

Somerset Fairs

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THERE is in Vol. LXXXII of these *Proceedings* a Survey of the Somerset Fairs by the Rev. N. F. Hulbert, which was supplemented by a short article in Vol. LXXXIV. Mr. Hulbert refers to about 200 fairs; another fifty or so are now added, together with some extension and emendation of the information in the original contribution. Mr. Hulbert's article will be referred to as H.

The Society recently acquired a volume into which had been bound pages relating to Somerset which had been removed from larger works covering the whole country.¹ The acquisition was of considerable general value because the Society did not possess copies of the original works; it was of value also because it provided three lists of fairs, two of about 1770 and one of 1817, which gave particulars of a number of fairs not recorded in H. A short description of these extracts, with particular reference to the nature of the information they give about fairs will probably not be out of place.

The first consists of pages 39 to 62 from a folio volume described (by a former owner on the front page) as 'Spencer's History of Somersetshire 1769'. Lowndes' *Bibliographer's Manual* names Nathaniel Spencer's *The Complete English Traveller*, published as a folio volume 1772-73: a note says it was written by Rob. Sanders and published in numbers. Several fairs are named in the subject matter. This work will be referred to as S.

The second consists of pages 359 to 373 from a folio volume described (as the last) as 'G. A. Walpoole's History of Somersetshire 1770'. Lowndes (*op. cit.*) names George Augustus Walpoole's *The new British Traveller*, published as a folio volume in 1784. The headlines of the sheets in the Society's volume have the title 'The New and Complete British Traveller'. An accurate [*sic*] list of fairs in the county is given on p. 373. This work will be referred to as W.

¹ This volume was given by Mr. R. E. B. Meade-King, and came from the Library of his father, Sir William Meade-King.

The third extract consists of pages 182 to 230 of a quarto volume described (as before) as 'Somersetshire by James Dugdale, LL.D. [*sic*] 1819'. This appears to have been taken from volume IV of a work, published in 1819 by James Dugdale, LL.D., entitled *The new British Traveller*, of which the Society has only the first three volumes. A list of fairs is given on pages 193-4. This work will be referred to as D.

W and S, which are approximately contemporary, list 99 fairs, of which only 33 are named by both, so that the lists are largely complementary. These are only a few discrepancies :

	W.	S.
(a) Norton St. Philip	March 22	March 21
(b) Taunton	June 10	June 17
(c) Taunton	July 17, 18, 19	July 7, 8, 9
(d) Watchet	August 4	August 25

In connection with these the following points may be observed. (a) H, on page 93, mentions March 21 as occurring in a list for 1785 ; D also gives March 21 ; W's date of March 22 may be based on a list of fairs for 1784, in which year March 21 fell on a Sunday. (b) H, on page 153, says a fair has been held on June 17 since at least 1729 ; D also gives June 17. (c) W is probably a printer's error ; the fair occurs on Translation of St. Thomas (July 7) in the original grant in 1256 ; on July 7, 8, 9 in D ; and H implies that it was held on the 7th. (d) D also gives August 25 ; no other source of comparison is known.

Certain fairs are dated in W and S by means of references to days of the week or feast days : dates in D are almost all given as days of the month. An analysis of the two sets of dates makes it practically certain that D based his information on a list of fairs for the year 1817.

The correction of the calendar in 1752 when the New Style was introduced had repercussions on the dates on which some fairs were held. This in itself is not a particularly noteworthy fact : what is extraordinary is the delay in making the change that is evidenced by the following list of fairs which advanced their dates by 11 days from the original ones. It will be noted that in a number of cases the change had not been effected by 1770, although it is observable in 1817. In one case, at Bruton, it will be noted that the date of the fair, having been advanced

about 1770, reverted afterwards to its original, and correct, date; and a similar reversion took place at Stogursey.

