

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

A Survey of the Somerset Fairs

BY THE REV. N. F. HULBERT, M.A.

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AMONG the numerous institutions which have gone to the making of English social history, few can boast an activity at once so widespread and so continuous as that of the English fair. It is very probable that fairs existed in pre-conquest England, and certainly, during the three centuries which followed the Norman conquest they increased in number very rapidly, until by the end of the fifteenth century England was covered by a network of fairs and markets. In Somerset alone we have evidence of ninety-four fairs established by charter before 1500.

The rise in importance of the towns, with their opportunities for settled and continuous trade, naturally reduced the commercial importance of the fair, periodic by nature, as a prime channel of trade. Nevertheless, in 1729 in Somerset no less than 180 fairs are recorded as taking place annually. It is only in modern times, with the enormously improved methods of distribution and communication, that the death knell of the fair has been rung, and yet in 1933 in Somerset thirty-four fairs are listed in that *locus classicus*, Old Moore's Almanack.

These figures are sufficient to indicate the scope of the present work. It would obviously be impossible here, even if material were to hand, to attempt a complete history of each of these fairs. Little more can be done than to list them as they occur, and to note the chief points of interest as they are known, but it can at least be claimed that the result is comprehensive of all known fairs in the county.

It should be remembered that almost every village had its own feast, often called a fair, but such local festivities do not come within the scope of this article.

In order to facilitate reference, the county has been divided, more or less arbitrarily, into four districts :

(a). North-East, comprising all that area which includes Bath and Frome, divided from the North-West by a line drawn from Keynsham through Wells, and from the South by a line from Wells to Bruton.

(b). North-West, including all that area west of the above line and north of Bridgwater.

(c). South, the remainder of the county, which is the most thickly populated part of the whole.

(d). West, all the country lying westwards of a line drawn from the mouth of the Parrett through Taunton.

Each of these districts will be dealt with in turn, the fairs being described in order, and a note appended to each section containing the conclusions to be drawn from the survey of each district. A general summing up will be attempted at the end. With this brief introduction we turn to the first section.

(a). NORTH-EAST SOMERSET

Quite naturally, our survey of this part of the county will begin at BATH, ancient city of the Romans, and linked through many centuries of its history with the sister city of Wells in the title of the bishops of the see. No less than four fairs are to be distinguished in Bath, belonging respectively to the Bishop, the King, the Prior and Convent, and the citizens. All are now things of the past, so we may describe them in order of their appearance.

The first mention of a fair in Bath occurs in a papal bull, dated from the Lateran in 1156, in which Pope Adrian IV grants to Bishop Robert protection for his church, and the possessions thereof, namely, the Abbey of SS. Peter and Paul, 'with pleas, laws, judgements and customs, markets, tolls and fairs on either feast of St. Peter'. A later bull, addressed by Pope Alexander III to Bishop Rainaud in 1178 grants the same protection, including tolls and fairs 'as freely as king William II and king Henry I held the same, and as they were granted to Bishop John'.¹ This is evidently the source of Collinson's statement that the fair was granted to Bishop John de Villula by Henry I in 1101 'ut cum maximo honore ibi pontificalem suam sedem habeat'. It is not till 1284, however, that we find King Edward I granting a charter to Bishop Robert of Bath and Wells for the holding of this fair on the vigil, feast, and morrow of SS. Peter and Paul (29 June) and the seven days following. Thereafter the fair had a long and apparently continuous history. It is mentioned in various seventeenth-

¹ These bulls are listed both in the Chartulary of Bath Priory (*Som. Rec. Soc.*, vii, 68) and in the Calendar of MSS. of the Dean and Chapter of Wells (*Hist. MSS. Com.*, i, 439).

century lists of fairs, and by Collinson, though in his day it was held on 10 July, and for one day only. It is described in 1785, in the *Travellers Pocket Book* as a cattle fair, but was known later on as Cherry Fair, under which name it lingered on until 1851, being held in the High Street and adjoining streets of the city.

Of the King's fair at Bath little is known. It is mentioned in the presentments in answer to a commission of enquiry of the third year of Edward I, 1275, made by a jury empanelled for the purpose. This was the year in which Edward received the city back from Eleanor his wife, to whom he had presented it a year or two before, and gave it to William Merleghe.² The account of the city then received contains the statement that 'the King was accustomed to hold in the city of Bath a fair on the Beheading of St. John the Baptist' (29 Aug.), and goes on to complain that 'the Prior of Hinton had received a charter of Our Lord the King (Henry III) to hold a fair on the same day at Hinton, to the damage of the City of Bath of 10s. per annum'. Since no further mention of this fair exists we may presume that the rival fair at Hinton (which see) succeeded in ousting that at Bath.

The third fair to be noticed here is the Prior's fair, which dates from a charter of 1304 in which the King grants it for two days, *viz.* the vigil and feast of St. Lawrence the Martyr (10 Aug.). The fair was held in the manor of Barton (now occupied by Barton Street and sundry surrounding courts), an estate which had been leased by the monks as far back as the time of Henry III. Collinson, though with no authority, pushes back the origin of this fair to 1292. It would seem to have quickly gained in popularity and usefulness, for in 1335 Edward III, on the petition of the Prior and Convent, extended the time to eight days by adding four days before the feast and one after.³ It is worth noting too, that at this time—in 1341—the citizens of Bath were exempted from payment of 'stallage, murage, pavage, piccage'. The Prior's fair continued its existence after the Reformation had swept away its original owner, and finds place in the lists of 1729, but seems

² King and Watts, *Municipal Records of Bath*, 1189-1604.

³ *Charter Roll*, 9 Edward III, m. 1.

to have ceased by 1801 when Warner's *History of Bath* came to be written. It is tempting, in view of the absence of any documentary evidence, to suppose this fair of 10 August to have been transferred to the little village of Lansdown, a couple of miles away, where it had a further period of activity to be described below.

Finally, the citizens themselves, already released from the payment of tolls, received from Henry VIII in 1545 the grant of a fair to be held on the first day of February and six following days, 'together with a court of Piepowder, and all other rights and appurtenances'.⁴ This fair, as it was the latest to be granted, was also the last to survive. It came to be known as the Orange fair, and was held in Walcot Street. Like other fairs, it shrank to a single day, and was associated with the feast of the Purification (2 Feb.). Later still it was held on the 14th of the month, and is mentioned on that day by Collinson. The fair lingered on till 1854, when the following extract from the *Bath Chronicle* of 16 February of that year records it: 'The Bath Orange Fair, which under the powers of the City Act has been curtailed to a cattle fair, took place on Monday last in Walcot St.'

One further reference to Bath comes from the Municipal accounts of 1596 where, under the date 14 October, an item is recorded, 'Paid for crieing Lamas Fair iiiid'. It seems likely that this refers to the Prior's fair on 10 August.

Three more fairs in the close neighbourhood of Bath must next be noted. The first of these is that held on the hill at LANSDOWN on the same date, August 10, as the fair held in earlier days at 'Le Barton by Bath'. A charter of Queen Anne, 1708, grants this fair on 11 and 12 August for ninety-five years. The *Travellers Pocket Book* (1785) notes it as a fair for cattle, cheese, and toys, and Collinson in 1792 describes it as 'a large fair held on three successive days beginning on 10 August on the top of the down, for horses, horned cattle, sheep, cheese, and pedlary'. As a cattle fair it remained, though reduced to one day, until at least the middle of the nineteenth century. A vivid description of Lansdown fair may be found

⁴ *Charter Roll*, 36 Henry VIII. Cf. King and Watts, *Municipal Records*.

in Lord George Sanger's book, *Seventy Years a Showman*. It will be of interest to give a portion of this description here :

' From place to place we went with our little show, and at length found ourselves at Lansdown, near Bath, for the big cattle, sheep and pleasure fair that then used to be held annually on August 10th at the hill village which is some two miles from the old city. . . . Bath at this time (*circa* 1848) had in its slums what was considered to be the most brutish and criminal mob in England, and for these people Lansdown fair was, as they put it, their night out. . . . Though it lasted but one day, the fair was always a big one, occupying a great space on a broad hillside. On this booths, shows, and refreshment tents of all descriptions were erected to form an enormous ring, in the centre of which were the droves of sheep, cattle and horses which formed the staple of the fair to which the country folk flocked from all the district round. . . . As dusk fell the regular business people—the farmers, graziers, and others who had been dealing in the horses, cattle, farm produce and such like—left the fair to the pleasure seekers. The drinking booths, gingerbread stalls, and shows began to twinkle with lights . . . as night advanced the character of the crowd gradually changed. It grew rougher and rougher, fights were frequent, oaths and screams were mingled with coarse songs from the drinking and dancing booths, which were filled with a motley throng.' After describing the arrival of the mob from Bath, Sanger continues, ' the scenes which followed were almost indescribable. Not content with drinking all they could, the ruffians staved in barrels, turned on taps, and let the liquor run to waste. Then they started to wreck the booths. Canvas was torn to shreds, platforms were smashed up and made bonfires of, wagons were battered and overturned, show-fronts that had cost some of their owners small fortunes were battered to fragments. Everywhere was riot, ruin, and destruction.'

It must have been scenes like this that hastened the closing of many of the old country fairs. The reader is referred to the rest of Sanger's description for an account of rough showman's justice on that occasion.⁵

Another fair under the shadow of the walls of Bath was that at LYNCOMBE, granted in 1304 to the Prior and Convent on the same charter as that which conferred the fair at Barton. The Lyncombe fair was to be held annually on the vigil and feast of the Invention of the Cross (3 May). The festivals of the Holy Cross were not infrequently chosen in Somerset as fair days, and there seems to have been some considerable

⁵ Lord George Sanger tells us in his book that he himself began life with a peepshow in St. James fair, Bristol.

devotion in the county in ancient days to the symbol of Christianity. Indeed, a tradition existed that a portion of the true cross had been discovered in the year 1030 at Montacute. This fair, like many another, seems to have pursued an uneventful course through the centuries. It survived at least until Collinson's day, though by this time confined to one day only, namely 4 May. The historian records that it was known as Holloway fair, being held at the top of that street.

Before leaving the neighbourhood of Bath itself, there remains the fair at LANGRIDGE to be mentioned. Granted in 1272 to Anselm Basset on his manor of 'Langerungg', the fair was to be held annually on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Mary Magdalene, the patron saint of the parish church. As is so often the case, a long period of silence only comes to an end with the eighteenth-century lists, both those of 1729 and 1785 containing this fair. After that time the fair seems to have suddenly multiplied, for while the *Travellers Pocket Book* (1785) gives a second fair on 2 August, Collinson in 1792 mentions no less than four annual fairs at Langridge, *viz.* the second Monday in Lent; Old Midsummer day; Michaelmas; and 11 November. Every one of these fairs has since disappeared, nor do any records of them seem to have survived. It must remain doubtful whether such sporadic growths can be dignified with the name of fair at all.

This group of fairs in and around Bath seems comparatively isolated, and we must come south to HINTON CHARTERHOUSE for the next. The fair at Hinton had a short history there, for it was removed after rather less than a century to the neighbouring village of Norton St. Philip, where its later history is recorded.

The fair appears to have been granted by Henry III, probably about 1254, to the Prior and Convent of Hinton, and was held on the vigil, day, and morrow of the 'Decollation' of St. John the Baptist, 29 August, to which saint the church was dedicated. Our information however, comes at second-hand from a charter of Edward III in 1345, which states that, 'whereas by the clamour, noise, and violence of men fre-

quencing the fair, which is held in a place near the church,⁶ the holy offices and devotion of the Convent are in various ways disturbed, the said Prior and Convent have returned their charter to be cancelled in the chancery'. In return for this deprivation the king granted the monks leave to hold a fair in their neighbouring manor of Norton at the same date, which should be held to include the feast and the two preceding days. We have already noted above the objection lodged by the monks of Bath against this fair, and that at Norton on 1 May, 'being held in a place only three leagues from the city'. We are not told whether they received any compensation for the alleged damage, nor does it seem likely that the removal of the fair was in any way due to this or any subsequent complaint.

Two miles away is the village of NORTON ST. PHILIP, also the property of the convent of Hinton, where two fairs are to be noted, one originally granted to the place itself, and the other transferred from Hinton. The indigenous fair was granted to the Prior and Convent in 1255, to be held annually on the vigil, feast, and morrow of SS. Philip and James, the patron saints of the church. It is possible that an echo of the dispute with the monks of Bath is reflected in the frequent changes which occur in the days of this fair, which give its history a kind of uneasiness. It may also stand as an example of the leisurely progress of monastic and other disputes in the Middle Ages.

In 1293 the Prior and Convent successfully petitioned the king for a charter enabling them to hold the fair on the three days preceding the feast, instead of the vigil, feast and morrow of the original grant.⁷ The days were again rearranged in 1346 to include the feast and the two days following.⁸ Finally in 1353 leave was obtained to extend the fair to five days, *viz.* the vigil, the feast, and the three days preceding.⁹ Thus constituted the fair seems to have continued through the intervening centuries till it appears in 1785 as 'a great fair for cloth, etc.'. Cattle must have been a staple of the fair, for it is as a cattle

⁶ A field in front of Hinton House is still called 'Fair Close'.

⁷ *Charter Roll*, 22 Edward I, m. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 Edward III, m. 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 Edward III, m. 4.

fair that it lingered on till 1902, when it came to an end. 'The cattle used to be tied to the wall', writes the Vicar of Norton, 'all the way up the road from the church to the George Inn, and then brought into a field alongside of the wall for sale'. This field is still called 'Fair Close'.

The second fair at Norton is that transferred in 1345. Held on the two days preceding the feast, and the feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (29 Aug.), and for the same commodities, cloth and cattle, as its fellow, this fair also finds place in the lists of 1729 and 1785. It also has ceased to be held, presumably dying out at the same time as the May fair.

In addition to these well attested fairs, various vague notices occur in the old lists, among which are 27 April (1729), 21 and 27 March (1785). Collinson, after speaking of the May and August fairs, described above, says, 'two others, formerly famous for cattle and cloth, have long since been discontinued'. No information is forthcoming, however, about these other fairs.

A mile or two from Norton lies the hamlet of FAULKLAND in the parish of Hemington. Here in 1263 a fair was granted to John de Courtney to be held on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Barnabas. No such fair exists to-day, though I am told that it died out only one hundred to one hundred and fifty years ago. No mention, however, is made of this fair in the various lists consulted, so that it is possible that there may have been a short-lived revival only, about that time.

A little more is known of the fair at ROAD, a few miles east of Faulkland. This was granted in 1283 to Lawrence de Sancto Mauro, or St. Maur, to be held annually on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Margaret (2 Sept.). Here again, however, there seems to be no means of bridging the long gap between this date and the eighteenth century lists. These give (1729) the Sunday after 29 August, and (1785) the Monday after August 29, and describe the fair as held for cattle and cheese. Collinson mentions the above grant, but though the fair must still have existed in his day, makes no reference to its activity. An old book on Somerset, published in 1822, says that 'Road was

formerly a large market town, and a fair is held there on the Monday after August 29'. This date seems to have been changed about this time to the Monday after 9 September, for the Parish History of North Bradley and Road Hill, 1884, states that 'until recently a large fair was held' on that date (called Road Revel Sunday) in a field called 'Blundersleigh', for the sale of cheese, and as a pleasure fair. The book goes on to say that Frome had now become the great cheese mart of the district. It would seem, therefore, that the fair came to an end sometime between 1822 and 1884, though one or two people in the village think it was held more recently.

The quaint little village of BECKINGTON is among those whose fair day was that of its patron saint, in this case St. George. The fair was granted to John de Erlegh in 1318, and this is the sole reference we have been able to trace. In itself, of course, this is no proof either that the fair was ever held, or that it enjoyed a long existence.

We come now to FROME, and here we stand on firmer ground, for the Frome fairs are still in existence, and until recently retained many of their old characteristics. Four fairs have at one time or another been held here, two of which survive to-day, namely in February and November. Those no longer held were in July and September.

1. *The September Fair.*

On 28 August 1270, William Braunch and Joan his wife received a grant for themselves and their heirs of a yearly fair at their manor of Frome on the vigil, feast, and morrow of the Nativity of St. Mary (8 Sept.). No further notice of this fair is obtainable until 1785, when it occurs in the *Travellers Pocket Book* under the date 14 September, *New Style*, and is designated a cheese fair. It appears to have lingered on for some years subsequently, for Collinson makes mention of four fairs here, though 'only two are of any account', *i.e.* those in February and November. Nevertheless, the lineal descendant of this fair may surely be traced in the large gathering now held in the last week of September, and known as the Cheese show.

