The Papers of the former Corporation of Langport, 1596-1886.

BY THE REV. D. MELVILLE ROSS, M.A.

I. List of Documents preserved in the strong-room of the Town Hall.

(1). 1596. Parchment "Rent Role for Towne Land of Langport Estover belonging to the Portreeve and Cominalty written the 6th day of November in the 38th yeare of our Sovereigne Lady ye Queene that now is."

(2). 1617. Original Charter (Latin) of James I, in box with key.

Herein also is the receipt for commutation of the yearly payment to the Crown for £15, Ap. 1788, thus described in Portreeve's Account, 1787: "Paid ye Commissioners of Land Revenue ye purchase money for ye 10/- a year paid to the King's Majesty yearly to remain free burgesses bought off for ever £17."

Also old Silver Seal of Corporation. In British Museum the Seal is given No. 5048, A.D. 1617, a black-a-moor's head to the left filleted the bust circled with a lace collar. In charter, "Portreeve and Commonalty of the B. aforesaid shall and may have a common Seal."

(3). 1643-1670. Packet of annual balance sheets of Portreeves' Accounts with some few omissions.

(4). Minute Books:

No. i. 1657-1710. This book has lost its cover, and is

not filled to the end. It has chiefly Presentments of Courts Baron and Courts Leet of the Portreeve and Commonalty, with some few minutes inserted out of place and time. One minute of 1780 mentions the appointment of a new Deputy-Recorder.

No. ii. 1666-1796. Leather bound. Chiefly minutes. The cover is very elaborately stamped. It bears the initials E.P., most likely of Sir Ed. Phelips, Recorder in 1665. It has the Royal Arms, Portcullis, Rose and Crown, and a fortified gateway, which may be a memorial of the traditional lower gateway to the hill fortifications of Langport. At the commencement is an English translation of the Charter of 1617, of the Rent Roll of 1596, and a Court of Survey of Town Lands and Burgages held in Feb. 1658-9.

No. iii. 1797-1830. Leather bound. Minutes.

No. iv. 1831-65. Do. Do.

No. v. 1865-85. Do. Do.

(5). 1675-1685. Only documents of Court of Record. Book not filled up. Actions of debt, assumpsit and trespass.

(6). Portreeves' Accounts. *See* (3) above.

i. 1701-1811. Leather bound volume.

ii. 1812-1851. Parchment bound.

iii. 1851-1889. Do.

iv. Another book, 1840-1859, contains a set of yearly summarised balance sheets on printed forms.

(7). 1800-58. Book of Licensing Sessions.

At the end a table of offences dealt with at Petty Sessions, 1860-1.

(8). 1701-1883. Presentments. *See* above (4), No. i.

These are Courts Leet and Courts Baron of the Corporation and of the lord of the manor, tied up in packets, fairly complete from 1701 to 1808, when the Corporation purchased the manor, after which they continue till 1883. The Court Leet was held less often as copyhold tenure was

passing away—fell into abeyance, 1872—held 1883—and revived in 1901, because of the common moors.

Memorandum of proceedings at the Courts Leet, 1829 and 1843.

Copy Presentment of the Customs of the Langport moors, 1819.

(9). Numerous parchments of leases of XVII to XIX Centuries, useful in determining old sites of tenements, etc.

(10). Miscellaneous Papers :

Various surveys and lists of tenants of the corporation and manor in the XVIII and XIX Centuries ; inquisitions by the coroners (the portreeves) ; bonds relating to the Parret Fishery ; surrenders of copyholds ; lawsuits concerning Stanmoor Bridge and Great Bow Bridge ; short sketch of Langport history, 1828 ; the Parret Navigation Co. and Drainage Districts ; vouchers ; maps *re* Tithe Apportionment, 1840, Land Drainage Act, 1861, and proposed new Town Embankment, 1883. English copy of Charter.

(11). Title deeds of Grammar School estate ; and lawsuit of Corporation with Gillett's Executors (1686-1698).

(12). Present Town Trust Papers (include opinion of council on customs of stocking manors, 1903).

There are two subjects which may be drawn with interest from these documents ; how the Civil War affected Langport, and what changes have occurred in the appearance of the town, its streets, buildings and bridges.

II. The Civil War Period.

The first glimpse of Langport's share in the history of the times (which the corporation papers present) is during the great Civil War. Here are echoes of that sad time when the rights of the king and the rights of the people broke fiercely like two dark thunder clouds against each other, and brother

against brother, family against family, were dragged into the conflict.

Langport, in its small way, was a centre of attentions, being one link in a chain of fortresses from Bristol or Bridgwater to Lyme, which each side in turn required, in order to attack or defend the West Country. It is difficult to decide whether Langport was royalist at heart or not. Several indications suggest that it was. Probably its chief concern was so to order its policy that it might keep its goods in peace. The town was certainly not on the side of Parliament at any time like Taunton, and it seems to have been content to support the king when it was safe to do so. When the king had the upper hand, Langport willingly contributed and sent presents to the Royalist leaders, but when Parliament was the stronger the corporation sent presents of fish and sugar loaves to the chief Parliamentary leaders in the neighbourhood. No man became prominent for either side from among the people of Langport as John Heron did in the last revolution.

Thomas Trevilian, who is mentioned in the town charter of 1617 as the town clerk, still held that office, and seems not to have been republican like his cousin Richard's family at Midelney. It was Midelney which refused the ship money when Langport paid it through Thomas Trevilian their portreeve. After the war, parliament picked out two of the leading burgesses who had been portreeves to punish them for known activity in the king's cause, John Ball and Thomas Edmonds (Calendar State Papers, 1652). Probably the fact that the town clerk had a cousin in R. Trevilian, who was on the Parliamentary committee for Somerset, saved the burgesses from further inquisitions. There is no doubt about the joy and the hogsheads of liquor when Langport celebrated the Restoration.