	Orig.	c. 1770	1817
Bath	(Feb. 1)	Feb. 3	Feb. 14
do	June 29	June 29	July 10
Bridgwater	Sept. 21	Sept. 21	Oct. 2
Bruton	April 23	May 4	April 23
Buckland Dinham	Sept. 29	—	Oct. 10
Cheddar	April 23	May 4	May 4
do	Oct. 18	Oct. 29	Oct. 29
Chiselborough	Oct. 18	Oct. 18	Oct. 30
Cock Hill	—	Dec. 28	Jan. 8
Crewkerne	Aug. 24	Sept. 4	Sept. 4
Dulverton	June 29	July 10	July 10
do	Oct. 28	Nov. 8	Nov. 8
Glastonbury	(Sept. 14)	Sept. 8	Sept. 19
Ilchester	July 22	Aug. 2	Aug. 2
Langridge	July 22	[Aug. -(c)]	Aug. 2
Lydeard, Bishops	Mar. 25	—	April 5
Lydford, West	Aug. 1	Aug. 1	Aug. 12
Martock	Aug. 10	—	Aug. 21
Petherton, South	June 24	July 5	July 5
Priddy	Aug. —	Aug. 10	Aug. 21
Somerton	Oct. 28	[Nov. 8(c)]	Nov. 8
Stogursey	Sept. 12	[Sept. 23(c)]	Sept. 12
Stogumber	April 25	April 25	May 6
Wedmore	July 22	(Aug. 25)	Aug. 2
Wells	May 3	—	May 14
do	June 24	June 24	?July 5
do	Oct. 14	Oct. 14	Oct. 25
Weston Zoyland	Aug. 29	[Sept. 9(c)]	Sept. 9
Wincanton	Sept. 18	[Sept. 29(c)]	Sept. 29
Wiveliscombe	May 1	May 12	May 12
Yarlington	Aug. 15	Aug. 15	Aug. 26
Yeovil	Nov. 6	Nov. 17	Nov. 17

Dates marked (c) are taken from Collinson's *History of Somerset*.

Of these 31 fairs, only 8 had advanced their dates in the 1770 list, though this number might be increased, if it is possible to fill in the gaps in that list, by another 8: even then only half the fairs listed would have made the change.

Before giving a supplementary list of fairs based largely on S, W and D we will notice a few references which amplify or correct the information given in H.

Axbridge. An earlier reference to the Lady Day fair occurs

in the charter of incorporation issued by Queen Mary 1557 February 1 (*P.R.* 3 & 4, *P. & M.*, iii, m. 35) when it and another on St. Barnabas' day were granted, the latter being a perpetuation of that noted in H (though the wording of the grant does not indicate this). In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1805 (p. 202) is a reference to a fair formerly held here on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude [Oct. 28], which has not been noted elsewhere; the same source also says that the Corporation tried to revive St. Barnabas' fair about 12 years previously, but without effect.

Bath. The fair originally held on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul (June 29) changed its date to the New Style equivalent July 10 between 1784 and 1817. The only other fair mentioned by W, S and D is that originally granted in 1545 (see H, p. 89), but both W and S give its date as February 3 and not as February 2 as mentioned by H; D give the date as February 14.

Binegar. S carries the first reference to this fair back a few years to 1772.

Broadway. Although St. Aldhelm's fair (May 25) lingered on till the beginning of the present century, it is not recorded by W, S or D. The last-named, however, lists a fair on September 24.

Brompton Regis. W describes these fairs as being held on the Wednesday before Holy Thursday and the Thursday se'nnight after October 10. D has May 24 (which, if a misprint for May 14, would agree with W) and October 16 which is in accord with the description of the date in W.

Broomfield. W and D both mention the November fair; the former places it on November 3, possibly a misprint for November 13.

Buckland St. Mary. What appears to be a reference to a fair here will be found under Langport (*q.v.*).

Camel, Queen. In 1264 a yearly fair at Camel was granted to John de Burgo, to be held on the vigil, feast and morrow of St. Barnabas [June 10 to 12] (Ch. R. 48 H. 3, m. 2). Neither W nor S has any reference to Queen Camel, but D records a fair on June 11 and another on October 25, the reformed calendar equivalent of October 14 noted by H.

Chard. In H (p. 130) it is stated that the date of the fair granted in 1292 was altered from September 14 to St. James's

Day, July 25. It appears, however, that the fair on this latter date is older than any mentioned in H, for in the *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (14 E. 1, m. 24) there is an inspeximus of a charter of 'William, Bishop of Bath and Wells, the second of that name' dated Monday next after the feast of St. Barnabas in the fifth year of his pontificate (*i.e.* 1271 June 15) confirming to Chard its 'fair of St. James'; it seems, therefore, that the September fair granted in 1292 died out. The other three fairs are all mentioned by W and S, the July fair having moved to the 'reformed' date August 5; D does not mention this last.

