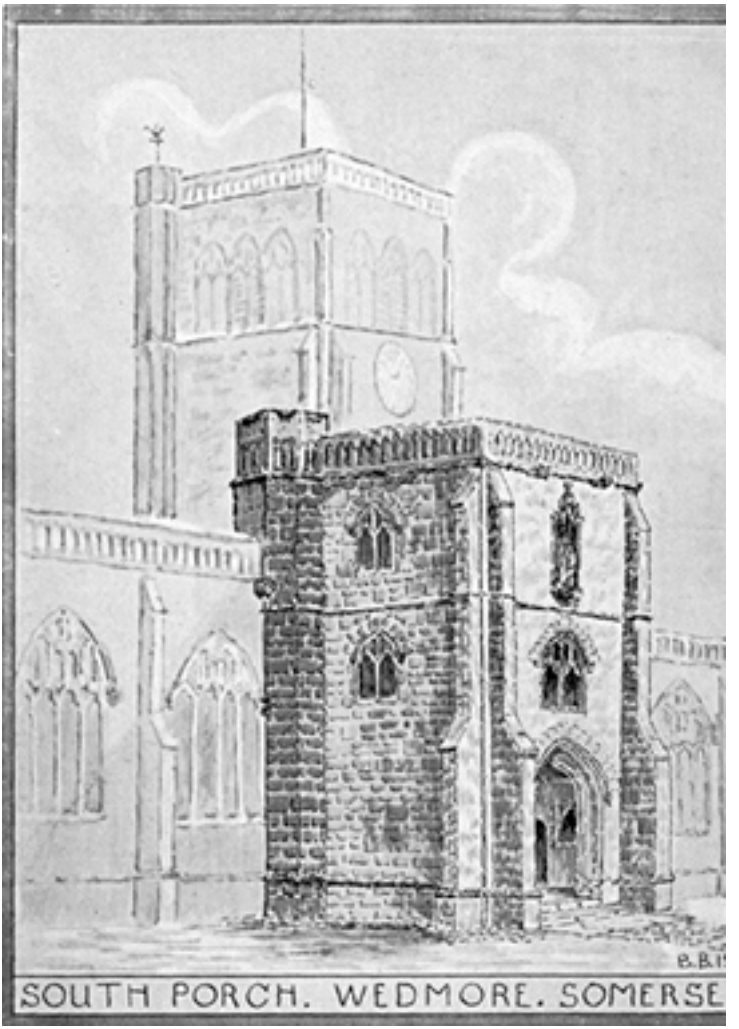
A Brief History of Wedmore

By

W. MARSTON ACRES F.R.Hist.S.


SOUTH PORCH. WEDMORE. SOMERSE

Introduction to the 2001 edition.

This book was published some 50 years ago, in an incomplete form. As you will see, from the preface, it wasn't published by the author.

50 years isn't a very long time in history, but it is a long time in knowledge and technology. W. Marston Acres was unable to confirm some of the things that were eventually included in the book. It would be unfair of us to blame him, as he passed away before he had finished his research. The problem we face is whether a document with some very interesting information should rot on shelves because of errors, or be re-published with a caveat. I've decided the latter. With the assistance of Hazel Hudson, we can state, once and for all, that there was not a port in Wedmore…ships did not sail up the Borough! Marston was incorrect in his understanding of what a port reeve was and that led to some misunderstandings.

I believe that it is more important to have some information, knowing that there are errors, than no information at all. Be assured that there *are* errors in this book, but making this document available using today's technology allows us to look into other places for the truth. What is reported as factual is fairly accurate, but what is left to conjecture should be viewed with a suspect eye.

One day we hope to publish a second edition, of sorts, that will correct what is incorrect, but for now we can only offer the above caveat…and our thanks to W. Marston Acres for his brief history of Wedmore.

-Michael Tutton-
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
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PREFACE

Wilfrid Marston Acres was engaged in writing this history of Wedmore during the years of his residence in the parish (1941-53). He was working on it at the time of his death on, St. George's Day, 1953, and he had spoken to me of his intention to revise some sections and of adding a chapter on " Wedmore Today."

On consideration I have thought it wiser to publish the manuscript as he left it rather than to add to it by another hand. I am anxious that the learning and research he brought to his task should be available in book form so that local historians may use his work and continue the story in future years.

The sketches for the illustrations were presented to the author by Bergan Birkett before his death in 1949. Neither author nor artist lived to see his work in this final form, and its present publication may be taken as a tribute to these two friends who had so many interests in common.

E. LOUIE ACRES,
Glanville Lodge,
Wedmore,
Somerset.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WEDMORE

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A Brief History of Wedmore

1. THE ISLE OF WEDMORE.

Between the valleys of the rivers Brue and Axe in Central Somerset a ridge of high ground, about eight miles in length and varying in breadth from one to four miles, rises from the surrounding moorland to rather more than 200 feet above sea level in several places. In remote times this high ground was an island as the waters and marshes of the Axe separated it from the mainland on the east while on its western side there was a large inlet of the sea extending as far south as Pilton. The Saxons named it "The Isle of Wedmore."

The erection of a sea-wall at Burnham by the monks of Glastonbury in the 14th century, and the drainage systems of later times, have effected the reclamation of much of the original marshland which surrounded the island, but until the middle of the 16th century lakes and swamps made Wedmore difficult of access. In 1607 the collapse of the sea-wall at Burnham caused 100 square miles of northern Somerset to be flooded to a depth of twelve feet and great storms, in 1703 and 1811, drove the, sea inland as far as Glastonbury. Even at the present day the flooded state of the moors after periods of heavy rain makes it easy to visualise Wedmore as an island.

Though the primitive peoples who came to Britain in successive waves from the Continent of Europe before the beginning of the Christian era have left many evidences of their settlements in Somerset, very few traces of pre-historic man have been found in the vale of Bridgwater or in the marshes of the Axe. It seems probable, therefore, that the isolated and rocky island known subsequently as Wedmore was but very sparsely populated in ancient times, and were it not for the discovery of a Neolithic axe head, now in the Wells Museum, it might reasonably have been conjectured that the island was entirely uninhabited until the coming of the Romans to Britain.

2. THE ROMAN OCCUPATION.

The landings of Julius Ceasar on the coast of Kent in 55 B.C. and the following year were merely punitive expeditions intended to overawe the inhabitants of Britain and discourage them from sending assistance to Gaul. Consequently after receiving their submission Caesar withdrew his forces before penetrating far into the country. But in 43 A.D. the

Emperor Claudius, being ambitious to add Britain to the Roman Empire, sent Aulius Plautius with a formidable army to conquer the land. The south-eastern parts of Britain soon submitted to him, and although Caractacus maintained resistance in the West for some time, Ostorius Scapula, the successor of Plautius as commander of the army, had subdued Somerset and founded the City of Bath by the year 50 A.D.

One of the decisive battles of the campaign in Somerset, in which Ostorius defeated a tribe of the Belgae known as the Cangi, was fought in 49 A.D. at the hamlet of Castle near Wookey. A hill to the south of the village, known as Fenny Castle, which was the scene of the conflict, still shows the remains of British earthworks.

Occasional discoveries of Roman coins and potsherds in Wedmore and the surrounding hamlets suggest that small garrisons of Roman soldiers were maintained on the island, and there is reason to believe that one of these garrisons was located at Castle in the hamlet of Heath-house where several skeletons were unearthed in 1883. The garrisons would have kept a look-out over the western sea and have guarded the approaches to Mendip where, as early as 49 A.D., the Romans were working the lead mines. The soldiers were not needed to control the Britons who, once they were subdued, gave little trouble, and during the 350 years of the Roman occupation they were able to pursue undisturbed, the peaceful activities of tilling the ground, fishing in the salt lakes, and snaring the wild-fowl of the woodlands and marshes.

3. THE SAXON CONQUEST.

The gradual withdrawal of the Roman legions from Britain in the early years of the 5th century was soon followed by attacks from the Picts and Scots, which the Britons, long untrained in warfare, found great difficulty in repelling. They, therefore, sought help from the Saxons, and in 449 Hengist and Horsa landed in Kent with considerable forces; but, having assisted to expel the northern hordes, they turned their arms against their former allies, and although the Britons gained a great victory at Aylesford in 455, when Horsa was killed, large reinforcements from the Continent enabled Hengist to push his adversaries, westward and to establish himself as King of Kent in 457.

Through the remaining years of the 5th century, and during the century following, Saxon tribes overran the greater part of England. But although Cerdic established himself as King of the West Saxons in 519, Somerset was not invaded until 577 when Ceawlin, after a battle at Deorham where three British kings were killed, captured Bath, pushed across the Avon, and reached the south side of Mendip. There, however,

his progress was, checked by the marshy country, surrounding Glastonbury, and it was not until 658 that Cenwalch advanced through the southern part of the county to the Parrett and captured all the rich land west of Petherton between the Parrett and the Ile. Even then much of the central part of the county remained unconquered, for the Britons held the Poldens, where they were protected on the north by the great central lake of Somerset, and on the south by the vast expanse of the Sedgmoor marshes. In 682, however, Centwine drove the British from the hills and pursued them across the Parrett as far as Cannington. Included in the territory gained by the Saxons at this time was an island to which they gave the name "Vado-maer " (i.e., Vado, the famous) after one of their leaders. In the course of time this name became simplified to "Wedmore."

4. SAXON SETTLEMENTS AT WEDMORE.

It was fortunate for the Britons in Somerset that the Saxons had accepted Christianity before they had made much progress with the conquest of Western England for the indiscriminate slaughter or complete displacement of the population which took place when the invaders were pagans gave way to a more humane policy under which the conquered people were allowed to remain and sites and buildings associated with the British Church were spared from destruction or desecration. Cynegils, King of Wessex, had received baptism from Bishop Birinus in 635 and Centwine had followed the example of his father a year later. It is not surprising, therefore, that after his conquest of central Somerset in 682 Centwine should have granted the Island, of Wedmore to Wilfrid, Bishop of York, probably in the belief that so isolated a place would provide a suitable site for a monastery similar to that established by the bishop at Selsey in the preceding year. Wilfrid, however, being fully occupied with missionary work amongst the South Saxons, transferred his rights to Wedmore to the Abbey of Glastonbury, but it did not long remain in the Abbey's possession, probably because Caedwalla, who succeeded Centwine as king in 685, refused to confirm the original grant and claimed the island as royal property.

In accordance with their invariable practice the Saxons quickly settled themselves by families on the land they had conquered by making clearings in the forests or by utilising the unappropriated waste to start farming. Place names of villages on the isle of Wedmore bearing such suffixes as "ton," "ham," and "worth," to which the personal names of leaders or heads of families were added, indicate, the localities of these settlements, most of which are near water. The Britons living on the island were generally left undisturbed if they were landowners, or

employed as serfs if they were not. Their status was safe-guarded in 693 when King Ina issued a code of laws giving definite rights to his British subjects, including the right to hold land.

5. THE KINGDOM OF ENGLAND.

The conquest of Somerset was completed by King Ina who, after defeating a large British force under the Welsh prince Geraint, advanced the Saxon boundary from the Parrett to the Tone and subsequently subdued Western Somerset, driving the British into Devon and Cornwall. For purposes of administration the county was then divided into forty-three "hundreds," a "Hundred" being 100 hides, and a "hide" as much land as was calculated to maintain a family. The island of Wedmore, together with Burnham and Brean, was included in the Hundred of Bempstone, and settlers round the inland lakes became known as "Somersactas," i.e., Seo-mere-saetan ("dwellers by the sea lake") and from them the county became known as Somerset.

Before his abdication, in 726, Ina had made himself master of all England south of the Thames, but during the following century Mercia disputed the supremacy with Wessex and it was not until 835, four years before his death, that Egbert, by conquest and treaty, brought this internecine strife to an end and was acknowledged as King of the English.

The consolidation of England under the one king was primarily due to Egbert's outstanding qualities as a soldier and a diplomat, but a strong underlying motive to Saxon unity was the menace of Danish invasion. Beginning in 787 with raids on the coasts of England for the purpose of plunder, it became clear by 851, when a party of the invaders for the first time wintered in Thanet, that they had determined on conquest and settlement. Within twenty years they over-ran most of the northern, eastern and central parts of England and made many settlements, particularly in the coastal areas between the Tyne and the Thames, but the stubborn spirit of the men of Wessex prevented the "heathen-men" from making any permanent settlements in the southern and western counties during that time.

6. ALFRED'S STRUGGLE WITH THE DANES.

The Danish attempt to conquer Wessex began in 871 when their ships sailed up the Thames, passed London, and seized the town of Reading. Assembling their forces, King Ethelred and his brother Alfred led an assault on the Danish camp, and this was followed by a series of fiercely-contested battles in which fortunes fluctuated. Eventually the exhaustion of both armies led to a truce at which the Danes agreed to

leave Wessex. Ethelred received a wound which proved mortal in a battle fought during this year at Marton in Wiltshire, and Alfred was chosen as his successor in the kingship.

For four years there was peace, but in 876 the Danes attacked and captured the town of Wareham in Dorset, and later moved to Exeter where they were besieged by Alfred's men and starved into surrender. Again they promised to leave Wessex, but they went no further than Gloucester, and in January, 877, they captured the town of Chippenham in a surprise attack and by establishing their headquarters there were able to dominate the surrounding country. So serious was the situation that Alfred, with a small body of faithful followers, retired to the island of Athelney where, on a small area of firm ground strong in natural defences of forest and morass, he constructed a fortified camp together with a causeway by which alone it could be approached. At this camp an army was gradually assembled which, from time to time, made forays into the open country to cut off small parties of the enemy and to capture their supplies.

Before Easter, which fell that year on March 23rd, the forces of Alfred were threatened from another direction when a Danish fleet under Hubba, after raiding the Somerset coast, landed an army at the mouth of the Parrett. The defenders, under Odda, Alderman of Devon, retreated to their camp at Cynwit, where they were beseiged, but in a determined rally they "cut down the pagans in great numbers." Hubba was slain; and the few survivors fled to their ships.

7. THE BATTLE OF ETHANDUNE.

The destruction of Hubba's forces encouraged Alfred to plan an attack on Guthrum's main position at Chippenham before Danish reinforcements could be sent there. Consequently "in the seventh week after Easter," i.e., on or about May 12th, 878, the Saxon king with his small company left Athelney and, accompanied by men from other parts of Somerset, rode in one day to the eastern borders of Selwood Forest where they were joined by men from Wiltshire and Hampshire. After another day's march and a night in camp they reached Ethandune where the Danes had established outposts to defend their headquarters at Chippenham some sixteen miles to the north, and in a fierce battle which lasted from noon to evening the Danes were routed. Those who survived the battle retreated to their fortified camp at Brattan Hill, but the Saxons pursued and surrounded the camp and after a siege of fourteen days shortage of supplies compelled Guthrum to surrender. The Danish leader expressed his willingness to give as many hostages as might be demanded, pledged himself to quit Wessex for ever, and declared the

readiness of himself and many of his principal followers to accept baptism.

Despite the many previous failures of the Danes to keep their promises, Alfred magnanimously agreed to make peace on these terms, and after a preliminary treaty had been ratified at Chippenham he and the greater part of his army returned to the camp at Athelney. The success of this short campaign had not only secured the safety of Wessex but had made the Saxons master of most of the south and west of England. Ethandune, therefore, may justly be reckoned among the decisive battles of English history.

8. THE DANES AT WEDMORE.

Three weeks after Alfred's return to Athelney, Guthrum attended by thirty of the worthiest men that were in the army "went to Aller for baptism at which Alfred with Ethelnoth, Alderman of Somerset, stood as sponsors for the Danish king who was given the Christian name of "Athelstan." In accordance with the custom in the early Church the priest who administered the Sacrament anointed the foreheads of the baptised with holy oil and, to prevent the oil from being rubbed off, placed white linen bands round their heads. The "chrysom-loosing" of Guthrum, at which the baptismal band was removed, took place eight days later at Wedmore where Alfred entertained the Danes at his manor-house for twelve days. During that time the terms of a treaty fixing the boundaries between the Saxon and Danish kingdoms were agreed upon, the Danes retaining most of the country, east of the Watling Street (a Roman road which linked Chester and London) while Alfred's kingdom comprised the whole of Wessex, Kent and Sussex.

Guthrum honestly endeavoured to keep his promises, for when fresh bands of marauders attacked Rochester in 885 he gave, no encouragement to those of his East Anglian subjects who joined them. He seems, indeed, to have been a genuine convert to the Christian faith as coins struck during his reign bore his baptismal name "Athelstan," and when he died, in 890, his body received Christian burial at Hadleigh in Suffolk.

A serious Danish attack under the leadership of Hasting was made in 893, and there were three years of fierce fighting before the Danish leader and his surviving followers sailed back to Normandy, but the kingdom of Wessex, though often threatened, was held inviolate against the enemy.