This 'show' has become one of the largest in the kingdom, and is enhanced by the addition of many other interests, horses, sheep, cattle, poultry and farm implements.

2. *The February and July Fairs.*

In 1492 Sir Robert Willoughby, Lord of Broke, and steward of the household, successfully petitioned the king on behalf of his ward, Edmund Leversegge, son of a former tenant in chief, and Lord of Frome, and was granted the right to hold two annual fairs.¹⁰ The first of these was to be held on the three days preceding St. Matthias day, 24 February, the day, and the day following. This is the fair which still survives, and will be noted below. The second fair granted to Willoughby was to be held on the vigil, day, and morrow of St. Mary Magdalene, 22 July. This July fair seems to have been prolonged till the eighteenth century, when it is listed in 1785 as a cattle and cheese fair, and by Collinson on the same level as the September fair. It has now ceased to exist.

The February fair, described in 1785 as for cattle and cheese, is now held on the last Wednesday in the month. The reason for its dissociation from St. Matthias day is as follows: Frome has two market-days, Wednesday and Saturday, both included in the charter of 1492, the former being 'big market' and the latter 'small market'. The monthly market also falls on a Wednesday, the last in each month. It has been found convenient, therefore, to hold the two remaining fairs regularly on the last Wednesday of February and November. Both fairs are now reduced to one day each. (The Wednesday market seems to be of pre-conquest antiquity, being mentioned in Domesday as worth 46s. 6d. per annum. The Saturday market was granted to William Braunch by Henry III in the charter quoted above. Both were confirmed to Edmund Leversegge in 1492.)

3. *The November Fair.*

No trace can be found of the origin of this fair—known as St. Catherine's fair, and held in the eighteenth century on

¹⁰ The original charter—7 Henry VII—may be seen in the museum of the Frome Literary Institution.

25 November, the feast day of the saint. It may have taken its name from the patron saint of the chapel which stood on the top of Catherine Hill. This chapel was in existence as early as the latter half of the thirteenth century, for one of its chaplains, Hugo by name, signs as witness to the deed of sale of some land in Frome at that date.

The fair is called a cattle and cheese fair in 1785, and is mentioned by Collinson as one of the only two that were of any account in his time. It is strange that cloth does not seem to have formed the staple of these fairs, since the historian notes that the town manufactured in his day 160,000 yards annually.

We are indebted to Mr. J. O. Lewis, of Clumber House, Frome, for an account of the latter day aspect of the Frome fairs. A market company was formed in the early seventies of last century. It bought the rights of the markets and fairs from the lord of the manor, the Earl of Cork, and one of the ideas was to take the fairs and weekly cattle markets out of the streets into a close-by field, now called the market field. Before that time, all was carried on in the streets, cheese pitched on the pavement on straw before the churchyard gates, cattle tied to the many iron pillars and railings at the side of the streets, while horses showed off their paces in the roadway. Sheep were penned in moveable pens in front of the old Guard house near the bridge. Butter and eggs were sold on a raised paved portion of the market-place, and shooting galleries, ginger-bread stalls, toys, etc., occupied the same pavement. There were large crowds, and when it rained the roadway was ankle deep in mud. Still, some 3,000 extra folk would visit the town on the first day. Fifty years ago a second day, with only a normal number of patrons, was kept up, but for many years now the fairs have been of one day's duration only.

In the near neighbourhood of Frome there lingered until only a few years ago one of the few winter fairs in the county. This was at NUNNEY, where in 1260 Henry de Monte Forti was granted the annual fair on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Martin, 11 November, together with a weekly market on

Wednesday. The original charter is at Taunton Castle, having been bequeathed to the Somerset Archaeological Society in 1936 by Mr. A. M. G. Daniel.¹¹

It is recorded that in 1279 Nicholas Braunch, Lord of Frome, attempted to stop the market on the pretext that it was an injury to his own market at Frome on Saturday. Monte Forti, however, was able to produce his own charter in defence. The fair was listed in the eighteenth century as one for cattle, sheep, and pigs. There are some who remember Nunney fair, though it has now ceased to be held, and in fact the date 11 November will in future be associated in men's minds with quite other emotions than those generated by such a gathering.

The village of WHATLEY, a mile or so north of Nunney, once had a fair, granted in 1442 to David Servyngton, Esquire, and held on the vigil, day, and morrow of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr, 7 July. Of this fair, however, I have been unable to find any information at all. It was held as late as 1729, but disappears from subsequent lists, while no indication is forthcoming as to the staple commodities which justified its existence.

¹¹ The following translation of the document has been made by Miss N. Dermott Harding, Archivist to the Somerset County Council Record Office :

Henry, by the grace of God, King of England, Lord of Ireland and Duke of Aquitaine, to Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Priors, Earls, Barons, Justices, Sheriffs, Reeves, Ministers and all his Bailiffs and faithful people, greeting. Know ye that we have granted and by this our charter have confirmed to Henry de Monte Forti (Montfort) that he and his heirs for ever shall have one market each week on Wednesday at his Manor of Nuny (Nunney) in the County of Somerset ; and one fair in the same place each year to endure for three days, namely, on the vigil and on the day and on the morrow of St. Martin ; except that market and that fair be to the hurt of neighbouring markets and neighbouring fairs. Wherefore, we will and firmly command, for us and our heirs, that the aforesaid Henry and his heirs for ever shall have the aforesaid market and fair with all the liberties and free customs to such a market and fair pertaining ; except that market and that fair be to the hurt of neighbouring markets and neighbouring fairs, as is aforesaid. These being witnesses : the reverend fathers Baldwin, Archbishop of Canterbury, Walter, Bishop of Worcester, Simon de Monte Forti, Earl of Leicester, Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Essex, Philip Basset, James de Aldythlegh (Audley), John Maunsell (Mansell), Treasurer of York, Peter de Monte Forti, Robert Waleround (Walerond) and others. Given by our hand at Westminster on the twenty-fourth day of October in the forty-fourth year of our reign. [1260, Oct. 24]

Close by, on the Radstock road, lies the village of BUCKLAND DENHAM. Here in 1239 the lord of the manor, Geoffery de Dynant, received the grant of a fair at Michaelmas. This was confirmed in 1393 to John Dinham by letters patent of Richard II. Collinson erroneously associated this fair with Corton Denham in the extreme south of the county. Buckland fair was still in existence in 1729, but seems to have died out before the end of the century.

Another small fair among the many of which our knowledge is strictly limited is that at BABINGTON, the next village. This was held on 2 September, the feast of St. Margaret the Virgin, patron saint of the village church. It was granted in 1285 to William de Botereus, and was to last for three days. The fair appears in no list of later days, and possibly continued only a few years from its foundation.

Quite otherwise is the case of MIDSOMER NORTON, where we can trace the history of the fair very nearly century by century from the start. The original charter conferring the right of holding the fair at Norton was given by Henry III to Hugh de Vivonia in 1248. He was granted the day before the vigil, the vigil, feast and morrow of St. John the Baptist (24 June). Since then the fair has undergone many vicissitudes, though there is no evidence to show that the original charter was ever annulled.

The manor was held during the years 1346–1386 by Edmund Fitz-Herbert, and it is recorded that he took one quarter of the tolls from the annual fair, which for some reason or other was then held on St. Mark's day, 25 April.¹² In 1495 the manor passed to the Duchy of Cornwall, but the next reference to the fair occurs in a survey by John Norton, 1611, in which he states that it yielded to the lord of the manor a profit of scarcely more than 10s. or 12s. a year. This was collected by the reeve and bailiff of the manor, who erected stalls and booths. The fair at this time was held on a different day again, namely Good Friday.

On that day it remained all through the century and nearly

¹² Reprint of a lecture by Rev. W. Morris, vicar, 1882.

the whole of the next, various scattered references enabling us to keep track of its history. Thus the Patent Roll of Charles I, 1628, contains a lease of the Church House at Norton, the fishery and the annual fair to one John Walter, chief baron of the Exchequer, the sum of 3s. per annum enabling him to claim the fair. The Parliamentary survey of 1650 places the profits of the fair at 10s. Another lease of 1679 stipulates Good Friday, and this unusual date is continued in 1729.

By 1789,¹³ however, the date of the fair had been changed back to 25 April, St. Mark's day, and in this change we may doubtless trace the influence of the religious revival under John Wesley. Collinson notes the fair on this day, and speaks of it as held for cattle, pigs, and pedlary. The latest charter, drawn in 1898, grants the fair to the Prince of Wales, as Duke of Cornwall, and sometime between this and the beginning of the present century a second day was devoted to pleasure.

The fair still exists, though now almost entirely a pleasure fair. I am told that within living memory it was a serious cattle fair, and that to-day at least one beast must change hands, and that the fair must be held in the open street. Probably down to the reign of King Edward I the churchyard held the fair, and it was subsequently kept in the church square, until, as it grew and extended, it reached the market-place where it remains to-day.

At STRATTON-ON-THE-FOSSE, the site of the modern Abbey of Downside, a fair was granted to Thomas de Sancto Vigore (St. Vaux) in 1281, to be held on the vigil, feast, and morrow of the Nativity of St. Mary. But nothing whatever seems to be known of this fair, and we must perforce class it with those whose existence seems to have been short lived.

A minority of the fairs were held on the moveable feasts. Such was that at CHEWTON MENDIP, granted 'of special grace' in 1348 to Henry le Fitz Roger on the vigil, day, and morrow of the Ascension. No information is available about this fair until its closing years. It occurs in the list of 1729 under the

¹³ Survey of William Simpson, 1789.

date 'Holy Thursday', and Collinson mentions it under the same title as having been held 'formerly for cattle, now toys, etc.' The fair must have lingered on for some time longer, for an old man in the village, born in 1848, tells me that he remembers as a boy of ten going to the fair, which was held in what is still called the 'Fair Paddock' near the Waldegrave Arms. He says that it was mainly a sheep fair, and was discontinued about 1860. If the fair was a sheep fair it seems more likely that it may have been changed to October, as indeed the old villager thought, than maintained on Ascension day. No documents are available which would throw light on the last days of the fair.

Of the fair at BINEGAR we have no early information. The first reference to it occurs in the *Travellers Pocket Book*, 1785, which makes mention of a fair lasting from Monday to Thursday in Whitsun week. The days, according to this list, are devoted as follows :

Whit-Monday—all sorts of cattle.

Whit-Tuesday—cloth and horses.

Whit-Wednesday—sheep.

Whit-Thursday—horses again.

Collinson in 1792 speaks of 'a very large fair lasting the whole of Whitsun week, for cattle, woollen cloth and toys', and declares that it was anciently held in the high street of Wells, but that in the last century (*i.e.* the seventeenth) when the plague prevailed, was removed to Binegar. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, it is understood, was able to demand a fee of ten shillings at the fair.

There are a few entries in the churchwardens' accounts of Binegar to the effect that certain sums of money were paid to two men to guard the church during the fair, since it was, and is held in the fair-field surrounding the church. The fair still exists, but has shrunk in size, since horses are no longer in great demand. It is principally now a cheap-jack fair, and forms an occasion for the assembling of gypsies.

At CROSCOMBE the only mention of a fair comes from Collinson, who makes the entirely unsupported statement that

the ' place still retains the fair of the grant of Edward I '. The fair was held on Lady-day apparently, but I have been unable to find any trace of the charter in the Rolls series or elsewhere. The church here is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Two fairs remain to be mentioned in this part of the county. The first is that at SHEPTON MALLETT obtained by Hugh de Vivonia in 1235, to be held on the vigil, feast, and morrow of SS. Peter and Paul, the patron saints of the parish church. The charter contains also the grant of a market. The grant was drawn in March 1235, and by October of the same year the following prohibition testifies to the watchful eye which a medieval prelate kept upon his own :¹⁴

Mandatum est vicecomiti Somerset' quod mercatus quod Hugo de Vivon' levare fecit in Sypton ad nocumentum mercati venerabilis patris J. Bathoniensis episcopi in Welles, sine dilatione prohiberi faciat et per totam balliam suam clamari nedecetero teneatur.

Whether the bishop attempted to go beyond his terms of reference and suppress the fair with the market is not clear, though the following rather involved piece of writing seems capable of some such interpretation. It is dated March 1236 :

Mandatum est vicecomiti Somerset quod non obstante eo quod mercatum quod Hugo de Vivon' levaverat apud manerium suum de Sypton amotum fuit per preceptum regis propter nocumentum venerabilis patris J. Bathoniensis episcopi apud Welles clamari faciat apud predictum manerium ipsius Hugo quandam feriam per tres dies duraturum, viz. in vigilia et in die et in crastino apostolorum Petri et Pauli.

Some time between this and the next reference the manor passed to the Beauchamp family, and the fair seems to have died out, for a fresh charter of 1318 grants to Cecily de Bello Campo another fair, also in June, on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Barnabas.¹⁵ This fair continued until the eighteenth century, though by 1729 it had been changed to 8 August. It is described in 1785 as a fair for ' all sorts of cattle ' and cheese. Collinson definitely asserts that this August fair is the same as

¹⁴ For this and the following reference see *Close Roll*, 19 and 20 Henry III.

¹⁵ Immediately above this on the *Charter Roll* occurs the grant of a fair on the feast of the Ascension to ' Reginald son of Reginald ', but a note on this charter states that ' afterwards the charter was changed on the information of Tho. de Charlton as afterwards '.

that granted to Cecily, and adds that it was known as Silver Street Fair.

Finally, we must note the grant of a fair at EVERCREECH in 1269 to the Prior and Convent of Montacute. The fair was to be held 'on their manor of Crich' on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Matthew (21 Sept.), but nothing further is known of it. It does not seem to have survived into the eighteenth century, like so many of its fellows, for the lists omit any mention of the place.

Of the twenty-seven fairs, then, which have at one time or another existed in this part of the county, the majority were of very early foundation, fifteen having been founded during the thirteenth century. One or two of the fairs seem to have come to an end in little more than a hundred years, but nearly all enjoyed a life of at least four centuries. By 1850 or 1860 a slow attrition had accounted for all but three. Fairs still exist in Midsomer Norton, Binegar, and Frome, but in each case the fair is a shadow of its former self. Perhaps in one case, the September cheese fair at Frome, there is still an importance which warrants the use of this pretentious term.

Although in the earliest days the fairs were general marts, the tendency must always have been for each to be frequented on account of some special commodity which circumstances made it possible to concentrate at that spot. The great majority of the fairs described above survived as cattle fairs, in which term is included the sale of sheep, horses, and pigs. Next to this cheese was the most frequent staple of the fair, and in only two cases—Norton St. Philip and Binegar—is cloth noted as a commodity in this part of Somerset.

(b). NORTH-WEST SOMERSET

A useful link with the preceding section is to be found at KEYNSHAM, on the borders of the county. A convent of Austin Canons was established here, and to them in 1303 king Edward I granted an annual fair, to be held on the vigil, feast, and morrow of the Assumption (15 Aug.). An inspeximus and confirmation of this grant made in 1463 is witnessed by the

Bishop of Durham, Humfrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, and others.

As in other places, the fair lingered on, though the convent shared the common fate in the sixteenth century, and two hundred years after its original owners had departed, its life remained unexhausted. The fair is noted in 1785 as held for cattle and cheese, and Collinson speaks of a considerable manufacture of wool here. This August fair remained in a flourishing condition until recent years, enriched by the addition of the usual roundabouts. It was latterly held on the Wednesday following August 10, and is still observed, though now indistinguishable from the ordinary market.

The eighteenth century lists speak of a second fair at Keynsham, also connected with a festival of the Blessed Virgin, *viz.* 25 March, but I have been unable to ascertain the origin of this fair. It continued, however, until about 1857, when the transference of the sale of cattle to the August fair caused its demise.

At the little village of QUEEN CHARLTON, now administered with Keynsham as one ecclesiastical parish, there is a reference in Collinson to a fair 'granted by Queen Elizabeth in 1572', to be held on July 20, and still continued in his day.

Queen Charlton was formerly on the main road from Bath to Bristol and it was as the Queen passed through the village on one of her visits to Bristol that the fair was founded. We are able, by reference to the Lord Chamberlain's accounts, to fix this royal visit as occurring in 1574, and this is confirmed by the churchwardens' accounts of St. James, Bristol, where we find that the bells were rung daily during the week that Her Majesty spent in the city. We must correct the statement of Collinson, therefore, and fix the origin of this fair in 1574. No such fair exists to-day, nor can have done for many years, as all remembrance of it has long ceased.

It will be convenient now to shift our ground right across to the coast, and to work our way south-wards from Clevedon.

