

MALMESBURY, Wiltshire

Extract from National Gazetteer, 1868

"**MALMESBURY**, a parish, post and market town, municipal and parliamentary borough, having separate jurisdiction, but locally in the hundred of Malmesbury, county Wilts, 42 miles N. of Salisbury, 94 W. of London, and 7 W. of the Minety station on the Great Western railway. It is situated on elevated ground on the river Avon, over which there are six bridges. The converging branches of the river partly encircle the town, uniting at its southern extremity, where they form the Lower Avon. It is stated by Leland to have been an ancient British town, called *Caer Bladon*; but the earliest historical mention is of the middle of the 7th century, when a fortress existed here called *Ingelburne*.

It was subsequently famed for its mitred Benedictine abbey, founded on the site of the hermitage of St. Mailduff and Aldhelm, hence called *Mealdelmesbyrig* by Bishop Leutherius of Winchester, in 675. Buildings gradually arose round the abbey, forming a town which was chartered by Edward the Elder, and was endowed by Athelstan with the common called King's Heath. It continued to flourish, notwithstanding the ravages of the Danes, and, at the time of the Conquest, was one of the most important places in Wilts. A castle was built here by Bishop Roger, of Salisbury, in Henry I.'s time, which was taken by Stephen, and again, in 1152, by Prince Henry, afterwards Henry II., who laid siege to this fortress, and took it after an obstinate defence. The abbot was made a mitred parliamentary baron by Edward III., and the revenue of the abbey at the Dissolution was £803 17s. 7d. The town, which gives title of earl and baron to the Harrises of Great Durnford, was garrisoned in the Civil War for Charles I., and was twice taken by the parliamentary army. Under the Charter of Incorporation, confirmed by William III. in 1696, it is governed by a high steward, an alderman, and 12 capital burgesses. It returned two members to parliament from Edward I.'s time, but, since the Reform Act, it returns but one, the right of election being extended to the £10 householders of an enlarged district.

The town is well lighted with gas, and was paved under authority of an Act of Parliament obtained in 1798. It consists of a principal street, called High-street, which is crossed at the top by Oxfordstreet and Gloucesterstreet, the latter leading to the parish of Westport St. Mary. It contains two banks, a savings-bank, townhall, and a spacious market-place, in which is an octangular market cross, erected in the reign of Henry VII., and ornamented with flying buttresses, pinnacles, and an octangular central turret. A brisk trade was formerly carried on in woollen cloth, but is now decayed. There are breweries, tanyards, and a newly-established, ribbon manufactory; pillow lace is also made by the women and children.

Malmesbury Common, or King's Heath, which was given to the town by King Athelstan, was enclosed under an Act of Parliament, passed in 1826, which entitles every freeman in the borough to one allotment, and to every capital burgess from 8 to 15 acres. The loftiest point of the common is Shade Hill. The town is a polling-place for North Wiltshire, and petty sessions for the hundred of Malmesbury are held here once a month. The outlying portions of the new borough are chiefly in meadow and pasture, with a small proportion of rich arable land. The old borough comprises parts of the parishes of St. Paul, St. Mary Westport, and the Abbey district.

The living of St. Paul's is a discharged vicarage, valued in the king's books at £8 2s. 1½d. The church is dilapidated, but the tower, surmounted by a lofty spire, is still standing, and contains the bells, rung on public festivals. The living of St. Mary is a vicarage* with the perpetual curacies of Rodborne and Corston annexed, in the diocese of Gloucester and Bristol, joint value £265, in the patronage of the lord chancellor. The church dedicated to St. Mary is supposed to have been built by Bishop Roger of Salisbury, and formerly belonged to the abbey. That part only is used which was given to the town by William Stumps, the wealthy clothier, by whom it was purchased at the Dissolution. This portion consists of the W. front, nave, and its aisles, part of the transepts, and the decorated south porch, containing the figures of the Twelve Apostles-in fine preservation. About thirty years since the whole fabric was substantially repaired and the vaulted roof restored. The interior is handsomely fitted up, and over the altar is a painting representing Christ raising Lazarus, which was presented by the Earl of Suffolk.

There are chapels-of-ease at Corston and Rodborne. The parochial charities produce about £216 per annum. There are almshouses endowed with £20 per annum, National and infant schools, besides private and endowed schools. The Independents, Moravians, Baptists, Wesleyans, and Calvinistic Methodists have places of worship. Near Westport Church stands the house where Thomas Hobbs, the famed philosopher, resided. He was a native of this place, as was also Mrs. Mary Chandler the poetess, and William of Malmesbury, the celebrated English historian of the reign of Stephen. At King's Walls Roman coins and triangular bricks have been found, with traces of Bishop Roger's town wall.

The poorhouse for the Malmesbury Poor-law Union, which embraces 25 parishes in Wilts, is situated on the road to Sheraton, on the site of ground where formerly stood a convent of the Knights Hospitallers. In this building, of which some small portions remain, Henry VIII. was entertained by Stumps, the wealthy clothier, and Charles I. dined in 1643. Lord Northwick is lord of the manor. A small market for general provisions is held on Saturday, and markets for cattle on the last Tuesdays in every month, except March, April, and May. Annual fairs for horses, cattle, and sheep, are held on the 28th March, 28th April, 5th June and 15th December."

"**ABBEY IN MALMESBURY**, a parish in the hundred of Malmesbury, in county Wiltshire, not far from the town of Malmesbury. An abbey of the Benedictine order was established here in the 7th century by Maudulf. It appears to have been one of considerable importance, second, in the west of England, only to Glastonbury. Part of the old church still remains."

"**BURTON-HILL**, a tything in the parish and hundred of Malmesbury, in the county of Wilts, adjoining Malmesbury."

"**COLE**, a tything in the parish of St. Paul; Malmesbury, in the county of Wilts, 1 mile S. of Malmesbury."

"**COLE PARK**, a tything in the parish of St. Paul, Malmesbury, in the county of Wilts, 1 mile S. of Malmesbury."

"**CORSTON**, a tything and chapelry in the parish of St. Paul, Malmesbury, hundred of Malmesbury, in the county of Wilts, 2 miles S.W. of Malmesbury. The living is a perpetual curacy annexed to Malmesbury, in the diocese of Gloucester and Bristol, in the patronage of the lord chancellor. The church, dedicated to All Saints, is a modern edifice, with a tower. Here is a free school."

"**MILBOURN**, a tything in the parish of St. Paul, Malmesbury, hundred of Malmesbury, county Wilts, 1 mile N.E. of Malmesbury."

"**RODBORNE**, (or Redborn), a tything and chapelry in the parish of St. Paul, Malmesbury, hundred of Malmesbury, county Wilts, 2½ mile S.E. of Malmesbury, its post town. It is situated near the line of the Rodborne railway. The living is a perpetual curacy annexed to the vicarage of Malmesbury, in the diocese of Gloucester and Bristol. The church is dedicated to the Holy Rood."

"**WEST PARK**, a tything in the parish of Malmesbury St. Paul, county Wilts, 1 mile S. of Malmesbury, of which it forms a suburb. It is joined with the hamlet of Cole."