

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Weston-super-Mare

BY ERNEST E. BAKER, F.S.A.

being his Presidential Address at the Weston-super-Mare Meeting, July 9, 1929

LET me commence my Presidential Address by saying that I consider it to be a vast honour to be elected the President of so large and so influential an association as the Somerset Archæological Society, with its one thousand and fifty-two members, representing a section of the best brains in the county. When I first sat down to write my Address my heart almost failed me, and I was appalled by the thought that whatever I wrote would be severely dealt with by an army of archæological critics. However I persevered and my nerves recovered and my self-consciousness disappeared, and here I am.

This is the fourth meeting of the Society which has taken place in Weston-super-Mare since its formation in 1849. The first was held on the 16 September 1851 under the presidency of Thomas T. Knyfton, Esq., High Sheriff of the county, when the census population of the town was 4,033. The second was held in the year 1885 under the presidency of Lord Carlingford, and the third was held in the year 1905 under the presidency of Lieut.-Col. J. R. Bramble, F.S.A., when the population was about 20,000. Since then the population has grown enormously and now the normal number of inhabitants, out of season, is estimated to be no less than 35,000. It follows that the Weston of to-day is a tremendously different place to what it was when we last met twenty-four years ago, and still more different to the small town of the young childhood of some of

us who were alive in the days of the Crimea or the Indian Mutiny.

The Society during its comparatively lengthy life has issued a long series of volumes of *Proceedings* with descriptive and exhaustive articles upon nearly every place in the county, Weston-super-Mare included. Notwithstanding this, however, as the meeting this year is in Weston, and as I am an old Westonian, it does seem meet and proper that I should practically confine my remarks in this my Presidential Address to my native town, and briefly and at the risk of repetition tell you something of its history.

Many people think, and even with confidence assert, that Weston has no history, but this is quite erroneous, for Weston's history dates back from the time when the prehistoric tribe dwelt in times of peace on the sunny southern slopes of Worlebury Hill, and in times of threatened invasion or attack removed to the wind-swept and strongly fortified encampment.

Mr. C. Dymond in his exhaustive work upon Worlebury says that 'it will be generally conceded that Worlebury must be attributed to one of the races in occupation before the Roman Conquest of North Somerset', and mentions the Iberians as the earliest dwellers in these islands.

From these prehistoric days it is a considerable jump to the thirteenth century, when we first take up the comparatively modern history. Weston, we find, had a Church and a Rector in 1226, during the reign of Henry III; consequently we do think that we Westonians can look back with some pride on our antiquity and resent the insinuations that we have only just been invented.

There is no special reference to Weston-super-Mare by name in the Domesday Book, *Hascecomba* and *Aisecombe* being the sole representatives of both Weston and Ashcombe: the *Westone* hitherto mentioned in all county histories from Collinson downwards as referring to Weston-super-Mare is an error, for that *Westone* is not situate in the hundred of Winterstoke, as is Weston-super-Mare.

The Church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and Collinson writing in 1791 described it as a small building of one pace, 84 feet in length and 20 feet in breadth, having at the west end

a tower; and he says that in 1292 it was valued at ten marks.

The earliest references to a Rector of Weston are contained in the exceedingly interesting *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells*, published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, and the first allusion in the Calendar is in an ordinance of Bishop Jocelin made in 1226, which sets out various dues, etc., to be rendered to the treasury of Wells; amongst them, 'of the Rector of Weston 100 lb. of wax'.

In the year 1233, the payment of the 100 lb. of wax was more fully set out and detailed in an ordinance of Jocelin, Bishop of Bath, which, after reciting that insufficient provision had been made for the light of St. Andrew, Wells, decreed that the parson of Weston, near Worle, of the bishop's patronage, should render of the revenues of that church yearly 100 lb. of wax to the treasury of Wells, 50 lb. at the Passion of St. Andrew, and 50 lb. at his translation, so that the treasurer might find a candle of competent size for ever to burn upon the high altar at every hour any office was celebrated in the choir day or night. Dated Wells, the Assumption 28 Bishop Jocelin.

The Monday after St. Scholastica, 1277, was a memorable day, for on it sentence was pronounced by the official of the Bishop of Bath and Wells in the great church of Wells in a suit of Nicholas, son of Nicholas, the treasurer of Wells, against Sir Guy de Scheuyndon, the rector of Weston by Worle, for 100 lb. of wax, arrears of a yearly pension of 100 lb. of wax, which he was bound to pay by ordinance of Bishop Jocelin, upon the confession of the said rector, who craved a term for payment thereof, but he was condemned in the said pension and arrears, and terms for payment by him were fixed.