At CLEVEDON, then, a fair was granted by Edward III in

1346, the letters patent, bearing the endorsement 'by Calais', being drawn actually during the prosecution of the famous siege. The fair was granted to Edmund de Clyvedon, to be held on the feast of St. Peter's Chains, 1 August. The chapel at Clevedon Court still bears the dedication of St. Peter. An interesting list of witnesses at the foot of the original charter includes at least one Somerset landowner, Thomas de Bello Campo, Earl of Warwick, together with Edward, Prince of Wales, Richard Earl of Arundel, William de Bohun and others.

Nothing at all seems to be known of this fair, except that one old man remembers his father speaking of a fair about seventy or eighty years ago, held in some fields in sight of the sea (where the Leagrove Road houses now stand). It is impossible to say whether this was a continuation of the original fair, though it seems unlikely as the old lists are silent, and our informant cannot remember what time of year the fair was held.

Another fair whose history is lost in obscurity is that at WESTON-IN-GORDANO. Nevertheless, the charter of 55 Henry III (1271) preserves for us the grant to Ralph de Bakepuz of a yearly fair on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul 'at his manor of Weston in Gordenlond'. The parish church of the village is dedicated to these saints, which is in part a confirmation, though indeed, so long is it since the fair has been held that local authorities are sceptical of its former existence.

At PORTBURY, Maurice, son of Thomas de Berkeley, received in 1348 the grant 'of special grace' of two fairs to be held, one on the feast of St. John before the Latin Gate (6 May), and the other 'on All Saints (1 Nov.)'. This Maurice was the son of that Thomas de Berkeley who recovered the estates forfeited by a preceding Maurice, and this grant, therefore, may be taken as a sign of renewed prosperity and royal favour.

Both these fairs seem to have come to an end before the eighteenth century, for in the lists of that date the only fair mentioned is one held on Whit-Sunday. Quite possibly with the reduction of Saints' days which followed the Reformation, the now neglected festival of St. John before the Latin Gate was changed into the familiar Whitsuntide as fair day, since it

would normally occur near enough to the old day. This is, however, pure conjecture.

No fairs have been held in Portbury within living memory, nor is there any annual gathering that may be a relic of the fair.

Almost due south of Portbury stands the village of WRAXALL, and here the monotonously similar situation confronts us, namely, a very early reference to the fair, combined with a total lack of any later information. An *inseximus* of 36 Edward III (1362) records the earlier charter (not on the charter roll) which granted in 1291 a fair at 'Wrockeshale' to Ellen de Gorges, and confirms it to Theobald her kinsman and heir. The fair is to be held on the vigil, day, and morrow of All Souls¹⁶ and the five days following. The parish church is dedicated to All Saints.

Although there is no memory of a fair at Wraxall, evidence of the market still exists in the levelled plinth and basement of the market cross, which stands just outside the lych-gate, and out of which grew later a fine old elm tree called the 'Cross Elm'. 'Here', says the parish historian, 'stood the whipping-post and stocks'.

BACKWELL, a few miles due south again, presents a picture of a fair of simple continuance, uncomplicated by any additional fairs, and unchanged in date, save for its reduction from three days to one, from its commencement till the present day.

The fair takes its rise from a charter of Henry III in 1270 to Ela the famous Countess of Salisbury and with her husband joint founder of Salisbury Cathedral. The fair was granted for the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Matthew (21 Sept.), and continues on that day through the centuries. It is a sheep and cattle fair and is now held in a field at Farleigh in the parish, its home for hundreds of years. This field, of course, is called 'Fairfield', and nearby one may see the Fairfield Inn.

Backwell fair has now shrunk to pretty small proportions, though in 1934 some two thousand sheep and about 150 colts

¹⁶ Not All Saints day, as Collinson declares, who also states that Theobald de Gorges *procured* the fair of Edward III.

and horses were on sale. The usual roundabouts now form the pleasure fair.

We may pause here to remark that, as the reader has already noticed, such a straightforward account is the exception. It appears to be the fate of the would-be historian of the fairs, that he should find his origins clear and the later history obscure, or else, if he is fortunate enough to possess recent information, to lack any origin at all. Only occasionally may he have it both ways.

Thus, when we turn to CONGRESBURY fair, we find the origin obscure, though the following document is perhaps a *terminus a quo*:¹⁷

Westminster, Feb. 17, 1227. Grant to Jocelin Bishop of Bath and Wells and his successors in frankalmoin of the manor of Cungrebir, with the advowson of the church . . . which manor and advowson had been given to the said Bishop by King John, whose charter the king has inspected, to be held by payment of £35 tale. Grant also that the same may have fairs for two or three days, and markets for one day in the week in all their manors, so it be not to the damage of neighbouring fairs and markets.

This permissive licence is all that we have been able to trace, though Collinson, quoting Adam de Domerham, speaks of the charter of Henry III, as though it gave definite grant of a particular fair.

By the eighteenth century, however, the fair had become fixed on September 14, and is mentioned in 1785 as a fair for cattle and horses. It is still kept up on the Monday following the second Sunday in September, and after the morning sale of cattle, etc., the day is given up to pleasure. The manor has now passed to the Trustees of the Bristol Municipal Charities, who can throw no light on the history of the fair.

The village of WRINGTON, set in its lovely valley under the Mendip hills, was granted a fair in 1332. The Abbot of Glastonbury, as lord of the manor, was the recipient, and the fair was to be held on the vigil, day, and morrow of the Nativity of St. Mary (8 Sept.). On this date it lasted till the early years

¹⁷ *Charter Roll*, 11 Henry III.

of the eighteenth century, appearing in 1729 but not in later lists. Nothing is now known of it, though there is a vague belief that it used to be held in the wide street of the village.

The fair at **UBLEY** is almost the only 'Bartholomew fair' in the county, being held on the feast of the patron saint of the church there. It dates from 1318, when Richard Damory received a charter for his manor of *Ubbele*, and on St. Bartholomew's day it continued until at least 1785, when it appears as a fair for cattle, hogs, and cheese. In later days it has become detached from the saint's day, being now held on the first Monday following the feast (24 Aug.). It is now chiefly a cattle fair.

Quite close is the village of **WEST HARPTREE**, and here again we are back in our familiar old position of ignorance. A fair was granted 'of special grace' in 1414 to John Tiptoft, knight, and Thomas Bays, Esquire, to be held on the feast of the Ascension and the three days preceding, upon a certain common of theirs in the manor of 'Westhartree'. No such fair exists to-day, or can have done for a long time, for no reference to it is made in any of the lists consulted, the above entry in the charter roll of 2 Henry V being the sole mention of it which has come to hand.

Climbing now to the heights of Mendip, we come to an interesting example at **PRIDDY**, of the duplication of fairs, for like that at Binegar, the fair at Priddy was reputed to have been transferred in 1348 from Wells on account of plague. The inhabitants, however, have ever since rigidly adhered to an arrangement which was originally intended to be temporary, and so the fair at Priddy has lasted to the present day. It has always been held in August, and appears in 1785 on the tenth of the month, for oxen, horses, and sheep. In Collinson's day it was kept on the 21st—the date is still kept—and was described by him as 'a large fair for horses, sheep and horned cattle'. Its date in the height of summer suggests that it was originally the midsummer fair at Wells.

The fair is now held on the lower green of the village, and is

a sheep fair, though there used to be a day devoted to the sale of horses. The profits seem to-day to belong to several private people who are described as the shareholders, and who own the hurdles on the green. A local proverb has it that 'The first rain after Priddy fair is the first rain of winter'.

Westward from Priddy, and at the foot of the hills, lies CHEDDAR, and here Collinson remarks that two fairs, on 4 May and 29 October, were 'procured by Jocelin, Bishop of Bath & Wells, 19 Henry III'. The charter roll of that year contains no recorded grant, but from the churchwardens' accounts of the parish church, which commence in the year 1612, we learn that the fairs were originally held on the festivals of St. George and St. Luke, the alteration in date in Collinson's day being due, of course, to the adoption of the *New Style* calendar.

The churchwardens' accounts referred to above contain entries for both these fairs, and indicate that they were then administered by the officers of the church, so much being received yearly from the fairs, and money being spent on timber, presumably for the erection of cattle pens. It is as cattle and sheep fairs that they persist into the eighteenth century, being mentioned both in 1785 and by Collinson.

The fairs do not exist as such to-day, though there remains a link with that of St. Luke in so far as the weekly auction mart in Cheddar on Wednesday is always enlarged, with the inclusion of sheep, when St. Luke's tide comes round.

We now come to AXBRIDGE, where three fairs have at one time been held. The first of these is that granted in 1279 to the Bishop of Bath and Wells on the vigil and feast of St. Barnabas and the two days following. It has been stated that this fair had been granted some time earlier than this to William Longsword by Henry III, and that this charter, which may still be seen at Axbridge, is merely a transfer of rights.¹⁸ This St. Barnabas fair persisted into the eighteenth century, and finds place in the list of 1785 as a cattle and sheep fair. It has long since died out.

¹⁸ Cf. 'Axbridge Charters', *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xv (1868), ii, 6-20, by the Rev. W. Hunt.

The public records of Axbridge are still apparently awaiting classification, so that we have been unable to trace the remaining fairs back beyond 1729, when mention is made of two, on the feasts respectively of Candlemas (2 Feb.), and the Annunciation (25 Mar.). The former of these lingered on until about thirty-five years ago, when it came to an end. The Lady-day fair was also a cattle fair, and has outlived the others, surviving to-day. The mention of an important industry in tanned hides in Axbridge is of interest in the light of these cattle fairs.

There are several fairs in the vicinity of Axbridge which must be mentioned. The first of these is at SHIPHAM, where a charter of 1309 grants an annual fair, 'at the instance of Richard Lovel', to William Malherbe on the feast of St. Leonard, the patron saint of the church. One reference only serves to connect this with the gathering of to-day. This occurs in a list of fairs appended to 'A general view of the Agriculture of the County of Somerset', by John Billingsley, 1795, and describes the fair at Shipham as taking place on November 17, *New Style*, among those fairs 'to which Somerset farmers resort to buy Lean Stock'.

To-day in Shipham there are two gatherings—in May and November, which go by the name of fairs. But although within living memory these were definitely sheep fairs, they have now become no more than informal farmers' gatherings for the sale of farm implements and a few calves. The 'fairs' are still held in what is known as the fair-field, but they take place without any kind of ceremony, and are attended by very few folk save the farmers concerned.

The charter of 1298 which licenses the fair at WEARE, a few miles south of Axbridge, names as its recipient a certain John Abadam (or Adam), 'in service with the king in Scotland', and this reminds us that such grants were sometimes made as rewards for loyal service. In fact, the close of this particular Scottish campaign in 1304 gave occasion for more than one grant of a fair in Somerset.

The fair at Weare was to be held on the feast of the Assump-

tion of St. Mary, 15 August, and seems to have survived into the early eighteenth century, when it was held on 7 July. Collinson, however, some seventy years later has no mention of it, nor have we been able to find any further information.

Of the fair at WEDMORE we have only late notices. The first of these occurs in 1729 when a fair at Wedmore is mentioned on 22 July, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene. The parish church here is dedicated to St. Mary, though there is some doubt as to whether the Virgin is intended. If a really early origin of the fair could be established, its association with the Magdalene might go some way towards resolving this uncertainty, since fairs were frequently granted on the festival of the patron saint of the village. Unfortunately in this case the requisite data are not at present forthcoming.

During the course of the eighteenth century the introduction of the *New Style* calendar seems to have caused some uncertainty as to the date of the fair, some lists giving 22 July and others 2 August. The fact is that in some cases a fair clung to the Saints Day with which it was originally associated, while in others, when the changed calendar came into force, the inhabitants seem to have been more desirous of holding to the fair day, irrespective of the connection with that of the saint. How this particular problem was eventually solved in Wedmore we do not know, as the fair has long since died out, and although it is believed it lingers faintly in the memory of some of the older people, there is no certain information to be gathered from them. The fair was formerly known as one for cattle and sheep.

Striking westwards again to the coast, we reach BURNHAM, now known almost entirely as a health resort, but probably as old as the Romans, who may have embarked here for the passage of the channel of the Severn which separated them from the base at Caerleon. As early as 1285 a fair was granted to Burnham by Royal Charter, to be held on the feast of the Nativity of St. Mary, 8 September. Nothing whatever seems to be known of Burnham fair, though the name finds place in the lists of 1785 and 1797. By this time, however, the fair-day

was established on Trinity Monday, and the staple of the fair seems to have been cattle, horses, and sheep. No fair has been held in Burnham within living memory.

Close to Burnham are two towns which for our purpose yield very little information, fairs being mentioned by Collinson, but no earlier. The first of these is HIGHBRIDGE, where in 1792 two fairs, toll free, are recorded, one on 10 August, and the other on 17 December. We have no information whatever about these fairs, save that neither of them exist to-day.

At HUNTSPELL the position is very similar. A fair, toll free, is mentioned by Collinson on 29 June, and a list of ten years earlier tells us that this was a cattle and sheep fair. We learn that it lingered until a few years before 1876, though the sale of sheep had been discontinued some years before that.

At WOOLAVINGTON again, Collinson is our only authority, and indeed, speaking of 'a large fair for cattle, sheep, and young colts', he says that it was only established in the year 1777. Possibly on account of its recent origin, this fair finds no place in the lists of 1785 and 1797 quoted from above, nor does it appear to have survived to-day. The fair was originally held on 18 October, St. Luke's day.

Finally, we note at CHEDZOY a charter of 1314 granting a fair to Simon de Monte Acuto to be held annually on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, 22 July. This is the only reference to this fair that I have discovered, and there is no recollection in the village of any such gathering in recent years.

Reviewing this North-Western section of the county, we note that the existence of the original charter enables us to fix the establishment of only about half of the fairs noted above—a small proportion. Comparison of the dates of these reveals that, whereas before 1300 only five fairs flourished, as far as we can tell, in this part of Somerset, as against fifteen in the North-East, the early years of the next century saw a pretty

rapid increase in their number, all the remaining charters save two being drawn before 1348, the year of the Black Death.

It is, of course, too early in this survey to attempt to assess the inevitable effect of this terrible scourge, and of the consequent economic confusion of the fourteenth century, upon the fairs, though it is obvious that such an effect must have been far-reaching. We may, however, put forward the following suggestion, namely that in the cases (*e.g.* at Weston-in-Gordano 1271, Chedzoy 1314, Beckington 1318) where an early charter is followed by complete silence, and apparent extinction of the fair, it is possible that the Black Death may be sought as the cause of the cessation. The removal of fairs to Priddy and Binegar from Wells on account of plague is an indication of the prevalence of the sickness in the county, while we know that Holcombe was wiped out by the Black Death, the present village standing some distance from its original site.

Although no fair in this part of Somerset seems to have attained the importance or size of such fairs as those at Bath, Wells, or Frome, a high proportion has survived until the present day, fairs still being held annually at Backwell, Congresbury, Ubley, Priddy, Axbridge and Shipham. These are now without exception cattle fairs, though there is reason to believe that cheese, and in a few cases cloth or wool, have in the past been important commodities at some of the North-West Somerset fairs.

(c). SOUTH SOMERSET

The ancient city of WELLS stands in the heart of Somerset, not only geographically, but in almost every other way. Historically the importance of this age-old place, linked with Ina the Saxon king, and with a long line of bishops, rulers of the see, cannot be disputed; while to those whose good fortune it has been ever to live in daily association with these ancient walls and stones, Wells breathes a spirit, be it religious or something other, which no spot in the county can rival.

And the fairs of WELLS are unquestionably among the earliest in the county. They were formerly five in number, and of these the festivals of St. Andrew, the Invention of the Cross, and St. Calixtus with their attendant fairs, can be traced back to within a century of the Norman Conquest. They

furnish an excellent example of the spontaneous rise of the fair from the opportunity afforded at great festivals of the church for trade and barter, in part essential if the large crowd of pilgrims and others was to be provided for during their attendance at the shrine.

The feast of St. Andrew, patron saint of the cathedral church, was obviously an occasion for such a large concourse of devotees, but the reasons alleged for the choice of the remaining days of St. Calixtus and the Invention of the Cross are so interesting that space must be found to repeat them here.¹⁹ As far back as the time of Canute, Leodgaresburgh, or Montacute, had been the scene of an 'invention' or finding of a portion of the True Cross. The sacred relic had been transported by oxen (taking their straight way by divine monition, says the tradition) to Waltham in Essex, where later Harold erected the great church which rivalled the Abbey of St. Peter at Westminster. This church was consecrated in 1060, among those present being Bishop Giso of Wells. Ever afterwards king Harold maintained a great devotion to the Cross of Waltham, and this became his rallying cry on the fatal day of battle six years later. It is therefore by no means improbable that the altar of the Holy Cross was raised in the Mother Church and endowed by Harold himself in Bishop Giso's time.