9. ALFRED'S PEACE-TIME ACTIVITIES.

During the peaceful interludes of his reign, King Alfred was much occupied in devising methods for the security of his kingdom. Realising that Wessex could not be defended effectually without a navy he began building ships soon after his succession and the successes gained by these vessels against Danish invaders in 875 and 877 encouraged him, after the Peace of Wedmore, to build larger and swifter vessels for the defence of the English coasts. His re-organisation of the army ensured that the principal fortresses were permanently manned and that a sufficient force was always available to resist a sudden attack, while the restoration and construction of forts and strong-points round; the coast, and the protection of the royal residences and the larger towns by walls and ditches also received attention. Fortified posts or "burhs" were built on a number of islands, and it is probable that the names "Borough" and "Panborough" on the island of Wedmore mark the sites of two such forts which were built to guard the entrance to the Mendip Straits and to defend the approaches to the Isle of Avalon.

Wedmore was only one of the many manors in King Alfred's possession and it is not probable that much of his life was spent in the village, but as the scene of a famous treaty the place will always have historical significance. It was once believed that the king's residence was at Mudgley, but it is much more likely that it was on or near the site of the present manor-house.

Alfred, who died on October 26th, 901, after a reign of nearly 30 years, has been, acclaimed by distinguished historians as "the noblest of English rulers" and "the most perfect character in history." Certainly there have been few monarchs who have devoted themselves with such unselfish ardour to the defence of their country and the welfare of their people, and none who have maintained a higher standard of personal conduct in their personal lives. Wedmore has good reason to be proud of this, its most distinguished resident.

10. THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY.

Edward, the son and successor of Alfred, was not content to share the government of England with Danish rulers and with the help of his sister Ethelfleda, "Lady of the Mercians," he fought against them with such success that before his death in 925 they had acknowledged him as their overlord. This position, in spite of Danish attempts to regain independence, was maintained by Edward's successors until 981 when Danes from overseas renewed their attacks at a time when England was

ruled by Ethelred, a king who was lacking in both, courage and capacity, and whose policy it was to buy off the invaders. Eventually Sweyn, King of Denmark, having over-run most of the country, was offered the throne of England. However, he died shortly afterwards and Ethelred then returned from Normandy, where he had taken refuge, and was nominally king until his death in 1016, although Sweyn's son, Canute, held most of the country.

Canute was then accepted as, king by most of the Saxons but the people of London elected Edmund Ironside, who rallied his countrymen to fight with such courage and tenacity that in 1017 Canute agreed to a division of the kingdom; but Edmund's death in 1018 left Canute as sole ruler.

Although the whole population must have suffered severely from the ravages of the Danes during the reign of Ethelred, the county of Somerset was fortunate in not being subjected to such continuous attacks as the northern and eastern counties, nor was it the scene of any major battle. Only in 1006, when the invaders "terribly marked each shire in Wessex with fire and devastation," and in 1015 when Canute "plundered in Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset," were the inhabitants of Wedmore in any serious danger, and it is probable that on those occasions they were protected from invasion by the marshy character of the surrounding country.

11. DANISH DOMINATION.

Canute, who ruled England from 1017 to 1035, gave the country the peace she so sorely needed, for he dealt justly with his new subjects and was so assured of their loyalty that he, was able to absent himself for long periods when affairs in Denmark demanded his attention. It is significant that Englishmen were in the forces which resisted a Swedish attack on Denmark in 1025, and with those which conquered Norway in 1028. At Canute's death two of his sons divided England between them, Harold Harefoot taking the north and Hardicanute the south, but as Hardicanute remained in Denmark the whole country was under Harold's control until his death in 1040. Hardicanute then became king but lived only until 1042, and with him the Danish domination of England came to an end as Edward, son of Ethelred by Emma of Normandy, was chosen to succeed him.

Wedmore has an interesting link with the Danish kings for in March, 1853, when the path near the north-eastern boundary of the churchyard was being widened, an earthen vessel was found by Mr. Tucker Coles which contained more than 200 silver coins ranging in date from the reign of Ethelred 11 to that of Hardicanute, some of them

from Somerset mints. The coins must have been deposited in the ground before the earliest coinage of Edward the Confessor was circulated, and had lain there undisturbed for more than 800 years. Many Danish landowners were deprived of their estates when the Saxon monarchy was restored in 1042, and it was probably one of these who placed the coins in the ground for safety. A stone with an inscription marks the place in the churchyard where the hoard was discovered. Most of the coins were bought for the British Museum, but one of them, at least, has found a home in a Wedmore farmhouse.

12. THE LAST SAXON KING.

Edward the Confessor, in whom the English line of kings was restored in 1042, was half-brother both to Edmund Ironside (son of Ethelred II by his first wife) and to Hardicanute (son of Canute by Emma of Normandy), but having spent the greater part of his life in Normandy he was French in habits and sympathies. The influence of Earl Godwin, whose daughter he married, was strong enough to ensure that Englishmen were appointed to the more important positions in the State, but he was able to confer many ecclesiastical offices on his foreign friends. Amongst these was Giso, a native of Lorraine and one of his chaplains who, whilst on an embassy to Rome in 1060, was consecrated by the Pope and on his return to England was appointed Bishop of Wells. On arriving at Wells the Bishop found a small church whose revenues were so inadequate that the four or five canons responsible for the services were reduced to begging their bread.

For the better endowment of the church Giso, in 1062, obtained from King Edward a grant of land in Wedmore, and from Queen Edith lands at Mudgley and Mark, and by Royal Charter, in 1065, the Church of Wells was granted "not only all that the bishop and his predecessors have obtained of the King and his predecessors, or by purchase, but whatever the church under his rule is seen to possess." List of the possessions of the church which were appended to the Charter include "in the place called Weddmor a possession of four hides, and the villages thereto belonging are Biddesham (properly called Tarnuc), another called Neawycan, and Mercern: these, all, with woods, fields, meadows, feedings, fisheries and mills are confirmed to the church or to the bishop." From this time, therefore, Wedmore ceased to be a Royal manor and became a possession of the church of Wells, and it remained in the same ownership until 1547.

13. THE NORMAN CONQUEST.

England was not disturbed by invaders from overseas during the reign of the Confessor, and the Danes who had settled in the country, though resentful at being deprived of their estates, were too small a minority to cause much trouble, but the influx of Normans into the country and the consequent introduction of foreign habits and customs caused considerable unrest among the Saxon population. In 1051 Earl Godwin and his sons planned an insurrection, but on being summoned to London to stand their trial they fled to Normandy for safety. Returning the following year with a formidable fleet, with which they threatened to attack London, the King agreed to re-instate them in their former offices and to banish all foreigners from the country. Godwin died soon after his return to England, but his son Harold, who succeeded him as Earl of Wessex, was the virtual ruler of England during the remainder of Edward's reign, and when the king died on January 5th, 1066, Harold succeeded to the throne without opposition.

William, Duke of Normandy, however, alleged that Edward had promised him the succession, and he began immediately preparations for the invasion of England. His armies landed at Pevensey on September 28th and on October 14th the fate of England was decided at Hastings where the Saxons were defeated and Harold, two of his brothers, and thousands of their followers were slain. An attempt was made to rouse the Saxons to further resistance and Edgar Atheling, a grandson, of Edmund Ironside, was proclaimed king, but opposition collapsed when William approached London and on December 26th he was crowned in the Abbey church of Westminster.

Giso, Bishop of Wells, continued in office through all these changes. During Harold's brief reign he had found opportunity to obtain from him a confirmation of the Charter of 1065, and as his Norman sympathies commended him to William, the estates he had acquired for the church of Wells continued in his possession after the Conquest.

14. THE FEUDAL SYSTEM.

The estates of Harold and of those who fought with him at Hastings were confiscated by William immediately after his accession, although other landowners were permitted to retain their estates on swearing fealty, but the insurrections which broke out in different parts of the country later in the reign were followed by the forfeiture of so many estates that most of the land came into the king's possession and was granted by him on a feudal tenure to his principal supporters.

The elements of feudalism were established in England as early as the 7th century, for in the time of King Ina there were many great land-owners in Wessex holding estates from the king and working them by the labour of peasant families, and a century later King Edgar ordained that "every landless man should have a lord," but under William a more highly-developed system was introduced. Large estates were granted to about 700 Norman nobles for stated payments and services, and they leased parts of these lands to sub-tenants on similar conditions. Below these free tenants were large numbers of serfs who were allowed small holdings of land for their own use but were compelled to work on their lords' demesnes. Even the possessions of the Church were brought under the system, Abbots and Bishops being required to swear fealty for their lands to the king and to furnish knights for military service when called upon to do so.

As taxation and military service were both based on the holding of land, William appointed Commissioners to make a survey of all the estates in the kingdom so that he might be accurately informed of his resources in men and money. The Survey was completed in 1086, the volumes in which particulars were entered becoming known as the Domesday Book. Valuable information in regard to the manor of Wedmore is supplied by this record.

15. MANORS OF THE ISLE OF WEDMORE.

From the Domesday Survey of 1086 it appears that a large part of the Isle of Wedmore had by that time divided into manors, these representing grants of land made by the Saxon kings apart from the manor of Wedmore which the kings had reserved for their own use until Edward the Confessor granted it to Bishop Giso for the church of Wells. The manors of Allerton (11 hides), Weare (6 hides), Alston Sutton in Weare (5 hides), Badgworth (2 hides) and Ternoc in Badgworth (1 hide) were all held by Walter de Douai as tenant-in-chief, and the small manor of Clewer (3 virgates) by the Bishop of Coutances, all these manors being let to sub-tenants. Mark, Blackford and Mudgley were then included in the manor of Wedmore; Panborough, consisting only of six acres of land and three arpents of vineyard, was in the possession of the Abbot of Glastonbury; and Bagley, with only half a virgate of arable in addition to meadows and woodland, was held by Roger de Courcelle.

The manor of Wedmore, which Bishop Giso held at the time of the Survey, was assessed for taxation as a holding of ten hides, the arable land being considered sufficient for thirty-six ploughs. Of this land 4 3/4 hides belonged to the lord's demesne where there were four ploughs and four serfs, and the remaining 5 1/4 hides were divided between thirteen

villeins and fourteen bordars, who had nine ploughs. There were also eighteen cottars, landless peasants who occupied cottages on the estate and were employed entirely in menial duties on the lord's land. In addition to the arable land there were seventy acres of meadow, fifty of woodland, one league of pasture "reckoning length and breadth," moorland which paid nothing, and two fisheries which paid a rent of ten shillings. The animals on the estate were six "unbroken mares," seventeen oxen and three swine. The manor was valued at £17: in King Edward's reign it had been worth £20.

16. THE CHURCH OF WEDMORE.

Although there is no documentary evidence to prove the existence of a church at Wedmore before the time of the Normans, nor any trace of pre-Conquest architecture in the existing building, it is not likely that a village where King Alfred held the manor would have been without a church when the ceremony of Guthrum's chrysm-loosing took place in 878. Indeed, as the first Saxons who settled in the village at the end of the 7th century had accepted Christianity, it is probable that a primitive building for religious worship was erected soon after their arrival.

Definite proof that there was a Saxon church at Wedmore in the reign of the first Norman king is furnished by a writ of 1075 addressed by Queen Matilda to "the Sheriff and men of Somerset" requiring them "to give Bishop Giso possession of the church of Wedmore, often claimed by him, which at her request Osbert, Bishop of Exeter, has conceded to him." The fact that the church was held by the Bishop of Exeter suggests the possibility that the original building on the site was erected before the establishment of the Diocese of Wells in 909. The pillars and arches which support the tower of the present church are traditional Norman in character and date from c. 1200.

That the Norman church-builders were busy on the island of Wedmore is indicated by a document of 1176, issued by Pope Alexander III, whereby he confirmed the Dean and Chapter of Wells in the possession of various manors in Somerset and also of "the church of Wedmore with the chapels of Merch (Mark), Blakeford (Blackford), Bidesham (Biddisham), Alwarton (Allerton), and Mudeslega (Mudgley), together with other chapels not named in the document. The remains of a chapel dedicated to St. Cuthlac are still visible at Marchey.

17. SOMERSET IN NORMAN TIMES.

Soon after the accession of William II in 1088, a number of the barons who supported the claim of his brother Robert to the throne raised an insurrection in the West Country, seized Bristol, and burnt the

towns of Bath and Ilchester before the superior forces of the king compelled their flight or submission; and in the struggle between Stephen and the Empress Matilda fifty years later Somerset was the scene of considerable fighting when Stephen attacked and captured the castles of Cary and Harptree and besieged William de Mohun in his castle at Dunster. But during the 13th and 14th centuries Somerset was remote from the main events of national history and enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity. Consequently there is little to chronicle concerning Wedmore during the period, though some interesting facts of local history are supplied by deeds and charters of the Cathedral of Wells of which the manor of Wedmore was a possession.

Bishop Giso, when he was appointed to the See of Wells in 1060, increased the number of canons to ten, built a cloister, refectory and dormitories to the south of the Cathedral church, and obliged the canons to live together as a celibate brotherhood under a provost; but John of Tours, who succeeded him in 1088, transferred the seat of the bishop to Bath, destroyed the monastic buildings and the canonical discipline at Wells, and appointed his brother Hildebert as provost and steward of the canon's property subject to a rent-charge of sixty shillings to each of them. When Hildebert died his son John took possession of the estates as though they were personal property, and at his death bequeathed them to his brother Reginald. The canons received no more than a bare subsistence from the revenues of the lands, including the manor of Wedmore, which had been given to the church of Wells for their maintenance, and it was not until 1136 that this grave injustice was remedied by Bishop Robert.

18. REFORM OF THE WELLS CHAPTER.

Robert of Lewes, who became Bishop of Bath in 1136, found the church of Wells "suffering intolerably from the oppression of the provostship" and from "lay exactions and intrusions." He therefore obtained a Charter for the incorporation of a Chapter to be presided over by a Dean and endowed the members of the Chapter with separate freehold estates to support the dignity of their offices. Among these estates was "Wedmoreland," which was divided into six prebends, the church of Wedmore being assigned to the Sub-Dean while the remainder of the property in Wedmore, Mark and Mudgley, together with a virgate of land in Biddisham, was granted to the Dean subject to the payment by him of One hundred shillings yearly to each of the four canons from the profits of the estates. The income from the remaining land at Biddisham was appropriated to the provision of a Vicar at that place, and for repairs to the fabric and the supplying of ornaments for the church of Wells.

From 1136, therefore, when the first Dean (Ivo) was appointed, the Deans of Wells became lords of the manors of Wedmore, Mudgley and Mark instead of the Bishops. Their title to the estates was confirmed by a Bull of Pope Adrian IV in 1157, and was recognised by a Charter of King Henry II by which was granted to Dean Ivo the right of "free warren" on his estates "as his predecessors had it in the time of King Henry his grandfather."

Reginald the precentor, as compensation for surrendering his claim to the estates, was given the rich prebend of Combe St. Nicholas, but his right of surrender was challenged by his nephews and it was not until 1164 that "Payn de Peneburggis with Henry his son; Roger Witeing with William, Robert, and Gilbert Almari his brethren; Osbert de Bathonia; and Ralph Denebold with Robert his brother "made abjuration upon the Gospel and relics of Saints of the rights claimed by them over lands at Mark, Mudgley and one virgate of Biddisham in consideration of a payment of seventy marks by the Dean and Chapter of Wells.

19. PREBENDS OF THE DEAN.

To Bishop Robert was due not only the recovery of the estates which provided endowments for the Dean and Chapter of Wells, but also the restoration of the church of Wells to the status of a Cathedral, for during his episcopate it was laid down that the churches of Bath and Wells should be equally seats of the Bishop who should be elected by representatives of both chapters and enthroned in both churches. Actually, the next bishop, Reginald, was elected in 1174 by the Wells Chapter alone, but Pope Alexander III, when confirming the election in 1176, decreed that a settlement with the chapter of Bath for joint elections should be made. It was not until 1242, however, that the chapters agreed to a joint election of bishops, and the bishop did not resume the title of "Bishop of Bath and Wells" until 1244.

In 1210, by an ordinance of Bishop Jocelin, the church of Wedmore, which had belonged to the Sub-Dean, became a prebend attached to the Deanery, subject to a payment of 4 marks yearly to a priest-vicar of Wells. At the same time the church of Wookey, previously attached to the Deanery, was given to the Sub-Dean, who was to allow a vicar ministering in the church of Wells at least two marks yearly.

The manor of Mark, which had been granted to the Dean and Chapter of Wells in 1136, seems to have been appropriated by Bishop Reginald, and was confirmed as his possession by a Bull of Pope Alexander III in 1178. Reluctant to surrender their rights, the Chapter of Wells repeatedly challenged the Bishop's title, and in 1242, when the

Rector (Richard de Dynam) resigned, Bishop Jocelin "to put an end to disputes of long standing" ordered that the church of Mark should be attached to the prebend of Wedmore as a single benefice, but that the Dean and his successors should pay £4 a year towards a fifth prebend.

20. THE MANOR OF BLACKFORD.

The manor of Blackford, which had previously been in the possession of the Abbey of Glastonbury, was acquired by the Bishop of Wells early in the 13th century in circumstances which are of particular interest. In 1191, when Richard I went to the Holy Land, he was accompanied by Savaric, an ambitious man of noble family, whose cousin Reginald was then Bishop of Bath. Through the influence of the King, Savaric was elected Bishop in succession to Reginald in 1192.

When returning from Palestine in December 1192, King Richard was wrecked in the Adriatic, and in passing through the territory of his enemy the Duke of Austria he was arrested and transferred to the custody of the Emperor Henry, VI. As Savaric was a kinsman of the Emperor he was consulted when terms for Richard's release were under discussion, and demanded as a condition of the release that the Abbey of Glastonbury should be united with the See of Bath under his jurisdiction and that he should bear the title of "Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury."

