

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
SOMERSET ARCHÆOLOGICAL AND  
NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY  
DURING THE YEAR  
1942

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THE Ninety-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society was held at Taunton Castle on Tuesday, 7 July. The morning meeting was held in the Wyndham Hall. In the absence of the new President, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Francis Underhill, Bishop of Bath and Wells, owing to illness, the chair was taken by the outgoing President, the Rt. Rev. Abbot E. Horne, F.S.A. He was supported by Mr. A. W. Vivian-Neal, F.S.A. (*Chairman of Council*), Major F. M. E. Kennedy, C.B. (*Hon. Secretary*), Mr. A. E. Eastwood (*Chairman of Finance*), and Mr. H. St. George Gray, F.S.A. (*Asst.-Secretary, Curator and Librarian*).

### The Annual Report

MR. H. ST. GEORGE GRAY, Asst.-Secretary, read the Annual Report, which was as follows:—

‘IN presenting the ninety-fourth annual report the Council wishes to state that since the last meeting 31 new names have been added to the list of members and associates, including two life members, as against 27 in the previous year. Losses by death during the year have amounted (as far as can be ascertained) to 20, and there have been a few resignations. The membership to-day is in the region of 860, but owing to War conditions it is impossible to give the exact number in this report.

'The Society has sustained the loss by death of the following members during the period under review: Mr. B. G. Adams (1931), Mr. A. E. Baker (1910), for many years Librarian of Taunton Public Library, the Rev. H. D. Birley (1936), Major E. F. Browning (1927), Col. E. A. Daubeney (1907), the Rt. Rev. Bishop C. F. de Salis (1908), Mrs. A. C. Dilks (1934), Mr. Jeston Homfray (1939), Miss C. E. Honey (1928), Mary, Countess of Lovelace (1916), who died at the age of 93 years, Mr. Reginald Monckton (1913), Mr. Maurice E. Page (1920), who had made an intensive study of the Sedgemoor battlefield, and of the Rebellion, the Rev. J. J. B. Palmer (1929), Mrs. R. M. P. Parsons (1921), Mr. James Scott (1923), Mrs. Henry Symonds (1934), the Rev. K. W. P. Teale (1917), Miss I. R. Wansbrough (1938), Mr. H. G. Wedd (1904), and Miss Charlotte Winch (1907), who gave several interesting books to the Library from time to time. The death of Mrs. Somerset Clive, who presented the major portion of her pottery and porcelain to the Museum last year, is also noted with regret.

'The volume of *Proceedings* for 1941 was issued recently.<sup>1</sup> In spite of many troubles, due to the War, we have been able to maintain a high standard of production, and to give nineteen plates, including the ten devoted to the encaustic tiles of Cleve Abbey, Glastonbury Abbey, etc. The Society has material in hand for the next volume, but difficulties may increase, particularly in regard to paper.

'Two or three members have expressed their surprise that an annual volume should be published during the War, and regard the work involved in printing as detracting from the War effort. It is not generally realized that the official regulations provide a rationing scheme for printed material, and that the Society is only able to have such printing done as does not, in the opinion of the Government, hinder the War effort. Such societies as ours are rightly regarded as performing a useful service to the community by keeping up their normal activities in a moderated form, to act as a connecting-link between the culture of the past and that of the future.

'During the year little has been done at Taunton Castle

<sup>1</sup> The total cost to the Society of *Proceedings*, vol. lxxxvii, amounts to £190 17s. 10d.



in the way of general repairs and decoration, but electric power has been brought in to certain parts of the building for heating and cleaning purposes; and the telephone has been extended into the Curator's office.

' Since the last annual meeting a further eight hundred-weights or so of books have been removed from the libraries and taken away into the country.

' Much of the Society's income nowadays is absorbed by increased general insurance, cover under the War Damage Acts for the buildings, furniture, show-cases, books and museum specimens, and the cost of employing a permanent fire-watcher for night duty. The outgoings for maintenance have therefore increased.

' It should be reported that certain rooms and galleries in Taunton Castle have been requisitioned for definite uses in case of emergency.

' Great losses have been suffered by several of our English museums from enemy action during the War. At the Free Public Museums at Liverpool almost the whole of the collection of Ethnographical material (foreign) was destroyed—one of the most valuable and representative in the country. We are among the societies which have been able to contribute to the new ethnographical collection for Liverpool. Specimens which had not been exhibited at Taunton for many years, and for which the Society had long been seeking a suitable home, have been purchased by the Liverpool Corporation.

' In further reference to the Museum it should be reported that accessions have been well up to the average and include several specimens of local interest. John Stringfellow's steam-engine for aeroplanes, c. 1868-88, which has been put into working-order by the kindness of Avimo Limited, has caused much interest. In January and February a striking series of photographs of the newly-discovered "G. B. Cave", near Charterhouse-on-Mendip, was exhibited in the Museum, and is now being shown in other museums in the West. The collection of umbrellas and Victorian sunshades has been brought together in one case in the Great Hall. All three of the colours of the Somerset Volunteers, 1804, have now been repaired and netted and re-hung.

' Since the last meeting the first report of the S.W. Group

of Museums on the petrological identification of Stone Axes has been issued. One of the aims of this committee is to identify the stone (that is other than flint) from which Neolithic axes were fabricated ; another concerns the interesting subject of trade routes during the Neolithic and Bronze ages.

‘ There has been a good sale for the eight-page handbook, entitled *Notes on Taunton Castle*, price 2d., which was issued just a year ago.

‘ Turning to the Library and to literary matters it might be stated that the work on the revision of *Somerset Incumbents* has had to be suspended temporarily owing to Mr. Fitzroy Jones being called away for War work. Some of this compilation was being done at Bath a few years ago in collaboration with our Society, and the manuscript which had accumulated there has recently been deposited at Taunton Castle.

‘ The Society of Antiquaries has in preparation an entirely new edition of Papworth’s *Armory*, the scheme for which has been described in *The Antiquaries Journal*. A small committee of the Somerset Archæological Society has been formed to assist locally in this great compilation. In this connection the Society has recently purchased an heraldic manuscript, c. 1620–30, relating to the West country.