Harold was slain on 14 October 1066, the festival of St. Calixtus, and the victory lay with the Norman duke. Bishop Giso, himself a foreigner, may well have found his sympathies and hopes centred on the new king, and may indeed have raised in his church the altar of St. Calixtus both as a courtly compliment to the new, and a pious memorial of the old master.

Whether these things were so or not, it is certain that fairs on these three days were well established before 1160, when a charter of Bishop Robert, now in the possession of the Cathedral library, contains the following interesting clause :

' whereas the noise and disorder of markets held in the Church and vestibule of the church bring dishonour to God, disturbance to the ministering priests, and hindrance to the worshippers ; lest the church should become a den of merchandise, henceforth the markets on the three days of the year, namely the Invention of the Holy Cross, St. Calixtus, and St. Andrew, shall be no longer held near the church but in the broad places of the town.'

¹⁹ Cf. Church : *Early History of the Church in Wells*, p. 31 seq.

This charter, which also grants quittance of toll to those who congregate at Wells for the said feasts, is witnessed by Ivo, Dean of Wells, Reginald the Precentor, Robert and Thomas the Archdeacons, etc.

We may readily imagine the scene, as the stalls were set up before the porch, and on the steps, and even in the shadow of the nave itself, with the clamouring, jostling throng pushing far and wide within as well as without the sacred building. Yet it was a very long time before the bishop's order was successfully carried out, for although before 1180 Bishop Reginald, who granted the morrows of each of the above days, made over to the burgesses a moiety of the profits from the hiring of stalls, which belonged to him as overlord²⁰ (presumably as an inducement to remove the business to their own part of the town), yet by 1298 things are very much the same. Statutes made at a special chapter held on the morrow of St. Andrew in that year contain the following :

' No vicar may leave the choir until service is over, even to say the service of the Virgin Mary in her chapel, save for matins there on a double feast, in order to stop the practise of going to converse with laymen in the nave under colour of purchasing goods exposed for sale there.'

Further, it is enacted that no trading is to take place in the nave, and the sacrist is to be punished for permitting it.²¹

The difficulty is still acute in 1334, by which time the fairs of St. Calixtus and St. Andrew have grown by Royal Charter to eight days each. Bishop Reginald now complained to the king that ' the place before the gates of the said manor (of Wells) whereon the fairs are by ancient custom held, is so narrow that the merchants who come thither have for a long time erected their stalls and booths outside the same, both in the cathedral church and in its cemetery whereby much mischief unseemly to holy church has happened and happens to the said church and cemetery '. The king grants permission for the fairs to be held ' as well within and without the gates of their manor on the south side as on the aforesaid place '.²²

Ten years later we find evidence of continued friction. It

²⁰ Charter in the City Archives. Cf. Church, *Op. cit.*

²¹ *Calendar of MSS. of Dean and Chapter of Wells.*

²² *Charter Roll*, 8 Edward III, 1334, July 8.

is the report of a commission 'assigned to hear and determine certain matters in Somerset', 1344. The report states that Bishop Ralph complains against certain men (here follows a long list of names), for conspiring to obstruct his view of frankpledge, his hundred court, and his four fairs a year, *viz.* two days before to two days after the feast of St. Calixtus, two days before to two days after St. Andrew, during the feast and vigil of the Invention of the Holy Cross, and during the vigil and Nativity of St. John Baptist. A summons is issued to the parties to appear at Batheaston on the Thursday after St. Bartholomew. The bishop appears and pleads his rights, but the defendants absent themselves. Order is made to have them before the justices on the Beheading of St. John Baptist, and on this occasion the bishop claims, and is awarded, the truly enormous sum of £3,000 damages.²³

It will be noticed that an extra fair has made its appearance here, and before leaving this early period, we must record the establishment of two new fairs, granted in the opening years of the thirteenth century. The first of these, about 1201, was the gift of Bishop Savaric (1192-1205), and was to be held annually on the anniversary of the dedication of the chapel of St. Thomas at the entrance of the city on the road to Glastonbury. The date was the morrow of St. John the Baptist.²⁴ This then is the origin of the midsummer fair. The second additional fair brings us to the first royal charter of the city, that of king John granted in 1202, in which he confirms the four fairs already mentioned and grants one other, on the eight days following the feast of the Translation of St. Andrew. This must have been in practice simply a continuation of the existing May fair, that of the Invention of the Cross.

Thus, by the time of Magna Carta the following fairs were annually held in the ancient city :

- May 3—Invention of the Cross.
- May 7—Translation of St. Andrew.
- June 25—Morrow of St. John Baptist.
- October 14—St. Calixtus.
- November 30—St. Andrew.

²³ *Calendar MSS. Dean and Chapter*, R. I, f. 240-3.

²⁴ Charter in City archives. Confirmed 18 Edward I, 1290.

The charter of king John also granted that the Dean and Chapter of Wells, and the prior and monks of Bath should be free of toll throughout the king's land for all that they should buy and sell. By fortunate chance an interesting example has survived of the careful way in which such privileges were safeguarded. The following incident is given in full, both for the quaintness of its language, and for the light it throws upon the punctilious manner of such medieval transactions. The date is 1250 :²⁵

Memorandum that on Sunday before St. Andrew 1250 (Sunday letter B) William. de Beaumont provost of Bristol gave back to H. subdean of Wells one halfpenny taken of Walter son of the late Simon de Heanton his man for toll of a fish sold there, and to John de Derham three farthings taken of three men for wheat etc. sold there : and this was done towards the Avene bridge before the seld of Wm. the goldsmith, in the presence of . . . Clerk of the Toll house, who read the king's charter before the said Wm. de Beaumont in the street, by these tokens, that the said W. changed a penny with W. the goldsmith for four farthings whereof he handed three to the said John, and the bell was ringing for Vespers. And Wm. de Beaumont added, after hearing the charter read, that he knew the canons' men should be quit of toll, and if any had to pay, it was for want of an oath that they were their villeins. Next day this was repeated in the toll house by the subdean, and after by Wm. de Beaumont before Simon the clerk, mayor of the town, and several burgesses, and the charter read by Jordan the clerk, whereupon the subdean and the said John by leave of the mayor withdrew with their toll repaid.

We have already noted elsewhere the transference of fairs to Priddy and Binegar in time of plague, and the subsequent duplication of fair days. The four seasons of the year—May, June, October, and November were observed in Wells down till the eighteenth century, the lists of 1729 and 1785 both giving fairs at those times, though the precise date is not always the same. Collinson, by a curious misreading of Calixtus, presents us with a fair on St. Catherine's day.

To-day there are only two Wells fairs—one on the first Saturday in May, now known as May Market, and the other on the first Tuesday in December. This is the St. Andrew's fair. Both are now pleasure fairs, held in the street in front of the Town Hall, though some cattle are sold at the ordinary market during the day. The fairs last only one day, to which is attached an evening pleasure fair on the preceding

²⁵ *Calendar of MSS. of Dean and Chapter*, vol. i, p. 88.

night. It is interesting to note that the profits on this initial evening are, by a modern arrangement, given to local charities, and the money is collected from the roundabouts, etc., by friends and supporters of the hospital.

The history of the fairs at GLASTONBURY is much more obscure than that of the Wells gatherings. Although not of the same antiquity the Glastonbury fairs were ancient institutions, and it is strange to reflect that the oldest of them is the strongest survivor to-day. This is the famous Tor fair, so called because of its ancient association with Glastonbury Tor, and the Church of St. Michael at Torre which once stood upon its summit, and of which the tower only remains. The fair held annually by the monks of Glastonbury upon the feast of their patron saint, St. Michael the Archangel, was in existence before the reign of Henry I. This king, indeed, granted an extension of the time of the fair from two days to six. The fair was originally held in the fields at the foot of the south side of the Tor, where several very interesting local names keep it in memory there—'Cinnamon Lane', where the spice merchants are said to have had their stalls, 'Coursing²⁶ Batch', and a field originally known as 'Bull Baiting Field'.

The fair has, however, long since forsaken its first home (it may be held in any place in the manor), and still flourishes in a field near the station called 'Fair Field'. It is now a large and important gathering for the sale of cattle, horses, and sheep. The date of Tor fair, though always in September, never seems to have been very fixed. Originally held on Michaelmas day, it appears in various lists as early as 19 September, and was finally fixed by order of the Secretary of State in 1890 on the second Monday in September and the week following.

Strangely enough there is also in Glastonbury, besides this Tor fair, a Michaelmas fair, held now on the second Monday in October, and in earlier days on 11 October. This has dwindled now to a thing of no importance, and its early history is difficult to disentangle from that of Tor fair, also held at Michaelmas. It is possible that it may have arisen in the first place spon-

²⁶ Scorse = barter.

taneously in the town at the time of the holding of the sister fair on the slopes of the Tor.

Two more fairs, now discontinued, remain to be mentioned. The first of these, granted in 1283 to the Abbot, was held on the feast of St. Dunstan the Archbishop (19 May), and lasted four days.²⁷ St. Dunstan had been Abbot of Glastonbury in 940 A.D., and after his elevation to the primacy had performed the ceremony of recrowning king Edgar in the Abbey church of Bath in May 975. The fair associated with his memory had died out by the time that Collinson wrote, and probably long before. No trace of it remains to-day. Collinson also notes a fair on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, 14 September, which, he says, was no longer kept at the time of writing. Such a multiplication of September fairs seem very curious (other eighteenth-century lists giving 8 Sept.), and one is tempted to wonder whether the early historians have not confused them. Nothing is known of this Holy Cross fair to-day.

Passing east from Glastonbury, we reach DITCHEAT, where the abbot had a fair in 1332 on the patronal festival, that of St. Mary Magdalene. This fair was granted for five days, namely the two days before the feast, the feast, and the two days after.²⁸ Nothing further is known of this fair, nor does it exist to-day.

At WEST LYDFORD there is record of a very ancient fair, granted in 1260 to Nicholas son of Martin. This was to be held on the feast of St. Peter ad Vincula, 1 August. St. Peter is the patron saint of the church. This fair appears to have persisted right down to the eighteenth century, where it occurs, after the introduction of the *New Style* calendar, on 12 August, and was a cattle fair. It is now extinct, though there is reason to believe that it was held up to fifty years ago. A second fair which makes its appearance here in the eighteenth century is that upon Maundy Thursday. The origin of this gathering is unknown to me, but it lingered on until the middle of the last century as a cattle fair.

²⁷ *Charter Roll*, 11 Edward I.

²⁸ *Charter Roll*, 6 Edward III.

The Convent of BRUTON received licence of Henry VIII in 1533 to hold two annual fairs,²⁹ one on the feast of St. George, the patron saint of England, and the other on that of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 8 September. The Blessed Virgin was the patron saint of the church there. It was laid down that a court of Pie Powder was to be held at the said fairs before the steward of the abbot and convent 'with the same tolls and customs as at Bartholomew fair'.

Bruton was famed for cloth at this time, and finds mention in Leland's itinerary on this head, but this industry had fallen off by the time of the next reference to the fairs in the eighteenth century. The fairs are now cattle fairs, and appear with the usual alteration of date owing to the *New Style*. On these new dates, 4 May and 19 September, they continued for some time, eventually dying out. The second of the two, however, lingers in the memory of certain inhabitants. Known in later years as Bruton Revel, it had evidently become solely a pleasure fair, and I am told that an attempt made recently to revive the market side of it came to nothing.

At CASTLE CARY we find trace of at least four fairs, two of fifteenth-century origin, and two later additions. In 1468 John, Lord of Zouch, received 'of special grace' the grant of two annual fairs on the feasts respectively of SS. Philip and James, and of St. Margaret the Virgin.³⁰ These two fairs remained until the eighteenth century, the latter being removed to 28 September, and they were then augmented by the addition of two new fairs, which make their appearance first in a list of 1729. These were held on Whit-Tuesday, and on a Tuesday in Lent variously described as the 'Tuesday before Palm Sunday' (1729), 'Mid Lent Tuesday' (1785), and 'the Tuesday sennight before Easter' (Collinson). During this century the September fair seems to have fallen into abeyance, the other three being kept for the sale of bullocks, sheep, and all cattle. The beginning of the next century, however, saw all four once again in existence, the dates of the 'moveable' fairs having now become fixed. The mid-Lent fair had then

²⁹ *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, vi, 9.

³⁰ *Charter Roll*, 8 Edward IV.

come to rest on 17 March, and the Whitsun fair on 29 May. The two earlier fairs were now held on 1 May, and on the first Tuesday after 29 September. No fairs exist to-day in Cary, and they seem to have died out about fifty years ago.

Two more eighteenth-century fairs existed in WINCANTON, under letters patent of 5 Queen Anne (1706). These were held on Easter-Tuesday, and on 18 September (*New Style* 29th). The market on Wednesday, mentioned by Collinson still exists. In his day it was a 'considerable' gathering for the sale of butter, cheese, pigs, and flax yarn. The last named is no longer sold. The fairs in Wincanton are still listed in *Old Moore*, to take place on the above dates.

At CUCKLINGTON we reach the eastern border of the county, and here we find record of a fair granted in 1304 to Henry de Urtiaco to be held on the vigil, feast, and morrow of All Saints, and the eight days after. This is one of those grants evidently made by Edward I after the Scottish campaign in recognition of the services of his followers. The later history of the fair, if any, is unknown. It had died out before 1800.

Still keeping very close to the county boundary, we pass south to CHARLTON HORETHORNE (sometimes sub-Horethorne), so-called from its position and also, from its possessors, Charlton Caunville. This family held the manor from soon after the Domesday survey until the reign of Henry III, when it passed by marriage into the possession of William Longsword, son of the Earl of Salisbury. This William was succeeded, after his death in the Saracenic wars in 1250, by his son William Longspe, or Lungespe, and it was to him that a grant of a fair was made in 1252 at 'Cherelton' on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, the patron saints of the village church. The next generation saw another change of ownership, when Margaret, daughter of William Lungespe, and heiress of his estates, married Henry Lacy, Earl of Lincoln. Whether the first fair now ceased or not, we do not know, but the grant of another in 1294 to Henry Lacy points to that probability. This is especially likely as the new fair ('at his manor of

Charlton Caunville') was to be held only a week later than the last, namely on the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr, 7 July. This was only a two-days fair.

Evidence that the fair continued into the next century is supplied by the following interesting entry in the Patent Roll, 27 Edward III :

Sept. 17, 1353. Westminster. Pardon for good service done in the wars, in parts beyond the seas, to John de Cornwaille of Kyngesdon indicted in aid of the ravishment of Isabel de Staunton Dreu, of beating men in Cherelton fair, of the King's suit for the ravishment and the said trespass and of any consequent outlawries.

The fair is no longer in existence, nor can it have had a very long life, as compared with the majority of fairs, for it finds no place in the lists of 1729 or 1785 which are our chief source of information for the eighteenth century.

Very few early fairs were granted to the bailiffs and burgesses of a town, yet such is the case at MILBORNE PORT, which received a fair charter under these terms in 1397. The fair was to be held on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude the Apostles, 28 October, and on the day before. In quite the usual way, the fair seems to have gone without note until the eighteenth century, when we find it joined in the lists with another on 5 June. Collinson, who seems to have confused the two, says of the October fair that it was 'by prescription, no charter to be found'. The reverse is obviously the case. The fairs were cattle fairs, and in 1785 were already dwindling, for the lists speaks of 'a few cattle and toys'. The June fair lasted until a little more than fifty years ago, and the October fair, while still nominally in existence, is now only a pleasure meeting, no stock being sold.

North-westwards from the last-named places lies YARLINGTON, which once boasted the largest fair in the neighbourhood. Originally granted in 1314 to Simon de Monte Acuto, this fair was held on 15 August, the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, patron saint of the village. Simon de Montacute had in the previous year been granted licence to fortify his manor of Yarlington—an indication of the growing im-

portance of the place, or rather of its master. That the manor was a desirable one, however, is plain from the fact that in 1542 it was leased to Sir William Parr, kinsman of the famous Katherine Parr, whose good fortune it was to survive her royal husband. The fair had by this time been changed to another feast of the B.V.M., namely the Nativity, on 8 September; and two years later, in 1545, both manor and fair were given in jointure to the new Queen Katherine, rent free for life.³¹ On the death of King Henry, Lord Parr³² received licence of Edward VI to grant the reversion of the manor and fair to Thomas Smyth, Esq., D.C.L., his heir.

By the eighteenth century the fair was once again attached to the Assumption, and was known as one for cattle, horses, and sheep. As such it remained until the last decade of last century, when it ceased owing to the competition of the modern fortnightly markets.