On Richard's return to England in 1194, he repudiated the concession he had made to Savaric when under duress, and although Savaric had the support of Pope Celestine III he did not obtain full possession of the Abbey until after Richard's death in 1199. Pope Innocent III, who, had succeeded Pope Celestine in 1198, being moved by the sufferings of the monks, appointed a Commission to arbitrate between Savaric and the convent, and by a concordat of 1202 the, Bishop was given canonical jurisdiction over the Abbey and ten of the manors, one of which was Blackford. In 1218, however, Pope Honorius III issued a Bull dissolving the union of the churches of Bath and Glastonbury and restoring to the Abbey six of the ten manors which had been given to the Bishop in 1202. Blackford was one of the four manors which the Bishop was allowed to retain, and in 1227 this grant was confirmed by King Henry III.

21. THE DEANS' HOUSE AT MUDGLEY.

On the cast side of the hill which descends from the crossroads at Mudgley to the heath is a site which was once occupied by the manor-house of the Deans of Wells. In the course of excavations, which were made on the site in 1878 fragments of pottery and other relies were discovered which, in the opinion of experts, dated from the 12th century

and it is probable that a house was built here by Dean Ivo or his successor, Richard of Spaxton, and that the chapel of Mudgley mentioned in a document of 1176 was attached to the house to provide a place of worship for the Deans' household and the tenants of the manor.

About 1221, Peter of Chichester, then Dean of Wells, obtained by exchange from Alexander of Mudgley "all the land, meadow, alder grove and moor lying within the circuit of the park of Mudgley," and also "all the land he had on the east side of the road from Wedmore to Mudgley," which extended eastward to land already belonging to the Dean, and southward to a road leading to the Dean's Court. The exchange was, no doubt, effected to make the Dean's estate a more convenient one for enclosure.

An important event in the history of Wedmore was the grant of a Charter by King Henry III on 18th May, 1255, giving Giles de Bridport, Dean of Wells, and his successors the right to hold a market at Wedmore on Tuesday of each week, and an annual fair on the vigil, the day, and the morrow of the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, i.e., on July 21st, 22nd and 23rd. As it was usual for village fairs to be held on the festival of the saint to whom the church was dedicated it is probable that the original dedication of Wedmore Church was in accordance with this practice, but, if so, the dedication was changed at a later date as in Wills of the 16th century wherein the church is named it is always referred to as " The Church of Our Lady," or " The Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

22. CHURCHES ON THE ISLE OF WEDMORE.

Although the island of Wedmore was divided into manors after the Saxon Conquest and local administration was thereafter carried on through the manor courts, the ecclesiastical parish embraced the whole of the island, and the places of worship built in the villages in Norman time and later were chapelries of the church at Wedmore. By the end of the 13th century, however, the division of the whole country into parishes, which had begun in the 7th century under Archbishop Theodore, had been virtually completed.

During the 13th century the churches of Allerton, Mark, and Biddisham were rebuilt and all traces of their Norman origin have disappeared, though Allerton and Biddisham retain square 12th century fonts. From a document of 1265 it appears that a new church at Mark had recently been consecrated by Bishop William Bytton, whose saintly life made so great an impression on his contemporaries that his tomb at Wells became a place of pilgrimage after his death in 1274. Of the 13th century church at Mark the south aisle and the porch still remain. Weare

Church, which was appropriated to the Abbey of St. Augustine, Bristol, in 1257, was almost entirely rebuilt in the 15th century, but it retains a square Norman font.

The only evidence of any alteration made to Wedmore Church in the 13th century is the existence of a beautiful Early English south doorway, which is protected by a porch built in the early years of the 16th century. The doorway was not originally in its present position as the church of the 13th century had an aisleless nave. It seems probable that the church was lengthened westward in the early years of the 13th century and that the doorway formed the main entrance to the building at the west end until the 15th century builders removed it to the south side of the church. The wooden door bears the date 1677, but the ironwork on the door is probably contemporary with the stonework.

23. AN ERRANT PRIEST.

As a celibate priesthood was the general rule in the Western Church from the early years of the 12th century, it is not surprising that people in Wedmore were much scandalised in the Spring of 1248 when William de Hoyland, a priest-vicar of Wells Cathedral, was seen on several occasions at Bagley in the company of Isabel Josce, whose father was an acolyte at the Cathedral. Knowledge of these happenings having come to the ears of the Dean he summoned Hoyland to appear before the Chapter "on Wednesday after the Assumption and on the Friday following." On appearing before the tribunal Hoyland confessed his fault and also admitted having assaulted the lady's father, and as the matter had become a public scandal he was ordered to "take his place with the boys on their bench from the said Friday to the Nativity of St. Mary." This curious penance appears to have been duly performed, but when it was reported to the Dean some weeks later that the offence had been repeated, Hoyland was summoned to another meeting of the Chapter "on the Tuesday after St. Lucy" to receive sentence.

Before the appointed day, however, Hoyland resigned his vicarage, and the Chapter in accepting his resignation agreed that he should be permitted to receive his stipend and an allowance in lieu of his " daily commons " and to take his seat in the choir " until the morrow of the Circumcision." These concessions seem to have erred on the side of leniency, but,' the members of the Chapter may have been aware of some extenuating circumstances which are not recorded in the Cathedral archives. In 1274 a list of persons imprisoned at Cambridge is given, charged with causing the death of William de Hoyland. (See Notes and Queries, May 26th, 1951). Possibly this is the same William de Hoyland.

24. AGREEMENTS CONCERNING COMMON RIGHTS.

In June, 1308, John de Godlee, Dean of Wells, entered into an agreement with Bishop Walter de Haselshaw which brought to an end the frequent disputes concerning common rights over the moors attached to the manors of Wedmore and Blackford. The Bishops had claimed for themselves and their tenants at Blackford common rights for their cattle on the Deans' moors in Wedmore, and the Deans had made a similar claim in respect of the Bishops' moor at Blackford, but their bailiffs had made a practice of impounding any cattle found on lands under their supervision which did not belong to their respective employers. By the agreement now made the Bishop surrendered all his and his tenants' rights over the Wedmore lands and the Dean renounced his rights on Blackford moor, except that he reserved the right of pasture for the cattle of six of his tenants dwelling above the moor. As a result of this agreement the Dean enclosed 600 acres of moor between Cocklake and Northload, and in June, 1310, the enclosure was ratified by the Abbot of Glastonbury who, however, retained rights of pasture for his tenants at Panborough, Bleadney and Clewer on those parts of the Dean's moor which remained unenclosed.

A somewhat similar agreement was made, in October 1309, between the Dean and John de Northlode. The Deans of Wells had always had "common of pasture" for their cattle in Northelode's wood at Bagley, and Northelode and his ancestors had enjoyed similar rights over the Deans' wood at Bagley, but as much damage was being done in the woods by trespassers, each party agreed to surrender his rights of pasture in the other's property so that 'the lands might be enclosed with dykes and hedges.

25. DISPUTES CONCERNING PROPERTY.

Disputes between the Deans of Wells and the Abbots of Glastonbury concerning property rights were of frequent occurrence. In 1299 the Abbot complained that certain persons, amongst whom were five Wedmore men, had cut down and carried away his trees at Mere, broken the bridges built there, and beaten his servants, while in 1315 the Dean complained that a number of men had broken down the walls and dykes erected by his predecessors at Mark for the preservation of the course of the water flowing towards the sea and the safety of the lands of the Deanery at Merk, Modesle, Wedmore and Bydesham, "by reason of which breach, and the inflow of water, his corn and herbage in the said lands, meadows and pastures were submerged and lost."

A still more serious quarrel arose in November, 1326, when two servants of Adam, Abbot of Glastonbury, accompanied by two monks, trespassed on land at Yelemore, situated between Mudgley and Meare, which the Dean claimed as his property, and destroyed cottages, cut down trees and seized goods. The Bishop directed the Sub-Dean to publish a monition that this contempt of ecclesiastical rights was mortal sin incurring excommunication, and to summon the Abbot and the four offenders to answer for their conduct. However, the matter was settled in May 1327, by an agreement between the parties wherein their respective rights were clearly defined. The unenclosed portion of Yelemore was to be divided into two parts of equal value, the Dean was to hold the portion nearer the dyke known as the Lichelak and the Abbot the portion near a watercourse called Padenesberthlak. The Abbot was also to have the pool called Ferlyngmere and the sole right to fish therein, but liberty was given to the Dean's tenants to water their cattle there and to cross the pool by boat daily from sunrise to sunset.

26. POSSESSIONS OF THE MANORS.

When Dean Godlee died, in 1333, his executor handed over to the representative of the succeeding Dean, Richard de Bury, the livestock, waggons, ploughs and other goods belonging to the manors of Wedmore, Mudgley and Totney. This is the first record in which Totney is mentioned as a separate manor: the estate was situated to the south of the present road between Blackford and Mark.

The inventory of the goods on the estates, which is dated 1st August 1334, shews that each of the three manors had eight oxen valued at 13s. 4d. each, and that at Chirchland (which was part of the manor of Wedmore) there were two oxen similarly valued and two plough horses worth 10s. each. The manor of Wedmore also possessed a bull (valued at 12s.), a cow (10s.), a boar (3s. 4d.), a waggon, a cart, and a plough with furniture for eight oxen, while at Mudgley there was a waggon, a plough, yokes for eight oxen and a wooden harrow. No particulars are given of goods at Totney but there was probably a "plough with furniture" for the eight oxen belonging to the manor.

When John de Fordham was appointed Dean of Wells in 1379 he complained of the dilapidations left by his predecessor, Stephen Pempel. The Bishop thereupon appointed Commissioners (one of whom was John Adam, "chaplain of the parochial chapel of Mark") to make enquiries and report to him. After visiting the manors of More, Mark, Totney, Wedmore and Mudgley and interviewing sundry persons they assessed the cost of necessary repairs at £232 16s. 1d. Among the items included in this sum were £8 13s. 4d. for repairs to the chancel of Mark

Chapel and the chaplain's house; £20 for a windmill and £46 13s. 4d. for a grange at Totney, both of which had been burnt down; £35 13s. 0d. for repairs to sundry buildings, including two mills at Wedmore; £26 13s. 4d. for repairs to houses and to the "ancient chapel" at Mudgley; and £40 for the enclosure of Mudgley Park. The serious condition into which the properties had fallen was probably due to a shortage of labour in consequence of the ravages of the Black Death and to the reluctance of the surviving peasants to work at the old rates of pay which the Statutes of Labourers vainly endeavoured to enforce.

27. ECCLESIASTICAL COURTS.

In the reign of William I ecclesiastical jurisdiction was separated from the secular business of the Courts, and thereafter all causes connected with spiritual matters were tried by canonical law in the Courts of the Bishop or Archdeacon. Wide powers were exercised by these Courts over the laity as well as the clergy, and offences against the moral law were amongst those upon which thy gave judgment and imposed penalties.

On the 15th September, 1338, John de Middleton, rector of Bleadon, acting as commissary for the bishop, sat in the parish church of Banwell to investigate charges of improper conduct brought against Alice Manschupe of Blackford and Cristina Coker of Cocklake. Both women confessed their guilt and they were ordered to go barefoot twice round Banwell Church: the penances were immediately performed. In July 1342, the same John de Middleton, having enquired into the "crimes and excesses" of certain parishioners of Wedmore, ordered "fustigations" for some of them. The Dean of Wells protested to the Bishop against these sentences as an infringement of his rights as Lord of the Manor, but the Bishop, in a tactfully worded reply, stated that as the crimes were perpetrated in places outside the Dean's jurisdiction the commissary had not exceeded his powers.

On the 11th October, 1351, John de, Rysngdon, the Bishop's commissary, sitting in the church of Wedmore, ordered the Vicar of Wedmore to pay half a mark (6s. 8d.) for the procuration due to the bishop for the “reconciliation of the cemetery at Wedmore." The circumstances which necessitated this "reconciliation" are not recorded but a clue is provided by an entry in Bishop Bubwith's Register relating to a similar case in 1413 which states that a Commission had been issued to John, Bishop of Annaghdown" to reconcile the churchyard of the parish church of Wedmore, defiled by the shedding of blood.” Wedmore has evidently been the scene of some violent behaviour in past days.

28. WEDMORE IN THE 14TH CENTURY.

Some idea of the general appearance of the village of Wedmore in the 14th century may be obtained from the study of old documents, although many details must be left to conjecture. The present parish boundaries, together with those of Blackford and Theale, indicate the extent of the village at that time, but although farmhouses and cottages were scattered over the whole area, the main population was concentrated within the narrow limits bounded by Pilcorn Street, the Manor and the church on the north, by Grant Street and part of Glanville Street on the south, by Guildhall on the west; and by the Borough on the east. The Borough was then a port on the shore of the river Axe into which flowed the waters of the Lurbourne from the high ground of Sand and Blackford. The Lurbourne was at that time a considerable stream which attained a breadth of about thirty yards in the valley lying between Grant Street and Church Street.

Standing on high ground to the north of Church Street, then a narrow lane, was the cruciform church, originally a 13th century building to which aisles and lean-to eastern chapels had been added about 1340. To the west of the church was the manor-house, owned by the Deans of Wells but not occupied by them, as a summer residence was built for the Dean at Mudgley in the 13th century. An inn probably stood on or near the site of the present George Hotel, but the Old Vicarage which stands on the south side of the street was not built until the 15th century.

Near the north end of the Borough was the 14th century market cross, still to be seen in a small enclosure near the southern end of the same street; it has a slender octagonal shaft which supports a beautiful canopied head bearing sculptures on its four sides, the subjects being the Holy Rood, the Madonna and Child, and figures representing a knight and an ecclesiastic, but the ravages of Time have much defaced the sculptures.

In the 14th century many of the houses in the village were situated in the Borough, which included the lower end of Church Street. Adam-atte-Breche, whose Will was proved in 1342, left his "burgage" in the Borough to his daughter Crispina, and amongst his neighbours mentioned in the Will were John-atte-Church, John La Hayter, William Le Clerk, and Richard-atte-Heth, whose surnames were obviously derived from their occupations or from the positions of their dwellings.

29. THE BISHOPS' MANOR-HOUSE AT BLACKFORD.

The Palace at Wells was mainly built by Bishop Jocelin in the first half of the 13th century, and thereafter he and his successors made it their principal residence. But in the early years of the 14th century a house of palatial proportions was erected by Bishop Drokensford which seems to have been a favourite place of residence of himself and his successor, Ralph of Shrewsbury, as many documents were dated from Blackford during their periods of office It is on record that in 1338 the Dean of Wells visited Bishop Ralph at Blackford to remonstrate with him against a summons to attend his Visitation, and by a Commission dated at "Blakeford" in 1356 commissaries were appointed to apportion the tithes of St. Cuthbert's Church, Wells, between the Vicar and the Dean and Chapter.

John Harewell, who was Bishop from 1367 to 1386, with the approval of the Wells Chapter, caused the buildings on the manor at Blackford to be demolished as they had been erected "on a sumptuous scale," were "in no way necessary," and absorbed large sums yearly in repairs. In 1391, when Ralph Erghum was Bishop, the remaining materials of the buildings were sold, and at the same time it was decided that "the buildings within the Bishop's manor of Congresbury, except the barn there, should be demolished as unnecessary and superfluous considering that the bishop has several neighbouring manors fully sufficient for his residence," The higher cost of labour after the Black Death was probably the principal reason for these economies.

From the fact that a Vicar was appointed to Blackford soon after the Bishops' manor-house was demolished, it seems likely that the "free chapel" there had been previously served by a priest from the Bishop's household. Thomas Polton, the first Vicar of whom there is any record, resigned in 1408, but the list of Vicars is almost complete to 1548. There is a tradition that the church of Blackford was destroyed by fire but the date of this misfortune is unknown.

30. SERF-LABOUR AND THE BLACK DEATH.

Under the manorial system the peasants who cultivated the land were in the position of serfs, for they were bound to their lords and were obliged to work on their lords' demesnes, for three or more days a week. In the course of time, however, many of the serfs arranged to pay money in lieu of services so that they might have more time to work on their own land, and with this money the lords were able to employ hired labour.

But the ravages of the Black Death in 1347-1350 caused a serious shortage of labourers and demands for higher wages which meant that the landowners could no longer hire labour at the rate they received for

commuted services. Acts were passed imposing heavy penalties on men who refused to work at the wage-rate current in 1347, but these laws could not be enforced, and the general discontent of the peasantry with their condition led to the insurrection of 1381. Richard II granted the rebels a general pardon and promised them freedom, and although these terms were repudiated by Parliament many landowners leased their lands to tenants, or started sheep-farming which, since it required less labour, was more profitable than corn-growing. In the next century serf-labour was seldom required, and many peasants were granted their freedom on easy terms.

Numerous instances of the manumission of peasants on the manors of the Bishops and Deans of Wells are recorded in the archives of the Cathedral from late in the 14th century until the early years of the 16th century. Among those on the Isle of Wedmore who gained their liberty were Thomas Fowle of Wedmore in 1448, John Vowles of Mudgley in 1509, Thomas Borde and his sons Thomas and Richard, "natives belonging to the manor of Blackford," and all their progeny in 1545, and "John and William Hobbes and Richard Trubbe and his son John," "natives belonging to the manor of Marke, their sons and daughters and all their progeny," in 1545.

