



Longleat, in the late 17th century

Wilts Archaeological and Natural History Society

...In the afternoon an excursion was made to Longleat, the princely seat of the Marquis of Bath, where his Lordship hospitably entertained the archaeologists and his friends, amounting altogether to upwards of 600 ladies and gentlemen. The luncheon was most magnificent, including almost every delicacy that imagination could devise, the whole arrangements being under the direction of that admirable caterer, Mr Gunter. After the luncheon, the Rev. Canon Jackson, the Secretary, delivered a very able lecture on Longleat. He commenced by offering the thanks of the society, in a few well chosen words, to Lord Bath for his reception. He then said - You are a Topographical Society for Wilts, and as such you should assemble within the limits of your county. You are nearly trespassers, for you are within three fourths of a mile of Somerset in the Hundred of Heytesbury. As to the parish, the house is situated in two parishes: when my Lord Bath writes his letters, he is in Horningsham, when he dines, he is in Longbridge Deverill. What is the derivation of Longleat? Sir R C Hoare says, Longa lata, the long broad: but that derivation is to be objected to. Here are two adjectives, and no noun. The truth is, the word is a noun of Saxon origin, meaning aqueduct, or a mill race, or course of water of such kind. The water originally supplied a mill, and there was now (as Lord Bath said) a "tradition of a mill near the old stable." On the site of this house stood once a Priory of Black Canons, consisting of a Prior and four or five monks, maintained by the adjoining lands. There were different altars here, which Canon Jackson mentioned). The names of several priors were preserved; there was an inventory of the plate and garments, some of which did not seem to be altogether clerical. The priory in the 21st year of Henry VIII was dissolved, and added to Hinton Charter House. In 1530, Hinton Charter House itself was dissolved. Longleat was acquired by Sir John Thynne through the influence of Protector Somerset. He was before in way connected with Wilts, but being secretary to the Protector, he picked up some crumbs from his table. At first it was humble purchase of 100 acres. Then the Baronet married the rich Sir Richard Gresham's daughter, lady with handsome fortune *in esse*, and more *in futuro*. He added to his estate. His good fortune created jealousy. He was summoned before the Privy Council, but gave good account of his possessions, and was dismissed unharmed. He had sixteen children. In 1566, he gave the order to build Longleat. Who was the architect? Tradition says, John of Padua,

and tradition is right. Canon Jackson then entered into some interesting particulars respecting the transition style of domestic architecture, from the fortified place to the more luxurious mansion. Longleat has this peculiarity: it may be regarded as unique in its way. It is a mixture of Tuscan, Ionic, and Corinthian architecture; one story being like another. You may think it barbarous, but the result is good. It is not ecclesiastical, because there are no pointed windows and tracery work; it the new Italian style. It was adhered to til the time of Elizabeth and even of James. There are various instances even in this country. Sir John Thynne was his own clerk of the works. In three years he spent £8,000, a large sum for those days. Queen Elizabeth came to see him before he had finished his house. She built no palaces herself, but encouraged others to do so when she came to visit them. Sir Christopher Wren was afterwards employed on the house. The Duke of Monmouth visited Longleat. Crowds followed him shouting for the Protestant Duke, and casting flowers in his path. Within a few months he and his host both had died violent deaths; Monmouth on Tower Hill, Mr Thynne murdered near Whitehall. Canon Jackson traced the murder of Thynne, an account of which has already appeared in the Archaeological Magazine. He passed a warm and well –deserved eulogy on the late Marquis of Bath, the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, for his public spirit and uniform kindness and amiableness of disposition. He congratulated the Society and county on the determination shown by the Marquis to follow in his ancestors' steps.

The lecture was most successful: at its close, Captain Gladstone invited the company to thank, with voice and heart, the Marquis for his hospitality, and the Canon for his learning.”

Bath Chronicle & Wiltshire Gazette 14 August 1856