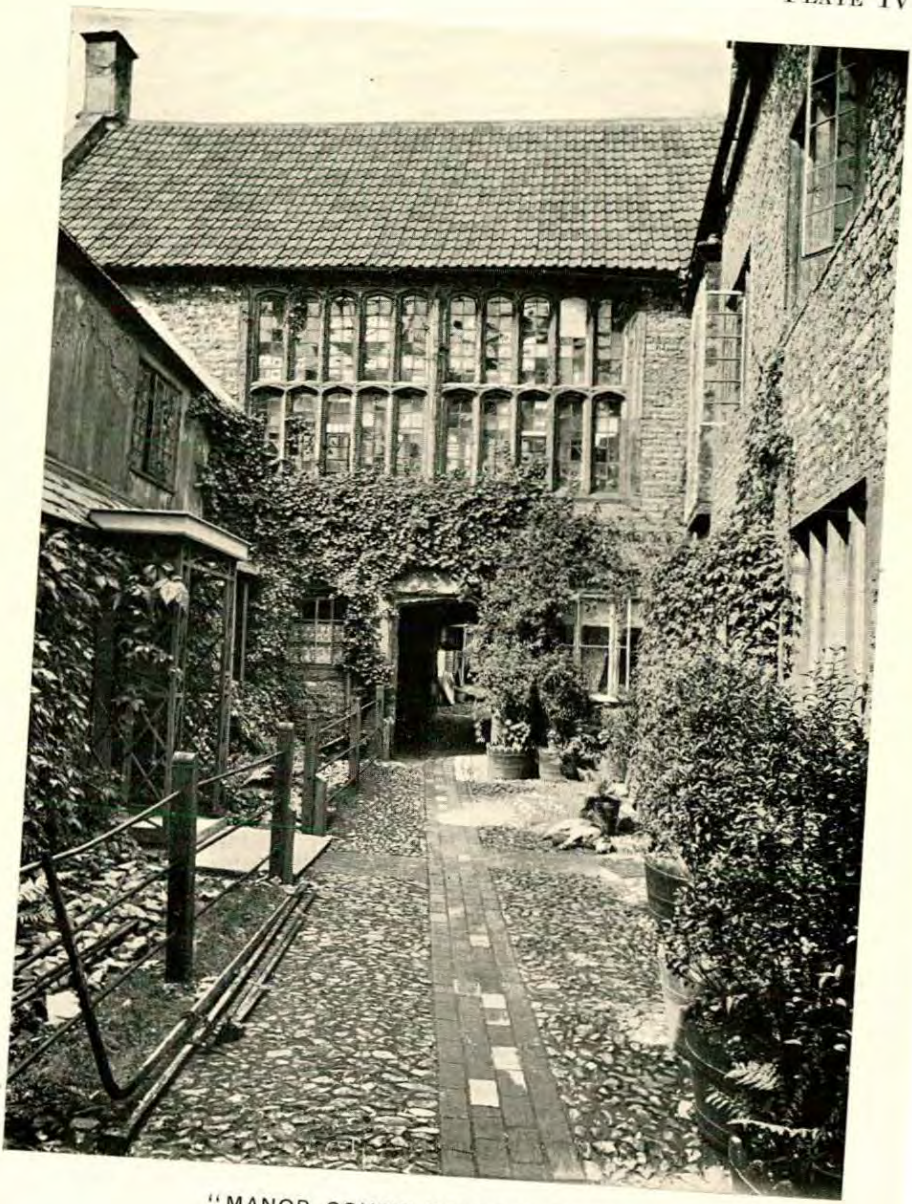


"MANOR COURT HOUSE," CHARD

From a Photograph by Mr. H. St. George Gray

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Old Chard

BY COLONEL J. WM. GIFFORD, J.P., F.R.A.S.

being his Presidential Address at the Chard Meeting, July 12th, 1927

BEFORE addressing you on Old Chard, which I have deemed the subject most suited to this occasion, I should like to say that, although a native of Chard, archæology is not my subject, and to ask you therefore to deal leniently with any slips or inaccuracies of which I may be guilty.

