

# THE STORY OF PURTON

*A Collection of Notes and Hearsay*

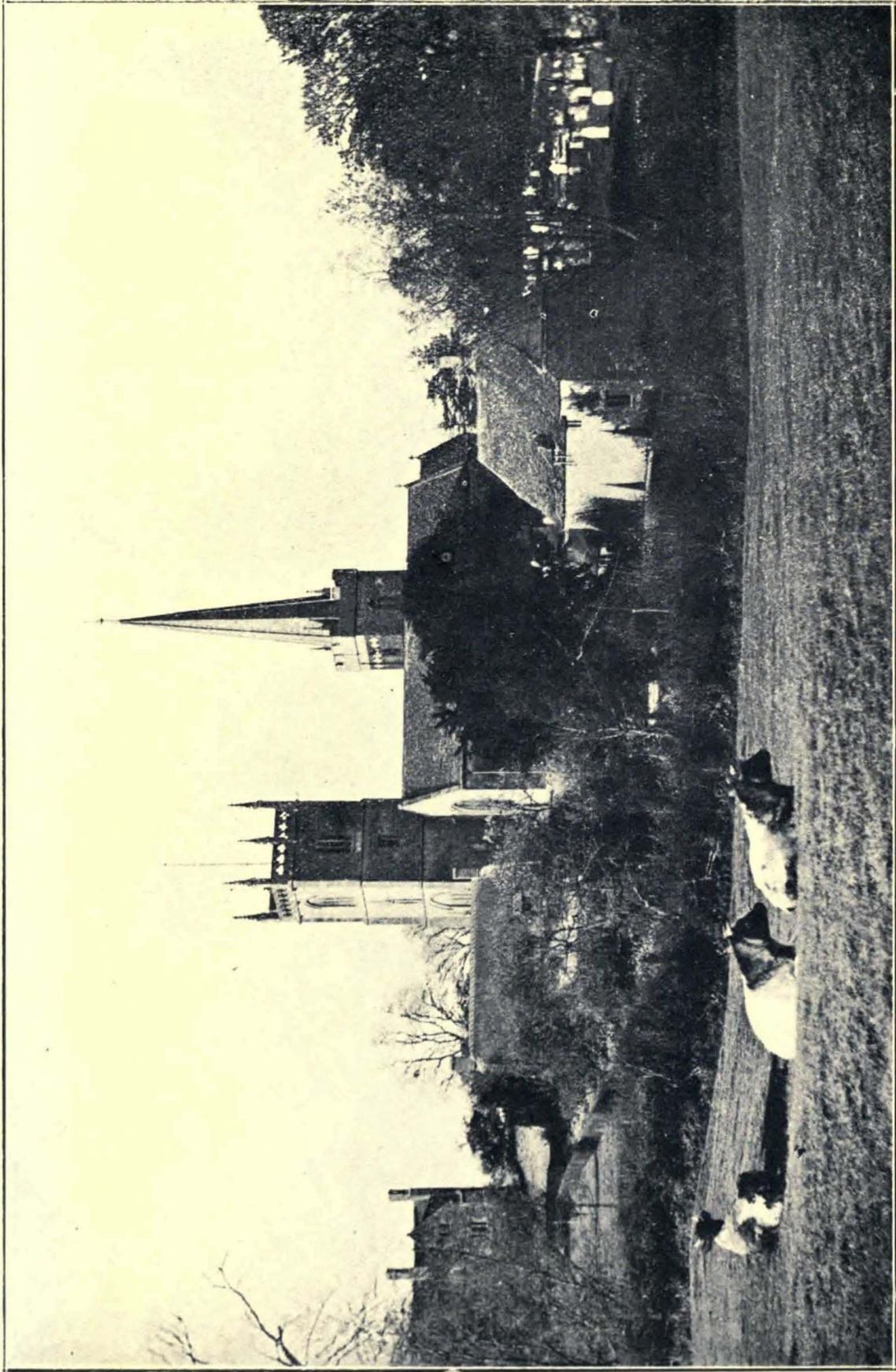
GATHERED BY  
ETHEL M. RICHARDSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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*Photo by J. Haskins.*

ST. MARY'S CHURCH, PURTON, MANOR HOUSE, AND OLD COTTAGES.



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To  
THE DEAR MEMORY OF  
MERVYN STRONGE RICHARDSON,  
CAPTAIN 1ST BATTALION ROYAL WELCH FUSILIERS,  
BY HIS MOTHER

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## FOREWORD

My little volume has outgrown my first intention, for as time went on, and the fact that a story of Purton was being written became known, I received notes and information beyond what I had been led to expect was possible. The piecing of it together has helped me to live through the saddest year of my life, and I trust that what I have collected may interest others, and perhaps arouse in them some of the enthusiasm and love for Purton which it has in me. I have quoted freely from several volumes of *Wilts Notes and Queries*, and from Mr. Ponting's delightful pamphlet on the Church, which was written for the *Wilts Archaeological Magazine*. I have also to acknowledge help from the Rev. Edward H. Goddard in allowing me to quote from this magazine, and also for correcting and assisting me in preparing my MSS. for publication. The volumes I have chiefly consulted are Britton's *Beauties of Wilts*, Aubrey's *Wiltshire Collections*, *The New British Traveller*, and an old volume called *Parish Laws*, published in 1733, and given to me by Mr. H. Dash.

I was also fortunate in having had talks with our late Vicar, and from him received valuable notes and newspaper cuttings. My thanks are also due to Mrs. Story-Maskelyne, Miss Maud Prower, Mrs. Atkinson, and Miss Walsh, and to Canon Livingstone, Canon Manley, the Rev. R. B. Harrison, Mr. Josiah Haskins, Mr. Wilding and Mr. Frank Kempster. Mr. Lee Osborn assisted me in the Clarendon chapter; and I must not conclude without my husband's name, who gave me much sympathy and encouragement in my task.

E. M. R.

March 27th, 1917.



# The Story of Purton

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY DAYS

WHICHEVER way one looks from Purton, the eye is charmed by the view. To the north there is the wide prospect of gently-undulating hills, and broad meadows richly wooded, and Cricklade Church a bold landmark in the middle distance. On the other sides there lies a typically English rural countryside, curiously winding roads and green lanes, as though there had been in the old days plenty of time, and no need to hurry to one's destination.

There are many quaint houses jutting in and out, without any order or scheme, and in consequence a prospect so restful and homelike. We cross the church field, and find a picture of rare historical and archæological interest in the group of buildings before us.

First comes the Great Barn, then the Manor House, and beyond the magnificent structure of our glorious Church, with its western tower and central spire.

This fine and stately building stands with its surrounding graveyard thickly studded by the resting-places of those villagers who, having accomplished their "lifelong task of living," have gone for ever from the scene of their labours.

Parish churches with a western tower and central spire are very rare. Three only exist in England to-day, one at Wanborough and one at Ormskirk, both interesting churches, but the writer can testify to the greater beauty and symmetry of the Purton edifice.

In the dim and distant past the great Forest of Braden is supposed to have covered almost the whole of the northern division of the county; but of those dense woods, once the



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home of wolves and other wild animals, scarcely a vestige remains, and the ancient spelling is only perpetuated in Bradenstoke Abbey—this is a mediæval building which stands on the edge of that long sweep of hills once the natural south-western boundary of the forest—and in Braden Pond, a large sheet of water near the village of Minety.<sup>1</sup>

The name of Purton, which is of Saxon origin, and signifies “The pear-tree enclosure,” is spelt in a variety of ways in the old deeds which mark the passing of the years—Peritone, Periton, Pureton, Puriton, Puryton, Pirton, and even Purrton, but the old Peritone is certainly the prettier and more distinctive name, as Porton and a Pirton occasionally cause trouble to the Post Office authorities, especially when the address on a letter is indistinctly written.

The oldest thing that human hands have made at Purton is Ringsbury Camp. It has been called a Roman Camp, but is much older, as its shape at once forbids this theory.<sup>2</sup> No Roman general ever encamped his troops except in a regular rectangular camp. Also it is away from the great lines of roads which the Romans made between great centres such as Corinium (Cirencester) and Aquæ Solis (Bath).

It is doubtless of the same age as the camps on the Downs. It is likely that these camps were places of refuge for a time of danger, each for its own tribe or neighbourhood.

The great camp at Avebury probably dates from 1500 to 2000 B.C., at the end of the Neolithic and beginning of the Bronze Age (the recent excavations go to prove this), and Avebury was no doubt an “ancient monument” when Cæsar came to Britain. Probably all the stone circles were connected with worship or observation of the heavenly bodies. In the light of present-day history it is instructive to note that we are told by no less an authority than Cæsar that “the Germans (those beyond the Rhine) had no gods or sacrifices but what they could see, the Sun, Moon, and Fire, and such is natural if all revelation of religion were lost.” Anyhow, at Ringsbury at various times Roman coins, and once a millstone, have been unearthed.

During the sixth century Wiltshire experienced the full

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries.*

<sup>2</sup> Mr. MacKnight.



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force of the Saxon invasion, and the country round Purton was the scene of many desperate engagements.

Towards the close of the seventh century the Christian King Cēdwalla, who ruled the West Saxons, laid the foundation of the Abbey of Malmesbury, and amongst the earliest grants made to that religious house<sup>1</sup> was one bestowing thirty-five hides in Purton, comprising the chief Manor and the Rectory. Under the heading of Purton are the words : “ Terra est XXXV hyd de orientali parte silvae quae dicitur Bradon Hac dedit Chedwalla rex, Aldhelmo Abbati.”

There is another grant of land in Purton made by Egeferth, the Mercian King, A.D. 796, and subscribed to by a king of the West Saxons, Beorhtrich by name. As it states that the Mercian King Egeferth makes it, *having been requested* to do so by Beorhtrich, King of the West Saxons, it seems probable that Wessex had become tributary to Mercia. But a darker hour was yet in store. The Danes under Guthrum “burst into the territory of Wilsaetas,” took the royal town of Chippenham, and from thence harried the surrounding country.

In 905 they “put to military execution all Brithendune as far as Bradenstoke,” and seized, either in Braden or thereabouts, all they could lay their hands on. Year after year the awful spectacle was repeated, and the ceaseless series of invasions in which Wiltshire played so prominent a part continued until the Conqueror’s strong hand gave the stricken country peace at last.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. MacKnight (once of Purton and Lydiard Millicent, and of whom more anon) wrote in 1886 as follows :—

“Pavenhill I consider more interesting than Ringsbury. Canon Prower told me that it was a *Danish* encampment, and that his father had received that tradition. This would carry it (tradition) back more than 120 years, and most likely it came down regularly from generation to generation to his time from the fact itself. It is certain that the hill is escarped in two places, and this might have been done as a temporary defence, not as a permanent military station. Then just below it you have ‘Battle Lake,’ which name would connect that strong position with some engagement, and, if the tradition of ‘Danish encampment’ be true, it would be between the Danes and Saxons.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter xvi.

<sup>2</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries*.



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Now Alfred defeated Gothrum 878, and according to William of Malmesbury required him to be baptised, standing as his sponsor, and then gave him East Anglia as a kingdom tributary to himself, and the Saxon Chronicle says that in 879 this army went to Cirencester from Chippenham (near which he had been conquered), and stayed a year there before moving eastward. In that march they would pass through Purton to avoid Orwolder (Braden Forest), and the engagement at 'Battle Lake' (then undoubtedly undrained) might then have taken place. At least you have the tradition of a Danish encampment, and a battlefield below it, and the historic fact of the defeat of Gothrum at Eddington, and the march of the Danish army (879) from Chippenham to Cirencester. Put all these things together, and do your best to give body to the old tradition and re-people the old places. Canon Prower was strong in his belief that the Danes were at Pavenhill, and, if so, it must have been about that time, A.D. 879."<sup>1</sup>

From this account it would appear that Battle Lake lay in the low-lying land immediately below the above-mentioned "strong position," and the quaint name of Pond's Gutter which is given to a stream which flows to-day beneath the road in that direction may possibly be derived from its waters having in those old days helped to feed Battle Lake.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Mr. J. H. Sadler.



## CHAPTER II

STORIES OF PURTON—THE DE VESCIS, DE PERITONES,  
PAYNELLS AND KEYNES

“BISHOP ALDHELM, the former landlord of Purton, was no ordinary man. Amongst other miracles wrought by him, was the lengthening of a beam of wood by virtue of his prayers. Then it is asserted that the ruins of a church built by him, though open to the skies, were never wet with rain during the worst weather. His clothes also were not of the human cut, for when Aldhelm on one occasion was at Rome one of his garments remained for a time self-suspended in mid-air, after the fashion, it is to be presumed, of Mahomed’s coffin. But whether or not Aldhelm had the gift of performing miracles or not, it is quite certain he was no ordinary man. Martineau in his *Church History* thus refers to him :—

“ ‘Aldhelm was one of the earliest of English poets, and made his art subservient to the higher office of instructing the people in the knowledge of the Gospel. Having composed tales and ballads in the Saxon tongue on subjects likely to be of popular interest, he used to station himself on a bridge, or at the junction of cross roads,<sup>1</sup> and there sing his poems to the harp, till he had collected an audience, then, having charmed their ears with music, he took occasion to give them spiritual instruction for their souls. Aldhelm, moreover, had an extensive knowledge of the Greek and Latin tongues, and the Canon of Roman law. For this he was in a great measure indebted to the School of Hadrian at Canterbury, though he had in earlier life been a pupil of a learned Scottish monk. He was also the first scholar who was distinguished for composition of Latin prose and verse, and though his poetical performances in that language are not remarkable for elegance, they are by no means contemptible, when we consider the barbarism of the preceding age, and the difficulties with which the student had to contend.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Possibly by Mrs. Walsh’s Great Barn.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Veysey’s Notes.



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The Domesday record of Purton runs thus :—

“The same Church (St. Mary’s of Malmesbury) holds Piritone. It was assessed in the time of Edward the Confessor at 35 hides. Here are 24 ploughlands. Twenty-one hides and a half are in demesne, where are 2 ploughlands, and 5 servants. 20 villagers, 12 borderers, and 13 cottagers occupy 19 ploughlands. The Mill pays 5s. Here are 60 acres of meadow. The wood is 3 miles square. A burgage in Crichelade, belonging to this Manor pays 6 pence. It was, and is worth 16 pounds.”

Edward de Saresbury held property in Purton (*temp.* King Stephen). His holding passed by marriage to the Bohuns, Earls of Hereford. As before mentioned, the name of Purton means “The pear-tree enclosure,” and this good old Saxon name was borne by the once all-powerful family of de Peritone, Adam de Peritone owning a large portion of North Wilts. He was heir to Odred (falconer to King Henry II.), who had married a sister of Sir Thomas de Sampford.

Adam’s son was Thomas de Peritone, who, as will be seen later in our story, made a grant of tithes in the early part of the thirteenth century, and he was a person of some piety, for he built a private chapel for his own use, promising that the church should lose nothing thereby. Thomas apparently left no son to succeed to his inheritance, but three grand-daughters, co-heiresses. First comes Isabel, who married William de Vesci, of whom we read that he was “summoned to Parliament in 1295, and was one of the competitors for the Crown of Scotland *temp.* Edward I.”<sup>1</sup> He was also mentioned as “Justice in Eyre for all the Royal Forests beyond Trent, and one of the Justices Itinerant touching the pleas of the Forest, Governour of Scarborough Castle, and Lord Justice of Ireland, where he was Lord of Kildare.”

One pictures his coming to Purton, and his meeting with Isabel de Peritone, an heiress of no small standing, and then perchance the happy wedding in the fine old church. Alas! the register does not go back so far, but it is more than likely that it took place here, in the bride’s native village, and doubtless was a great day for Purton and its inhabitants.

Isabel’s husband was a son of William de Vesci, and traced his descent far beyond the Norman Conquest to the founder

<sup>1</sup> *Burke’s Peerage*, 1837, p. 283.



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of the House of Blois in Normandy. He had an elder brother John, who was summoned to Parliament as Baron de Vesci Dec. 24th, 1264, and when he died William succeeded to his honours and estates.

Thomas de Vesci in his turn followed as the only remaining brother to carry on the line.

Their father William had taken many precautions that a suitable wife should be found for the heir to his estates. The taste of the principals was not consulted, as was the custom in those days, and the record is strangely unlike the manners of to-day, when the young manage their own affairs according to their inclinations.

In the Calendar of Patent Rolls, July 26th, 1253, we find on record that in case John the elder brother should fail to marry "one of the daughters of the lord of Chambre (de Camera), or of the vicomte of Aosta (Augustensis), as the queen and the said Peter shall provide," that William is to be the husband of one of the said ladies, but if in his turn William should fail to fill the position by dying too soon "the said Peter de Sabandia or his assign shall have the marriage of the next heir, saving to the King the wardship of the lands" of the younger William, "during the minority of his heirs."

His father went to France with the King in 1253, for we find his name with others who had "protection . . . for so long as they are in his service in those parts with the King."

The oath which the father William took was a very serious and solemn affair. It was taken in the King's presence at Portsmouth, "on the day of St. Mary Magdalen, 37 Hen. III.," and it was to be enforced by "four good men selected by William, and four good men selected by the counsel of the Queen and Peter de Sabandia," and there was to be a sum of money assigned when the marriage should take place.

To make assurance doubly sure, William bound himself "on his fealty in the King's hand," and Peter swore a similar oath "to procure performance thereof," and further William "laid himself under the royal and ecclesiastical jurisdiction" to fulfil his covenant "under pain of 1,000 marks," and of the Archbishop of Canterbury's ecclesiastical censure. Amongst many witnesses to this were the Earl of Warwick, John de Grey, etc.



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Peter de Sabandia, in 1254, got the wardship of the "lands and heirs of William de Vesci, together with the marriage of the heirs, the advowsons of the Churches, liberties and all things belonging to the wardship, so that he marry the heirs without disparagement."

These lands seem to have been of a very large extent, including "demesnes, homages, rents, villeinages, woods, meadows, pastures and other issues," and included "the Castle and Manor of Alnewyk."

In a dispute between Henry III. and Montfort, Earl of Leicester, in 1264, it appears William de Vesci and his elder brother John joined Leicester against the King, and this incurred the royal displeasure, for we read that "Protection until Michaelmas" was given to William de Vesci "for the Manor of Kattorp, Co. Lincoln, and the men of that Manor, which has been taken into the King's hands, because he is against the King with John de Vesci his brother in the present disturbance of the realm."<sup>1</sup>

There is the old Scots saying that "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley," and so it seems to have been with regard to William de Vesci's marriage, as neither a lady of Chambre nor of Aosta, but as already stated Isabel de Peritone, was the bride selected when the time came.

Unhappily poor Isabel failed to provide the wished-for heir, not only to her own broad acres, but to those of her husband, including the Barony of de Vesci, which at his brother John's death came to him in 1289.

At William's death, therefore, without lawful male issue, Gilbert de Aton was declared his heir, and after him the Barony passed through many vicissitudes and changes, two hundred years later being vested in Henry de Vesci (1503), whose dwelling-place is given as "our lady besides the market Cambridge."<sup>2</sup>

In an Indenture of a sale to the Rajah of Sarawak on March 6th, 1893, now among the Purton House deeds, we find that twenty-seven acres of land, including Bark Field and the present gate-lodge, were sold by the Earl of Shaftesbury

<sup>1</sup> Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1258-66.

<sup>2</sup> His daughter Isabel married Gilbert de Aton. See *Burke's Peerage*.

<sup>3</sup> Wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.



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and the Viscount de Vesci. This seems to suggest that though six hundred years or more had rolled by, a de Vesci still held a tiny share of the broad lands his family had obtained through the marriage with Isabel de Peritone.

Through her great-great-grandmother, the Honourable Elizabeth Vesey, sister of the first Viscount de Vesci, the writer likes to think of a slender link with bygone days in Purton, now happily strengthened by her husband's possession of the old Bark Field.

Another sister of Isabel married a Keynes, a name familiar in several neighbouring villages, and the youngest, Katherine de Peritone, married John Paynell, and left descendants.

Of these Paynells and Keynes we find some curious records in Edward I.'s day, and later Katherine Paynell owning "a capital messuage, etc., at Puryton," also 64 acres of arable, 10 of meadow, her rent 41s., "works of four customers, pasture and pleas, etc., held of Robert de Keynes by service of rendering 2s. yearly at Feasts of St. Andrew, and St. Peter ad Vincula. Philip Paynell, her son, aged 25 and more is her next heir."

This Philip had to "seek his inheritance," and in a writ to prove it, which lay "as well in the King's hand, as in the wardship of Katherine Paynell, his mother, in the nineteenth Edward I.," we read as follows: "Jn de Cantebe says year of that the said Philip was born at Pyriton in hundred of Staple, on the day of the Assumption, about the 1st hour, 53 Henry III., and was baptized in the Baptistry of St. Mary's Church Pyriton, by Richard,<sup>1</sup> then vicar, on the morrow, at the morning hour (*hora matutina*).

"Philip Basset, uncle of the sd. Philip's Mother, who was then at his manor of La FASTERNE,<sup>2</sup> being asked to be godfather, sent his friends (familiares) Hugh de Courteney and Jn de Pyriton to lift him from the font, and give him the name of sd. Philip Basset, and Agnes, then the wife of Roger de Writel, held him, and was his godmother. He is certain of the time, for one Jn. le Frie of Pyriton, married one Emma at Hockday, before the sd. Philip's birth, and the witness met him leading his wife, with a great company, and struck one Wm. Champeneys, who was very abusive, heavily on the head with a staff, for which he was heavily amerced in the hundred

<sup>1</sup> Ricardius de Bristolla.

<sup>2</sup> Now Vasterne Manor.



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(court) of Worth, and made pecuniary amends." (Writ made at Malmesbury as "proof of age" on Sunday, Feast of Saint Swithin, 19 Edward I.)

One of the witnesses "Philip de Forde agrees," adding "that the aforesaid Vicar who baptized the said Philip was born at Cirencester."<sup>1</sup>

Eleanor Keynes owned 10 marks rent in Purton and Chelworth in Edward III.'s reign.

Later, one John Sothill in Henry VII.'s day, held the "Manor of Pereton" from the Abbot of Malmesbury, and a sad description of his heir, George, runs thus, "George Sothill, aged 30 and more, a natural idiot from his birth," the manor being valued at £10. On account of his infirmity the King held the "natural fool and idiot's" manor, and his sisters were named his heirs, on his death at the early age of 38 years.

In an Inquisition quoted in the *Wilts Archæological Magazine* we find references to a De Peritone, a Walrond, and a Keynes as follows:—

Richard de Peryton made a grant of a knight's fee and advowson in Wodbergh to Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, in 1370.

William Walrond "held in his demesne as of fee, two carucates of land in Peunhull,<sup>2</sup> from Malmesbury Abbey by rent of 15s. yearly, and a suit of court twice a year at the Manor of Puryton worth 40s. a year clear" in 1369.

John de Keynes in 1376 "held in his demesne, as of fee, in the vill of Puryton the Manor of Keynes from the Abbot of Malmesbury, by what services the jurors do not know. It is worth 10 marks yearly clear."

<sup>1</sup> c. Edw. I., File 60(5) Cal. Mg., Vol. ii., No. 819.

<sup>2</sup> Pavenhill.





CHIMNEY-PIECE IN COLLEGE FARM, PURTON.



CHIMNEY-PIECE IN COLLEGE FARM, PURTON.



## CHAPTER III

### FOREST RIGHTS—COLLEGE FARM—THE HYDE FAMILY

BRITTON the antiquary tells us that "the Parish of Purton is very extensive, and comprises a considerable part of the Forest of Braden," which, he adds, "is now almost destitute of wood, and much of it is enclosed and cultivated. It is termed by old writers Brithendune or Bredon Wood. From the Roll of Perambulations of Forests, it appears that in the 12th of Henry III. Brayden, then called an ancient forest, was the property of Thomas de Sampford. In the 28th of Edward I. it belonged to the family of Peverell. In the 45th of Edward III. Hugh de le Spencer bought Peverell's Woods of Sir John Wroxhall, and Spencer, being attainted of treason, his possessions were forfeited to the Crown. Braden Forest was then given to the King's fourth son, Edmund de Langley, Duke of York. Among the Lansdowne manuscripts in the British Museum is a copy of a warrant to Richard, Earl of Cambridge, dated the 8th of Richard II., authorising him to fell timber in Braden Forest. This nobleman, who was the second son of the Duke of York, was in 1415 beheaded for a conspiracy against his cousin, Henry V., and Braden again reverted to the Crown.

"In the fifth year of Charles I. the Forest of Braden was disafforested, when 100 acres of it were allotted to the poor of Cricklade, 150 acres to the free holders of the inner boundary of the said Forest, 25 acres to the poor of The Leigh in the Parish of Ashton Keynes, and 25 acres to the poor of Purton Stoke; all the aforesaid parties having had right of common in the Forest, and having put in their claims to a compensation for the loss of their rights.<sup>1</sup>

"The farmers who occupied the lands after the disafforestation claimed exemption from poor rates on account of the grant of lands out of the Forest to the poor, but their claim was set aside, and they have paid poor rates for many years."

Some of the grants connected with Braden Forest are

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter viii.



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peculiar, *i.e.* by gift of Henry IV. the Abbey of Cirencester was entitled to four does a year from Braden Forest. The Prior of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at Wootton Bassett (and subsequently the Vicar) enjoyed the right to cut trees to build his house, and to hunt with bow and hound without hindrance from gamekeepers in Braden Forest. Some lands in Purton, probably part of Braden in 1472, maintained a chantry in Ramsbury Church. The first Earl of Clarendon, Edward Hyde, was not born in Purton, but his father, Henry Hyde, lived in what is now the College Farm, at present occupied by Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Iles, under Worcester College, Oxford. On a chimney-piece in one of the rooms there is a shield of arms of the Earl's grandmother, one of the Sibell family, viz. a tiger looking backwards in a mirror. Lord Clarendon tells us that in his seventeenth year, "being seized with an illness at the Middle Temple, his friends much feared a consumption, so his uncle (Sir Nicholas Hyde, of Marlborough, Lord Chief Justice) thought fit to send him into the Country to Pirton in North Wiltshire, whither his Father had removed himself from Dinton" (where the Chancellor was born 1608), "choosing rather to live upon his own land, the which he had purchased many years before, and to rent Dinton, which was but a lease for lives to a tenant." While living in this house at Purton he relates a strange coincidence, for he tells us that "whilst he was reading to his Father in Camden's Annals in Latin, the particular passage relating to a certain *John Felton* who had fixed the Pope's Bull against the Bishop of London's Palace gate, a person of the neighbourhood knocked at the door, and told them that a post had just gone through the village to Charlton, the Earl of Berkshire's, to inform the Earl that the Duke of Buckingham was killed the day before by another *John Felton*."

His two elder brothers dying, the Chancellor succeeded to the property, having apparently recovered his health in the salubrious air of Purton.

He married firstly Anne, daughter of Sir John Ayliffe, of Grittenham, in the adjoining parish of Brinkworth.

She died of smallpox in the first year of marriage, 2nd July, 1632, aged 20. Mr. Hyde was elected member for Wootton Bassett and Shaftesbury, but chose the former.



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He then married as his second wife a daughter of Sir Thomas Aylesbury. The "Short Parliament" coming to an end, he was re-elected for Saltash, and represented that constituency in the celebrated "Long Parliament." His cautious disposition gradually weaned him from the popular side, and he became a supporter of the King, who in return for this knighted him, and created him Chancellor of the Exchequer. He travelled on the Continent with the King, acting as his adviser and secretary, and later on was appointed to draw up the famous Declaration of Breda.

In 1660 he was raised to the Peerage as Earl of Clarendon. He was in favour of a policy embracing the supremacy of the Anglican Church, and earned by his severe policy the hatred of the Puritan party. He opposed the Dutch War, which was popular in the country, and busied himself in raising large sums of money for the Crown. Amongst other causes of his unpopularity was the idea that he favoured the King's marriage with Katherine of Braganza, knowing that she was unlikely to have children, and so to make practically certain that his daughter Anne, who had secretly married the King's brother, James, Duke of York, should some day be Queen of England. Anne Hyde had gone to Court at the age of 22 as maid of honour to a sister of the King. She at once captivated James's fancy, but wisely insisted on a regular marriage. She eventually became the mother of eight children, two of whom, Mary and Anne, were in turn Queens of England. When the story of the marriage was known, Clarendon became the object of much popular abuse, and he was much alarmed, for he then turned on Anne, laying the blame at her door. She was no doubt given to much extravagance, and was of a proud and arrogant disposition. Later on she joined the Roman Catholic Church, and dying in 1671, was buried in Westminster Abbey. It has been said that Anne was born at College Farm, but such was not the case, though much of her childhood was probably spent there.