Between Yarlington and Ilchester lies QUEEN CAMEL, where according to Collinson there were originally four chartered fairs. We have been unable to discover any early charters at all, but in the opening years of the eighteenth century two fairs certainly survived. These were held respectively on Trinity Thursday (*i.e.* the feast of Corpus Christi), and on 14 October, St. Calixtus. The latter was changed after the *New Style* was adopted to 25 October, thus forsaking its saint's day, as was often the case. The fairs were held for 'all sorts of cattle', but we have no knowledge of them to-day.

A fair was granted to MARSTON MAGNA in 1248, to be held on the feast of St. Martin, 11 November. Nothing more is known of it.

We now come to ILCHESTER, an important junction even in Roman days, standing on the Fosseway, and possessed in ancient times of several fairs. Unfortunately, however, there

³¹ Sir William Parr, created Earl of Essex, was granted the reversion of the estate in 1547, and during the queen's life was to pay an annual rent of £3 3s. 5½d. (*Patent Roll*, 1 Edward VI).

³² Burke's *Extinct Peerage* (1831), p. 410.

is a lack of any early information, and though Collinson states that fairs were held here on 29 August (Beheading of St. John Baptist), 22 July (St. Mary Magdalene), and the Monday before Palm Sunday, it is impossible to verify his statements. The list of 1785 gives two fairs, in July and August, and an isolated reference in the State Papers of James I pushes back the August fair to 1619. This is as follows :

Information of Thos. Laver of Lambrook, co. Somt. Was at Ilchester fair on Aug. 30, and heard Sydenham & Hawker speak of the Romish as the true church, and call Protestantism trumpery trash invented by Luther . . .

This stands as an interesting reflection on the state of popular feeling.

These fairs, obviously much older than our references allow us to record, were all extinct when Collinson wrote, and in his day their place had been taken by a fair on 25 March 'for horses, horned cattle, and sheep'. Even this is now dead, and though travelling pleasure fairs still visit the town, there is no recollection of the time-honoured days.

The fair at TINTINHULL is also known to us only through indirect references, though these are much earlier than is the case above. The fair belonged to the Prior of Montacute, and our earliest date comes from the Somerset Pleas of 1244, where the bailiffs of Exeter implead the prior for taking tolls of lawful men of Exeter at his fair at Tintinhull.³³ It is obvious that the fair goes back beyond this, which is nine years earlier than the date given by Collinson. The Cartulary of Montacute Priory provides another reference, this time of 1285, wherein Edward I inspects and confirms a charter of Henry III which states :

quod predicta ecclesia sanctorum Petri et Pauli de Monte Acuto et monachi qui ibidem Deo deserviunt habeant et in perpetuum teneant omnia maneria sua et mansiones suas et omnes terras suas et feria sua . . . de Hamedon et de Tyntehall liberas et per tredecim die duraturas cum stallagio et thelonio . . .

The Close Roll of 12 Edward II (1319) also mentions the fair here, in the enrolment of release by Richard Lovell, lord of

³³ *Somerset Pleas*, Roll 175, no. 1266, 28 Henry III.

Castle Cary, to the prior and convent of Montacute of his right in the manors of Tintinhull, East Chinnock, etc., with all appurtenances, fairs, markets, etc., in Tintinhull.

It would appear that the fair died out at the Reformation, when the convent was suppressed, for no later references are to be found, nor does there remain any fair to-day.

At MONTACUTE itself the prior was granted a fair in 1246, to be held at the Chapel of St. Michael on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Edward 'in the quinzaine of Michaelmas'. The date is therefore on 13 October. At some time during the course of the centuries the date of this fair was changed to 25 April, or 6 May *New Style*, and appears in the list of 1785 as a fair for the sale of leather, sheep and cattle. The 'May fair', as it is called, still continues to-day, and is held in the Borough, *i.e.* in the centre of the village. The opportunity is taken nowadays to raise money for local charities on this day, but as far as we know no stock sale takes place.

We are indebted to Mr. John Goodchild, editor of the *Western Gazette*, for the following information, the result of his own research, on the origins of the YEOVIL fairs. Henry V, in 1420, gave the manor and church of Yeovil to the Convent of Syon in Middlesex which he had founded, and in 1421 he signed a charter granting to Elizabeth the abbess and to her successors for ever the right to hold two fairs yearly in Yeovil, one on the feast of St. Bartholomew and the two days following, and the other on the eve and feast of St. Leonard and the two days following, provided that the fairs were not to the injury of any other fairs in the neighbourhood. This grant is probably the confirmation of rights already existing, as there is mention of fairs in earlier times. This is the genesis of the present July and November fairs, the former being termed St. Botolph's fair in the early seventeenth century. Under this name it occurs in Holinshed's chronicle, when he records a fire which broke out in the booths.³⁴

In the lists of 1785 the fairs were noted under the dates 28 June and 17 November. They lasted two days each, and

³⁴ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, ii, 489.

among the commodities listed for sale there are horses, bullocks, sheep and lambs, hogs, and wool. Collinson tells us that formerly a large manufacture of woollen cloth was carried on here. This was of course the famous West of England cloth, and since the shifting of the industry to the north, Yeovil has been noted for leather and gloves. The fairs were still in existence in Collinson's day, and we are told that the church of St. John Baptist was endowed with the manor and the market profits of stallage, the fair, etc.³⁵ To-day the Yeovil fairs have become fixed on the last Friday in June, and the third Friday in November.

A few miles south of Yeovil lies BARWICK, and here a charter of 15 Henry III (1231) granted William de Cantilupe a fair at his manor of 'Berewic' on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, the patron saint of the church. Three years before this, however, the Close Roll reveals that William had received the king's permission to hold the fair. In an inquisition of 2 Edward I (1273) the fair is valued at 13s. 4d. a year.

Four centuries later the fair, known also as Stoford fair, is thus described by Gerard :³⁶

'Stoford belongs to Berwicke (Barwick) . . . and now it is meane enough, only in greate requeste once a yeare for a plentiful fayre there kept on the feast of St. Barnaby, when you may see the portgrave of the towne (for that priviledge they continew until this day) guarded with four or half a dozen copper maces walke in greate state (through the towne), though sometimes he is a man of verie meane estate.'

No further reference is to be found to Barwick fair, though we are assured that it has been held within living memory, and indeed died out little more than twenty years ago.

And now we come to SOUTH PETHERTON, whose fair dates from at least 1252, when Ralph de Albiniaco (D'Aubeny) received the grant from Henry III enabling him to hold a fair on his manor of 'Pereton' on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. John the Baptist's day, 24 June. Two hundred years later the fair was regranted to Ralph's descendant William Daubeny,

³⁵ A Piepowder court was held every day for the parson of the town.

³⁶ Gerard's Particular Description of the County of Somerset, 1633, *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xv, 168.

king's esquire, by Henry V who in 1448 extended the time from three days to six.³⁷

The eighteenth century saw the divorce of the fair from its original saint's day, owing to the *New Style*, and henceforth it was held on 5 July. It now became famous as a cattle and sheep fair, and as such remained until well on into the next century. The parish historian, Dr. Hugh Norris, tells us that in the memory of an old man then living (1879) the pens were computed to contain eight and twenty thousand lambs, the town being almost full of them.

During the closing years of the last century the sale of lambs had declined, but the fair was still a great occasion. I am indebted to a correspondent for a description of Petherton fair forty years ago. 'The square was full of standings with sweets of all kinds, including huge "cushions" of peppermint lumps, gilded gingerbread, and also wonderful penny toys, and water squirts called "lady teasers"'. I once saw a fat woman on show, and horrible deformities preserved in spirits. Many got happily drunk by the evening.'

Nothing now remains of the fair, save tolls for standing in the market place,³⁸ and the names of Cheap Street (called Market Street in old documents), and Cornhill, on either side of the market-place.

CHISELBOROUGH fair finds place in the lists of 1785, and in Collinson. Held on St. Luke's day, 18 October (*New Style* 29th), it was a large fair for horses, cattle, and toys. It no longer exists, nor are there any early records of its history.

Another early grant is that to SHEPTON BEAUCHAMP, whereby in 1260 Robert de Bello Campo received the right of holding two yearly fairs, one on the feast of St. Petroc, and the other on that of St. John Baptist. It is curious to find a Cornish saint commemorated in this way in Somerset, and one is tempted to assume that here we have another example of a

³⁷ *Charter Roll*, 26 Henry VI. Dr. Norris, in his book on S. Petherton makes this the origin of the fair.

³⁸ The last toll was paid two or three years ago, a sum of five shillings levied by the lord of the manor, for the sake of keeping up the old tradition.

fair, held by prescription from ancient times, and only later legalized by charter. St. Petroc was a native of Monmouthshire who is said to have landed at Padstow, founded Bodmin, and evangelized Cornwall and Devon. He is also credited with the conversion of king Constantine, and died about 586 A.D., aged ninety. Of the fairs of Shepton, however, nothing further is known.

The hamlet of LOPEN, now administered with South Pether-ton as one ecclesiastical parish, provides us with an interesting example of the way in which a fair might change hands at the king's pleasure, and also indirectly furnishes us with confirmation of the fact that the holding of a fair was a profitable undertaking, and so a privilege worth the obtaining. The fair is said to have been procured by John de Meriet of Edward I, but the day upon which it was held is not certain.³⁹ Its possession was pleaded in 1308 by George de Meriet, who seems to have held it until 1321, when Edward II gave it to William de Pynland during his pleasure by letters patent of that year. The next king in 1330 committed the fair to Gilbert Talbot for the term of twenty years, and Pynland was discharged of fifty shillings yearly which he had paid for it to the king.⁴⁰ Our next, and last, reference to Lopen fair comes from the time of Queen Elizabeth, who in the thirtieth year of her reign granted it by letters patent to Tipper and Dawe. Some-time between this and the end of the eighteenth century the fair died out, at any rate as such, though it lingered on into the next century as a sort of festival called 'Lopen Play', when such sports as wrestling, single stick and cudgel play took place. About this time, in order not to clash with the more important Somerton fair, the Lopen Play was moved to Trinity Wednesday, and at last dwindled to nothing more than a gingerbread stall set up in the village street. According to tradition, it was at Lopen Play (or Fair) that Cardinal Wolsey, when only a rector at Limington, in the time of Henry

³⁹ But see article, 'Meriet of Meriet and Hestercombe', *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxviii, where the writer says it was anciently held for seven days, from Pentecost till the morrow of Trinity Sunday.

⁴⁰ *Close Roll*, 5 Edward III.

VII, got drunk and disorderly, and was consequently clapped into the stocks by the first Sir Amias Paulet of Hinton St. George. It is a somewhat discreditable reflection on the character of a great man that one of Wolsey's first actions after he had become Lord Chancellor of England was to summon Sir Amias Paulet to London and compel him to live in the Middle Temple for five or six years (*D.N.B.*)

At CREWKERNE, although the market appeared in Domesday, where it rendered four pounds, the origin of the fair is unknown. We have to wait until 1599 for the following description of it, in a 'survey and Rentall of the said mannor':⁴¹

'Within the town of Crokerne is a markt every Satterday, well served and furnished with all kinds of wares and victuals oute of all partes of the countrye, and mucche accesse thether by reason of the saide markt ; and on Bartholomew day yearly a greate fair. The tolls, stallage, and proffytes as well of the fayre as of the markt appertayneth to the lord, and is worth forty pounds yearly, the lord in times past have byn accustomed to elect and choose one man at their pleasure and name hym a Portreve, whose office was always to collecte and gather yerely the proffytes of the market and fayre and to yield accompte thereof at the auditt. But now the sayde office is granted by cobby for terme of lyves, accordinge to the custom, paying yerely to the lorde fower pounds thyrteene shillynges & fower pence.'

St. Bartholomew is the patron saint of Crewkerne, and so a natural choice for the fair day, but with the *New Style* the two became separate and the fair has ever since been held on 4 September, eleven days later. The profits of both market and fair are now, and have been for many years, the property of a private individual, having passed from the Poulett family either by sale or in exchange for land.

Like all similar institutions, Crewkerne fair is no longer what it was, but sixty years ago it ranked as one of the greatest fairs in Somerset, and so far as the pleasure side of it was concerned, there was nothing in the county to beat it. Thousands of sheep were penned, hundreds of bullocks were offered for sale, and tons of cheese pitched in and about the old market house. Many hundreds of people thronged the streets, which were more than ever congested by the display of farm implements

⁴¹ I am indebted to Mr. Willis Watson, F.R.H.S., for this reference, and for the description of Crewkerne fair sixty years ago.

ranged up and down the main thoroughfares. Shows, roundabouts, and stalls for fruit and confectionery made attractive displays before the holiday crowds. In earlier days, besides the commodities mentioned above, linen drapery was a staple of the fair, mention being made of it as far back as 1785.

Five miles from Crewkerne, in the parish of Cricket St. Thomas, rises WHITEDOWN, once the site of a famous fair. We are able to assign the year 1361 as the date of its charter, from an inquisition held at Montacute on 6 June, 44 Edward III (1370), the object of which was to determine whether and how 'a certain fair newly set up at Saint Wyte and held yearly from the feast of Pentecost in 1361' until the above date had prejudiced the fair at 'Lopene', which lasted from Pentecost till the morrow of Trinity, and was held by one Gilbert Talbot directly of the king. The issue of this inquisition is not known, but it is safe to assume that it was not adverse to St. Wyte, since the fair continued until the nineteenth century. Edward IV in 1467 declared in a charter drawn at Westminster on 7 May of that year that :

Whereas Stephen Preston esq. the king's sergeant, Lord of Cryket Thomas has there, as all the lords of the manor have had there from time immemorial, a yearly fair at a place called Seint White down on the morrow of Whitsunday and the day following with all the profits thereof : the king by special grace hereby approves and ratifies the said fair.

The king at the same time extended the fair to the three days following Whit-Monday.⁴²

The subject of this fair raises the interesting question of the identity of Saint Wyte, or Whyte, and also of St. Rayne, whose name is commemorated in St. Rane's Hill near Crewkerne, of which Whitedown is really a continuation.⁴³ There have been several attempted identifications, but it seems probable that the names can be associated with a St. Reigne or Reginfrede, bishop of Cologne, and St. Whyte or Wittia, bishop of Buraberg, who with St. Boniface, the apostle of the Germans, and fifty more were martyred on Whitsun eve, A.D. 775, near Utrecht. These were mostly Wessex men sent as missionaries, and their

⁴² *Charter Roll*, 6 Edward IV.

⁴³ I am again indebted to Mr. Willis Watson for these details. See also *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, xxxvii, ii, 44.

martyrdoms were commemorated at Whitsuntide annually throughout the English church. It can be assumed therefore with some probability that St. Rayne was venerated in the fifteenth century in a chapel or cell near Crewkerne, and that St. Wyte had a home a few miles away near Chard, where his votaries held annually special services in his honour 'die Pentecostem'. The existence of the fair at that time is an indirect corroboration of this, though Gerard, in his *Particular Description*, 1633, finds the hill called White because of its association with the 'Greate fair' held there on Whit-Monday. The fair persisted through the next century, being noted in 1785 as a gathering for the sale of bullocks and horses, and even into the nineteenth century, though it has now become extinct.

At WINSHAM a certain John de Bucton, provost of Wells, received in 1262 a grant of a fair to be held there on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul. Except that this fair, altered to the Wednesday in Whit week, occurs in the eighteenth century lists, and is now a thing of the past, we have no information about it whatever.

Much more, fortunately, is known about the fairs at CHARD. We are able to date the origin of these fairs from an inspeximus of Edward II in which the king confirms a charter of 20 Edward I (1292) granting to Robert, bishop of Bath and Wells, the manor of 'Cerde', and two annual fairs there. These were to be held on the festivals of the Holy Cross, namely the Invention (3 May), and the Exaltation, or Holy Cross day (14 Sept.) They lasted for five days each.

At some time during the next two centuries the date of 14 September was altered, and the fair attached to St. James' day, 25 July. It is probable that this change took place in the sixteenth century, since our next reference, in 1643, speaks of St. James' fair as well established. In that year the sale of all the late bishop's lands was ordered, and commissioners were appointed who sold the manor of Chard, 'its fairs, markets, and the toll of beasts' to one Nathaniel Whetham for £3,718. This toll of beasts is expressly stated as being taken at St. James

fair. Charles II in 1683 confirmed to Chard all existing rights, and round about this time a third fair makes its appearance, on the festival of All Souls, 2 November. Thus the list of 1729 gives us fairs here on 3 May, 25 July, and 2 November. Curiously enough, the *New Style* caused only St. James' fair to be altered, and this fair was held in future on 5 August. All three in 1785 are listed for cattle of all sorts, and pedlary. Collinson adds that the largest potato market in England was held at Chard.