After events clearly showed that the town had not the Puritan sympathies of Taunton and Bridgwater. When these were out and out for the Monmouth rebellion, Langport had

only three men marked down by Judge Jeffreys, and they were not among the chief burgesses. The family of John Bush, the minister intruded into Huish-cum-Langport vicarage, did not continue in dissent, but returned to the church, and their burial place is in All Saints' Church. It was a matter to be remarked as late as 1828 that no dissenting chapel had been erected in Langport until that time (Short Sketch), whereas elsewhere meeting houses have constantly dated from the Puritans of the Rebellion. (Powell's *Bridgwater*, vol. i, gives a chapel 1688.) The close connection which had existed from time immemorial between the corporation and the church still continued. In 1703 the corporation "removed Thos. Edmonds from ringing the Curfew Bell at 4 in the mg and keeping the Church Clock for neglect of soe doing" (Minutes, vol. ii), and they regularly paid the clerk 20*s.* or 30*s.* per annum in the XVIII Century (Portreeves' Accounts). In 1719 £10 was paid by the portreeve towards augmenting the vicar's endowment within the town (Minutes, vol. ii). In addition to the church rate, they gave such subscriptions as £5 5*s.* to the Sunday school (1792), £5 5*s.* to the erection of the organ (1807), and a loan of £400 to repair the church (1826).

Langport chose a noted Royalist for recorder in 1667 in Sir E. Phelips. In this same year all the chief burgesses, with the recorder and town clerk, bound themselves by the oath and declaration that it was not lawful upon any pretence whatever to take arms against the king, and "that I do abhor that traitorous position of taking armes by his authority ag^{t} his person or against those that are commissioned by him," and that there was no obligation from the oath commonly called the Solemn League and Covenant, but that it was an unlawful oath. They called on Richard Seaward, under penalty of £5, to be admitted burgess and to take this oath (Minutes, vol. i); and later they expelled him from the corporation because he was "excommunicated and doth obstinately refuse and neglect

to reconcile himself to the church" (vol. ii). In 1669 the Minutes (vol. i) state that to give a good example to all persons dissenting the public service on the Lord's Day, and for a future encouragement to all persons observing the Lord's Day, and keeping the publique (service), and for the advancement of the reputation of the portreeve and burgesses of the time being that all the chief burgesses for the time to come shall on each Lord's Day attend at Mr. Portreeve's house some very short time before the beginning of the public service on each Lord's Day and give their attendance on the said portreeve at church and soe home; and if without good excuse any refuse, they would levy restraint on the goods of such, if the fine of 3*s*. 4*d*. was refused.

Amongst the neighbouring families there were strong supporters of both parties in the Civil War. Edward Ceely of Creech St. Michael, whose family was afterwards allied to Trevilian's, was a strong Parliamentarian. His cousin, Col. Ceely, was governor of Lyme at the time of Langport fight, and Ceely is mentioned in 1652 and 1659 (Port. Accounts). The family of Marmaduke Jennings of Burton Pynsent appear to have been on the same side. The mother of Richard Trevilian (Mary Jennings) was of that family. In 1652 the corporation spent £2 8*s*. on birds at Christmas to give to Mr. Jennings, Mr. R. Trevilian, and Mr. Newton of Swell; 16*s*. 6*d*. on fish to Mr. Pyne; also £1 14*s*. 2*d*. for birds to Mr. Jennings, Mr. Ceely, and Mr. Newton. Another item in that year is "paid for meeting at the Swan when Mr. Jennings and Mr. Trevilian rode for London, 5*s*." The Pyne family of Curry Mallet and Cathanger were also divided against one another in that terrible period. Humphrey Alsop says: "I desire to be allowed for keeping of a maymed soldier in the year my brother Thomas was constable by the order of Mr. Pyne, Mr. Hendly, and Mr. R. Trevilian then committees in Langport, £4 14*s*." (1652, Port. Accounts). On the other hand Valentine Pyne, the second son of G. Pyne

of Curry Mallet, became eminent on the Royalist side, and was with Chas. I, Rupert, and Chas. II (*Dict. Nat. Biog.*).

Langport had also intimate relations with two other local leaders who were very prominent, one for the King and another for the Parliament: Sir John Stawell and Col. Wm. Strode. Sir John Stawell of Cothelstone had married the daughter and heiress of Sir Edward Hext of Low Ham. By the generosity of Sir Edward and his lady Langport had lately received its almshouses at Somerton and its fund for apprenticing children. One wonders how many Langport and Low Ham men were enlisted in the troops which Sir John recruited for the 1643 campaign. Mr. Speke, who joined Sir John Stawell in all his service for the king, was a tenant under the Langport corporation (Port. Acct., 1646). On the Parliament side Col. Wm. Strode was one of the foremost leaders in the early part of the war. John Bush had been his trencher chaplain at Barrington Court, who was afterwards intruded into Langport benefice.

In the campaign of 1643, Lord Hopton advanced from Cornwall, and garrisoned Taunton, Langport, Bridgwater, and Dunster. The Royalist army reached Langport by June 6th, which was important as defending the line of the Parret with Bridgwater. From this time, for two years, until the day of the battle, July 10th, 1645, Langport was held securely as a Royalist town. It served as one centre in the line of defence of the West from Bristol to Sherborne, and was useful for the storage of arms and provisions, and as a place of refuge for all Royalists in this district. The loyal Trevilians of Wick and Kingsbury took refuge here, when parties of the enemy were scouring the neighbourhood. The Somerset committee reported in 1646 that Robt. Trevilian of Drayton was on the king's side, and joined Sir J. Stawell and the plundering cavaliers. He had set forth a horse for the king, was against Lyme, and had fled to the garrison of Langport for safety when the Parliamentary forces came near Drayton.