But darker days were in store for Clarendon. The House of Commons in 1667 impeached him for treason, and Charles warned him to expect no protection or help from him. He then left these shores for the South of France, where he wrote his noted books, *The History of the Great Rebellion*, and his



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*Autobiography.* Dying there in 1674, his remains were brought home to Westminster Abbey, where they lie in the vault with others of his family at the foot of the steps leading to Henry VII.'s Chapel.

Everyone who goes to London has seen Hyde Park, but few who enjoy its sylvan beauties realise that this princely gift was bestowed upon London by this very Lord Clarendon, in acknowledgment of which he received a gilt key and the right to enter the Park at any time he chose. Surely we Purton folk may feel (even though the best part of three centuries has rolled away since the gift was made) a reflected glory and satisfaction that a Purton man was able to offer and bestow upon the nation so great a boon while time shall run. The great parks are truly called the "lungs of London," for the wonderfully healthy record of that great city is in no small measure attributable to these open spaces, and the millions who enjoy Hyde Park as each year passes might at least give a kindly thought to the Purton Chancellor who did so much for them, their ancestors and descendants.

There is no doubt that the wall which encircles College Farm is of an ancient date, and must have stood there long before the road which runs round it was made. This is obvious from the fact that a curve begins from where the Post Office stands, and the straight road continues its line just beyond where the wall turns, so it is evident that the road only deflected to avoid the wall already there.

The postern gate which breaks the wall has a pretty arch, and probably dates from about 1680, but may be older.



## CHAPTER IV

REFORMATION CHANGES—INTERESTING EVENTS—CHURCH ALES—  
ST. GEORGE'S CULT

“ AT the close of the sixteenth century<sup>1</sup> the so-called Reformation was proceeding in a resolute, if not a relentless manner. The very principles of our religion were being slighted and impugned, the outward forms so venerated by generations in the past were treated with the utmost contempt, the stately ceremonial was regarded as slavish idolatry, and even the surplice was flung aside as superstitious. A spirit of destruction passed over the land, the churches were desecrated, and the materials of the most exquisite shrines were removed, and sold for what they would fetch.”

The following is an extract from a document of the time of Edward VI., dealing with the spoliation of Purton Church :—

“ Interrogatories to be mynystered on the part of Sir Edmund Bryddges Knight.

“ First, whether Browne and Jaakes, servantes unto Benet Joy, dyd stele and convey away the Image of Seynt George ouzt of Puryton Church, and caryed the same to the Mancion house of Joys or no.

“ Item, whether one of the Church wardens commanded them soo to doo, or by whose commande they so did, and who byd them put hit into the wole house of Joys', and for what intent the same was caryd away more than the other images.

“ Item whether Browne and Jakes did confesse the takying away the said image, and whether they toke the same ageyn oultzt of the woll house and caryd hyt to the Church ageyn, or who caryd the same image to the Church.

“ Item, whoo commanded them to bring hit to Church and what was the cause, or did they bring hyt of their owne free will.

“ Item. Whether the seid Sir Edmund Bryges did convey away his trees owzt of Joys' ferme grounde with as much spede

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. xxxiii., p. 145, etc.



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as he could gett caryage, or whether he sufferyd them to lye of purpose to destroy Joys' grasse.

"Item. Whether the bearward to Sir Edmund Bryges be a natural foole, or folishe or noo."

Certain acres in Purton were set apart for the maintenance of church lights, and at the Buthaye (which once stood behind the cottage on Mrs. Walsh's property, now occupied by Mr. Davis the verger) was brewed "Seynt George's ale," the proceeds of the sale of which were dedicated to the use of St. George and his priest. The old cottage, which was pulled down in 1901, showed an absence of windows in front upstairs, the inside was more interesting. In the principal living room beside the hearth was a four-foot-square alcove with an opening into a dark chamber above. In this room there was no window or any approach except through this alcove. The inference we draw is that it was as it remained since Benedict Joy answered the above interrogatories.

On the subject of the disputes between Lord Chandos and the Pulleys, and also of the various schemes employed to raise funds necessary for the Church's expenses, the writer gratefully acknowledges the following most interesting notes written for this volume by Mrs. Story-Maskelyne :—

Purton in the days of Queen Elizabeth was in the throes of supremely interesting events, which were of the greatest importance to its inhabitants, events giving rise to questions relating to the religion of the land and to the common rights of the people. In both questions the Brydges family were concerned and played a prominent part.

Sir J. Brydges had been Groom of the Bedchamber to King Henry VIII., and was created Baron Chandos by Queen Mary for his share in suppressing Wyatt's rebellion. He had acquired the monastic lands at Purton and elsewhere, too, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

These monastic suppressions were the cause of much bitter feeling, which accompanied the profound religious changes all over the country during the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary and Elizabeth, one result being that the lease of the Manor and Rectory of Purton, given in 1515 by the Abbot of Malmesbury, in anticipation of coming troubles, to R. Pulley,



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his wife, and four young children in survivorship, was after the Dissolution held by Lord Chandos, although, as the rent was reserved, it was many years before he came into full possession. The Manor rented at £9 16s. od., the Rectory at £12, and the Tithes 40s. were paid yearly at the Feasts of Lady Day and Michaelmas, from which we may presume that the grand old tithe barn was by that time no longer filled, as of old, with the tithe in kind, which used to cover its spacious floors in the days of the Abbot of Malmesbury, 40s. being paid instead.

In the days when the families of R. Pulley and J. Brydges both considered themselves lawfully entitled to possession of the former Abbey lands it was inevitable that disputes should arise.

In Edward VI.'s time a curious case in point arose when the tenure of Isabel, daughter of R. Pulley, and now wife of Bennet Joy, after peaceable enjoyment of the Manor and Rectory for many years, was called in question and her house forcibly entered by the servants of Sir E. Brydges. For this and other serious indictments she brought an action against him, accusing him of molestation and persecution of many kinds, amongst others the following: "They did breke and enter into the duff house and killed all the doves, and distroyed the duff house." They destroyed the well with refuse, and prevented the Pulleys from collecting "the 20 loodes of wood they were entitled to 'get in Braden.'" It was also said that "they entered the Court with a hand gun and dyd shote and kyll the hennes and capons, and dayly shoteth his doves and pultry . . . so that his servants went in terror of their lives." The Brydges family seem to have kept a bear, for one of the accusations brought against him was that "his beareward and his servants did course a Beare upon the ground called 'Wyndmill Hill'<sup>1</sup> at the time when the cows were in calf thus causing much loss." Last, but not least, was the accusation of the forcible entry into the "house of Joys."

The event which led to this forcible entry into Joys' house was preceded by an order from the King for removing "all images and Idolls from the Church of Puryton," when G. Messenger, one of the Wardens of the Parish Church,

<sup>1</sup> Now part of the park at Purton House.



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who had been appointed by the King's Visitor, "repeired to the Church (on the 29th Jan., 1547-48) with diverse of his neighbours and there pulled down all Images and Idolls within the said Church, according to the Commandment . . . and as it became true subjects to doe, which after they soe did, they did shutt and put all the same images in a corner of the Church, appointing them to be sold, and the money thereof coming to be put into the Poor's men's box, to such uses as the Visitor appointed, then the Churchwarden and others departed." Whereupon Isabel was overheard by her servants, saying that "much lyking the image (of St. George) wished she had the same at home in her house," and "that it was a pity to deface the same." Her servants then "stole the Image from the Church and carried it to the Wool house belonging to the Mansion." Next came the servants of Sir E. Brydges, "who broke upon the door with a pyked staff in search of the stolen Image which they took forth and carried to the Church ageyn."

Transactions such as the above must have been deeply resented by parishioners still belonging to the older faith, as were the family of R. Pulley, to which belonged both Isabel and her niece Jane, wife of George Maskelyne, who, when an old woman after a widowhood of over sixteen years, made her last will. Her memory would carry her back over three-fourths of a century of profound changes. She was almost to a year the contemporary of her sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth. Reared in the older faith, she had seen the beautiful Church of Purton in the full glory of the ancient rite, and the vain longing for one at least of its accessories found a pitiful expression in a clause thus:—

"To the Bells of Pyrton XX's and the increase of 40s. towards the yearly maintenance of one to play uppon the organs in the parish Church of Pyrton aforesaid, whensoever the parishioners there shall and will provide and hire one to play uppon the same."<sup>1</sup> She further desired in her will to be buried near her grandfather Pulley, the conventual lessee of the church lands of Malmesbury Abbey, in the chancel of the Church. Those days were indeed a contrast to what Isabel Joy must have remembered, when as a little child the old Abbot of Malmesbury and the monks accompanying him

<sup>1</sup> A. S.-M.



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came to the house of her father in Purton to receive their dues at the court holden on the Manor, when, as we find recorded by one of the former monks of Malmesbury, he saw "Isabel then a young gyrlle of ii or iii years of age, playing up and down in her father's house," whom the then Abbot did much countynance and did play withal" and "would jest withal and call yt wife." (Star-Chamber Proceedings, W. & M., vol. xxxiii., p. 145 *et seq.*)

With the passing of those days passed also the remembrance of very much else, such as the uses for which the church lands had originally been given, and it came to be supposed that "certain lands which had been given to superstitious uses, and so employed in the reign of King Henrie 8th, had been withheld and consealed from her Highness Queen Elizabeth." To clear up these points a commission, consisting of Sir W. Brydges and others, was appointed in 1592 (the thirty-fourth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign). Amongst the witnesses called, R. Plover, an old man aged 86, said that he "had known all the parcels of land in question all his life; and that these church lands were at one time held by one Th. Shurmer who did maintain the lights such as the Trinity light and other tapers in the Church on holy days and Festmatt days . . . and that he used to light and put them out." Also that "the Churchwardens had the letting of the church lands in respect of their office"; that "the Buthies belonged to the maintenance of the Image of St. George and of his Priest, who did long time agone use to praie for the Brethren and Sisters of St. George. The two Ale Stewards were yearly chosen by the parishioners and were called St. George's Ale Stewards, and they did brew an ale called St. George's Ale . . . and they had the use of the ground called the Butheys and did make therin St. George's Buttes . . . then as now. The *increase* of their ale and rent of the Butheys did maintain St. George and his Priest . . . till the Image and his Priest were abolished and the lights taken out of the Church," after which "the Churchwardens did enter and take to all the said lands, and employed the same to the use of the Parish Church of Pirton." The church lands which are here alluded to, and which had belonged to the Church "tyme whereof no memory of man runneth belonging," were in 1577 and 1582 let by the Churchwardens to George Maskelyne



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and his heir, his son Edmund being in possession of the leases at the time of the "Depositions." They were then said to be :—

- 1 acre lying in Woodward Crofte
- one  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre in the Hourne <sup>1</sup>
- one  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre lyeth in Hilly Meade
- one  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre lieth in Barfield
- one  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre lieth at the Downe end.
- one acre and half at Clardon
- half an acre lieth at Shilfinche
- and one parcel or parocke lyeth in Restrop <sup>2</sup>
- and also one parcel of land called the Buthies.

It may be of interest to append the list of lands leased to George Maskelyne in 1577 and 1582, as throwing light on where these church lands were.

Leased to George Maskelyne his son and daughter for life, 4 acres *arable* land and *meadow* lying dispersed in the Fields and Meadows of Purton called the church lands belonging to the use of the Parish Church of Pirton.

1577. 20 Elizabeth.		1582. 24 Elizabeth.
acres.		acres.
1. 2. 0. lieth on the South end of <i>Clardon</i> shooting on Holbrook Way.	=	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ in Clardon.
0. 2. 0. at the South end of the <i>Downe</i> .	=	$\frac{1}{2}$ at the Downe End.
0. 2. 0. in <i>Barfield</i> shooting upon Smith Mead.	=	$\frac{1}{2}$ in Barfield.
0. 2. 0. upon <i>Bremhill</i> shooting East and West.	=	$\frac{1}{2}$ in Hilly Land.
1. 0. 0. upon Shilfinch shooting upon Holliewell's Hamme.	=	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \frac{1}{2} \text{ in Shilfinch.} \\ \frac{1}{2} \text{ above Hollie well.} \end{array} \right.$
0. 2. 0. in the Pry in a parcel of mead called Dry-acres.	=	1. in Woodward's Croft (arable). $\frac{1}{2}$ in the Hurne (mead), (called the Lampland by R. Plover).

<sup>1</sup> Called by R. Plover "The Lampacre."

<sup>2</sup> Spoken of elsewhere as "Hollie Well."



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Gostie Mead is called Lampacre in old deeds, and paid sixteen pence for a light in Purton Church. Goss is the Wiltshire name for *Restharrow*. Gostie Mead was part of Ware's "*Old Lands*" in Bentham, sold to Edmund Maskelyne.

Most of these church lands can still be made out on the old Parish Map of Purton, dated 1744.

It may be well here to give some explanation of the Church Lights and Church Ales, which are constantly referred to in Churchwardens' Accounts in pre-Reformation days.

From the accounts of St. Edmund's at Sarum, during the years 1443 to 1702, we get the names by which many such Church Lights were known, *e.g.* The Trinity Light, The Wife's Light, Maiden's Light, Servant's Light, Rood Lights, and many Saints' Lights. The Rood Light was supported by the devotion of the people; others were supported by collections made in Church or by Guilds and Brotherhoods. "The hire of XXth Shepe which J. Ludlow did give to the maynteyning of St. Sebastians Light" brought in twelve shillings.

"The stewards of each light received a certain sum as '*Stock*' for maintaining their light and promoting the success of their festival, and, after deducting the expenses incurred from what they had collected and retaining '*Stock*' for next year, the balance or '*Increase*'<sup>1</sup> was brought to be hallowed and given to the Churchwardens for Church Works."

Candles for the year made from wax purchased for the purpose were brought out to be hallowed at Candlemas (Feb. 1st).

Many ancient records exist of fresh fire drawn from flint used to make Holy Fire on Easter Eve, all lights being first quenched.

The *Herse Lights* spoken of as in use in Purton Church were probably those "burnt beside dead bodies in Church."

*Church Ales* (Feasts) are repeatedly noticed in the Sarum Churchwardens' accounts from long before to long after the Reformation.

It was the Church Ales which formerly provided the money to maintain St. George and his Priest at Purton, till, as the old

<sup>1</sup> We here get an explanation and meaning of the term "*Increase*" used by an old witness when speaking of the Ale which maintained the Image of St. George and his Priest.



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witness said, "they were abolished and taken out of the Church." We can easily imagine how deeply the memory of this event (the story of which is told on page 29) must have sunk into the minds of the old men, and how vividly it was recalled when they gave their evidence fifty years after it occurred. But, although so many changes had meanwhile taken place, the custom of brewing Church Ales was continued, and were still brewed, though now for a different purpose, in the Butheys. In pre-Reformation days the parishioners had no choice as to attending these Church Ale feasts and contributing to the money which they provided for the Church. This we see from the following extract taken from an old Indenture (see *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. ii., p. 193):—

"The Inhabitants of . . . shall brew foure ales—at their own costs and charges . . . and every inhabitant shall be at the said ales; every husband and his wife shall pay 2d and every cottyer 1d. and all come to the said ales. . . . The profits and vantages coming of the said ales, (shall be retained). Eight ales shall be brewed betwixt the Feast of St. Andrew and the Feast of St. John Baptist if the inhabitant be away at one ale to pay at ye toder for both or els to send his money."

The money thus collected was used to repair the churches, to buy books for the service "cuppes for the celebration of the Sacrament, Surplices for Sir John" (*i.e.* the Clergyman), "etc., etc."

In the days of Aubrey's<sup>1</sup> grandfather, there being no rate for the poor at Kington St. Michael, Wilts, "the *Church Ale* at Whitsuntide did their business." In the Church of Thorpe le Soken in Essex is an ancient wooden screen bearing this inscription:—

"This cost is the Bachelors—made by Ales. Jesus be their mede."

The "*Word Ale*"<sup>2</sup> is still held in secret at Midgehall at Michaelmas to celebrate the exemption of the land from tithe, the name being derived from the Anglo-Saxon Wordland. A *Scot Ale* got its name from the fee or Scot paid by the people.

<sup>1</sup> Aubrey, the Wiltshire historian, seventeenth century.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter xvii.



A *Clerk's Ale* was held to enable the Clerk to collect his dues more readily.

Feasts connected with these ales led in time to riotous conduct and they had to be suppressed by law, although in some places they lingered on into the last century, the *Clerk's Ale* being held at Chiseldon as late as 1845, as related in the *Wilts Arch. Magazine*, vol. ii., pp. 190 and 399. The word "Butt" means a boundary between two properties, as it does in the field called the Butts at Purton and in another in Lydiard Millicent. It is more likely, however, that the place called the Butthey, which is not at a boundary, was so named because it was the enclosure or "haie" for "St. George's Butts," as described by the old witness, R. Plover, in 1597.



## CHAPTER V

## THE MASKELYNE FAMILY

IN writing of this family one has to go back a very long way in the history of Purton, as no less than eighteen Maskelynes in succession have been the respected owners of broad acres in Purton and Lydiard parishes.

The first was Robert, a freeholder in Lydiard Millicent in 1435, nearly five hundred years ago.

His great-grandson, William of Purton and Lydiard, "*gave rent to Maintain a Light before our Lady*" at Lydiard Tregoze. Curious bequests were made in the old wills of bygone days, when values were so immensely greater than at the present time. For instance, a single ewe was often bequeathed.

As far as we know, West Marsh was the first Purton home of the family, and there George and Jane Maskelyne lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth. The touching story of Jane is told in the chapter about the Church, where allusions are made to her grandfather Richard Pulley, and to her aunt Isabel Joy (*née* Pulley), who lived at that time at the Manor House, close to the Church and Great Tithe Barn. The endless quarrels arising from the length of the conventual leases given to the Pulley family, which overlapped Lord Chandos' purchase of the Manor, are also described in Chapter iv. After the dissolution of the Abbey, the church lands<sup>1</sup> originally given by pious benefactors for the maintenance of church light were let by the Churchwardens to George Maskelyne of West Marsh, for the benefit of the Church.

After the death of George and Jane Maskelyne, their son Edmund, who was a member of the Inner Temple and a Feodary of the Duchy of Lancaster, added largely to the land belonging to the family. He was lord of the Manors of Cricklade and Chelworth and of Slaughter (Co. Gloucester), and M.P. for Cricklade in 1625. As a lawyer he was greatly interested in

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter iv. for the list of these fields.



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the very early enclosure of Purton Common, agreed upon by Lord Chandos and his Purton neighbours in 1596-97.

At Basset Down is preserved an Account Book dated 1638, kept by Edmund's son, Neville Maskelyne, which gives very useful information about the land and the stinting of beasts on the commons.<sup>1</sup>

Neville was also a Member of Parliament for Cricklade, and it was he who charged the Pry Pasture with £5 a year for the poor of Purton, and 10s. to the Minister to preach a sermon on Good Friday. He was also one of the original Trustees of the Purton Play Close, conveyed to them in 1641.

His grandson, Neville, who succeeded him in 1679, served in a troop of Militia Horse at the time of Monmouth's rebellion, his Commission from Lord Pembroke being addressed "to my loving friend Neville Maskaline Esqr. in 1683."

This Neville and his wife Ann, daughter of the Vicar of Purton, Rev. W. Bathe, brought up a family of ten children at West Marsh, both dying young in 1706 and 1711 respectively.

Little is known of the childhood of these children, but from a letter written very long afterwards by Lady Clive, preserved at Basset Down, we learn that two of them, her aunts Jane and Sarah, when old women had great pleasure in recalling the following story: "Five sons and five daughters lived to grow up and sit at their parents' table. They were all dressed alike, one year in yellow, another in blue, etc., and one year, as they walked in procession up the steps of Purton Church, an old woman sitting on the wall of the churchyard, cried out in a treble voice, 'There go Squire Maskelyne's Yellowhammers.'" Soon after the death of their parents, West Marsh was sold to pay the money settled on the younger children, and the eldest son, Neville, rebuilt and settled at the Down, the younger children having to seek their fortunes in London or India.

The third son, Edmund, a clerk in the East India Company at Whitehall, brought up three sons and one daughter Margaret, afterwards Lady Clive.

The eldest son, William, eventually inherited the Ponds Farm, Purton Stoke, from his Bathe great-uncle.

Captain Edmund, the second son, bought Basset Down on

<sup>1</sup> See *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. xl., p. 122.



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leaving India. The third son, the Rev. Nevil Maskelyne, D.D., born 1732, became Astronomer Royal at Greenwich, and having outlived his two brothers, finally inherited the Purton properties and Basset Down. He was buried in Purton Churchyard, near his forefathers. To him we owe the first conception of and publication of the *Nautical Almanac*, the first volume of which appeared in 1767.

The great French Astronomer Delambre said of him :—

“ He has left the most complete set of observations with which the world was ever presented, corrected in the most careful manner, which has served during thirty years as the basis of all astronomical observations ; in short, it may be said . . . that, if by any great revolution the works of all other astronomers were lost, and this collection preserved, it would contain sufficient materials to raise again nearly entire the edifice of modern astronomy.”

He had one daughter, Margaret, who married in 1819 Anthony Storey, son of the Rev. William Storey, by Bridget Prower, sister and aunt of two successive Vicars of Purton (1771-1869), a family well known in Purton for a great many years.

Mrs. Maskelyne was a skilful artist, and many beautiful and interesting sketches from her pencil are now at Basset Down House. Amongst them is an exquisitely drawn map of Purton district,<sup>1</sup> of a very large size and elaborate detail.

The view of old Purton House (facing p. 107) is a reproduction from her work in 1802-10.

Her son, Mr. Mervyn Nevil Storey Maskelyne, was M.P. for Cricklade, and a Liberal Unionist in politics. He married in 1858 Thereza, daughter of J. Dillwyn Llewelyn, of Penllergare, who has collected much information about Purton, and contributed several articles to the *Wilts Archæological Magazine*.

He left three daughters :—

1. Margaret Emma, of Purton, who devotes her life and energies to social work amongst her poor neighbours, and is specially interested in Poor Law reform. She is one of the members for Lydiard Millicent of the Cricklade and Wootton Bassett District Council.

<sup>1</sup> Copied from an older map of the date 1744.



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2. Mary Lucy, married the late Right Honourable Hugh Oakeley Arnold-Forster, M.P. for West Belfast and Croydon, Secretary for the Admiralty and Secretary of State for War. She has four sons, William, Mervyn, John and Christopher, who all served their country in her hour of need.

Mrs. Arnold-Forster leads a busy life. She entirely organised the arrangements for the Belgian Refugee colonies in the district, and is much interested in all schemes for social work.

3. Thereza Charlotte, married the late Sir Arthur Rücker, F.R.S., Principal of the University of London, and has one son, Nevil, who fought in France during the War.



## CHAPTER VI

### PURTON CHURCH

THE patron saint of our beautiful Church is St. Mary, but curiously enough in the time of Edward III. St. Nicholas is the name given.<sup>1</sup> Aubrey, writing in 1569, gives the following interesting description of it :

“This is a very faire Church, sometime doubtless a place of great devotion, as appeares by those many niches in the walles within and without to sett images in, etc.

“At the East end of the Chancel, without are two Angells, holding some kind of vegetative between them, which I suppose to be either a laurel or olive branch. All the windowes in the Chancell are seminated all over with estoiles or starres of six points.

“On the North side of the Altar, in the wall, is an old marble tomb, but the inscription with coates of Arms being in brasse, on purpose to perpetuate the memories of the dead, gave occasion to sacriligious hands to teare them away. In this Church have been very fine paynted glasse, but now so broken and mangled, that there is little to be recovered. In a crosse aile, on the South side, in the third column of the East windowe is this coate (Keynes No. 225). In the south windowe in the same aile, are several Bishops with their mitres and crosiers. This Coate (No. 226, Paynell) is in the last windowe on the south side of the Church, and this inscription has been shuffled, I know not how, by the glazier, into the first column of the same windowe, ‘Johannes Passus.’ (This may have referred to some stained glass representation of the execution of St. John.)

“In this parish was Chancellor Hyde’s habitation when a private gentleman, before the civill warres.”<sup>2</sup>

But we have already told something of Chancellor Hyde, and must now continue with our account of the Church.

<sup>1</sup> In a fine of Edward III., 1336.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter iii.



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Mr. Ponting, the Diocesan Architect, some years ago compiled a delightful paper<sup>1</sup> describing the Church in detail, and the writer has adapted these notes in the following description.

Our Church is very symmetrical in form, having a nave with north and south aisles, a central tower below the spire, with north and south transepts, chancel with north sacristy (now the vestry) and South Chapel, and the later western tower where the bells hang. There was formerly a north door in the central aisle, now built up; it is remarkable for the high level at which it is placed, the sill being three feet above the floor and other doorways, and the jambs outside show that this was its original position, though the lie of the ground does not explain the reason for it.

### *Twelfth Century.*

The earliest feature is the Transitional Norman impost of the east respond of the south nave arcade, which suggests that there may have been a central tower of that date, though this, like that on the north side, was removed and re-instated when the present tower was built.

### *Early Thirteenth Century.*

The nave appears to have been rebuilt at this period, only the cylindrical piers of the two arcades with caps and bases remain, and the bases are missing on the eastern responds against the central tower. Although the north and south piers are coeval, the capitals of the north are richly carved with foliage characteristic of the style, while those on the south are only moulded.

A little later the present chancel was erected. All the walls (except the east wall, which was rebuilt in 1872) are of this date, though there have been many insertions. An original lancet window remains in the north wall near the central tower, but it is built up and disused since the fifteenth century when the sacristy was added outside it. The doorway which cuts into the window is also built up. Portions of a similar window farther eastward can be seen on the south side of the chancel. In the south wall of the sacrarium the original Early English piscina exists, large and with two shelves.

<sup>1</sup> See *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. xxiii., p. 229.



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### *Fourteenth Century.*

The chapel on south side of the chancel appears now to have been added. The three-light east window here is a beautiful specimen of "flowing Decorated." The window and doorway, now closed, in the south wall, are evidently later insertions, coeval with the aisles. A "Decorated" piscina with shelf in south wall shows this to have been a chantry. The central tower and spire, north and south transepts, were probably built about the end of the reign of Edward III. The tower is a singular combination of Decorated and Perpendicular styles, the alternate sunk chamfer and hollow of the piers and the groining of the lower stage being earlier in feeling than the upper stage. The spire, as its bold roll indicates, was evidently a continuation of the lower and earlier work. The squinches of the spire have square pinnacles with the parapet. The upper stage of the tower is open to the spire, and has two corbels low down on the east and west faces inside, and larger ones higher up on north and south sides, which probably supported bells before the western tower was added. A door opens in the south transept, and lower on the north and east are built-up windows; these would be blocked by adjacent roofs, which retain their original pitch. There are two-light windows higher up on four sides. A turret stair from north transept gives approach to this stage, and to a second floor above the higher bell corbels. A bit of Norman roll-moulding is seen on the third step from the floor, which suggests that this work displaced some former work of that period.

### *Transepts.*

A piscina, of which the shelf is missing, shows in the south transept that an altar once stood here; an archway having led through the east wall to the chapel confirms this, for the chamfer of the south jamb is stopped at four feet from the floor (which would be about the level of the mensa, including the step); over the position of the altar is a *squint* of a triple quatrefoil, with the splay of the jamb on the east side inclined slightly to the north, in the direction of the altar of the chapel.

### *North Transept.*

Two corbel heads indicate an altar here on the inside faces



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of the jambs of the later and peculiarly flat archway in the east wall opening into the sacristry. A beautiful little Transitional window peeps out clear of the north aisle.

### *Fifteenth Century.*

Considerable alterations soon after, if not actually in connection, followed. The upper parts of the walls and arches of the nave arcades were taken down, the Early English piers and responds raised about three feet, but the original capitals retained, and new arches with the mouldings of the time erected on them. The new stones were clumsily fitted into the old, and the former height of the old piers is easy to see. The mouldings of the capitals appear to have been partly altered to meet the newer style.

At this time the north and south aisles were re-built and the *south porch* erected, and here many Decorated features linger, *i.e.*, the tracery of the west window of the north aisle, the doorway and niche in the south porch, and the rich jamb and arch-mouldings of all the windows, showing the *Decorated* feeling in a marked degree. The *south aisle* has its original roof of span form and high pitch.

### *South Porch.*

This is large and rich in detail. A plain outer doorway with two orders of chamfers with label over. A moulded stone arch crosses the porch from east to west, dividing it into two bays, and supporting the *Priest's Room*. Outside the east wall a buttress receives the thrust of the arch, the stair turret strengthens the west side, and there are diagonal buttresses south-west and south-east. These and the angle *buttresses* of the later *western tower* are the only ones in any part of the Church, which is remarkable.

