

Barton Grange

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BARTON GRANGE in the parishes of Pitminster and Corfe—the parish boundary passes through the house—probably occupies the site of the Prior of Taunton's summer residence. It may well be that there was a farm or grange at Barton even before the time of Henry I when the estate was granted to the priory by William Giffard, Bishop of Winchester; but no part of the existing building, or of the building recently pulled down, seems to have been of earlier date than the great house erected on this site by Humphrey Colles soon after the dissolution of the priory, and it is supposed that he completely demolished the medieval grange.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the house was reduced in size and drastically remodelled for Lady Cooper. To suit the romantic taste of the period it was again called 'Barton Grange', although for several generations it had been known as 'Barton House'. By the simple expedient of removing the ceilings of the ground-floor rooms and the floors of the rooms above, thus throwing two stories into one, a suite of large rooms was constructed! Except in the kitchen wing, all signs of Tudor work were either destroyed or concealed. During 1931 two-thirds of the house, which had remained practically unaltered since Lady Cooper's death in 1848, have been pulled down, and what was formerly the kitchen wing is all that now remains. The house-breakers have found much Tudor work in Ham Hill stone concealed by nineteenth-century alterations, and a few pieces of thirteenth-century work—parts of clustered

columns of typical design—which may have been brought from the ruins of Taunton Priory as building material.

It is stated by Collinson that Humphrey Colles obtained a grant of the Grange of Barton at the dissolution, but it appears from a manuscript abstract of title, made about 1720, that Barton was granted to John Ogle by king Henry VIII, by a patent dated 23 October, 32 Hy. VIII, though two years later Humphrey Colles was in possession. The Colles family had been associated with the neighbourhood of Taunton before the dissolution, and the same abstract of title mentions a deed of 1513 made 'between the prior and convent of Taunton of the one part and John Towse Humphrey Colles and Roger Hill of the other part whereby in consideration of £100 paid to the said prior by John Towse the said prior covenants to say mass for the soul of him and his family in the chapel of the monastery and grants for every default' certain penalties to be levied by distress upon the manor of Barton.

In 1547 Sir Thomas Darcy alienated to Humphrey Colles and Elizabeth his wife the lands and rights in Blagdon which had formerly belonged to the priory. (In the *Visitation* of 1573 Elizabeth, second wife of Humphrey Colles, is stated to have been sister of Thomas, Lord Darcy.)

The Colles family used the chancel of Pitminster Church as their mortuary chapel, and the monument said to be that of Humphrey Colles—there is no inscription—which now stands in the baptistry, formerly stood under the east window, behind the site, or actually on the site of the pre-reformation high altar. On the north side of the chancel at Pitminster is the monument of John Colles, who succeeded his father Humphrey at Barton in 1570, and his wife Ann, daughter of Sir John Thynne, the builder of Longleat; and on the south side of the chancel is the monument of their son John Colles of Barton and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of Humphrey Wyndham of Wiveliscombe. Kneeling figures, almost life-size, of their four daughters, wearing the picturesque costume of the court of Henrietta Maria, are on the plinth of the monument. One daughter seems not to have married; the remaining three were the heiresses of their parents' great estates. Ann married Sir William Portman who died in 1646. Margaret married Sir

Gerard Napier of Middlemarsh, Dorset. Elizabeth, whose portion was the Barton estate, married first Herbert Dodington by whom she had no issue, and secondly John Coventry of whom Clarendon said that he was 'all ways one of the most remarkable men of his time'. He was son of Lord Keeper Coventry, and a description of his character is given in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in the notice of his more famous son, Sir John Coventry of Barton, after whom 'the Coventry Act' of 1671 was called. John Coventry and his son Sir John Coventry deserve to rank among the worthies of Somerset. It is probable that the formal plantation at Barton called the 'Monks' Walk' was laid out in their time.

Before her marriage to John Coventry, the Barton estate was settled on the children and descendants of Elizabeth Colles, and failing descendants, as she should appoint, but after her marriage she signed a deed under which, failing descendants of her marriage, the estate was to pass to her husband or his heirs. By this deed the Barton estate was lost to the descendants of Humphrey Colles, for Sir John Coventry, the only surviving child of Elizabeth Coventry, died without issue in 1682, and the estate passed to Francis Coventry, his only surviving uncle. Sir Lacon William Child, who had married Ultra Trajectina, daughter of Francis Coventry, became one of the trustees for the estate. Francis Coventry died in 1680. His son Francis Coventry the second died in 1686 unmarried, when Ultra Trajectina Child seems to have inherited Barton, and in 1692 Sir Lacon William Child sold the whole property to Smart Goodenough. The estate still comprised, as it had done in the time of Humphrey Colles, the manor of Prior's Blagdon, the grange of Barton, the rectories of Pitminster, Corfe, and Trull, the advowson of the church of Pitminster, and the rent or tithes of the mills of Taunton.

Smart Goodenough, who was high sheriff for Somerset in 1699, lived at Barton 'with great honour and reputation both to himself and his country' and died in 1720, leaving the estate to his grandson, William Hall Earle, second son of his daughter Henrietta, wife of William Earle of West Harptree, sergeant-at-law. William Hall Earle died the following year aged twenty-one, and the estate passed to his elder brother Good-

enough Earle. On his death without issue, Barton was left to his cousin Francis Milner Newton (*d.* 1794), whose grandmother appears to have been the wife of Francis Milner and a daughter of Smart Goodenough. Josepha Sophia, daughter and heiress of Francis Milner Newton, married first Colonel Wheat and secondly Sir Frederick Cooper. She died in 1848 without issue and left Barton to her cousin Francis Wheat Newton. Though the grange has been sold, much of the property remains in the possession of his descendants.

Authorities :—Collinson ; Manuscript Abstract of Title of Barton Estate ; Visitations of Somerset ; Local Tradition.