosity of those days. They seem to say to each of us :—

> "Give all thou canst : high Heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely calculated less or more ;
> So deemed the man who fashioned for the sense
> These lofty pillars, spread that branching roof
> Self-poised, and scooped into ten thousand cells,
> Where light and shade repose, where music dwells,
> Lingering and wandering on, as loth to die ;
> Like thoughts whose very shortness yieldeth proof
> That they were born for immortality."

Whatever may have been faulty in the management of abbeys and monasteries, the parochial life does not seem to have been uncared for. All through the fifteenth and down to the middle of the sixteenth century, churches and towers and aisles were being built. Huish tower is supposed to have been built towards the close of the fifteenth century, or in the beginning of the sixteenth.

The list of vicars of this parish from 1407 to 1512 is complete and unbroken. As one vicar died, another was appointed, and there are 20 vicars in all—a large number for the space of time. Thus we gather that for one century at least the parish was well cared for. During all the stormy times of the Wars of the Roses, there were vicars who had University degrees—a pleasing fact, for those were days when Englishmen were at variance with Englishmen, and bitter feelings and unkind deeds held sway : and we must hope that the vicars were men

who helped to soothe the ruffled passions of their flock. In 1485, Henry, Earl of Richmond, won the battle of Bosworth, and became King Henry VII. It is a matter of history that the men of the West espoused his cause, and amongst them especially Richard Fox, Bishop of Bath and Wells, whom the king honoured by promotion to the Bishopric of Winchester. Henry VII, like his predecessors upon the throne, was a devoted admirer and patron of architecture, and it was during his reign that Henry VII's chapel at Westminster, King's College, Cambridge, and St. George's Chapel, Windsor, three of the most perfect examples of Tudor architecture, were finished. Sir Reginald Bray, an architect of genius and taste, was instrumental in the completion of some of these works, and it is to him that we are said to owe the design of Huish tower. He died in 1503 : and if it can be proved that he was the architect, we should have a clue as to the date of its erection. A legend hovers around the neighbourhood that *its* architect was the *pupil* of the architect of Kingsbury church tower, and that the latter, on seeing how far the work of his pupil surpassed his own, committed suicide by throwing himself from the top of his own handsome production. But, personally, I do not believe in the authenticity of the legend. The beauty of Huish tower consists alike in the perfection of its proportions, and the admirable character of its workmanship. It is built of the local blue lias stone, and consists of four sections, separated by ornately chiselled string courses, which together with the flying shafts, pinnacles, windows, buttresses and battlements, are of Ham Hill Stone. The lowest section is plain and solid, but the ornamentation increases as the eye rises upwards, advancing from tier to tier, spending itself in an elegant and appropriate crown. The lowest string course on the south side has four stone bosses, on which are sculptured the emblems indicative of our Lord's Passion—the crown of thorns, nails, etc. The symmetry of the tower proves it to be the design of one brain ; although its present appearance is

not that which it bore in the days of Collinson. He says, "at the west end of the church is a very fine, lofty and stately tower, the top of which is beautifully ornamented with eight Gothic pinnacles, each surmounted with a spear head, the iron being more than two feet in length above the stonework." These spear-heads were removed at the restoration of the tower in 1845, the work of renovation being carried out with much skill and success by a workman named Pollard.

In the tower is a peal of five bells, which bear the following inscriptions respectively :

1. R. Savery, Founder, Taunton, 1839.
2. } Cast by John Kingston, Bridgwater.
3. } Joseph Sawtell, Anthony Cullen.
   Churchwardens, 1822.
4. W.W. Churchwardens in the year of Our Lord God, 1620
5. Repent I say : be not too late :
   Thyself at all times ready make.
   T. P. I. M. 1650.

If the tower was built in the reign of Henry VII, it would be a comparatively new building in the reign of Edward VI, and this freshness, and consequent excellence of condition, probably saved it from demolition. In the "Survey of colleges, free chapels, chantries, etc., made by commissioners of Edward VI, A.D., 1547," the following entry is found :—"The churches of Huish and Langport are one benefice, whereof one may be spared and taken down, for they stand within a third bolt-shot together"; but happily the suggestion was not carried out, and neither Langport church nor Huish church was meddled with.

A memorial, of a singularly interesting character, appears to be remaining of the Rev. Thomas Rowseter, a vicar of Huish at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This gentleman was instituted to the living in 1512 ; and, built into the wall, over a window on the east side of the vicarage, is a sculptured stone embodying his name in a rebus.



The stone was doubtless brought from the old vicarage, (which stood near the Muchelney road), on its demolition in the early part of this century, and then built into its present position.

The Rev. John Davage was appointed vicar in 1571, and it is worthy of record that this is the date inscribed upon the paten. The history of communion plate is a matter of general interest. In the year 1572, a decree of the Wells Chapter ordered "That the plate which before time was used to superstitions, should be defaced, and two communion cups be made out of the chalices." The Wells plate consequently bears the date 1573. In 1576, Visitation Articles were issued by Archbishop Grindal for the Province of Canterbury, as before in York, enquiring "whether there was in the church a fair and comely communion cup of silver with a cover of the same, which may serve for the administration of the communion bread?" An injunction was also issued to the churchwardens "to provide such a cup and cover as mentioned above." These commands from high quarters seem to have been anticipated in Huish Episcopi, as the paten here is dated 1571.