In the third year of the reign of Edward II, the wax was again in arrear and proceedings had to be taken for its recovery:

The Dean of Axbridge, by a return dated from Eastbrent November 1349, to a mandate of the official of the Archdeacon of Wells, dated xv Kal. November 1349, directed the rectors of Uphulle, Kyustoke, and Worle, or any of them on behalf of Master Richard de Thormerton, treasurer of Wells, to admonish Sir John, the rector of Weston, to pay 50 lb. of wax, the arrears for St. Andrew's term of a yearly payment of 100 lb. due from

his said church, or to compel him so to do by sentence of suspension and excommunication and by sequestration ; and he stated that he had been unable to admonish the Sir John, after diligently seeking his corporal presence, but had sequestered the fruits in his barn—namely, wheat, barley and beans, valued at two marks.

During the episcopacy of John de Harewell in October 1375, to ensure the due payment of the wax, Sir John Horn, rector of Weston-super-Mare, made oath and promise at Wookey, laying his hand in that of John de Harewell, bishop of Bath and Wells, in the presence of William Cammel, precentor, John de Horsyngton, chancellor, and John Waryn, canon of Wells, that he would pay to the church of Wells a yearly pension of 100 lb. of wax due from his church.

It will be observed that the payment of the 100 lb. of wax gave no end of trouble over a long course of years.

The wax used for the composition of High Altar candles during the thirteenth century would in all probability consist entirely of beeswax taken from the hives of honey bees, and if the whole comb were sacrificed the production of 100 lb. yearly from a simple village of about 200 people is quite possible and would not be unduly onerous.

About the year 1353, it appears that Ralph bishop of the diocese became aware that malicious persons, 'sons of iniquity', were seizing wreck of the sea and other privileges, the property of the church ; he therefore in the month of February of that year issued from Banwell a very strongly worded mandate to the dean of Axebrudge and the rectors and vicars of Weston-super-Mare, Upphulle and Custoke :

'It cannot be a matter of doubt,' he said, 'that these persons have to the danger of their souls fallen under the sentence of greater excommunication. Desiring then that these evil-doers should turn from such presumptuous errors, he laid a strict injunction upon the said rectors and vicars jointly and severally in the churches of Uphulle, Custoke and Weston-super-Mare and charged them that on the Sunday of the next ensuing festival of the conversion of St. Paul, and on the other Sundays and festivals then following, with bells ringing and candles burning, they do publicly, solemnly and in due form

denounce that, all and severally, those disturbers, usurpers, despoilers, as aforesaid were liable to the sentence of greater excommunication.'

That Weston men from the earliest days never lived without taxation goes without saying, of course; the few inhabitants, all of small estate, had not an Urban District Council rate to pay or a mighty income tax, but still they were taxed according to their means. The earliest taxation we have met with is a Lay Subsidy which was levied in the first year of the reign of Edward III, 1326-7, to meet the requirements of the crown. It was an assessment of a twentieth in respect of the property of Weston folk in the hundred of Winterstoke and it produced £3 1s. 1*d*. Fifteen people were taxed, and the amounts varied from the threepence of May Le Irays to the xx pence of Robto de Ceddr (Cheddar).

Passing on a few centuries we find that the Church appears to have fallen in much disrepair, and when in 1805 a Banwell gentleman visited the edifice he wrote to the *Gentleman's Magazine* that he was sorry to see the roof and windows in a sad state of repair, one window in particular being much broken, and where the glass was wanting its place was supplied by bundles of hay. The rector evidently had not read to his flock 'The Sermon for repaying and keping cleane of Churches', out of the book of Homilies appointed by Queen Elizabeth to be read, from which I make this extract:

'It is sinne and shame to see so many churches so ruinous and so fouly decayed almost in every corner. Do ye your partes, good people, to kepe your churches comely and cleane, suffer them not to be defiled with rayne and weather, with dounge of doves and owles, stares (starlings) and choughes (crows) with other fylthy-nesse, as it is foule and lamentable to behold in many places of this country. It is the house of prayer, not the house of talking, of walking, of brawlying, of minstrelsie, of hawkes, of dogges Bynde your selves every man and woman to theyr power, towarde the reparations and cleane kepyng of your churche.'

A few years later the parishioners resolved that their church was too small for growing Weston, and thereupon they applied for a faculty to take down the church and erect a larger one to hold double the number of sittings. The faculty was granted,

and in 1824 the quaint old church was razed to the ground and a farmer built a place of worship in its stead.