John Trevilian of Kingsbury had been twice prisoner, and said at Somerton two years since, "we shall hang the Roundheads for twopence a dozen." He maintained his son to ride up and down in arms with the Cavaliers, and when any of the Parliamentary forces came near Kingsbury, the said John Trevilian did fly to the garrison of Langport for refuge. (Camden Soc., Trevelyan Papers, iii). In 1644, J. and W. Cote of Curry Rivel sent cattle to Sir F. Mackworth, governor of Langport, and accepted a protection from him for the saving of their estates. (Calendar of Com. for Adv. of Money, 1652).

Part of the two years was by no means a pleasant time for the town and garrison of Langport. By the march of the Earl of Essex in the summer of 1644 Taunton was surrendered to Blake, whose skirmishers swept the country all around to provision Taunton. The dissolute Goring purposely oppressed Langport to gratify his spite against Hopton, who had settled Langport as a garrison, as well as against Mackworth, with whom he had disputed in the North (*Clarendon*). The portreeve's account for 1643 contains memories of the memorable advance through Langport in June, 1643: "For a quarter of Meall when my Lord Hopton and Sir Francis first came, being compelled there-unto." "Sacke for my Lord Millard when in town being compelled to it, 17*s*." "Petition concerning the Corporation, 1*s*." "Hosen and Shoes by warrant sente by our Majestie and by order of the masteres, £5 10*s*." Towards this last item £5 was specially collected by consent and order. "New locke and key for the vestry door, 2*s*." Here ammunition seems to have been stored. "Wm. Gill for making powder, 1*s*." We can note the distress caused by the war in the following items: Canvas and Cloth bought for the poor from John Catell and John Sawtle and Gregory Loosemore, and £3 15*s*. 10*d*. for clothing and shoes given to them. The contributions which were arranged by Lord Hopton to be paid towards the king's exchequer are set

down in a way which suggests many different kinds of taxation: "13 months' contribution, 13*s.* 4*d.*; 14 months' contribution, 13*s.* 4*d.*; 15 months' contribution, 13*s.* 4*d.*; 16 months' contribution, 13*s.* 4*d.*, concerning the corporation monie." However, all this did not prevent the jolly burgesses from granting £4 to the portreeve, "to my two feasts," and "wine at my first court and birds to the Recorder (Merifield), 11*s.*"

When Charles himself followed the Earl of Essex to the West in 1644, he stayed at Sir C. Berkeley's house in Bruton. The latter was at that time lord of the manor of Langport. "P^{d} Sir Charles Barkeley's rent in arrears 19*s.*" (1658). "For chief rent to Sir Charles" (1659, Port. Accounts). The king stayed three days at Ilchester, gathering in reinforcements and supplies. The portreeve enters in that year £1 4*s.* and £3 12*s.* for "Majesties forces under Lord Hopton and Sir Francis Mackworth." "For a quarter of mault and 20 bushels to Sir Richard Winckfield, William Whitead Commisary."

At the battle of Langport in 1645, Fairfax destroyed the king's army of the West. The garrison had been reduced to two days' provision by the negligence and ill-will of Goring, and had to live by plunder. Sir F. Mackworth had refused under such conditions to attempt to hold the town. The town itself must have fared badly during these disputes, and life must have been very uncertain, when the clubmen could venture to the very walls and fire over them. But the scene of destruction after the battle was still more pitiable, and most of the houses in Bow Street lay in ashes. All the principal buildings, the Market House, Town Hall, Market Cross, Hanging Chapel, and bridges required restoration. The portreeve enters in the accounts for 1645: "P^{d} the Constables John Ball sen. and Thos. Edmonds to save the Town of untoward plunderinge 12*s.*" "A shroud to bury a soldier out of Robt. Gould's house 3*s.* 6*d.*" "A shroud to bury a soldier out of R. Gill's house 3*s.* 6*d.*" "A grate for the prison against the Streete 8*s.* 10*d.*" "Repairs to prison house 6*s.* 8*d.*" "New

lock and key and for mending the vestry door 2*s.* 8*d.*" "Glazing Town Hall windows 3*s.* 4*d.*" "Mending Market House Buttery with board and nayles to save ye glass 1*s.* 4*d.*" The next note suggests fortifications: "P^{d} for timbering to make (. . . ?) by ye command of Sir Francis Mackworth 6*s.* 6*d.*" "More for timber and wages 12*s.* 6*d.*" The miseries of the time are reflected in the following: "30 travellers men women and children 3*s.*" "P^{d} W. Gill for a warrant and inquisition for taking Milsom Mill;" "for a shroud to bury her 3*s.*;" and "Ed. Evans to bring her to Little Bow in a boat."

The Town Clerk was commissioned to obtain another seal. "£1 10*s.* to Mr. Trevilian new Seal of Corporation." Perhaps the former had been stolen. Was this the present black-a-moor seal, and is the British Museum mistaken in giving the date 1617, or is it the portcullis seal? No document now extant shows the use of the portcullis seal before 1750.

In the next year (1646 account) we find: "laid out for paying in of the King's rent 6*s.*" (this is perhaps the annual payment mentioned in the charter); "John Barker for drawing up a petition to the Commissioners for to take off the six months' contribution 1*s.* 6*d.*" The repairs to public buildings, Market Cross, Broad Bow and Town Hall continued. There were heavy law expenses in addition.

