

## Historical Recollections of Wincanton and its Neighbourhood.

So favoured a site as the slopes of these hills, facing the south, and overlooking the fertile and extensive valley, stretching far into Dorsetshire, was not likely to be overlooked by the Romans, during their long residence in this island, and Stuckely informs us, that an urn full of Roman coins, some of which he had seen, and implements used by the same people, were found here.

Further proof of their residence has recently been added, in digging the foundations for a farm house, on a hill side, about a mile from the town, when a tessellated pavement, painted in chequer work, was uncovered. Unfortunately it was not preserved, but some of the stone tesserae, rude and unequal in size, may be seen in our temporary museum. A large slab of freestone with edges bevelled, and ornamented with the "dog-tooth" pattern, and pedestal of the same material, were likewise found on the spot, and pronounced by a competent judge to be also Roman. The building had been destroyed by fire, as evidenced by charred wood, the ends of burnt posts, and blackened wheat. An abundant and never-failing spring flows from the hill side,—a powerful attraction to a people so fond of the bath.

Without dwelling on the subsequent settlements of the Saxons, as shown by the monosyllable "ton," or "town," the termination of many villages in the locality, and the derivation of the word "Wincanton," called in Doomsday Book "Wincaleton," from "Win," a height, and "Cale," the name of the river which flows below it; or the more remote occupants of the Pen Pitts, which he considered under-ground dwellings, the writer passed on to the most marked event in English history, the subjugation

and division of the country, by William the Conqueror. The manor was granted by the Norman, to one high in his favor, as Wincaleton was given to Walter de Dowai, with thirty-three other manors in this county.

Before the time of the Plantagenets, it passed into the hands of the Lovells, Lords of Cary, and from them, by marriage, to the St. Maurs, and the Zouches. He would not, however, trace this part of its history, or show what side the families took in the Wars of the Roses. The last direct representative marched with Richard III to Bosworth field, and, more true than Stanley, adhered to the losing side.

A property in a distant part of the parish called "The Marsh," significant of its situation, still flooded by the river, escaped confiscation, as belonging to the mother of the attainted Lord, and was long the residence of the family of Zouche. The site is now occupied by a more modern house, probably built from the ruins of the former one at the restoration of Charles II, as over the chimney-piece in a large room on the first floor, the letters "G. T. K." and 1661, are embossed. The property then belonged to George Thomas, styled "Knight," and passed, by the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth, in 1682, to Thomas Wickham, of Horsington, whose descendant of the same name sold it at the end of the last century, to an ancestor of the present Grant Dalton, Esq. A part of the moat surrounding the residence of the Zouches still remains, and the house continues to be known as Marsh Court. There were other families of note residing in the 16th and 17th centuries in this parish.

In the account of lay subsidies, paid into the Exchequer in the 32nd of Henry VIII, we find in the tithing of Wincaleton:—

Richard Zouche pays for his lands	...	50s
Thomas Hungerford for his goods	..	20s
Richd. Devyn do.	.. ..	10s

At the visitation of the Heralds' College, in 1623, John Ewens, of Wincanton, was entered as entitled to bear a coat of arms, and his pedigree is given. John Dyer, of the same place, and Robert Glyn, who married a daughter of Robert Huson, of Wincanton, are also entered.

In the immediate neighbourhood we have, in those parishes we purpose to visit, the following names entered in the books of the same visitation, as entitled to armorial bearings :—

- “Stowell, - Lawrence Hooper, Gent.
- ” - Richd. Daccomb, Gent.
- Milborne Port, - Henry Gifford, Gent.
- Horsington, - Christopher Foster, Gent., entrd.”

N.B.—Foster was his ‘alias,’ his true name being Wickham, eldest son of James Wyckham, of Horsington, by his wife, n<sup>e</sup>e Margaret Servington. See Court Roll, &c. ;

- And “Gawen - Ar.
- Charlton - Wm. Pointer, Gent.
- ” - George Hussey, Gent.”

The chief Justice Dyer, whose portrait we see on the walls of this hall, and of whom we are about to hear more, was connected with this town, as by the pedigree of John Ewens, above alluded to, we find that his grand father, also John, married a daughter of Alexander Dyer, of Wincanton.

The time was now approaching when other arms were sought, than those which the Heralds' College granted,

When civil dudgeon first grew high,  
 And men fell out they knew not why ;  
 When hard words, jealousies, and fears,  
 Set folk together by the ears,

and in those civil troubles Wincanton had some share.