This new parish church, improved from time to time as far as is possible, has two leading features, one, its Norman font, recovered from a field where it had been used as a cattle-trough for years, and the other a wonderful great east window with ten quaint vignettes of thirteenth-century glass, the tints and tone of which are particularly good and noticeable.

We will now narrate a few incidents in the life of the Village of Weston, gathered here and there from the records of its history.

Miraculous Wells. Weston rejoices in having two miraculous wells of spring water. Their peculiarity is that they are filled when the tide ebbs, and that they empty themselves when it flows, thus contradicting what one would naturally expect to happen in the ordinary course of events.

Wells that thus siphon off at certain times are known elsewhere, and their mechanism is quite simple. The requisite is a siphon exit, and an external source of water which fills the exit, and then retreating empties the water collected in the well as it would necessarily do. Such wells as these were in former days thought by the credulous folk to be miraculous, and legends were always attached to them, wonderful cures of diseases were ever attributed to them, and frequently they were known as Holy Wells. The Weston well is situate at the eastern end of Manilla Crescent; some few years ago it was open to the visitor's eye, but it is now covered with masonry; however, it is probably not injured but only walled up. It would seem to be a pity that it cannot be re-opened, for it would be a most remarkable and scientifically interesting spectacle. Another well was always said to be in the grounds of the Summer Cottage of the Rev. Wadham Pigott, now Grove Park, but that too is now covered.

Civil War. In the Great Civil War Weston took its part, although the village was remote and off any road, and far from the busy haunts of men. Upon the outbreak of the war in 1642, the Rev. Christopher Sadbury was rector of Weston, and of course sided with the king and evidently did all in his power to forward his cause, and in consequence he deeply offended those of his parishioners who espoused the Parliament.

These parishioners made a charge of high delinquency against their rector, alleging that in the year 1642 he went from Weston to Bridgwater, a garrison of the king, and there in a sermon said that the Parliament men were rebels for fighting against the king, that in the following year he held correspondence with Lord Pawlet's servants, and continually sent intelligence to the king's party in Wales. That he caused the king's soldiers to take up several of the well-affected of his parishioners and keep them prisoners 'att his house'.

Presumably the rector then lived in the rectory, and it is interesting to note that 'his house' of 1643 is now the residence of your President.

They further alleged that the goods of others were seized and sums of money exacted from them, and that they could not be released until he gave orders. That in the same year he voluntarily equipped a horseman with arms against the Parliament in Capt. Keenes' Troop. That in the year 1645 he equipped another horseman against the Parliament in the troop of Capt. Watkins, under Sir Francis Doddington, and gave the rider 5s.

That finally in the year 1645 Sir Thomas Austen with his brigade came to plunder the Parliamentary supporters in the parish of Weston, and they with their friends in Worle and Milton joined together and routed the brigade, but shortly afterwards the brigade rallied and fell upon the parish, when the said Rev. C. Sadbury gave Sir Thomas Austen a list of those men who had opposed him, whereupon Sir Thomas in the night accompanied by Mr. Sadbury plundered and imprisoned them, and caused some of their horses to be sent into Wales.

In 1649 the Commissioner of Sequestration for the county of Somerset sat and heard the allegations, and they ordered that the estate real and personal of Christopher Sadbury of Weston-super-Mare be forthwith sequestrated and disposed of for the use of the state.

Nothing however appears to have been done until December 1651, when John Williams a parishioner rose up and made a charge of high delinquency against the rector on the old grounds. This was quickly proceeded with, and in the February following it was ordered that the Commissioners of

Sequestration do forthwith seize the goods of the said Christopher Sadbury.

The rector however did not sit down quietly. His lawyer, Mr. Lane, lodged a petition against the order and the proceedings dragged on, as law proceedings *sometimes* will, till 1652 when the case was heard and Christopher Sadbury appeared in person and declared that he had subscribed to the engagement to be true to the Commonwealth, and the court, having before it the certificate of the auditor that he could not find that Christopher Sadbury had ever been under sequestration, ordered that he be discharged, and so he remained Rector.

Population. In the year 1649 Parliament ordered a survey of all the church lands in England to be made, and in 1653 the returns to this order were published. In 'The Returns of the Church Livings of the several Hundreds in the Countye of Somersett exhibited by Mr. Hobson, May 18th 1653', appears the following: 'The Parish of Weston-super-Mare consisteth of about Five and thirty Famelys. There is for it a Parsonage with cure &c. worth about per annum Foore score pounds. Mr. Christopher Sadbury a preaching Minister is Parson there.'