Cock Hill. W and D both refer to a fair at this place, the former giving the date as December 28 and the latter as January 8. There was a Cockhill manor in Castle Cary, but no reference to this fair giving certain identification of its locality has been traced.

Creech St. Michael. In H (p. 102) the location of Crich', where a fair was granted to Montacute Priory, has been incorrectly interpreted. The living owned by the Priory was that of Creech St. Michael, to which place Collinson attributes the fair. Evercreech belonged to the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at Wells, and contemporary forms of the name seem always to incorporate some form of the prefix.

Crewkerne. Although the origin of the fair still remains untraced, an early reference to it occurs in the Somerset inquest held on Hugh de Courtney's lands on Friday after the day of SS. Tiburtius and Valerian 20 E. 1 [1292 April 18] (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. iii, p. 24).

Cutcombe. Collinson mentions a fair held at Ludwell Bridge in this parish at Michaelmas. No other reference to this fair has been traced.

Frome. It is remarked in H (p. 94) that no further notice of the fair on the Nativity of St. Mary granted in 1270 is obtainable till 1785. There is, however, a reference to it in the Somerset inquest held on 12 August 23 E. 3 [1350] after the death of Andrew Braunche, grandson of the original grantee. (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. x, p. 290).

Huntspill. There is no early reference in H to any fair here. The inquest on John de Coggan held 4 May 30 E. 1 [13 & 2] mentions a fair on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul [June 29] (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. iv, p. 89).

Ilchester. Verification of two of the dates given by Collinson is found in the Patent Rolls of Queen Mary who, when making Ilchester a free borough in 1556, granted fairs on the Monday before Palm Sunday and on the feast of St. Mary Magdalen [July 22] and the two following days in each case (*P.R.* 3 & 4, *P. & M.*, xi, m. 26). It is probable that this grant perpetuated existing fairs. The fair on March 25, mentioned by Collinson, is not included in the lists in W, S and D.

Kilmington. W and D both contain references to a fair held on August 24 (the latter says August 25, but, as pointed out above, this was probably due to August 24 being a Sunday in 1817). Phelps in his *History and Antiquities of Somerset* [1836] says that an annual fair was formerly held in September, but it was productive of so much disorder that it had been discontinued by the order of the lord of the manor. This action by the owner of the manor is a reminder that many of the grants of fairs (and markets) were made to individuals for their personal benefit and that of their heirs and successors.

Langport. H (p. 137) refers to an I.P.M. mentioned by Gerard which he does not appear to have traced. It was held on Monday the morrow of Easter 18 E. 3 [1344 April 5, not 1345 as interpolated in H] to ascertain the lands held by William de Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, at his decease. (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. viii, p. 287). From it we learn that he had fairs at Bokland [? Buckland St. Mary] and Lamporte Westovere on the day of the Decollation of St. John, Bapt. [August 29]. This is a different fair from that noted in H as granted in 1304.

Langridge. H attributes a fair on the feast of St. Mary Magdalen [July 22] to Langridge near Bath. The index of the concerned Calendar of Charter Rolls equates the 'Langerungg' of the charter to Langridge in Brushford, and it is presumably this fair to which Collinson refers under Brushford where he says a fair is still held in August. D lists a fair at Langridge on August 2 (*i.e.* 11 days after July 22), but does not indicate which Langridge is referred to.

Lydeard, Bishops. There are some discrepancies in the various records of the grant of the fairs here. The original charter, exhibited in Taunton Castle Museum,¹ mentions both fairs as being of six days duration, namely on the vigil, day and

¹ Given by Sir Wroth P. C. Lethbridge, Bart.

morrow of the Nativity of the Blessed Mary and the three days following and on the vigil, day and morrow of the Annunciation of the Blessed Mary and the three days following. The reference to the grant in the Calendar of the MSS. of the Dean and Chapter of Wells, Vol. i, p. 152, names both fairs. Turning, however, to charter number 46 in the Calendar of Charter Rolls for 1257-1300 (p. 389) we find that only the fair of the Annunciation is named. In the report on the MSS. of Wells Cathedral (p. 72) the Annunciation day fair only is mentioned, although the same deed is being calendared as on p. 152 of the Dean and Chapter MSS., both reports covering the same documents.