‘ The Society has also lately acquired by purchase typescript copies of the church registers of Norton Fitzwarren and West Hatch, and a few days ago Mr. H. G. Chick, the transcriber, gave the Society a copy of the registers of Chard. The Society already had copies of the registers (unpublished) of : Ansford, Broadway, Beer Crocombe, Castle Cary, Evercreech, Kingston St. Mary, Langford Budville, North Curry, Penselwood, Pitminster, Shepton Montague, and Thurloxton ; also indexes of the names in the registers of Cucklington, Stoke Trister, and Stowey (near Clutton).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Copies of Registers (unpublished) of the following places are preserved in the City Library, Bath : Batheaston, Bath (St. Michael’s, St. James’s, Twerton, and Weston), Charlcombe, Kelston, Monkton Combe, and North Stoke (part).

Copies of these are also in the custody of the Holburne Museum at Bath, and in addition the following Registers, also copied by the late Rev. C. W. Shickle, F.S.A. : Widcombe-Lyncombe, Swainswick, Bathford, Bathwick, Claverton, Freshford, Woolley, Englishcombe, Priston, Marksbury, Farmborough, Timsbury, Brislington, Newton St. Loe, Langridge, Queen Charlton, North Stoke (pt. ii), South Stoke, Saltford, Keynsham, Corston, and St.



‘ Last autumn the Society issued a circular letter to all the solicitors of Somerset and Bristol on the subject of the preservation of local records.

‘ Our members and others are looking forward to the early publication of the Index to the first twenty-two volumes of *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*; the subscription price is 7s. 6d. Recently the Rev. A. L. Browne gave the Society his manuscript list of Somerset Charters preserved in the Bodleian Library. His death was announced in the spring. This valuable compilation will be printed in the pages of *Som. & Dor. Notes and Queries*.

‘ Mr. H. S. Howard has been re-elected the Society’s representative trustee on the Ilchester Town Trust, and the Rev. Christopher Woodforde has been elected to a similar position on the Axbridge Town Trust.

‘ The Botanical Section of the Society held its field-days during the 1941 season, and the Ornithological Section published its report for 1941. The Bath, the Weston-super-Mare, and the Northern Branches of the Society have ceased to function for the time being, but the youngest of the branches, the West Somerset, has held its meetings much as usual.

‘ Council meetings of the Parent Society were reduced in number nearly a year ago. For the future they will, during the War, only be held quarterly; but committees will meet more frequently.

‘ Taunton Castle was visited during 1941 by 9,765 persons, including 1,361 attendances from members. Only in two previous years has the attendance been greater. The largest day on record in the Museum’s history was Easter Monday, 1941, when there were 169 visitors.’

On the proposition of Mr. C. E. Burnell (High Sheriff of Somerset), seconded by Mr. James Morland, the adoption of the Report was carried unanimously.

Decuman’s (Williton); also the following Wiltshire parishes: Bishopstrow, Bromham, Corsley, and Dauntsey. These extracts are carried to 1812, and in the case of Charlcombe to 1816.

It might also be put upon record here that the following Registers of this diocese (to 1812) were micro-filmed in August 1942: Ansford, Bathwick St. Mary, Evercreech, Huntspill, Martock, Meare, Mells, Minehead (parish church), Moorlinch, North Cadbury, Portbury, Portishead, Ruishton, Seaborough, Sutton Montis, Taunton St. Mary, Thornfalcon, Wayford, Wells St. Cuthbert, West Lydford, Wraxall, and Yeovil St. John.

## Finances

Mr. ARTHUR E. EASTWOOD, Chairman of Finance, presented the Accounts of the Society for 1941, and they were formally adopted. They have already been printed in *Proceedings*, vol. lxxxvii.

## Election of Members and Officers

At the beginning of the Meeting the following three candidates were elected members of the Society : Miss Mary Tritton, Mr. Frank H. Goddard, and Mr. R. Cochran Allan.

Mr. A. W. Vivian-Neal, Honorary Editor, Major F. M. E. Kennedy, Honorary Secretary, Mr. F. L. England, Honorary Treasurer, and Dr. A. Bulleid, Vice-President, were re-elected.

In the Council of fifteen there were seven vacancies. Mrs. J. B. Clark, Mr. A. E. Eastwood, Lt.-Col. J. A. Garton, the Rev. Preb. G. W. Saunders, and Dr. W. Watson were re-elected, and the Rev. C. Woodforde and Mr. Charles E. Burnell were elected.

## Somerset Record Society

A great part of the year was occupied in the production of the volume for 1940, which was issued to subscribers in the autumn. It is a further collection of transcripts from Bishops' Registers, upon which Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte was engaged at the time of his death.

Pending a meeting of the Council work has been begun upon a Consuetudinary of the Cathedral, known as the Cosyn MS. Dom. Aelred Watkin of Downside has undertaken the work involved. The volume is to be issued to subscribers for 1941.

## National Photographic Record

Dr. F. C. EELES, Secretary of the Central Council for the Care of Churches, in an address, gave some useful information about the national photographic survey of churches, and appealed for photographs of churches and church fittings, either of this or the last century. Such photographs were being catalogued and properly filed.



The members then adjourned for lunch, after which the Museum and the Castle garden were visited before they met at the Municipal Buildings at 2.30 p.m. Assembled in the Council Chamber, Mr. St. George Gray made a short statement on the history of the building (see *Proceedings*, lxxxiii, 10, and lxxxvi, 75).

## THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE, WILTON

At the Church the members were welcomed by the Vicar, the Rev. Canon G. E. M. Bennett, and the following description was given by Dr. F. C. EELES :

The Church of St. George, Wilton, though generally regarded as of little architectural interest, turns out, on close examination, to contain at the west end, some of the oldest walling in the whole of West Somerset, inasmuch as it has been found to exhibit some Saxon work.

Anciently one of the chapels served by Taunton Priory, its association with the well from which it derived its name of Fons Sancti Georgii or Wilton (= well town) probably gave it exceptional importance. This may explain the existence of a stone church here before the Conquest and the fact that there was an enlargement with two aisles as early as the thirteenth century, as it appears that the well was a place of great popular resort.