### *Niches (thirteen in all).*

There is a beautiful niche in the east wall of the south porch constructed to hold a single figure, sides panelled the full height, as also the soffit and part of the upper back. It has a square head, and has been richly traceried, but much is destroyed. Every part shows original colouring in red, yellow



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and blue, as do the spandrels of the arch spanning the porch. The following niches are outside :—

Three on west face of tower	..	Perpendicular.
One on north face of tower	..	„
One on south face of tower	..	„
One in east gable of south chapel		Transitional Decorated to Perpendicular.
One in south gable of south transept		Early English (replaced here).

Inside :—

One in east wall of porch (see above)		Transitional.
One in centre of north aisle	..	„
Two in east wall of chancel	..	Perpendicular.
One on sill of east window of chancel		„
One cut in east respond of south arcade of nave	.. .. .	„

### *Corbels (six).*

- One in east wall of south transept.
- One in east wall of north transept.
- Two in jambs of archway in east wall of transept.
- Two in west wall of north aisle.

### *Priest's Room.*

A turret stair on the north-west angle of the south porch leads to the priest's room. The original doorway remains with ogee head, and fireplace with carved patera in the mouldings of the jambs. The roof is modern, and the pitch is lowered from its old position. The chimney is coeval with the staircase, the coping similarly embattled. Observe the curious sink stone just outside the door, the spout carried through the wall of the turret to the outside, showing that this room was inhabited. The larger window is of recent date.

### *Western Tower.*

This appears to have been erected at about the middle of the fifteenth century, and to have been carried out as a distinct work. Note the fact that oyster shells are employed in forming the joints; this is not the case in any other part of



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the Church. This does not occur in any Wiltshire Churches of earlier date than the middle of the fourteenth century. (The earliest use of these shells with which Mr. Ponting is acquainted is in the Transitional Church of Edington Monastery, dedicated in 1361.)

The Tower is a beautiful specimen of the best period of Perpendicular. It is in four stages, with angle buttresses carried the full height, and pinnacles standing square on them. The pinnacles are richly crocketed and pierced, and a pierced parapet of quatrefoils is carried round between them. All the niches have crocketed canopies, and the four lower ones have the base for the figure raised on a low shaft, whilst the upper one is supported by a carved angel-corbel.

### *The Chancel.*

About the time of the building of the western tower the windows in the chancel, two on north, one on south, and the east window appear to have been inserted. The niches here are identical with that over the west window outside the western tower. A third niche rises from the centre of the window-sill, covered with the ancient colouring, but this niche is incomplete.

The chancel has sedilia with flat arch, under—and coeval with—the south window of the sacrarium, and there are remains of a late altar tomb on the north.

Outside the east window there is a sculptured panel, undoubtedly of the Annunciation, 15½ inches by 13 inches; a flat cusped canopy, much mutilated, projects over the figures. This panel, coeval with the window above (fifteenth century), possibly commemorates a rededication of the Church, as described by Aubrey earlier in this chapter.

### *Glass.*

There are fragments of fifteenth-century glass in the windows in the north and south transepts, and in two windows of the north aisle, the latter having figures of bishops.

### *Ancient Wall Paintings.*

A fresco over the doorway in the south wall of the south chapel is the most remarkable, apparently the raising of



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Jairus' daughter, whose figure is well drawn, and fairly well preserved, lying on the ground with her feet towards the east, her hands at her sides, clothed in a long garment, head and neck exposed with flowing hair. Another figure shows our Lord, with a nimbus, with one hand outstretched and seven attendants standing by. The other wall paintings are very indistinct.

Over the doorway in the south aisle a panel containing some inscription may be traced, enclosed by a border. A male figure guards each side ; the one on the west side holds a rod.

With the sun brightly shining, and with the eye of faith, one can sometimes see more in these old frescoes than is apparent to a cautious critic, and he would be a bold man who would try to explain away what undoubtedly has been the happy experience of some devoted observers of these ancient colour studies.

One cannot learn a building of this kind without many years' of patient love and observation, but the knowledge will come to those who look for it, with joy and much reward for all the time thus spent.

If you came to Purton and asked one of the inhabitants why there is a tower as well as a spire on the Church, nine people out of ten would tell you that it was because two sisters built the Church and could not agree, so decided to have both. This appears to be the usual explanation, as the following lines on Ormskirk Church will show. It seems that "two daughters of Orme, a famous pirate, built a Church to keep their memory green, but disagreed on the design, so they at length decided to have a tower and also a steeple at Ormskirk, Lancashire."

“ ‘ Sister,’ said one, ‘ it ’s my desire,  
The Church should have a tapering spire,  
To point to realms where sin’s forgiven,  
And lead men’s thoughts from Earth to Heaven.’ ”

“ The other said, ‘ I like a tower,  
It speaks of strength, of might, of power,  
An emblem of the Church’s strength  
To overcome the World at length,  
To show, that ’gainst the Church, though frail,  
The gates of Hell shall not prevail.’ ”



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These particulars of our beautiful peal of bells are interesting:—

No. 1, the treble bell, is engraved “Jno Grymes and Wm Packer Churchwardens,” and its diameter is thirty-seven inches.

No. 2 is engraved “Anno Domini 1628,” and measures  $41\frac{1}{2}$  inches across.

No. 3, the oldest bell of all, has this inscription, “This bell was made in The yeare of The Lord 1598,” and is 44 inches across. Mr. Doble, the bell-hanger from Taunton, told the writer that a bell with so early a date should be specially noted, as previous to this no bells bear anything but the trade mark of the maker upon them.

No. 4. This bell was very badly cracked, and could not be rung, so in 1916 it was taken down and re-cast, of which we shall speak later. The old inscription and decoration has been exactly reproduced on the new cast. The words were as follows: “Edward Deane, Humprey Stanley, Churchwardens. A.R. 1750,” and the diameter was  $45\frac{3}{4}$  inches. The bell was found to be rather thin, so to ensure no crack this time some more metal was added, and the tone is certainly very fine. It now bears in addition the following inscription:—

“ Recast M.C.M.XVI.  
A. M. D. G.  
et in piam memoriam  
Mervyn Stronge Richardson  
1st Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers  
killed in action at Fricourt France, March 19th 1916.  
aged 21 years.  
Dulce et decorum est, pro  
patria mori.  
Arthur Richardson. Captain.  
Frank Kempster. Churchwardens.  
John Veysey, Vicar.”

No. 5 is the tenor bell, whose well-known tones are rung alone for the last five minutes before service, and it is also rung as the Passing Bell, when a parishioner has been called away from this world to the next. Its diameter measures 50 inches.



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The small call bell, which rings as service is about to begin, is engraved :—

“Come away, make no delay,”

and is dated 1760 ; the diameter is only 13½ inches.

With five bells it is possible to ring twenty-four different changes, with a larger number thousands of changes can be rung. There is much to be learnt in the art of bell ringing, and a certain amount of risk for beginners, but it is well worthy of trouble to become an expert, and a high honour to be able to join in calling the parishioners in this way to the House of God. In some parishes in bygone days on Sunday mornings men were stationed on various stiles in the parish (when a Church was without bells), who called out at intervals: “Come to Church, Mr. Black ; come to Church, Mr. Jones.”

To Messrs. Taylor, of Loughborough, was given the re-casting of No. 4 bell. Some of the money had already been collected in the parish ; but on examination it was found that a new floor was required, and an entirely fresh arrangement for ringing, and a good deal of strengthening to make all safe and secure. Captain Richardson, who had just experienced the loss of his youngest son in France, offered to do the bell casting at his own expense in his son's memory, and gave £100, the Hon. Mrs. Hewitt, Captain Walter Stronge, Miss Stronge, Mrs. Walsh and Miss Story-Maskelyne also subscribing with this object. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners added £10, and so the work was at once put in hand, and the result is very satisfactory.

Captain M. S. Richardson had fought in France since September, 1914, and had been once severely bruised by a shell, and once also wounded in 1915. A shell burst on the wire which he was inspecting in front of the firing-line, killing him and a lance-corporal who was with him. He was buried a few hours later 100 yards behind the front line. He had been recommended for the Military Cross, and was mentioned in Despatches.

Three years previously a fund was inaugurated to purchase a new organ for the Church, and the Carnegie Trust, at Captain Richardson's request, kindly promised the sum of £250 when a similar amount had been collected. Happily the money was forthcoming, so the order has been placed with Messrs. Nicholson,





PURTON, WILTS.  
*(Old print. This pool is now drained away.)*



ST. MARY'S CHURCH, PURTON, BEFORE RESTORATION.



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of Worcester, and it is hoped the instrument may be installed by the end of the summer. The Lord Bishop has promised to come to Purton to dedicate the No. 4 bell, and will arrange his visit so that the organ may then also be consecrated.

Old Morgan Staley was the Clerk who said the responses in the days when the three-decker pulpit was still in our Church. He was famous for his powerful Amens, which he repeated in a loud, sonorous tone. On one occasion only he failed in this response, to the amazement of the congregation. What had happened was this. Staley had only one eye, and wore glasses. Unknown to him, the glass over his remaining eye fell out of his spectacles, and finding himself, as he thought, blind, he for once forgot to say his Amen.

The following is a list of the Vicars of Purton, with the names of the Patrons :—

	<i>Patrons.</i>	<i>Vicars.</i>
1299.	Abbot of Malmesbury	—
1312.	„ „ „	Johannus de Hauteford.
1316.	„ „ „	Johannus de Haydoy.
1349.	„ „ „	Ricardius de Bristolia.
1384.	„ „ „	Robertus de Suttleton.
1389.	„ „ „	Nicholas Wods.
1409.	„ „ „	Robertus Denly.
1409.	„ „ „	Johannus Burnet.
1444.	„ „ „	Henricus Pyke.
1478.	Johannus, Abbas de Abingdon.	Johannus Lyneham.
1515.	Johannus Kyte, Capelanus et Thomas Hawkins.	Johannus Frankelyn.
1555.	Edmundus Brydges Miles.	Johannus Hyte.
1569.	Ditto et Ducis Chandos, Barō de Sudley.	Thomas Roberts.
1573.	Doratheia Chandos vidua et do.	John Prendergast.
1582.	do. et Gab'l. Knowles	Gul Symons.
1601.	do. „	Rob Price.
1629.	Johannus Cooper Miles.	Rob Symons.
1664.	Anthonus Dominus Ashley. Barō de Wimborne.	Jacobi Hemerford.
1664.	do. do.	Gulielemus Bath.
1715.	Maurice Ashley, Arsinger.	Gul Alford.



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	<i>Patrons.</i>	<i>Vicars.</i>
1748.	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury.	Richardus Glass.
1762.	„ „	Nathanial Sandford.
1771.	The Bishop (by lapse).	Gregory Sharpe.
1771.	Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury.	John Prower.
1828.	„ „	John Mervyn Prower.
1869.	„ „	Walter Mitchell.
1874.	„ „	James Hewlett.
1878.	„ „	John Veysey.
1917.	Earl and Countess of Shaftesbury, Miss Warrender, The Rev. Father Waggett, and Mr. Glynn.	The present Vicar, Robert Birch Harrison.

The oak choir stalls and the screen at the west entrance were erected in 1893, and the old font was rescued from its banishment and re-erected in the Church for use again in the christening of young Purtonians at the same date. It was found lying in the garden belonging to Mrs. Walsh's cottages; it is octagonal, and of the local stone.

In the Priest's Chamber are kept a number of ancient tomes relating to Articles of Apprenticeship, payment of tithes, and also lists of those parishioners who were in the workhouse, or who were in receipt of what in old days came under the name of "Extraordinaries," and now would be called out-relief.

The first apprenticeship document is dated 1684, when Charles II. was King of England, and Robert Plomer and John Eatoll were overseers of Purton Parish. Anthony Stanley, son of William, described as "a poor child of the said Parish," was apprenticed to one John Askweeke, of Dauntsey, to learn the "trade art and mystery of a Largeweaver" for seven years "in the best manner," his master promising to provide him with "meate, drinke, apparrell, and washinge, and lodginge, fitt for such an apprentice." At the end of the seven years Anthony was to be fitted out with "apparrell of all sorts good and new, that is to say, a good new suit for Holly-days."

With a girl the wording was different, for we read that in 1698 Eleanor Pannell was apprenticed to John Warman, of Malmesbury, and the indenture runs thus:—

"She shall not *haunt*, unless it be about her master's



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business there to be done, at the dise [dice], cards or any other unlawful game or games. She shall not play the goods of her said masters.

“Inordinately she shall not waste, nor them to anyone lend without her master’s lysons, marriage with any man within the said tenure she shall not contract, nor excuse, nor from her said service, either by day or by night shall absent and prolong herself, but as a true and faithful servant ought . . . behave herself towards her Master and Dame as well in words as in deeds.”

In return for all this she was to be instructed in the “art craft or mystery of Cows-lard making” and to receive food and clothing. The Justices who signed her indenture were Edmund Pleydell and Nevil Maskelyne.

An entry dated “May ye 18th 1728,” shows a touch of humour. It says :—

“Then received of ye Revd. Mr. Glasse ye sum of sixteen pounds in full for work, coals, and all other demands whatever, from ye beginning of ye World to this day. Witness my hand.

“The mark of X. Hun More. 16. 0. 0.

“Witnefs Jno Clerks.”

In the reference to Purton Mill dated October 19th, 1744, we find a coincidence, for then, as now, a Lewis lived there, and “Elizth Lewis, late Orchard, pd ye Tythe of ye Mill for 9 years to Lady Day £12. 0. 0.”

Then “Betty Giles” seems to have been somewhat slack in meeting her obligations, for on August 21st, 1744, it was recorded that she paid for tithe,

“ 4 cows in ye common	0 2 0
12 lambs	0 3 0
12 sheep 4 months	1 0
	0 6 0”

But the sinister note follows: “N.B. Betty Giles to account to Mr. Wheeler and Miss Langston for 2 years due Lady Day last.”

Among the “Extraordinaries” are some quaint entries, for we find: “1757. Gave William Bayley. His wife having the small pox 5s.” Poor William, we wonder how he laid it out, and whether he too fell a victim.



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Then on July 1st of the same year comes : " Bread and Cheese at John Stanley's wifes burial 3s. For Ale 3s. 9½d."

Needlework was not too highly paid, as " For making 1 shift for Anne Ayrog 5d. was given," while for " digging the graves and ringing the bells " 3s. 6d. was the amount allowed.

Moses Slade on July 18th, 1769, " hurt himself mowing, and got 2s." and Mary Cutts got " 1s. for her young child being much burnt."

The entries are written in the old style, and want some practice to decipher, but luckily the following was not missed : " Gave Mary Lewis by order of vestry to buy ale, bread and cheese at her lying in 5s."

It is surely well to impress upon the young the spirit of reverence, and that the Church and God's Acre which surrounds it are hallowed ground. In the old days this was unhappily not the custom, for we are told that when any parishioner wanted a good flat stone, he repaired to the graveyard to pick out one which might suit his purpose. It is even said that someone in Purton wanting a new bottom for his oven upon which to bake his bread pressed a tombstone into the service, and when the bread was duly baked, plainly upon the bottom of the large loaf could be read the words, " Here lies the body of . . . "

The following lines have been well known in the neighbourhood as a song for many years in illustration of the story just related, which no doubt, like other tales, has " not lost in the telling."

### THE VILLAGE BAKER.

#### I.

Job Jenkins was a baker and  
 A very honest elf,  
 By selling crust and crumbs he made  
 A tidy crust himself,  
 But Job he lived in better days  
 When bills were freely paid,  
 And bakers were thought honest then  
 So bread was never weighed.



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### II.

While walking through the old Churchyard  
He saw some old tombstones,  
That long had marked the resting-place  
Of some poor neighbour's bones,  
"These bodies long have gone to dust,  
These stones no use," he said,  
"They 'll mend my oven and improve  
My very next batch of bread."

### III.

Tom Snooks, the parish mason,  
A very sporting blade,  
Who in race horses and the dead  
Had done a tidy trade,  
To him Job gave the order,  
Regardless of amount,  
And charged it to the Parish  
In his next half-year's account.

### IV.

The job was done—the bread was baked—  
Job, in his highest glee  
Sat up to draw the batch that he  
Might great improvement see,  
But soon as drawn he "slope the pill"<sup>1</sup>  
With horror in his looks,  
And rushed out like a madman  
And knocked down Tommy Snooks!

### V.

"Get up, you wretch, and come and see  
The blunder you have made,  
Your tombstone bottom sure will prove  
A deathblow to my trade,  
I know that when you 're in the whim  
At trifles you don't stick,  
And by your trick you 've spoilt my batch  
My cottage, square and brick."

<sup>1</sup> *Pill* means *corner*; A.-S., slipped away.



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### VI.

He took him to the bakehouse,  
Where a curious sight was seen,  
The words on every loaf were marked  
That had on tombstone been,  
One quartern had " in memory of "  
Another " here to pine,"  
The third " departed from this life  
At the age of ninety nine."

### VII.

A batch of rolls when they were done  
Had on the bottom plain,  
The trusting words distinctly marked  
" In hopes to rise again,"  
A batch of penny loaves came next  
Which said " our time is past,  
Thus day by day, we 've pined away,  
And come to this at last."

### VIII.

Tom Snooks now turned his head away  
His laughter to conceal, he said " he thought  
It a nobby way in making a bread seal."  
Says Job, " This seal has sealed my fate  
How can I sell my bread ?  
To feed the living, when it bears,  
The motto of the dead ? " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Mr. John Greenham.



## CHAPTER VII

AN ANCIENT RECORD OF PURTON—OLD FAMILIES—A MYSTERY—  
THE “ANCREN RIWLE”—OLD PURTON FOLK

IN an ancient volume<sup>1</sup> published 1659–70 we find the following account of Purton :—

“Three miles South of Cricklade is a village called Purton, which is very pleasantly situated, and has a handsome Church, with several good buildings, and is well inhabited. A few years ago, as some men were digging to make a grave in the Chancel of the Church, they struck against a stone coffin about three feet below the surface of the ground, and, having with some difficulty raised it up, it was found to measure 6' 6" in length, 22" broad, 11" deep and 3" thick, except the head which was hollowed with great art, but the rest of the coffin was rude workmanship. It was impossible to determine the time when this had been first deposited, as neither figure nor inscription were to be seen.

“In it were found three skulls of the common size, supposed to have been forced into it by accident, when other graves had been opened in the place, and this opinion is the more probable, from there having been a wooden lid to the coffin.”

The old family of Goddard held considerable property in Purton, Francis, second son of Edward Goddard, of Clyffe, having held the Purton House Estate. He was succeeded by Edward, and after him Anthony Goddard, who married Mary Evans, and was buried at Purton in 1725, leaving an infant son to succeed him, afterwards Richard Goddard, M.D., of Purton House, who married a daughter of Sir J. Willes. His only daughter married Robert Wilsonn, R.N. Their eldest of four daughters married Richard Miles, who purchased the property from his mother-in-law. After this Horatio Nelson Goddard, of Clyffe Pypard, was the owner, and from him, in 1843, Purton House was purchased by the well-remembered Major Prower.

<sup>1</sup> *The New British Traveller.*



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Miss Maud Prower, who spends some months of the summer at Sissells, is his daughter.

The Rev. John Prower, M.A., had succeeded the Rev. Gregory Sharpe as Vicar in 1771, and died aged 80 years in 1827. He was succeeded by his son John Mervin Prower, who died in 1869, aged 85, the two Prowers having thus held the living for practically a century.

Major Prower, of Purton House, was the son of the latter, and in a newspaper account of his day we find the following :—

“ He was the first and readiest to assist in the work of the restoration of the Church, and his name was never mentioned by either rich or poor in the village, where he was best known, except lovingly, and where he was the representative of a Father and Grandfather who had for nearly a Century occupied the position of the ‘ Person of the Village.’ ”

But if Major Prower was much beloved in Purton, where to this day his name is a household word, even more so was his wife, Mrs. Prower, who by her continued kindness and her royal gift of remembering faces had well earned for herself the soubriquet of “ The Mother of the Village.”

It was a sad day for her when for various reasons it became necessary to leave the dear old home where her children were born, and where she was so much appreciated by all who knew her, but such was Fate.

It was in the year 1872 that the work in the Church began, and the total cost of the restoration then undertaken was £2,500. Of this Major Prower gave £1,000, Lord Shaftesbury gave £100 and half an acre of land, Mr. C. Wykeham-Martin £100, Mrs. Plummer £100, and Mr. S. C. Sadler and other parishioners contributed liberally.

An old feature of the graveyard at Purton is the yew, strapped together with its iron bands, and another the stem of the old Preaching Cross, both memorials of the days of open-air worship in God’s Acre. Since the loss of so many of our Purton heroes in the War, it has been the custom on festival days and anniversaries to hang a laurel wreath on the old cross base in loving memory of the fallen, with a card bearing their names and a few lines of comfort for sorrowing hearts.

These ancient Preaching Crosses are said to have been often in place before the village churches were built, hence the name,



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as about them the congregation gathered to hear the preacher, and around them were laid to rest in God's Acre those who had finished their life's journey. Often these holy places were lent for unworthy use, such as trading, Church Ales, etc., of which we have spoken elsewhere, and in some places bones are found outside what is now the boundary. This may account for the skeletons turning up in what was once the Purton Vicarage garden and shrubbery.

In a wonderful structure such as Purton Church there is much to hold the imagination. One wonders who designed, who built it? Architects, workmen, all long forgotten. Generation after generation of worshippers have followed each other, and each and all gone in their turn. One feels that the prayers and praises from so many lips must have hallowed and beautified the very arches, pillars and stones as the centuries slipped away. But in the year 1872 a real surprise and unfathomable mystery was brought to light in the remarkable discovery of an adult female skeleton built up in a cavity in the chancel wall.

In the angle formed by the north transept and the chancel there was a chapel, now used as a vestry. At some time the entrance to this chapel was closed. During the work of restoration about forty years ago the stonework on the north transept side was removed, and a low oak screen substituted. On the chancel side a plain doorway was discovered. When the workmen were pinning the end of the east wall of this chapel into the chancel wall, they found that four feet from the floor the wall was hollow, and on opening it found the skeleton lying at full length, the head and shoulders in a cavity cut out in the chancel wall, the remainder of the body being in the chapel wall. The cavities in both walls had been specially prepared, and when the body was in position the wall was built up. Who was this woman, and what was her story? Was she a recluse? Probably so, and the recess in which the head lay was the outlook through which a view of the altar was obtained.

The Church at Edington in Wiltshire had such a reclusorium, and possibly some solitary enthusiast connected with the Abbey of Malmesbury elected to spend her days in a living tomb. In the story of Thaysis, told in the "Golden Legend," we have a



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picture of a recluse : “ She went to the place which the Abbot had assyned to her, and there was a monasterye of vyrgns, and there he closed her in a cell, and sealed the door with led And the cell was lytyll and strayte, and but one lytyll window open, by which was mynistered to her poor lyvinge : for the Abbot commanded that they should gyve her a lytell brede and water.” If this room or chapel could tell its tale, no doubt it would be of great interest. Originally there were three windows, one looking north, one west, and one south, but these had been so effectively filled and closed that nothing but the dead blank wall met the eye. Over this room or chapel there was a second chamber ascended by an incline, the whole being covered by a heavy stone roof. The birds built their nests there, and the boys went up to rob them, but they never ventured to enter the lower chamber. The tradition was that no one must go in there, and it is supposed Canon Prower knew why, as when about eighty years ago it was suggested to him it might be used as a robing room, he asked that the subject should not be referred to again, that its history bore some reference to a former vicar, and that a “ dark deed ” had been committed there. The finding of the skeleton intensified but did not explain the mystery. <sup>1</sup>

The following lines on a nun immured in Purton Church, Wilts, whose skeleton was discovered in 1872, give a version of what *may* have happened :—

Take thy candle, hold the Cross,  
 Thou must die for mortal sin,  
 Better bear the body's loss  
 Than the loss of soul within.

Lady Abbess lead the way,  
 Sister, check thy rising tear ;  
 Do not pity—rather pray,  
 She is lost to all but fear.

Press her body to the wall,  
 Leave unclosed a narrow space,  
 That she may hear our mercy call  
 From the priest in holy place.

<sup>1</sup> From Mr. Veysey's Notes.



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Scanty food may pass her lips,  
 Lengthen thus her parting wail,  
 This may plead in life's eclipse  
 When no other plea avail.

Seal the tomb, the mass is said  
 Ere the well-spread mortar dry,  
 We declare our daughter dead  
 Though we hear a muffled cry.

\* \* \* \*

Four hundred years! her bones are white,  
 Mute witness of barbaric creed,  
 Where darkness brooded, till the night  
 Of Love Divine and fetters freed.

C. J. LANGSTON.

But as we have already said, other places besides Purton had these recluses, if such this mysterious woman was, who of their own free will gave a vow to enter the cell and never more to leave it. It was usual, but not necessary, for them to belong to one or other of the religious orders.

The more or less solitary life of the anchoress or recluse had at this time (A.D. 1373), as earlier, many followers in the country parts and large towns of England. Few of the women's "anchor holds" were in the open country, but many churches of the villages and towns had attached to them a timber or stone "cell," a little house of two or three rooms, inhabited by a recluse who never left it, and one servant or two for errands and protection.<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally a little group of recluses lived together, like those three young sisters of the thirteenth century, for whom the "Ancren Riwele," a rule or counsel for Ancres, was at their own request composed. The recluse's chamber seems to have had generally three windows (as at Purton), one looking into the adjacent church, so that she could take part in the services there, another communicating with one of those rooms under the keeping of her "maidens," in which occasionally a guest might be entertained, and a third, the "parlour" window, opening to the outside, to which all might come who desired to speak with her.

<sup>1</sup> From the Introduction to *Revelations of Divine Love*, by Julian of Norwich, A.D. 1373.



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According to the "Ancren Riwe," the covering screen for this audience window was a curtain of double cloth, black, with a cross of white, through which the sunshine would penetrate, sign of "Dayspring from on High." This screen could, of course, be drawn back when the recluse held a "parliament" with any who came to her.

In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* we read: "So he kneeled at her window, and anon the recluse opened it, and asked Sir Perceval what he would. 'Madam,' said he, 'I am a Knight of King Arthur's court, and my name is Sir Perceval de Galis.' So when the recluse heard his name, she had passing great joy of him, for greatly she loved him before all other knights of the world, and so of right she ought to do, for she was his aunt."

The vows taken by recluses ran in this fashion: "I offering yield myself to the Divine Goodness for service, in the order of anchorites, and I promise to continue in the service of God after the rule of that order by Divine grace, and the counsel of the Church, and to show Canonical obedience to my ghostly Fathers."

The injunction given to the recluses in the "Ancren Riwe" may still appeal to us, though six centuries have passed since it was penned. It runs thus: "At some time in the day or night, think upon and call to mind all who are sick and sorrowful, who suffer affliction and poverty, the pain which prisoners endure who lie heavily fettered with iron, think especially of the Christians who are amongst the heathen, some in prison, some in so great thralldom as is an ox or an ass; compassionate those who are under strong temptations: take thought of all men's sorrows, and sigh to our Lord that He may take care of them and have compassion, and look upon them with a gracious eye, and if you have leisure repeat the Psalm 'I have lifted up mine eyes,' and pray, 'Stretch forth oh Lord to Thy servants and to Thy handmaids the right hand of Thy heavenly aid, that they may seek Thee with all their heart, and obtain what they worthily ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.'"

Then in "The Scale of Perfection," by Walter Hilton, who died 1396, we read of "How an anchoress shall behave herself to them that come to her":—

"Since it is so, that thou oughtest not to goe out of thy house to seek occasion how thou mightest profit thy neighbour by





*Photo by Geo. J. Tutley.*

“CURLY TOM,” DIED AGED 104.



OLD MRS. COOK.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

deeds of charity, because thou art enclosed, . . . therefore whoso will speake with thee . . . be thou soon ready with a good will to aske what his will is . . . for thou knowest not what he is, nor why he cometh, nor what need he hath of thee, or thou of him, till thou hast tried. And though thou be at prayer, or at thy devotions, that thou thinkest loth to break off, for that thou thinkest that thou oughtest not to leave God for to speake with anyone, I think not so in this case, for if thou be wise, thou shalt not leave God, but thou shalt find Him and have Him, and see Him in thy neighbour, as well as in prayer, only in another manner.