First, a word about the geological position of the town. Chard is on the greensand. In the valley below the town we come on blue lias. Passing along the road to Ilminster we have the reservoir on our right, during the formation of which some interesting fossils were found, especially the jaw of an ichthyosaurus, now in the Hull collection in the Taunton Museum.

The lower lias abounds in bituminous matter not unlike coal, for which a futile search was made near Chard many years ago. I think an extensive series of beds intervene between the lias and the coal measures. Indeed a boring for coal made some years since, right down to primordial rock at Lyme Regis, proved fruitless. Continuing on the road to Ilminster, at Hornsbury we reach a patch of greensand. As we proceed we find that this patch stands on a yellowish band of marlstone, of which there is or was a quarry at Donyatt.

At the west end of Chard we have an ancient quarry in the greensand, now disused and known as the 'large cave,' but evidently artificial. A little further up we reach a natural cleft in the rock, of sufficient length to form a subterranean

passage for some distance under the hill. Indeed tradition has it that it reached and communicated with Crimchard House. When a boy I entered it, mostly on hands and knees, for some hundred yards or more, finding at one point some old rush-lights partly burnt, still sticking to the wall.

Higher up again we have a modern quarry still more or less in use, and showing the junction of the greensand with the chalk, the same kind of greensand occurring underneath, as we noticed lower down. A marly substance occurs just above the latter, in which may be found a number of fossils, nautili, bivalves, ammonites, etc. The intermediate long cave is reported to have been permanently stopped up by the farmer, some forty years ago, sheep and a dog having been lost there.

We have no record of any settlement at Chard earlier than the Roman one, but of this we have indubitable evidence. The broad straight streets crossing at right angles, the discovery of Roman coins from time to time, and the remains of Roman buildings, all point the same way.

One of these is the villa discovered at Wadeford by Mr. John Brown in 1810, and opened up at the Society's meeting in 1865. There was evidence that the owners of this villa had passed the mere colonist stage and had settled down, for they must have enjoyed most of the luxuries available at that time.

Beautiful pieces of tessellated pavement were unearthed, there were remains of baths, and among what must have been the household midden heap, Professor Sir William Boyd Dawkins (happily again with us to-day) identified the bones of the short-horned ox, the horse, the pig, as well as the antlers of deer and the jaw of a lamb.

Most unfortunately the pavement was left exposed and, later on, was partially spoiled by frost. Another such Roman villa is found in the grounds of Whitestaunton Manor, on the site of a traditional wishing well. The remains of this villa are, I understand, still in good preservation. All this evidence indicates continued Roman settlement, say for one or two hundred years. Although, as already stated, there is no record of previous occupation, it may well be that, when the Romans came, they found a hamlet of primitive dwellings on the site where Chard now stands belonging to earlier inhabitants whom

the Romans, with their accustomed skill, subjugated and absorbed.

The Romans left Britain about the year 410, leaving undefended the Britons and many Romans who had settled down and stayed behind. The King of Kent called in the Saxons to help him against the Picts and Scots in 449. About fifty years later, the original inhabitants of the south-west found a leader, and we read of King Arthur, a Celt, and his knights of the Round Table. He fought and beat Cerdic, the founder of Chard, but was killed in battle near Bath in 520, and the Saxons finally subjugated Britain about 650.

It was during the third and last invasion of the Saxons that Cerdic founded the Kingdom of Wessex and gave his name, undoubtedly pronounced Cherdic, to Chard. Other places bear his name in the same form, such as Charford and Charmouth, where he is supposed to have landed. Chard is mentioned in the Domesday book as 'The town of Cerdre,' evidently pronounced Cherdre. That the final 're' soon got dropped goes without saying, and when we remember that the country people in this district still pronounce the name George as Jarge, we see how Cherd became Chard. At the time of the suppression of the monasteries, the original pronunciation of Latin was lost, especially that of the letter C, which many think should have the sound of K, but others think should have the value of C in modern Italian, that is of *ch* before *e* and *i* (pronounced *chay, chee*) and *k* before *a* (pronounced *ka*). Now the written language in those days was chiefly Latin, and the value of C in Cerdre may be the lost value of C in Latin, the parent of modern Italian. Indeed we have some slight confirmation of this in the form in combination taken by the Latin word *castrum*, a camp, for instance Lancaster, Manchester.