The next account is dated 1648, and mentions four rates "to Sir Thomas his army," amounting to 21*s.* 8*d.*; and two other small rates "gathered for the British Army." Does the latter mean covert assistance to the king's forces? Law expenses were again heavy for the year, and public buildings were still under repair. Another attempt was made to have the war tax lightened. "P^{d} Jarvis Smith for promoting about the contribution to ease the town 6*s.* 8*d.*" The following may be a reference to the fortifications: "for drawing the timber out of the ground in North Street by Hannam house 9*s.*" The Somerset elders were now intruding into church matters; probably a big conversion-to-order was made after the capture of Langport,

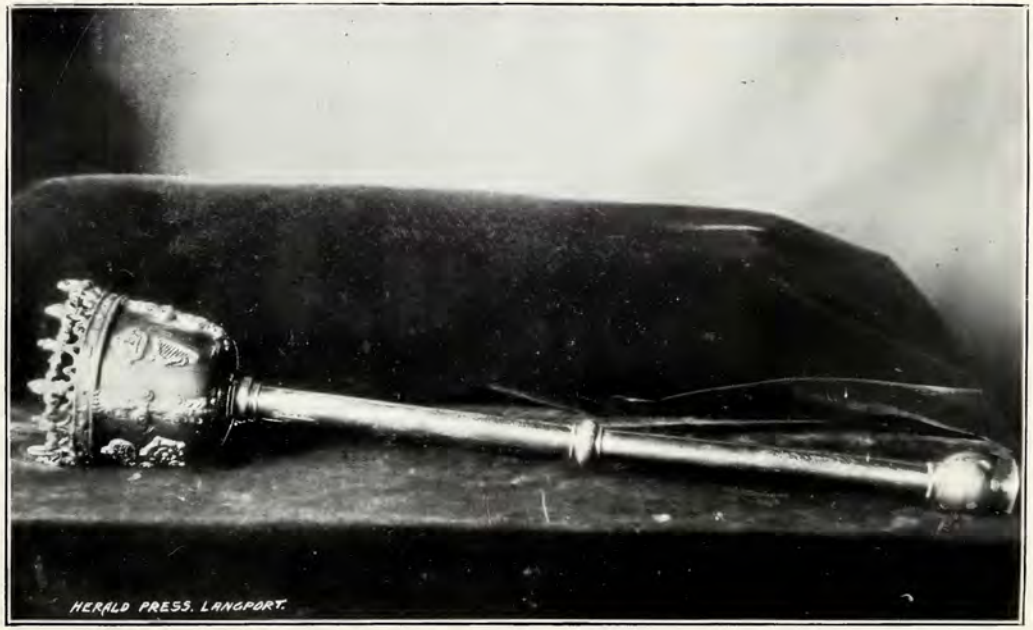
and the Solemn League and Covenant and the Parliament's Prayer Book were forced on the town. This year the Church Prayer Book was forbidden on heavy fines, even in private houses. "Pd a minister Mr. Rowes for preaching 11*s.*"

In the next year (1649 account) the war rate went up alarmingly. Contributions for Sir Thomas Fairfax are mentioned amounting to 59*s.* 3*d.*, and the different sets of months amount to seventeen months. The heavier rate is probably due to the second Civil War, which broke out from April to August, 1648. Further expenditure was incurred on public buildings and law proceedings. A small item which reflects the changes made in religion is also brought in: "for a minister which taught here 2*s.* 6*d.*"

In 1650 (Port. Accounts) the war tax had fallen considerably, but rose again in 1652, which may be accounted for by Cromwell's expedition against Scotland and the battle of Worcester in 1651. In this latter year we find: "the hanging Chapell" mentioned, which quite disproves the fable that Judge Jeffreys' hangings brought in that name, rather than the position overhanging the road.

In 1653 the war tax was heavier still. The Dutch were attacking us, and Blake had been defeated by Trump in November, 1652. The church being then compelled to have dissenting ministers, these unusual items appear: "Minister's dinner and wine to John Michell 17*s.* 6*d.*" and "the preacher's dinner and wine to John Michell, 16*s.* 6*d.*" and "the lecturer's diet and wine 7*s.* 6*d.* and 11*s.*" Amongst the receipts were £50 from J. Michell for part of the fine of the Inn or Swan.

In 1656 a large sum was spent on the vestry. "Mending the vestry with timber, lead and soder, £2 9*s.*, and its lock, 10*d.*" The government contributions were £2 7*s.* 6*d.* A larger sum was spent on lecturers: "Pd. Nicholas Weech for attending the lecture and ringing the bell, 10*s.*" "I desire to be allowed for my expense to the lectur, £4." "Paid for the minister's dinner and for sack, £4 18*s.*" "For wine to give



MACE OF THE CORPORATION OF LANGPORT.

Head bears C. R. (temp. Chas. I.). Shaft has Bust and Badge of the Duke of Somerset, Lord of Langport Manor, 1443-4.

From a Photograph by Mr. G. H. Hemmel.

to Mr. Moore, Mr. Darby, and Mr. Bernard for preaching here on the Sabbath, 4*s.*" The very large sum of £15 17*s.* was spent on clothing for the poor; and they also provided for the scolds: timbers, bolts and nayles to make the cucking stool, 12*s.*; and wages, 9*s.* 6*d.*; lock and chain to lock it, 2*s.* 2*d.* Also paid for bringing a note to warn the masters, 4*d.* In 1657 ministers at the lectures throughout the year cost £7 1*s.* 4*d.* In 1658 we may notice: "Seager for making ye Stoks, 7*s.* 4*d.*; and for the ieron, 8*d.*; also lock for Letleas (Little Ease)." The charge for the lectures was £7 6*s.* 4*d.* This is the last time that a charge of any extent is made for preachers at All Saints', and it is probable that John Bush was appointed as permanent minister at this time. The war contributions went down to about 30*s.* per annum.

The next portreeve was John Michell, landlord of the Swan, 1658. He came into that period of confusion which occurred between the death of Cromwell and the Restoration, when the Rump Parliament was first restored and then turned out by the army, and Royalist risings took place in different parts. It may be that Langport was preparing for what all men longed to see, the king get his own again, for it began to secure its mace: "For the mace and carridge and letters, £7 10*s.*" "To Mr. Ceely for serchinge for Birgesses and his fee, £1." The Langport mace has no hall mark which may show its date. Probably it represents two dates. The head is of Charles I, and is divided into four compartments, each bearing a crown surmounting a rose, thistle, harp, or fleur de lis, with C.R. The staff may be as old as 1443, for it bears the portcullis, and at the butt end a bust of a duke wearing a ducal coronet. The ducal family of Beaufort, whose badge was the portcullis, were lords of the manor till the Lady Margaret's death. The only male lord was John, created duke 1443, died 1444. When the head of the mace was made under Charles I, the town could number several lords of the manor since the Beauforts, but none who used their badge,

the portcullis. The town placed the same badge on the battlements of the church tower. The mace is silver gilt. A Court of Survey was held in February, 1658-9, which is preserved in Minutes, vol. ii.

