



PAINTED STONE SLAB BEARING THE ARMS OF WADHAM AND A COLLECTION OF BADGES
Formerly at Merifield and now preserved at Wadham College

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

The Wadhams and Merifield¹

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being his Presidential Address at the Wellington Meeting, 17 July 1934

‘WHILES he lyved of Merefield in ye County of Somersett Esquier’, says the inscription on the monument of Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham in Ilminster Church. But the traveller who visits Merifield to-day sees but little to remind him of its kindly owners, and would without hesitation agree with the poet who wrote

‘On Isis bank not here seek Wadham’s fame.’

Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham deserved that their memory should be held in honour. Unfortunately their own home no longer exists, but there is a college of abiding charm at Oxford which has kept green the memory of its Somerset founders for three hundred years and more—a little bit of Somerset in Oxford, and Somerset masons helped to build it. Even now it must be much as our Somerset masons saw it, for Jackson, in his book on Wadham College, says, ‘the original building stands as the builders left it, without diminution or addition’.

Before we speak of the Wadhams we must first of all deal with the early history of Ilton and the neighbouring parishes, and the manor of Merifield. It appears that the ownership of the greater part of these properties and the lordship of the manors were successively in the hands of the early Saxon kings, and then of the Abbey of Athelney until the Dissolution, and

¹ Mr. William Wyndham of Orchard Wyndham is one of the representatives of the ancient family of Wadham of Merifield, and was the owner of the site of Merifield Manor House, but has now sold his property at Ilton.

after that event of the Wadhams and their heirs. The families associated with the neighbourhood during the middle ages, the Beauchamps, Pophams, de Ilmynstres, de Muryfelds, de Birminghams, and before the Dissolution the Wadhams themselves, were either owners of comparatively small properties there, though some of them owned large estates elsewhere, or tenants and sub-tenants of the Abbot of Athelney.

Merifield is not situated in the parish of Ilton. The two-and-a-half acres upon which the manor-house and surrounding outbuildings stood are in the parish of Ashill, near the boundary of Ashill and Ilton, and rates have always been paid to the parish of Ashill on these two-and-a-half acres. King Alfred gave Ashill and Merifield to his foundation of Athelney. King Edgar added the manor of Ilton to the endowment of the Abbey. The parish of Ilton lies to the west of the Ile and is six miles long and one mile wide. It comprises the five hamlets of Cad Green, Ilford, Hurcot, Ashford and Rapps. Ashford was a separate manor and was granted by Eadwig to his servant Eadheah in A.D. 958 (Kemble, *Codex Dipl.*). In Domesday it is stated that 'William held of Roger Aisseford. Ulwin held it in the time of King Edward and gelded for one furlong. The arable is one carucate and 3 acres of meadow and 10 acres of pasture. It was and is worth 30 pence'. Elias de Ashford by charter, without date, gave a mill in Ashford to the Abbey of Athelney (*Register Ath. Abbey*). Peter de Yvelton (36 Edward III) granted to the Abbey certain lands in Ashford and Ilton.

In the reign of Edward I Merifield was in the hands of the Beauchamps of Hatch Beauchamp. The following account is from the *Inquisitio post mortem* of John de Bello Campo, 12 Edward I (1283). 'The Manor which was of the purchase of the said John and Cecily his wife, viz :—A capital messuage, garden and dovecot, 200 acres of arable, $7\frac{1}{2}$ acres meadow, 10 acres wood, 8s. 3d. rent of villains, &c., holding of Thomas de Montsorel of the fee of Wythlakington doing two suits of court and rendering 10*d.* rent. A mill and five acres of meadow held on the fee of Hylton rendering to the Abbot of Athelnyngnye 25s. rent &c.' John de Beauchamp left one son who died in 1362 without issue. He was succeeded at Merifield by

his sister Cecily who married Roger Seymour and after his demise Richard Turberville, knt. Sir Richard died in 1363; not long after his death his widow granted the manor to Fulke de Birmingham, a Member of Parliament and a soldier of the French Wars.

During the time the property belonged to the Beauchamps two other names are mentioned as of Merifield. They were John de Ilmynstre tenant of Merifield in the reign of Edward I (*Reg. of Athelney Abbey*), and Lovecok de Muryfeld whose name appears in the Lay Subsidy Roll for the year 1327.

Fulk de Birmingham, John de Ilmynstre, and Lovecok de Muryfeld were probably sub-tenants as the Beauchamps seem to have been in possession from before 1283 to 1394, when Cecilia de Turberville, heiress of that family, died at Merifield.¹ It may be supposed that her heirs sold their interest in Merifield to the Wadhams.