Weston a 'Nasty Place'. In the British Museum may be seen about a hundred manuscript volumes containing the Diary of the Rev. John Skinner, rector of Camerton, near Bath, written and illustrated by him. The diary is, as may be gathered, exceedingly fully written, and the entries are, as a general rule, entertaining. In August 1826 he visited Weston, and on his departure he entered his impressions in his diary, which were not complimentary to the budding Brighton of the West. He wrote:

'Leaving Weston with the same kind of feeling the traveller experiences on quitting his bed wherein he has been tormented with fleas and vermin, we rode gently along the beach towards Uphill, stopping by the way to look at the foundation of a new hotel just emerging from the sand. What can possibly induce such myriads to visit this nasty place, to broil on a loose sand during the dog days with no other view to amuse them but the muddy expanse of a turbid estuary, or that hundreds of silly projectors should to a certainty ruin themselves in building houses.'

Mrs. Piozzi. In the early years of the last century Weston

first commenced to come to the front, through the fashionable physicians of Bath, who advised their patients—the smart set of their day, jaded and worn with the entertainments and balls of that gay city—to go to Weston and take a recuperative course of sea bathing.

Amongst those who came was the remarkable Mrs. Thrale Piozzi, the friend of Dr. Johnson, who visited the village on several occasions, and wrote characteristic letters from her lodgings; one, in our possession, of 27 August 1819, was written to Sir James Fellowes at Bognor Rocks, Sussex. We copy it in part :

WESTON-SUPER-MARE,

27 August 1819.

I feel delighted Dear Sir that you have not forgotten me; some Ladies that I met upon the Sands last night said Sir James Fellowes had mentioned my name at gay and fashionable Bognor. This little Place is neither gay nor fashionable yet full as an Egg, insipid as the white on't and dear as an Egg o' Penny. I enquired for Books there were but Two in the Town was the reply—a Bible & Paradise lost. They were the best however.

The Breezes here are most Salubrious no land nearer than North America, when we look down the Channel, and tis said that Sebastian Cabot used to stand where I now sit & meditate his future discoveries of Newfoundland. Who would be living at Bath now? the bottom of the Town a stew-pot, the top a gridiron.

The Whipping Post and Stocks. Taking the Westonians of old days as a whole, they were presumably a quiet, peaceable lot. No doubt the daily spectacle of their Whipping-post and Stocks, kept well painted and in good order by the overseers of the poor, was a considerable deterrent from local crime. In the accounts of the overseers for 1745 we find this entry :

Item paid for ye painting of ye	
Whipping Post & Stocks	00. 01. 03½

and we may be quite sure that the whipping-post and stocks were intended not so much for the punishment of the orderly Westonians as for the sturdy vagabond who tramped the country round.

Samphire Inquest. Shakespeare in 'King Lear' refers thus to the dangerous business of samphire gathering :

' Come on, Sir,
Here's the place ; stand still, how fearfull
and dizie 'tis, to cast ones eyes so low.
Halfe way down
Hangs one who gathers samphire, dreadful trade.'

Weston furnishes an excellent example of the truth of this statement in the following account of an inquest on poor Joan Davis, held by Anthony Godwin, coroner, and a jury of fourteen good and lawful men, viz. : four from Weston, six from Locking, one from Worle, one from Hutton, and two from Uphill.

The Inquisition was held in 1587, upon the death of Joan Davis, a samphire collector, and the jury found that 'Joan on the 27th day of May (29 Elizabeth) 1587 being at Weston-super-Mare in the peace of God and of Our said Lady Queen and collecting Sampyer upon a stone adjoining the sea, by misfortune and *against her will* fell headlong upon the stones there, and then and there by the aforesaid misfortune and the force of the aforesaid fall broke her neck, and then and there instantly died and not otherwise or in any other manner'.

Besides samphire, which is a fairly common sea-plant in Weston, Camden's *Britannia*, 1695, specially mentions *Polygonum Maritimum* as 'found by Dr. Plukenet on the Severn shore near Weston-super-Mare', while Brody in his *Flora of Weston* particularly notes 'Field Eryngo' as a rare plant growing on the south side of Weston Hill. We have not lately been able to trace the clump of this plant where we knew it of old.

Referring again to Worlebury Camp, which some of you were fortunate enough to visit this morning, by the courtesy of Mr. Arthur Beck the owner, we know that a certain amount of misapprehension exists respecting it, and that vague rumours are floating about which should be straightened out. We would therefore state that the Camp containing about twenty-three acres is subject to covenants to preserve it as an Ancient Monument, and that no building or structure of any kind whatsoever, except seats and notice-boards, shall be erected or

placed on the land. In addition to these covenants, the camp was some years ago scheduled under the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1913, and then it was inspected by Mr. C. R. Peers, Inspector of Ancient Monuments.

