

# Poyntington.

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BY THE REV. J. HEALE.

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I THINK it cannot be uninteresting to the Somersetshire Archæological Society to have some particulars laid before it of even one of the remotest and most obscure villages of the county. With your permission I will speak of Poyntington, which, little known as it now is, was at one period of its history not without some degree of comparative importance. And though my little village has not the claim which others have to the honor of a visit from your Society, it yet retains some relics of its ancient state which are not altogether unworthy of an antiquarian's notice. I beg permission to bring these before the Society, with the recently discovered indication of that which I have referred to ; and I will do this with as much brevity as possible.

Although its population is numerically very small, and the number of houses in it is now little more than a score, there are records, as well as traditions, which prove that Poyntington was, about 200 years ago, a populous and a much larger village. Not unfrequently the foundations of old dwellings, larger than the majority of the existing houses, have been met with even during the present century,

in the south-east corner of the parish, where it adjoins the county of Dorset.

It is believed to have been, at a very early date, a favourite resort of the old Monks of the neighbouring Abbey of Sherborne. At any rate, the "Monks' fish pond"—an extensive, and still a most clearly and distinctly defined artificial reservoir—marks the place whence, on the old Church's Fast-days as well as Festivals, was drawn a supply for some of the bodily comforts of those good old devotees, for the repose of whose souls we are called upon to pray, at Osborne and elsewhere.

Amongst the remains of the ancient village, two good examples of domestic architecture are to be seen. Especially worthy of notice is the old Manor House, date about the middle of the 15th century—memorable amongst other things as having been the residence, in the 17th century, of Sir Thomas Malet, one of the Judges of the King's Bench, who, for his loyalty and adherence to the cause of his royal master, suffered very severely in both purse and person.\*

From those days of civil discord dates the time of Poyntington's decline.

In June, 1645, when Parliamentary troops were in the neighbourhood of Sherborne, and probably en route for Wincanton, a fierce engagement took place between the loyal villagers of Poyntington and a strong force of the Roundhead soldiers, in which Baldwin, the second son of Sir Thomas, lost his life "in the King's service." The scene of the fiercely fought battle, in which he and a large number of combatants fell, is just beyond the limits of the

\* Sir Thomas was thrown into the Tower where he remained until the Restoration; his wife, Dame Malet, had her wedding ring taken from her, and, for the remainder of her days wore a horn one, which is represented in the family picture, still preserved at Willaton House, Wiltshire.

parish (within the borders of Dorset), where are still to be seen many mounds marking the graves of those who fell in the contest. To this very day that battle-field is to the villagers of Poyntington and Osborne a place of dread as the shades of night draw on, and very few indeed of either village are bold enough to pass alone near to the spot where headless men and one headless woman are said to be seen in troops, about the time which Disraeli terms "the witching hour of two." And to this very day also my village children listen with trembling hearts and bated breath to the fireside tales in which are handed down, from generation to generation, the deeds of valour done by their village ancestors; and especially by that Knight—the son of the great judge who lived in the big house—who is said to have leaped into the battle over the gate dividing the two counties; leaping on horseback with all his armour on right into the midst of the fight, and, after killing more than a score, to have been within an hour brought back dead to his father's house, and, for fear of the plague, to have been buried the very next day—a fact which is confirmed in the old parish register, to which I shall presently refer.

Passing, however, from secular to ecclesiastical subjects, there are two remains yet existing in excellent preservation of the original Norman church, which occupied the site of the present somewhat dilapidated building of the Decorated period—date perhaps from 1320 to 1350. These Norman remains are worthy of notice—the north doorway of, most probably, the 12th century, with a singular excision on the east capital, supposed to have been used for the hanging of a lamp on Saints' days; and the original font, with cable moulding; good specimens both. The doorway, with its flat, unsculptured lintel, indicates a date probably prior

to any of the Norman work found in Sherborne Abbey.

Passing now over many centuries, and coming to recent facts :—

In the years 1844 and 1845, whilst engaged in clearing away a heap of refuse which defiled a portion of the floor of my church, and which seemed to have been accumulated by an infinite number of generations of village sextons, and whilst removing, at the same time, a thickness of many inches of yellow and of whitewash, which entirely concealed the very fine mouldings which can now be seen in all their beauty, these discoveries were made which brought to light again some objects of interest, about which I may be permitted to make some brief remarks.