“If thou canst love thy neighbour well, to speak with thy neighbour with discretion shall be no hindrance to thee . . . if he comes to tell thee his disease [distress] or trouble, and to be comforted by thy speech heare him gladly, and suffer him to say what he will, for ease of his own heart, and when he hath done, comfort him, if thou canst, gladly, gently, and charitably, and soon break off—and then after that, if he will fall into idle tales, or vanities of the World, or of other men’s actions, answer him but little, and feed not his speech and he will soon be weary, and quickly take his leave.”<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Everyone knew old Mrs. Cook and her husband, who for so many years lived in the Lodge at Purton House. The likeness opposite shows what a fine old woman she was, patience, goodness and many other virtues having stamped themselves in the lines which Time had written so freely on her face. Old Cook was very deaf, and speaking of this infirmity, she once said, “It is hard on John, why I has to kick ‘un to wake ‘un.” On one great occasion in their uneventful lives they were taken up to London by Major Prower. Old Cook was adorned in a brand new flowered waistcoat. What puzzled Mrs. Cook was the endless flow of people in the streets, and she remarked, “Hadn’t we better stand in a doorway till the crowd is past?” Doubtless her one day in London was never forgotten, and what she did and saw there was an oft-told tale; but still she would have maintained against all comers that “London was all very well, but give *I* Purton for pleasure.”

<sup>1</sup> MSS. in *British Museum*, edited by Grace Warrack..



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like the historic lady from Peebles. She had a great grief in the sudden death of her daughter in 1911, and the old couple then left Purton, and lived with a married daughter in Swindon till both passed away at a ripe old age.

These old Purton folk have seen wonderful changes since their young days, when no G.W.R. Works in Swindon existed, and Purton was a sleepy hamlet much as it had been for five hundred years and more. It is a thousand pities that when houses were wanted for the Great Western employés the style of the village was not considered, and that the uncompromising red brick was substituted for the more dignified stone. What good advice he gave who once said, "Have nothing inside or outside your house unless it is *useful* or *beautiful*." If this were done, how much that to-day offends the eye and taste would not be seen. No horrible little terracotta faces would leer at us above doorways and windows, or eruptions of coloured tiles disfigure the walls. Inside a good print or two of well-known fine pictures would sweep away glaring atrocities in colours quite untrue to nature, and the plush bracket and tawdry mirror would give place to the fine old brass candlesticks, the grandfather's clock, and the copper warming-pan gleaming in the firelight, which in the old days gave such charm and beauty to a simple home. Yes, "useful or beautiful" is a very good rule and well worth remembering, though of course good taste has to be cultivated like other virtues. Still, there is no use in being like Mrs. Dombey, "who died for want of making an effort," and at least we can all do our best, according to the light that is in us.

A line in the Purton record of past years may well be written on Henry Telling, of Pavenhill, who died in 1916, aged 87 years. For a quarter of a century he had dug the graves, and was much esteemed by the Prower family and other neighbours in his native village.

The Commissioners of Edward VI. found a very small quantity of plate when they visited Purton.

There is a chalice weighing 4 oz. and 1½ oz. "for the King." The stem, base and cover are certainly nearly one hundred years older than the bowl, and in all probability belong to an Elizabethan chalice of *circa* 1575, the bowl of which was altered in 1666. On the rim round the paten cover is inscribed,



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“ John Gillum and William Shermur, Churchwardens of Purton 1666.”

A paten resting on a foot, *circa* 1708, has inscribed underneath, “ The gift of Fanny Righy, 1820.” She was the eldest daughter of Robert Prower, M.D., and married the Rev. Hew Righy, Vicar of Hockley, dying in 1827. A modern service, chalice, paten and cruet-shaped flagon, inscribed, “ Presented by Cornwallis and Anne Wykeham-Martin, a thankoffering for many mercies 1872,” completes the collection.

Old Mrs. Jefferies told the writer recently a story of Mr. Wykeham-Martin's kind consideration for his poor neighbours. Her old mother was wheeling a heavy barrow to the station, and seeing that she seemed tired, Mr. Wykeham-Martin took the barrow from her and wheeled it down himself, calling to mind what Shakespeare wrote so long ago : “ How far this little candle throws its beams, so shines a good deed in a naughty world.”

Mrs. Wykeham-Martin was a lady of much charity, and during her long and trying illness she diligently made warm garments for the poor.

The Cottage Hospital was built at the expense of this family for the village, but it is no longer in use as such, for the patients are now sent to the more commodious Victoria Hospital in Swindon.



## CHAPTER VIII

## OLD TITHES AND PORTIONS—CRICKET—MILLS—CHARITIES

THE tenure of the Abbey of Malmesbury of these lands (of Purton, etc.) extended over a period of more than eight centuries, but of the Saxon times we know nothing. During the reign of Edward I. the rent roll was taken in full. The Abbot received a large portion from both sources (spiritually and temporally), the remainder of the spiritualities were divided between the Chamberlain and the Pittancer, the Prior and the Cook sharing the smaller part of the temporalities. The division between the two last seems to have been somewhat curious, for the Cook received ten times as much as the Prior, although that official ranked next in authority to the Abbot, and held the first place in Choir, Chapter and Refectory.

Then there were also other dues to be paid by the manor for Peter's Pence and Pannage, for Church Scot in fowls and corn, dues too of fowls at Christmas, and eggs at Easter. Most of the holders of land were tenants under the Abbey. Thus in the "Nomina Villarum" the Abbot of Malmesbury is returned as the only landowner in Purton against whom a writ of military summons can be issued.

There is a grant of tithes made, we read, by Thomas, son of Adam de Peritone, in the early part of the thirteenth century. The acquisition of the Rectory and the pension granted to the retiring priest are interesting, in charters dated 1276-77. In the case of the Rectory, an addition at the end of the record furnishes us with the price paid for it, and as this exceeds only by 10 marks its (given) annual value, it went cheap. The Rector's pension was £20, and later commuted to 200 marks.

In 1530 (two hundred and fifty years later the Rectory was valued at £59 10s. od., the earlier having been £13 8s. 5d., not including payment in corn, fowl and eggs) forty-nine tenants were on the rent roll. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries.*



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At the Domesday Survey the Abbey possessed only one mill in Purton, but during the abbacy of William of Colerne a second mill with a pond was added, and in the rent roll two mills are quoted. Abbot William claims our notice as an early restorer of Purton Church, round which he erected a strong wall. Another work of his in Purton was a stone-roofed grange—probably Mrs. Walsh's great Tithe Barn. He also caused new gardens to be laid out. In the paragraph that alludes to Abbot William's work at Purton one new garden (unum novum gardenum) and a lower garden were mentioned, and in that lower garden two fishponds were constructed by his order, now over six hundred years ago, doubtless those which still lie at the foot of the vicarage garden. The late Vicar told the writer he had seen a deed at Malmesbury granting (in thirteenth century) the orchard to "the poor vicar of Purton."

\* \* \* \* \*

### *The Workmen's Institute.*

This was the gift in 1879 of Mr. James Sadler, and was built on the site of an old and dilapidated building, originally built in 1770 for a school. The architect was Mr. Orlando Baker, of New Swindon, and the builder Mr. James Grey, of Purton, and the cost was £2,000. At the foundation ceremony, after a prayer had been said by the Vicar, Mrs. Fisher laid the foundation stone. Mr. MacKnight gave an address, saying "he remembered when the villagers came to Church in their clean white smock-frocks, but broad-cloth was now worn." Underneath the foundation stone was placed a bottle containing *The North Wilts Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*, a few coins of the realm, and a parchment with particulars of the donor. The building was opened in 1880 by the Earl of Shaftesbury.

Purton Cricket Club is of far fame, and the site is one of great beauty and extensive views. It was generously presented to the Club by Mr. J. H. Sadler in 1911. Previous to this it was part of the Purton House Estate, but cricket matches have been played there for many a day, the first recorded match being one between Lansdown C.C. and Purton C.C., which took place in the year 1834. John Smith, of Ramsbury Manor, once walked the eighteen miles to play, breakfasting en route at Swindon.



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He scored fifty in his first innings, and a friend bet him he would not repeat the feat in his second. He had forty-eight, and he hit a two, but his partner ran one short, making him forty-nine, and next ball he was out, so he lost his bet, but walked back undefeated to Ramsbury. The Pavilion was erected in 1854. In the year 1869 the old Club became defunct, for an Archery Club flourished about the seventies for ten years or more. Mr. Clement Scott, the author and dramatist, wrote in 1895: "We were taught to believe at Marlborough that the Purton Club was a kind of divine Cricket Olympia."

Any reference to cricket at Purton would be incomplete without the name of Mr. Hastings, who did so much for the Club, taking both time and trouble to further its interests. Our best batting average is held at present by Mr. Stephen Brown, and the best bowling average by Mr. Haskins.

### *Purton Allotments.*

These were obtained at the suggestion of Mr. MacKnight from the great and good Lord Shaftesbury in the year 1863, and since then have been let to the surrounding inhabitants, providing them with work in their spare time, and producing vegetables for their families.

Near the allotments, at the Fox, is a quarry, on Mr. Sadler's property, and from time to time interesting discoveries in the shape of iron knives, swords and spears have come to light there. The greatest find, however, was in the autumn of 1911, when several skeletons and an ancient sword were unearthed. These are now carefully treasured in the County Museum at Devizes.

The antiquary, Mr. B. G. Cunnington, writing in 1912 of the finds at the Quarry said: "There is little doubt that this is a Saxon cemetery, as both the sword found last week and the spear-head found to-day are without doubt Saxon."

A blue glass bead was also found, and Mr. Cunnington refers to the above discoveries as "these most interesting relics of Saxondom in Wiltshire."

### *Schools.*

These were built in 1860 by the exertions of the Rev. Digby Octavius Cotes, M.A., of Balliol College, Oxon., his wife,



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Mrs. Cotes, and her two sisters, the Misses Bathe, contributing largely to the cost. Mrs. Cotes also, at her own expense, moved the Chapel of Ease at Braydon from its former site to where it now stands. The family of Bathe has for many centuries been connected with Purton. William Bathe in the year 1664 was Vicar, and owned the Ponds Farm, then called "the Mansion House at Stoake." A letter beginning "Good Mr. Bathe" and signed "your very affectionate servant Clarendon" shows he was on the best of terms with that most illustrious of Purton families, the Hydes. The "Mansion House at Stoake," as it stands to-day with the moat which still surrounds it, was once the scene of a tragedy, as a little Bathe boy was drowned in it.

The pretty picture of Purton Church (see p. 47) was picked up at an old bookseller's, and sent to *Wilts Notes and Queries*, and was identified as belonging to No. XXXVI. *Marshall's select views in Great Britain*—published 1827 (Dec.) by W. Marshall 1. Holborn Bars. London. Printed by W. T. Ruffy 29. Budge Row. price 6d.

### *Mills.*

There are two mills, and some controversy has arisen as to which is the original Purton Mill. Both are on the banks of a tiny tributary of the Thames which rises at Restrop, passes the south wall of the churchyard, flows through the grounds of Purton House, passes the old Milk House, and so to Purton Mill, now in the occupation of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis. Both the Purton Mill and at Mr. and Mrs. Greenham's farm the Ridgeway Mill, about a mile to the east, are mentioned as belonging to Malmesbury Abbey. Ridgeway as it now stands is certainly not older than the time of Queen Elizabeth, and Purton Mill has been entirely rebuilt during the last half century. But when we take designs and situations of the Mills into consideration we may gather some information. We conclude that whatever collection of dwellings there may have been in old days would be near the Church, market place, or some social centre. Now a mill to be useful should be convenient for those who wish to use it, and it seems probable that on building a second mill it should be nearer or close to a good road, in hopes of obtaining some advantage over the older mill, and so procuring the desired custom. At Ridgeway the mill



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pond is small, the stone escarpment very limited, while at Purton Mill the pond is large, well made and extensively edged with stone, and speaks of the handiwork of an able and wealthy person, as Abbot William of Colerne is known to have been. In the Malmesbury register it is spoken of as a fishpond, and so evidently of sufficient importance. Thus we may assume that the Wiltshire farmer who used the Ridgeway Mill may have carried his corn to the identical spot to which his sturdy ancestor the Saxon ceoil did more than a thousand years ago. Purton Mill is recorded in Domesday Book, and was then valued at 5s. Millers were an ancient, jovial and well-to-do race, and their calling went from father to son. In 1241 we find William, son of Richard (presumably both millers), and John, Abbot of Malmesbury, mentioned in a "concord" wherein Purton Mill and about 20 acres of land were granted to William and his heirs for ever for the rent of 13s. 4½d. per annum.<sup>1</sup> A document dated 1306 speaking of Purton Mill is extant. The Ridgeway Mill ultimately passed into the possession of Pembroke College, Oxon.<sup>2</sup>

### *Parish Charities.*

Nevil Maskelyne, who died about 1679, charged the Pry Pasture with a yearly payment of £5 to the poor of Purton, and with a further payment of 10s. to a minister for preaching a sermon on Good Friday.

### *Gleed's Charity.*

Frances Gleed gave £200, the rents and profits to the poor housekeepers of the parish not receiving weekly alms, 10s. once a year. The poor relations of the benefactor living in the parish should be preferred before others, whether they receive weekly alms or not. The £200 was invested in land situate at the Cross Lanes, on the north side of Hawk's Moor Lane, two fields of pasture containing about 13 acres, called Poor's Land. The Wilts and Berks Canal paid £10 down on taking possession of a small portion of Gleed's Charity in 1816.

<sup>1</sup> *Reg. Malm.*, vol. ii., p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries.*



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### *Hiscock's Leaze.*

In an Act of Parliament passed in 1795 we read that "in the year 1778 it had been agreed at a lawful vestry that the rents and profits of the late Hiscock's Leaze in the Common should be given to the poor for ever, every year on Good Friday." In Parliamentary returns dated 1786 the following charity is mentioned: "Epaphroditus New, 1640, gave to the poor £30 in money, producing £1 7s. od. then land." The parish knew nothing about this charity, but as Hiscock's Leaze is not mentioned, it might have been purchased with the £30 given by New."

Miriam Stevens left in 1723, at her daughter's death, £17 os. od, "without deduction for ever," £16 os. od. to maintain a schoolmaster to teach twenty poor children "reading, writing and accounts," and 10s. for a sermon to be preached on Easter Monday by the Vicar of Purton, the Rectors of Lydiard Millicent and Lydiard Tregoze, yearly in their turns, and 10s. for a dinner for the preacher, and the remaining 10s. to the schoolmaster, for keeping a book with said sums, and the names of the children. The Vicar and two Rectors to be trustees for ever, to render the charity as beneficial as it could be. The money rolled up for five years, when the Trustees obtained from Lord Shaftesbury a lease of a house and garden (on the site of the present Institute) for three lives for £25. They built a schoolroom adjoining with the rent charge saved and some subscriptions. It all cost £120. Two of the lives above mentioned were Thomas Plummer and Richard Garlick Bathe. The Vicar chose the twenty children who were educated free, and there were always numerous applications; the schoolmaster had in addition about fifteen paying scholars.

### *Poor's Platt Charity.*

In 1834 it was stated in a Parliamentary report that this twenty-five acres of land was granted by King Charles by letters patent to the poor of Purton Stoke, in lieu of their right of feeding their cattle and picking wood in Braydon Forest, at the time of the disafforestation. However, this was found to be inaccurate, as they were given under a decree of the Court of Exchequer dated November 19th in the sixth year of King Charles' reign. Another mistake occurred, in that the Charity came to be applied to the whole of Purton, instead of Purton



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Stoke alone, so after this the words "Poor of the hamlet of Purton Stoke" were to be included in the new decree drawn up in the reign of George II. It had also become habitual to restrict the charity to about twenty-three inhabitants whose houses were there at the date of this decree, and these people had the nominating of the Trustees, and though new houses were built, they refused to allow them to participate in the charity. The Parish Council, soon after its establishment, found out how matters stood, and discovered that some of the recipients were in good circumstances and not subjects suitable for relief at all.

Trustees were therefore appointed, and the letting of the land takes place each year on the first Thursday after Old Christmas (January 6th). It is carried out by the curious ceremony of "Chalking the Bellows!"

The bellows are taken round by the landlord of "The Bell" at Purton Stoke, accompanied by one of the tenants of the preceding year, who is given the option of making the first bid. This is done by chalking the amount on the bellows. When the bellows have been passed round the room three times without an advance, on arriving the third time at the last bidder he becomes the tenant for the ensuing year.

This custom has been observed for at least a hundred years, probably for very much longer. The rents received in 1900 were £13 and £15. There are no buildings, only pasture. The conditions are that the grass may not be mown, but twice a year the thistles must be cut. The tenant undertakes to keep "mounds and fences" in repair, to pay all rates and taxes, except the Thames valley drainage rate. He has to find a surety for £20. No manure may be removed from the land. £2 2s. od. is annually deducted for refreshments for the Trustees. The poor recipients receive sums from 10s. upwards, according to their circumstances.

Another curious way of auctioning land is by cutting a candle one inch in length and lighting it, and as soon as this is done the bidding begins. He whose bid is given as the flame flickers out is the winner.

These old customs are interesting, and one would like to know whether they are used in other districts beyond Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.





PURTON HOUSE, WILTSHIRE, 1917, FROM "THE GREEN WALK."



THE GREAT CEDAR, PURTON HOUSE, WILTSHIRE.



## CHAPTER IX

## PURTON HOUSE—THE MANOR HOUSE

THE history of Purton House seems to be closely connected with the old mill which stands about half a mile below, and which in an Inq. P.M. of Henry Maskelyne 16 Chas. I. is called Chester Mill, and elsewhere Chester's Mill, probably from the name of the miller then in possession. At this time Purton House appears to have gone by the name of Chamberlaynes, and the property passed into the possession of Francis Goddard under this title in the seventeenth century.

The Brydges family had been the owners when it passed out of the hands of Malmesbury Abbey at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, represented by Lord Chandos, of Sudeley.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. xxx., we find an article, "Purton, A Case in the Star-Chamber," and in it we read that the tithes of the Manor of Purton pertained to the office of the Chamberlain of Malmesbury Abbey. From this we may assume some connection between this ancient house and the tithes collected for the Chamberlain of Malmesbury Abbey. Possibly the tithes were brought there to the Chamberlain, and hence the name.

Anyhow, the site is one of great antiquity, and many a century has passed since the first stone was placed in position; it must be at least two hundred years since the wonderful elms in the park and pleasure grounds were planted.

The name of Chamberlaynes appears to have been given up when the Goddards took possession about the middle of the seventeenth century, and Purton House has been the name certainly for the last two hundred years.

The earliest deed extant is dated 1698, and an interesting map, drawn a few years later, with its "kitching and little gardens," coppices and fishponds, shows the house to have been similar in shape to the charming pencil sketch drawn by

<sup>1</sup> John Aubrey, see Chapter iv.



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Mrs. Story-Maskelyne about a hundred years afterwards. These fishponds were three in number, and bear out the idea of monastic ownership, as, always wise and provident for their creature comforts, the old monks' well-known rule and custom was to have three ponds to be used in rotation to hold their fish, one of the three ponds being annually drained and sown with a crop to keep all fresh and wholesome, and ensure no possible sediment remaining at the bottom.

When the present owner took possession in 1911 he found a charge of 11s. a year payable to no less than seven different persons in the shape of a fee-farm rent, and the schedule relating to it ran as follows :—

“ Wilts No. 248.

“ All that annual or fee-farm rent of 11s., issuing or payable out of, or for Purton House, Purton, in the County of Wilts (formerly part of the possessions of the late Monastery of Malmesbury).”

If interesting from age, it was a tiresome transaction, and so for the sum of £16 “ the seven ” were induced to abandon their claim, and the new owner obtained an indefeasible title, which had not been enjoyed since the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The underground stream, which, after flowing through the fishponds in the vicarage garden, wends its way under the road and beneath the present-day kitchen garden at Purton House, has a sluice arranged to feed the lake when desired, and this is probably part of the old water system, when the mill below was an object of some importance, and is mentioned as such in the Domesday Book.

Francis Goddard, was followed by Edward Anthony and Richard, of whom we have already given some particulars, and after their day the place passed through the hands of many owners, as some say Church lands are wont to do. The deeds tell the story of sales, mortgages, and leases ; truly, amidst the cloud of words and “ vain repetitions ” it is no easy task to discover what is doubtless of interest to record. In the old days the orchard was much larger, stretching almost half-way across the present park, and the ridge of its boundary fence can now be plainly seen, four huge trees marking the upper line. The coppices, which now are divided,



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were formerly joined in a continuous line across the top of the park.

In a deed of sale of the property of Mrs. Sarah Miles to Horatio Nelson Goddard, in 1840, the house is referred to as "All that newly built capital messuage, tenement or dwelling house," and also speaks of the older house as "that ancient messuage, etc.," which was "taken down." Later in this voluminous deed a reference is made to "all the Close, pick, or parcel of pasture ground, commonly called the Coneygar, and two Coppices . . . the Coneygar being now flooded and covered with water."

The word "Coneygar" means in old English a rabbit warren, so apparently the bed of the present lake was once the haunt of the coney, long since departed.

From the deed just mentioned it therefore appears that certainly the principal rooms were built in the thirties, and the fine porch with its Ionic pillars on the western side of the house took the place of the older eastern entrance, when the drive had run across the Home Close to the Highworth Road with a graceful curve.

It seems that the centre of the house was left intact, except for the roof, when this demolition took place, as in the room which is now used as a library, and was formerly the servants' hall, a different style is found, and the wall to the adjoining room measures nearly four feet in thickness ; also the appearance of the house outside in this part (and the bedrooms above) is similar to what we see in Mrs. Maskelyne's sketch. The servants' wing was added by Major Prower, with the offices below, in 1863.

Old Mrs. Selwood, still alive, clearly remembers the building of the house, and relates that while this was in course of erection the family lived in the older wing, which ran in the direction of the kitchen garden, and was taken down in its turn when the mansion was fit for habitation. Events make a marvellous impression on a child's brain, and though nearing her centenary, she can still talk and tell of what must have happened at least ninety years ago.

After the Prowers' day the Rajah of Sarawak, who had married a Wiltshire lady, Miss de Windt, bought Purton House ; but it is said the church bells got on the Ranee's nerves,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> At that date the bell was tolled all day when a parishioner died.



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and so they only stayed a short time. The Russell family took a lease from the Rajah, and at last purchased the place in 1899. Miss Russell having bought Red House, went to live there in 1908. The present owner made many interior alterations to bring things up to modern requirements, and relieved the house from a dense mass of trees and shrubs which had surrounded it. He formed the terrace round the south front, took in a considerable piece of the Home Close as pleasure ground, planting a yew hedge in 1915, and in the preceding autumn laid out the beginning of the rose garden with its paved walks, gay with rock plants, and a stone dial to mark "only the sunny hours." When planting shrubs opposite the garden wall a few years ago an old key was dug up, which was of such a quaint shape that the writer took it up to London to show to the expert at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He pronounced it to be fourteenth century, and one of the earliest of keys. A silver token was dug up in the yard, and many copper coins of various dates have come to light.

The Green Walk, so called in the old deeds, runs along the entire length of the lake, which is about two acres in extent, with a stoned-faced ha-ha, and is shown exactly as at present in a prettily coloured map dated 1824.

In ancient days the "way in" was by the side walk, now called the "Monk's Walk," with its ivied wall and clipped yew hedge, a grateful shade on a summer day. It would indeed be difficult to find a more peaceful scene than when from the Green Walk by the large Irish yew, on a still evening in June one looks across the lake at the venerable grey towers and spire of the grand old Church, which with the copper beech, the great cedar, and Purton House itself, lie mirrored in the still waters. This great cedar was planted by Sir George Hayter, the famous early Victorian portrait and historical painter. He was staying at Purton House about seventy years ago in order to paint Major and Mrs. Prower's pictures, and so commemorated his visit. The story goes that some goats, trespassing where they should not, nibbled the top off the young tree, the result being that, failing its leader, the tree broke out into what became the fourteen mighty limbs of later days.

Sir George Hayter also painted the portrait of Canon Prower, which now hangs at Sissells, a pleasant picture and,



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it is said, an excellent likeness. One old John Templer, who knew him well, remarked when shown the picture that "it looked as if 'Passon' had had a glass of wine."

In this connection a story told recently by an old inhabitant may be given. He said that in the good old days Major Prower held a temperance meeting at Purton House (which cause he had much at heart), and that after tea he stepped out of the dining-room window and addressed the meeting as follows: "I like my glass of beer, and I like to see my men enjoy it." This was all the old man remembered, though doubtless Major Prower had more to say which is not recorded.

The present owner, Captain Arthur Percy Richardson, is an Ulsterman by birth, his family having settled there in the days of the famous Plantation, from the borders of Oxfordshire and Warwickshire, where his ancestor, the Rev. John Richardson, M.A. Oxon., held considerable "landes" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries around Mollington. Captain Richardson served for eight years with the 5th Batt. Royal Irish Rifles, and on the outbreak of war offered his services in any capacity to the War Office. He was appointed Adjutant to the National Reserve at Swindon, and after five months' voluntary work there re-enrolling reservists, he was offered the command of a company in the 10th Batt. The Suffolk Regiment, in which he served for six months, a medical report preventing his going, as he hoped, to France.

His two surviving sons are :

Edmond St. John, who served with the Wiltshire Yeomanry during the Great War as a trooper until rheumatism obliged him to leave. He had previously held a commission for four years in the Denbighshire Hussars Yeomanry.

Arthur Kenneth, commands a company in the 3rd Batt. Royal Welch Fusiliers, having served in the trenches in France with the immortal 7th Division for seven months in 1914-15, and taking part in the Battle of Festubert, when he commanded the trench-mortar guns in the 22nd Brigade, and was one of five officers left in the regiment after the battle.

Capt. A. P. Richardson is a member of the Carlton Club, and was formerly Master of the Old Killultagh Harriers in County Antrim.

A few touching lines are to be seen on a grey headstone in



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the churchyard, of one William Andrews, who with his "kind master true" laid out the woodland walks at Purton House.<sup>1</sup>

"Here sleepeth one who lived devoid of all,  
 Hasty in word, but very kind of heart,  
 Skilléd in business, giving all their due,  
 Honest and just, to his kind master true,  
 Rejoicing in the Park, and Lake, and Shade  
 Of woodland paths, he and his master made,  
 Wife, children, neighbours, bless his Christian end.  
 And mourn the loss of husband, Father, Friend."

Died June 1st 1847—born 1777.

In Cary's<sup>2</sup> *New Itinery of the Great Roads with Noblemen's and Gentlemen's seats of England and Wales and parts of Scotland*, we find Purton House described as "on the right of Purton Street," and as the residence of Dr. Richard Goddard. This looks as though the Church was considered the centre of the village, as only passing in that way along the Highworth Road could Purton House be so described. Lydiard Park is said to be "on the right of Hooke Street." Even in these days of finger-posts at all the corners, it is no easy task sometimes to find the way, and with only Cary's book to guide one it must have been puzzling indeed, for as to which *is* the right-hand side remains an open question. Possibly the traveller when taking directions always faced due north.

### *The Manor House.*

This fine specimen of the smaller type of manor house stands close to the Church, and with it forms one of the most charming groups of buildings in North Wilts. The property belonged to Malmesbury Abbey before the dissolution of the religious houses, and the names of the last tenants of this great mitred house, Bennet and Joy, are preserved to us in the case brought by them in Star-Chamber against Sir Edmond Bridges, some of the details of which may be found in another chapter of this book.

"The Mancion House" mentioned in these proceedings must have had a very different appearance from that of to-day, for it was practically rebuilt about the end of the sixteenth century by Lord Chandos, who then owned the property. He seems to have sold it a little later to Sir John Cooper, who

<sup>1</sup> Also at Red Lodge.

<sup>2</sup> Published September 1st, 1792.





THE MANOR HOUSE, PURTON, NORTH FRONT, LOOKING SOUTH-WEST.



THE MANOR HOUSE, PURTON, SOUTH FRONT.



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married the heiress of Sir Anthony Ashley, of Wimborne St. Giles, and was the ancestor of the Earls of Shaftesbury. His son was Lord Chancellor to Charles II., and the "Ashley" of the Cabal Ministry. It is not known how many of this family actually resided at the Manor House, but in the eighteenth century the Honourable Maurice Ashley (who had dropped the name of Cooper) lived here with his wife, Katherine Popple, and they lie buried in the Church, and are commemorated by a tablet with a Latin inscription on the chancel wall. After this the house seems to have been used exclusively by tenants renting the land from the Shaftesbury family, and it was probably during this period that the house was fitted up internally to meet the requirements of an ordinary farmhouse.