The Rev. Nicholas Watts was appointed Vicar on April 9th, 1624, but there does not appear to be any record of his death. Whenever that event occurred, the spiritual charge of the parish was undertaken by the Rev. Cannanuel Burnard, who was Rector of Pitney from 1625 to 1668. He thus was Vicar at one of the most critical, one of the darkest and saddest, periods in the history of the Church of England, and the manner in which he manfully held his position and administered the ordinances of religion to the people of this neighbourhood is worthy of our warmest gratitude and admiration. The Church was persecuted with a rancour and bitterness without a parallel in her history. Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, 72 years old, was executed on Tower Hill amidst the revilings of the mob. The Independents, the Presbyterians, and other opponents of the Church, acting under the protection of the

government of the day, seized upon every available appointment and living throughout the country. Langport Church is said to have been held by a Mr. Bush ; but Huish was cared for by Mr. Burnard. A body of Commissioners, called "Triers," amongst whom was Hugh Peters, a boisterous and insolent fanatic, went from place to place "to ascertain each clergyman's spiritual state," and took measures for ejecting from their livings all who could not satisfy their enquiries.‡ Huish people seem to have been true to their church amidst these harassing trials, and two mementoes of the devotion and generosity of the people of those days remain even to the present day to animate their descendants, and prompt them to the same fidelity. The beautiful pulpit bears date 1625, with the letters C. B.—most probably the initials of Cannanuel Burnard : whilst a bell, bearing date 1650—with the initials T. P. I. M.—was hung in the tower, to send forth the message of its inscription, warning all who heard its sound of the perils and uncertainty of life, and pointing to higher thoughts :

> "Repent, I say, be not too late,
> Thyself at all times ready make."

I have omitted any mention of the battle at Wagg Drove, as that incident forms the subject of another paper. Nor does this sketch require any account of "those years of hypocrisy and violence, during which the voice of the Church of England was silenced, and Presbyterianism, after trying to bring a spiritual despotism into every parish and household, was in its turn obliged to yield to Independency, a hydra of many heads." Charles I. was recalled in 1660, and the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662. This Act deprived of his benefice every person who was not in Holy Orders by episcopal ordination, unless he was so ordained Priest or Deacon before the Feast of St. Bartholomew (Aug. 24th). The force of this Act was not felt here : Mr. Bush must have given up Langport quietly,

‡ See Perry, p. 483, and Procter, p. 101.

and Mr. Burnard, now an old man, would gladly be relieved of Huish.

The Rev. Wm. Baker, B.A., of Wadham College, Oxford, was instituted Vicar on March 2nd, 1662. To this Vicar we owe the commencement of our oldest parish register. It is entitled "Regifter Book of ye Buryall of ye dead in woollen onely." It is in an extremely dilapidated state, and is unbound. It was saved from destruction by Mr. W. Wheller, of Huish Mills, who handed it to Mr. W. Bond Paul, of Wearne Wyche, who in his turn presented it to the present Vicar to be deposited in the parish chest. It contains entries of Burials "in woollen" from 1678 to 1695—from which year to 1698, there appears to be a loss of some pages. From the year 1698 to 1726 (the end of the book), there are entries of the births, marriages and deaths.

The Rev. W. Baker was buried March 11th, 1684, and his successor (the Rev. Wm. Jeanes) was not instituted until May 8th, 1686. There was thus an interregnum of two years; and it was during those two years that the Battle of Sedgemoor was fought (July 6th, 1685). We cannot doubt that some Langport and Huish men were in Monmouth's army: at all events *three* are said to have been hanged near the Hanging Chapel for their share in the Rebellion. At this period of the history of the parish, the leading laymen for some generations were the Colliers and the Weeches. Mr. George Collier and Mr. John Witch *(sic)* were churchwardens in 1726-7-8, and their names are inscribed on the bread plate—a portion of the communion plate. Mr. Phillip Collier, gent., was buried in the parish church, April 10th, 1679, and Mr. John Collier April 17th, 1717. The property of the Colliers, either by marriage or otherwise, passed into the possession of the Michell family, several members of whom have since held office as Vicars or as Churchwardens. The Rev. John Michell, B.A., of Wadham College, Oxford, was Vicar from 1722 to 1744—and at a later period the Rev. John Michell, LL.D., Preben-

dary of Gloucester, was Vicar from 1780 to 1802. And two windows are in memory of later members of the family.

There are few incidents worthy of record in the history of the parish during the latter half of the eighteenth, and the early portion of the present century. The Huish "Revels" or Sports, held annually on Huish "Green" were not of an ennobling nature; and quantities of cider are entered in the parish accounts as having been paid for out of the rates for consumption at the now famous Huish Bridge. The Vicars of the parish were frequently non-resident. The Rev. J. Chard, "Parson Chard," "a clergyman of the olden sort," the memory of whom still lingers in the neighbourhood, was curate-in-charge for many years, residing in Langport. The Rev. George Baily Tuson became Vicar in 1824. It was during his incumbency that the present vicarage was erected in 1828. The Rev. Edward Pering Henslowe succeeded him in 1839, and held the living until his death on September 16th, 1882. Forty-three years cannot be lived in one place by a man of great force and pronounced individuality of character, without leaving their deep impress upon it; and it requires another paper as long as this to recount the story. He saw each point of advancement, moral, social, religious, that has been so characteristic of Victoria's reign: he was brought into touch with the joys and sorrows of many families still existing —baptising, marrying, burying; he saw the restoration of the two beautiful parish churches, which we Langport and Huish folk deem second to none anywhere. He saw the two parishes separated by an Order in Council on March 24th, 1876, and he possesses the honour of having held the living for a longer period than any other Vicar during the five-hundred and sixty years which I have humbly, though imperfectly tried to lay before you.