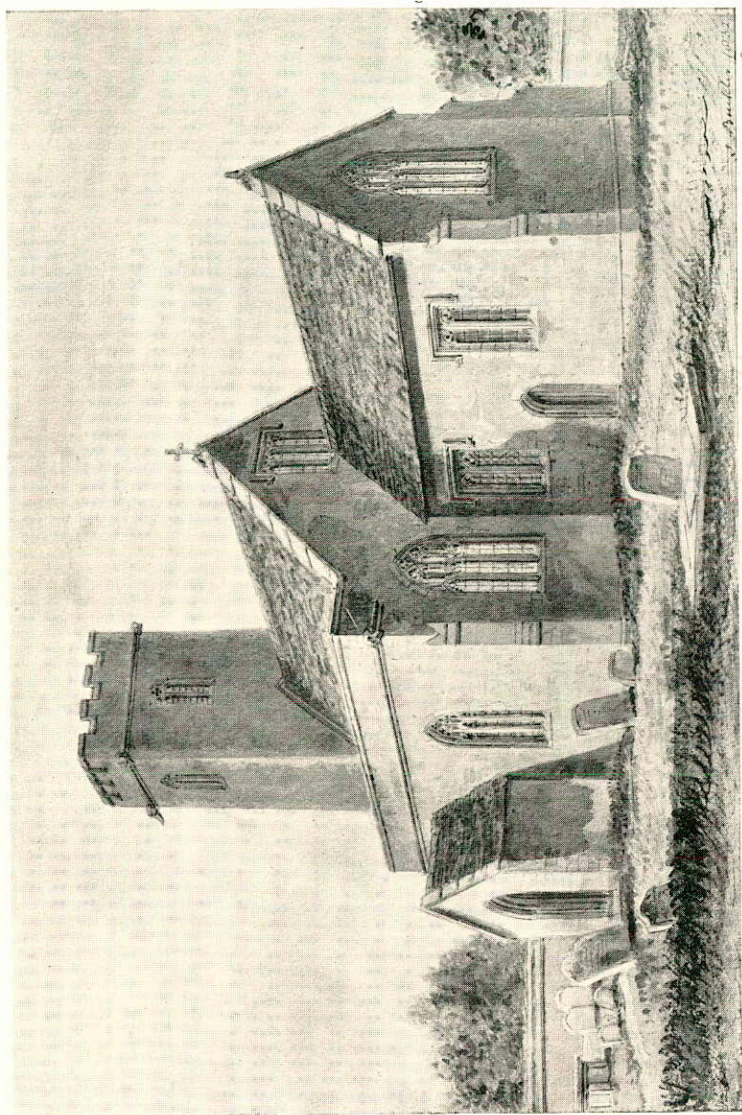
The recognition of the remains of the west end of the earlier church here as Saxon work suggests that the church, or chapel as it then was, must have been of more importance than has been generally recognized. It is well known that Saxon work is almost entirely absent all over this part of England. It is sometimes believed that the curious hybrid work at Milborne Port is the only work of the period left in the county, save perhaps the north side of the chancel of Culbone. The absence of Saxon buildings does not mean that there were no Saxon churches. What it does mean, not only here, but also elsewhere, is that the bulk of them were of wood, and only here and there were stone churches built. There is, of course, a Saxon doorway at Sherborne, and the complete Saxon church at Bradford-on-Avon—both places of importance. The use of stone here at Wilton may be due to wealth accumulated from

the offerings of those who resorted to the well for the sake of its curative properties. At the same time we cannot assume that wooden Saxon churches were always due to poverty. There is probably a great deal to be said for Professor Strzygowski's contention that there was a Saxon tradition of building in wood of considerable elaboration of which we get the reflection in the ornamental stone treatment which we see in an elaborate form at Earls Barton in Northamptonshire, and in the character of the Norman carvings at Kilpeck in Herefordshire, which appear to be based on earlier wooden models. Be this as it may, we can confidently point to Wilton as embodying the only visible existing relics of Taunton as it was before the coming of the Normans and the founding of the Priory.

The building consists of chancel and nave with north and south aisles, west tower, south porch, and vestry, on the north side of the chancel. As it stands, it has the superficial appearance of being mainly a symmetrical reconstruction on the usual fifteenth-century lines. The nave arcades have five bays; there are arches in line with the chancel arch leading into chancel aisles, of one bay each. The nave is wide in proportion to its aisles, and unusually lofty; the upper parts of the walls are unpierced by windows, both nave and aisles being under a single external roof, though internally they have separate waggon-roofs. This may be paralleled to some extent at Cannington and Norton-sub-Hamdon, and rather more closely at Winsford. As at Winsford, the east wall of the nave is pierced by windows, and the chancel roof is comparatively low.

At the west end outside can be seen, in the west walls of the aisles on either side of the tower, portions of the corners of the original nave. On the south side only a little is left, near the ground, but on the north side there is a considerable amount showing very definite long and short work carried out with large stones in the pre-conquest manner. Internally, the responds of the arcades are of the thirteenth century, each consisting of a flat pilaster, on the face of which is a circular shaft with a deeply moulded capital of the normal Early English type. Here we have evidence of the addition of two aisles not long after the Norman period which saw the foundation





ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, WILTON, TAUNTON, FROM THE SOUTH-EAST, 1832  
*From a Photographic Copy, by H. St. George Gray, of J. Buckler's Drawing in the Pigott Collection at Taunton Castle.*

of Taunton Priory. It is evident that the corners of the earlier aisleless nave are not Norman work, but older. This evidence rules out any supposition that the long and short masonry is chance work of some later period, such as one occasionally finds, e.g., in the chancel of Countisbury, North Devon.

Of the thirteenth-century work, there is left part of the side wall of the three westmost bays of the north aisle, and much of the pillars of the western part of the arcades. The mid-fifteenth-century builders seem to have reconstructed the whole church, but in doing so they reused the material of the thirteenth-century pillars, cut bases in their own way, and built depressed four-centred arches with the usual mouldings. The capitals have rather coarse continuous mouldings and in one case, near the west end, there are signs of the use of recut thirteenth-century arch-stones at the springings. The thirteenth-century pillars consist of a circular core with four attached circular shafts. They may be compared with those of the outer north arcade of St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton, which is also rebuilt thirteenth-century work.

The fifteenth-century reconstruction left the church with nave and aisles of four bays, and an aisleless chancel.