Of the Chard fairs in the nineteenth century we have valuable notes in the evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Market Rights, 1888.⁴⁴ Here we find it stated that the fairs are now held on the first Wednesday in May, August, and November, and that the tolls were let for £88. Horses were sold in May and November at the top of the town, and in August near the church. The chief sale of sheep in Chard was also on the fair days. The toll taken on beasts was still demanded in 1888 by Lord Poulett then the owner, and the procedure was as follows: Long poles were placed across the street at each end of the town, and two or three men stationed thereat. All cattle that had been sold these men used to stop and demand toll for. This led to great confusion in the streets, and eventually the corporation compromised with Lord Poulett for two pounds per annum in lieu of these tolls.

The three fairs are still observed in Chard on the first Wednesday of May, August, and November, though there is no great potato market now. The sale of cattle and sheep provides the business side of things, while the usual amusements are not lacking.

Crossing the river Ile at Chard we pass northwards to BROADWAY. Here Edward I granted to Henry de Urtiaco in 1304 a fair on the feast of the patron saint, St. Aldhelm, traditional builder of Malmesbury Abbey, whose day was 25 May. The fair was to last for nine days—a very considerable grant. It must have later become a cloth fair, for Collinson speaks of

⁴⁴ This report, extending over twelve volumes, provides an exhaustive statement of the economic aspect of the markets and fairs, as well as a record of the conduct of many such fairs in the nineteenth century.

'a large trade in serges, narrow cloths, druggets, etc.' at Broadway. The fair lingered on until the beginning of the present century, when it was killed by the reaction which followed the Great War.

At BUCKLAND ST. MARY the eighteenth century lists have a fair on 18 September for horses, and bullocks on a second day. But nothing more seems to be known of it, save that a charter of 42 Henry III grants a fair at Bocland. This, however, seems more likely to be Buckland Denham.

Several fairs have at one time been held at ASHILL, though none remain to-day. The earliest grant is that made in 1276 to Maud de Multon 'at her manor of Ashelle' of a fair on the feast of the Assumption of St. Mary, the patron saint of the church. This fair was probably killed by the Black Death, or even ceased before that, as in 1317 two new fairs were granted to Thomas de Moleton, at the instance of the bishop of Exeter. These were to be held in 'Ayshehull' on the festivals of the Annunciation (25 Mar.), and of SS. Simon and Jude (28 Oct.), and were to last three days each. When the manor changed hands at the end of the century, the two fairs above were confirmed to the new owner Thomas Beauchamp by Richard II.⁴⁵

What was the later history of these fairs, I do not know, nor whether they are the same as those which appear in 1729 on Easter-Wednesday, and the Wednesday after 8 September. It is interesting to recall that this last date is also dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, so that in all three fairs have existed in Ashill on her days. The fairs were held at the end of the eighteenth century for cattle, sheep, and the usual pedlary, but have since died out.

The following fairs are recorded in the Charter Rolls, but nothing more is known of them: STAPLE FITZPAINE, 1233, to Robert de Briwes, SS. Peter and Paul; THURLBEARE, 1214, to Simon de Montacute, St. Thomas; HATCH BEAUCHAMP, 1301, to John de Bello Campo, Beheading of St. John Baptist.

⁴⁵ *Patent Roll*, 16 Richard II.

Letters Patent of 9 George I granted three fairs annually to WEST COKER, *i.e.* 6 May, 3 June, and 3 September. The recipient was Sir Philip Sydenham. Nothing seems to be known of these fairs.

Another very ancient fair is that at ILMINSTER, and this was also held on the festival of the Assumption (15 Aug.). It is possible that the fair on this day at Ashill was suppressed at an early date since it must have interfered with this one, being held in so near neighbourhood. The only documentary evidence I have been able to procure of Ilminster fair comes from the Inquisition Quo Warranto, 1280, in answer to which Abbot William de Gyvele of Muchelney states that he claimed to have a fair on the feast of the Assumption at Ilemynstre, and that he and his predecessors from the time of Henry, the present king's grandfather, and before that had held such liberties.⁴⁶

Although 15 August is the only date quoted in the lists of 1729, the next century saw an amazing growth of so-called fairs at Ilminster. A list appended to the Royal Commission, 1888, gives no less than five dates, *viz.* the last Wednesday but one in February, and September; and the last Wednesday in May, July, August, and November. These must have been merely enlarged market-days, for the surviving Ilminster fair is one only, and held on the last Wednesday in August, which is to all intents and purposes the time honoured saints' day. The fair is now held for cattle and sheep.

Fairs were granted to: BEER CROCOMBE, 1231, confirmed 1239, Nativity St. Mary, 8 September; CURRY MALLET, 1323, to Hugh Pointz, All Saints, 1 November. Nothing further seems to be known.

The manor of NORTH CURRY has from ancient times belonged to the Dean and Chapter of Wells, and in his book 'North Curry, ancient Manor and Hundred', Dr. Olivey states that the market and fair there date from the charter of King John,

⁴⁶ Cf. *The Mynster of the Ile*, J. Street, 1904.

1206. It appears, however, to be more likely that the market only was the grant of John, and that the fair was established by Edward I. The evidence for this assertion is to be found in the MSS. of the Dean and Chapter of Wells. No charter of King John to North Curry has survived, but several charters of Edward III inspect and confirm earlier grants, and give us their content. Two are of special interest. The first of these, in the fifth year of Edward III, is an inspeximus of an inspeximus of 11 Henry III of a charter of John, dated 10 September of his seventh year, 'and also a grant of Edward I with grant of a market and fair at N. Curry'. The second gives the actual year. In it Edward III in 1337 inspects and confirms the charters of 11 Henry III 'and 8 Edward I in favour of the bishop of Bath and Wells, and the dean and canons of Wells, with a further grant (*i.e.* in the second charter) that in lieu of a weekly market on Wednesday at their manor of Northcory, the said dean and canons shall have a weekly market on Tuesday, and a yearly fair on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. Peters Chains'. From this it seem clear that Edward I in 1280 changed the day of the market and granted the fair on 1 August.

The church at North Curry is dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul, so one would have thought that 29 June, the patronal festival, might have been chosen as the fair day. But it has been discovered that 1 August was the appointed day for the collection of Peter's Pence, so that possibly this was an added reason for holding the fair then.

The fair continued its course on 1 August until the eighteenth century, when it was changed (1790) according to the following printed circular of that time :

Whereas North Curry fair has hitherto been held on the first day of August (Lammas Day). This is to give notice that the said fair will in future be held on the First Tuesday in September, for the sale of all sorts of fat and lean cattle, sheep, and horses, and for the encouragement of butchers, horse dealers, and others, the inhabitants will endeavour to get a good show of every kind. Dated 5th day of June 1790.

Before this, however, the Dean and Chapter had had a sharp encounter with a gentleman who claimed the profits of the fair as a result of his purchase of the property. The record of the

Chapter acts of 1721 shows the Dean and Chapter standing on their dignity :

July 19, 1721. Ordered that Mr. Collins, who lays claim to the prison house and fair of North Curry shall be wrote to that the Dean & Chapter insist on their right thereto, and that Mr. Collins forthwith produce his title, otherwise that a legal proper method be taken for recovering the same.

Evidently a full enquiry was instituted, and the result of it is set forth for us in the ledger of 1723 under the date 14 November.⁴⁷

Whereas a dispute hath arisen between the worshipful Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral church of Wells, and Francis Collins of Wiveliscombe in co. Somt. gent. purchaser from the family of Sandfords who claimed from the family of Aishfords of the remains of the manor of Knapp within the parish of North Curry touching the exercising the office of bayliffe of the hundred of North Curry, and the fees and perquisites thereto belonging, and also touching the right and title of the fair and market and the prison house . . . Mr. Collins for good consideration releases and quitclaims for himself and his heirs to the Dean and Chapter and their successors all his rights, titles and claims.

Local tradition says that the fair was kept for two days, the first for business, and the second for pleasure. In 1785 the business is stated to have been the sale of bullocks and sheep. All bills were presented at fair time and rents paid then ; old fashioned tradesmen still send out their accounts at the old date, though the fair has now ceased to be held. It is difficult to fix the exact date of its demise, but it seems to have died a slow death in the first years of the present century.

An occasion distinct from the fair, but of even greater interest, was the ' Reeve's Feast ', held annually at North Curry at Christmas. Although strictly speaking not germane to our present subject, its unique character demands its inclusion here. The feast, as its name implies, was provided by the reeve and certain other tenants of the manor, some finding money, some wheat, according to the value of the tenements they held. On the day before Christmas certain other tenants, Jack of Slough and Jack of Knapp by name, were masters of the ceremonies and had to distribute portions of three bullocks and some loaves of bread, provided by the

⁴⁷ Ledger 1701-1739, p. 256. *MSS. Dean and Chapter*, vol. ii. ■ _ _ _ _

reeve for the time being, among the tenants of the manor in quantities according to their holdings. The remainder, after some portions had been reserved for the feast, was divided among the poor of the parish. On the day after Christmas the feast itself was held, and the chief table decoration was an immense mince-pie surmounted by an effigy of king John. According to the charter a toast was drunk 'to the immortal memory of king John', and liberty to continue drinking given until two candles of one pound weight were burnt out. Many curious details about this feast will be found in Olivey's book quoted above, but its chief interest for us lies in the fact that it, and perhaps it alone, kept the memory of king John in honoured commemoration. The feast has not been held in recent years.

The abbot of MUCHELNEY claimed to have two fairs, one on the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul, and the other on that of St. Peter in Chains. Our only information about these fairs comes from the great assize Quo Warranto, 1280, where the abbot claimed them, and said that he and his predecessors had used the aforesaid liberties from the time of the conquest without interruption.⁴⁸ It would seem that the fairs disappeared at the same time as the monastery, for no later records of their existence has come to our notice. But the note on Ilminster fair should be compared.

Another ecclesiastical fair was that at LONG SUTTON, held by the abbot of Athelney under charter of Henry III in 1267. This was to be observed for three days commencing on the eve of St. James. It appears to have survived the reformation, but by the time that Collinson wrote, it had evidently declined, for he lists it merely as a fair for pedlary. The date too was now changed to Trinity-Monday. No such fair exists to-day.

MARTOCK fair, on St. Lawrence's day, was granted to Ingelram de Fieules in 1247. In 1302 the inquisition post mortem of William de Fyeues assesses the profits of tolls at 6s. 8d. No

⁴⁸ Cartulary of Muchelney Abbey, no. 102, *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xiv.

mention is made of it in later lists, though the day is still observed as a pleasure fair.

At LANGPORT, originally a place of no small importance, since the river Parret was at one time tidal and navigable thus far, a charter was granted in 1617 by James I. The original is still preserved in the town hall. Among the privileges granted therein is the right to hold four fairs a year, and these were as follows :

First, on the eve of St. Peter and St. Paul the apostles, and on the morrow of the same day ' as it hath been anciently accustomed '.

Second, ' to be begun on St. Martin's eve in the winter '.

Third, ' on the Monday in the second week of Lent ', and

Fourth, ' shall begin on the third day after the feast of St. Matthew, and on the two whole days following '.

At every fair a court of Piepowders was authorized.

The eighteenth century saw these fairs unaltered, save for the difference of eleven days in November, and the St. Matthew's fair, now on 5 October. The business transacted was chiefly the sale of fat cattle (in Lent), black cattle and lambs (in June), fat cattle and sucking colts (October), and cattle, hogs, and sheep (November). During the course of the next century the fairs were reduced to three, now held on the Monday after Easter-Monday, 15 August, and 3 September. Between 1888 and the present day the number has been further reduced to one, the September fair, which still exists in a small way. Thirty years ago at this fair cart-horses, foals, and suckers used to be tied up in North Street to the number of about a hundred. Now only a few horses are brought in, and my correspondent declared that one would hardly know that a fair was in progress.

There are, however, traces of a much earlier fair here. Thomas Gerard⁴⁹ in 1633 quotes an inquisition post mortem of 18 Edward III (1345) which relates to a market at ' Langport Eastover ' and a fair at ' Langport Westover '. In his day

⁴⁹ ' Particular Description of the County of Somerset ', *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xv.

the fair seems to have become extinct, though the market was still 'well furnished with fowle in the winter time and full of pect eles as they call them'. Westover is a small hamlet or suburb of Langport, and it is possible that this fair may owe its origin to a charter of Edward I, dated 1304, in which the king granted the right to Henry de Urtiaco 'at his manor of Westovre', the fair to be held on 8 September and the eight days following.⁵⁰

SOMERTON, the ancient county town, was a royal manor in the thirteenth century, and here Henry III, 'ad melioracionem manerii sui', granted in 1255 a fair lasting eight days, starting from the vigil of All Saints.⁵¹ A second fair was given by Edward II in 1320 to Edmund Woodstock his brother, to be held on the vigil and feast of St. Andrew and the seven days following. In the course of the next three hundred years the fairs at Somerton multiplied, until in 1633 Thomas Gerard is able to write :

'Since Edward III the town is fallen soe to decay that were it not for the Monday markets, stored with cattle, and from Palm Sunday until the midst of June the weeklie faires, unto which many resort from farr to buy such ware . . . it were of little worth.'

The next century saw these 'weeklie faires' a little less noticeable, being held in fact every three weeks from Palm Sunday until Trinity. Additional fairs are given in 1729 on 19 September and 28 October. These were held for 'cattle, sheep, hogs, and pedlary'. It is inconceivable that such gatherings, though they are called fairs, and distinguished from the weekly market, should be of the same 'genre' as the great fairs which find notice elsewhere in this survey. Possibly we should have to class many of the smaller country fairs with these gatherings, if it were practicable on the scanty evidence to make any distinction between them and the fairs properly so called, such as those at Wells or at Frome. No fairs appear to have survived at Somerton beyond the middle of the nineteenth century, if indeed they lived so long. The Royal commission of 1888 does not include the town in its list of fairs.

⁵⁰ *Charter Roll*, 32 Edward I, m. 2.

⁵¹ *Close Roll*, 39 Henry III.

Several fairs in this neighbourhood may be dealt with briefly. At COMPTON DUNDON the fair granted in 1289 to Cecily de Bello Campo, and held on 22 July, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, continues regularly in August until the Great War. It had evidently declined in importance, and died a natural death in that period of upheaval, during which so many ancient institutions received their death blow.

A fair formerly held at MOORLINCH on 2 August for cattle came to an end, according to Collinson, about 1750. It still finds place, however, in the list of 1785, on 20 August. Its origin is unknown.

Collinson again, quoting the history of John of Glastonbury (i, 266) tells us that abbot Sudbury obtained in 1293 the grant of a fair at MIDDLEZOY, which he held of the king, and which continued in the possession of the abbey until the dissolution.

The abbot and convent of Glastonbury also had of Edward III a fair at WESTON ZOYLAND on the feast of the Beheading of John Baptist, 29 August. This fair continued all through the centuries until the last few years, when it appears to have died out. It was listed in 'Old Moore's Almanack' in 1931, but had disappeared in the edition of 1933. It was described as a large fair for cattle.

NORTH PETHERTON, whose patron saint is the Blessed Virgin, had a fair granted to it in 1318, when John de Erlegh received licence of the king to hold his fair on the feast of the Nativity of St. Mary, 8 September. Sometime before the eighteenth century the day was altered to 1 May, SS. Philip and James day, and the fair was noted, strangely enough then for shoes. It lingered on till the closing years of the last century, but is now, we think, dead and gone.

A little north-west of Bridgwater lies the hamlet of PERRY, now only a handful of dwellings between Wembdon and Chilton Trinity. In the time of Edward II, however, it seems to have

been a place of some note, judging by the list of inhabitants given in the Exchequer Lay Subsidies,⁵² and here a fair was granted in 1308 to Matthew Furneux from whom the place took its name of Pury Furneux. Nothing is known of this fair.

Finally, we come to BRIDGWATER itself, and here we strike a rich vein of material. The fairs here were four in number in past days, though to-day only one survives in any state. It will be convenient to record them in order :

(a) *The Midsummer Fair.*

This is the earliest of Bridgwater's fairs, taking its rise from the charter of king John *circa* 1200 in which, after confirming to his 'beloved and faithful William Brewer' that Bridgwater shall be free borough, the king goes on to grant

quod ibi sit liberum mercatum et una feria singularis annis per octo dies duratura silicet a die Nativitatis Sancti Johannis Baptiste in octo dies cum thelonio, paagio, pontagio, passagio, lastagio, stallagio, et cum omnibus alii libertatibus et liberis feriam pertinentibus.