About 1400 Sir John Wadham, the judge, seems to have acquired Merifield. His *Inquisitio post mortem* mentions Muryfield near Ilminster among the other manors which he held. In the *Register of Athelney Abbey* is the record of a court held at Ilton in Michaelmas term 1412 when the tithing-man came and 'presented that Sir John Wadham held of the lord a water-mill at Ashford, 30 acres of pasture 4 acres of meadow called Perryhay'.² 'And since the last court he had died.

¹ It is evident that the connection between the Beauchamps of Hatch and the Abbey of Athelney was of long standing, and that the protection of that powerful family was valued by the Abbots (*Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* xliii, ii, 111). In the reigns of the first Plantagenets it was convenient, if local disputes occurred, for the monastery to have friendly neighbours with a military force at their command, rather than to trust completely to the impartiality of the law. Whether the Wadhams acquired their original interest in Merifield by purchase from the heirs of Cecilia de Turberville and the Beauchamps, or from subsequent tenants, is uncertain, but they could not have entered into possession without the consent of the abbot for the time being; and it is significant that the first of the Wadhams to hold Merifield was a learned judge who would have been able to protect the property of the Abbey in case of need as efficiently as a feudal magnate in earlier days.

The 'messuage' which the Beauchamps occupied at Merifield in their dual capacity of tenants and guardians of the Abbey property in that neighbourhood must have been a house of some importance, and the existing moat may date from their occupation.—ED.

² The site of the Almshouses.

And he says that William Wadham is the son and nearest heir of the said John, and is now of full age.' This son, Sir William (1391-1452), the builder of the Wadham aisle at Ilminster, lies buried in that aisle with his mother.

Sir William's son, Sir John, is said by Collinson to have acquired the manor of Merifield by marrying Elizabeth one of the four daughters and co-heirs of Sir Stephen Popham of Merifield and of Popham in Hants, a statement difficult to reconcile with the previous history of the manor. But the Wadhams inherited the manor of South Bradon and became entitled to quarter the arms of Popham and Reade owing to this marriage, Sir Stephen Popham having married Margaret daughter and co-heir of Nicholas Reade of Over Anthony near Tiverton, who was the owner of the manor of South Bradon.

Let us now examine the origin of this family who were to give to their house such lasting fame. The ancient manor of Wadham or Wadeham in Knowstone, North Devon, belonged according to Lysons 'to an old Saxon of the name of Ulf, who had held it in demesne ever since the time of Edward the Confessor, and that it was not improbable he might have been the ancestor of the family of Wadham, of whom this was the original residence' and from which, with equal probability, they adopted their name. Pole related that 'one William Wadham was a freeholder of this land in King Edward I's time and that both East and West Wadham, Sir John Wadham (the judge) possessed in King Henry IV's time'.

From Wadham they appear to have migrated to Egge or Edge in Branscombe *c.* 1377, for before the end of the reign of Edward III, it had passed into the possession of Sir John Wadham, who made it his residence. His son was Sir John Wadham, the judge, a Justice of the Common Pleas in the reign of Richard II, first of the family to hold Merifield. Of him Risdon relates that 'he was free of speech yet it was mingled with gravity and discretion', and that 'he was a man of sound judgment'. The judge married Joan Wriothesley and died towards the end of the reign of Henry IV, and was probably buried in the north transept of Branscombe Church. He left two sons William and Thomas of Redworthy in Ash-reigny. William, eldest son of the judge, was sheriff of Devon

in 1438 and married Margaret daughter of John Chiselden of Holcombe Rogus. He is the traditional builder of the tower and north transept of Iminster Church, where he lies buried under a very large tomb, on the top of which is a ponderous slab of Purbeck marble, inlaid with two splendid brasses depicting the full length effigies of a knight and lady under a rich canopy. The knight is habited in a very early suit of plate armour, with basinet and sword—the lady in a coverchief and long robes. The monument was probably erected during the life-time of the knight, as the age and dates were never inscribed on the brass ; only a portion of the inscription remains :—

*Simul cum Willmo Wadhām filio eordem que obiit . . . die
Mensis Anno dñi Willmo CCC^o . . . Et qui quidem Willms . . .*

There is a further rhyming Latin epitaph at the feet of the figures which makes it clear that the female figure represents Joan the mother of Sir William and daughter of Wriothsesley. The shields of arms are unfortunately gone, but a rose, the family badge occurs between each word of the leger line.