The account of Thomas Alsop, Nov., 1659—Nov., 1660, records the general rejoicings at the Restoration of the king. "Hogshead of beer when the King was proclaimed, £1 10*s.*" "Beer when the Coronation was observed, 5*s.*" "For the Company of Masters at feasts and meetings, for wine, beer, tobacco, and cider, £7 10*s.* 6*d.*" The contributions to government continued at 12*s.* 6*d.* per quarter. An interesting item is, "Cloth and Cord to pack up ye mace to send to London, 9*d.*" The church arrangements were allowed to continue unaltered till 1662, and so we still find: "clarke for attending ye lecture, 10*s.*" "To Mr. Michell ministers' ordinary and ye wine, £4 18*s.*"

John Blake, 1660-1, shows the town honouring the old Royalist, Sir John Stawell, to whom they sent "12 pottells of Cannarie, £1 16*s.*, and Sugar loaves, 9*s.* 8*d.*"

The town had to provide ten men, as of old, to the county force, and so we have: Pd. to Captain Cannon for 3 muskets, £1 13*s.* 6*d.*; to Humphrey Gardener, £3, and one musket, 16*s.*, and barrel, 5*s.* "Bringing the muskets from Taunton, 6*d.*" "Powder to try them, 10*d.*" "Powder at muster in Rowditch, 2*s.*" 10 bills and 7 sets of bandeleres, 3 dirks, tipping the pikes, 10 swords, £7 1*s.* "2lb. powder to keep guard at the Swan, and Mr. Michel for soldiers' pay, £1 10*s.* and £1 10*s.*" "23rd April. 5lb. powder, 8*s.* 8*d.*" "Mr. Weech for 7½lbs. powder for Tanton Muster, 12*s.* 6*d.*"

In the next year John Ball, 1661-2, paid £2 for the king's arms, probably put up in the church, and three days' pay to the trained soldiers, and 10*s.* for mowing the river and throwing the hasick (sedge or rushes such as hassocks are made of).

We need not here enter into the history of *John Bush*, given by Calamy and others, but simply notice how the cor-

poration papers refer to him. He was elected one of the "Moorheads" (*i.e.* moorheards or herds) in 1668, and presented Mr. J. Michell, the portreeve, for trespassing on the moors with his pigs. In Feb., 1676, he was elected a capital burgess, and was fined 10*s.* for refusing to take the oaths. In March he was fined £4; in April £5; in May £10 after he had refused to take the oath of allegiance and supremacy, and the oath that he would not take arms against the king. These were read out to him, and the fine inflicted thereafter. In July, 1678, on pain of a fine of £20, he seems to have submitted, and took the oath and the office of a magistrate. He is found as portreeve in 1686, and also for the following year, and again in 1701. His son, grandson, and great-grandson were each in their turn portreeve, and their names appear in the Minutes down to 1760 (vol. ii). Amongst the trade tokens of Taunton Museum is one marked with the minister's name: "John and Mary Bush." He married for his first wife Mary Alsopp, and is described as "Curat of Langport," June 3, 1662 (Pitney Register); and his second wife (1682) was the widow of Richard Trevilian, the Parliamentarian. He appears to have lived at Midelney then, and was buried at Drayton in 1711, aged nearly 80. His first wife was daughter of a Langport mercer, and the portreeve (1666) enters: "John Bush 3½ yards canvas, tape, and buttons, 6*s.* 2*d.*"

III. The Former Appearance of the Town and Changes in its Buildings.

This is a proper subject of interest for an Archæological Society, and has not hitherto been discussed in the *Proceedings*.

The rent roll or survey of the corporation in 1596, which corresponds generally with the survey in 1659, may help us to form some idea of Langport under the Tudors and Stuarts.

The town must have appeared then very different from

what it was in the early XIX Century. Hardly a building of the Tudor period, save the church and hanging chapel, now remains. It has gone through another great change since the XIX Century began.

In 1596 there was a "Mill House" in "Upp Streete *alias* Chep Streete." This was either a miller's house, or, more likely, a windmill, of which mention is made in the manor court roll of 1344. In 1659 the house is a burgage, "heretofore called Mill-house." Leases of the XVIII and XIX Centuries mention Windmill Toyte near Rowditch, to the N. of the present Hill House (Toyte=cushion or mound). On the top of the hill, W. of the church, and on the S. side (located in Minutes, iii, 1817) stood the *Market House*, giving its sub-name of Chep Streete to this part; and near it were a set of twelve shammells and two thatched standings or booths, let by the corporation to the various tradesmen of the town. The Tudor shammells still remaining at Shepton Mallet, or the old picture of Ilminster market place and its standings (Street, *Mynster of the Ile*) might, perhaps, give some idea of the appearance of Langport hill at that time. Its present state, which knows none of these things, could not suggest its former appearance. The *Shammells* were the shops of the tradesmen, and were hired at a rent of from 2*s.* to 5*s.* (1596). Under Elizabeth only one "house called a shoppe" is mentioned in North Street, and another in Uppstreete, and a third in Bow Street. The Market House had its bell, before the ringing of which by the order of the portreeve, who was clerk of the market, none might begin to buy or sell. This Market House occurs in the portreeve's accounts down to 1767. In a survey (Minutes, vol. ii) of 1795, we find "where old market house formerly stood." Near the W. end of the church was the *Church Cross*, on the steps of which (if it were like Muchelney) we might picture the market folk resting. A fair for cattle on the hill is mentioned as late as 1810 (Presentments). In 1813 fair and market place on the hill was