Cerdre conquered the Isle of Wight in 530 and added it to his kingdom of Wessex, which subsequently grew into what is now the kingdom of England.

In 845 Somerset was attacked by the Danes, but Chard is not much mentioned until after the Norman Conquest in 1066. We know, however, that before that date and indeed until 1801, when it was bought by Earl Poulett, Chard Manor belonged to the bishop of the diocese. In the Gheld Inquest of

1084 taken two years before the Domesday survey it is especially named as the land of Bishop Giso, who was made a bishop in 1061.

The first mention of Chard, otherwise than as a manor, was in 1198 when, Savaricus being bishop, one hundred shillings was given from Cerde by the hand of the parson there for masses to be said for one year, in the church at Wells, for the bishop, his predecessors, the benefactors of the church, and all the faithful defunct. But the time when Chard first became a town dates from Bishop Jocelyn, whose episcopate began in 1206. In 1234 he divided the income of the church, appointing the larger tithes to a cathedral officer named the provost. The smaller tithes and fees, including the tithes of hay, etc., were, with one or two small exceptions, set aside to form the income of a vicar, to whom a house was assigned near the court of the provost, under the condition that no new aperture should be made in it on that side. Jocelyn then made a grant of 52 acres of land to the burgesses of Chard to be independent of him as lord of the manor.

These 52 acres comprised the borough of Chard until 1892, when the boundary was enlarged. The charter which embodied this grant is given at length in several of the books on Chard, notably in Mr. Green's *History of Chard*. Among other points Jocelyn gives ' To all who build, acres as required on payment of 12 pence each yearly,' but the owners are not to transfer their houses to Jews, nor to religious houses, nor churches without license from ' " self " or his successors.'

These privileges were confirmed by Bishop Wm. Button (the first : there were two Bishop Buttons) in 1253 and by Bishop Robert Burnell in 1280. Finally the whole was settled by King Edward I's charter of confirmation given at Exeter on January 7th, 1285. Bishop Burnell also confirmed a charter of King John which granted exemption to all free tenants born in Axbridge, Welynton, and Cherde, from all toll, pickage (money paid for breaking ground for erecting booths at fairs), pannage (food for swine in the woods), and kaiage (toll on loading and unloading goods). On the death of Bishop Button in 1264 he was succeeded by Bishop Walter Gifford, who had the assurance to excommunicate Simon de Montfort and sub-

sequently became Archbishop of York. Taunton Castle was founded by Ina and the principal remaining part was built in the reign of Henry I by an earlier Walter Gifford, Bishop of Winchester.

The value of Chard Manor in Domesday book was £16, but by 1293 it had increased to £32 3*s.* 4*d.* In 1327 the lowest taxable value was 10*s.* The tax was $\frac{1}{20}$ thus :

Johannes de Watersmyth was taxed 18*d.*
Luka de Lokier . . . . 12*d.*

It may be interesting to note that the name Lockyer is still a familiar Chard name, and is also the name of the distinguished astronomer who founded Salcombe Regis observatory.

Chard first sent members to Parliament in 1300, and continued to do so until 1329. It was not until 1265 that any borough was deemed worthy of being represented. Members were paid 2*s.* a day, then about the value of a sheep. This pay had to be found by the borough. An entry of £5 for the last two members has been found in the corporation books and this brought matters to a climax and caused a petition for relief from payment. This was refused and rather than continue, Chard renounced its right to representation in Parliament. A portreeve and burgesses then took the place of a mayor and corporation, or rather was added to these, both bodies for a long time co-existing, and at constant variance. But the portreeve style was retained and was in use at the time of the municipal corporations return in 1835.

At some time since that date the portreeve was replaced by a mayor. Chard was also an assize town and possessed a Shire Hall, known by the curious name of ' New Work,' where sessions were occasionally held. This hall stood at the crossing of High Street and Holyrood Street. Two old paintings of it hang in the Town Hall which replaced it in 1837.