In 1892 Lord Shaftesbury sold all his Purton estates, and the house and land, then known as the Church Farm, were bought by Mr. Charles Beak, a native of Purton, who emigrated to Mexico, and there made a sufficient fortune to enable him to purchase the property which he knew so well in his boyhood. On his death, in 1900, the Manor House and land adjoining were sold by the representatives of the Beak family to Mrs. Walsh, widow of Arthur Francis Walsh, of the Hoystings, Canterbury.

Though outwardly the house was altered as little as possible, internally the changes made were considerable. On the ground floor the small lobby, hall, and parlour adjoining were knocked into one to make a lounge hall, the north wall of the parlour being removed to give access to an oak staircase which took the place of a small deal one that rose abruptly from the front door to the first floor passage. A drawing-room was obtained by knocking into one two small rooms which had been used for farm purposes for over a century. In this room and in the hall and dining-room open fireplaces were built. The chief alteration outside was the addition of a small wing on the north side of the house and the removal of some unsightly outbuildings. During Mr. Beak's ownership the brick chimney stacks, which to judge from an old drawing must have been a conspicuous feature of the house, were lowered, as from want of repair he considered it advisable to reduce their height, some of the brickwork having fallen in a gale.

The gardens surrounding the house were all laid out after



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Mrs. Walsh had bought the place. Steeple Piece, the field at the back, was turned into pasture and a belt of trees planted all round. The old manorial dovecote which stood in the farmyard was brought into the garden, pigsties and a large cart shed were removed, lawns laid out, a pergola built, and a belt of trees planted next to the churchyard. The great barn was repaired and stabling made in part of it, the rick yard was quarried by degrees and laid out as a kitchen garden. The old winnowing shed projecting from the barn being unfortunately beyond restoration had to be demolished, but the hatch through which the sheaves were passed can still be seen in the wall of the barn.

Mrs. Walsh's son, Mr. Arthur Walsh, late R.N., has been again serving his country during the war in connection with the Navy, and Miss Walsh is untiring in her labours to help on all good work in Purton.

Mrs. Walsh and she are expert gardeners, and their flower borders and lawns are a picture of beauty. Overshadowed by the lofty Church towers, and with the beautiful old house and barn as a background, it all forms a delightful picture.



## CHAPTER X

THE OLD VICARAGE—FACULTY FOR PURTON HOUSE PEW—  
RESTROP HOUSE

IN 1912, the graveyard being full, it was decided by the Bishop to move the existing vicarage, which, built time out of mind, had gradually become surrounded on three sides by graves, making it impossible as a residence.

It had a pretty garden and fine shrubs, and the house, though very old and inconvenient to modern ideas, was dearly loved by our late Vicar. The writer well remembers the tragic grief on his face when, meeting him one morning after the demolition had begun, he remarked, "I have been to *see my house.*" He had lived there for over thirty years, much beloved and respected, and it was hard to move in his later life to new surroundings, and a real trial to him. The Vicar always held that with the monastery at Purton House the vicarage was the hospice, and there was one room there which had evidently served as a chapel. A curious stone fire-place was discovered built up in the wall of one of the rooms, and also a pretty window-frame, both of which have been happily utilised in the new building; the latter is placed over the entrance door.

It was thought that possibly some of the figures which formerly had their places in the beautiful niches of the Church might have been buried beneath this old house, but such, alas! was not the case, only a few coins and some bones were brought to light.

It must be many centuries since the garden surrounding the old vicarage was made, and a fact that wants some explanation is the frequent discovery of skeletons as the ground is dug to form new graves. It seems to lend confirmation to the late Vicar's theory that this building was the hospice, and possibly the wayfarers from other parts of the country were laid to rest there, and not buried in the ground belonging to the parishioners. No skeletons were found in the newer upper portion, which did



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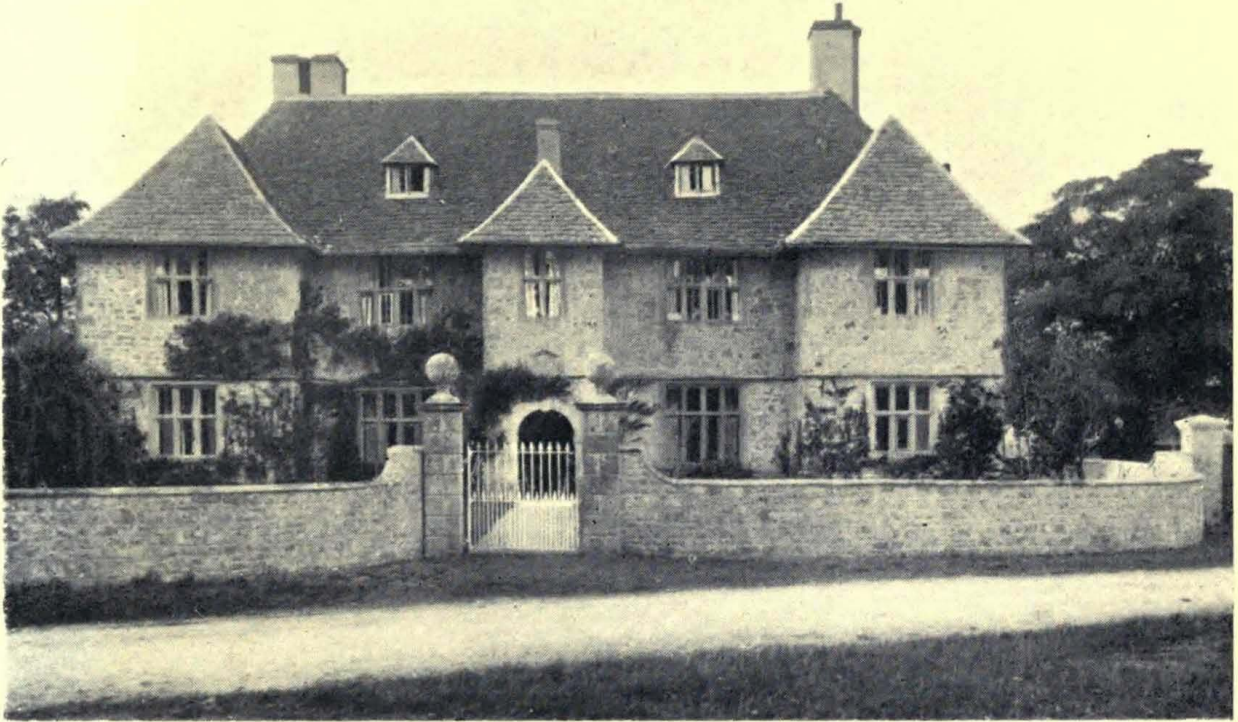
not include the vicarage garden, but which has been taken into the graveyard in recent years.

There is a curious tradition of an underground passage from Purton to Malmesbury, and, strange to say, two years ago, when Mrs. Dash's grave was being dug, an arched way was come upon, apparently in the supposed line; but this was possibly a monastic water conduit, which was sometimes brought for many miles in pre-Reformation days.

The larger houses in the old days held what were called "faculties" giving a right to a pew in the Church, and one such deed is in the possession of the owner of Purton House, granted in 1698 under the seal of the Chancellor of the Diocese of Sarum, and runs as follows:—

Robert Loggan Batchellour of Lawes and Chancellour of the Diocess of Sarum; To all Christian people to whom these Presents shall come, sendeth greeting; whereas request hath been made to us on the part and behalf of ffrancis Goddard of Pirton in the County of Wilts, and Diocess of Sarum Esq, that the seats or pew built and situate in the South Isle of the Parish Church of Pirton aforesaid, being six foot and half an inch in length, and near about three foot in breadth, adjoining to another seat belonging to the sd ffrancis Goddard on the East, and the seats of Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper on the West, to the Church wall on the South, and opening to the North (which said seats for many years past hath been and now is in the possession of the sd ffrancis Goddard) might be confirmed to him, his heirs and assigns for so long as he or they occupy and possess the House and Estate within the sd Parish of Purton which he now enjoyeth, for himself or them his or their familys to sitt stand and kneel in, to hear Divine Service and sermons. Now know you, that we, proceeding herein as the Law in Church rules directs and appoints, by issuing forth said Proclamation under said seal of office bearing date the fourth day of February last past, riteing [*sic*] and admonishing all Persons haveing any right or interest in or to the same seats, to appear and sett forth and propose forth their right or interest therein in due forms of Law, if any they have, which Proclamation being duly executed, returned and verified to us, and noe Person appearing, (excepting one John Eatell of thesd Parish, by his Proctor,





RESTROP HOUSE, PURTON.

The residence of Colonel Canning, C.M.G.



THE HALL, RESTROP HOUSE, PURTON.



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who after a competent terme assigned him, did not sett forth or Propose any Right or interest in or to the same seats, but rather declined all power thereto), Doce of S Ordinary power and authority, and as far as by the Ecc.ticall Laws we are enabled, grant, verify and confirme the sd seats or Pew, situate as aforesaid, unto the sd ffrancis Goddard, for him, his heirs, and Assigns, for long as he or they occupy or possess the House and estate within the sd Parish of Purton which he now enjoyeth, for himself or them, his, or their familys to sitt, stand, and kneel in, to hear Divine Service and sermon without the Loss hindrance, interruption or Disturbance of any Person or Persons what soever.

In witness whereof we have caused the seals of our Office to be affixed to these presents. Dated at Sarum thiss two and twentieth day of March in the year of Our Lord God One thousand six hundred ninety and eight, according to the Style of the Church of England.

Ed. Thistlethwayte. Regius.

---

Honi Soit.

2 of these stamps 6d. each.

VI pence.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *Restrop House.*

“This house is as good and pure a specimen of Elizabethan architecture as could be found,”<sup>1</sup> built of stone, the roof of old grey tiles with overhanging eaves, and with the fine transomed windows, an especially picturesque effect is given to the front or south side.

Like many other houses of the period, it was built in the form of the letter E, a compliment we may suppose to the Queen. It is said that Queen Elizabeth spent a night in it, but that is scarcely likely, although she probably did see the house passing on her way from Burderop to Cirencester.

The name is thought to signify red, and speaks of war and

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries.*



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battle in bygone times. Sad to relate, the history of the house seems to be buried and lost, and no information can be obtained as to who built it, and of those who lived and died there during the four hundred years of its existence.

Ringsbury Camp, not far away, is evidence of the importance of the position from very early times, and there is a tradition of a battle having been fought near by during the Wars of the Parliament.

The names of "Battle Well" and "Battle Cottages" seem to confirm this. Human skeletons and a stone cannon-ball have also been found buried near the house. One cannot think that the owners of Restrop dwelt unconcerned during such a long and eventful period, and it is to be supposed that they must have taken at least some small share in what was passing around them.

Together with other property in the Parish of Purton, Restrop belonged to the Shaftesbury family. It is not known if any member ever resided there, but the coat of arms over the entrance to the porch is the Ashley-Coopers'. How strange it is that the first Earl of Clarendon, Lord Chancellor of England, and his great political opponent the Earl of Shaftesbury should have been near neighbours and adjoining landowners in this quiet Wiltshire village. After being in the possession of the Shaftesbury family for some two hundred and eighty years the house passed into other hands, and was purchased by the present owner, Colonel Canning, in 1912. He, with due regard to the character and beauty of the house, has made it his object to renovate and preserve the building, and to restore it as much as possible to its original state.

Partitions put up in recent times have been removed, to bring the hall to its former dimensions. A fine stone fire-place has been uncovered, providing a hearth admirably fitted for a fire of logs. The stone fire-places are a feature of the house, as are the oak stairs.

In the drawing-room there is a good specimen of a Jacobean fire-place. A small dais at one end and a "powder room," with newly-found oak panelling, give an old-world effect, and an endeavour in the style of furnishing has been made to bring all into harmony.

Lieut.-Col. Canning is a Wiltshireman by birth, and a



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collateral relation of the family of Lord Stratford de Redcliffe. On the outbreak of war he rejoined the Army and commanded a battalion in Gallipoli, including the far-famed evacuation, and afterwards in the Arabian Desert. In recognition of these services he received from His Majesty the well-earned decoration of The Most Distinguished order of St. Michael and St. George. He is at present serving in Ireland.



## CHAPTER XI

WATKINS' CORNER—PRESENT-DAY RESIDENTS—PURTON STOKE—  
“CURLY TOM”

ON the road to Purton Stoke is a sharp turn, almost describing a crook, and a gruesome tale is told of the spot.

One Watkins was accused of having committed a murder, and at this corner a gallows<sup>1</sup> was erected (some say a tree was used) and in full view of the public the last sad reparation was exacted. Some time afterwards, the story goes, the father of Watkins confessed that he, and not his son, was the guilty person. A fearful thunderstorm raged after the hanging took place, as though Heaven itself were raising a protest, and folks say that the hangman's horse, taking fright on the way home, upset the trap, breaking his master's neck.

A tale is also told of a sudden fire some years later, which reduced to ashes the very gallows used and the shed wherein it stood.

Of course, the corner was said to be haunted, and further tragedy followed. One dark night some friends who had been drinking were talking of Watkins, and one offered to bet another that he would not dare to creep along the ditch and say, “Well, Watkins, how are you feeling?”

The bet was accepted, and unknown to him who took it up another crept to the farther end awaiting his advent. When the question was duly asked, the reply came, “Very cold and miserable,” and this was so terrifying, and also so unexpected, that the unlucky sportsman, having a weak heart, collapsed and died of fright.

These public hangings were considered a sight not to be missed if it was possible to get there. North Wiltshire folk loved to attend the Devizes Hang Fair as recently as the early part of the nineteenth century. The late Rev. C. W. Bradford,<sup>2</sup> who took his B.A. Degree at Oxford in 1852, used to tell his son-in-law

<sup>1</sup> A Staley of Purton erected the gallows.

<sup>2</sup> Vicar of Clyffe Pypard, 1863–1883.



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how he went up the tower of St. Peter-le-Bailey Church at Oxford to get a good view of a hanging, and the writer's father used to relate how, when driving on his father's (Sir James Stronge) coach, which was called "the '74," he saw the dead body of a man hanging on a gibbet at Shrewsbury, who had been executed for highway robbery. This was in the year 1836.

Miss Prower remembers that her grandfather, Canon Prower, as Vicar, was obliged to attend Watkins' execution, and to read the last solemn service over the unfortunate condemned man. The book which he used on this occasion was a small Prayer Book, now at Sissells, and on the fly-leaf is the following inscription :—

" Robert Watkins of the Burrough of Wootton Bassett read from this book the 108 Psalm, when on the Scaffold for the murder of Stephen Rodway of Cricklade Friday July 30th. 1819.

" JOHN MERVIN PROWER."

The Prayer Book was published in London in the year 1787, and an asterisk on the exhortation which begins " Dearly beloved " points to a note below as follows :—

" This exhortation is fraught with preparatory instruction to worship Jehovah in spirit and in truth."

It is strange to hold the little volume in one's hand open at the 108th Psalm, and to think of Watkins' feelings as he read, " Awake, thou lute, and harp : I myself will awake right early " with the noose already round his neck ! In the thirteenth verse there was more suitable expression to his desperate situation, " O help us against the enemy : for vain is the help of man."

Stranger still to relate, Canon Prower allowed his seven-year-old son, afterwards Major Prower, to be brought as a spectator, and even held up by the gardener " to get a better view ! "

All praise to those who put a stop to such spectacles in the ensuing years, for surely such sights must have only pandered to an unhealthy taste for horrors, though doubtless well meant as a deterrent to evildoers.

Old Mr. Lewis says he remembers Canon Prower's four-wheeled shay in which he used to drive himself about when Lewis



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was a little boy. It had a seat facing the driver and one behind, and on the front seat he always had three baskets, which the children knew well, for one contained apples, one sweets, and one coppers, which the old gentleman used to throw to the children to scramble for, amidst shouts of laughter from himself and them. "Oh, we all knew *his* carriage," Lewis said, chuckling to himself at the recollection of those far-off days.

Mr. Lewis' mother, who was a Daniels, often told her sons of the wonderful assemblage on the day John Watkins was hanged. The condemned man was brought past Purton House and round by the churchyard to the place of execution, while the tenor bell tolled its solemn chime for the dread ceremony about to take place. She said that the body was taken when life was extinct to where Mr. Greenaway's farm now is, and a post-mortem was performed, and then it was returned to be buried at Watkins' Corner. The crowds that gathered passed all records, and his clothes seem to have been greedily seized upon as souvenirs, one man even boasting that he had worn his boots, while an old woman used to show his braces carefully rolled in paper!

Mr. Pedley remembers that his old gardener, Wilton by name, used to boast that he had walked all the way from Bibury and back to see poor Watkins hanged, and he always spoke of the terrible thunderstorm which raged that day.

This Wilton's brothers, three of them, all fought and fell in the Peninsular War, which fact forms an interesting link with the past.

Passing on, we arrive at Purton Stoke, with its pretty picturesque cottages dotted about irregularly, and on the right-hand side there stands the comfortable reading room, painted a cheerful green and white, which was erected some eight years ago by the exertions of Mrs. Warrender, assisted by contributions from various friends. It is an inestimable boon to the villagers on winter evenings, and on Sundays is used for the Church services.

Turning to the left, we find a charming old-world spot, Stoke House, part of it built, it is said, in the time of Charles II., surrounded by rose gardens in summer, and brilliant in spring time with daffodils and other bulbs. This is the residence of Miss Warrender. Miss Alice Warrender is the second daughter



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of the late Sir George Warrender, 6th Baronet, and sister of the late well-known Admiral of the same name. The latter's widow is a sister of the present Earl of Shaftesbury.

Debrett tells us that this family is of French extraction, formerly de Warende, which settled in Scotland *temp.* James V. Miss Warrender was for several years Vicar's Churchwarden to Purton Parish, and takes a deep interest in all that tends to the welfare of the neighbourhood. In peace time she was a keen follower of the V.W.H. Hounds.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *The Salts Hole.*

Quoting from *The Leisure Hour* in 1861, we find as follows :

“ A valuable mineral water has been discovered near Purton, and the analysis shows that this water was rich beyond all precedent in sulphates, carbonates, chlorides, phosphates, iodides, and bromine, with sulphuretted hydrogen, and a very large amount of free carbonic acid gases, and that a similar water is unknown in England or the Continent.

“ The spa is marked by a small octagonal building in a field, time out of mind it has been called the Salts Hole. The poor all resort to it and value it highly, but the local gentry and doctors placed no value upon it. Mr. S. C. Sadler, who had owned the spot for fifteen years, thought it a nuisance, as it flooded the lane in the winter months. At this the poor bitterly exclaimed, “ You are taking our physic from us, whatever shall we do when it is gone? You may say it is no use, but we know it is, and our fathers before us.”

The story goes on to tell how their pleading was disregarded, and the place was drained, and cartloads of soil thrown on the spot; but the spring remained unvanquished, and was *sure* to reappear. Mr. Sadler then railed it round and put a lock on the gate. But the poor neighbours were not to be done out of their physic, which “ always made them well,” and used to break the lock and take it as before.

“ At last the owner had a serious illness, and remembering the persistent faith of the poor in the despised spring, he



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determined to try it himself, and found immediate benefit. Two most eminent chemists were then asked to make an analysis of the water. They found it to contain the two finest salts, and specially rich in phosphate of lime, which being the basis of bone, is specially good for sick children. Also they found that it had none of the irritant properties of most other English waters, and there is no English spring resembling it. When the well was filled in and destroyed the exact locality for a time was doubtful, but a white surface on a slight sinking of the earth pointed to a likely spot, a hole was made, and the water came bubbling up, to the great joy of the neighbourhood. This occurred in 1859. A pump and pump-room were then scientifically erected" (and still remain).

"Many are the cures attributed to the waters, though a neighbouring doctor jeeringly remarked, 'One can readily compound the ingredients, we administer the same every day.' " "But," the account continues, "the ingredients may indeed be known, but not the secret of their combination. The water when bottled is so full of gas, an empty space must be left, or the neck would burst, when corked under pressure it effervesces. When exposed to the air it is in a state of ferment owing to the explosion of the gas, and it has a milky appearance."

In a paper by Mr. S. C. Sadler, M.R.C.S., we read:—

"By the testimony of some old people now living in the parish, it is certain that this mineral well was known and much resorted to at a very remote period. Thus:—

"'Isaac Beasley, now (1860) in the 93rd year of his age, and possessing extraordinary power of memory, and great physical strength for his years, states that all his life he had been in the habit, when out of health, of drinking this water, and it was certain to put him right, and that his father took this water as physic, and a vast number of folks in his young days took this water for all manner of diseases, and it mostly cured them. He heard his father say that often a great man came down from Oxford, with a coach and four horses, to get some water from the Salts Hole.' "

These facts would date some two hundred years back from the present day.

The waters are to this day drunk by the country-folk as a



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cure for many ailments, a cart full of bottles dispensing to the customers who desire it.

Turning again sharply to the left brings us to Pond's Farm, a very quaint and interesting old house, famous for having been the residence of Bathes and Maskelynes in days gone by, and called "The Mansion House at Stoke" in ancient deeds. Here it was that Nevil Maskelyne lived, the great astronomer whose mind was able to defy space and distance, weigh the stars, and foretell the courses of the planets. It is now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Ponting, whose excellent cheeses are celebrated far beyond Purton.

But we must retrace our steps, and climb the long Purton Hill, passing the old toll-gate on the right and Purton Court at the corner, now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Bickford.

Passing the College Farm brings us to "The Cedars," the residence of Mr. and Mrs. John Fox. Everyone was glad to welcome them back from Australia in the autumn of 1916, after an absence of three years. He is the owner of extensive cattle ranches in Queensland, and pays them periodical visits. He served in the South African War with the Australian<sup>1</sup> contingent, and is a Hampshire man by birth; his elder brother is the owner of Adbury Park, near Newbury. Mrs. Fox is descended from the old Puritan family of Winthrop. Her ancestor was the famous John Winthrop, who, when the question of emigration "to a land in the West where religion and liberty could find a safe and lasting home"<sup>2</sup> arose, said: "I shall call that my country where I may most glorify God, and enjoy the presence of my dearest friends." The emigrants during this time were many of them men of large landed estates, shrewd London lawyers, or young scholars from Oxford.

"Farewell, dear England!" was their cry as the ships bore them from these shores to the unknown country across the wide ocean.

"Our hearts," wrote John Winthrop's followers to those left behind, "shall be fountains of tears for your everlasting welfare, when we shall be in our poor cottages in the wilderness."

Many died miserably of cold and discomfort in the first terrible winter. A letter from Winthrop runs thus: "I thank

<sup>1</sup> In the Queensland Mounted Infantry.

<sup>2</sup> Green's *History of the English People*, p. 493.



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God I like so well to be here, as I do not repent my coming. I would not have altered my course, though I had foreseen all these afflictions, I never had more content of mind."

Three thousand Puritans arrived there from England in a single year. Laud's persecutions led to their abolishing Episcopacy, and abandoning the use of the Book of Common Prayer.

Green tells us that "between the sailing of Winthrop's expedition and the assembly of the Long Parliament, that is ten or eleven years, two hundred emigrant ships had crossed the Atlantic and twenty thousand Englishmen had found refuge in the West."

But a day of retribution was coming, and in 1644 "King Pym's" ride over England on the eve of the elections for the Long Parliament brought new life to England, and stopped the tide of emigration, for as Winthrop wrote, "The change made all men to stay in England in expectation of a new world."

A very charming collection of family letters is still preserved, telling of all the difficulties and dangers, fateful decisions, and cruel partings, which the Winthrop family endured for conscience' sake.

Passing on, we come to a picturesque house in the Georgian style, with a high roof and grey stone slates. This is "The Close," the residence of Mr. and Mrs. John Brown. Mrs. Brown's father, the Rev. Walter Mitchell, was a former Vicar of Purton, and Mr. Brown's maternal ancestors (the Bathe family) have for many generations been well known in the district.

Two sons are now lords of the Manor of Purton Keynes, and a third is fighting in Egypt.

All Purton knows what a good friend Miss May Brown is, and her sister, Miss Lily Brown, has for several years now been nursing wounded soldiers at Cheltenham. Another daughter, Mrs. Plummer, lives at Wroughton.

Miss Ruck, though rarely seen, still remembers her old friends, and lends a kindly hand to those in distress.

Miss Maud Prower lives at Sissells, a little farther on, a quaint and pretty old house, with a glorious view on the north side extending far away to the Cotswold Hills.

The name Sissells doubtless comes from a former owner, one Joan Sistell, widow, who in 1640 held a close and pasture



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in Purton,<sup>1</sup> and in the later Inquisition we find that "William Digges held in Purton . . . two grounds, called Sissells hills, and forty acres of arable lying in Battlefeeld, alias Bettlefeeld."

Mr. and Mrs. Pedley are well known in the neighbourhood, having moved here from Latton some years ago.

Mrs. Sayer lives at Longcroft. Her husband, the late Captain Sayer, took a leading part in Purton village in bygone days.

Mrs. Charlton<sup>2</sup> and her daughters live at "Hillside," and are interested in all social work.

Mrs. and the Misses Redman, at Churchfield Lodge, are interested in nursing and Foreign Missions.

Red House with its charming grounds is the home of Miss Russell. She has been for two years the Commandant of a Convalescent Home for wounded soldiers at Reading, having also helped to run a canteen there.

The principal landowners in Purton are James Henry Sadler, D.L., Mr. C. D. Heycock and Mrs. Story-Maskelyne.

The population in 1911 was 2,645 in the ecclesiastical parish.

There is a Congregational Chapel, built in 1829, with 120 sittings, and there are also Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Chapels.

Mrs. Plummer, who lives in the Lower Square, used during her husband's lifetime to live at the Manor House. One of her sons is now serving his country in her hour of need.

Mr. A. H. Dunn is the licensed lay reader of the parish, and he officiates every Sunday in Braydon Chapel of Ease. He is a gifted preacher, and in peace time held a weekly Bible Class for men at the Institute, which was largely attended.

The Children's Home was built in 1914 by the Guardians in the form of two labourers' cottages, so that if necessary in later years the building could be easily divided, and used to accommodate two families. At present (1917) sixteen children are being trained there to become useful citizens.

<sup>1</sup> Wilts Inq. P.M., ch. i., p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> A daughter of Admiral Dent, by his wife, the Lady Selina Hastings.



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There is a saying that "you can live as long as you like in Purton," on account of its excellent reputation for health and freedom from infectious complaints. There does seem to be something in it, as great ages are attained, accompanied by wonderful health and strength. Our late organist, Mrs. Smith, who recently retired, had occupied her post for fifty years, and was presented on her retirement with a purse of sovereigns by the parishioners.

A well-known figure in Purton till recently was "Curly Tom" (see p. 59). He used to say that his father and mother had brought him to London from Norfolk as a baby. Anyhow, he seems to have drifted down to Wiltshire, and for many years had a regular beat as a pedlar, tramping round to dispose of his wares to the willing country-folk.

He used to say that "people in his class" learned to read and write in his young days, as they found it useful to their customers, who were unable to do so. He was taught by having sand spread on the top of a wooden box, and when smooth the boy was given a skewer, and with it learned to form and read letters on the sand. (This might prove a valuable suggestion to the Education Authorities if the present scarcity of paper should become acute.)

One felt he was one who might have made a better thing of life had the chance come his way, as both in appearance and manner he was superior to what one expects from such circumstances. For many a year he tramped the country round, but at last the years began to weigh upon him, for there is no cheating old Time after all, and he used to come to the Workhouse for the winter months, and when the days got longer, and the trees put on their spring attire, "Curly Tom" would make his appearance as usual before the Guardians, saying, "Good morning, Gentlemen, I want to ask your help." Five shillings was accordingly always given to him, and with this he sallied forth to buy his stock-in-trade of pins, needles, bootlaces, etc.; and so well did he understand the wants of his district, that by his trading he was able to entirely support himself, until the shortening days and chilly nights warned him back to his winter quarters in the Workhouse.

Born nine years before Waterloo, and at the age of 104 only a little deaf, he was often to be seen sauntering along enjoying



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his pipe, which his friends saw to it should not want for tobacco, and no one enjoyed a cup of tea more than he did, given with a friendly word of greeting. "That is tea!" he used to say with great appreciation. The writer saw him at the point of death, and his extraordinarily aged appearance then showed that Time had not forgotten him, although his life had reached so far beyond man's allotted span.