enlarged by the abolition of a ruined house (Minutes, iii). The name Pigg Street given in XVIII Century leases to part of Uppstreete, seems to imply that the pig market was also held there to the N. of the church. In the Elizabethan survey, the *Hanging Chapel* is called the Town Hall, whilst that "which was commonly called the Town Hall," between the Little Bow and the Crosse, is used as a burgage house. The upper well was on the hill in 1668 (Minutes, vol. i), and also a set of elms which were not to be topped by the portreeve without the consent of the major part of the burgesses. A survivor of these apparently lasted to the XIX Century, and old people can remember how men sat under it, and passed beneath its spreading branches to enter the west door of the church. A *Church House* existed in the Tudor and Stuart times, probably on the hill to the north of the church, where church-ales were given (Eliz., Churchwardens' Accounts). It is found after the rebellion in the corporation's hands. In 1646 Mr. Hannam, sometime portreeve, was permitted to have a lease of it for £5 fine. Work is mentioned about the Church House in 1727 (Port. Accounts).

At the bottom of Uppstreete, somewhere near the present post office, was the *Market Cross*, a building of stone with tiled roof. It may have been like Somerton or Cheddar Market Cross. Langport had its share in the wool and weaving trade, as the wealth of the portreeve, Heron the Dyer, under Henry VI, and other references may prove. The Cross is often mentioned needing repairs in the Port. Accounts, and is last heard of in 1779. Hard by the Cross stood "The Inn" (1596) of the place, called in 1659 "The Swan," and in 1818, when the corporation bought it, "The Langport Arms." It possessed its own brewery, standing near "The Inn" (1596). Not far below was the prison, appropriately called "The Little Ease," which was demolished before 1751 (Minutes, vol. ii). Several burgesses had *three acres* in Langport Field, the arable or pasture land to the N. and E. of the town, which was prob-

ably farmed on the co-operative system, and divided by baulks of grass in place of the modern hedges. Other burgesses are mentioned as having withy beds to the S. of the hill, or near Bow Street. One stood on the present site of the Congregational Chapel.

Watley Green, or common, was used for fairs (Court Leet, 1688). It was mapped out in 1829, preparatory to granting leases to build thereon (Port. Accounts).

The *Hospital, Almshouse*, or *Poor House*, of the town, was the House of the Blessed Mary Magdalene, in Westover, near the Great Bow Bridge. In 1591 it had a resident priest, "Sir Richard Pepyn guider there," and is called a poor house or hospital (Calendar State Papers). In 1684 it is ordered "that £10 be disbursed by the portreeve for settlinge and placeinge out of John Pope to the Hospitall House of St. Mary Magdalene neere L. Weston." In 1656 the portreeve paid £2 for receiving of Weech's maid into the almshouse.

Yet another public building of early days was *Dwelly's Barn*, later styled Dwelly's Plot, or Town Plot, on the N. side of Bow Street, near Little Bow. For this, even in the time of the Civil War, £1 per annum was paid to the churchwardens by the portreeve. Perhaps it was the old Tithe Barn thus taken by the town.

We come to the *Langport Bridges*. In the chantry survey of Edward VI we are told of "the Bridge ther which is a great bridge of stone with xxx arches beinge the great staye of that towne and the contrye there aboute." Elizabeth's grant or charter of 1564 more correctly speaks of "bridges" in so great ruin and dilapidation that the inhabitants cannot support and repair the same bridges. The charter of James I also correctly mentions "the bridges containing in the whole one and thirty bowes." Of these the Great Bow Bridge was re-built in 1840. In 1825 the town clerk had no means of discovering who built this ancient bridge or the date of it, but it was then a long and narrow stone bridge of nine arches.



LANGPORT'S ANCIENT STONE BRIDGE OF NINE ARCHES.

Pulled down in 1840; from a Painting made about 1810.

From a Photograph by Mr. G. H. Hemmel.

About the same time there were still nine arches under Bow Street (1828, Short Sketch). Little Bow Bridge may account for two more arches. A draught bridge at Broad Bow (Port. Accounts, 1646), probably conveying to the island of Cocklemore, may give us two more; but where the other nine were placed, it is impossible to say. The xxxi arches did not include the bridge between the two moors, which was ordered to be built in 1669, in place of putting a bull in the moors.

The *Arches under Bow Street* were at all times a constant care to the corporation. The portreeve, J. Michell, was presented in 1688, "for that 3 arches between the two Bowes wants repaire and are very dangerous for travellers and is to be repaired on pain of £2."

The charter grants to the town 2*d.* for passing carriages and 4*d.* for conveyance of merchandise or goods brought over or delivered within six hundred feet of either bridge. In Port. Accounts: "paid 3 men to stop James Berbier's goods for pontage" (1662). Lock and key for the bridge (1670).

In 1800, when Portlake Rhine was straightened and deepened, the corporation paid £87 towards re-erecting little Bow Bridge.

The oldest houses now existing in Langport are some built in Queen Anne's reign. They bear the character of that day. One has the name of a tenant, T. Saunders, on the window pane, 1709, so the present owner, Mr. Whitemore, courteously informs us.

Another great change was made in the appearance of Langport in the early *XIX Century*. The Short Sketch of History included in the town papers (1828) has some glaring misstatements, but may be trusted to know what had lately taken place. It states that about 1800 the town was in a dilapidated state from the antiquity of its buildings, but the corporation and Sir R. Colt Hoare, who were the owners of the greatest part of the property, sold it off in fee to the lessees who were holding for lives. "Whereupon a great

many new houses have since been erected and are still erecting, thereby giving the town a very different appearance to what it had in the last century." The corporation Minutes (vol. ii) show why the change occurred at that time. The Ilchester Canal Co. was just formed, and needed lands for river improvements. They state (Minutes, iii) that most of the corporation property was in houses, many of which were in a ruinous condition in 1801.