As it stands at present, the whole eastern part is an enlargement carried out in 1837 by Robert Carver, the architect who rebuilt Wiveliscombe Church. He seems to have pulled down the east walls of nave and aisles, extending them one bay to the eastward in the same form, rebuilding the chancel farther east, and providing aisles of one bay each to the western portion of it. Thus we find the chancel arch, and those leading into the chancel aisles, both from the nave aisles and the chancel, have mouldings of a kind that would not have been used in the fifteenth century. Robert Carver used a different stone for his walls. Eastward of the centre of the fourth bay of the nave, the old mixture of chert and occasional sandstone gives place to rubble made of the dark slatey stone from the north side of Taunton. Carver reused all the old window-tracery he could and his work was very carefully done. He seems to have made use of the lower parts of the displaced windows of the north aisle in the two eastmost bays on the north side, while providing new tracery like that of the other side windows. For the corresponding positions on the south side, he made



entirely new windows with the outer parts of the arch and jamb stones cut straight, and set a little forward of the wall surface. Buckler's drawing here reproduced (Plate II) shows a single three-light Perpendicular window here—the existing one has only two lights and may be a reconstruction—with another at the east end of the aisle and a square-headed three cinquefoiled light window over the chancel arch. Robert Carver reused square-headed windows of two cinquefoiled lights in his new chancel aisles, and these must have come from the sides of the old chancel. They are certainly in large measure old. The chancel probably had two on each side, with the small doorway between them on the south side which is now reused in the south wall of the extended chancel. The single light side windows in the chancel are clearly modern: they appear to be insertions of a later period than that of Carver. The east window, of three cinquefoiled lights with trefoiled tracery lights running up to the head, is of common fifteenth-century type, first reused by Carver and then, as recently as 1906, set higher up in the wall to make room for a new reredos in two tiers. It is strange that so recently as that it was not understood that the original reredos would only have been a single series of low panels beneath the window. This was a late survival of the common Victorian misconception of the nature of the altar and reredos of an ancient English church. At Wilton, as elsewhere, there would originally have been a low reredos under the window, without the shelf and the plain base which the Gothic revivalists so often introduced to display the altar ornaments. Above the chancel arch are three windows. A large central one of three cinquefoiled lights has two panels of three trefoiled lights each in the tracery, of a very common local fifteenth-century type, probably transferred by Carver from the east wall of the south aisle. The side windows are of a single light each, and may contain material taken from the former east windows of the aisles. The tracery of these windows is set deep in roughly made openings after the manner of the 'rustic work' of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The south doorway is Perpendicular work like the main part of the church. It has a simply moulded two-centred arch under a square head, the spandrels filled with foliage. On the

south side of the chancel is a small doorway of the same period with simple mouldings and no label. It seems to have been reset a little farther to the west than it was before, judging from indications in the masonry farther east.

The porch front is modern, but a small plinth at the sides, similar to that round the eastern part of the church, indicates that a porch was built as a part of the big extension scheme in 1837, if not earlier.

Turning to the walls. The earlier walls of the western parts of the aisles show the use on the north side of cherts and local sandstone mixed, on the south side mostly cherts with a little sandstone. From this we gather that the aisle wall on the north side is the earlier. Both aisles show a raising of the walls in the fifteenth century.

High up on the south side may be seen the base (cut out of a single stone) of a narrow thirteenth-century lancet window reused by the fifteenth-century builders.

The tower, faced with selected pale-coloured cherts from the Blackdown Hills, was rebuilt in 1853. It does not appear to contain any ancient features.<sup>3</sup>

The roofs of nave and aisles are of the waggon-type, but with very thin ribs and wall plates. There are three purlins and no bosses in the aisles, while the nave roof is of low pitch with five purlins and bosses of some kind on the intersections of the three middle purlins only. It is impossible without close examination to see the nature of these bosses. The panels are plastered. The chancel roof, of very low pitch, is clearly the work of 1837. An account of the bells was published by the late Rev. D. J. Pring, when vicar here in 1893.<sup>4</sup>

We are entirely without evidence of the nature of the Saxon church or of subsequent alterations prior to the fifteenth-century enlargement. But it is not impossible that before the fifteenth century there may have been a central or axial tower, which would mean that the older church was not so very much shorter than the present one.

Of later alterations and of fittings, we know little or nothing.

<sup>3</sup> From Buckler's drawing (Plate II) it will be seen that the earlier tower was of a simple type with a plain embattled parapet over a string-course with gargoyles at the corners and two light belfry windows.

<sup>4</sup> *A Short Account of the Bells of St. George's Church, Wilton, Somerset*, Taunton, 1893.



The nineteenth-century restorers seem to have abolished everything ; even the font is modern. All that remains from the post-reformation period is the finely carved and painted Royal Arms of 1787, and the interesting mural monument to Sir Benjamin Hammet, 1800, a signed work by Sir Richard Westmacott, which is described in the biographical notes on Hammet which follow.

The following particulars of documentary evidences relating to

### THE CHAPEL OF FONS ST. GEORGE

are inserted here by the Hon. Editor as a supplement to the architectural description of Wilton Church.

(They are abridged from unpublished notes of the late Thomas Hugo, F.S.A., in the library of the Somerset Archæological Society.)

This was a Chapel annexed to the Church of Taunton. It was dedicated to St. George, and was included in the gift of Bishop William Giffard of the Church of Taunton and its Chapels to the Priory, c. 1115. He also gave all his land near Fons St. George in his manor of Taunton, with all the course of the brook of Syreford (Sherford) near Taunton, for the grinding of their corn. (*Cal. of Charter Rolls*, iv, 318 ; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, ix, ii, 4, 6, 27.) In 1332 bishop John of Winchester granted the Black brook to the Priory instead of the Sherford stream. (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xxviii, ii, 25.)

The next notice that has been met with is referable to about the year 1180, when Stephen, Prior of Taunton, and his canons, in a charter to Reginald, Bishop of Bath, conceded that all their churches and chapels should make returns to him and his successors in all episcopal customs after the manner of the other churches in his diocese, except the Chapels of St. James, St. George de Fonte, St. Margaret of the Sick, and St. Peter of the Castle, which the aforesaid bishop had allowed to be exempt. (*Reg. Well. A. ff. 35b, 36. Lib. Alb. Well. f. 342 ; Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xviii, ii, 132.)