The first discovery made was that of the old Parish Register, buried beneath more than a foot of soil and rubbish and in apparently a completely rotten state. With extreme care and caution, which were necessary, for more than 12 months before, leaf by leaf the manuscript was dried, and brought to the state in which I have the pleasure of showing it to day. It dates from the year 1618, and contains many very interesting entries.

The second discovery was that of a fine piscina, in a very unusual position, forming a part of the east face of one of the piers separating the nave and the aisle. Above the piscina was an exceedingly beautiful and perfect, though very small, mural painting of the Virgin Mary, in the act of giving a blessing. The painting was highly artistic and the colours extremely vivid ; but they began speedily to fade on exposure, and portions of the painting dropped bit by bit from the wall, until in a few days the Virgin's figure was almost obliterated.

Some equally beautiful paintings, but less perfect, were found on the several faces of the other octagonal pier between the nave and the aisle. The most beautiful and

perfect of these represented the Virgin Mother seated on her throne, the infant Jesus on her lap, holding in her right hand a dove, with its head downwards and wings expanded, apparently an offering from a figure kneeling before her, from whose mouth proceeded a legend, of which, however, only small and unconnected portions were plainly visible. On another face of the same pier, adjoining the abovenamed painting, was St. Christopher, whose head and shoulders, staff, and one foot were most distinct and beautiful. On a third face two figures side by side; and on all the faces of the piers small portions of figures were more or less distinct. Above all the paintings, in one of the very fine mouldings of the capitals, were fragments of words, as if the name of each Saint had been painted above him. It is suggested that most probably, as the church is dedicated to All Saints, there were paintings of all the Saints of the calendar, or at least as many as the walls afforded space for.

More recently, whilst taking down, five years ago, a very old and dilapidated chancel, which has now been replaced by an entirely new building, a few objects of antiquarian interest were brought to light. At the lowest south angle of the east end was met with a very remarkable and very ancient arch, with a radius of from three to four feet, apparently rough Norman work. All attempts to preserve it, or to remove it without destroying it, I regret to say, utterly failed. No other surmise could be made as to its original purpose than that it was the entrance to an old burial place beneath the ancient chancel. The earliest recorded burial in it is that of Dame Stuckley, who died in 1402, but the arch referred to was apparently of a much earlier date.

In the foundations and walls of the old building was found a very large number of fragments of encaustic tiles,

indicating that the preceding edifice had been richly ornamented with tile-pavement. To a very few of those fragments—exhibited in the Local Museum—I venture to invite the Society's attention, soliciting at the same time some information which I am desirous to obtain as to the presence in my parish of some of the armorial bearings—that of Clare for example—but especially of a hunting scene, and of a knight in armour on horseback. I may be permitted to say that the authorities of the South Kensington Museum have expressed their desire to become possessed of the fragments representing the hunting scene. Some members of your Society will, doubtless, be able to throw some light upon the subject. If I mistake not, King John had a hunting seat not far from Milborne Port, and possibly the representation of the hunt, together with that of the royal arms, may be traced to, and commemorative of, that fact.

I shall trouble you, Mr. President, with only one sentence more. In my church tower are three bells; one bears the modern date of 1770, with, of course, the names of the then churchwardens. Another, without a word to the churchwardens' glory, bears the inscription 'An.no Do.mi.ni, 1595.' The oldest has on it the simple but suggestive legend, 'Maria.'

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The following are the Armorial Bearings on the tiles referred to :

De Albini or Daubney, *a fess fusilly, each fusil charged with an escallop* : Stanton of Whitestanton, *fretty. gu. and or* : Beauchamp of Hatch Beauchamp, *vair* : also fragments of *3 leopards in pile, a lion rampant*, and of initial letters.

An interesting notice of Pavement Tiles with Heraldic Bearings existing in Somersetshire churches was contributed by Mr. Lewis Way, to the Proceedings of the Archæological Institute, Bristol, 1851, p. 262. The first coat named above does not occur in his list. ED.

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