Until 1800, except for the disappearance of the old public buildings, the narrow streets and old thatched houses of the town might have recalled Tudor and Stuart times. *The Court Leet Presentments* throughout the XVIII Century emphasize this fact. It was not only in Stuart days that such barbaric customs as the following were possible: "We present *Nicholas Weech* for that his wife doth by a common nuisance throw water out of her door into the streate to the prejudice of their neighbours, which they are to cast noe more in payne of 10*s*." (Minutes, vol. i); it was also possible in the XVIII Century, when certain tenants were constantly guilty of causing obstructions and nuisances in the streets. The first notice we have found of any better system being organised is in 1754, when the court of the portreeve ordered that "henceforth every occupier of any houses or lande within the Borough should take up, cleanse, and carry away all dirt, soyle, and other nuisance lying in front of their houses and lands half way over the street, at least once in every week, under such penalties as the portreeve and commonalty should think fit and proper to inflict on defaulters" (Minutes, vol. ii). Two years later an amateur system of *police* was thus arranged: "It is agreed that a watch be immediately set up, and that every housekeeper alternately, by four at a time, do find and provide 4 fitt and proper persons to watch every night from nine of the clock in the evening until five in the morning, and that the same be keep't up, and this order to continue in force till counter-manded," June, 1756 (Minutes, ii).

In the presentments of the courts leet, the portreeve is presented because "the prison house, known by the name of the Little Ease," is out of repair, and also because the stocks, "pilery," and cucking stool are out of repair (1706, 1745, etc.). He is presented also when the town well, or arches, or bridges, causeys, or shamells want repair (1724, 1747). High and low, rich and poor were indifferently reprimanded by the courts leet. Under the Commonwealth Dame Bridgett Trevilian, the widow, was presented because Thomas Trevilian's house wanted thatching (Minutes, i, 1657). The death of T. Trevilian, town clerk, is presented in 1657. In 1663 Mrs. Trevilian is again presented, because her kitchinge stable and stanles want thatchinge. In 1708 Lady Edith Phelips was presented because her house was out of repair. In 1732 Lord Berkley, lord of the manor, was ordered by the court leet to repair the pound on penalty of two guineas. The simplicities of life in the XVIII Century are impressed on us when we find the perpetual presentments of chimneys, and remember the danger of wholesale fires, under which people then lived, when thatched roofs and wooden walls were in use. In 1713 one tenant is called up for making a fireplace in his house and not erecting a tunnell (chimney), "and for every tyme he makes a ffyre to pay the penalty of 20*s*." In 1733 it is ordered that certain chimneys be raised 2ft. higher; or, again, an oven is out of repair and "dangerous of setting fire to the neighbours." James Hurd is presented for allowing his tenant to make a fire in a room of his, wherein was no fireplace or chimney (1736). Each inhabitant had to keep the pavement fronting his own house in order, and "causeys" are constantly presented.

The game and the fish of the manor had not then been civilised out of existence. Both the corporation within the borough and the lord of the manor gave leases for fishing in the Parret, where salmon was plentiful. A lease of the fishery was granted by Sir E. Phelips, the portreeve, to J.

Pitcher, in 1691, for 21*s.* 6*d.* per annum. Another was granted on easier terms to John Trevilian, Esq., being recorder in 1719 (5*s.*). In 1764 it was ordered that twenty couple of wild fowl be given yearly to Mr. Speke, the recorder (Minutes, vol. ii). In 1843 the vicar of Huish paid 10*s.* 6*d.* for a lease of the fishery. In a document dated 1717, the limits of fishing and fowling for the lord's gamekeeper are defined. At the court leet held by the lord's steward, two verderers were presented for the year; and in 1729 Mr. Mathews, cordwainer, was appointed gamekeeper to Lord Berkeley, and was authorised to take for his own use any nets or sporting instruments found in use by others within the bounds. In 1791 Lady Chatham of Burton Pynsent, being a relative of the wife of the lord, Sir R. Colt Hoare, writes to him in alarm about a rumour that the Parret fishery was to be let to a Bath or Seaton fishmonger. In the presentment of 1731 we still find the mediæval designation of customary tenants. Besides verderers, well-wardens were appointed by the lord, constables and constables' bailiff, royal bailiff, and searchers and sealers of leather. When the court leet was omitted in 1732, the jurors presented the steward to pay them a bowl of punch of 10*s.* value for not keeping the customary court.

The improvement and re-building of the town in the early XIX Century was not accompanied by any diminution of the floods. The promoters of a bill presented to parliament in 1825 for the re-building of Langport and Long Load bridges, stated that the floods had during the last five years annually increased in depth and extent. This was said to be due to recent enclosures of various moors and common fields and to increased activity in drainage. The waters, which used to lie a long time in the moors, were thus quickly drained into the bed of the river, which was not large enough to pass them down. Boats were used for weeks in Bow Street to convey food to the houses, and people lived in the upper rooms, or were fed at the Town Hall. The bill was not passed in 1825, but the Parret

Navigation Co. obtained powers in 1840, at which time the Langport Corporation gave £500 towards the new bridge on condition that they should not have any responsibility in future for repair. After the improvement of the Parret Navigation at that time, Langport became a centre for distributing the merchandise which was brought up the river, and an extensive river canal and highway carrying trade was organised, reaching as far as Axminster. Stuckey's Bank was then founded (1806). The population increased by nearly one-third to about 1200. The introduction of the railway undermined the carrying trade, and the population is now reverting to eight hundred. Many houses have been pulled down and replaced by gardens, streets have been widened, and roads diverted at the entrance and exit of the town, where the two stations are built, so that the inhabitants of 1807 would hardly recognise the Langport of 1907.