31. THE GUILD OF ST. MARY.

An interesting feature of Wedmore Church is the chapel standing west of the south transept which was built for the Guild of St. Mary, established in 1449 when Nicholas Carent was Dean of Wells under a licence granted by King Henry VI. All parishioners of Wedmore were eligible for membership, and members met annually on the Festival of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8th) to elect a Master and two Wardens. The licence gave authority to the members to endow a chantry by acquiring lands, rents or other property to the value of 12 marks per annum as provision for a chaplain to celebrate Mass for the welfare of the King, Queen Margaret and all members of their guild during their lives and for their souls after death "at the altar of St. Anne on the north side of the parish church."

Documentary evidence of the establishment of the Guild is lacking, but there is reason to believe that it came into existence soon after the granting of the licence, and although it is unlikely that any chaplain would have been courageous enough to pray for the welfare of Henry VI after his deposition in 1461, Masses may have been continued for the Guild members, and perhaps for the new king, Edward IV.

In 1548 the Commissioners who had been appointed to enquire into the revenues of the chantries reported that the Chantry of Our Lady

in Wedmore Church derived an income, of £9 per annum from lands and tenements, that the plate consisted of two chalices weighing 12 ounces, and ornaments valued at 6s. 8d., and that the chaplain, William London, had a house and garden in Wedmore for which he paid four shillings a year. As the use of the chapel for its original purpose was no longer permitted, the western entrance was built up and a new entrance made to it from the south side of the church by removing the windows on its north side and cutting away the stonework below them. It was not until the restoration of the church in 1881 that the door and windows in the west wall were discovered and re-opened.

32. ORDINANDS FROM WEDMORE.

Among the names of ordinands in the Register of Bishop Thomas Bekynton are those of several men who were natives of Wedmore. In 1446, Nicholas Dysham was ordained an acolyte, and two years later he was made a sub-deacon and given a title by the Priory and Convent of Taunton. In 1451 Nicholas Dowse was ordained an acolyte and John Menyman a sub-deacon in the chapel of the Bishop's Palace at Wells; and in 1454 Nicholas Dobbee was ordained a sub-deacon and given a title by the Hospital of St. John-the-Baptist, Wells. In addition to the three major orders there were, in pre-Reformation times, four minor orders of which the acolyte was one. It was the duty of the acolyte to care for the sacramental vessels and to attend the priest at Mass.

Of the three men named Nicholas there is no further mention in the Register of Dysham, Dowse and Dobbee, but from this and other sources of information it is possible to trace the subsequent career of John Menyman. In March 1452, he was ordained deacon in the church of St. Cuthbert, Wells, by James, Bishop of Achonry, and was appointed a Vicar-Choral in Wells Cathedral. Six months later he was admitted to the priesthood in the chapel of the Bishop's manor at Banwell.

As a Vicar-Choral, John Menyman was allotted a chamber in the Vicar's Close in 1452, and he continued to live in the Close, though in a different chamber, after his appointment to the rectory of Ashbrittle in 1459. In 1464 he exchanged the living of Ashbrittle for that of West Coker where he stayed until he became Vicar of St. Cuthbert, Wells, in 1488.

During the year 1478-9 he held the office of Communar in the Cathedral Chapter, and subsequently he occupied that position from 1486 to 1491 and in the year 1492-3. After becoming a Canon Resident and Vicar of Winscombe in 1493 he was Keeper of the Cathedral Library in 1494-5 and Auditor from 1494-7. When he died in July 1497, he had

been associated with the work of Wells Cathedral for more than forty-five years.

33. VIOLENCE AT WEDMORE.

A case heard in the Star Chamber in 1493 shows that the parishioners of Wedmore were disposed to re-act violently in defence of what they conceived to be their rights. On behalf of the plaintiff, the Dean of Wells, it was stated that 1500 acres of land on Wedmore Moor, of which he was the owner, had been enclosed with walls as a protection against "ragious floods of water," but on the 2nd June, 1493, Hugh Hardwick, Richard Dwale, Richard Sidnam, William Combe and John Martyn, all of Glastonbury, "accompanied with other evil-disposed and riotous persons of the same town arrayed with bows, bills and other weapons," broke down 15 feet of an ancient wall known as Kumnor-walle, so letting water into the lands, and "stood ready with bows bent and arrows in them to shoot at the tenants" should they attempt to interfere. Later in the day, after the wall had been built up, it was broken down again in the same place and in five other places.

Most of the defendants pleaded "not guilty," and Hardwick and Dwale contended that the Abbots of Glastonbury and their tenants had the right of common pasture on Wedmore Moor, and that they had removed the barriers and stakes on the wall which had only recently been erected to prevent the passage of beasts that way by order of the Steward of the monastery. They made complaint that the Dean's tenants and servants, about sixty in number, having armed themselves, called the parishioners of Wedmore together by ringing the Church bells, and then proclaimed that if the Abbot's tenants broke down the banks again "they should be beaten and slain and fried in their own grease in their own houses." This alarming threat was not carried out in its entirety, but William Tytenhull, Constable of Northload, and Agnes More "then beyng with child" were severely beaten.

Unfortunately the decision in this case is not recorded, but as the carrying of arms with the intention of disturbing the public peace was forbidden by law, the combatants on both sides had made themselves liable to heavy penalties.

34. ALTERATIONS TO WEDMORE CHURCH.

During the latter half of the 15th, century and in the early years of the 16th century, Wedmore Church was considerably altered and to a large extent rebuilt. The chancel was lengthened eastward and its chapels heightened; the tower was rebuilt from above the arches; the nave was lengthened, heightened, and widened by the addition of aisles; the transepts were partly rebuilt, the "old Chapel" enlarged, and the south porch constructed. When the builders had finished the work the only remains of the earlier church were the 13th century pillars and arches supporting the tower; a doorway of the same period which was re-set in the south wall of the nave; and a window of the 14th century which was removed from the old clerestory of the chancel to the east end of the south chapel. These features still remain, and the ground-plan of the church has not been altered since the 15th or 16th century reconstruction.

It will be noticed that the piers and mouldings of the north arcade, and the character and design of the roof in the north aisle, are inferior in workmanship to those on the south side, and that the windows in the north wall are of Tudor type. It seems likely that the south aisle was built before the start of the Wars of the Roses in 1455, and that there was then a pause in the rebuilding until 1485, when Henry VII became king after his victory at Bosworth Field; for although Wedmore was remote from the scenes of the most desperate fighting most of the able-bodied men of the parish would have been called upon to serve in one or other of the armies.

35. DEAN COSYN AND OTHER BENEFACTORS.

In 1501 William Cosyn, Dean of Wells, granted to John Chelcote and John Clerke, churchwardens of Wedmore, some vacant land measuring 44 feet by 24 feet "lying to the south of the steps of the western churchyard" as a site for a Church House, to be built at the cost of the parishioners, on payment to the Dean and his successors of two pence a year "if demanded." The building was completed before 1508, for in a document of that year it is stated that part of it had been built on a tower. When, and for what purpose this tower was erected must be left to conjecture; perhaps it was a look-out tower built in Saxon times or earlier so that a watch might be kept for enemy vessels sailing up the broad waters of the Axe. The Church House must have proved a great convenience to the parish for it was of two storeys and would have

provided accommodation for Church meetings and convenient storage for parochial records, vestments, and other Church property.

Another benefaction of Dean Cosyn was the grant in 1509, of the lease of lands in Wedmore and Mudgley to the Vicar (Thomas Cornish, Bishop of Tenos), churchwardens and fourteen parishioners of Wedmore on condition that they provided a chaplain "having a good voice" to celebrate Low Mass at St. Anne's altar on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays "for the good estate of the Dean and his successors while in the flesh and for their souls when they have departed from this light," and for the souls of Bishop Oliver, Deans Forest and Carent, and of all parishioners of Wedmore. Annual rents amounting to £3 1s. 10 1/2d. were to be paid to the Dean for the lands, and if the rent should be in arrear for a month, or Mass not said, the lessees or their assigns might be expelled. The altar of St. Anne was in the north chapel to which it had been moved from its former position in the north transept.

Wills of the 15th and early sixteenth centuries provide some interesting information concerning benefactors of the church and parish of Wedmore. In 1425 Nicholas Kemp, chaplain of Mark, bequeathed 20s. each to the churches of Wedmore and Mark, 6s. 8d. to the causeway between Mark and Blackford, and 3s. 4d. towards making a highway in the borough of Wedmore; John Gunthorpe, Dean of Wells, who died in 1498, left £30 to Wedmore Church to provide ornaments for the high altar; John Retford, Vicar of Wedmore, from 1492 to 1503, left £20 for a priest to sing Mass in Wedmore Church for himself, his father and mother, and John Tolle for a period of three years, and also 40s. "for the making of a new bell"; and Bishop Thomas Cornish, Vicar, gave 20s. to the Church. More unusual were the bequests of John Babcary who, in 1514, left two cows to the church, and of Thomas Wichefilde of Allerton who, dying in 1556, gave directions for his body to be buried in the churchyard of "Our Blessed Ladie of Wedmore" and bequeathed half a bushel of wheat to the church.

36. THE SUPPRESSION OF THE MONASTERIES.

Great changes of an ecclesiastical character took place in England during the later years of Henry VIII's reign, the immediate cause being the refusal of Pope Clement VII to consent to the King's divorce of Queen Catherine. It is not easy to believe that the king had any genuine doubts regarding the legality of a marriage which had taken place 20 years earlier, but not to be thwarted in his passion for Anne Boleyn he defied the Pope by marrying her secretly in 1533 and repudiating the judicial jurisdiction of the Papacy in England by a Statute of Appeals. In the following year an Act of Supremacy was passed by Parliament

making the king "Supreme Head on earth of the Church of England" so that authority in all ecclesiastical matters, as well as in civil business was vested in the Crown.

Armed with these powers, Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar-General, carried out the suppression of the lesser monasteries in 1536 and in 1539 the greater abbeys and friaries were treated similarly, their properties being confiscated to the Crown and granted to those who carried out the king's commands. To those who opposed his will Henry shewed no mercy, and among many who suffered death at this time was the saintly Abbot Whiting of Glastonbury who, after a mock trial in the Banqueting Hall of the Palace of Wells, was martyred on Tor Hill. The magnificent Abbey Church was then given over to pillage and destruction.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Henry was influenced in his actions by any sympathy with the principles of the Reformation, for in 1521 he had earned from Rome the title of "Fidei Defensor" for his treaties against Luther, and in 1539, under the Statute of the Six Articles, all persons were required, under the most severe penalties for disobedience, to give their assent to Transubstantiation, Communion in one kind, the celibacy of the clergy, monastic vows, private masses and auricular confession. It was in the reign of Edward VI that doctrinal reformation began.

37. THOMAS CROMWELL AND THE DUKE OF SOMERSET.

In 1537 Thomas Cromwell, on the King's nomination, was appointed Dean of Wells. By virtue of his office Cromwell became Lord of the Manors of Wedmore and Mudgley, and in December, 1539, he appointed William Butler to be bailiff of the Bempston Hundred, wayward of the Hundred and keeper of Wedmore Park, at wages which amounted in all to £2 a year. The park at Wedmore, which was then of considerable extent, contained deer, and in 1545 William Fitz-William, who had succeeded to the Deanery after Cromwell's execution in 1540, gave permission to Thomas Clerke "to have every year a buck in summer and a doe in winter from the park at Wedmore."

Soon after the accession of Edward VI in 1547, Dean Fitz-William was compelled to resign his office and to surrender the manors belonging thereto into the hands of the king, the estates and the Dean's residence were then granted to Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, and when a new Dean was appointed he had to be content to live in one of the houses usually occupied by the Canons.

The rapacious Somerset then cast envious eyes on the manor of Blackford, and in 1548 Bishop Barlow surrendered it to him for a cash

payment. Two years later, deeming it unfitting .hat he should live in the Deanery while the Bishop occupied the Palace, Somerset proposed that they should exchange residences and also certain manors. By this exchange the Bishop became the owner of the park of Wedmore and also the church of Mark "with the glebelands, tithes and emoluments thereof." The Duke did not long enjoy the estates he had acquired by his ruthless bargaining as he was executed in 1552 and all his property reverted to the Crown. Bishop Barlow endeavoured to leave the country on the accession of Queen Mary in 1553, but he was soon captured and imprisoned, and Gilbert Bourne, who succeeded as Bishop, was granted possession of the Palace.

38. SUPPRESSION OF THE CHANTRIES.

Early in the reign of Edward VI the Council of Regency, dominated by the Protector Somerset, decided to suppress the chantries and give their revenues to the king. Commissioners were, therefore, appointed to make a survey of the endowments and property of existing chantries and it appears from their report of 1548 that at Wedmore, in addition to "The Chauntrie of oure Lady" (founded by Dean Carent in 1449) and "The Service of Saincte Anne within the paryshe churche" (founded by Dean Cosyn in 1509) there was one of more recent foundation, a certain Walter Stone having bequeathed a sum of money for the maintenance of a priest to celebrate Mass "within the paryshe churche for a term of seven years begynnynge at the feast of Saincte John Baptist" in the first year of King Edward VI. Robert Moryce was appointed to perform the duty at a remuneration of £5 a year, but he had only received £4 10s. up to Lady Day, 1548, when the order for the suppression of the chantries became effective; he was, however, granted a pension of £4 a year. The only sacred vessels belonging to this chantry were two chalices weighing twelve ounces; these were, no doubt, added to the plunder of similar articles from other churches.

One other chantry at Wedmore is mentioned by the Commissioners in their Report which is described as "One masse callyd Jesus masse foundyd within the sayde paryshe churche." It was endowed by a charge of eleven shillings a year on a piece of land called "Chaterly," then in the tenure, of Thomas Broke, of which sum twelve pence was given each year to a poor woman within the parish. There is no mention of the day of the year on which this Mass was said, but in the Anglican calendar "Name of Jesus" appears as a minor holy-day on August 7th, while in the Roman Church it is observed on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany.

39. SALE OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL MANORS.

The arrangement for an exchange of properties made in 1550 between the Duke of Somerset and the Bishop of Bath and Wells appears to have been voided by the Duke's attainder in the following year, for the park of Wedmore was sold by Edward VI to Henry Bacher and the Rectory of Mark was in royal ownership in 1585 when Queen Elizabeth granted it "with the tithes and other rights belonging thereto" to Nicholas Claxton of Rodney Stoke. The manors of Wedmore and Mudgley, which the Dean had been forced to surrender in 1547, and the manor of Blackford, which Bishop Barlow had sold to the Duke of Somerset in 1548, became to property of the Crown on the Duke's attainder.

The manor of Wedmore (except the park) passed to Queen Mary after her brother's death in 1553 and she sold it to her Vice-Chamberlain, Sir Henry Jernegan, for £585 17s. 11d. At the accession of Queen Elizabeth in 1558, however, Sir Thomas Gresham, the famous London merchant, obtained the property either by grant or purchase: it then consisted of 150 messuages, 50 tofts, 10 mills, 100 dovecots, 200 gardens, 2,000 acres of pasture, 200 acres of woodland, and 1,000 acres of gorse. In 1577 Gresham sold the manor-house, with some cottages and about 170 acres of land, to Thomas Hodges, and before his death in December 1579, he, disposed of other portions of the manorial estates in small lots.

The manor of Mudgley was bought by Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, in 1553, but he sold it two years later, and the property changed hands frequently until 1609, when Richard Bridges sold the estate, consisting of 386 acres, with twelve tenements and four cottages, in five portions, to Nicholas Wykes of Wells, John Litheat of Mudgley, William Boulting of Wedmore, John Fry of Mudgley, and Richard Counsell of Mudgley.

40. RELIEF OF THE POOR.

An alarming increase in poverty and vagrancy followed the Dissolution of the monasteries for the poor were no longer able to obtain relief at the monastery gates, and their numbers were recruited by many who had formerly been employed on the Abbey estates. It has been estimated that 80,000 peasants were reduced to beggary as a result of the Dissolution.

By an Act of 1601 every parish was made responsible for the maintenance of its own poor, and as, all persons who had been settled in a place for a month had the status of parishioners, the Overseers were vigilant in excluding any who were likely to need relief. Consequently

when William Smyth of Wedmore married the widow of Ralphe Holle of Ditcheat, in 1621, and took up his residence at that place the Overseers applied to Quarter Sessions to order his removal, alleging "that he was a very disorderly fellow" likely to become chargeable to the parish of Ditcheat if he remained there. The magistrates thereupon ordered that Smyth and his wife should be removed to Wedmore "unless that parish gave Security to the Overseers of Ditcheat to discharge them of any further liability for them."

Another clause of the Act of 1601 gave power to the Churchwardens and Overseers, with the assent of the two Justices of the Peace, to bind as apprentices children who were orphans, or whose parents were too poor to pay apprenticeship fees. In 1631 John Popham was apprenticed in this way to John Moreton of Wedmore for the term of eight years "to learn the trade: of a woollen weaver," but a year later the indentures were cancelled by order of the Quarter Sessions as Popham "had behaved himself very lewdly and dissolutely in absenting himself from his master's service, and stealing of hens and other goods from his master's neighbours." In 1634 Moreton was ordered to repay to the Wedmore Overseers the fee of £4 he had received from them with Popham, who had become incapacitated for work and was costing the parish of Wedmore fourteen pence a week for maintenance.