By courtesy of the Record Office it has been confirmed that the charter, as enrolled on the Charter Rolls, definitely mentions one fair only, but after the mention of this fair, there are the words (as in the Museum copy) 'unless these fairs (*ferie ille*) are injurious to neighbouring fairs'. From this it seems probable that in the original Charter, which provided the copy for the roll, two fairs were granted by two separate clauses, differing only in that one contained the word 'Annunciacionis' and the other the word 'Nativitatis', and that the copyist's eye, mislead by the similarity of the wording, passed over one clause altogether. This suggestion is confirmed by an inspection of the charter in the Society's Museum.

Merriott. Leading to an inquest at the request of George de Meriet is a writ of certiorari dated 29 March 2 E. 3 (1328) in which it is declared that his grandfather John and his ancestors had a fair at Merriott 'beginning on Friday next before the Ascension and lasting till the morrow of the said feast' and another at Lopen 'beginning on Wednesday next before Whit-Sunday and lasting till the morrow of Holy Trinity'. The former is not mentioned in H, nor in S, W and D: the latter fair is referred to in H, quoting an article in Vol. XXVIII of these *Proceedings* as saying that the fair was anciently held for seven days—from Pentecost until the morrow of Trinity Sunday; the writ referred to above gives a length of thirteen days.

Midsomer Norton. In H the comment is made that, during the tenure of Edmund FitzHerbert, the fair granted to Hugh de Vivonia for St. John Baptist's day was then held on St.

Mark's day. At the inquest on his predecessor Reginald Fitz-Herbert, held on the Saturday after St. Faith 20 E. 3 [1346, Oct. 7], the fair is described as being held on (the original date) the Nativity of St. John Baptist [*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. xiii, p. 486]. This fair is not noted in W, S or D.

Moorlinch. In H (p. 139) the date 2 August in the first line should read 20 August (see *Collinson* iii, 429). The fair is recorded in D as being held on the 20th.

Petherton, North. It is assumed in H that the date of holding the fair granted in 1318 was altered to May 1, but the fair on this date was a different one, having been granted in 1556 by Queen Mary as a yearly fair on the eve, day and morrow of SS. Philip and James. The grant begins by reciting that the town had, from time immemorial, had a yearly fair on the eve, day and morrow of the Nativity of St. Mary Virgin, and the fair on May 1 was an additional grant. This last fair is recorded by S and D.

Puxton. The *Gent. Mag. Library*, Engl. Topography, part X, refers to an annual fair held here on Whit-Tuesday, to which date it had been altered (c. 1800) from Trinity-Monday. No other reference to this fair has been found.

Road. Reference is made in H to the fair to be held on the vigil, feast and morrow of St. Margaret whose day is quoted as September 2: the correct date is July 20.

Shepton Beauchamp. It seems probable that the fair on St. John Baptist's day was but short-lived, for at the inquest held in Somerset on 7 December 35 E. 3 (1361) into the estate of Margaret, widow of John de Bello Campo, only the fair on St. Petroc's day is mentioned (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. xi, p. 21).

Shepton Mallet. The inquest on Reginald Fitz-Herbert (see above, under Midsomer Norton) also refers to his fair here on the feast of the Ascension and the calendar adds 'the toll of which is nothing on account of its novelty'. This fair is not mentioned in H and has not been noted elsewhere.

Somerton. At the inquest held on 30 December 26 E. 3 (1353) after the death of John, Earl of Kent, only the older fair—that on the feast of All Saints, granted in 1255—is named, the fair on St. Andrew's day, granted in 1320, having presumably died out, or perhaps been annulled owing to its being 'ad nocumentum vicinarum feriarum' as the grants so con-

sistently provided against (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, vol. x, p. 44). A fair on November 8 is mentioned in D which has not been noted elsewhere, but this is not obviously related to either of the two early grants beyond all three being held in the same month.

Stratton on the Fosse. An earlier grant of the same fair as that noted in H (p. 99) was made 1267 June 4. (*Ch. R.*, 51 H. 3, m. 5).