## CHAPTER XII

### PARISH LAWS, 1733—SEVERE PENALTIES

IN a quaint old volume called *Parish Laws*, published in the year 1733, there are some curious accounts of the duties of Churchwardens, as “besides the care of the repairs of the Church seats, Churchwardens are to see that all the parishioners duly resort to their Parish Church, and there continue during the time of Divine Service, to permit no Person to cover his head in the Church, except he have some infirmity, and then with a cap; not to permit any to stand idle, walk, talk, or make any noise in the Church, or to contend about places, and to chastise disorderly boys, etc., also to keep excommunicated out of the Church, and to allow no interludes, plays, feasts, Church Ales, Musters, markets, temporal Courts or Leets, Lay Juries, or any other profane usage to be permitted or allowed therein, also on Sacrament days: to observe they that absent themselves from it, and present them for the same at the next Visitation. Also to see that all behave themselves orderly, soberly and reverently; kneeling at the prayers, standing at the Belief, bowing at the name of Jesus, sitting or standing quietly and attentively at the reading of the Scriptures.”

One shilling was the fine imposed by the Justices for each of the above offences, and also for, “1st, Absenting from Church, 2nd, Not abiding there till service and sermon were ended, 3rd, For not behaving orderly and soberly while there.” Five shillings was the fine for doing “any worldly work or business on Sunday,” but for trading or travelling on the Lord’s Day the fine was twenty shillings. If any butcher killed on Sunday six shillings and sixpence was the forfeit, and for meeting at bull-baitings, bear-baitings, interludes or Common Plays three shillings and fourpence was the fine exacted. The money derived from these sums to be applied to the relief of the poor; failing ability to pay, the offenders were to be put in the stocks. Churchwardens also had as part of their duties to visit frequently on Sunday ale-houses, and if they found any tippling to make



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them pay three shillings and fourpence and the master of the house ten shillings, also five shillings for using trade, and if in Church hours, another shilling each all round ; and then all was not forgiven, for they were to be presented by the Churchwardens at the next Visitation. Their powers also allowed the Churchwardens " to present the Minister if he was not constantly resident for doing his duty, or for leading a disorderly or irregular life." However, if the parson was a proper man, he was well protected, as the offence of disturbing or abusing him while doing his duty was a serious matter. £10 for the first offence, £20 for the second, and for the third the offender should forfeit all his goods and chattels and be imprisoned for life. No cursing or swearing was allowed, one shilling or two shillings was the fine, and if under sixteen to be whipped.

The fine for not coming to Church was £20, and if continued for a year £20 for every month and two parts in three of his or her estate, and to produce two sureties in £200 for future good behaviour. Anyone who "is assaulted or beaten in Church, is not to give back blows in his own defence, as he may do in another place." For striking or laying hands on anyone in the churchyard excommunication was imposed, "but if with a weapon, or if only drawn for that purpose, to lose one of his ears." The poor are described as of two classes : 1st, those who are willing to work but are not able ; 2nd, those who are able to work but are not willing. These latter could be sent by two justices to the House of Correction. Churchwardens and overseers could also be consigned to this terrible place for "refusing to account, there to remain till they will." Boy paupers were apprenticed till the age of twenty-four and girls till twenty-one or marriage ; no apprentice might be older than fifteen "when first bound." Rogues and idle people were to be set to work, and "moderately whipped" or have "fetters and givies" put on them. Persons receiving parish relief were obliged to wear a badge on their right shoulder sleeve, on refusal may be sent to the House of Correction for twenty-one days at most, to be whipped and kept to hard labour ; formerly they were burned on the left shoulder. Boys could be apprenticed to sea service being ten years old and upwards if likely to be a charge to the parish, who begged alms, or whose



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parents were chargeable, the apprenticeship to continue till twenty-one years was reached.

The parish laws for labourers then were that "those that work by day or week shall continue at work betwixt the middle of March and the middle of September from 5 in the morning till between 7 and 8 at night, except 2 hours for breakfast, dinner and drinking, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour for sleeping," all the rest of the year from twilight to twilight, on pain to have "one penny defalked out of their wages for every hour's absence." All artificers "had to work in haytime and harvest on pain of 2 days and 1 night in the stocks, or 40s. forfeit."

Beggars and vagabonds got a short shrift. "Anyone found wandering, begging and misordering himself . . . be ordered to be openly whipped, until his or her body be bloody, or be sent to the House of Correction, and be kept at hard labor at the discretion of the justices." Those thought to be specially dangerous got even worse treatment, for they "shall cause him to be whipped three market days successively." No person likely to live by begging could be brought into England by a master of a ship from Ireland, Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Scilly. £5 was the fine for bringing such a one, the intruder was to be openly whipped and sent back to where he came from. We have all heard of hue and cry, but one hardly realises that not two hundred years ago a constable could call on parishioners, after describing a felon, to assist in the pursuit, and so on from constable to constable, town to town, and county to county. Pursuers had the right to search suspected houses and persons, and carry the latter to the justices to be examined. Inhabitants of any hundred where hue and cry was made and neglecting to pursue "shall answer of moiety of the Damages" as a penalty, and also be "grievously fined and imprisoned."



## CHAPTER XIII

### LYDIARD MANOR HOUSE—MR. MACKNIGHT—A GHOST STORY— THE SMOCK-FROCK—"GRUBBING THE MOOTS"

ONE mile due south of Purton lies the picturesque village of Lydiard Millicent.

Behind the beautiful church are the ruins of Lydiard Manor, overgrown with ivy and the home of bats and owls.

This house has an interesting history, and was built by one Robert Turgis in the year 1459. For four hundred long years it stood there defying time and weather, until the fatal night came when fire destroyed in a few hours its roof, floors, etc., leaving the walls standing as a melancholy reminder of the past centuries, when it was a bright and beautiful dwelling.

The Webbes had bought the property in 1576 from Robert Turgis' "successors." William Webbe was a Catholic, and was fined for harbouring recusant priests.

The description given by Mr. MacKnight of the house tells us that the chapel was in the roof, over the drawing-room. Behind the altar was a panelled door, which opened into two other rooms without windows; and behind the panelled door was a chimney-stack, behind which two men could be easily concealed. From the second room was a door into the other wing of the house, the exit being through a panel like a door of a raised cupboard, and by this it was possible to go through other rooms to a staircase leading to the back of the house.

It would seem that when the searching party surrounded the house the priests were thus concealed, and made their way out into the wood, where in a small clearing the foundations of two small cottages have been discovered, which would afford them shelter. They were not taken, but it is believed that information was subsequently extorted which led to the conviction for harbouring these plotters against the Government.



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The fine appears to have crippled the estate, which was afterwards mortgaged, and in 1714 Sir John Askew, the mortgagee, foreclosed and entered into possession. He built the stabling and the barn, and laid out the garden on an extensive scale ; but he is said to have speculated in the South Sea Bubble scheme, and to have been unable to complete his designs, of which more anon.

The Rev. William MacKnight was born in the year 1816. A member of an ancient Scottish family, he began his life in Wiltshire as tutor to the sons of the Earl of Suffolk at Charlton Park.

From thence he moved to Purton, and with five pupils lived there for a couple of years, before taking up his residence at Lydiard Millicent.

While living at Purton, he wrote to his fiancée, Miss Davis: "By the by, this is a very appetizing place. My housekeeper says, 'Dear, dear, how much they (the pupils) do eat, sir, they must be ill.' She has actually persuaded one of them to take medicine *for fear*."

Mr. MacKnight loved his occupation, and threw his whole heart into the work of training his pupils for the stern battle of life. He writes: "I am fairly one of them,<sup>1</sup> not a vestige of their tutor left." One good rule he made: "I never if I can help it correct before people, it is most unwise to do so." Sometimes he had very unpromising material to work upon, for he writes of one as "the veriest dolt and lump I ever saw, . . . cannot find his place in the Greek Testament, does not know whether his father was ever at College, does not know anything, in short . . . what am I to do with such an article? His family want him to go to College and be a lawyer! I think I must try to be delivered from him if I can . . . G — is just the reverse, I call him 'Daydawn' and the other 'Midnight.'"

It was in December, 1851, that Mr. MacKnight left Purton for Lydiard Manor, which he was to transform into a bright and beautiful home. He married Miss Davis in the same year at Bibury, and for many years lived a happy life with his pupils in his glorious garden. As already mentioned, this famous

<sup>1</sup> Amongst his pupils were General Sir Redvers Buller, Lord Frederick Leveson-Gower, Mr. J. H. Sadler, etc.



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garden had been laid out in Queen Anne's day, by Sir John Askew, with yew hedges, grass walks and flower beds in a mathematical scheme, using the multiple of five, the flower beds five feet from the yew hedges, and the beds themselves five feet wide.

Of course there is a ghost, and Madam Blunt is said still to "walk" in the old garden. Six bundles of trees were brought from Nova Scotia in 1780 by one Captain Welch, of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and beneath the shade of this fine timber the pupils of Mr. MacKnight worked and played.<sup>1</sup>

He has left an account of a sudden and very terrible storm of wind which took place on October 31st, 1873. He describes how "the tall spruces lashed about as though by some terrific force made into playthings," and how "one elm after another crashed to earth, one of which in falling tore out the end of the gate-lodge." How "the storm apparently struck the ground, which was torn up as though by a steam plough."

After the storm came a water-spout, which washed up to its foundation the metal on the Purton Road. But the strangest thing of all was that it all took place on *October 31st*, and that Madam Blunt's tree was spared amidst the general havoc.

This is the ghost story. Madam Blunt was born Miss Askew, and from an old letter dated Wootton Bassett, November 9th, 1764, we learn that she was engaged to a young clergyman, and everything was arranged by her parents for her marriage. She, however, was in the habit of trying her blandishments on others besides her fiancé, and this so preyed on the young man's mind that it affected his brain. One night<sup>2</sup> there was a dinner party, and one of her favoured swains was present, as well as the unfortunate lover. No one knew exactly what occurred, but later in the evening, in the dark, the three met, there was a struggle, and the clergyman, who it is thought had dined not wisely but too well, drew a pistol and shot himself, although the guilty pair did all they could to prevent him. In the old rectory the marks of blood and brains could be seen on the wall till it was pulled down in 1857.

Miss Askew married Colonel Blunt in 1768, and seven years

<sup>1</sup> *Recollections and Letters of Rev. W. MacKnight*, by E. L. Thomson.

<sup>2</sup> October 31st.



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after his death, on inheriting the Manor, went to live there (in 1811). She saw few or no neighbours, but the gipsies knew her well, and were always welcomed to sing and dance before the house. She enclosed a piece of the garden called "The Slopes," keeping the key herself, and only allowing the gardener to enter in her company. For hours daily, until her death in 1822, she would walk up and down in this garden quite alone, and people say that to this day she still "walks," and that on the 31st of October, when night falls, she may be seen there seated under Madam Blunt's tree.

People at Lydiard tell that when the will was opened it was found that Madam Blunt had given directions that her coffin was to be carried seven times round this special tree, which folks say had been given to her in a flower-pot years ago by a well-loved swain, and her directions were accordingly carried out—seven times the solemn procession made the circle of the tree before laying her remains to rest in the old churchyard adjoining. But in the will there was more than this simple order.

History says that one evening a party of friends were gathered together at the Sun Inn at Lydiard, and Madam Blunt's health not being very good at the time, the question arose, "If anything happens to the old lady, who will have the Manor?" One Mrs. Kibblewhite, just in for her husband's pint of beer, volunteered the surprising information: "You'll see, our Jim will be lord of the Manor when the old lady dies." Her remark was received with incredulity and disdain, and Richard Parsons, Madam Blunt's servant, said, "Your Jim—never likely—as likely as me." "You'll see," repeated Mrs. Kibblewhite, "I know a thing or two—the Manor's sold and bought already—good night." Home went the good lady and told her husband what had occurred. "There now, you've done it, you've spoiled it all, and our Jim will never be lord of the Manor."<sup>1</sup> And he never was, for Richard Parsons told Madam Blunt the whole story. (It seemed that her son, Sir Charles Blunt, had sold his succession to James Kibblewhite for a sum of money. This happened in June, 1817.) Madam Blunt thereupon sent for her agent, Mr. Bewley, collected all the papers and documents, which were packed into two saddle-

<sup>1</sup> From *Lydiard Manor*, by Rev. W. MacKnight.



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bags, and off she rode on a pillion behind him to catch the nearest London coach. This old lady of seventy-one years succeeded in her errand, and the story went "that Lydiard was bought and sold three times in one day in the streets of London." Thus was it explained: "On July 1st and 2nd, 1817, there was a lease and release by Mary Blunt to Samuel Waller in trust for her and her heirs. July 3rd and 4th, 1817, a lease and release by Samuel Waller to Mary Blunt and her heirs—that is to whom she should choose, not Sir Charles Blunt."<sup>1</sup> And so it fell out that "our Jim" was never "lord of the Manor." He tried to claim it with a lawsuit, but lost that and probably any other fortune he was possessed of.

Anyhow, there was no luck with the place as far as Madam Blunt's heirs were concerned, and for nine years it stood empty and unoccupied.

In 1841 it was bought by Mr. Streeten, and then sold to Mr. Story-Maskelyne in 1872. It is now again derelict, and owing to a curious will no one can rebuild the house<sup>2</sup> and occupy the old-world garden, though many have wished to do so, and to restore it to its ancient beauty and charm.

Writing of the smock-frock in 1852, Mr. MacKnight says:—"The parishioners still came to Church in their white smock-frocks, which were here and there varied with a blue one, with its pattern in white thread conspicuous on the breast." There was a great draught in the Church, owing to leaks in the old oak roof, and he adds: "The wind swept in gusts over us," and one day, he writes, "a good many smocks being present, one by one, for his protection, drew out his red pocket-handkerchief and threw it over his head. Then I had a not unpleasant variety of colour before me, the white, blue and red. It was a most picturesque group of a generation that is rapidly passing away, and soon to be seen no more. My poor neighbour," he adds, "Mrs. Ody, who earned her living by adorning the smock-frock with her handiwork, complained in 1860 that where she once made a score she did not now make one."

<sup>1</sup> *Lydiard Manor*, by Rev. W. MacKnight.

<sup>2</sup> It was completely gutted by fire some years ago.



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“Grubbing the moots,” in the old Wiltshire dialect, is still practised in these parts when work is slack during the winter ; and very cleverly are the roots of fallen trees chipped out by practised hands, a benefit to the owner, who wishes to be rid of the unsightly “moot,” and a help in firing to one in need of it.



## CHAPTER XIV

RED LODGE—MR. SADLER'S RECOLLECTIONS—OLD COINS—  
" YOU COME FROM PURTON "

RED LODGE, the residence of Mr. John Edward Ward, is situated in the north-west portion of Purton, now separated off into the civil parish of Braydon. This district was not within the ancient bounds of Braden Forest as given in the Perambulation of 28 Ed. III., although by the encroachments of the early Norman kings it had been brought within its limits.

It was no doubt covered with woods, and in a later Perambulation is described as "late ye woods of Henry de Lacey Erle of Lincolne."

From the Inquisition P.M. of this nobleman, dated 4 Ed. II., it appears that he held them as part of his Manor of Aldebourne, which came to him as the inheritance of his wife, Margaret, and "that it belongs to the Earldom of Sarum," which he also held. His sole daughter, Alice, though thrice married, left no issue, and on her death the vast estates which she inherited from her father passed to the brother of her first husband, Henry, Earl of Lancaster. Thus this property fell into the hands of the Crown. When early in the reign of Charles I. Braden Forest was disafforested the land claimed by the Crown as royal demesne and Duchy of Lancaster estates was let on lease to Philip Jacobson, the King's Jeweller, and Edward Sewster, with rights to grub up the woods, convert the land to tillage, to erect iron works, etc.

At first there were serious disturbances, but no doubt in time things settled down. Later the Crown divided its estates into three portions and leased them for a number of years: firstly, to James Duart, the principal residence being called Slyfield Lodge, within the forest; the second portion to Philip Jacobson, the principal residence being Statton Lodge, without



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the forest ; and the third being the Great Lodge to Roger Nott, the principal residence within the Forest.

From this it appears that Hatton Lodge was the name of the principal residence on the Crown property held under the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Jacobson family lost their interest in it early in the eighteenth century, and in 1729 the Nott family obtained a lease of it, but their residence, in an old map of 1733 described as Nott's House, was the Great Lodge, now called Ravens Hurst House Lodge. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Crown disposed of all its Braydon property, and a farm called the Duchy Ragg, in Cricklade St. Sampson, was sold to the Earl of Clarendon, from whom it passed later to Mr. Joseph Neeld. In Andrews' and Drury's map of 1773 both the White Lodge and Red Lodge are marked in this district, and the name Hatton Lodge has disappeared ; but there can be little doubt that this is the ancient name of the present Red Lodge.

As already mentioned, the large Red Lodge estate (3,800 acres) was purchased by Joseph Neeld in 1829, not all at once, but bit by bit, and was mostly corn-growing land. After 1829 the Neelds gradually laid it down in grass, and planted the woods between 1830-40, which are extensive. A coach road was made, which leads us to suppose that the building of a mansion was contemplated.

Sir Algernon Neeld lived for a short time at Red Lodge, but it was not till 1902, when Mr. Ward acquired the property, that the old Ranger's house was altered and considerably added to.

The architects were the late Mr. Seddon, of Westminster, and Mr. Jones, of Gloucester. The gardens, which are celebrated in the neighbourhood, were designed by Mr. White, of Victoria Street, Westminster.

Long, closely-shaven grass walks with herbaceous borders, and flanked with rambler roses gracefully trained on posts, meet the eye on all sides, and there is a beautiful rock garden with many treasures carefully tended therein. In springtime the daffodils are a glory, once seen not easily forgotten, stretching in a blaze of yellow right across the park to the woods beyond. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ward are keen gardeners, and Captain Harold Ward has inherited his father's taste, being



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an enthusiast on rock work. He is now in France serving as Adjutant to the Wiltshire Yeomanry.<sup>1</sup> He is a member of the Inner Temple and a practising barrister, and married Miss Grice-Hutchinson in 1913.

Mr. Ward is the son of Mr. John Ward, of Whittington, Salop, who was partly instrumental in constructing most of the Welsh railways.

Until Mr. Ward retired from business in 1896 he practised as a solicitor at Newport (Mon.), and acted for numerous ironworks and colliery companies in South Wales. He is a member of the Reform Club and J.P. for the county, and represents Braydon in the Cricklade and Wootton Bassett Union.

Mrs. Ward has organised and successfully carried out a weekly working party for St. John Ambulance during the war, and has sent large consignments of hospital requisites regularly as a result of these efforts.

Miss Meriol Goodwin, Mrs. Ward's niece, spent a long time nursing the soldiers in the Bath Military Hospital.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. J. H. Sadler remembers as a boy the different services and aspect of the interior of our interesting old Church. At that time, some sixty years ago, the music was supplied by flutes and viols,<sup>2</sup> which, after much tuning and blowing, were ready for their work. The performers were seated in a gallery which was placed over the west entrance, and later on the organ, which was obtained by the energies of his uncle, Mr. W. H. Sadler, stood in the gallery in place of the earlier band of musicians. This was in the year 1851.

The galleries ran along the south side of the nave and in the north transept. One in which the Sadler family sat was

<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in Sir D. Haig's despatches.

<sup>2</sup> The "flutes and viols" must have been highly prized by our predecessors, for the following short extract from the late Major Prower's diary proves this:—

"20th July, 1851. Sunday.

"Gallery choir ceased to sing being in dudgeon on account of the organ being ordered."



## THE STORY OF PURTON

approached from the western end of the nave by a spiral staircase. Behind this gallery a door, which must have been a narrow one, had its place in a portion of the window on the side next the south porch (then the vestry). Steps led to this gallery from outside. Six families occupied the seats in this larger gallery.

The three-decker pulpit, with clerk's desk, stood in more or less the centre of the Church, *i.e.* in front of the second pillar on the left side of the aisle. Beside this was the large square Purton House pew.

There is an interesting fragment of oak carving on the back part of the right reading desk, and part of one of the old galleries forms the counter in Mr. Kempster's shop.

The curious sword which was found with the skeleton in the ancient chapel wall was bought many years ago by Major Prower from a man at Braydon, in whose possession it then was.

Colonel Prower has kindly promised to restore it to its rightful place, the Church where it was found. It will form an interesting relic in the Priest's Room Museum.

Job Morse remembers the finding of the skeleton in the wall. He was present, and said the shape of a form was there, but blew away in dust when the air got in, leaving only the bones.

In the year 1839 a man named Lloyd visited Wiltshire, and carved with the most accurate care models of the three churches, Purton, Wroughton and Clyffe Pypard. In the models the interior of the churches is exactly reproduced. The model of Purton Church is now in the possession of Miss Prower, and is complete even to the green frill surrounding the square Purton House pew.

With regard to the patron saint, a curious local tradition ascribes it to St. Michael, and the fact that the village feast falls on the Sunday within the octave of St. Michael seems to lend colour to this view.<sup>1</sup> It almost seems as though both over the building and dedication of our Church opinions were inclined to differ and refuse to give way to one another in those far-off times.

When the old vicarage was demolished in the spring of

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries.*



## THE STORY OF PURTON

1913, the Rev. J. E. Pugh spent many hours searching for treasure which might possibly have been buried beneath the old house. The dust and mess was horrible, but he persevered with the help of a large sieve, and at last he was rewarded by finding four coins :—

1. Dated George II., cast in commemoration of the peace, and engraved, "Peace nourishes trade." Britannia seated, watching a ship in full sail, as she leans upon her shield.

2. A beautiful little coin engraved, "Carolus. D.G.M.A.G.C. Rit. Fram. F. T. Hip. Rex."

3. A very roughly made, not symmetrical, coin of copper.

4. Silver, so worn no marks legible.

Mr. Pugh kindly presented his find to the proposed Priest's Room Museum. Some months ago the bell-hanger, Mr. Doble, was in the belfry with the writer, and he discovered a most curious part of an old barrel-organ of which no one living had ever heard. It revolves on pivots, and a label on it bears the words, "End of second Chant," showing that in times now long forgotten it had borne its part in the services of the Church. Some carved fragments of stone were also found, evidently part of a former niche. As already stated, the floor of the belfry was in a terribly worn condition, full of holes, and really very unsafe. This has now been thoroughly restored and strengthened, which was very necessary for the safety of all concerned.

There is a curious saying, the origin of which is wrapped in mystery, used by West-country people on seeing a door left open. "Oh, you come from Purton!" is said to the offender. From and before the days of Dean Swift this is to some minds a deadly crime, and the story goes that a servant of his, having been sent to a distant part of the country somewhere in Ireland, received an urgent message to return.

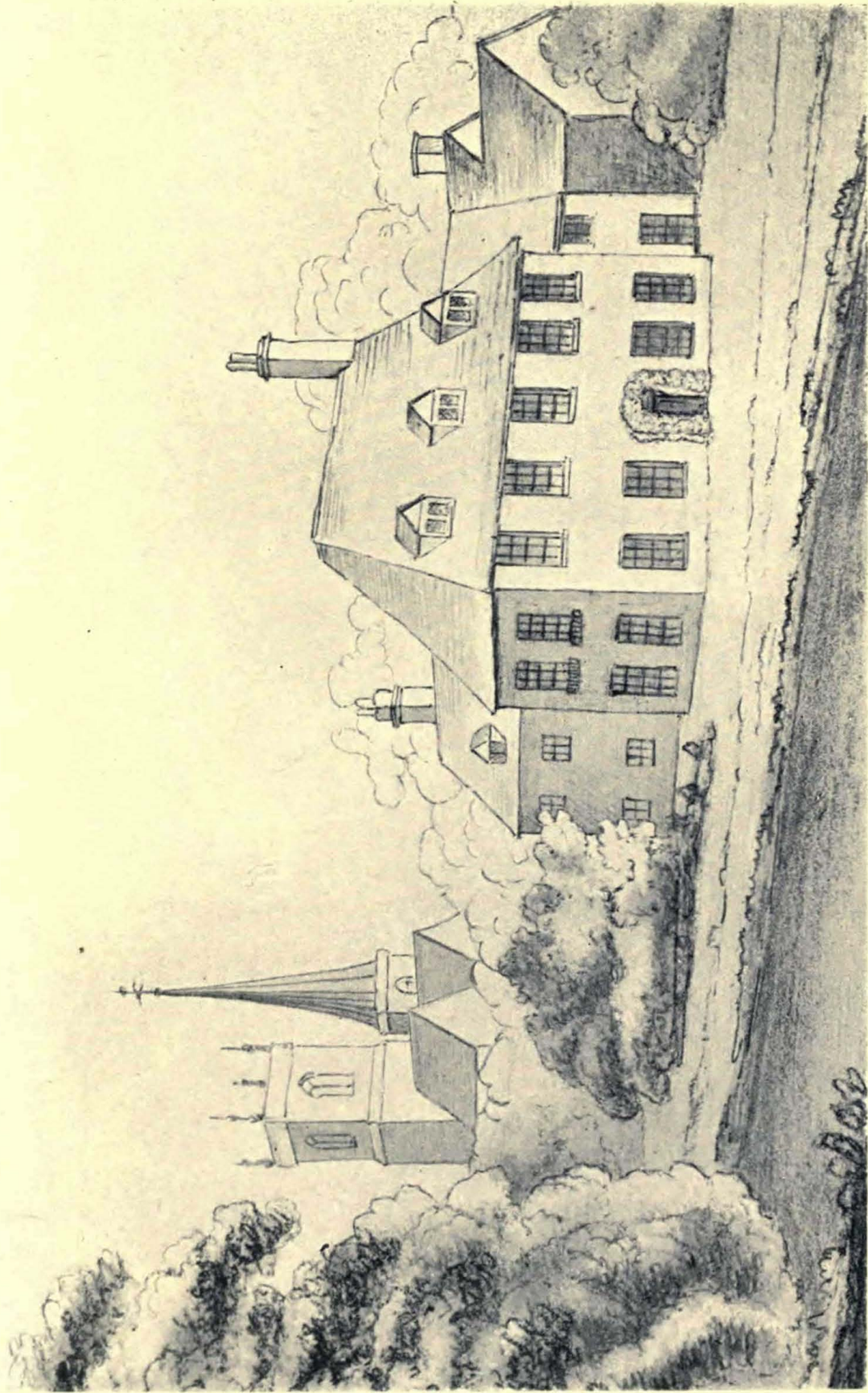
On entering the crusty old Dean's presence, he discovered the sole reason for his recall in the following stern order, "*Shut the door!*" Surely we may be forgiven for believing that the saying with regard to Purton folk may have originated in a hospitable instinct to keep an open friendly door, ever offering to the traveller a welcome within.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

The writer recently met a lady whose son was fighting in France, and he had written home saying that he had been with some soldiers in a house, and one had left the room and forgotten to close the door. A Cornishman who was present at once called out, "Oh, you come from Purton!" "What do you know of Purton?" asked the young officer. "Oh, I don't know where the place is, but they never shut the doors there!" was the reply.





PURTON HOUSE, 1800.

*(From a Contemporary Sketch by Mrs. Story-MaskeLyne.)*



## CHAPTER XV

PURTON FAIR—THE BONFIRE—THE PLAY CLOSE—  
THE BIND HOUSE*Purton Fair*

THIS, with a weekly market (held on Thursdays), was instituted in 1213 by "Royal Charter" for the continual support of a Chaplain to minister in the Chapel dedicated to St. John the Baptist at Purton. It was to commence on the morning of the 24th of June, the festival of the patron saint of the Chapel, and to continue for one day only.<sup>1</sup> This Chapel appears to have been quite distinct from the Church itself, and exempt from the control of the Vicar of the parish. There is mention of an Oratory in Purton, built about this date by Thomas de Peritone, which seems to have been a private chapel for his own use, as it was erected "infra septa curiae suae de Peritone;" and the grant of the Abbot of Malmesbury of complete exemption from the mother Church at Purton for this Oratory, on condition that the said Thomas would "undertake that the said Church should not be the loser in any manner there from," rather inclines one to think the Oratory and private chapel were on eand the same building.

In *Hone's Everyday Book* the following account of Purton Fair is written by one Charles Tomlinson, which is given in his own words:—

Aug. 18. 1826.

DEAR SIR,

Perhaps you or some of your readers may be acquainted with a small village in the north of Wiltshire called Purton, very pleasantly situated, and dear to me, from a child: it being the place where I passed nearly all my boyish days. I went to school there, and spent many a pleasant hour, which

<sup>1</sup> This does not agree with the date given later.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

I now think of with sincere delight, and perhaps you will not object to a few particulars concerning a fair held there on the 1st of May and the 3rd of September in every year. The spot wheron Purton Fair is annually celebrated, is a very pleasant little green, called " The Close " or play ground, belonging to all the unmarried men in the village. They generally assemble there every evening after the toils of the day, to recreate themselves with a few pleasant sports.