41. PUNISHMENTS AND CUSTOMS OF THE 17TH CENTURY.

Offenders against the moral law were much more severely dealt with in the 17th century, than in pre-Reformation days. Under ecclesiastical law such persons had been required to make public confession of their faults and, to perform some simple penance, but in the reign of James I, when penalties were imposed by the magistrates, persons found guilty were frequently ordered to be whipped through the nearest market town on a market day, or to some other severe punishment. It does not appear that this brutal treatment, which was inflicted on two Wedmore women in the years 1608 and 1615 respectively, was in any way effective as a deterrent, although it was imposed "as an example to others to avoid the like offence."

An interesting side-light on the customs of the times is provided by an application to the County Justices in 1609 by the Constables and other residents of Taunton for a licence to enable Durstoun Priddian of Wedmore to sell butter in their town. It was stated that Priddian and his wife made journeys to Taunton twice a week "with one or two horse-ladings of butter," but the men of Bridgwater would not allow them to pass through their town without a licence. In 1612 Richard

Counsell of Wedmore was granted a licence to buy butter and cheese within the county of Somerset and to sell the same in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset.

Stringent measure were adopted in Stuart times in regard to the regulation and licensing of ale-houses, and those which were considered superfluous were suppressed. In 1616 the Jury of the Hundred of Bempstone, having been informed that there were six "tipplers" in Wedmore, were of opinion that one or two were sufficient for the village, and the Justices were asked to decide which of the men were most fit to be licensed. The word "tippler" was then applied to a vendor of intoxicating liquors, not, as in later times, to the too-exuberant consumer.

42. THE CIVIL WAR.

During the early years of the Civil War the Royalist cause in Somerset was maintained by the Marquis of Hertford and other prominent gentlemen in the County, while most of the yeomen and manufacturers supported the Parliament. The first shots of the war were exchanged at Street in August, 1642, but serious fighting did not begin in Somerset until the King's Cornish army, after their victory at Stratton in May, 1643, over-ran Devon, and marched to Chard, where they were joined by forces under the Marquis of Hertford and Prince Maurice. The united armies marched into Somerset, quickly captured Taunton, Bridgwater and Dunster, and after skirmishes at Chewton Mendip and Claverton defeated Waller's main army at Lansdown, near Bath, on July 5th. In 1644, however, the Royalists were driven out of Taunton, and on July 10th, 1645, after being defeated at Langport, they were expelled from Bridgwater. Dunster, their last stronghold, surrendered on April 19th, 1646, after a siege of 160 days.

Wedmore seems to have passed through these years of war without serious disturbance although Wells, only eight miles distant, was occupied by each party in turn. A note on the flyleaf of a book in the Cathedral Library records that on May 10th, 1643, Colonel Popham's soldiers "rusht into the church, brok down the windows, organs, font, seats in the quire, and the Bishop's seat, besides many other villanies": the palace was also plundered. But at Wedmore, although the use of the Prayer Book was prohibited in 1645, the Reverend Matthew Law, who had been Vicar since 1627, continued in office until 1647, when a Presbyterian, Robert Edwards, was intruded into the living.

43. THE COMMONWEALTH MINISTERS.

The ministry of Robert Edwards in Wedmore came to an end in 1650 when Francis James, an Independent, was given the living. James, who seems to have been a person of quarrelsome nature, was summoned to appear at the Wells Quarter Sessions on April 19th, 1653, to answer a claim by Sarah Castle for arrears of wages due to her on leaving his service, and for the surrender of certain articles of her clothing which he had detained. He was ordered by the magistrates to pay 21 shillings for wages due and to hand over to Sarah "one green gowne, two redd petticoates, a blew petticoate, a red whittle, a black capp, a smock, a halfe smock, two pairs of gloves (one leather and one yarne), a pair of blew stockings, and two lynnen capps-one holland and one dowlas." The publicity given to this matter may have led to the minister's resignation for in 1654 Jeremy Horler was appointed to succeed him.

On the 7th May 1655, Jeremy Horler married Ann, widow of George Hodges, who had died only two months earlier. This marriage, which seems to indicate that the Hodges family were on the Parliamentary side in the Civil War, was of considerable social advantage to Mr. Horler as he thereby gained a residence at the manor-house where he continued to live until his wife's death in 1684, although he gave up his ministerial duties sometime before the Restoration of 1660. Perhaps it was through his wife's influence that the "Trustees for maintenance of Ministers" on December 25th, 1655, approved an augmentation of £30 to the income of the minister of Wedmore which, in 1650, was only £50 a year.

A petition was presented to Cromwell in March 1655, by twenty-three residents of Wedmore, asking to be allowed the use of a room in the Church House for religious services as they had no place where they could conveniently meet. As the services in the Parish Church were then being conducted in accordance with the "Directory" authorised by Parliament in 1645, there would not seem to have been any need for such separate services, but the Council, to whom Cromwell referred the matter considered that "all fit accommodation should be given to persons that truly fear God and manifest the same by a humble and peaceable conversation," and granted the petitioners the use of the room when it was not required by the civil authorities.

44. THE WESTOVER FAMILY.

At the Quarter Sessions held at Wells on 15th December, 1658, John Westover of Wedmore reported that as he was returning home from Brent Fair on Michaelmas Day he was attacked "in a dark place of the way" by a number of men, whose names he gave, one of whom "tore half his cloak off his back and struck him so that he fell off his horse."

There seems to have been some difficulty in identifying the assailants, and it is not recorded that any of them were convicted.

This John Westover, who was a member of a family long established in Wedmore, was buried in the south aisle of Wedmore Church in 1679 under a tombstone with an inscription including twelve lines of verse of which the initial letters spell the deceased names. Unfortunately when the church was restored in 1881 the tombstone was moved into the south chapel and the font was placed on it so that much of the inscription is now hidden. The last four lines of the verses read: -

"Of death let this a warning be
Unto such as pass by,
Expect a sudden change to see,
Repent, for doctors dye."

Westover's wife, Joan, and his son John, who, like his father, was a "chyrugeon," are also commemorated on the tombstone. Both father and son lived at Porch House, a 17th century building to which a wing was added in the 19th century, but the younger John, in addition to his ordinary medical work, took resident mental patients and for their accommodation built the stone outhouse of three storeys, which still stands. From 1685 to 1700 Dr. Westover kept a journal in which he entered the names and ailments of his patients and the fees he charged them. The two large stone figures of the 15th century, now used as gateposts in the courtyard of Porch House, were brought there from a religious house at East Brent which was demolished in 1708.

45. CERTIFICATES OF SETTLEMENT.

When the Act of 1601 provided that every parish should be responsible for the maintenance of its own poor, it had not been foreseen that as the trade of the country increased there would be a flow of labour to areas where work was most abundant. When this happened the Overseers in such areas viewed with some alarm the influx of persons who, having no resources beyond their capacity to work, might require relief if trade fluctuations reduced the demand for labour. Consequently, in 1662, an Act was passed empowering the Overseers, with the consent of two justices, to remove any persons who came to live in a tenement of less than £10 annual value to the parishes where they had a legal settlement if there seemed a probability that they might need poor relief.

In 1672 the justices had, under the last-named Act, ordered the removal of Moses Pether from Wedmore to East Brent, but the Court of Quarter Sessions decided that he should be allowed to remain at

Wedmore "unless the parishioners thereof shewed good cause to the contrary"; and in July, 1674, an order by the justices for the removal of Elizabeth Porch from Wedmore to Meare was rescinded by the Court of Sessions. These cases shew that Overseers and local justices were sometimes over-zealous in their endeavour to keep the Poor Rate at a low figure.

There was a clause in the Act of 1662 which permitted a person to go into any parish to work provided he, carried with him a certificate from the Minister and a Churchwarden or Overseer of his own parish acknowledging that he was "a declared inhabitant" of that place, and gradually it became the practice for parish officers to give such certificates to families wishing to move elsewhere so that the Overseers of the parishes in which they worked might have security against their becoming a charge on them. In April, 1678, John Starr was allowed to live with his grandfather at Wedmore on the undertaking of the parish officers of Compton Bishop to receive him again should he require poor relief, and in April, 1696, William Carpenter of the parish of St. Cuthbert, Wells, who wished to work as a blacksmith at Wedmore, was allowed to live in that village under a similar guarantee. In 1697 legal sanction was given to this practice, in Parliament and uniform method of procedure was adopted for the granting of "Certificates of Settlement."

46. PARISH APPRENTICES.

The clause in the Poor Relief Act of 1601 which enabled Churchwardens and Overseers to bind poor children as apprentices was taken full advantage of by the parish officers who found this a convenient way of providing for the children and at the same time supplying farmers and others with a constant supply of cheap labour, for the only obligation on those who took the children was to provide them with "sufficient meat, drink, apparel, lodging and washing, and all other things necessary and fit for an apprentice." Boys were bound until the age of 21 or 24, and girls until 21 or marriage, and as there was no minimum age limit for apprenticeship until 1816, children were often apprenticed at seven years of age, or even younger. Any parishioner of standing might be required to take a child and had to pay a fine of £5 if he refused to do so. Agreements were sometimes made, with masters in other parishes, but the Overseers in those parishes were naturally reluctant to accept the children as a residence of 40 days gave them a legal settlement.

In the parish chest at Wedmore are a large number of apprenticeship agreements. Most of them are on printed forms, but the two earliest in date appear to be copies of informal agreements made in 1679. One of

these reads "Joane King, daughter of Robert King, late of Sand, carpenter, deceased, of her own free and voluntary will and by the consent of the Churchwardens and Overseers of Wedmore, apprentices herself to John Latcham of Stoughton, husbandman, until she is 21": the other document records that "John Pi, son of George Pi, was apprenticed by the parish officers to John Gill of Wedmore, blacksmith, until he is 24 by the consent of two justices, to learn the trade of a blacksmith." These children probably made the usual promise to serve their masters "in all lawful business according to their power, wit and ability, and honestly, orderly and obediently in all things demean and behave themselves towards their said masters and all his" during the terms of their apprenticeships.

47. THE MONMOUTH REBELLION.

During the reign of Charles II his illegitimate son, James, Duke of Monmouth, gained considerable popularity in England amongst those with Protestant sympathies for they saw in him a possible successor to the throne instead of the lawful heir James, Duke of York, who was an avowed Roman Catholic. Consequently, when Monmouth landed at Lyme on June 11th, 1685, a few months after the death of Charles, he found sufficient support to enable him to march quickly to Taunton and thence to Bridgwater, where many Somerset men joined his army, and during his subsequent march through central Somerset he obtained more recruits in the towns and villages through which he passed. There can be little doubt that men from Wedmore were amongst those who assembled at Bridgwater and, marched out from that place on July 5th to meet their deaths on the field of Sedgmoor or, a little later, at the hands of the, hangman.

The list of men executed after trial by Judge Jeffreys, though it records the names of six hung at Wells and six at Axbridge, does not mention any men of Wedmore. This fact may seem to contradict the tradition that Jeffreys held Court at the market-house in the Borough and that by his orders a man was hanged on the market cross. There is no doubt, however, that many of the "rebels" were summarily executed without trial, and the story handed down in the Leigh family that two men were hanged on the same bough of an elm tree in Comb Batch must not be dismissed as merely an idle tale.

Unfortunately, Wells Cathedral, where the damage caused during the Civil War had been made good in 1664, again suffered at the hands of Monmonth's men, for it is recorded in a minute of the Cathedral Chapter held on July 1st, 1685, that "the rebel fanatics early this morning profaned the whole furniture of the Cathedral, almost ruined the

organ, and transformed the sacred edifice into stalls for their horses." They are also said to have taken lead from the roof to make bullets, and wantonly to have defaced some of the statues on the west front of the building.

Where Monmouth failed in 1685, William of Orange succeeded in 1688, for in the interval of three years the arbitrary acts of King James had made him so generally unpopular that when William landed in Torbay on November 5th, 1688, he was welcomed as a deliverer and the King, finding that he had not the support of the army or of those he had supposed to be his friends, left the country. An Act was then passed by which William and his wife Mary, a daughter of James II, became King and Queen for their joint and separate lives.

48. THE HODGES FAMILY.

Late in the 17th century the manor of Wedmore passed into new ownership after having been in the possession of the Hodges family for over a hundred years. George Hodges, who died in March 1655, had no male issue, but his widow, Ann, who shortly afterwards married Jeremy Horler, continued to occupy the manor-house until her death in 1684. The estate then passed to Jane, the younger of her two daughters by her first husband, who had become the wife of John Strachey of Sutton Court, near Bristol, in 1662, and before 1700 she had sold it to Sir Thomas Bridges of Keynsham. The name of Strachey, however, appears in the Rate books of Wedmore until 1783 and this fact points to the probability that members of that family continued to occupy the manor-house as tenants long after the Bridges became the owners.

In the north chapel of Wedmore Church is part of a monument to the Hodges family which incorporates brasses to Captain Thomas Hodges, who was killed at the siege of Antwerp in 1583, and his son George, who died in 1634: they were the son and grandson of the Thomas Hodges who bought the manor of Wedmore in 1577. The body of Captain Hodges was buried in Flanders, but his heart was sent to England for burial: the inscription on his brass concludes with the verse:-

Here lyes his wounded heart for whome
One kingdom was too small a room;
Two kingdoms therefore have thought good to part
So stout a body and so brave a heart.

On the north side of the choir is a mural monument curiously designed with an inscription which reads: - "Near to this place rest ye

bodies of George Hodges, Esq., and Ann, his wife, since the wife of Jeremy Horler, Clerk." There are no dates on the monument, but the burial registers shew that the husband died in 1655 and the wife in 1684.

49. APPLICANTS FOR POOR RELIEF.

The Overseers of the Poor, two of whom were appointed each year for Wedmore, must often have found their duties of office a great hindrance to their ordinary occupations, but although the office was an unpaid one they could not refuse to serve in their turn without incurring legal penalties. As each parish was financially responsible for its poor the Overseers were much pre-occupied in endeavouring to keep the rates at as low a level as possible, and any generous instincts they may have had were held under strict control.

Before poor people were granted relief careful enquiries were made as to their legal status as parishioners, doubtful cases being referred to the local justices before whom the persons concerned were examined. Records of many of these examinations from 1728 onwards, which are preserved with the parish documents, shew that it was often difficult to determine the place of the last legal settlement, for settlements could be acquired in a variety of ways-by birth and parentage, by marriage, by hired service for twelve months, by apprenticeship, by renting a tenement above the yearly value of £10, by ownership of property, by payment of public taxes, or by serving a public office.

Examples of problem cases referred to the justices are those of John Williams in 1740 and John Barnard in 1741. Williams was born at Wedmore and remained there until he was 19 or 20 when he went to Mark and lived there with his uncle, William Counsell, for 1 1/2 years, but under no covenant though he received clothes and money from him. He then worked for William Bowl of Blackford; and afterwards at a wage of 3s. a week for James Holbrook of Rodney Stoke, but on his marriage he returned to Wedmore and was living there in a cottage which be bought for £18. John Barnard, whose birthplace was Somerton, had worked for a year under covenant for Richard Dowling of Coxley for a wage of £6 15s., but had subsequently rented a house at Compton Dundon for £14 10s. a year, and was then living with his father-in-law, Joseph Cutler, at Wedmore. The decision of the justices in these cases is not recorded. If the parish officers were dissatisfied with the magistrates' decision in any case they could appeal to the Quarter Sessions against the "Order for Removal": this was done quite frequently, and often with success.

50. POOR-HOUSES.

A meeting of the Vestry was held on September 24th, 1734, to consider the erection of a workhouse. It was decided that "the two houses applied to the use of the poor should be repaired for the purpose and henceforward should be deemed Workhouses, and that only persons admitted thereto should be relieved by the Overseers." At another meeting held a fortnight later the parish officers were directed to observe the provision of an Act of 1693 that "the names of those to receive relief should be entered in a book to he produced at each Easter Vestry, and none but they were to receive relief except by order of a Justice of the Peace," and also of a clause in an Act of 1697 requiring all persons in receipt of relief "to wear a large Roman 'P' with the first letter of the name of the parish in red or blue cloth upon the right shoulder of their upper garment." At the same meeting the Vestry ordered "that the Churchwardens and Overseers should seize the goods of all persons receiving relief to the end that the same be brought into the Workhouse."

The obvious purpose of these resolutions was to discourage applications for relief so that the rates might be reduced, for only people in the most desperate circumstances would consent to terms which involved the sacrifice of their personal liberty and subjected them to the indignity of being branded as paupers. To what extent these orders were enforced the parish records do not reveal, but as the question of providing a workhouse was raised, and similar resolutions passed, at frequent intervals between 1748 and 1785, it is evident that no effective action was taken in this matter during the 18th century. Although the appointment of a "prudential person" as Workhouse Master was approved by a Vestry held on August 4th, 1786, there is no evidence that such an appointment was ever made. This was probably due to the smallness of the salary offered failing to attract applicants.