Chard figured largely in the struggle between the Stuarts and Cromwell. Essex House is named after one of Cromwell's commanders. A full description of the struggle may be found in Green's *History of Chard* and Pulman's *Book of the Axe.*

But I should like to mention two stories connected with that time. Some of Cromwell's soldiers came to Montacute House and demanded a meal. The squire, no doubt a Phelips, over-

heard them say that they were going to Avishays to arrest the squire, probably a Marwood, as he was a king's man and suspected of plotting against the Parliamentarians. The two squires were friends, and the Montacute man slipped away on his horse and rode his hardest for Avishays, about seventeen miles away and about two miles from Chard. As Cromwell's men rode in at the gate, the squire of Avishays escaped at the back, and his wife met the soldiers at the front door and kept them talking until her husband had got away.

An early record of the Baptist church at Chard, dating from 1653, formerly in the possession of the late Mr. F. W. Brown and handed over to the Society on his death, runs : ' The Baptish church of Jesus Christ meeting at Chard in the County of Somerset, tradition informs us was first planted by one Captain Wallington, an officer in Cromwell's army, a man eminent for heroick boldness and courage, generosity, great zeal for religion, and one that feared neither man nor devil when called by Providence to any Enterprise.

' Mr. Aaron Stark who was a member of this church used to relate many things of Captain Wallington, which he had heard from his father, who knew him and sat under his ministry when he preached in Crimchard Lane. Two things in particular he used to relate of him as proof both of his generosity and courage ; and however incredible the latter may appear, yet Mr. Stark was so well persuaded of its truth from the testimony of his father, that he would be very angry at any that seemed to doubt of it. They are as follows :

' A gracious woman but poor who lived at Cuttiford's Door had her house burnt down ; she came and told the Captain of her calamity, he immediately gave her a handful of gold and told her not to sorrow but go home and build it again.

' When in the service of Cromwell, he came to a small town, tired and fatigued, in which there was but one Inn and that was full, except a back room which they said was haunted and in which they would not venture to put any Person. " Well," said he, " if they have no other I would put up with that, only let me have a candle sufficient to burn the whole night." They endeavoured to persuade him to the contrary, but he said he was no way afraid and therefore insisted upon lodging there.

After some refreshment he was shown the room. He then took off his sword and laid it on the table and after reading a chapter in the Bible (which he always carried with him) he spent some time in prayer and went to bed. He had not been there long before he heard something at the door and looking up saw the door open and the form of a hog enter and make towards him. He got upright in the bed and looking sternly at the hog said : " Ah ! Satan, art thou not ashamed of thyself, thou who once was an Angel of Light, thus to transform thyself into a filthy hog. Ah ! Satan, art thou not ashamed of thyself ? " It immediately slunk back, ashamed indeed, disappeared and the Captain enjoyed a good night's rest.' The Baptists were granted the use of the Shire Hall at Chard about 1650.

Chard parish church was built in the fifteenth century, no doubt on the site of an older church. Pulman, in his *Book of the Axe*, says it is built in the third pointed or Perpendicular style of the fifteenth century, but that it is greatly spoiled by being without a clerestory and also by a want of boldness in the ornamental details of the windows, etc., but that the general effect of the interior is a certain completeness which goes some way to compensate the imperfections referred to. Certain most interesting wall-plates in the church and memorial stones in the graveyard are also described by Pulman, who records the inscriptions at length. There is another point of interest connected with Chard Church. Measurements which have been made of the nave, transepts, etc., come out in more uniformly even numbers in Belgic than in standard feet and inches. Mr. E. M. Nelson, the great microscopist, when staying in Shetland some years ago, made some measurements of the Hestinsgarth stone circle. He found that, if instead of using the ordinary British standard foot, he used a foot of 12·96 inches, most of the measurements were divisible by the number three with negligible remainder and the others were very little out. This foot he called the Belgic or Hestinsgarth foot, and later applied it to other stone circles including Stonehenge and Avebury and the monuments at Baalbec, near Damascus in Syria, always with the same result. These researches have been published by Mr. Nelson in *The Cult of the Circle Builders*,

and he also made the suggestion, many years back, that measurements of Chard Church might prove interesting.