Their favorite game is what they call back-swording, in some places called single-stick. Some few of the village have the good fortune to be adepts in the noble art, and are held up as beings of transcendent genius, among the rustic admirers of that noted science. They have one whom they call their umpire, to whom all disputes are referred, and he always with the greatest impartiality decides them. About six years ago, a neighbouring farmer, whose orchard joins the Green, thought that his orchard might be greatly improved. He accordingly set to work, pulled down the original wall, and built a new one, not forgetting to take in several feet of the Green. The village felt great indignation at the encroachment and resolved to claim their rights. They waited till the new wall should be completed, and in the evening of the same day a party of about 40 marched to the spot, armed with great sticks, pick-axes etc. and very deliberately commenced breaking down the wall. The owner, on being apprised what was passing, assembled all his domestics, and proceeded to the spot, where a furious scuffle ensued, several serious accidents happened. However, the aggressor, finding he could not succeed, proposed a settlement: he entirely removed the new wall on the following day, and returned it to the place where the old one stood. On the morning of the Fair, as soon as the day begins to dawn, all is bustle and confusion throughout the village.

Gipsies are first seen with their donkeys approaching the place of rendezvous: then the village rustics in their clean white Sunday smocks, and the lasses with their Sunday Gowns, caps and ribands hasten to the Green and all is mirth and gaiety. I cannot pass over a very curious character who used regularly to visit the Fair.

I was told by an ancient inhabitant that he had done so for several years. He was an old gipsey, who has attained



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to high favour with the youngers of the place, from his jocular habits, curious dress, and pleasant stories he used to relate.

He called himself "Corey Dyne" or "Old Corey," and those are the only names by which he was known. He was accustomed to place a little hat on the ground, from the centre of which rose a stick about three feet high, whereon he put either half pence, or a small painted box, or something equally winning to the eye of his little customers. There he stood crying, "Now, who throws with poor old Corey—come to Corey—come to Corey Dyne: only a halfpenny a throw, and only once a year." A boy who had purchased the right to throw was placed about three feet from the hat, with a small piece of wood, which he threw at the article on the stick, and if it fell in the hat (which by the by it was almost invariably sure to do), the thrower lost his money: but if out of the hat, on the ground, the article on the stick was claimed by the thrower.

The good humour of Old Corey, generally insured him plenty of custom. I have oftentimes been the loser, but never the winner. I believe that no one in all Purton knows from whence he is, though everybody is acquainted with him. There was a large show on the place, and the rustics were wont to gaze with surprise and admiration. The chief object of their wonder was our "Punch." They could not form the slightest idea, how little wooden figures could talk and dance about, they supposed that there must be some life in them. I well remember that I once undertook to set them right, but was laughed at and derided for my presumption and boast of superior knowledge. There was also another very merry fellow who frequented the Fair, by the name of Mr. Merriman.

He obtained great celebrity by giving various imitations of birds, etc., which he would very readily do, after collecting a sufficient sum, "to clear his pipe," as he used to say.

He then began with the nightingale, which he imitated very successfully, then followed the blackbird, linnet, gold finch, robin, geese, and ducks on a rainy morning, turkeys, etc. etc. Then perhaps, after collecting more money to clear his pipe, he would imitate a jackass, or a cow. His excellent imitation of the crow of a cock strongly affected the risible muscles of his auditors.

The amusements lasted till nearly midnight, when the rustics



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being exhilarated with the effects of good strong Wiltshire ale, generally part, after a few glorious battles. Next day, several champions enter the field, to contest the right to several prizes, which are laid out in the following order :

- 1st. A new smock.
- 2nd. A new hat, with a blue cockade.
- 3rd. An inferior hat, with a white cockade.
- 4th. A still inferior hat, without a cockade.

A stage is erected on the Green at 5 o'clock, the sport commences, and a very celebrated personage, whom they call their "umpshire" (umpire) stands high above the rest to award the prizes.

The candidates are generally selected from the best players at singlestick, and, on this occasion, they use their utmost skill and ingenuity, and are highly applauded by the surrounding spectators. I must not forget to remark, that on this grand, and to them interesting day, the inhabitants of Purton do not combat against each other—no—believe me Sir, they are better acquainted with the laws of Chivalry.

Purton produces four candidates, and a small village adjoining called Stretton<sup>1</sup> sends forth four more. These candidates are representatives of the Village to which they respectively belong, and they who lose have to pay all the expenses of the day, but, it is to the credit of the sons of Purton I record, that for seven successive years, their candidates have been returned victors.

The contest generally lasts two hours, and, after that, the ceremony of chairing the representatives takes place, which is thus performed. Four chairs, made with the boughs of trees are in waiting, and the conquerors are placed therein, and carried through the village with every demonstration of joy, the inhabitants shouting " Purton for ever ! Huzza my boys ! Huzza ! " waving boughs over their triumphant candidates. After the chairing they adjourn to the village public house, and spend the remainder of the evening as before.

The 3rd day is likewise a day of bustle and confusion. All repair to a small common called the Cricket ground, and a grand match takes place between the Purton Club and

<sup>1</sup> Now Stratton, so called from the Roman Street.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

Stretton Club. There are about twenty candidates of a side.

The vanquished parties pay 1s. each, to defray the expenses of a cold collation, which is previously provided in a pleasant little copse, adjoining the Cricket ground, and the remainder of the day is spent convivially. I remember hearing the landlord of the Public House Purton, which is situated on one side of the Green observe to a villager, that during the three days merriment he had sold 6,000 gallons of strong beer and ale. The man of course doubted him, and afterwards very sarcastically remarked to me.

“ Its just as asy measter for he to zay zix thousand as dree thousand.” Does not this, good Mr. Editor, show a little genuine Purton wit ?

I am now my dear Sir finished and have endeavoured to describe three pleasant days spent in an innocent and happy manner, and if I have succeeded in affording you any service, or your readers any amusement, I am amply rewarded.

Allow me to add I feel such an affection for old Purton, that should I at any time in my life visit Wiltshire, I would travel twenty miles out of my road to ramble once more in the haunts of my boyhood.

Believe me, my dear Sir,

C. T.

August 18. 1826.

Since writing above, I have received a letter from a very particular friend, who went to Purton School five years, to whom I applied for a few extra particulars respecting the Fair etc. and he thus writes :—

DEAR C.

You seem to think that with the name, I still retain all the characteristics and predilections of a “ hodge,” and therefore, you seek to me for information respecting the back-sword playing, Fair, etc

I know that as to the first, it is, and has been for the last two years, entirely done away with, as the principal farmers in the place “ done like it,” and so dont suffer it As to the Fair, where lads and lasses meet in their best gowns, and ribands and clean smocks, you must know most assuredly more than I do, as I seldom troubled about it.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

You must bear in mind that this Fair is exactly the same as that held in the month of May, but, as no notice has been taken of it by Mr. Hone in either of his volumes, I suppose it very little matters whether your description is of the Fair held in May or December [*sic*].

I have to lament, my dear Sir, the discontinuance of the ancient custom of back-swording at Purton village but, as long as they keep up their Fairs, the other loss will not be so much felt.

Aug. 13. 1826.

A note is added by C. T. saying that Old Corey only came to the Autumn Fair, and that that held in May was for cattle alone, while the later one was for pleasure.

Then follows a poem with this dedication :—

To the worthy and respectable inhabitants of Purton this song is most respectfully inscribed by their ever true and devoted humble servant, Charles Tomlinson.

### *Song : Purton Fair.*

Come neighbours listen, I 'll sing you a song  
Which I assure you, will not keep you long,  
I 'll sing a good song, about old Purton Fair.  
For that is the place lads, to drive away care.

The damsels all meet full of mirth and of glee,  
And they are as happy, as happy can be,  
Such worth and such beauty fairs seldom display,  
And sorrow is banished on this happy day.

There 's the brave lads of Purton at back-sword so clever,  
Who were ne'er known to flinch, but victorious ever,  
The poor boys of Stretton are bashed away,  
For Purtons famed youth ever carry the day.

Tis old " Corey Dyne " who wisely declares,  
Stretton's lads must be beaten at all Purton's Fairs,  
They cant match our courage, then huzza my boys  
To still conquering Purton, let 's kick up a noise !



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Old Corey's the merriest blade in the Fair,  
 What he tells us is true, so prithee dont spare,  
 Remember poor Corey, Come pray have a throw,  
 Tis but once a year, as you very well know.

But here ends my song, so lets haste to the Green,  
 Tis as pretty a spot as ever was seen,  
 And if you are sad, or surrounded with care,  
 Haste quickly, haste quickly, to Old Purton Fair.

### *Purton Bonfire.*

In another letter from Charles Tomlinson to the Editor of the *Everyday Book*, we find the following :—

DEAR SIR,

At almost every village in England, the *fifth of November* is regarded in a very especial manner. Some pay greater attention to it than others, but I believe it is invariably noticed by all.

I have been present at Old Purton bonfire, and perhaps the following short notice of it may not be uninteresting.

I before stated that the green, or Close, at Purton, is the spot allotted for amusements in general. This is also the place for the ceremonies on this highly important day, which I am about to describe.

Several weeks before, the boys of the village go to every house begging faggots; and if they are refused they all answer together :—

If you don't give us one  
 We'll take two;  
 The better for us, Sir,  
 And the worse for you.

They were once refused by a farmer (who was very much disliked by the poor for his severity and unkindness) and accordingly they determined to make him repent. He kept a sharp lookout over his faggot pile, but forgot that something else might be stolen. The boys got into his backyard and extracted a new pump, which had not been properly fixed, and bore it off in triumph to the green, where it was burnt amidst the loud acclamations of the young rogues generally.



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All the wood, etc., which has been previously collected, is brought into the middle of the close where an effigy of poor Guy is burnt. A figure is made (similar to one of those carried about London Streets,) intending to represent the conspirator, and placed at the top of a high pole, with the fuel all around. Previous to lighting it, poor Guy is shot at by all who have the happiness to possess guns for the purpose, and pelted with squibs, crackers, etc. This fun continues about an hour, and then the pile is lighted, the place echoes with huzzas, guns keep up perpetual reports, fireworks are flying in all directions, and the village bells merrily ring. The fire is kept up a considerable time, and it is a usual custom for a large piece of "real Wiltshire bacon" to be dressed by it, which is taken to the public-house, together with potatoes roasted in the ashes of the bonfire, and a jovial repast is made. As the fire decreases, successive quantities of potatoes are dressed in the embers by the rustics, who seem to regard them as the great delicacies of the night.

There is no restraint put on the loyal zeal of these good folks, and the fire is maintained to a late hour. I remember, on one occasion, hearing the guns firing as I lay in bed between two and three o'clock in the morning. The public-house is kept open nearly all night, ale flows plentifully, and it is not spared by the revellers. They have a noisy chorus, which is intended as a toast to his Majesty, it runs thus :—

My brave lads remember  
 The fifth of November,  
 Gunpowder treason and plot,  
 We will drink, smoke, and sing, boys,  
 And our bells they shall ring, boys,  
 And here 's health to our King, boys,  
 For he shall not be forgot.

Their merriment continues till morning, when they generally retire to rest very much inebriated, or, as they term it, "merry," or "top heavy."

I hope to have the pleasure of reading other communications in your interesting work on this good old English custom ; and beg to remain,

Dear Sir, etc.,

C. T.

October 20, 1826.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

These very interesting stories of old days seem to bring with them a wish to know something of the manner in which the people of Purton obtained this privilege of having a Play Close or Green, forever reserved for them and their descendants. The writer has therefore, through the kindness of Mrs. Story-Maskelyne, obtained the following information:—

### *Purton Play Close.*

Under the name of "The Church House Close," a close of pasture containing three acres more or less, now known by the name of the Play Close, was conveyed by Henry Gleed, "Innholder," and Mary his wife to Trustees in the year 1641, and with it a house adjoining called "Weekes" or "Wilkes." The close of pasture was "to be used for a place of exercise, recreation, lawful sports and pastimes, at all fit and convenient tymes and seasons for the common good and benefit of the young and other inhabitants of Purton."

The house was to be held in trust for an almshouse for the poor people of Purton, who were "to be placed there as the Vicar, Churchwardens, and Overseers of the Poor, and other chiefest and best sort of inhabitants of the Parish of Purton, or the major part of them shall appoint."

The above-mentioned house called "Weekes" and the "Church House Close" had previously formed part of the copyhold estate of Henry Gleed's father, John Gleed, which was enfranchised in 1608 by Gray, Lord Chandos, son of the first Lord Chandos, and owner of much land formerly belonging to the Abbey of Malmesbury. In the Gleeds' time the Church House was occupied by John Pannell, and the "Inn" presumably by Henry Gleed, as he is described as an "Innholder," and now "Weekes" becomes the Almshouse. The Trustees who paid £66 to Henry Gleed and his wife, 17 Charles I., 1641, for this close of pasture and "Weekes" to be held in trust for the inhabitants of Purton were:—

Nevill Maskelyne (Gent).  
 William Maskelyne (Gent).  
 William Skilling,  
 George Stevens,  
 Richard Bathe,  
 Thomas Carter, and  
 John Telling of Purton (Yeomen).



## THE STORY OF PURTON

Where Mr. Mussell's shop now stands was once the "Lock up,"<sup>1</sup> where those villagers who had forfeited their right to freedom through drink or other causes were placed "in durance vile" until the Justices could sit and pronounce sentence upon them. There was no window in front in those days; the opening door was on the right side (now closed); and as the level of the interior was much below the present floor, it must have been indeed a stuffy and unpleasant abode.

The old door may still be seen on an outhouse. It is of oak, freely studded over with nails, and an oblong opening, strongly barred with iron near the top, was the only apparent ventilation available.

Across the narrow alley may be seen the ancient house of "Weekes," once the Almshouse of the parish, and mentioned as such in Mrs. Story-Maskelyne's notes. It is a large house built of the local stone, with a stone tile roof; its condition is lamentable, the tiles are only held in position at the edge of the roof by a piece of rabbit wire arranged to catch them should they fall.

There is an immense chimney on the left side, wide enough to have been used as a hiding-place should occasion have required it, and a pretty old window at the back, which once no doubt looked on to the Play Close, but now only overlooks a small garden.

The "Co-operative Stores" just opposite is an old house, and bears the date 1677.

The stocks once stood somewhere in this part of the village, and an unpleasant enough position it must have been, as no doubt the children of those days were much like their descendants at Purton to-day, and would have much enjoyed some horse-play with a helpless victim in the stocks, who would have been quite unable to defend himself or retaliate in any way.

Early in the nineteenth century a dispute arose in connection with the Play Close, as Mr. Haskins' grandfather began to make a road across it to gain access to his fields from the High Street. This was fiercely resented by the neighbours, and while the work of making the road was continued by day, each night deep ditches were dug across by the indignant Purtonians.

<sup>1</sup> Or "Bind House."



## THE STORY OF PURTON

At length the law was called in, and after much discussion Mr. Haskins was allowed to make his road, but only so as to enable him to have ingress and egress to his farm.

The curious little pathway which runs from the Schools to the High Street, with high walls on either side, bears the quaint name of "The Little Lane."

While thinking of names, one occurs frequently during the eighteenth century in the Gleeds' Charity Accounts which is worthy of record, namely "Thomas Catchaside." Surnames were probably given as nicknames when not derived from property, and one wonders whether Thomas Catchaside or his ancestor had done some unusual feat on the cricket field to earn himself this appellation. No descendants of the name exist to-day in Purton.

Wayside pools rejoice in picturesque names in this neighbourhood, Harvest Water, the Weir Pond and the Wash Pool bringing to one's mind scenes from other days now long departed, of horses watered during harvest, an ancient water system, and a sheep dipping.



## CHAPTER XVI

### BRADEN FOREST—PARISH BOUNDARIES

*By Mrs. Story-Maskelyne*

FORESTS originally were not merely tracts of wooded country, but included waste ground, moors and commons, such as Dartmoor, Exmoor, etc., within the boundary of which the rights of hunting were reserved for the King, and they were subject to very severe forest laws, which dated back to the days of Canute.

The earliest record we have of Braden Forest is in one of the charters of Malmesbury Abbey, dated A.D. 796, where it is stated that Purton, or Piritone as it was then called, was situated "*on the east side of Braden Forest.*"

The wood at Purton, as recorded in Domesday, was two miles long and two broad, but though the forest was no doubt larger than this, including as it did a considerable portion of Cricklade Parish, it was at that time very much smaller than it became in the days of King Henry II. and John, for those Norman princes were wont to increase their hunting grounds by encroaching on and afforesting the woods of their neighbours, and subjecting them to the stringent forest laws by which they protected the deer and other wild animals living in the woods, and keeping them for their own private sport.

Much in the same way as William Rufus created the New Forest for his own hunting ground, so we find that several woods near Purton were afforested by Henry II. and John, and thus added to Braden Forest.

These encroachments included—

Brockenbury, Brenke- all belonging to Malmesbury Abbey.

worth, Cheorlton  
and Purton woods.

Woods of the Manor        „        „        Cirencester Abbey.  
of Minety.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

Woods of the Manor of Midgehall.			Stanley Abbey.
Woods of the Manor of Ashton.	„	„	Tewkesbury Abbey.
Woods of the Manor of Lydiard Tregoze.	„	„	William de Grandison.
Woods of Hailstone (nr. Cricklade).	„	„	the Abbey of Gloucester.
Woods of Lydiard Millicent Manor.	„	„	John de Cleetor and Robert Russell.
The Brochure Woods	„	„	Elizabeth Paynell and Alionora de Keynes.

We learn from this list and other evidence that after the Norman afforestations and encroachments Braden Forest included Wootton Bassett<sup>1</sup> on the south to near Ashton Keynes on the north, extending to the River Rey on the east and to Charlton on the west. The ancient oaks still living on Blagrove Farm probably mark an outlying part of a black grove of the old forest.

In consequence of the grave troubles arising from these Norman afforestations, Henry III., when only nine years of age, was compelled to issue the *Charter of the Forest* in 1217.

To comply with the directions of the Charter, perambulations of the forests were necessary, and they were, moreover, required in order to carry out special regulations regarding the sale of fallen timber after the great gale of 1222. Braden Forest was one of over forty forests affected by the gale, the perambulation of which was made in Henry III.'s reign.

Further perambulations made in 1300 (Edward I.) and in Edward III.'s reign show that by that time the forest was greatly reduced in size.<sup>2</sup>

The following story taken from the Cartulary of Malmesbury Abbey is a good exemplification of forest troubles :—

“The Abbot of Malmesbury hath a wood which is called Flusrygge, appertaining to his Manor of Cruddewell, and have

<sup>1</sup> Wootton Bassett is mentioned as “*intra silvam que vocatur*” in a charter of Eadwig.

<sup>2</sup> See perambulations of both dates at the end of the paper from J. T. Akerman's paper in *Archæologia*, vol. xxxvii.



## THE STORY OF PURTON

had this wood in severalty . . . now 500 years and upwards, till the reign of King John who enforested it, and since that time they have had the same wood . . . against all men's rights, from Michaelmas day at noon until Martinmas day at noon, for preservation of the Mast. It happened on the Morrow of St. Michael in the 6th year of King Edward, that the Earl of Hereford being at His Manor of Wokesege, which is near to the same wood of Flusrygge, there came his people and put the demesne hogs of the Earl and the hogs of his people of the town of Wokesege into the aforesaid wood ; then came the Abbot's people and impounded the Earl's hogs and the hogs of his men at his manor of Cruddewell. Soon after came the demesne people of the Earl and the people of the town with great force, and broke down the gates and forcibly took out the hogs, and wounded the Abbot's people even unto the death, so that the Coroner was sent to look into this great affray. The hogs were forcibly driven back to the wood and kept there over 15 days till all the Mast was consumed ; so that no one belonging to the Abbot dared to come near the wood."

J. T. Akerman, from whose *History of Malmesbury and Braden* these extracts are quoted, says that "a quit claim of the Earl of Hereford brought this dispute to an amicable conclusion."

In later times the inclosures of commons and the disafforestation of forest lands brought other grievances into notice, and when Charles I. handed over a large tract of Braden Forest for inclosure, the rights of the inhabitants, which now came to an end, to pasture their cattle in the woods and wastes and to gather fuel there had to be considered by the Exchequer Commissioners. In 1628 they reported (*inter alia*) that Edward Pleydell<sup>1</sup> had been "accustomed the Thursdays before Shrove Sunday yearly, to hunte, chase, kill and carry away the Venison and wylde beastes that they should fynde in the places of the sayde forest called *Great Sautridge, Little Sautridge, Keynes Wood, Poucher's Ragg, Cove Wood, Wood brehc, The Leighe fields, Brownes and Hailstones* even unto *Cricklade*." He also claimed fishing rights at *West Mills*.

<sup>1</sup> He was a landowner in Cricklade.



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The proceeds of the hunt were applied to the Parish Church of Cricklade.

In these days J. Aubrey<sup>1</sup> was told by Mr. G. Ayliffe, of Grittenham, "that a squirrel might have jumped from tree to tree all the way from Wootton Bassett to Grittenham."

After the inclosure of 1628, Charles I. allotted 100 acres to the poor of Cricklade and 25 acres to the poor of Purton Stoke, in lieu of their forest rights.

The profits arising from the letting of the aforesaid twenty-five acres allotted to the poor of Purton Stoke are distributed at the beginning of each year, but the present footing on which the charity was established was not made till the eighth year of George III., when it was ordered that the inhabitants of Purton Stoke should be at liberty to nominate fifteen Trustees to set and let the twenty-five acres of land, and to manage the said charity for the said benefit of the poor inhabitants; also that as often as the number of Trustees should be reduced to seven others were to be named to make the number to fifteen.

The twenty-five acres are partly in Purton Parish and partly in Cricklade, and they consist of two fields of pasture ground. The Trustees distribute the rents yearly on the first Thursday after the 6th of January, application being made a year before the applicants can receive the charity, and when once admitted they receive it for life. In 1765 £30 9s. was distributed among sixteen families. In 1885 one field was let for £30 and the other £19. In 1917 there were only nine Trustees appointed to act.<sup>2</sup>

### *Inclosures of the Common Field.*

The inclosure and disafforestation of woods and wastes, interfering with ancient rights which the owners were bound to respect and by which the people claimed "House bote," "fyre bote," "hedge bote," "gate bote," etc., were frequent sources of trouble down to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Troubles arising from the manner in which the

<sup>1</sup> J. Aubrey, the great antiquary and historian of Wiltshire of the seventeenth century.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter viii.



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common fields, both arable and pasture, were cultivated were equally common at that time.

The earliest inclosure of common land in Purton Parish was effected in the reign of Queen Elizabeth in A.D. 1594, when Lord Chandos, who became a landowner there after the dissolution of Malmesbury Abbey, agreed with "the tenants, freeholders, copy-holders and fermore within the manor and lordship of Pirton and Purton Keynes, to exchange, inclose and take in several lands lying in the Common fields of Pirton." Four years later they confirmed the original Inclosure Act, and "for a competent sum of money did assent and approve the exchanges . . . clearly freed from all clayme right and interest of common," at the same time specifying that these exchanges should be made without interfering with the "*Custom of the Manor.*"

In this unsettled state of affairs it was evidently necessary that the people's rights should be defined and stated in writing, so that they could be referred to when required, and *Certaines Customes belonging to the Mannor of Pirton*, a document on parchment now at Basset Down, was probably written for this purpose and at this time; it probably was Edmund Maskelyne's own copy, to which he referred in his reply to a suit in Chancery, alluded to farther on.

It is written, with many abbreviations, on a long parchment roll,<sup>1</sup> containing forty items.

The customs relate to copyholders, inheritance and tenure of land and heriots, whilst others relate to the rights and customs of the people to have timber, wood, stone and sand for their "house bote," etc.

The following items will suffice to give an idea of these old customs:—

*Item 12.* "Our Custom is to have all manner of Timber for our reparations of Customary tenements as often as need shall require, as well for doores, wyndowes, as other great timber, appointed by the lord's officer, and also that we should have sande, for the same separations in the Common, and also stones if we have any within our arable ground, every man upon his own ground."

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. xl., p. 110.



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*Item 13.* "Our Custom is if we take timber for reparation of bridge we should have it delivered by the Lord or his officers, as often as need shall require."

*Item 14.* "Our Custom is that all Toppes, Starved trees windfalls and shrowdes, all underwood as thorn, maple, hazel, and withy, as others, to be ours by our Customs."

In Item 12 we notice that sand and stone belonged by custom to the people with certain restrictions, and this fact is alluded to in Edmund Maskelyne's reply to a bill in Chancery concerning the early inclosure of 1597, where he mentions "Stean Mead" as a place for getting stone without trespass. "Stean Mead," near Woodward's Bridge, was called Vennys when bought by Edmund Maskelyne for £2 in 1610.

The common fields concerned in the inclosure of 1597 are not mentioned by name in the Act, nor are the names of the freeholders and copyholders concerned in the exchanges with Grey, Lord Chandos, but from a MS. book written by Nevill Maskelyne in 1630, soon after the death of his father Edmund, we find that 850 more acres of common or waste land were inclosed by agreement between George, Lord Chandos, and the inhabitants of the Manor, when the following *fields* were still uninclosed:—

"Betwell Field, Combe Field, Church Field, Bar-field, Brynfield, Estfield, Sparsoll Field, Clardon Field."

Betwell Field is elsewhere called Battle Field, or Bettle Field. Barfield is evidently what is now known as Berkfield.<sup>1</sup>

The fields were all arable, and they were cultivated in common, according to the custom of the country, "controuled" by the Constables and Tythingmen chosen yearly by the Steward and Court of the Manor, who met and decided on the crop to be sown; their decision was law.

The arable fields "were to receive rotation of either wheat, rye, or spring crops, and were thrown open when the crops were carried, to be depastured in common by the cattle of the Community." They were divided into permanent strips

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter ix.



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of unequal size, scattered over the fields, and allotted to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood according to their importance, the lord of the Manor claiming one fifteenth.

The extreme inconvenience of this old method of cultivation is obvious, and led to further inclosures and exchanges.

The reasons given for both the 1738 and the 1799 inclosures the first applying to pasture land and the second to arable, were similar.

In 1738, when 1,200 acres known as Purton Common and Purton Stoke Common, including Shooters Hill, Peavenhill, Bagbury Green, Little Marsh, Widham and Cow Street, parts of the Manors of Great Purton, Purton Keynes, and Purton Pouchers, were enclosed, it was stated that "for want of proper culture the Common land had been greatly impoverished," and frequent disputes arose among the owners of adjoining land relating "to their rights of Stinting,<sup>1</sup> or Stocking the Common, the land and freeholders were desirous that a specific part should be assigned to each proprietor to hold as freehold farms," or, as stated in 1799, "whereas the properties of . . . owners in the open and common fields lie intermixed and dispersed in small parcels in their present situation, and are incapable of any considerable improvement, but if divided and inclosed and specific allotments made to the several persons interested therein, such allotments and inclosures would tend greatly to the advantage and improvement of their Estate." Therefore the inclosure was effected.

Since the passing of the last Inclosure Act of 1799 the modern map of Purton Parish presents a totally different aspect to what we see portrayed in an old map finished in 1744, which shows the arable fields still cultivated in strips.

The numbers on the map refer to the owner of the strip, or land,<sup>2</sup> and they show that No. 3, for example, held ten separate strips in this one field, all lying separate from one another. We are told that "the 100 acres belonging to the

<sup>1</sup> The *Stint* was the unit by which rights of common were measured, one Stint being the right to pasture during a definite part of the year one horse or two cows, or ten sheep, or one sheep or three geese.

<sup>2</sup> The word "land" is used to denote the ground between two water furrows in a ploughed field. The *head land* is where you turn the plough.



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Rector's Glebe near Peterborough, was made up of 145 strips with no better boundary from other properties on each side than a mere furrow."

It was this awkward arrangement that led to the inclosures of Purton Parish and elsewhere.

### *A Perambulation of Braden Forest in the reign of Henry III.*

The boundary began at "Brimyngersbridge," and goes on to "Garesbourne"; to "Wodebridge," "Wishweresnull," "Shaldeford," "Bradenbrook," "Steortwood," by "Swillbrook," to "Pye Hegge"; by the Thames to "Halegston"; to "West Mull"; to "Couel de croyz" (which Mr. Akerman thinks was a cross with a cover in or near Cricklade); then to "Calcot bridge"; to "Stokken lake"; to "Eisey bridge"; to the River "Rey" at "Langebrigge"; to "Wydehull Mill"; to "Ayldeford"; to "Shaghebrigge," and so back to the commencement.