The "two houses" which were the subject of so many resolutions were originally the Church House and the Chantry House, but since the end of the 17th century they had been used as dwellings for the poor. Both buildings stood in the churchyard - the Church House at the south-west corner facing Church Street and the Chantry House at the west end facing down Pilcorn Street.

51. PARISH HOUSES.

Notwithstanding the Vestry's many resolutions, it is not likely that outdoor poor relief was entirely discontinued, nor can it be supposed that the two houses in the churchyard could accommodate all the parish poor. It is possible that the Parish Officers had, from time to time, built cottages on the waste, as they had been empowered to do by the Poor

Law of 1601, and that they had also taken possession of cottages on the decease of owners who had been in receipt of parish relief in order to recover for the parish part of the sums spent on their maintenance. In these houses paupers were often given free accommodation.

In 1698 the Parish Officers bought a house from John Baker of Oldwood for £30, perhaps for the use of the poor. The house had, in 1693, been granted by the feoffees of Bishops Still's Almshouses to William Baker, and his wife Jane, and his son John for their lives, but as William Baker died in July, 1696, and his wife in the January following, their son John had power to assign the property.

At a meeting of the Vestry on April 4th, 1784, the Overseers were authorised to purchase "all the, cottage houses and gardens now standing on any of the waste ground or belonging to any person or persons within the parish who shall or may be in want of relief from the said officers." Accordingly on September 29th, 1784, the Overseers bought a cottage at Theale from William Daunton, and one at Panborough from Thomas Lewis, paying £5 for each, and the men were allowed to remain in the cottages under tenancy agreements, Daunton being given a lease for 21 years and Lewis a lease for 7 years at a rental of 20s. a year each, payable quarterly. In 1786 agreements on similar terms were made with Thomas Williams of Clewer, William Beach of Panborough Moor, and Jane Hoare of Blackford.

52. BASTARDS AND BEGGARS.

Among the multifarious duties of the Overseers during the 18th century one of the most troublesome was that of arranging for the maintenance of illegitimate children. If an unmarried woman asked for relief, either before or after the birth of her child, she was examined on oath before a magistrate concerning the father. On obtaining his name a warrant was immediately issued for the man's arrest and when this was affected he had either to pay the amount stated on the affiliation order or go to gaol. In a case heard in 1773 the father was ordered to pay 1s. 6d. a week while the child was chargeable to the parish, and the mother was required to pay 6d. a week unless she should "nurse and sustain it." The amount demanded from fathers varied from 1s. to 2s. a week, and they had also to pay the lying-in expenses which might be as little as 6s., but were usually between £1 and £2.

A good deal of trouble was caused by people whose legal place of settlement was Wedmore but who wandered about the country in search of work and, not finding it, took to begging. Between 1772 and 1791 ten or twelve such people were arrested as "rogues and vagabonds" and conveyed to Wedmore from places as remote as Halberton, Isleworth,

Bray, Cookham, Kidderminster, and Kirkby Lonsdale. Under an Act of 1744 any justices before whom vagrants were brought might order them to be publicly whipped, or send them to the House of Correction until the next Sessions, at which they might be sentenced to a further period of confinement before being conveyed to the places where they had legal settlements.

Husbands who deserted their wives and families might have their property, seized on a magistrate's order or, if apprehended, were required to give security not to repeat the offence on pain of imprisonment. Among the parish papers is a document of 1779 wherein John Sheppard acknowledges himself to be bound to the Parish Officers of Wedmore in the sum of £20 "in case I ever shall run away from my wife and family and thereby leave them chargeable to the said parish, and I further agree to pay the said parish all the expenses I have put them to by running away in time past."

53. MEDICAL ATTENDANCE ON PAUPERS.

Medical attendance on poor people who were ill was paid for by the Overseers, but professional advice was sought only in serious cases, minor ailments being treated by some local man or woman who claimed to be skilled in healing. If the patient was confined to bed and no relative was available, a woman was engaged for the necessary duties at a wage which was sometimes as low as a shilling a week. Much time and trouble was caused to the Overseers in making these arrangements for individual cases, and the expense to the ratepayers was considerable and incalculable. The Parish Officers therefore decided to adopt the plan of making a contract with a local doctor to attend all the parish poor at a fixed rate per annum, and in 1764 the Vestry agreed to pay Mr. Richard Glanvile the sum of eight guineas from Easter to Easter "for the surgery work of the poor as is not able to pay themselves."

In 1766 the annual payment to Mr. Glanvile was raised to ten guineas, and in 1777 to fourteen guineas, but in 1786 he had apparently given up this work as in April of that year a parish meeting was held "to elect a surgeon or apothecary to have the care of the poor." Mr. John Sprake then undertook the duties, but instead of receiving a fixed sum per annum he was "instructed to produce his bill every month," and this arrangement continued until the end of the 18th century. Mr. Glanville was, however, asked by the Overseers to report on the state of Thomas Williams' wife in 1787, and in 1789 he inoculated the children in the Poor House against small-pox at a fee of one guinea. The fee for other children was three shillings each.

The cost of paupers' funerals was usually paid by the parish. The arrangements were carried out as economically as possible, the principal expense being the coffin, which was made by the local carpenter at a cost of 15s. or 16s. for adults and 8s. for children. A small payment was made to the women who lifted the corpse into the "chest," the sexton was paid 2s. 6d. for digging the grave and ringing the bell, and occasionally calico was bought for a shroud and the mourners were given bread and cheese.

54. THE VILLAGE SCHOOL.

Evidence that there was a school in Wedmore as early as 1707 is provided by an entry in the Churchwardens' Accounts for that year which reads: "For mending the Schoole-house windows, 1s. 6d." The State did not concern itself with education in the 18th century, and the poorer classes in towns and villages where there was no endowed school had no opportunity of learning to read or write, unless the parents were prepared to pay a few pence weekly for such tuition at a Dame's school or in a Charity School built and maintained by their more prosperous neighbours. It was in the reign of Queen Anne that some enlightened people began the movement to provide schools for the education of poor children in reading, writing, moral discipline, and the principles of the Church of England, and amongst the, earliest of such schools was that at Wedmore.

No further reference to a school appears in the parish documents until 1732 when, at a meeting of the Vestry, it was agreed to pay a schoolmaster £4 a year "to teach such poor people's children as the parish shall think proper." The master's name is not recorded, but in 1751 Joseph Chapman was appointed to keep the school at a salary of £5 a year, and in 1757 he was succeeded by John Rickard, who, at the same time, was appointed "to take care of the Parish Books," which had formerly been kept by the Parish Clerk, William Sweet. Sometime before 1783 Rickard gave place to William Nicholls, who was paid a year's salary (the sum not stated) "for teaching ten boys "on Lady Day, 1784, and £5 5s. for a year's salary on Lady Day, 1785. In 1796 the vestry appointed William Rickard, "son of the late John Rickard," to keep the school.

The parish school was probably held in a room of the old Chantry House, which stood at the west end of the churchyard. The room must have been cold and comfortless, as it was not until 1761 that the Vestry resolved "that a fireplace should be built in the School chamber." a similar resolution in 1733 not having been acted upon.

55. THE ANDREWS LIBRARY.

On the west wall of the porch on the south side of Wedmore Church are two stone tablets with Latin inscriptions, one of which commemorates James Andrews (died 1747) and his two wives, Elizabeth and Frances, while the other bears the names of John Andrews (died 1748) and William Andrews. These memorials, which were erected by William Andrews in his lifetime, were originally on the north wall, of the chamber above the porch, but in 1880 they were removed to their present position. In the room mentioned is a collection of 125 books, published abroad between 1536 and 1737, which are known as the "Andrews Library."

The history of these books and of their original owner had been almost forgotten until the Revd. S. H. A. Hervey began to make enquiries, when a few facts concerning them came to light; but the story has been made quite clear through the recent researches of Mr. Cosmo Rawlins. It appears that William Andrews was the second son of James Andrews by his first wife and was baptised at Wedmore in 1697; that he took his B.A. degree at Oxford in 1724 and studied theology with a view to becoming a priest, but as he was a non-juror he could not accept the offer of Church preferment offered to him by Sir Marmaduke Gresham. In 1728 he went abroad as courier to William Draper of Addiscombe, Surrey (a grandson of John Evelyn, the diariest) and did not return to England until 1737. He then accompanied George Pitt, junior, to Oxford and remained there as his tutor until 1739. He then appears to have returned to Wedmore to live with his father and step-mother at "the corner house opposite the west gate of the churchyard, a house which, in recent times, has served as a Police Station, an Air Wardens' post, and a private residence.

While he was at Wedmore, William Andrews, with permission from the Vicar of that time, used the room above the church porch as a study, and it is probable that he worked there on his translation of Pascal's "Provincial Letters," which was published in 1744. He left Wedmore in 1748 and went to live in Bath, where, in November, 1750, he was married in the Abbey Church to Anne Reyner, widow. He died in June 1759, and was buried in Bath Abbey: his wife survived until 1762.

Before leaving Wedmore for Bath, William Andrews moved his Library to the "corner-house" which, after his father's death, was occupied by his half-sister Ruth and her husband, Henry Rawlins, and there the books remained until 1792, when, after the death of Mr. Rawlins (who had survived his wife) their son, the Rev. Henry Rawlins, conveyed them to the chamber above the Church porch prior to selling the house.

56. HANNAH MORE'S SCHOOL.

The efforts of Hannah More and her sisters to establish Sunday and Day Schools in the Mendip villages, which began in 1789 with the opening of a school at Cheddar, met with violent opposition from the local farmers and other employers of labour. While staying at an inn at Cross to make enquiries for suitable premises for a school at Cheddar, Hannah and her sister Martha came in contact with a man whom Hannah described as "the chief despot of the village, who is very rich and very brutal." This man assured them that "religion would be the ruin of agriculture, that it was a very dangerous thing and had produced much mischief since it was introduced by the monks of Glastonbury," while they were told by another man that "they should not come to make his ploughman wiser than himself; he did not want saints but workmen."

In 1799 the Misses More opened a school in Pilcorn Street Wedmore, which was put under the superintendence of Mrs. Carrol, but violent opposition to its establishment was aroused and at a meeting of the Vestry on the 18th August in that year, at which the Vicar (William Bishop) and the curate (William Eyre) and the Churchwardens were present, it was resolved: -

> "That the school in this parish erected and supported by subscription through the hands of the Miss Mores is offensive to us as being the meeting-place for people who are not respectful to the regular ministry of the Church. We do not approve of such schools as having, in our opinion, the doubtful if not dangerous tendency of innovation. The care of the poor youth of this parish is ours, and we meet again upon a plan of a school for them at our own expense."

The "savage" and "depraved" farmers (as Miss More described them) then presented a petition to the Dean of Wells asking that Miss More's school should be suppressed, and notice was given out in church that a parish school would be opened on the following Sunday and if the children did not attend it "the parish officers should be upon them." The objectors to Miss More's school were evidently not successful in their attempt to have it closed for in 1800 Miss Martha More reported that it was "not as full as we could wish, yet some appearance of improvement," and added "but the parish depraved and shocking as ever."

57. GROWTH OF THE VILLAGE, AND, CHURCH LIFE IN THE 18TH CENTURY.

Many persons, particularly farmers, acquired land in Wedmore during the later years of the 16th century when the manor which had belonged to the Deans of Wells was sold in small lots, and the building of houses and cottages on these lands led to a considerable increase in the population of the village during the two following centuries. In 1791 there were 329 houses in the parish, sixty of which were cottages, and the population was estimated as 1,800. Of the total number of houses 34 were in the Borough and 59 "scattered about near the church," the others being in the surrounding hamlets. Blackford had 46, Theale 28, Cocklake 20, Stoughton 19, and Mudgley and Clewer 15 each. At West Ham, Sand, Heathhouse, Panborough and Crickham there were from 9 to 12 houses at each place, at Bagley there were 6, while at Latcham there was only one house, a farmhouse. These figures indicate clearly that except for the concentration of houses in the centre of the Village and in the hamlets of Blackford and Theale, the remainder were spread over a very wide area. The Census Returns of 1801 (the first Census taken in England) shew that there were 2,122 people living in the parish of Wedmore in that year.

Church life during the 18th century was not very vigorous for most of the Vicars were non-resident and the parish was left to the care of curates. Henry Castleman, who was Vicar from 1721 to 1741, and had previously served as curate, was one of the few incumbents who resided in the parish, and at his death he was buried in the chancel of the church. The Sacrament of Holy Communion was administered only three times a year - at Easter, Whitsuntide and Christmas, and Mattins, which was the only service provided on ordinary Sundays, was read throughout. Music was introduced about the middle of the century, and in 1754 a gallery was erected at the west end of the church for the accommodation of the singers. Even then the musical part of the service was probably restricted to the unaccompanied singing of Tate and Brady's metrical psalms, and perhaps a familiar hymn. The singers were started by the Parish Clerk, who, from his seat below the parson in the old three-decker pulpit, gave them the opening notes on a pitch-pipe.

58. THE MANOR OF WEDMORE AND THE ENCLOSURE ACTS.

In 1787 James Brydges, third Duke of Chandos, sold his estate at Wedmore for £3,850 to John Thring and William Bracher, by whom the property was let on a 21 years lease to John Barrow. Mr. Barrow, who had been resident at the manor-house since 1783, came of a family which had established itself at Wedmore late in the 17th century. After his death, in 1804, and that of his widow in 1808, their son, John,

purchased the property from John Thring and John Kellow Bracher for £15,000, and it was transferred to him on October 7th, 1808.

The considerable increase in the value of the estate between 1787 and 1808 is accounted for by the addition of many acres of moorland during the period under the authority of two Enclosure Acts. It was the policy of the Government at that time to encourage the accumulation of lands in large compact estates under landlords who had the capital and the credit to carry out the necessary draining and fencing of these waste lands so that they might be made suitable for cultivation. From the point of view of national production this policy was quite sound, but as the Commissioners who administered the Acts were empowered to dispossess all settlers on these lands who could not prove their undisputed occupation for at least twenty years, and to refuse recognition of any rights of common, there was an inevitable decline in the number of small farmers and a rise in the number of landless labourers after the provisions of the Enclosure Acts had been carried through.

In January, 1791, a Vestry Meeting was held at Wedmore "to make a new Poor Rate in which the new enclosed lands called Wedmore Moor, Churchland Moor, Tadham and Yeel Moor, Mudgley Moor, Tealham Moor, Blackford Moor, Blackford Ham, and Harepit" were included for assessment. A year later there was a similar meeting in respect of the "new enclosed lands called Panborough Moor, Yeo Moor, Ox Moor, part of Galway Moor, part of Great Notlake Moor, part of Little Notlake Moor, Cocklake Load and Bagley Green." In these two lists are the names of all the moors by which the Isle of Wedmore is surrounded.

59. REFUSAL OF POOR RELIEF.

Evidence is not wanting to prove that in the later years of the 18th century the Overseers' anxiety to placate the ratepayers frequently resulted in their refusal of assistance to people by whom it was desperately needed. In 1784 the Wedmore Overseers were summoned to appear before the Justices at the White Hart Inn, Langport, to answer the complaint of John Cripps "for refusing his relief," and in the same year summonses were also issued in respect of Mary Williams "for not relieving her in her distress," the case being heard by the Justices at the New Inn, Wrington.

A particularly distressing case was that of Mary Hardwick whose husband, an Excise officer, absconded, leaving wife and her children entirely unprovided for. She was granted relief which was quite inadequate and after some weeks she asked to be sent to London where she could get work at the silk manufactory in Spitalfields. The parish agreed to pay her rent for a year and the expenses of her journey to

London, which together cost £16 8s., and partly recouped themselves by selling all her furniture at public auction for the pitiful sum of £6 3s. 10 1/2d. In 1807 Mrs. Hardwick appears to have returned to Wedmore and to have obtained an indictment against the Overseers for refusing to relieve her and her two younger children; two of the elder children were then in domestic service and two others had been placed out as apprentices.

In December 1787, the Reverend Wadham Pigott called the attention of the Overseers to the case of a poor old woman "whose great age and informities require the immediate eye of her daughter. The idea of conveying such an object to a Poor House is shocking to humanity, where filth and misery must greatly aggravate the already insupportable weight of affliction. Her time cannot be long by course of years, and I think a hint only in a Christian country sufficient to operate on a considerate feeling mind to alleviate the shortly remaining span of her existence. On every account assist her, and prevent me the unpleasant task of enforcing by law what the more noble one of humanity should suggest the propriety of." It is heartening to know that the indigent poor had such a doughty champion as the Reverend Wadham Pigott.

60. NAVAL AND MILITARY RECRUITS.

In 1793, four years after the beginning of the French Revolution, France declared war on England, and except for a short period after the Peace of Amiens in 1803 the two nations were at war until Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 brought the struggle to an end. The danger of a French invasion of this country was for some time acute, and many men were recruited for naval and military service.

The only references to naval recruits in the parish records of Wedmore occur in the Vestry Minutes of 24th April 1795, when a rate of 6d. in the £ was made "for raising, four men to serve in the Navy from the parishes of Wedmore and Brean," and of a meeting held on 7th December, 1796, "to consider raising three men for the Navy"; but there is a good deal of information concerning military service from the year 1808 when, in addition to the regular Militia (first established in 1662 and re-organised in 1757), and the "Fencibles" (established in 1803), another supplementary force known as the Local Militia was raised. The number of men to be recruited in each County was fixed by Parliament, and to this quota every parish according to the number of its inhabitants, was required to supply its proportion of the number and their equipment.