By the ordination of the Vicarage of St. Mary Magdalene in 1308, it was arranged that the vicar should serve at his own cost, by himself and his curates, the Chapel of Fons George,

in the sacraments and other divine Offices of the Church. (Seventeenth-century copy of Register of Walter Haselshaw, Bishop of Bath and Wells, quoted *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, ix, ii, 17-18; *S.R.S.*, i, 69.)

It would appear that subsequent to this ordination an arrangement had been made which had materially altered the original settlement. The vicar seems to have been exonerated from the regular performance of the duties, and the Chapel of St. George to have been placed on a similar footing with those of St. James, Staplegrove, Bishop's Hull, Stoke and Ruishton, which were to be served by secular priests appointed and paid by the Prior. A change of the ancient order can alone explain the particulars of the first interference of Bishop Bekynton in the ecclesiastical affairs of Taunton. On 29 March 1444, the first year of his consecration, he wrote from Evercreech to the dean of Taunton, his apparitor there, and the vicar of St. Mary Magdalene

on information that the prior and convent of Taunton, who held the church, or chapel, of Wilton by Taunton appropriated to their own uses, and who have been accustomed from of old to provide a secular priest at their own costs to serve the same, have recently failed to provide such a chaplain, to the great prejudice and damage of the inhabitants of the township or hamlet of Wilton—to cite the prior to appear before the bishop or his commissary in the parish church of Evercreech on Thursday next, to show why the fruits and profits of the said church or chapel should not be sequestrated and a portion thereof assigned to a chaplain to be provided by the bishop until a secular priest be duly provided according to ancient custom. The perpetual vicar of Taunton is to appear before the bishop on the same day and at the same place, to propound and allege what he may think necessary and proper in favour of the right and interest which perchance belongs to him in this behalf; and in the event of this order not reaching him, the aforesaid dean and apparitor are to cite him to appear as above. (Quoted from *S.R.S.*, xlix, 9. The transcript given by Hugo is somewhat fuller.)

It may be remarked that Bekynton was a severe and unsparing judge of the religious of his diocese, and but little disposed to exonerate a community against whom a charge of unfaithfulness to their trust could in any way be substantiated. On the present occasion, however, unless by such a



change in the arrangement as has been suggested, of which no evidence is extant, the charge against the Prior was flagrantly unjust, and the vicar should himself have been cited for neglect and punished accordingly. William Nicoll, who was probably appointed at the conclusion of the investigation, was parish chaplain in 1449-50. (*S.R.S.*, xlix, 140.)

The story of the small endowment at Sherford, held by the prioress and sisters of White Hall in Ilchester, has been given fully by Thomas Hugo. (*Medieval Nunneries of Somerset*, 38-41, 81-5.)

The rectory or chapel of Wilton, with its oblations, fruits, profits, advantages and emoluments whatsoever, was granted to Silvester Taverner, 29 July 1549. The advowson was reserved, and the grantee and his heirs were to pay the stipend of the chaplain, celebrating and serving cure of souls in the Church of Wilton. (Pat. 3 Edw. VI., p. 7. mm., 35-8.)

#### NOTES ON WILTON

Mr. H. ST. GEORGE GRAY followed with notes on the history of the parish and of notable persons who lived there.

The name WILTON is a corruption of WELLTOWN, so called from the name of the tithing 'Fons Georgii', the spring of St. George, to which the afflicted were accustomed to resort, and which tradition reports to have worked many cures. Jeboult in his *West Somerset* refers to the well more than once, and says there was a healing spring on the south side <sup>1</sup> of the Church 'which was probably the noted fountain'.

The spring was said to be intermittent, and therefore regarded with a certain amount of superstition.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As one approaches the Church from the south side one is struck by the fine specimen of Wellingtonia (*Sequoia gigantea*). It is said that seedlings were sold in pots at the International Exhibition of 1862, and that this tree and others in the parish were planted as souvenirs of the occasion. The oak tree farther to the west was planted in 1862 in memory of the Prince Consort.

<sup>2</sup> A spring at Sherford, near the foot of Cotlake Hill, was esteemed beneficial to those suffering from sore eyes.

There was probably a holy well at Rumwell, which is regarded as a corruption of St. Rumbold's Well.

In Trull parish, there is a farm called Herswell, which the Rev. F. W. Weaver regarded as a corruption of St. Ursula's Well.

A spring at Fosgrove, in the parish of Pitminster, was thought 'good for sore eyes'.

There was formerly a considerable trade done at Wilton in the manufacture of duroys, druggets, etc. A place near the gaol, called 'Turkey Stretch', was at one time a yard where the weavers worked.

The beating of the bounds of the parish, generally called the Perambulation, was held at Rogation-tide, and the churchwardens' accounts make it clear that the event was regarded as a kind of festival, judging from the expenditure on refreshments.

In Queen Anne's reign and in the earlier Hanoverian days great efforts were made throughout the country to reduce the polecats, stoats and hedgehogs. The Parish of Wilton did not lag behind in dealing with this nuisance, and 4*d.* a head was paid from the church rates for their destruction. For instance in 1714, 14*s.* was paid for 34 hedgehogs, 4 stoats and 4 polecats.

The church music at Wilton, until 1842, was rendered by the usual band and choir, when S. Summerhayes, bandmaster of the West Somerset Yeomanry Cavalry, was appointed organist.

The stocks have disappeared, but were formerly well maintained. In the eighteenth-century churchwardens' accounts there are such entries as 'righting the stox 1*s.* 6*d.*' and 'mending the stocks 4*s.* 2*d.*'

In the Museum may be seen a portion of the copper vane from Wilton Church tower, which was struck by lightning on 29 June 1901. A photograph shows the damage which was done on that occasion. The initials, I. S. and E. B., are those of the churchwardens, John Stephens and Edward Beadon, and the date, 1853, that of the erection of the new tower.

A well-produced and well-indexed volume on the Wilton Registers, 1558-1837, by J. Houghton Spencer, was published in 1890; he was the son of a former vicar, John Ward Spencer, incumbent from 1843-85.