At the outset it seemed extraordinary that Chard Church, built as late as the fifteenth century, should to some extent also fall into line. But some of its walls have evidently been built up in contact with the walls of a previous church, before that church was demolished. Reasoning in this way and reducing a number of measurements (very kindly and accurately made by Mr. J. Madge) to Belgic measure, we get the following dimensions for the older church in Belgic feet :

Depth of Nave	60 ft.
Distance between columns . .	16 ft.
Depth of transept	14 ft.
Width of Chancel	16 ft.

Of course at that time even an approach to exact measurement was unknown.

Chard had its share in the excitements of Monmouth's Rebellion in 1685. He appears to have slept at Chard on his journey north from Lyme Regis, where he was joined by Defoe, at the house still called Monmouth House, situate next to the Grammar School.

Soon after the Duke's failure there followed the atrocities of Judge Jeffreys, twelve of whose victims after trial in the old Shire Hall already described, were hung, so tradition says, on a fine old oak removed in 1864 to make room for the railway. I can just remember the oak as a very small boy. The old shambles were on the left side of the High Street, just above and behind the old Shire Hall. These were succeeded by shambles on the site of the present Corn Exchange.

Grammar School. The date of 1583 on the rain-water pipe is misleading. All we know is that in 1671 William Symes, of Poundisford, conveyed to Henry Henley, Nathaniel Pitts, and ten others as trustees, a burgage and 1 acre for schoolhouse and headmaster's house, the said master to bring up 'youth in virtue and good learning.' In 1709 Pitts conveyed this to the Chard corporation for a thousand years. The next we know is that there was a great fire. We learn this from a document still preserved among the County manuscripts at Taunton. It was issued with the sanction of the portreeve and burgesses.

This document, issued in 1727, and petitioning for a brief or license to beg for money to rebuild after a fire, 'Humbly showeth that on Fryday the 25th day of August last past, about eleven of the clock in the forenoon, there happened a great and terrible fire which broke out in the dwelling-house of your petitioner Fra[s] Coleman, which by reason of the dryness of the season, there having been no rain for some months before, did in the space of four hours burn down, consume, and utterly destroy the Grammar School, being a large pile of buildings belonging to the said borough, and also the dwelling-houses of your petitioners with their household goods and furniture. The loss being £1,400, they pray that some one may be appointed to collect money for their relief.'

During the last century at all events Chard has not been without its men of note. Of these Stringfellow, in conjunction with Mr. Wenham, first constructed an aeroplane, which would actually fly, in 1847. An improvement was made in this in 1868 when another machine successfully flew across the Crystal Palace at the Exhibition of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain, obtaining the £100 prize. As it was driven by a small steam engine, petrol engines being unknown, it could only carry its own weight, but its main principles were almost identical with the modern aeroplane with its planes and propellers.

Mr. Stringfellow came to my father to ask for some help to finance his experiments and I can remember my father saying 'Now, Mr. Stringfellow, give up this nonsense. God never meant man to fly and we never shall fly.' This was the usual attitude in those days. I knew Mr. Stringfellow as an old man who earned his living by making brass bobbins and carriages for the bobbin net industry still carried on in Chard. He lived in a house at the top of the town with a bow window in which there was a microscope, my envy as a boy.

James Gillingham. Originally a shoemaker in Chard. During the rejoicings over the marriage of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra a man called Singleton had his arm shot off at the shoulder. This came to the knowledge of Gillingham who at once set to work to make him an artificial arm, a crude attempt, but quite successful. From that time, setting aside

his shoemaking, he developed a business in the construction of artificial limbs which has enabled many a poor cripple, who would otherwise have dropped out, to take his part in life again. He has not long been dead and his son and grandson still carry on with conspicuous success. During the Great War the Hospital at Chard was the only V. A. D. Hospital allowed to receive and fit up limbless patients, and this was solely because of James Gillingham.