In the regular Militia the age limits for recruits were 18 and 45, the term of service was five years, and it was permissible to provide or pay for a substitute. The amount of such payment varied considerable, for

although it was fixed at £10 in 1757, William Leigh of Wedmore had to pay £30 to James Clatworthy as his substitute in 1808, that being "the current price of a volunteer in the County of Somerset," but as Leigh was "not possessed of an estate of £500 half the amount was charged to the parish"; in the years after Waterloo the price of a substitute fell to £5 5s. The Local Militia, which was established in 1808, was raised by ballot among men between the ages of 18 and 30, service was for four years, and substitutes were not allowed.

Wedmore men who enrolled in the Militia were placed in the 2nd Somerset Regiment, while those who joined the Local Militia were drafted to the West Mendip, East Mendip, or Polden Hill Regiments. When the local militiamen were "assembled for exercise" for short periods in the Spring and Autumn financial assistance was given towards the support of their wives and children by the Overseers.

Among the men from Wedmore who served in the Militia were Benjamin Major from 1803 to 1808, Isaac Phelps from 1804-1813, and Richard Rendle from 1803-1813. Rendle obtained his discharge by paying £5 to Charles Methlin as his substitute: Phelps seems to have provided a substitute in John Swift without making him any payment; and the parish provided a substitute for Rendle in the person of George Lester. In the post-Waterloo period Thomas Vowles and Henry Harse joined the Militia in 1820 and Joseph Knight, Paul Stowell and Solomon Hardwick in the following year. Among those in the Local Militia between 1809 and 1812 were Joseph Stickland and Joseph Urch, descendants of whom are still resident in Wedmore.

61. THE MAINTENANCE OF HIGHWAYS.

The maintenance of common highways was a parochial obligation from early times, and in the Middle Ages this work was imposed on occupiers of ploughlands, but in 1555 an Act was passed ordering the annual appointment of two Surveyors in every parish with authority to call upon the inhabitants for such assistance as was necessary to keep the roads in good repair. This obligation was known as "Statute Duty" and its neglect was punishable by fines, but as there was no effective highway authority to see that the work was properly carried out it was frequently neglected, with the result that the roads in many parishes were quite unfit for wheeled traffic.

It was not until the latter part of the 18th century that the condition of the highways began to shew improvement in consequence of an Act passed in 1773 which gave power to the Justices to control the conduct of Surveyors as well as some measure of control over the Turnpike Trusts. These trusts had been legalised by an Act of 1663 which gave

them power to erect gates and toll-bars and to make a charge to users of the roads they maintained, and before the end of the 17th century there were more than a thousand toll-roads in existence. In rural districts, where local control was favoured, the old method of forced labour by reluctant villagers was usually replaced by a highway rate.

Local Surveyors continued to be responsible for the maintenance of all the roads through Wedmore during the 18th century, and their duties were often neglected. In July, 1797, Bridgwater Quarter Sessions imposed a fine of £200 on the parish for "failing to repair that part of the ancient highway leading from Mark to Rodney Stoke between Cocklake Bridge and Bartlett's Bridge," and the money was raised by a rate of 8d. in the £. A Minute of the Wedmore Vestry in connection with this matter dated 24th September, 1798, indicates that each hamlet in the parish then had a separate Surveyor, and in 1813 Mr. J. M. Tucker was employed "to measure the publick roads in the parish and estimate the probable expense of keeping the same in repair" and also "to apportion the lands for supporting the said roads in eight several hamlets," but in 1824 an Act was passed "exonerating the several hamlets for repairs of the highways within their respective limits and making the whole parish responsible for their upkeep."

The first record of any payment to the Surveyors of Wedmore for their services appears in the Vestry Minutes of 22nd September, 1821, when it was agreed to allow Edward Edwards and William Reeve £20 for the ensuing year, but in 1822 £5 each was considered a sufficient reward for Richard Baker and George Vowles.

In January, 1830, the parish made an arrangement with the Commissioners of the Turnpike Trust "to keep the road from Hayse's Corner to Moor Lane" in proper repair, and at the same time the Surveyors were empowered to have all the parish roads measured and to make an agreement with the Commissioners to pay over to them "an equal proportion of their whole rate according to the measure of the Turnpike and Parish roads respectively." At a Vestry held on January 6th, 1841, it was reported "that a turnpike road was in action of taking place through the parish" for which the Trustees of the Wells and Highbridge Turnpike Road were responsible, and in 1843, when the road had been completed, the parish agreed to pay the Trust £80 for keeping in repair for one year "so much of the said Turnpike road as lies within the parish."

Statute Duty was abolished by an Act of 1835, which placed the highways under the direction of Surveyors and ordered the expenses of maintaining roads to be paid by a rate levied on the occupiers of land. In 1875 the Public Health Act vested the powers and duties of Surveyors of

Highway in urban authorities. Turnpike roads became increasingly unpopular during the 19th century owing to their deterioration under the management of ignorant and incompetent men, and with the development of railways and the disappearance of coaches their revenues greatly decreased. Eventually they were abolished by the Highways and Locomotives Act, 1878, and in 1888 the Local Government Act placed the responsibility for main roads (which included all turnpike roads) on County Councils and for all other roads on Urban District and Rural District Councils.

62. OVERSEERS' DUTIES.

During the first thirty-five years of the 19th century the Overseers of the Poor carried on the difficult and thankless task of relieving the parish poor while endeavouring to keep the rates at a sufficiently low level to satisfy the most grudging of the ratepayers. How onerous their duties were is revealed by the parish accounts. In addition, to the regular allowance of 3s. to 3s. 6d. weekly to adults and 1s. 6d. to 2s. for children (of whom about 35 were "base-born"), which amounted to £5 a week, payments were also made to people temporarily too ill to work, to the doctors and nurses who attended them, and, when an illness proved fatal, to the coffin maker and others concerned with the funeral. To the most necessitous of the poor, coal (then costing 1s. per cwt.), peat, clothing, and occasionally potatoes were supplied. There were also the duties of binding children as apprentices, the removal of paupers to parishes where they had legal settlements, the apprehension of men who tried to evade their obligation under bastardy orders, the arrest of vagrants, and the oversight of the poor-houses and cottages in which indigent persons were housed.

The arrangement made in 1799 with Mr. John Sprake to attend the sick poor seems to have ceased in 1807 when a doctor, whose name is not mentioned in the Minutes, was paid a fixed salary of £20 per annum "in case no amputation takes place, or operation where two surgeons are required," but in 1816 Mr. Arthur Phippen was granted 50 guineas a year "midwifery included and casualties excepted." Apparently the Overseers considered this remuneration too high as in 1823 Mr. Septimus Tucker was appointed as Parish Doctor at a salary of £28 a year "midwifery, and casualties requiring other assistance, excepted," and this arrangement was continued until 1829. In 1830 Mr. Phippen was again appointed at 50 guineas per annum, and from 1831 to 1834, when the new Poor Law abolished the system of local Overseers, Mr. James Tucker received an annual salary of that amount.

The records of examinations before magistrates of persons requiring relief, in order to determine which parish was legally responsible for their maintenance, reveal many pitiful cases of hardship. Men who were too ill or too old to work had seldom found it possible to save money from their wages (which were usually between £5 and £10 a year) and many women and children were left destitute owing to the death or desertion of husbands and fathers. Ann Spearing, examined in 1839, reported that she had been married four times, three husbands having died and the fourth having deserted her. Harriet Thayer, after her husband had been sentenced to transportation in 1853, deserted her two young children and had later given birth to an illegitimate child. Among the recorded cases of vagrancy is that of James Roper, aged twelve years, who, in August 1804, was apprehended at Winchester "for wandering about and lodging in the open air." The magistrates sentenced the boy to imprisonment for seven days after which he was to be sent to Wedmore where his widowed mother was living. In these "good old days" poverty and destitution were treated as crimes for which even children were severely punished.

63. DEMOLITION OF THE POOR-HOUSES.

The dilapidated condition of the two Poor-houses in the churchyard was a frequent subject of discussion at Vestry meetings during the first thirty years of the 19th century. In October 1802, it was decided that the house facing the Vicarage, which was described as "nearly in ruins," should be taken down and that some other house should be purchased or built for the poor, but nothing had apparently been done two years later when, after a complaint regarding the condition of the house had been made at the Wells Sessions, it was resolved at a Vestry Meeting held on June 26th, 1804, that the house should be "immediate put in compleat repair under the superintendence of Mr. Edward Edwards." Mr. Edwards probably discovered that the house was beyond repair as the Overseers' account shew that James Larder was paid eight guineas for pulling it down, and at another meeting of the Vestry on March 22nd, 1805, it was decided "that the house lately taken down, be rebuilt with all possible dispatch on the old scite." Two months later John James' estimate of £285 Is. 9d. for the new building was accepted.

Ten years later Mr. John Barrow reported to the Quarter Sessions that the other Poor-house, at the west end of the churchyard, was in a very dilapidated condition and totally unfit for the reception of the poor as one of the rooms on the ground floor had no window, the floors of the house needed renewing, the four rooms on the upper floor were open to the roof, the walls were in a dangerous condition and the beds and

bedding in a deplorable state. The Court ordered the Overseers, to repair the house by laying new floors, ceiling the rooms, and erecting a new roof, and to provide new bedsteads and have all the beds washed. The Vestry, however, decided to rebuild the house and in due course it was taken down by John James at a cost of £8, but by a resolution passed at a meeting held on the 26th September, 1815, it was decided not to rebuild it on the same site but in "a more convenient situation." The result was that it was not rebuilt at all.

The house opposite the Vicarage, which had been rebuilt in 1805, was repaired in 1826 and some improvements were made to it in 1829, but under the new Poor Law of 1834 parishes were grouped into Unions with a Workhouse in each Union, and the old Poor-house became redundant. It was not until 1843, however, that the Vestry agreed to allow the Trustees of the Wells and Highbridge Turnpike Road to take down the poor-house and to convert the site and materials to any purposes they deemed advisable on paying £110 10s. to the Treasurers of the Axbridge Union. The house was, in fact, bought for that sum by Dr. Hancock who used the materials in constructing a house in the Borough. Part of the site was then used for widening the road and the remainder added to the churchyard.

64. CHURCHES BUILT AT BLACKFORD AND THEALE, AND CHAPELS AT WEDMORE.

The population of Wedmore steadily increased during the first forty years of the 19th century, between 300 and 600 being added to the number of inhabitants in each of the ten-year periods until in 1841 the total population was 3,995. A statement compiled by the Overseers in 1831 (when the number of residents was 3,557) shows that there were at that time 701 houses in the parish which were occupied by 724 families, 32 uninhabited houses, and eight in course of erection. Of the 724 families, 572 were engaged in agriculture and 131 in trade, there were 513 labourers and 92 male and 147 female servants, while Wholesale Merchants. Capitalists, Bankers, Professional persons "and other educated men" numbered 13.

The Revd. John Richards, who was Vicar of Wedmore from 1811 to 1825, took the initiatives in providing additional Church accommodation for the growing population by building Chapels-of-ease in the hamlets of Blackford and Theale at the western and eastern boundaries of the parish. In August 1823, a small octagonal building was consecrated at Blackford by Henry Ryder, Bishop of Gloucester, and in January, 1826, the foundation stone of Theale Church was laid by the Revd. Joseph Richards, who had succeeded his brother as Vicar of

Wedmore in 1825: when the building was completed two years later it was consecrated by George Henry Law, the Bishop of the Diocese. The new churches, which were erected by local contractors, have no architectural merit, but they have fulfilled a useful purpose for more than a century, and in consequence of the considerable fall in the population of these villages since the buildings were erected the accommodation they provide is more than adequate for present-day requirements. It was not until 1844 that Blackford and Theale became separate parishes.

Although Wesleyan societies began to be established in 1738 it was not until 1784 that Wesley's followers were legally constituted as a religious body disassociated from the Church of England. It is probable, therefore, that the small chapel which occupied part of the site of the present Church Sunday School was built towards the end of the 18th century. As the number of members increased with the growth of the population a larger building became necessary, and in 1817 the present chapel at the south end of Guildhall was built and the congregation moved into it in the following year. The old chapel was then sold for £105 to Church of England Trustees who also bought the cottage and garden which adjoined the chapel for £140. From 1820 the chapel was used as a Church Day and Sunday School, and the cottage as a residence for the master, until 1878, when the day scholars were transferred to the newly-built Board School in the Cheddar Road. The chapel and cottage were then demolished and were replaced by the existing building which has since been used for the Sunday School and for other parochial purposes.

There was a congregation of Anabaptists in Wedmore as early as 1656, and in 1709 William Sprake converted a house on Clayhill into a meeting place for them. In 1775 William Sprake, a son of the original benefactor, granted the house to Baptist trustees, and the present chapel was probably built about that time.

65. THE REVEREND WILLIAM WHITE.

Among the notable residents of Wedmore: in the 19th century the name of the Reverend William White, first incumbent of Theale Church, must find a place. The association of the White family with Wedmore began in 1774, when William White, a land surveyor of Arlingham, Gloucestershire, bought an estate at Sand where he built a mansion known as Sand House and lived there with his sister Abigail. In 1788 Mr. White married Ann Savidge of Blackford, but they had no family. Consequently when Abigail, who had married John Tucker, died in 1793 a few days after the birth of her second son, William, the infant was taken to Sand House to be cared for by his uncle and aunt.

William White Tucker, - to give him his full name - received his earliest education at a school in Wedmore kept by a worthy dame named Priscilla Latcham, and subsequently he went to schools at Bleadon and Bristol, but he found study "exceedingly irksome and distasteful " and made very slow progress. It was not an easy matter to find him suitable employment, as he "felt no particular inclination for any." However, at the age of 17 he was articled to a solicitor in Bristol with whom he remained for three years, but as he had neither inclination nor aptitude for the legal profession he abandoned it in 1815 and, with his uncle's consent, returned to Sand House.

Under the Will of his uncle, who died in 1816, the Sand estate was to become his property after the death of his aunt on condition that he assumed the surname of White. He did this immediately after his uncle's death. Having come under the influence of some earnest Methodists his thought turned to the possibility of becoming a minister, but he took no steps towards the attainment of his purpose until 1818 when, after studying for three years under the supervision of a clergyman at Almondbury, he was ordained by the Archbishop of York and appointed to a curacy at Dewsbury. After staying there for two years he returned to live with his aunt at Sand and carried out some clerical duties by doing temporary duty at Blackford and elsewhere. In February 1825, he married Jane, daughter of Benjamin Tyley of Wedmore, and for three years from that time he assisted with the services at Wedmore, Church.

In January 1828, Mr. White became the first incumbent of the newly-consecrated church at Theale. He was encouraged by a gradual increase in the attendance at the Sunday services and by the success of the Sunday School, but he was very much disturbed by the annual "Revel" in the village which gave rise to much drunkenness and fighting. In June 1829, he issued a printed address condemning the revels as being under the devil's patronage and referred in particular to "a dreadful amusement called backswood-playing in which men were encouraged to break each other's heads." In the following year he issued another address in which he expressed the hope that the "ancient but sinful custom of revelling might be swept away." His protests were not unheeded, and the revel was held for the last time on June 18th, 1830.

When his aunt died in 1931, Mr. White became the owner of Sand House and went to live there. Owing to ill-health he engaged a curate in 1833 to conduct the services at Theale, and in 1835 he resigned the living. For the remainder of his life he did not undertake any regular clerical duties but spent a good deal of his time in travel and in compiling an autobiography which was published in 1860. He died in 1867, aged 74, and was buried in Wedmore churchyard.

66. POOR LAW AMENDMENT.

By the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 local administration of the poor was placed under elected Boards of Guardians and its general superintendence under a central Board of Commissioners in London, parish workhouses were replaced by Union Workhouses in which several parishes were united, and out-of-door relief was not granted to able-bodied persons, those who could not support themselves being compelled to enter a workhouse.

Under an Order of the Commissioners, Wedmore was joined with 37 other parishes in the "Axbridge Union" from the 28th January, 1836, and at a meeting of the Vestry on the following day William Reeves of Blackford, William Green of Theale, and William Wall of Wedmore: were chosen as Guardians of the Poor. Wedmore, with a population of 3,557, was the largest parish in the group and the only one to have three Guardians; the parishes of Cheddar, Banwell, Wrington, Winscombe, Weston, Mark, Burnham, Congresbury and Blagdon had two Guardians each, while the remaining parishes, including Axbridge had each a single representative. It is of interest to note that the population of Weston in 1837 was 1,310 and of Burnham 1,113.

In June, 1836, there were 123 Wedmore people in the Union Workhouse, and by March, 1837, the number had risen to 159, for many people found it impossible to maintain themselves When all outdoor relief was withdrawn.

A meeting to consider what should be done with houses that were parish property in which poor persons had been allowed to live at a nominal rent was held in June 1838. Nothing was decided on that occasion, but at a meeting in May 1839, it was agreed that the houses should be let. The matter did not come up again until March 1843, when a meeting was held "to ascertain what property do belong to the Parish and what rent ought to be obtained for it." Apparently some of the houses which it had been thought belonged to the parish were claimed by the occupiers as their own property, and when these claims were submitted to the Poor Law Commissioners they ordered that one house at Crickham should be sold and the others let at rents of 3d. or 6d. a week.