Sir William Wadham left, John, his heir, William of Catherston, James, and Elizabeth married to Robert Stawel of Cothelstone, and Margaret married to Gilbert Yarde, and Anne married W. Montacute of Henley near Crewkerne. Sir John Wadham, third of the family to hold Merifield, married Elizabeth Popham and left two sons, John, his heir, and Edward of Pole Anthony ; also a daughter, Alice, who married Nicholas Stukeley of Affeton, North Devon. Sir John Wadham, the fourth Wadham of Merifield, married, firstly a daughter of Cheyney of Pinhoe and secondly Elizabeth, daughter of Hugh Stukeley of Affeton and sister of Nicholas Stukeley. He left Sir Nicholas, his heir, who married first Joan daughter of Robert Hill of Halsway, by whom he had Lawrence, eldest son, who died without issue, and John his heir ; Andrew ; Giles, who married Agnes, daughter of Clansey of Burton, and left a son Edward of Mere ; Mary who married Sir Richard Chudleigh of Ashdon, and Elizabeth married firstly to Sir Edward Bampfield of Poltimore, and secondly to John

Warr of Chipley. Secondly, Sir Nicholas Wadham 'took to wife' Margaret, daughter of Sir John Seymour of Wolf Hall, Wilts., aunt to Jane Seymour, third Queen of Henry VIII and to the Protector Edward, Duke of Somerset. By her he had one son, Nicholas, who died young, and a daughter, Jane, married to Foster of Badesley in Hants.

Sir Nicholas Wadham was made by Henry VIII in 1509, captain of the Isle of Wight, steward and receiver of the royal revenues and master of the royal forests there. He was constituted by the king a vice-admiral under Lord Surrey. In 1524 a patent was granted by the king to Sir Nicholas licensing him to make a park in his manor of Meryfield to consist of 200 acres of pasture and 40 acres of wood. In 1530 he was appointed one of the commissioners to take inquisition of the estate of Cardinal Wolsey, lately attainted. He also occurs as sheriff of Somerset and Dorset (see Fuller's *Worthies*).

We now reach John Wadham, Esq., of Edge and Merifield, second son and heir of Sir Nicholas, and father of the founder. He married Joan Tregarthen, daughter and co-heir of John Tregarthen and widow of John Kelleway of Cullompton. The Tregarthens were originally seated at the manor of Tregarthen in Cornwall.

The lady above mentioned was descended from Edward I through the Courtenay family and from an illegitimate son of Richard Plantagenet, second son of King John, born in 1209. By John Kelleway, her first husband, she appears to have had fourteen children; and by her second husband John Wadham she had six children of whom Nicholas, the founder, and his three sisters, Joan, Margaret and Florence survived. An entry in the Branscombe register records:—

'Mrs. Joan Wadham, wid. was buried the 30 September 1583.'

The place of the founder's birth is not known. As his grandfather was still living in 1533 he may have been born at Edge, Merifield, or elsewhere. Either Edge or Merifield are possible, for Prince says, 'The family resided sometimes in one, sometimes in the other, as their inclination led them.'

Neither is the year of his birth certain. It was either 1532 or 1533. At the Earl of Ilchester's house at Melbury are

portraits of Nicholas and Dorothy Wadham. He, aet. 62, 1595, in a black coat and cap-piked beard with his gloves in his right hand. She, aet. 60, 1595, is in black and holds a book in her right hand. On the portrait of the founder at Wadham College of the same date, 1595, his age is given as 63. Another of his lady 'aet. suae 77 A.D. 1611'. This also does not agree with the date on the portrait at Melbury. In the register of admissions to the Inner Temple, under date of the 7 Edward VI, 1552-3, is the following :—

'Nicholas Wadham of Brymton in Co. Somer.

9 die martii. pleg. Richd Baker.'

This may have been the founder, as we know of no other Nicholas Wadham at that date, and there was some connexion between the Wadhams and the Sydenhams of Brympton, Dorothy, wife of Nicholas Wadham, was second daughter of the celebrated Sir William Petre, secretary 'to four several Princes', and was born at Tor-Brian in South Devon. Her father was a Roman Catholic and a man of considerable wealth, having a great estate of abbey lands, consisting of twelve manors and four rectories. Sir Wm. Petre had a house in the main street of Cullompton, and that town being his mother's former home, it is just possible that in that place Nicholas wooed and won his wife Dorothy, who doubtless brought him a good share of her father's fortune.

It was at Merifield that Nicholas Wadham, the founder, kept such hospitality that as Fuller says in his *Worthies* 'his house was an inn at all times, and like a court at Christmas'. Nor were the poor forgotten; the tradition still lingers at Ilton, that every morning provisions were taken to a 'beggars' bush' or hollow tree, at the park entrance, so that needy wayfarers might help themselves without visiting the house. He avoided politics, and apparently took little interest in local affairs. He was, however, on 21 April 1586, added to the commission for the restraint of grain and victuals in Somerset (*Acts of Privy Council*, xiv, 70).