Attention has been drawn to the Royal Arms over the south door—House of Hanover, dated 1787, described in *Proceedings*, vol. lxxxv, 240. On reference to the churchwardens' accounts, this entry is found under 1827, 'Gilding and painting the arms, £3 10*s.* 0*d.*'

The Museum contains two parts of a large signboard for



Tolls, formerly fixed up at the tollgate at Compass Hill. The number of vehicles named on this board is somewhat remarkable : Carriage, Coach, Landau, Berlin, Chariot, Chaise, Calash, Caravan, Hearse, Waggon, Wain, Cart, Putt, Dray, Litter. Domestic animals are also detailed thus : Horse, Mare, Gelding, Mule, Ass, Ox, Steer, Gale, Bull. There was also a tollgate on the Trull road by the lane leading to Ramshorn Bridge, and toll-bars at Wilton Hill and Wilton Grove.

*Wilton Prison, Prehistory and Bronze Hoard.*

The first gaol in Wilton parish was erected c. 1755 ; it superseded the old Bridewell near Tone Bridge. After successive enlargements and rebuildings it became the chief prison of the county, for Ilchester was demolished in 1843.

When a part of the Wilton prison area was being deeply excavated in 1853, a local artist, W. F. Elliot, painted a canvas of what he saw. This has been cleaned and is hanging in the Museum. The spot depicted is thought to be the site of the present Drill Hall of the Somerset Territorial Army Association. A series of clays (blue, reddish and yellow) were cut through and revealed a prehistoric forest of oak, alder, willow and hazel, with acorns and hazel-nuts, embedded in leaf-mould. Parts of eleven immense oak trees, excellently preserved, were discovered ; one was 60 ft. long.

These trees may have flourished in the Neolithic or early Bronze Age (about 2500-1800 B.C.), and have been killed by subsidence of the land causing the river or the tributaries to overflow and deposit the clay beds. The skull and a few bones of a Woolly Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros antiquitatis*, Blum.) were recovered from the same site, but at a higher level, at a depth of only 6 ft. The animal lived in the glacial period, and the remains were perhaps washed down with clay from the neighbouring hills.

The County Museum contains these interesting remains, and part of one of the oak tree trunks taken from a depth of 18 ft.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Geology of Country between Wellington and Chard*, W. A. E. Ussher, 1906, pp. 52, 53 ; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, v, ii, 129-30.

Incidentally we might mention that remains of Reindeer have been found under 12 ft. of gravel near Taunton Railway Station, and an antler of the extinct Irish Deer (*Cervus giganteus*) was discovered at the Gas Works, Tangier ; these are in the Museum.

A small hoard of bronze implements of the middle or third quarter of the Bronze Age was found on 30 December 1879 in the course of constructing a drain within the borough of Taunton under the present lane leading from Wilton to Sherford, at the northern limit of Footlands Nursery, and at a depth of 2 ft. The place is clearly marked on the 6-inch ordnance map (Sheet LXX, S.E.). The hoard was purchased for the Somerset County Museum.

The pieces consist of: A socketed spearhead, nearly 1 ft. long, somewhat damaged, and six celts of the palstave type; they vary in length from 5 to 6½ in. One of them is unfinished as taken from the mould in which it was cast.<sup>2</sup>

A very much larger hoard of bronze implements, tools and ornaments was found in the grounds of the Taunton Union Workhouse about two years earlier, namely, in February 1877. This collection is also in the Museum, having been presented by the Board of Guardians.<sup>3</sup> In date this hoard compares almost precisely with the Wilton hoard.

<sup>2</sup> Pring, *The Briton and the Roman on the Site of Taunton*, 75, and Plate III; Evans, *Bronze Implements*, 90, 330, 464.

<sup>3</sup> Pring, *op. cit.*, 47, and Plates I, II; Evans, 116, 178, 198, 218, 367, 466; *Arch. Journ.*, xxxvii, 94; *Arch. Cambr.*, xcvi, 136-62, and Plate III.

## WILTON FAMILIES AND WORTHIES

### *The Powell Family.*

The Powell family of Cutliffe in the parish of Wilton have a special interest as they are recorded to have held the manor of Fons George (within the great episcopal estate of Taunton Dene), no doubt owing its origin to bishop Willam Gifford's donation to the Priory of land near the spring.

The manor of Fons George, 'with all its rights, members and appurtenances, lately belonging to the Priory of Taunton and parcel of its possessions', was granted to 'Thomas Hyll of Kyngston', 21 August, 36 Hen. VIII, 1544. The manor was, it appears, estimated to be of the clear yearly value of three pounds, thirteen shillings, and two pence, tithe not deducted.<sup>1</sup> It seems, therefore, that the manor was not

<sup>1</sup> Hugo MSS., Taunton Castle. See also *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, ix, ii, 91, 125; Orig. 36 Hen. VIII.



created by writ out of the Court of Chancery, addressed to the sheriff, at some date after the dissolution,<sup>2</sup> as has been suggested, but was a medieval unit in the complex system of local government to which this part of Somerset was subject.

In 1698, George Wood Powell conveyed the manor of Fons George to William Harvey and others.<sup>3</sup>

The north aisle of Wilton Church was purchased c. 1640 by George Powell of Cutcliffe as a pew and burying-place. He was an apothecary and was mayor of Taunton in 1642. His wife was Dorothy, daughter of Tristram Wood of Kittisford. She and her husband appear both to have died in 1684. The *Taunton Courier*, 20 December 1837, gives the following information: 'In the course of the improvements at Wilton Church, the workmen last week accidentally discovered in a vault behind the pulpit an immense stone coffin, 7ft. 9 in. long, 2 ft. 11 in. wide, and 2 ft. deep. The cover is upwards of 6 in. in thickness, and its weight nearly half a ton. A lion rampant appears on its upper portion in *basso relievo*, above which, in slight *alto relievo*, is the figure of a human skull supported by cross-bones and an hour glass. The lettering can be but imperfectly deciphered, but the following is traceable:

INHOCSEP ICH  
ROIACETCORPVS  
GEORGIPOWELL  
DE WILTONE IN  
COMITAVSOSET  
GENEROSIQUIOBIIT  
DIE MENSIS  
ANO DNI  
NOLIMETANGERE  
PROPIETATE & AMORE <sup>4</sup>

. . . Leaden cisterns, bearing the crests of lions rampant are still met with at Cutcliff in the same parish.'