In September, 1843, however, after the Auditor of the Axbridge Union had written to the Overseers, the Vestry resolved that all the houses should be sold, but this resolution was rescinded in May, 1844, and in the following month it was agreed: - "That the Churchwardens and Overseers be empowered to recover by application to the Justices the poor-houses and other parish property and, re-let them to such persons as

are deserving poor and parishioners at such rental as they shall think sufficient." The appeal to the Justices apparently failed, but it was not until May, 1849, that consent was given to the Board of Guardians to sell a cottage and two gardens in Shutters Lane, two tenements in Wedmore, a cottage and garden at Latcham, two tenements and a garden in Shutters Lane, a cottage and garden at Crickham, a cottage and garden called "Crickham churchyard," a cottage and garden at Crickham Elm, and a house comprising three tenements at Beggars Batch, Blackford.

67. CHARITABLE BEQUESTS.

In post-Reformation days it was not an uncommon practice for people to make small bequests for the benefit of the "Second Poor," a term applied to those in poor circumstances who were not in receipt of parish relief. Among the parish documents of Wedmore is a manuscript list of 1729 which records the names of persons who had, at various times, made bequests of from £5 to £20 to the poor, including those of Mrs. Mary Downton (wife of a former Vicar) who left £20 for the benefit of poor widows, and Robert Ivyleafe, by whom a similar amount was bequeathed to provide bread. Many such bequests were made throughout the later years of the 18th century and another list headed "Wedmore Charities as recorded in the Parish Accounts, 1767-1839," gives the names of twenty-three such benefactors.

It was the usual practice of the Parish Officers to lend the capital sums of these bequests to responsible local people and to distribute the annual interest to the deserving poor. Under such a system there was always the risk that the capital sums might be lost through the death, bankruptcy or dishonesty of persons to whom they had been lent, and it is obvious that there was something that required explanation in August, 1786, when the Churchwardens called a meeting "to obtain information of all Charitable Donations given by Deed or Will for the benefit of poor persons belonging to the parish, and also in whose hands such Donations were vested," and that at a Vestry held in December, 1788, it was ordered "That the Officers apply to the several persons having money in their hands belonging to the Second Poor of this parish to give security for the same." This order was probably due to the discovery that a bequest of £100 to the Second Poor by Mrs. Ann Castleman, who had died in 1769, was not in the hands of the Parish Officers, for at the same Vestry meeting it was decided to take Counsel's opinion as to the recovery of the money. As the name of Mrs. Castleman does not appear in any list of Wedmore Charities, it is to be feared that the poor never benefited from her gift. Nevertheless, the system persisted, for at a Vestry of 1799 the Churchwardens and Overseers were authorised to

receive money from persons having "Second Poor" bequests in their hands and to advance the same "on some proper security."

In at least one instance there was undoubtedly negligence on the part of the responsible officers, for in 1715 a loan of £5 was made to John Tincknell on promise of payment when demanded. Apparently he was never asked to pay either principal or interest, but in 1769 Edward Smithfield repaid the sum advanced together with interest at 4 per cent for 54 years amounting to £11 2s. 6d. The loss of the legacy of Samuel Vigor of Hemington who, in 1711, gave fifty shillings charged on certain lands in Wedmore for the schooling of two children of Wedmore and two children of Hemington seems to have been due to the fact that no effort was made to collect this money until 1740, when application was made for it and refused. Legal action was taken against Joseph Tower in 1763 to obtain the arrears, but it met with no success. The parish, in fact, was a heavy loser through these proceedings, as it had to pay an Attorney's bill, of £184 for costs of suit in 1773.

68. THE MANOR OF WEDMORE AND COURTS-LEET.

After the death of John Barrow in 1853 his widow continued to live at the manor-house until her death in 1871 when the Revd. John Barrow of Islington, as Trustee of Mr. Barrow's Will, sold to Charles Augustus Homfray "all those the manorial rights belonging to Lordships or reputed Manors or Lordships of Wedmore and Churchland," together with the manor-house, lawn, garden and premises containing 6 acres and 36 perches, and a close of 25 acres, 1 rood, 17 perches which was partly pasture and partly plantation land. Mr. Homfray appears to have held the property until 1878, when it was sold to Mr. John Frederick Bailey, solicitor, in whose family it has since remained.

Courts-Leet, which were originally manorial courts for the trial of criminal cases, were replaced in later times by Petty Sessions, but annual meetings of the Court Leet at Wedmore were held throughout the 19th century, rather to perpetuate an ancient custom than for any practical purpose. The Lord of the Manor summoned the two Portreeves to collect some small sums amounting in all to £2 11s. 11d. from owners of property in the Borough and to pay them to him at the George Hotel on a date named, and he ordered them to warn "a sufficient number of persons resident in the Borough to appear to do suit and service at the Court Leet." The main business of the Court was to give warning to "those who ought to do the same" to cleanse certain water-courses and put them in good and sufficient repair, and to appoint officers for the ensuing year, viz.: - two Portreeves, two Water Bailiffs, two Ale

Comers, two Bread Weighers, and a Hayward. The meeting was followed by a "supper" which consisted of cheese and celery and drinks, mainly cider. In 1877 the bill for these refreshments for fifteen people amounted to £2 10s. 6d., but in later years it was never more than £1 12s. 6d., even when the number who attended was eighteen. Suppers were charged at 4d. per head and drinks were accountable for the rest of the bill.

All manorial rights were abolished by an Act of 1922, but before that date the Court Leet at Wedmore had been discontinued. In 1935 Mrs. J. C. Smith of the Manor House presented to the Church the ancient weapons which the Portreeves had carried on ceremonial occasions and as signs of their authority to collect small dues from proprietors of travelling shows who wished to take up their stands in the Borough. Two of these "weapons" are now fixed above the door of the "Old Chapel" in Wedmore Church. The Portreeves and the Hayward (whose duty it was to impound stray animals) were the only members of the Court whose duties survived the 19th century.

69. DESTRUCTION OF VERMIN.

In many country parishes over a long period of time, which extended into the 19th century, it was the practice of the Churchwardens to encourage the destruction of creatures which the farmers believed did harm to their crops classed as "vermin" by making payments for their dead bodies. The practice began in the reign of Henry VIII under an Act of 1533, which ordered each parish to provide itself with a net for the destruction, of rooks, crows, and choughs, the owner of the manor being required to pay twopence to the Parish Officers for every twelve birds destroyed. In 1566 this, Act was extended to include all kinds of birds and other vermin. The Acts were renewed from time to time and were not finally repealed until 1863.

Records earlier than those of the 18th century have not been preserved at Wedmore, but the Churchwardens' accounts of that period show that "nearly everybody in the parish seems to have added to his income by slaying pole-cats, stoats, hedgehogs, sparrows, joys (jays), and pie-magots (magpies) and laying them at the Churchwardens' feet." The scale of payments was 4d. for a polecat, 2d. for a stoat or hedgehog, 1 d. for a jay or magpie, and 2d. a dozen for sparrows. In 1716 a shilling, was paid for a fox, and in 1720 Henry Tucker received 3s. 4d. for killing an otter. Polecats were evidently numerous at that time as 76 were killed in the parish in 1720. By 1733 the price for sparrows had been increased to 3d. a dozen and in that year no fewer than 230 dozen were accounted for.

A century later there were still some polecats in the parish as the Churchwardens' Accounts for 1824-5 include an item "Paid for pole-cats, hedgehogs and sparrows, 5s. 2d." At a Vestry Meeting held on the 20th August 1841, the Churchwardens were authorised to pay a farthing a head for sparrows, and with this encouragement more than 2,000 were destroyed every year, and in 1845 the number was 2,908. Yet despite these stem measures the cheerful chirping of sparrows still persists, hedgehogs and magpies are by no means rare, and foxes and otters are still hunted. Polecats, however, are no longer to be met with in the County of Somerset.

70. CHURCH SERVICES IN THE 19TH CENTURY.

In the early years of the 19th century the services in Wedmore Church were few in number and, for the most part, were unrelieved by music; but in 1811 when the Revd. John Richards, who already held a living in Bath, was also appointed Vicar of Wedmore, he delegated his Wedmore duties to a resident curate, the Revd. W. B. Cattell, and directed him to conduct an afternoon service each Sunday in addition to the morning service which had been customary. This arrangement continued until the death of Mr. Richards in 1825, but following the appointment of the Revd. John Kempthorne to the Vicarage in 1827 further changes took place, for almost immediately evening services were started, and in 1828 a barrel organ was placed in the gallery of the church on which tunes for the metrical psalms were played. Many of the parishioners protested at these innovations, but Mr. Kempthorne does not seem to have been unduly perturbed by opposition. He remained Vicar until his death in 1876 and it was in his time that the barrel organ was replaced by a two-manual Willis organ and the west gallery enlarged for its accommodation. When the gallery was taken down in 1881 the organ was removed to the north transept where it has since remained, although its position there has been changed on several occasions.

During the incumbency of the Revd. S. H. A. Hervey, who succeeded Mr. Kempthorne as Vicar, the sacrament of Holy Communion continued to be administered only on four or five occasions each year: it was not until 1898, under his successor, the Revd. Joseph Byrchmoor, that the service was said on all Sundays and on the Great Festivals. About the same time surplices were provided for the, choir-men, but it was, not until Whit Sunday, 1904, that they wore cassocks. Sullivan's "Church Hymns" was used during Mr. Hervey's time, but in 1904 "Hymns Ancient and Modern" replaced the older book. It is of interest to note that in 1901 the organist received an annual remuneration of £13 5s., and the organ-blower £1 10s.

71. LATER CHARITABLE BEQUESTS.

Bequests for the benefit of the poor of Wedmore, and for other charitable purposes, continued during the 19th century, one of the largest being that of Mr. Joseph Wollen, who left £1,000 to provide clothing for the poor and £200 for the Church School in 1845. Other benefactors were Mr. William Edwards in 1867, Mrs. Mary Culverwell in 1875, and Mr. George Pople in 1878, the Church School and the Coal and Clothing Club being the principal recipients of their gifts. Mr. James Toogood, who died in 1856, bequeathed five acres of pasture land in Weare, the rent from which was to be used every Christmas time in purchasing six large Bibles for the poor and in gifts of fifteen shillings each to the three men and three women who had been most regular in attendance at church, and to the three boys and three girls who had made most progress at the Church School.

In 1835 Mrs. Anne Lewis left £100 invested in the Wells Turnpike Trust the interest from which was to be divided annually between twenty poor persons who had not received parochial relief during the preceding year, but unfortunately when the Trust was dissolved in 1880 only £40 of the money was forthcoming. Bequests of money have invariably been invested in Government Stocks and the interest from these investments is still distributed annually in accordance with the wishes of the testators. A scheme was drawn up in 1880 under which all the parochial charities were vested in the Charity Commissioners, but the administration is in the hands of a local Committee of which the Vicar and Churchwardens are ex officio members.

In 1929 the Revd. Sydenham Hervey, a former Vicar, handed over to a body of Trustees an amount of £1,200 in 5 per cent. War Stock from the interest of which first prizes of £20 each and second prizes of £5 each were to be awarded each year to the two boys and two girls attending the Council Schools who were judged "not only by scholarship but by character" to be the most deserving. Another generous benefactor to the parish was Miss Clara Jane White (a grand-daughter of the Revd. William White of Sand) who, in 1937, bequeathed a large sum of money to augment the stipend of the Vicar, and a plot of land in the Blackford Road as a Recreation Ground for the village.

72. RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH.

Late in the 17th century a Vestry Room was built against the east wall of the south chapel, and in 1754 a Singers' Gallery was erected at the west end of the nave, but with these exceptions the church of

Wedmore was subjected to very few alterations until June, 1880. An ambitious plan of "restoration" was then carried out under the direction of Mr. E. B. Ferrey, during which the sanctuary and chancel ground levels were altered, the Vestry Room removed, the west gallery taken down, the south doorway repaired, the old pews replaced by new ones, the three-decker pulpit dismantled and its canopy discarded, and the font moved from the west end of the south aisle to the south chapel. At the same time the rough-cast which had been placed on the exterior walls in 1825 was removed, and the whitewash cleaned off the interior walls.

It is questionable whether all these changes were improvements, but the removal of the Vestry Room was certainly justified. Although it had been built for Vestry Meetings it was seldom used for that purpose as a room in the Poor House was reserved for such meetings, and on many occasions they were held in the church. Consequently the Vestry Room became a repository for lumber, and during the 18th century it had sometimes been used as a lock-up for persons who were insane. Richard Carver of Bridgwater, who erected Theale Chapel, had rebuilt the room in 1828 and for a few years after that date it was used for its original purpose.

During the restoration of the church several interesting discoveries were made. The removal of the whitewash on the wall north of the chancel arch brought to light the ancient painting of St. Christopher; the pre-Reformation altar-stone was found under the chancel floor; the doorway and windows on the west side of the "Old Chapel" were uncovered, and at the cast end of the north chapel a small opening was unblocked which for many years had been hidden behind the Hodges monument, and a window inserted.

In the tower of Wedmore Church eight bells hang. Two of these, probably dating from Stuart times, were re-cast in 1705, two more were added in 1772, one in 1775, and one in 1801. In 1881 two additional bells were bought and a clock with chimes was placed in the tower out of the sum subscribed for the restoration of the church. The stained glass in the east window was donated in 1887, and in 1890 the Alfred Memorial window, which also commemorates the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, was erected by public subscription.

73. A MEMORABLE VICAR.

Of all the Vicars of Wedmore the name of Sydenham Henry Augustus Hervey, who held the living from 1876 to 1898, is the most likely to be remembered on account of his strong personality, his amazing mental and physical energy and his great contribution to the welfare of the village. He was the third son of Lord Arthur Charles

Hervey, Bishop of Bath and Wells, by whom he was appointed to the Vicarage of Wedmore in the 30th year of his age. Without loss of time he issued an appeal for funds for the restoration of the church which met with so good a response that the work was begun in 1880 and completed in the following year. In 1878, after the celebration of the 1,000th anniversary of the Peace of Wedmore, he led a party of excavators at Court Garden, Mudgley, where it was then believed that King Alfred had lived, and in 1881 he published the first number of the "Wedmore Chronicle," which, being continued at intervals until he left the parish in 1898, made a valuable contribution to the history and archaeology of the village.

During his time at Wedmore Mr. Hervey also carried out the onerous and exacting task of transcribing the Parish Registers, making extracts from the erratically-recorded Minutes of Vestries, and from the scarcely-legible diary of Dr. John Westover. These sedentary occupations were relieved by much physical exercise, for Mr. Hervey was a great walker, an enthusiastic member of the village Cricket Club, and, in his younger days, an excellent tennis player. That music was one of his principal interests is evident from the pages of the "Chronicle" where many of his favourite hymn-tunes were printed and in which he had the temerity to remark: "Organists are not careful enough about how they accompany; they accompany too much, never letting the voices sing a single syllable without them; they accompany too loud, drowning instead of accompanying the singing." He was also the founder of the Isle of Wedmore Musical Society which, for many years, held an Annual Festival at which the music rendered was of a high standard. As a strong Liberal in politics in a constituency which was traditionally Conservative he incurred the displeasure of some of his parishioners by his uncompromising attitude, but he never lost their respect.

Although he was only 52 years of age when he resigned the Vicarage of Wedmore, Mr. Hervey did not continue his ministry in the Church but devoted the remaining years of his long life to researches in local history and genealogy, particularly in connection with the Suffolk families from whom he claimed descent. He died at Bexhill on February 4th, 1946, in the 100th year of his age; he was unmarried.

74. THE POPULATION DECLINES.

The gradual fall in the population of Wedmore from the peak figure of 3,995 in 1841 to 2,382 in 1921 was due to a variety of causes of which the most potent was the decline in British agriculture which began in 1846 with the repeal of the Corn Laws and continued more rapidly after 1870, when American corn began to be imported in large

quantities under the system of Free Trade. Many farm labourers, finding their occupation gone or their wages reduced, sought work in the towns or went overseas. The Vestry Minutes of Wedmore shew that the emigration of poor persons was encouraged. For in 1842 it was agreed that £20 should be paid out of the Poor Rate to defray the expenses of James Reeves with his wife and family to Canada, and that £25 should be paid from the same source "as a contribution for defraying the expenses of poor persons having settlements in the parish and being willing to emigrate." In 1850 a rate of 3d. in the £ was proposed for raising money to assist emigrants, but the matter was postponed as on a show of hands there was an equal vote."

A contributory cause of Wedmore's decline in population was the absence of any industry in the village and its distance from the railway, for the Bristol to Exeter section of the Great Western Railway which was opened in 1844 was laid on the level ground ten miles north of the village with Highbridge as the nearest station. Consequently, as there was then no bus service, the village was too isolated to compete as a place of residence with others more conveniently situated. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1901 the number of inhabited houses in Wedmore, Theal and Blackford had declined to 659 compared with 701 seventy years earlier, and that the majority of the houses now standing were built in the first half of the 19th century when the population was steadily increasing.

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