The borough archives contain no further references to this fair, but from various lists we know that it continued throughout the centuries, and indeed still survives as a small horse fair at the east end of the town.

(b) *St. Matthew's Fair.*

This is Bridgwater's most famous fair, still full of vigorous life to-day. No charter of origin remains to us, and our first reference to it is found in the Borough Court Roll⁵³ of 1379 which contains the following entry :

'de placito Nundinarum S. Mathei : Apos : . . viis iiiid' and (at the end of the account) Piepoudre *xvd*.

Similar entries are to be found passim, and from them it would seem that St. Matthew's fair was already well established, and pretty profitable by the fourteenth century. The fair is held in St. Matthew's field, or Fair field, outside the west gate of the town, and that this has been its home for

⁵² 'Kirby's Quest and Exchequer Lay Subsidies', *Som. Rec. Soc.*, iii.

⁵³ Bridgwater Records, no. 331, *cf.* Record Office, S.C. 2/198/14.

hundreds of years is clearly proved by a conveyance of 1404 which transfers a burgage whose position is thus described :⁵⁴

‘ outside the west gate of the town of Bridgwater as it were on the way to St. Matthew’s fair.’

It seems probable that the original site of the fair was some distance nearer the town than now, the mart having been pushed gradually out by the growth of new buildings around the gate.

Among the most interesting of the town records are several volumes of Water Bailiffs’ accounts extending over many years. In the account for the year 1544 we find the following items :

‘ payd to Harry the Bereward afore Syne Mathos day . . . 8*d*.
It. payd to a man to kepe the comyn house at Matheas fayre . . . 4*d*.

The charter of king Charles I, dated 1628, confirms the various fairs, and makes special mention of St. Matthew’s fair, prohibiting it to be kept on a Sunday, but, as usual, ruling that when the feast fell on that day, the fair should be held to commence on the Monday. By this time St. Matthew’s fair had evidently overshadowed the others, a position of pre-eminence it has retained to this day. For a few years in the eighteenth century the fair, affected by the *New Style* calendar, was held on 2 October, but it has reverted to its original connection with the saint’s day, and is now held again on 21 September. It is still a great fair, attracting large numbers of traders and others, and extends the length of West Street, which is lined with stalls and booths, as well as being held in the old-established field. It still retains its name of ‘Hiring Fair’, a relic of the days when men and maids were wont to hire themselves out to service at these gatherings, their contract being made from one fair time to another. It is interesting to note that the old Somerset designation ‘Mop’ for a fair probably has its origin in this same custom, the maidservants

⁵⁴ The document reads as follows : Sci. pres. et fut. qd. ego Johannes Lond de Stowey dedi conc. et haec pres. carta mea conf. Willhelme Vyscher de Edyngton tot. illud vacuum burgagium iacent extra port. occid. villa de Briggewater ex parte bor. vici, sicut itur ad nundinas Sancti Mathei inter burgag. Johanni Poterne ex parte orient et burgag. Thorne Stowell ex parte occid.—
Bridgwater Records, no. 530.

being used to carry the mop, symbol of their humble but necessary service. The fair here is still carried on for three days, the first being that devoted to business, the other two to pleasure. Large numbers of sheep and Exmoor ponies are offered for sale, together with other usual commodities.

(c) *The Lent Fair.*

In 1468 king Edward IV granted an important charter to the burgesses of Bridgwater, in which it is stated that

‘The Mayor, Bailiffs, and Burgesses shall have in the said town and borough a gild merchant with a hanse and other customs and liberties belonging to the said gild, and the same burgesses in their purchases of all merchandise brought in to the said port in ships or other vessels shall have preference over all others for twenty days after the bringing in of such merchandise; and that none other shall purchase such merchandise during that time without the licence of the Mayor, save in the time of the fair . . . the Mayor & Bailiffs & Burgesses shall have a yearly fair in the said town on the Monday next after Lent (proxima post carni-privium) and the four days following, and a weekly market on Saturday, unless such be to the damage of neighbouring fairs and markets.’

This charter was confirmed by Henry VII, and by Elizabeth, who ordained that the mayor should be the clerk of the market.

The Water Bailiffs’ accounts show a number of references to this fair in the sixteenth century, a selection of which is transcribed here for their interest :

- | | | |
|-------|--|----------------|
| 1532. | For the kyping of the common howse a lent fayre day
for the packs | iiii <i>d.</i> |
| 1534. | Received of Newport for a tun of yren which went to
Menhed a Lent fayre yeve at nyght | vi <i>d.</i> |
| 1541. | Item payd for ryddyng of ye comyn howse agayne Lent
fayre & mendyng of a loke of ye greate sellar | ii <i>d.</i> |
| | Item payd to Morrys Jonys for keypyng of the comyn
howse a lent fayre day | iiii <i>d.</i> |
| 1544. | Item received of Susyan Gybbes for a tone of wyne that
she had from Brystoll the Fryday after Lent
fayre | iiii <i>d.</i> |

The references to the ‘Common house’, and to the ‘packs’ make a valuable comparison with the practice at St. James’ Fair, Bristol, where the churchwardens assumed responsibility for the safe custody of these same packs, marking them with

paint, and setting men to watch over-night. The supposition is thus strengthened that the packs were large bales of merchandise stored by their owners in readiness for the fair. The fact that the Water Bailiffs' accounts contain more references to the Lent fair than to that of St. Matthew may be explained possibly in two ways, either that the fair was at this time (the sixteenth century) in its heyday, or more probably that it had a special significance for the water bailiffs by being held near the river.

In the eighteenth century the Lent fair was held on the second Thursday in Lent, and survived until the end of the last century. It has now ceased to exist.

(d) *The Christmas Fair.*

Very little is known about this fair, save that it was granted by the charter of Charles II, and was to be held on the 28 and 29 December, except when those days fell on a Sunday, and was to be kept in the High Street for all manner of great and small cattle, with a court of Piepowder and all liberties, etc. Like its fellows, the Christmas fair lingered on until the last century, but has not been of any account for many years, having now quite died out.

Something of the importance of the Bridgwater fairs, annual gatherings in one of the leading ports of the west, in earlier years may be deduced from the chief articles of trade which the accounts of the sixteenth-century bailiffs reveal, coal, fruit, herrings and salmon, in large quantities, salt, and dye-stuffs such as woad and 'orchell'.

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In reviewing this Southern section, which constitutes the largest part of the county, we find unmistakable evidence of the antiquity of the Somerset fair, and also a good deal of information as to the kind of merchandise most to be met with there, at any rate in later days. Although, so far as we know, there is no mention of any fairs in Somerset in the Domesday Survey, several of those in the foregoing section have their roots in the century which followed it, notably the fairs at Wells, Glastonbury, and Ilminster. And of the forty to fifty

fairs described, more than half were clearly in existence before 1300, while the greater part of the remainder took their rise in the fourteenth century. A good fifty per cent. of the early fairs in this part of Somerset were ecclesiastical, since besides the great house at Glastonbury, most of the smaller religious foundations were found here, and much of the land was in monastic hands. We know that the monks were agriculturists, and it seems probable that even before the widespread enclosures of the fifteenth and following centuries a good deal of sheep and dairy farming must have been undertaken. Butter, cheese, wool, and the sheep and cattle themselves find their way to the fairs, so that hundreds of years later some of the largest of the surviving markets (like that of South Petherton) owe their life to these wares. Cloth and flax yarn are also to be noted, though not so important.

As would be expected in an area which in past days was largely marshy and water-logged, the vast majority of the fairs were summer fixtures. But the presence of several winter fairs is significant, especially in such places as Langport and Hambridge, where the sale of wild fowl is to be noted. We can therefore feel justified in picturing central Somerset in the Middle Ages as a great dairy farming and sheep raising country, large tracts of low-lying marsh land being valuable breeding ground for wild fowl of every kind. Fishponds too would abound, not only to supply the monks of Athelney, Muchelney, and the like, but also to furnish forth the booths of the fair grounds.

Ten fairs only exist to-day, of which those at Bridgwater and Glastonbury seem still to be important functions. The number was far greater a generation ago, but the combined effect of the Great War, increased facilities for travel, and the growth of weekly or fortnightly markets, has brought about the rapid decay of the fair proper.

(d). WEST SOMERSET

We come finally to the Western district of Somerset, all that part of the county lying west of the line from the mouth of the Parret through Taunton. Here, as the country rises to the

wild and lonely heights of Exmoor, once forest, now desolate moorland, the population even now grows scanty, and in days gone by must have been almost entirely confined to the rough herdsmen whose livelihood was gained in the business of raising the sheep and ponies for which the district is famed.

In this desolate district fairs are few and far between, but along the coast, and around the large estate of Taunton Deane, we shall find them more frequent. Proceeding north-west from Bridgwater our survey will take us along this coast, and gradually back again through the inland district, until we conclude our task at Taunton itself.

And first we must note the fair at ENMORE, granted in 1401 to Baldwin Malet, 'king's knight', and to be held on Midsummer day and the day preceding it. How long this fair lasted we do not know, but its place seems eventually to have been taken by the fair at Broomfield, close by. This was held on 13 November, and was in existence when Collinson wrote, being held then for 'coarse cloth, and all sorts of cattle'. No recollection of their own fair remains among the inhabitants of Enmore, but we are told that the people used regularly to visit BROOMFIELD fair. The rector writes, 'our ringers used to ring there, and there were grand doings, one of the features being toasted biscuits and cider'. It seems that this fair, too, has now ceased.

A much older grant, dated 1281, gives to the bishop of Bath and Wells two fairs at BISHOPS LYDEARD. The original charter is preserved in the county museum at Taunton Castle, and mentions the *two* fairs, though the printed record in the Rolls series gives only one. The fairs were both held on days sacred to the Blessed Virgin Mary, patron saint of the church, the dates being 25 March, the Annunciation, and 8 September, the Nativity. The accounts of the communar of Wells Cathedral show that the profits of the 'markets'—which may well include the fairs here—were paid to him throughout the fourteenth century. In 1337 as much as £40 was received from Bishops Lydeard.

Both these fairs survive into the eighteenth century, though

they have by this time declined from the six days originally granted to one day apiece. The September fair seems now to have become mostly a pleasure fair, since in 1785 it is listed only for 'all sorts of toys', that on 25 March being held for bullocks, horses, and sheep. Probably the former was the first to become extinct, since recollection of the inhabitants now only extends to the one fair, and that only in tradition. No fairs can have been held here since about 1870.

In the list of 1729 a fair at *LYDEARD ST. LAWRENCE* is noted on 10 August, St. Lawrence's day. Collinson says that it was held 'formerly for cattle, now pedlary'. It died out before 1888.

The village of *CROWCOMBE* boasts a church with the unusual dedication of the Holy Ghost, and here a very early fair is to be noted. This was granted in 1227 to Godfrey de Craucombe, and was held on the feast of All Saints, for three days. A market on Friday included in this grant is changed in a charter of three years later to Monday. Cattle and drapery formed the staple of Crowcombe fair in the eighteenth century, by which time, as we have been accustomed to observe, the single fair has multiplied and has become three—the last Friday in May, the Monday after 1 August, and 31 October. Whatever be the origin of the mushroom-like growths of this century, it is significant to note that here the first two days are the traditional market-days recorded in the early grants, while the third is of course simply the eve of All Saints, and indicates that the original fair has shrunk from three days to one. The fairs at Crowcombe find no place in the Parliamentary return of 1888, and as far as we know have long ceased.

The origin of *STOGUMBER* fair is obscure, but it is at least as old as 1337, when the profits from it, together with those of Lydeard already noted, were paid to the communar of Wells. Stogumber fair was more profitable even than its fellow, bringing in in 1337 the sum of £66 13s. 4d. This was paid by serjeanty.

It is possible that the fair was originally granted on St.

Mark's day, for 25 April occurs in 1785, together with a fair on 1 August. These were fixtures for the sale of bullocks and sheep, but by the time of Collinson the August fair had long been discontinued, while the other was now fixed on 6 May. Even this has now ceased, though Stogumber fair is still a living memory among the people, who can tell of the time when the main street of the little village was lined with horses and other live stock for sale.

STOGURSEY fair figures in the eighteenth century lists under Stoke Courcy, when the dates 30 May and 12 September are given. These two fairs were still held in Collinson's day, but have now ceased. We know nothing of their origin.

NETHER STOWEY fair had a long if uneventful history, dating from 1304, when such a number of fairs came into being, and lasting until little more than a generation ago. It was granted to John de Columbars, to be held on the vigil and feast of the Nativity of St. Mary, the patron saint of the village. No early records of the parish exist, since a note in the church registers tells us that they were burnt in the 'big house' at the time of the great rebellion. These registers begin in 1640, so that it is almost certain that the Civil War is meant. But if we recollect that many manorial records are known to have perished also in the Peasants' Revolt we shall have a partial explanation of the extreme paucity of information about the fairs. This fair, however, appears in the eighteenth century lists, either on 7 or 18 September, *New Style*. We have no record of its staple commodities, though the probability is that sheep and horses were among them.

We are quite without detailed information of several of these West Somerset fairs, among which is that at KILVE, granted in 1296 to that Matthew de Furneux whose fair at Pury, or Perry, near Bridgwater, we have already noted. This fair was to be held on the feast of St. Margaret, 2 September, but no later evidence for it exists. There is no such fair held in Kilve to-day.

Precisely the same position confronts us at SAMPFORD BRETT, where in 1306 Adam le Bret was granted his fair on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. George. Complete silence follows, for no such fair is listed in any later authority, and we are forced to conclude that it had a short history.

The chartulary of CLEEVE abbey contains the following note, which once again is the sole evidence for the fairs.⁵⁵

Letters Patent of 6 Edward IV (1467) grant licence to the brethren to hold a market weekly and two fairs yearly toward the liquidation of the expenses connected with the re-erection of a chapel, anciently erected to the honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which had been wholly destroyed by flood. The fairs were to be held on St. James' day, and the Exaltation of the Cross, and were to last for the three days next following each feast. The usual clause safeguards neighbouring fairs.

Here we have quite obviously one of the many reasons for the grant of fairs, and once again perhaps some explanation of the silence which often follows the original notice of the fair. If fairs were granted on special occasions of calamity, such as this, and for such a specific purpose, then we may assume that, once their purpose was fulfilled, they were allowed, or more likely compelled, to cease.

We are able to trace the fair at DUNSTER as far back as 1355, when the following reference to it occurs in the Patent Roll of 29 Edward III :

Feb. 12, 1355. Westminster. Commission of Oyer and Terminer to William de Shareshull and others in co. Somt. on the complaint by John de Mohun of Dunsterre that Philip de Loccumbe and others broke his parks at Dunsterre, Mynhead, and Mershwode, entered his free warrens . . . hunted in the same . . . carried away deer, hares, partridges . . . and asaaulted Richard le Scolemaister his servant deputed to collect the toll and other profit of his fair at Dunsterre.

Sir Henry Maxwell Lyte in his *History of Dunster* records that in 1621 Robert Poore paid 12s. for the bailiwick of the borough, including the benefits of the standings, the weighing of yarn and wool, and all other merchandise brought to the town hall

⁵⁵ Cf. 'Charters of Cleeve Abbey', Rev. T. Hugo, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, vol. vi.

to be weighed, the benefit of the two fairs on ' Whitsun Mondaie, and Good Fridaie ', etc.

In 1629 we read that George Luttrell demised to Andrew Worth of Dunster ' all the office and bailywicke of the borough of Dunster . . . and also the outstandinges, coveridge-money, and pitching-pence, on the fayre daies . . . likewise the rents, yssues, and profitts of the butchers' standings on Whitsun Monday yerely ', reserving to himself all in-standings and shops, and the rents usually paid to him, and undertaking to provide ' fit, necessary, and sufficient boordes, tressells, forekes, and poles for the standinges aforesaid, as often as neede shall require '. In 1763 the right of holding the fair was bought by George Gale for £60. Dunster fair finds mention in the lists of that century, but only as a fair for pedlars, so that we must conclude that it was now much reduced. It has now for many years been a thing of the past.

Queen Elizabeth's charter to MINEHEAD contains a grant of two annual fairs, one on 1 March, and the other on the eve of St. John the Baptist's day, each fair to continue until noon of the following day. The charter was revoked by James I, but whether the fairs continued to be held is not known. Indeed, it seems open to doubt whether they were ever held, for Collinson and others of his time state that Minehead fair was held annually on Whitsun Wednesday. This may have been a survival of one of the earlier fairs, but it is impossible to verify. No fair has been held here for more than fifty years.⁵⁶ That these were not the earliest fairs at Minehead is proved by the Inquisition Post Mortem of Sir Hugh Luttrell, 1427, which mentions the annual fair at Michaelmas, worth twenty pence. This was valued at only three pence by the bailiffs of Edward IV, so that it must soon have ceased.