Possibly this sarcophagus, which was of unusual type in the seventeenth century, was prepared by George Powell during

<sup>2</sup> *Skrine of Warleigh*, E. W. Ainley-Walker, 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Som. & Dor. Notes and Queries*, v, 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 173, 174. For further information regarding the Powell family, see *ibid.*, 40, 227, 317.

his lifetime. The date of his death may never have been filled in.

In the westmost window of the north aisle are two oval medallions of seventeenth-century enamelled glass. The first of these shows the arms of Powell with helmet and mantling, *Per fess argent and or, a lion rampant gules*. Crest—*An estoile of eight points, alternately argent and or*. The second, dated 1674, is inscribed 'George Powell & Dorothy his wife of Wilton in Somerset', and shows with helmet, crest and mantling as in the first, the arms of Powell impaling those of Wood of Kittisford, *Per chevron argent and ermine, a chevron sable, in chief two leopards' faces gules*.

*Sir Benjamin Hammet (Plate I).*

Few who walk daily along Hammet Street or along Hammet's Walk know much of the man after whom these ways are named—the man to whom Taunton owes more, perhaps, than to any of her sons in the last two hundred years. Had it not been for Sir Benjamin Hammet's initiative and his vigorous and enlightened policy after the virtual loss of the trade in woollen cloth, the town might well have dwindled to a village. He was born at Wilton or Taunton in 1737, and died at Castle-malgwyn, his house in North Pembrokeshire, on 22 July 1800.

An obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* gives an interesting account of his life and character.

Sir Benjamin Hammet, knt. M.P. for the borough of Taunton, in the county of Somerset, and an eminent banker of Lombard Street. He was chosen alderman of Portsoken ward, London, 3 June, 1785, and received the honour of knighthood on presenting an address of congratulation to his Majesty on his happy escape from assassination by Margaret Nicholson, 1786. This gentleman was a conspicuous example of the effects of enterprise and industry. His origin was humble, and the progress of his early life afforded no prospect of the situation which he subsequently obtained. He wanted the advantages of education; but he possessed plain common sense, and was well acquainted with the qualities of mankind. After having filled the subordinate situation of a porter in the shop of a bookseller on Fish street hill, he became the architect of his own fortune, and acquired considerable property and high civic distinction. The bustle of one period of his life, and the calm that succeeded, notwithstanding his love of notice and popular-



ity, afford good materials for philosophic reflection. His character, drawn by an impartial observer, would render a useful lesson to youth on the benefits of industry and perseverance.—The present Mr. Hammet has been unanimously elected M.P. for Taunton, in the room of his father, who had been chosen representative of that borough four successive parliaments.

The writer of the obituary may have exaggerated the obscurity of Sir Benjamin's early circumstances in order to heighten the effect of the moral drawn from the story of his career. Be that as it may, Hammet's father was a serge manufacturer in Taunton just at the time when the woollen trade began to decline. The family, it is thought, came originally from Cornwall. The Hammets of Taunton appear to have been of the same stock as the Hammets whose name is found in the seventeenth-century records of Clyst St. George, near Exeter.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Benjamin had two elder brothers—Francis, who became a barrister, and John, who became a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy.

The bank in London with which Sir Benjamin was connected was the house of Esdaile and Hammet in Lombard Street, and he married Louisa, daughter of Sir James Esdaile. He had extensive interest in property in London, and built the Minories and the adjoining Crescent. In due course, he became a Sheriff of the City, and but for ill health would have been Lord Mayor. It was necessary for him to pay the usual fine of £1,000 for not accepting office on election.

There were two banks in Taunton at the close of the eighteenth century. The first modern bank to be established in Taunton was that of Hammet, Jefferies, Woodforde & Buncombe; it was opened in 1790, and afterwards carried on by Poole and Kinglake, having its headquarters on the site of the old Corn Exchange (where the Electricity Showrooms now stand). It may have succeeded a more primitive type of bank. Dr. Thomas Woodforde (1740–1826) combined banking with his medical practice in the town at an earlier date, but whether he drew on Hammet and Esdaile in London does not appear with certainty.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Hammat and Hammatt, *Foster's Alumni Oxon.*, 1500–1714, p. 639.

<sup>2</sup> The bank of John and Isaac Badcock was established about 1800 in Fore Street (see *Stuckey's Bank*, by P. T. Saunders, 1928).

Sir Benjamin is said to have lived at a house at Sherford, near Middleway.<sup>3</sup> In later life, however, he built Wilton House, and lived there when he was not at Castlemalgwyn or in London. It was in 1788, while a member for the borough, that he obtained an Act of Parliament (28 Geo. iii. 79), enabling him to pull down the old almshouses near the west end of St. Mary's Church, and also two houses in Fore Street which occupied the site between Briggs' shop and what was, until recently, Fox, Fowler's Bank. This made it possible to lay out and build the new street which still bears his name. It was a bold scheme. That the new street was centred on St. Mary's tower gave it dignity, and added a picturesque feature to the town ; and the modern private houses of which it entirely consisted provided accommodation of a type which would appeal to business men and private residents at a time when the financial position of Taunton was at so low an ebb that the older houses were in poor condition and few if any modern houses had been built for some years.<sup>4</sup>

In 1786, Hammet, who had first been elected a member for Taunton in 1782, obtained a grant from the see of Winchester of the office of keeper of Taunton Castle and bailiff of the manor and liberty of Taunton ; his object being that he might restore the Castle, which was then in so bad a state of repair that the town was in danger of losing the assizes. To lose the assizes would have meant such a diminution in trade and status that the financial ruin of the town, which was already so much impoverished, would have been complete. To hold the office of bailiff would have put Hammet in a difficult position if there had been a parliamentary election, as the bailiff of Taunton endorsed the sheriff's precept on such occasions, and he would therefore have been ineligible as a candidate. It was probably on this account that in 1786 he obtained a new grant of the offices of keeper of the Castle and bailiff in favour of his two sons, John Hammet, and James Esdaile Hammet, and of his nephew, Edward Jefferies Esdaile jointly, thus enabling himself to keep control of the Castle

<sup>3</sup> Collinson, iii, 294.