Now we propose to fly off at a tangent and give an account of some county manuscripts.

In the year 1888 one Cornish, a secondhand book-dealer at Manchester, sent me his catalogue of books and MSS. which he had for sale. By a piece of good luck I saw quickly that one lot comprised early MSS. of the bishopric of Bath and Wells—a run to the post office immediately, a telegram, and subsequently a cheque and these MSS. were mine, and in my library.

On examination I found that they were deplorably damp and horribly tattered and torn books made up of sheets or skins of parchment with vellum covers, in part falling to pieces, the result, I found, of having lain for years in a deal box in a wet cellar, neglected and unknown and uncared for.

However, after they had paid a visit of about two years' duration or so to Messrs. H., binders to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, they were returned to me all most carefully and skilfully repaired with sheets arranged and bound with the remains of their original vellum covers.

With the exception of the outer and time-worn leaves, the other leaves are all fine specimens of the ancient Scribes' Art.

The MSS. were bound in six volumes as follows—

- I. A volume consisting of ninety-six leaves or skins of parchment, size about 15" x 19", containing Bath and Wells Bishopric Accounts, 19 & 20 Henry VII. Thirty-four places in the county are mentioned.
- II. Another volume of similar size, consisting of ninety-five leaves or skins of parchment with original vellum cover, containing Bath and Wells Bishopric Accounts, 19 & 20 Henry VIII. In this volume thirty-six places in the county are referred to.
- III. Another volume of similar size, consisting of seventy-two leaves or skins of parchment with vellum cover, and con-

- taining Bath and Wells Bishopric Accounts, 19 & 20 Henry VIII. This mentions fifty-five places in the county.
- IV. Comprises Court Rolls of the Manor of Wells, 1351 and 1352, Edward III. Thirty long sheets or skins of parchment, of the approximate size of 36" long and 10" wide. These were originally in roll form, but on account of their somewhat worn and tender condition, brought about by their considerable age of five and a half centuries, they have been bound flat and at length.
- V. Rolls of Accounts of the Bishopric of Bath and Wells by Robert Canington, Richard Rook, John Davies, John Roberts, Richard — their bailiffs or attorneys. Fifteen long sheets of parchment also in very indifferent condition, of the approximate size 36" x 10". These rolls date from 29 Charles II, 1687, to 17 George III, 1777, inclusive.
- VI. A volume labelled :
 General Audit of the Bishopric of Bath and Wells, 33 Henry VIII, 1542. This volume comprises twelve sheets of paper with original paper covers with very clear and distinct handwriting, and it is in good condition. Its size is approximately 15" x 11". It mentions thirty-one places in the county : Yatton, Banwell, Bath, Axbridge, Stavordale, etc.

A memorandum is written on the first page of the before-mentioned Volume III in the words following, showing that the volume was produced in the trial of an action brought by George Hooper, Bishop of Bath and Wells, against Thomas Dyke and others.

Copy Memorandum.

<i>Inter.</i>	George Dominum Epis, nunc Bathen & Wellen Thomam Dyke and Gustavum Venner and Robertum Kerslake	<i>Quer.</i> <i>Defts.</i>
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At the *Execution* of a Commission in this cause at Wells in the County of Somerset this booke was produced and (*illegible*) unto Peter Davie Esqre at the time of his examination on the part of the Complainant this eighth day of (*illegible*) by and before us

Ri. Healy

John Bonner.

Wm. Shep.

Unfortunately the year of the trial has worn off, but as George Hooper the bishop succeeded in 1704 and died in 1727, it must have been between these two dates.

One can with every degree of certainty assume from this memorandum that one at least of the MS. books we have mentioned was taken out of the Chapter House safe or repository for production in the trial and to support the bishop's claim, and were never returned. In and about 1888 I had some correspondence with dear old Bishop Hobhouse upon these MSS., and he paid me a visit or two, and carefully examined them, and subsequently he saw the bishop of the diocese upon them, but discussion only resulted and the MSS. remained in my library.

All this leads up to the fact that I now, with the greatest possible pleasure, offer to present the whole of these unique and highly interesting MSS. to the Somerset Archaeological Society, if the Society will accept them, so that they may find a permanent home in the library of their native county, where undoubtedly they should be, and ever be accessible for the free use of the student members in accordance with any regulations of the Society.