Of PORLOCK we fortunately know a little more. The original grant of fairs to Porlock was made in 1366 in favour of Nigel Loryng, then lord of the manor. They were to be held twice a year, on the festivals of St. Barnabas in June, and of St. Martin in November. Each was to last three days. In 1613/14

⁵⁶ Cf. *History of Minehead*, Rev. Preb. F. Hancock, p. 10.

James I gave a new charter to Edward Rogers, Esq., in which he confirmed the grant of fairs, with a court of Piepowders, and all the usual rights and privileges. On these days the fairs remained until at least 1729, but sometime between that and 1785 the number increased to three, and the days were changed. They then appeared as the Thursday before 12 May, the Thursday before 9 October, and the Thursday before 12 November. This last seems the only link with the earlier fair days, St. Martin's day being the 11 November. The fairs were then cattle fairs, and as such remained until their decease. Of the Porlock fairs in the last century we have some account in the work of the local historian.⁵⁷ 'Both Domery and Porlock', he says, 'were in a state of excitement three times a year, when the May, August, and October fairs are held.' At the October fair, we are told, there were sometimes as many as 1,500 sheep and 200 bullocks penned in the street. The weekly markets drew farmers and their wives from the hill country to sell their produce. The old Market House has been destroyed, but a note on the back of an account of rents of the manor, dated Michaelmas 1734, tells us that 'Nicholls Poy hath took the Market place and part of the shambles and is to give for it per annum £1 2s. 0*d.*'. Since 1888, however, both market and fairs have been abandoned, the competition of Minehead, Washford, and other places having proved too severe for them.

WOOTTON COURTENAY in the eighteenth century had a fair on 9 September for cattle and sheep, but we know no more of it.

Porlock fair brought us to the westernmost point of our researches, and we must now come southward across the hills to BROMPTON REGIS, or King's Brompton, as it is called locally. Here a fair was granted in 1348 to Thomas Besilles on the feast of the Assumption, 15 August, and also one on the Ascension. Now, although there is no later mention of this August fair in any of the lists, an annual gathering known as the August Auction is still held on the second Thursday in the month. This has never, so far as can be ascertained, been designated

⁵⁷ *History of the Ancient Church of Porlock*, Rev. Preb. W. Hook. 1893.

a fair, but would seem to be an institution of long standing, and chiefly confined to the sale of sheep and lambs. It does not seem a very far cry from the original August fair to this survival in the same month. The parish church is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and the Assumption was always a popular feast of hers.

Of the Ascensiontide fair there is no trace, 'King's Brompton fair' nowadays being the one held on the Thursday nearest 21 October. Apparently this date is fixed by that of Bampton fair, which takes place on the last Thursday in October. It too is evidently still going on.

In the parish of Brompton Regis lies the site of an ancient convent of Black Canons, founded in the time of the Conqueror on the banks of the Barle, and called the Priory of Barlinch. In 1478 the prior, one William Hampne, and the brethren of the convent, which was dedicated to St. Nicholas, received a grant of two fairs, 'at their town of Bery'. BURY, or BROMPTON BURY, is now a small hamlet situated on the site of the ancient camp, but was evidently at that time a place of some importance. The fairs were to be held on the feasts of the Assumption, and of St. Nicholas, 6 December, with a court of Piepowders and all issue, profits, and amercements, provided it was not to the harm of neighbouring fairs. In the face of the already existing fair of the Assumption at Brompton Regis, it is difficult to see how such harm could be avoided, unless we assume that the fair had already declined. The absence of any later information about the Bury fair, however, leaves equally possible the assumption that *it* was quashed in favour of its older rival, and the August auction which still survives at Brompton would seem to point in that direction. Certainly no such fairs exist to-day, the place having come to be of such small importance.

The town of DULVERTON has been the recipient of several fairs. The earliest grant is that made in 1306 to William de Lughtenberg and his wife Hawisa, of a fair on the feast of All Saints, the patronal festival of the church. The second was made in 1488, by which time the manor had passed into the

possession of the convent of SS. Peter and Paul at Taunton, for the letters patent are drawn in favour of John Asshe the prior of the church there. This charter grants two fairs to Dulverton, namely the feasts of SS. Peter and Paul, and SS. Simon and Jude. All three of these fairs, in July, October, and November, are found in the various lists of the eighteenth century, but we have been unable to acquire any detailed information about any of them, nor do we know that they exist to-day.

At WIVELISCOMBE we find that our actual chartered fair, granted in 1285 to the bishop of Bath and Wells on Trinity Sunday, and the days before and after, is increased by 1729 to three fairs, by the addition of 1 May and 25 September. These were held for cattle and sheep. The Parliamentary returns of 1888 state that evidence was given at Wiveliscombe that the May fair brought into the town 2,000 sheep at one time, but that in that year only 100 had been offered for sale. Sheep pens were erected in front of the market place and in the streets. At the September fair between three and four hundred sheep were brought in, and stallage was charged at the rate of 1s. 6d. a score. It is clear that the fairs were then declining rapidly in importance, and they have now ceased altogether, though they have been held within living memory.

To the fairs at WELLINGTON we have only eighteenth-century references. They were, according to Collinson, originally procured of the crown by the bishop of Bath and Wells, but the historian omits to say which bishop sued, or which king granted, the right. We have been unable to find any recorded charter of fairs at Wellington, and since 1729 they have been held on various days. That list gives us the Thursday before Easter, and Holy Thursday (Ascension day), and these dates are repeated in 1785 with the additional information that the fairs were cattle fairs. Collinson's dates are Midsummer day and 10 November, sufficiently removed from the former to be remarkable. In the following century they were held on the second Wednesday in March, and the first Wednesday in June,

and the local historian gives us the following description of their activity at that time, about 1860:⁵⁸

‘Cattle were penned in the street from the Wesleyan chapel in Mantle Street to the White Hart in High Street, and also in South Street. Stalls were erected on every available spot by people from Taunton and neighbouring towns. Fat and best stock was placed in High Street beyond the White Hart, young stock in South Street. That portion of Millway in front of the Half Moon yard was called Sheep Pen Street, and sheep were regularly fenced there’. He tells us, too, that ‘further back than most people living can remember, the town on fair days was the scene of much disorder and drunkenness’. It would seem then that in small towns and great ones, an important factor in the discontinuance of fairs was an increasing refinement of public taste and manners which deplored the coarser and less decorous side of fair life. Curiously enough, the list given in *Old Moore* of 1933 still contains the dates of the Thursdays before Easter and Whitsun for Wellington fairs. What kind of gatherings these are now, we have been unable to find out.

Finally we come to TAUNTON itself, now the county town, but until about a century ago among the possessions of the see of Winchester. It was to Amaury, bishop-elect of Winchester that the fair was granted in 1256, to be held in Mill Lane on the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas, 7 July. This is the important Taunton fair, though another on 17 June has been held at least since 1729. It is interesting to note in Toulmin's *History of Taunton* (1791), that ‘there is not one butcher's shop in the town, all meat being sold from moveable standings’. This refers to the weekly markets, which until the provision of the market house in 1768 were held in the streets. The tolls of these markets were farmed in the eighteenth century at £400 per annum. Of the fairs we note that the June fair was held in the middle of the town, for one day, when all sorts of cattle and horses were on sale. The July fair lasted three days, and was kept on the North Bridge and in

⁵⁸ *History of Wellington*, A. L. Humphreys. 1889.

the North Town. The first day opened early in the morning with the sale of considerable quantities of garlick from barges, the next two days being solely for pedlary and confectionery.

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In this last section we have noted some twenty fairs, of which four can be shown by documentary evidence to have been in existence in the thirteenth century, and two more, at Dunster and Stogumber, may fairly safely be presumed to be as old. Apart from the peculiarly rugged contours of this part of Somerset, which prevented any large gatherings in the sparsely populated hill district, we note that the fairs seem to have grown up chiefly along the northern coast, where a considerable seaport trade is indicated, and around the large estates of the bishop of Winchester in Taunton Deane. Horses, cattle, and sheep were naturally the chief products of this area, though some cloth and linen wares are to be noted, due no doubt in the eighteenth century to the stimulus of the large import trade of Minehead in Irish woollen and linen goods. While most of these West-country fairs lingered on until the nineteenth century, only two places are still listed as possessing them, namely Taunton itself, and Wellington. Brompton Regis, we are told, still retains its fair day, and there too, the August auction would seem to keep alive the memory of an earlier fair. As far as we have been able to ascertain, no fairs of importance are now held west of Bridgwater.

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An attempt must now be made to sum up the chief points of interest which have emerged from this survey, and to indicate as far as possible what inference may be drawn in the direction of social and economic history.

We note at once that the really great fairs, whose influence and importance were far-reaching, are comparatively few. No doubt those at Wells and Bridgwater (together with the two great Bristol fairs), have played their part in the life of the whole of the West-country. To these we may add a secondary group, of which perhaps Frome, Taunton, and Glastonbury are

typical, which, while drawing traders from all parts of the county, did not extend their influence very far beyond it. There is, thirdly, a multitude of smaller gatherings still, whose importance must always have been purely local, and which in many cases seem to have been, especially in later years, little more than glorified markets. Of these, indeed, we may fairly say with Holinshed that ' Certes, it is impossible for me to come by all, for there is no towne in England but hath one or more such markets holden yearlie in the same, although none of them (I must needs confesse) be scarce comparable to Lowse fair, and little else bought and sold in them more than good drinke, pies, and some pedlarie trash, wherefore it were no loss if diverse of them were abolished '. This is no doubt an overstatement, yet it has a germ of truth.

As we approach the question of the rise, development, and decline of these Somerset fairs, we are faced with an initial difficulty. There seem to be two views of the history of the fair which we may take. One would see them ' growing up ' in response to the needs of the countryside, and in accordance with such geographical opportunities as contour and communication afford ; the other looks to the plain fact that most of the fairs have officially their *terminus a quo* in the royal or episcopal charter. Can these two views be reconciled ? It were obviously inaccurate to proceed as though either were wholly true, and to base the whole argument upon that foundation. The truth must lie between them. Some fairs, and among them the oldest and greatest, have quite definitely ' grown up ' either from a religious occasion such as the festival of some popular saint, as was the case at Wells, and at St. James in Bristol, or else from some natural necessity of trade, as at Bridgwater, or Bristol again, where the Michaelmas fair was the occasion of a large concourse of merchants from overseas. Many of these oldest fairs stand as a matter of fact at well established centres of communication, such as at Bath, Ilchester, Yeovil, etc. In part no doubt the fair may have been instrumental in shaping the lines of traffic, since ' all roads lead to the fair ', but in more than one case the Roman roads were there first, and the importance of the place already established as a junction. In the case of such fairs the royal charter

comes merely to confirm rights already in existence 'by prescription', whether such a charter actually states the fact or not. And in the absence of evidence it is obviously impossible categorically to state how many fairs, especially those which date from the thirteenth century, may not have been held 'from time out of mind'. It is surely not insignificant that a good forty per cent. of the Somerset fairs coincide with the patronal festival of the village church, and it may be suggested that in some cases such fairs may have a history which goes back beyond the actual charter.

Nevertheless, many fairs do seem to have been granted quite arbitrarily by the king for a variety of reasons which have nothing to do with such considerations as the foregoing. It is remarkable in Somerset that a round half-dozen new fairs make their appearance in 1304, and several more during the next few years. These were obviously intended as rewards for services rendered in the Scottish wars, and their recipients may safely be reckoned among the king's supporters in that campaign. One charter, quoted above, contains the words 'in service with the king in Scotland'. A second reason for the establishment of a fair is given us in the charter to the monks of Cleeve Abbey, overtaken by a local calamity, and faced consequently with a large capital outlay which the profits of the fair were to provide (p. 148). Whether some of the fairs granted in the years which followed 1348, when the Black Death took terrible toll of Somerset lives, were prompted by the same sense of calamity much more widely felt, is not certain, but we do know from the State Papers that, centuries later, when the national disaster of the Civil War had left in its train ruin and loss, many requests for fairs were received, and the large increase in their number which becomes apparent in the later lists may find here its cause. The king, again, might grant a fair, or fairs, to some favoured manor, as at his own royal manor at Somerton, simply for the benefit (presumably financial) of the place itself, or of its lord. In nothing do we regret the paucity of information so much as in this matter of origins, since, could we but know *why* the fair was granted, a wide field of local social history might well be opened to us.

Certain it is, however, that between 1300 and 1500 a very large proportion of the Somerset fairs came into being, and their long continuance is perhaps a testimony to the steady life of the countryside in this mainly agricultural community throughout the long period of the Middle Ages. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with their religious and political troubles, gave few new fairs to the county, unless, as suggested above, the Civil War and the subsequent need of reorganisation led to the increase in their number which is so remarkable in the early years of the eighteenth century, when our information becomes less scanty. That so many fairs, so-called, were able to survive into modern times reflects the prosperity of the country at large during the Hanoverian age. It was in the eighteenth century that the fairs finally forsook the saints' days which in so many cases had given them their first occasion, and though this may largely have been due to the confusion consequent upon the introduction of the *New Style* calendar, there may be some truth in the suggestion that it reflects the decay of religion as an abiding factor in the people's life. In an age when saints' days were no longer observed as holidays, it was naturally convenient to fix the day of the fair upon the same week-day in each year, and the ignorance of the church's calendar which had resulted from two centuries of Protestantism led to the cumbrous terminology which meets us in such phrases as 'the Tuesday before the last Wednesday but one in September'. At the same time we must note the influence of John Wesley's movement in the removal of fairs from some of the most sacred days, such as Good Friday, to dates less unsuitable for their purpose and character.

The decline of the fair, which has been so rapid since the beginning of the last century, is more easily accounted for than its rise. There can be no doubt that three factors have between them caused the disappearance of the great majority of these gatherings. The gradual growth of the large towns, with the consequent concentration of trade into the settled and permanent centres thus afforded, is a factor of long standing which has operated throughout the centuries. The jealousy of the old merchant guilds, and their steadfast endeavours to prohibit the activity of the 'free lance' trader, tended, even in the

Middle Ages, to restrict the business of the country fairs to commodities of solely local importance, and to draw all trade to the cities. But by far the most potent factor in the decay of the fair is that which has grown up since the Industrial Revolution, namely the vastly increased speed and ease of communication which has come with a mechanized age, and which enables the purchaser to visit the source of supply, or if he wishes, to command his wares to be brought to his own doorstep, without the intermediary of the fair. The fair has simply died a natural death, having outlived its usefulness to the community. But as with all decaying institutions, that which was least wholesome remained to the end, and enabled the last factor to operate against its survival. The growing sophistication and increased refinement of manners of English life found it impossible to gain adequate enjoyment from the time honoured fun of the fair, or to tolerate the accompanying licence and disorder which was natural to an earlier time. Thus it is that those fairs which have survived to-day are but shadows of their former selves, less full of busy trade and less robustious in their enjoyment.

Of the internal trade of the county the fairs tell us little more than is already known, since in all but a few cases it is not until we reach the eighteenth century that any record of the staple commodities becomes available. The big marts, as has already been said, would offer merchandise of all description for rich and poor, king and commoner alike, but the less important fairs were more specialised. It is well known that at Bristol the large seaport trade brought a wide variety of goods to the fairs, and at Bridgwater much of the trade came by water. Iron, wool, and dyestuffs like woad and orchell seem to be among the commodities of these coastal fairs, together with great quantities of fish and timber. In the inland districts, however, the bulk of the trade would seem to be confined to dairy produce, cattle, and sheep, and to be of local importance. What is known as *entrepôt* trade does not seem to have been a feature of the life of medieval Somerset. In this connection it is interesting to note that the vast majority of fairs are held in summer and autumn, winter fairs being very few, and presumably held for the sale of wild fowl, especially

in the marsh districts. In the south the summer fairs predominate, as we should expect from the nature of the country, and also from their own character, since we are told that 'the most critical sales of the year are those effected in early summer, when the amount of the last year's produce was known pretty correctly, and the prospects of the ensuing harvest could be fairly guessed'.⁵⁹

On the whole, as we try to envisage the Somerset of earlier days, covered with this network of fairs and markets, we see a widespread and fairly continuous activity, which offers a strong contrast to the modern localisation of trade in the large centres. Of the effect upon the life and character of the countryside of this reorientation it will be for future observers to speak, though changes sufficiently remarkable are to be noted in the single generation which has succeeded the dying-out of the greater number of country fairs.

⁵⁹ Thorold Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages* (1912), p. 144.