<sup>4</sup> At the end of Hammet Street, close to the site of the old post office, on the south side of Church Square, was Crockford's School, where originated the well-known publication, *Crockford's Clergy List*, now *Crockford's Clerical Directory*.



without endangering his position.<sup>5</sup> He put the Castle in a state of sound repair, rearranged the courts in the Great Hall and fitted up what was described as 'a commodius and elegant Grand Jury Room'. The expense only amounted to £417 towards which Alexander Popham, the senior member for the borough, gave £105. Other subscriptions amounting to £94 were obtained. Sir Benjamin afterwards filled up a portion of the inner moat, and laid out the Castle garden when he fitted up the judge's lodgings, of which the drawing-room is now familiar to members of the Somerset Archæological Society as the 'Adam Library'. If Sir Benjamin did not restore and repair as we should to-day, he at any rate saved the Castle from what might have been permanent decay or even destruction.

This biographical note would be incomplete without reference to Sir Benjamin's children. John, the eldest son, who, as has already been mentioned, was also a member for Taunton, married a daughter of Sir Ralph Woodforde. The second son was Francis, the third, James Esdaile. Of Hammet's daughters, Anne married C. Rogers, member for Queensbury; Louisa married Henri, Comte de Montesquiou; and Elizabeth married Richard Walpole.<sup>6</sup>

Restoration was undertaken at Wilton Church in 1777, and Sir Benjamin, who was a churchwarden in that year, appears to have taken an active part in the scheme. Formerly the east window of the Church (which was by Messrs. Wailes of Newcastle-upon-Tyne) contained a stained glass panel, measuring 24 by 18 in., representing him, as an elderly man, kneeling in an attitude of prayer. This panel was removed to the Museum by J. Houghton Spencer in 1885.

A copy of a portrait of Hammet in his prime hangs on the staircase of the Municipal Buildings. It shows him wearing a dark blue coat, laced with gold braid. The expression of the face is lively and alert (Plate I).

There is a memorial by Westmacott junior<sup>7</sup> to Sir Benjamin on the wall of the south aisle of Wilton Church. The inscrip-

<sup>5</sup> Webb's *History of Taunton*, 269.

<sup>6</sup> Burke's *Landed Gentry*, 1851 edition, Supp., p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> 'Westmacott junior' later became Sir Richard Westmacott; he was born in 1775 and died in 1856. His father, who died in 1808, was also a sculptor and Sir Richard's son, also Richard (1799-1872) followed the same profession.

tion states that it was erected as 'a duteous and grateful tribute by his eldest son'. The epitaph may fitly conclude these notes :

He was blessed by Nature with excellent Talents,  
 A clear and comprehensive Mind, A fervid Imagination and enter-  
 prising Spirit.  
 In Public Life he was equally distinguished for His Loyalty and  
 Patriotism : and  
 To his Munificence his Native Town of Taunton, to which he was  
 most zealously attached,  
 Owes many of its late and greatest Improvements.  
 In Private Life he was just, faithful, generous, Liberal to the  
 Poor and  
 A firm Friend to industrious Merit.  
 He lived honoured and Beloved by His Family.

#### A. W. Kinglake.

Alexander William Kinglake, generally known as 'Eothen', was born at Wilton House on 5 August 1809. He was the eldest son of William Kinglake and his wife, Mary, daughter of the Dr. Woodforde who had been the trusted friend of the Pitt family at Burton Pynsent in the days of the 'Great Commoner'.

The literary and intellectual interests of his parents were of more than ordinary value in shaping 'Eothen's' life, and to his mother he owed the individual trend of his mind and personality. From Eton he passed in 1828 to Trinity College, Cambridge. He was called to the bar in 1835 and acquired a considerable Chancery practice, but retired in 1856 to devote himself to literature and politics. In 1857 he was returned for Bridgwater as a Liberal, and took a prominent part against Lord Palmerston's Conspiracy Bill. He was with the French Army at Algiers in 1845, and in the Crimea, where he was present at the battle of Alma, and where he made the acquaintance of Lord Raglan. It was at Lady Raglan's request that he undertook his *Invasion of the Crimea*, which was published in eight volumes between 1863 and 1887. From a literary point of view it was one of the outstanding historical works of the century. His criticism of Napoleon III, was so severe that the circulation of the history was prohibited in France during the Second Empire.

In 1868, Kinglake was again returned for Bridgwater, but



was unseated on petition. He was personally free from all suspicion of complicity in the irregular methods employed at the election.

Kinglake is remembered less as the author of the bulky and elaborate history of the Crimean war, than as the youthful, vivacious and humorous hero of *Eothen*, a comparatively slight work which defies the ordinary canons of travel-book making, and owes its charm solely to the author's constantly and fully revealed personality. The tour described was made in 1834 and 1835, but the book was not published until 1844. The most objective passage is the circumstantial account of the traveller's reception by Lady Hester Stanhope, and the conversation he held with the uncanny recluse of the Lebanon. Lady Hester had spent a great part of her childhood at Burton Pynsent and had been intimately acquainted with the Taunton Woodfordes.

'Eothen' died in 1891; his ashes lie in the churchyard at Pitminster.<sup>1</sup>

#### *R. A. Kinglake.*

Robert Arthur Kinglake, registrar of the Taunton Probate District, was born in 1813 and died on 5 December 1893. The collection of busts of Somerset worthies in the Shire Hall owes its existence to him. He originated the idea and carried it out, at considerable personal cost, during a period of nearly thirty years, and wrote a descriptive pamphlet.

#### *Elizabeth Broadmead.*

Mention must be made of the famous Wilton centenarian, Mrs. Elizabeth Broadmead (*née* Rottenborough). The Society owns a miniature of her painted by P. Foy on 23 March 1781, when she was reputed to be 115 years of age. She is supposed to have been born in 1666, and was buried in Wilton churchyard on 10 March 1784; if the former date is correct she attained the age of 118 years. Mrs. Broadmead claimed that as a girl of 19 years she walked in procession before the Duke of Monmouth on his entry into Taunton on 18 June 1685.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These notes are chiefly drawn from the account of A. W. Kinglake in Chambers's *Cyclopædia of English Literature*, and from A. W. Kinglake, *a Biographical and Literary Study*, by W. Tuckwell, pubd. 1902.

<sup>2</sup> Further particulars may be found in *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, liii, i, 79.