He founded an almshouse for eight people in Ilton in 1606. His estates brought him in £3000 a year in the currency of the period and out of this income he saved £14,000, which he determined to set apart for the foundation of a college at

Oxford. This pious intention was carried out after his death by his widow Dorothy, for a full account of which see the *History of Wadham College*, by T. G. Jackson (1893).

Nicholas Wadham died on the 20 October 1609, aged 77, and lies buried under a sumptuous tomb in the north transept of Iminster Church. He left the magnificent sum of £500 'towardses my funeral expenses'. Dorothy died at Edge on the 16 May 1618, aged 84. She was buried beside her husband at Iminster, where both their portraits may be seen in brass upon their tomb.

Nicholas Wadham died without issue but left three sisters, (1) Joan married to Giles Strangways, ancestor of the Earl of Ilchester, (2) Margaret, married to Nicholas Martin of Athelhampton, Dorset, (3) Florence, married to John Wyndham, ancestor of the Earls of Egremont. The following manors with their appendant advowsons, Silverton and Rewe in the County of Devon : Chiselborough, South Bradon and Penselwood in the County of Somerset ; and Maiden Newton in the County of Dorset, descended to the above-mentioned three sisters of Sir Nicholas and their heirs, and alternate rights of presentation to these livings belonged to those families, and ultimately through failure of the Martin line and purchase, they passed to Strangways and Wyndham respectively as shown in a statement dated October 1856, in the writer's possession at Orchard Wyndham.

The manors of Ilton, Bradon, and Beererocombe, and part of Silverton and Rewe fell to Sir John Wyndham, by right of his mother Florence Wadham. He, disliking the situation of the house at Merifield, had it demolished. No building except a barn was to be seen in 1769. The moat is entire and still has some water in it. There is a fragment of the base of a tower with one loophole, and there is a large stone (sarsen) with a deep hole always filled with water, about which various legends linger. (This was illustrated in the *Somerset Countryman*, January 1934.)

In the valley below large fishponds, now overgrown, are to be found, and a field there is known as 'Fishpool Mead'. The ponds were fed by extensive springs called 'Nine Springs' but these probably were utilised when the Chard Canal was formed.

Certain fields bore the names of Part Old Park and Stephen's Park in 1800.

With materials from the old Merifield house, other houses were built at Woodhouse Farm and Scots Farm. The porch at Woodhouse has the Wadham device over the entrance. A large room at Scots was elaborately panelled. This oak panelling the writer presented to Wadham College to save it from going elsewhere, and also a sculptured stone from Orchard Wyndham formerly at Merifield (Plate III). On the dexter of the shield occur the arms of Wadham quartering, (2) Chesilden (*or*) *on a chevron (gu.) 3 martlets (ar.)*, (3) Popham (*ar.*) *on a chief (gu.) 2 bucks' heads cabossed (or)*, (4) Reade (*gu.*) *a bend fusilly (erm.)*; on the sinister, Seymour. The shield is supported by two beasts, apparently hinds, but as in the original copy of the Visitation of Somerset for 1531, Sir Nicholas Wadham's arms were registered with harts as supporters, it is probable that the beasts were intended to be harts and that their antlers have been broken off. Instances of commoners having supporters at this time are rare.

Balancing the arms of Wadham, in the sinister compartment on the carved slab, is a curious collection of badges the significance of which is difficult to discover. A rose was the badge of the Wadhams, but a rose surmounted by a royal crown as it is here shown, was a badge of Henry VII; why the crown should be here supported by a heraldic monkey and a hart or perhaps a hind collared is a matter of conjecture.

This stone indicates the marriage of Sir Nicholas Wadham with Margaret daughter of John Seymour. There is also a bench-end at Rewe Church which 'displays Wadham, a chevron between 3 roses impaling 2 wings in lure'.

There is a brass at Ilton Church displaying the same arms (Jackson, 104). Probably the frequent display of this matrimonial coat was not due to the royal marriage, for Margaret Wadham died some years before Henry VIII married her niece. But Sir John Seymour was a favourite military commander of Henry VIII, and his brother-in-law was probably very well pleased with the alliance.

In 1882 the old oak communion table from Ilminster Church was sold to Wadham College for £100. At Scots there was an

expanding Elizabethan oak table, which, according to tradition, formerly stood in the hall at Merifield. This was sold some years ago to the late Mr. Arthur Locke Radford. It is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

AUTHORITIES:—*S.R.S.*, vol. 14, *Cartularies of the Abbeys of Muchelney and Athelney*; *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.* xliii, 94–165, *Athelney Abbey*, T. Hugo; *Wadham College, Oxford*, T. G. Jackson.