In Edward III.'s time, after the passing of the Charter of the forest, the boundaries show that the forest was greatly reduced in size. They began at "Beostock"; then "to a small stream called "Greenbourne"; to "Colstockesford" "by the two Sandfordes" and the "Calewe-hill de la Cove" to "Godefrayshurn"; to "Sandraggeshok"; to "Canonesweye," "along the Thames to the house of William of the Mill"; "to the "Cowled Cross"; to "Stokebridge," "Wydemor," "Peverelsewoode," and so back to "Beostock."

In Charles I.'s reign the woods near Cricklade and Purton were disafforested and let to Philip Jacobson (to whom the King owed a large sum of money) and to others. The boundaries ran from "Charnam Oak," where was a Mere; to a gutter called Greenbourne; to Sandford; to the Leigh Marsh; to Burn-lake; and to the River Thames; to Halstone Bridge; to West Mills; to "Culver Hay Cross"; to the "Forty"; to the end of "Chelworth Lane"; to "Frith End"; "by the brook to Stoke Bridge"; to "Scholar's Cross"; to the Mere by Charnam Oak.

The boundaries of the Hamlet of Braden, as given in 1591, called the "Dutchie woods adjoining unto the Forest of Bradon



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and the Temple Closes, to the same appertaining, began on the north-east part thereof, at the north-west end of the said Tempel Closes, thence leading westward to Stonyhurst Waie, to Turntrowe Oke, to Gospell Oke, to the south-east part of Lodge lawne, to Armyrn Crosse, to Charlame Oke, down the green slade to Littell Charlame, by south part of wood to a tree called Dunncowe, to a mere there ; to Mapellzell to Abbottes bridge which boundeth upon Gestymelye ; to Purton Marsh, and so to south-west end of Tempell Close . . . verie good waste ground there."

### *The Perambulation of Purton Parish in 1733.*

In bygone years it was the custom to make sure of the boundaries of a parish by perambulating it in May,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> *Note by Author.*

#### ROGATION DAY PROCESSIONS.

The term litany, a word of Greek origin, belongs properly to any form of entreaty, but in Christian usage it has gained a specialised meaning as the result of a somewhat complex history. In early days the word was used to describe penitential services. St. Basil speaks of these in his day (375), but admits they were innovations. The term thus employed denoted days or acts of penitence and supplication, and when this reached the West, it was the equivalent of "Rogation." A little later, during the stress of the Arian conflict, St. Chrysostom introduced processions at Constantinople, as a counter-blow to Arian propaganda (398), accompanied by responsorial singing. This proved so popular, that the custom was retained, and processions were henceforth used as a method of solemn supplication, joined often with fasting and special prayer in time of emergency. This, too, penetrated into the West. The best-known instance is that at Vienna, when Mamertus the Bishop in 470 ordered special Rogation or Litanies to be celebrated on the three days preceding Ascension Day, at a time of great distress and terror in his diocese caused by the eruption of a volcano. Thence the Rogation spread through Gaul and came to England. The Council of Clonshoo in 747 adopted them as well as the older indigenous Roman Day of Supplication on April 25th, which had ousted a heathen procession called the Robigalia.

The responsorial singing would lend itself naturally for use in processions, when the various petitions could be simply and effectively responded to by the moving crowd. Accordingly, it is natural to find that in the West, too, at the Litanies or Rogation, psalms were sung, probably responsorially, and formed the main part of the service.

It was not, however, processional psalmody that was to be associated ultimately with the name of litany, but a form in which the deacon leads the prayers or names the subjects of petition, and the people answer to each "Lord have mercy."

The Rogation-tide litanies seem to have developed upon various lines in different places in England, but they all look back to these ancient types.



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impressing the boundary on the memory of young people who accompanied their elders in the perambulation in such a manner as should cause them to remember the boundary accurately. This was done in some places by beating the boys at certain spots, though in Purton in 1733 this was not done, and instead of beating the boys money was thrown to them, and in one place two boys fought. We also find that at the more important places in the boundary a gospel was read and a cross made in the places where crosses had been made in former years, on oaks or ashes, many of them long since dead and gone.

The "Gospel Oak,"<sup>1</sup> now kept in the Parish Church of St. Sampson, Cricklade, was once a landmark on the boundary of the two parishes.

The following<sup>2</sup> is a copy of "A true and Exact Perambulation of the whole Parish of Purton in the County of Wilts in the year of our Lord 1733 shewing all the boundaries of the said Parish with a particular account where the procession began and ended and all the Several places where Gospels were read and Crosses made, and all occurrences that happened being the business of two days as followeth." It has been shortened by leaving out the names of former owners of land to the right and left of the places indicated in the boundary, where these names confuse the story.

"Meeting at the Parish Church of Purton the third day of May where Prayers being ended the Procession went from thence to the Water in Jobbers Lane<sup>3</sup> (near Lydiard Millicent Church) where a Gospel was read and a Cross made, from thence along the bottom of Grove piece, through Gillams to Saunders Closes where a Gospel was read and a Cross cut on the right hand side of an Ashen tree, in an old decayed Mound in the Middle of the Close, thence to Bagbury Green where a Gospel was read and a Cross made . . . thence (through three grounds) to Restrop lane where a Gospel was read and a Cross made ; thence through Dry field, and Ile's, . . . through Gardens and grounds to Greenhill Ground, to an Oak called Green hill oak there a Gospel was read and a Cross cut on the said oak on the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in *Wilts Arch. Mag.*, vol. xl., p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> Now called Lydiard Lane.



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right hand side thereof and money thrown amongst the boys and to every person there present was given Cakes and Ale. From thence to an Oak about the middle of Greenhill where a Gospel was read and a Cross cut on the right hand side of the said Oak ; from thence to the bottom of Greenhill where a Meer Stone formerly stood near Sugham ford which divides the Common and Manor of Purton from the Manor of Lidiard Millicent where a Gospel was read and a Cross made. From thence through a ground of Nevil Maskelyne at the bottom of Greenhill into Purton Common . . . thence to a place where an Oak called Pin Oak formerly stood where a Gospel was read and Cross made. Thence in a direct line through the Purlieu into Langett<sup>1</sup> in Purton Common, where a Gospel was read and a Cross made . . . then up the road leading to Brinkworth, leaving the Meer stones near Webbs wood on the left hand and the Common of Purton on the right—to a place near where an Oak called Jaques Oak formerly stood near Lookers wood, where a Gospel was read and a Cross made and money thrown amongst the boys—leaving Lookers wood on the right hand, we came into Momes Leaze—at the upper end or corner of Momes leaze a Gospel was read and a cross made. Crossing the way that leads from Purton to Malmesbury . . . we came to the top of the hill called Worthy Hill—turning up the lane that leads to Minety where a Gospel was read and a cross made. Leaving the Inclosures belonging to the Manor of Charleton on the left, and the wood called Dutchy Coppices on the right we came to a place where an Oak formerly stood called Charnam Oak where a Gospel was read and a Cross made and Money thrown amongst the boys, and two boys fought. This is the utmost Bound of the West part of the Perambulation of Purton. From thence through the Dutchy Wood the land of Mr. Jacob we came to the Dutchy lands of Mr. Nott to a house called Willis' house . . . then to a place where an oak formerly stood called Gospel Oak, where a Gospel was read and a cross made and Money thrown amongst the boys and to every person there present were given Cakes and Ale. Then through the Dutchy lands till we came to an Ale House ; then into Cricklade

<sup>1</sup> A land gate, or langett, was a way by which a man went to get to his "land."



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Road, and to a gate at the end of the lane, then leaving the gate on the left hand we went through the hedge on the right hand into the lands of Mr. Rich being Duchy lands—we came to the corner of the Poor's Plot where a Gospel was read and a cross made—then through a ground called Pancake Hall, crossing the brook into Stoake Common—to the north corner of the Poor's Plot—where the Perambulation for this day ended.

“ Meeting the fourth day of May in Stoake Common at the north corner of the Poor's Plot—we proceeded to the upper end of Stoake Common, and so on directly up the Berry Hill ground—till we came to a lane leading from Minety Common to Momes Leaze where a Gospel was read and a cross made. Proceeding across the end of the ground leaving the lane on the left hand—where a Gospel was read and a cross made, then returning down the lands of George Pitt to a pond at the Corner of the Ragg meade . . . making a short turn on the left hand down the Ragg meade—till we came to the Corner of the Great Ragg where a Gospel was read and a cross made, proceeding in a direct line till we came to a corner against the Great Purliou, where a Gospel was read and a cross made—so all through the lands of George Pitt (formerly enclosed out of the Common of Purton Stoake) till we came to a small stream called Stoake brook, we crossed the stream into a Ground called Monks and through another ground into Littleworth Lane. . . . Midway in the said lane a Gospel was read and a Cross made near the Shore of the ditch on the right hand and also on an Ashen tree over against the same, and to every person there present was given Cakes and Ale.

“ From thence we went . . . into a ground called Littleworth then into a ground called East Mead, and also through Hay laines and Great Hayes, and Hayes lane—where a Gospel was read and a Cross cut on an Oak on the right hand side thereof—then through Little Hays, and the Hayes, and Marsh furlong—and Ten acres and Gossy Mead<sup>1</sup> and the Langett, where a Gospel was read and a Cross made at the north east corner of the said Langett last mentioned—from thence to a mead called the Ham and another called the Ham, and long acres, and a

<sup>1</sup> Gossy Head. “Goss” is Wiltshire for Restharrow.



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small Ham, and the Lower ground, and Gamons (and two more) Gamons and through two meads up to the River side called the Rea, and by the River side to the bridge called Woodward's bridge . . . where between the two bridges a Gospel was read and a Cross made. Then we came into North mead, and Long Hams, and Common Brook mead, and Smalways End and Wroughton mead . . . and to Common mead called Brook mead where the river divides almost at the upper end of the said Common mead. Then leaving both rivers on the left hand, we came to a Mill heretofore called Elvers Mill<sup>1</sup> now Orchard Mill, where in the Hall there at the upper end of the Table a Gospel was read and a Penny was then paid by Orchard the Miller (being an Ancient Custom) to the Minister of Purton. Then we crossed the said River to the Mill Taile and went through two little meads belonging to the said Mill, then into a mead the lands of the Revd. Mr. Coker up the middle part thereof to Elvers bridge leaving a watercourse heretofore a River according to ancient Tradition and the best information that can be had, on the left hand we came on the said bridge called Elvers bridge where on the East side of the Bridge belonging to the Parish of Purton a Gospel was read and a Cross cut on the Post there.

“ Then we came to Elversbridge Mead and the Moor ; then we crossed a little Brook or Rivulet into a mead called Brimhill, about thirty perches up to a Meer stone there, where a Gospel was read and a Cross made. Then in a direct line from the Meer stone to a Stone bridge and went over the same into a little mead to the south east corner thereof—then turning up the strait West hedge, to the back side belonging to a Farm called Spressels, where every person there present eat cakes and drank ale . . . from thence up the said Backside to a pasture ground part of the said farm leaving the Barns, Stables and outbuilding in the Parish of Liddiard Millicent on the left hand, and so up the said ground in a direct line—(through two more grounds) to a ground of the Revd. Mr. Richard Glasse, Vicar of Purton—then into the highway leading to Swindon where a Gospel was read and a cross made. Then crossing the high-

<sup>1</sup> Elvers Mill was the oldest mill in Purton, older than the mill built by Abbot William of Coleherne.—*Wilts Notes and Queries*.



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way into a ground Land of Mr. R. Tuckey, then into Longs the Estate of the late Mr. A. Goddard,<sup>1</sup> to the west Corner thereof where a Gospel was read and a cross made; then thro' a ground called Free close—and the Moor and Heycroft we came through the hedge to the waters in Jobbers lane where the Perambulation was completed and so there ended.”

<sup>1</sup> Then part of Purton House Estate.



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE WORD ALE—GOSPEL OAK

IN Mrs. Story-Maskelyne's chapter on Braden Forest some names of places occur to which belong facts of interest to Purton folk, although not actually within the parish. On the left of the road from Purton to Wootton Bassett is a farm called Midgehall, and a most interesting observance takes place annually called the Word Ale (Anglo-Saxon, "land" ale) in this house, in turn with two others (Spittleborough and Wickfield), on the first Sunday in October.

It appears that certain lands at Midgehall were given to the now vanished Cistercian Abbey of Stanley, near Calne. Some say Pope Innocent III. made a decree exempting all Cistercian monasteries and their property from tithe obligations, and that in consequence of this the tenants of these places refused to pay tithe to the Rector after the Reformation, and a compromise was at length agreed on between them and the Rector of Lydiard Tregoze, under which the Convent "of their common consent and will, having a holy respect unto charity," agreed to pay annually the sum of 8s., that being then (1228) the estimated value of three oxen.<sup>1</sup>

At the ceremony, which is yearly held in one of the three houses, and is called "the Feast of Word Ale," those present are bid to "pray for the Abbot of Stanley and all the monks of the Cistercian order, by whom we are all *tithe free, tithe free, tithe free.*" Bread, ale and cheese composes the "feast," and it is supposed that were this part of the observance omitted the full tithe could be claimed from the present owners.

Sad to say, the records connected with the Word Ale have gone astray. One Adam Tuck, who had been steward of the Wootton Bassett estate and Town Clerk, left in disgrace about

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Lee Osborn's paper on the Lvdiards



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1782, and as he took with him the Wootton Bassett Charter, which later was found amongst papers of his descendants at Denbigh, he probably also took away the Word Ale documents. Before the days of records being kept it was the custom to cut a notch annually on a white rod, to show that the ceremony had duly taken place, and "the hazel rod" has over two hundred notches cut into it, and people say there were several rods before this one which were lost. We have said that the feast is composed of bread, cheese and ale, all very good, no doubt, but the toast must be rather a trial to drink, as it is to be composed of a mixture of "cheese, beer and onions, with various spices."

One authority speaks of a "loaf of white bread into which a small White Wand, three feet long, must be stuck in a perpendicular position, also a thin Cheese, and a small barrel of beer. . . ." and of proceeding "to an upper chamber, where a Bible is placed on a table," and after business is finished "all will kneel down and repeat the Lord's Prayer before adjoining below for the Feast. The White Wand is then given to him whose next turn it is to hold the Court."<sup>1</sup>

Gospel Oak is the next name on the old map to claim our attentive interest. This is a farm about three miles from Purton, once in the Forest of Braden, and it has certainly borne this name for many centuries. Till 1865 a time-worn oak stood there, and tradition has it that under this tree "the early Christians used to meet."<sup>2</sup> It is hardly credible that hands should have been laid upon it to cut it down, but such, alas! was the case, for unhappily some are born entirely lacking in veneration and reverence to each generation. However, some remnants of the tree were saved, and a large piece may now be seen carefully lodged in the chancel of St. Sampson's Church at Cricklade, while a smaller piece is kept in the house to which it gives its name, the property of Mr. Godfrey-Jull, now enlarged and adapted as a Colonial Training College. But, alas! irrefutable evidence goes to prove that it is impossible that under the shadow of this particular tree St. Augustine met the British bishops A.D. 603.

<sup>1</sup> *Wilts Notes and Queries*, No. 67, p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> "The original Gospel Oak had disappeared before 1733."—*Wilts Arch. Mag.*



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There is no doubt that before the coming of St. Augustine Christianity had been fully established in Britain, but persecution drove the Christians westward, and their bishops found refuge in the wild fastnesses of Wales. At the close of the sixth century Gregory the Pope decided a mission must be sent to convert the pagan Saxons, and so in 596 Augustine set forth, at once to return dismayed at the terrors of his journey and mission. Gregory, however, would take no denial, and he at length, with forty companion monks, landed at Pegwell Bay, near Ramsgate. Ethelbert was King of Kent. He promised a hearing, and with Queen Bertha and her Christian chaplain, Bishop Lindhard, he received the new-comers somewhere in the Isle of Thanet.

A picturesque procession soon arrived. First a silver cross and a painted figure of our Saviour borne aloft, then the monks and saint followed, and solemnly chanting a litany, approached the royal pair.

Ethelbert listened attentively, and gave them permission to work and teach, and on Whit-Sunday, June 2nd, A.D. 597, he was baptised a Christian. The Missionary College close to Canterbury, which may be seen to-day, was established by Augustine as his abbey in those early days.

Augustine soon became a bishop, returned to Arles for his consecration, and was given by Gregory "the care of all the Churches," and made head of the bishops.

Differences of opinion naturally arose on various subjects as time went on, and many letters were sent to Gregory asking for help and advice. At length Augustine decided on a conference, and invited the bishops to meet him and each other to discuss their difficulties.

Bishop Forrest Browne was the first to unhesitatingly decide that Gospel Oak was this historically interesting spot,<sup>1</sup> which the Venerable Bede writes of as "a place which is to this day called Saint Augustine's Oak . . . on the borders of the Wiceii and the West Saxons." This point would be just half-way between St. Asaph and Canterbury, so equally convenient to both parties and so specially suitable for such an important event. The fixing of the date for Easter was one of

<sup>1</sup> This is not accepted by other authorities.



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the urgent problems requiring solution, amongst many others, and it would seem that each party was so convinced of its own view being the correct one, that agreement seemed well-nigh hopeless. Bede tells us that the Welsh bishops "did not comply with the entreaties, exhortations, and rebukes of Augustine," so the saint was at last driven to suggest that a test of miracle should be applied to settle the vexed question of authority. A blind man was therefore produced, and the test was the restoration by prayer of his eyesight. The Welsh were given the first chance, but their prayers proved unavailing. Augustine then began to pray, and the blind man immediately received his sight, proving St. Augustine's supernatural power. Still unconvinced, the Welsh declined to change their ancient customs, and begged for a second meeting with more of their colleagues present.

Some time after this seven bishops and many learned men arrived, having visited a saintly hermit to ask his views. He shrewdly told them that "if Augustine was a man of God, to follow him," and when they inquired how they might be assured of that, he replied that our Lord had enjoined lowliness and meekness; if Augustine exhibited those qualities they might accept his teaching, but if he were stern and haughty he was not of God. Again they asked, "And how shall we discern even this?" The wise anchorite had probably formed his estimate of Augustine from the reports of his "exhortations and rebukes," and advised them to arrange that he should arrive first at the place of meeting; if, when they appeared, he rose to greet them, well; if, though they were more in number, he did not, they were to "despise" him.

"So it turned out, Augustine remained seated. He offered that if they would follow the Roman custom in the administration of baptism, would accept the Roman time for keeping Easter, and would co-operate with him in his missionary work, he would waive all the other matters. But they would do none of these things, nor receive him as their archbishop, considering that if he treated them with haughtiness while they were negotiating, it was not likely that he would be more amiable afterwards. Augustine seems to have justified their opinion by losing his temper, and prophesying subsequent disasters to them, which in the then state of the country were only too



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probable, and unfortunately duly befel, and so the meeting broke up.”<sup>1</sup>

On the Ordnance Map at Down Ampney “The Oak” is marked, and it is highly probable that there the first meeting took place, and the second at Gospel Oak. At the former place there is still a well, said to be valuable in the healing of eyes, like the Holywell in North Wales, where to this day many hundreds of sufferers may be seen during the summer months diligently bathing their eyes in the potent waters.

Having ventured so far in the direction of Crickdale, which town is well worthy of a competent pen to tell its interesting story, the writer would like to draw attention to the curious fact that carved on the stone walls inside St. Sampson’s Church are four playing cards—the heart, the diamond, the spade and the club. A year ago the following explanation came into her hands, given by a lady<sup>2</sup> of eighty summers, who had had it from an aunt in days gone by, which goes to prove that there is more meaning in a pack of cards than is generally supposed, and that the popular idea that they were invented to amuse a mad king of France may not be the correct one :—

“ We begin with the diamonds :

“ A Diamond represents a figure in Eastern philosophy typifying the Supreme Power. It contains the shape of a cross. The King’s weapons are in the background, the face turned to the right (see Ezekiel i. 12). The hands raised in blessing.

“ Hearts :

“ Faces turned the same way, weapons in the background but wielded—supposed to represent angels or executive power.

“ Spades :

“ Faces turned to left, therefore represent devils, a Spade is a Heart turned upside down, with a handle. The Queen holds a Sceptre, the only one that does so, probably representing an evil sway, instead of the lawful one of the others, who hold flowers. The King wields his weapons.

<sup>1</sup> From *The Gospel Oak*, by J. Lee Osborn.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Godley, mother of Lieut.-General Sir Alexander Godley, K.C.M.G., etc.



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“ Clubs :

“ Faces turned both right and left, representing mankind. The Club is the Cubic measure of the Heart, and has a handle like the Spades. It also represents a trefoil emblem of the Trinity.

“ The King holds a Cross on a Globe, emblem of the Church in the World. All suggests mankind fallen, but to be raised by the Incarnation. All suits represent family life.”



## CHAPTER XVIII

### “ THE ANGEL ”—REMOUNT DEPOT—WAR WORK—DEATH OF REV. JOHN VEYSEY—INDUCTION OF REV. R. B. HARRISON

THE Angel Hotel is a picturesque old building, and has seen many generations come and go since Henry Gleed was innkeeper there. Many a glass of ale has been drunk since then, more than was good for the men of Purton, no doubt, when the boast of 6,000 gallons being drunk was made in one fair-time.

The Magistrates used to sit there, and in Mr. Sadler's father's time they met once a month, Lord Radnor driving over from Coleshill to occupy the chair. For twenty-two years Mr. Wilding has been the genial host, and in the piping times of peace many hunting men found comfortable quarters at “The Angel.” There is a large ballroom, in which entertainments were held.

In an old building in the yard adjoining the Play Close may still be seen the coppers once used for brewing the ale, and part of the old boundary wall also remains.

A game introduced, tradition says, by the charcoal burners (who came and settled in Pavenhill from the Forest of Dean) was “kick-shins.” It was a simple game requiring no accessories, and, as the name suggests, was just to see who would stand longest in a “kick-shins” contest. Happily it has followed the more knightly back-swording or single-stick into oblivion. William Hedges, John Baker, William Slade, and James Daniels were names to conjure with in the days of the back-swording, and their descendants could no doubt give good account of themselves to-day in games of skill and courage.

Purton boasts of Mr. James Kibblewhite, the famous champion runner, as one of her sons, and an account of his successes is worthy of record in our story of his native village.

He was born at Purton on the 6th February, 1866, started his athletic career in 1884, and ran with phenomenal success for ten seasons. He was selected in 1890 to run in London before King Edward and Queen Alexandra, then Prince and



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Princess of Wales, and during this period of ten years he won prizes of no less than £1,200 in value.

The following are amongst his successes :—

- 1886. Won Twenty-five Guineas Cup at Stourbridge.
- 1887. Won Twenty-five Guineas Cup at Stourbridge.
- 1888. Won Twenty Guineas Cup at Cheltenham.
- 1888. Won Half Mile Championship of Wilts.
- 1889. Won Half Mile Championship of Wilts.
- 1889. Won One Mile Championship of England.
- 1889. Won Twenty Guineas Cup at Cheltenham.
- 1889. Broke Three Mile English Record and World Record in London.
- 1889. Broke Three Mile Grass Record at Kennington Oval, London.
- 1890. Won One Mile Championship of England.
- 1890. Won Four Mile Championship of England.
- 1890. Won Ten Mile Championship of England.
- 1890. Won Ten Mile Southern Counties Cross-country Championship.
- 1890. Won Two Mile Northern Championship.
- 1890. Won Half Mile Championship of Wilts.
- 1890. Won Fifty Guineas Cup at Manchester.
- 1890. Won the One Mile and Four Mile Championships, both on the same day ; also One Mile Scratch Race in London, and One Mile Handicap with 150 competitors from scratch the same day.
- 1890. Won One Mile Championship of England.
- 1891. Won Ten Mile Southern Counties Cross-country Championship.
- 1891. Won National Cross-country Championship.
- 1891. Won Half Mile Northern Championship.
- 1891. Won Fifty Guineas Cup at Manchester.
- 1892. Won Four Mile Championship of England.
- 1892. Won Twenty Guineas Cup at Frome.
- 1892. Broke Four Mile Scotch Record at Glasgow.
- 1893. Won Twenty Guineas Cup at Frome.

He is now employed by the Great Western Works at Swindon, and has a son who, also a promising athlete, has fought for his King and country.



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For twenty-five years Mr. Drew has been Purton's respected Schoolmaster, and Mrs. Woodward teaches and fondly cares for the infants.

The members of the Parish Council are as follows :—

Chairman, Mr. Josiah Haskins.

Vice-Chairman, Mr. John Greenham.

Clerk, Mr. Wheeler.

Messrs. E. L. Gardner, John Glass, Charles Iles, Joseph Staley, F. Sutton, E. Titherley, W. Gough, A. Baker, B. Eatwell, John Greenaway, F. Adams, and Captain Richardson.

Purton is represented on the Board of Guardians by Messrs. Iles and Gardner and Mrs. Richardson.

Churchwardens, Captain Richardson and Mr. F. Kempster.

The Sidesmen are, Mr. H. Dash, Mr. J. Greenham, Mr. J. Glass, Mr. A. H. Barnes, Mr. Heath, Mr. J. Kibblewhite, Mr. W. Barnes, Mr. W. Hewer, Mr. R. G. Brown, Mr. Bull.

Sexton, Mr. Davies.

Relieving Officer, Mr. R. J. Webb.

Sanitary Officer, Mr. Hiscock.

Road Inspector, Mr. Godfrey.

Postmen, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Daniels, Mr. Shurey and Mr. Scott.

Parish Nurse, Miss Griffen.

Postmistress, Mrs. Bennett.

Rate Collector, Mr. Wheeler.

Master and Matron at the Workhouse, Mr. and Mrs. Maundrel.

Useful members of the Church choir are Mr. Webber, Mr. Foster, Mr. Barnes, Mr. O. Smith, Mr. A. Smith, and Mr. H. Smith.

During the Great War a large Army Remount Depot was organised by Mr. W. H. Robson and his sons. It was an interesting though pitiful sight to see the horses being trained in happy and peaceful methods for the terrors awaiting them. Special trains brought large consignments to Purton, and, tied in sections of four, one might see perhaps a hundred of them process through the village, led by a band of willing helpers, to their destination on Manor Hill. Mrs. Bickford, Mrs. Bucknill, Mr. and Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Chappell, Miss Bushby, and Miss Pethick gave their services voluntarily to help in this work. A number of mules were also trained there, some of which,



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arriving quite intractable, left patterns of all that a mule should be.

A War Savings Association was well thought out and organised, Mr. Drew, Mrs. Fox, Miss Elizabeth Redman and Miss M. Brown doing the chief part, assisted by a band of enthusiastic collectors, and a goodly sum weekly was rolled up.

The Misses Kempster arranged a working party weekly for the Red Cross, and a girls' meeting for the same object was held also, with excellent results.

A Woman's War Club was formed in October, 1914, and met weekly in the winter months during the war for mutual help and encouragement.

Miss Warrender, joined by Miss Story-Maskelyne, and with Miss Walsh's help, ran the Women's Agricultural Committee.

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association looked after the needs of the wives and parents of those who had gone to play their part so nobly, and a common anxiety and, alas! in many cases a common loss and sorrow, brought into touch those who otherwise would perhaps have never met.

The writer occasionally took a nurse's place who required rest for some weeks in a military hospital, and found it an interesting experience, and her sister, Miss Stronge, spent nearly a year working at a canteen in France under the Y.M.C.A.

In October, 1916, a long and well-spent life came to a close, as with much suffering bravely borne our beloved and respected Vicar, The Rev. John Veysey, after thirty-eight years of devoted work and service in the parish, was called to his rest. He had christened and married most of his parishioners who had come to man's estate, and there was many a sad heart when it was known that never again would his genial presence and kindly smile be seen in Purton.

His family left shortly afterwards to reside in Swindon, Miss Veysey, who was, in spite of much illness and suffering, so helpful to her father, having acted as his secretary till his death. Miss Edith Veysey took an active part in the work of the parish, and was especially interested in the Church music; on leaving she was presented by her numerous friends with a purse of gold and a watch bracelet.

One misses, too, the old lady who (though rheumatic and stiff, and in spite of eighty summers having passed over



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her head) faithfully each month delivered her Parish Magazines.

“The old order changeth, giving place to new,” and on February 14th, 1917, we welcomed Mr. Veysey's successor in the ministry here, the Rev. Robert Birch Harrison, on the roll of Vicars the twenty-eighth. He was inducted by the Archdeacon of North Wilts, the Rev. Ravenscroft Stewart, and a large congregation attended the interesting and quaint ceremony, the two Churchwardens leading the procession, and many local clergy taking part in it.

This brings “The Story of Purton” to the present day. Much has been left untold, but perhaps, such as it is, it may serve to awaken at least a deeper interest in our grand old Church, which, built and cared for by hands now long dead and forgotten, is now for the moment our heritage, “to have and to hold” for those who in due time shall take our places.