Before the King raised the Royal Standard at Nottingham, on the 25th August, 1642, he sent Sir Ralph Hopton, Sir John Berkeley, and others to the west to aid the Earl of Hertford, if matters came to extremities. Hopton raised a troop of horse at his own cost, and as his residence was at Witham Friary, his troopers must have been recruited from this neighbourhood.

The Royal forces assembled at Wells, where they remained inactive, unwilling to strike the first blow, and thus they allowed a superior force to be collected from Bristol and other towns, on the heights of the Mendip, under the command of Sir John Horner and Alexander Popham. As the enemy were increasing in strength, and the loyalty of their own men was not to be depended on during this state of inaction, Lord Hertford retired to Sherborne, where he was followed and besieged for four days. The enemy then drew off to Yeovil, and he, having left a strong garrison in the Castle, retired towards the Bristol Channel, followed by the Parliamentary Army, but before he reached the coast his force had almost dispersed, and he himself, with some of his officers, passed from Minehead into Wales. He ordered Hopton to conduct the few remaining cavalry, called 100 horse, and 50 dragoons—the men he had probably raised in this neighbourhood—into Cornwall, which he effected successfully, and these men formed the nucleus of that brave army of Cornishmen, which at Stratton, Landsdowne and other places, rendered such good service in the following year to the royal cause, and with the fall of Bristol, regained all the west to the authority of Charles. At this, the most prosperous time for the King's cause, the whole of Somerset, with the exception of Taunton, was reduced to obedience.

After the self-denying ordinance was passed, and the

Parliamentary Army was remodelled, the fortune of war took a different turn in the west, as elsewhere. Sherborne Castle, which appears to have remained unmolested, was now threatened, as forces were collected at Wincanton to harass the garrison. Not much importance appears to have been attached to this force, as it is not mentioned by Clarendon, but tradition says the camp was formed on a hill about a mile from this town, on the Sherborne road. It was an active little garrison, proofs of which have often been found.

About two years ago, at the junction of two roads on the Down near Charlton Horethorn, in a little mound, a quantity of human bones were found, which were collected and interred in the churchyard.

Whilst the garrison remained in Sherborne Castle, skirmishes must have been frequent, and an attack which was made on the enemy at Wincanton, on the 1st of April, 1654, is particularly mentioned, on which occasion Sir Jno. Digby, with a brigade of horse and dragoons, made 200 prisoners, and took two colours and 300 horses, suffering but little loss. The Castle was taken by assault on the 15th of August following, by Sir Thomas Fairfax.

Mr. Wickham then entered into some details he had obtained from the MSS. at the Rolls Court, concerning the confiscation of the Gawen property at Horsington, alluded to in Phelps' History, and the supposed peculations, and "malignant" proclivities of one Benjamin Mason, the Parliamentary Commissioner, who married the daughter of George Dodington of Nether Stowey, to a branch of which family, the estate, in part, now belongs. The writer produced an item in the account Mason gave to the commissioners at Goldsmith's Hall, as follows:—

Allowance to self as Treasurer ..	£	10	9	8
For 3 journeys to London ..		180	0	0
For self and servant, and 2 horses		152	16	0
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		343	5	8
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Hard measures had been dealt to the Gawens. By an act 43rd of Elizabeth, "To restrain the Queen's Majesty's subjects in due obedience," a heavy fine was placed on Thomas Gawen, who was a Roman Catholic, for not attending his parish church; and after this, being found to be a "Popish recusant," two parts out of three of the annual value of his estates, were seized for the Queen's use. On his death this was restored to his son William, by Charles I, but not long enjoyed, for being denounced by the Parliament as "a Papist in arms," the whole was confiscated. Where he fought we do not know, but his young neighbour, Thomas Wickham, great nephew of the aforesaid Christopher, was a cornet with John Byam, and other Somersetshire men, in Sir Thomas Bridge's loyal regiment, and returned to Horsington, where he long survived the civil troubles.

The Rev. Gentleman followed the course of history up to 1665, when an attempt was made to disturb Cromwell's power, on which account the owner of Zeals was brought to the scaffold. He then mentioned, in connection with the town, that the Prince of Orange passed through it, and concluded by reading a copy of a document he had discovered this spring at the Rolls Court, relating to the termination of the civil troubles, being the loyal address sent from this county to Charles II, with the sign manual of the principal gentry of Somerset.

Abate the edge of traitors, Gracious Lord,  
That would reduce these bloody days again,  
And make poor England weep in streams of blood.

Let them not live to taste this land's increase,  
That would with treason wound this fair land's peace ;  
Now civil wounds are stopp'd, peace lives again,  
That she may long live here—God say “ Amen.”

Mr. WM. ARTHUR JONES, M.A., read a notice of Sir James Dyer, Lord Chief Justice, which is given in part ii.