IV. Some Records which deserve notice.

A modern stained glass window in Langport Church was erected "In memory of Thomas Gillett, Founder of the Grammar School." The Grammar School owes its endowment to T. Gillett, but was not founded by him. His endowment was given in 1675. But in 1668 the Corporation Minutes (vol. i), speak of the school as an "Ancient Schole," and that the corporation had recently restored the buildings at great expense. Later they instituted a lawsuit against Gillett's executors about the appointment of the headmaster and the management of the school. The present Grammar School, with a stone inscribed "founded 1675," was not built till 1850 (Minutes, vol. iii).

1670, August. Within the cover of Minutes, vol. ii, is pasted an order signed by Lord Fitzharding, that Langport shall henceforth supply five foot soldiers instead of ten to Captain Cannon's company, because the rateable value was not fully £300. Lord Fitzharding was the successor in the

lordship of the manor to his father, who has been mentioned above as Sir C. Berkeley, under Charles I. This order will explain a minute of 1674 (vol. i), which provides that arms over and above those used in the service of the town are to be disposed of for the benefit of the town. "Paid 5 men for ye trayne Bande 2 days £1." "Ye muster master 7*s.* 6*d.*" (Port. Accounts, 1706).

1669, 1673. Together with the mace and seal and standards of weight and measure regularly handed on from one portreeve to another, there is here mentioned a bag of old writings (vol. ii). A sad destruction of old writings occurred after the death of the town clerk, J. F. H. Warren, in 1884.

1674. A year of great dearth. 20*s.* weekly was taken from the town stock to make bread to be distributed to the poor. The exhausting struggle with the Dutch at sea may have been the cause (Minutes, vol. ii).

1702. Expended at proclaiming the Queen £1 1*s.* 8*d.* On Coronation Day at the Swan and for the people in ale £2 10*s.* 10*d.* (Accounts).

1732. New Town Hall (the present) built (Port. Accounts).

1740. Pontage was again exacted from all vessels unloading near the two bridges, though this toll had for some time fallen into abeyance. Wheelage was apparently also demanded from carts passing over the bridge, as an action was brought against the Sergeant-at-Mace (1752) for stopping a Crewkerne man's waggon who refused the toll. In 1764, G. Stuckey (afterwards portreeve) was indicted at Ilchester for assault and battery on T. Webb, collector of wheelage.

1763. Frame to the picture of King James I, being the gift of Sir W. Pynsent, Bart., to the Corporation, 10*s.* 6*d.* (Port. Accounts). This has now disappeared.

1766. Lord Chatham £5 5*s.* to raise ye Gard walls of Broad Bow (Port. Accounts).

1769. The Corporation being 40 guineas in debt, Mr. G. Speke gave a sum of 20 guineas as a voluntary subscription on condition that the burgesses raised the rest.

1794. A disabled sailor from Lord Howe's fleet 6*d*. (Port. Accounts).

1795. Chaire hire to Wells being the first sessions for raising men for the navy £1 1*s*. (Port. Accounts). Beef given to the Poor £5 5*s*.

1801. Resolved that every member of the corporation receive the Sacrament annually, within 6 months previous to Nov. 1 (day of election of portreeve) on pain of £5 penalty.

Resolved to sell off houses and lands of corporation in fee simple, and all who do not purchase houses be compelled to put in good and sufficient repair (Minutes, iii).

A large sum realised by these sales was eventually invested in land at Westonzoyland (1869).

1802. Clock put up in Guildhall (Minutes).

1809. The manor purchased by the corporation for £250 from Messiter (Port. Accounts).

1814. £10 to poor because of inclement winter (Minutes, iii). £10 for rejoicings at general peace.

1815. £10 10*s*. to national fund for the relief of the wounded and families of those who fell at Waterloo.

1817. Potatoes and rice to poor in severe winter. This is not an unusual item.

Corporation advance money on interest to overseers to buy ground and build new Poor House in North Street, £246.

1825. Town spends £30 to oppose bill for Ship Canal.

1833. Night watch appointed for better protection of town.

1834. A calamitous fire in North Street which burnt poor cottagers out (Port. Accounts).

1837. Pair of stocks made on a moveable plan. (These were lately burnt by caretaker, 1906).

1840. Three pairs of new iron Market House Gates surmounted by portcullis in iron.

Tithe commutation. Guard walls of Hanging Chapel which had fallen E. and W. rebuilt.

1844. Fire engine house erected in Hanging Chapel garden.

1852. Cessation of business on funeral of Duke of Wellington.

1853. Langport West Station opened with festivities.

1856. £200 paid for new Pig Market near Little Bow.

1859. £5 contributed towards establishment of Volunteer Rifle Corps.

1872. Walter Bagehot elected deputy-recorder.

1875. Donation of £250, by J. Broadmead, Esq., to widen Little Bow Bridge.

1876. Commission of Inquiry on Municipal Corporations.

1878. Corporation contribute to Police Cottage and Cells in Whatley.

1882. £4 4*s.* paid to portreeve to attend House of Lords, and committee appointed to watch Lord Rosebery's bill for abolition of unreformed corporations.

1883. New Town Clock, £89. Petition for a fresh Charter for town.

1884. £200 subscribed to Town Embankment.

1886. March 27. "Langport a borough no longer . . . . . muffled peal on the bells of their fine old church" (*Som. Gazette*; in Minutes, vol. v).

A study of the records of the former corporation of Langport will convince every dispassionate reader that the rule of the portreeve and commonalty was on the whole wise, dignified, and beneficial. Their financial support was given to every project which was for the welfare of the town. They proved themselves efficient guardians of the public buildings and schools, streets, bridges, and ditches. They provided food and clothing, tools and work for the poor in times of scarcity. They looked after the almshouse and infectious hospital, the

prison and the fire engine. Nor did they neglect to mark suitably every national, patriotic, and ecclesiastical event. Experience has shown that the abolition of the corporation was an unfortunate blunder, and that the Parish Council cannot take its place.

We desire to acknowledge the courtesy of the Town Trust, and of their clerk, Mr. Wedd, for ready access to the strong room in the Town Hall to inspect the corporation papers which have been here described.