Stogursey. There was anciently here a fair on the feast of St. Andrew to which an extent dated Saturday after St. Bartholomew 29 E. 1 [1301 Aug. 26] says 'no toll or perquisite belongs' (*Cal. Is.P.M.*, Vol. iv, p. 341). This appears to be a different fair from those mentioned in H.

Weare. In H (p. 110) the fair held on July 7 is identified with that granted in 1298 of which particulars are given. There was, however, a fair granted in 1241 to be held on the vigil and feast [July 7] of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr, which is undoubtedly the origin of the fair held on July 7, and the later fair granted in 1298 must have died out.

Wedmore. In H (p. 110) we read, 'If a really early origin of the fair could be established, its association with the Magdalene might go some way towards resolving this uncertainty' [*i.e.* the identity of the St. Mary to whom the church is dedicated]. The evidence has been found. There is recorded in the *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, Vol. i, p. 446, the grant, in 1255, of a fair on the vigil, feast and morrow of St. Mary Magdalen.

Wellington. It is of some interest to note, in view of the discrepancy between the dates of the fairs in 1729 and 1785 as noted in H (p. 152) that Cox, in his *Magna Britannia*, published in 1720, gives the same dates as Collinson does in 1785.

Wellow. A fair is given by Cox (*loc. cit.*) as being held on St. Dunstan's day [May 19]; this is presumably the same fair as that recorded in D as being held on May 20. This fair is not recorded in H.

Wincanton. Earlier grants than those recorded in H (p. 120) have been traced. Two fairs were granted by Queen Mary in 1556 as single-day fairs on the Tuesday after Easter and the feast of St. Mary Magdalen [July 22]. (*P.R.* 2 & 3, *P. & M.*, vii, m. 9). The former was regranted, or confirmed by Queen Anne,

whose second grant of a fair on September 18 apparently replaced the older one.

Wootton Courtney. The date, September 9, given in H (p. 150) may be an error, for Collinson and D both give September 19.

Yarlington. The last of these amendments is not unfittingly the demise of another fair. In the *Castle Cary Visitor*, Vol. iii, p. 74, there is a reference to an advertisement, dated 8 August, 1900, in the *Western Gazette* giving notice that the 'ancient chartered fair will be discontinued, with the consent and approval of the Lord of the Manor'.

It now only remains to give a schedule of fairs listed in S, W and D which had not come to the notice of Mr. Hulbert when he wrote the original article. No origins of these have been traced: grants for some of them may be brought to light by the labours of those engaged on the task of producing the Calendars of our public records, whose work in the past has enabled these notes to be compiled.

Ashbrittle	Feb. 25 and Oct. 19	D
Bagborough, West	May 12	D
Banwell	Jan. 18 and July 18	D
Blagdon	Last Friday in August	W, D
Brent, East	Aug. 26	D
Brent, South	Oct. 10	D, Collinson
Broadway	Sept. 24	D
Burnham	Trinity Monday	D
Camel, Queen	June 11 and Oct. 25	D
Cock Hill	Dec. 28 or Jan. 8	W, D
Combe St. Nicholas	June 17 or Dec. 17	D
Curry Rivel	Monday after Aug. 1	W, D
Dundry	Sept. 12	D
Freshford	Sept. 6	D
Hinton St. George	April 23	D
Holloway		
(Widcombe)	May 14	D, Collinson
Ilchester	July 2	S, D
Kilminster	Aug. 24	W, D
Limpsham	April 25	D
Mark	Tuesday before Whitsun	W, D, Collinson
do	Aug. 10 and Sept. 15	D
Mells	June 9 and Sept. 29	D
Milverton	Easter Tuesday and St. James	S, D
do	July 21	S
do	Oct. 10	S, D

Minehead	Whit-Wednesday	D
Pensford	May 6 and Nov. 9	S, D
Puxton	See above	D
Redlinch	June 29	D
Ruishton	Whit-Monday	D
St. Decuman's	Aug. 24 and Sept. 10	D
Snowdon (? in Yeovil)	May 29	D
Somerton	Jan. 27 and Nov. 8	D
Stoke-under-Ham	April 25	D
S. Bucklebridge (?)	May 9 and Oct. 15	D
Watchet	Aug. 25	S, D
Wellow	May 20 and Oct. 17	D
Williton	Trinity Monday	D
Woodborough (in Winscombe)	Monday before Whitsun	Collinson