Cerne Historical Society

MAGAZINE

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF John Clavell

HIGHWAYMAN

Symposium

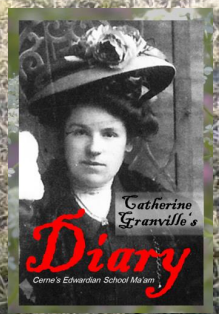
Cerne Abbey

REPORT

Bob Foulser The Water and Drainage Systems of Cerne Abbey

The Story of Cerne's Water Meadows

Of Grotesques and Hunky Punks



- **Symposium Report** Mike Clark, George Mortimer, John Charman
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Spring 2022

Cerne Historical Society

Introduction: Gordon Bishop

WELCOME to the Spring 2022 Issue of the Cerne Historical Society's Magazine, the eleventh since we began publishing it in April 2020, shortly after the beginning of the Covid pandemic.

The magazine was intended to entertain and maintain interest in the Society and its research during all those unpleasant days of lockdown and I am very pleased to hear from many members that it did do that. Although happily lockdown has now come to an end we are nevertheless planning to continue publishing the magazine at least until the end of this year when we shall again print an All in One edition of all four 2022 issues. Whether we can continue after that will be dependent on the number of volunteers who we can find to help us with the skills required. In the meantime we could supply printed copies of individual issues this year if members want them but we would have to receive at least 10 orders if we are able to get them printed for under £6 each. If you would like one, please let me know.

A major article in this issue is a report by Mike Clark, George Mortimer and John Charman on the Symposium we held on February the 24th. That was held to provide information and seek your ideas and suggestions about the research regarding Cerne Abbey and the site of the Abbey Church and other buildings we have been carrying out, particularly over the last two years, including the LIDAR survey that was carried out last December. Over 90 members and guests attended. Thank you all for making it such a successful event!

A sound recording was made by Andrew Popkin of the talks made on the night and that has been added to the PowerPoint presentation itself to provide you with a copy of it to replay should you wish to do so. The online link to it will be emailed to you a few days after publication of this magazine.

The Committee now needs to decide how to move the Abbey research on from here. One step we could take, with Lord Digby's kind permission, is to commission a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey over part of the area not included in the Scheduled Monument. That could well provide us with information about masonry and foundations several metres below the ground. That is a possibility we are actively exploring at the moment.

The Society's next meeting will take place on Thursday the 28th April at 7.30 in the Village Hall. Frances Eustace, a leading historian and performer in the world of Early Music and Historical Dance, will be giving a talk on Medieval Musical Instruments. She will illustrate her talk by playing a number of the instruments.

In the following month, on Thursday the 26th May, Kate Adie will be giving a talk on Thomas Coram, the Dorset born philanthropist who created the London Foundling Hospital. For both talks entry is free to paid-up members and costs £5 for guests. Both talks will undoubtedly be very popular.

Gordon Bishop – Chair of the Cerne Historical Society

Gordon may easily be contacted by using the form on the website cerneabbashistory.org/contact-us/

Cerne Abbey: CHS Symposium

Report

The Symposium was held on 24th February 2022 in the Village Hall

Report by Mike Clark, John Charman and George Mortimer

The two most prominent structures in Cerne's history, although one has left only remnants of its previous grandeur, are the Giant and the former Abbey. Much about them still remains a mystery. Thanks to the recent excavations and dating by the National Trust, we now have a narrower date range of 700 to 1100 AD for the Giant's construction but as to *Who* carved him and *Why,* that is still unknown. Some explanations can now be discarded and others will emerge. The dating exercise was always going to be undertaken by professional archaeologists with access to the appropriate tools.

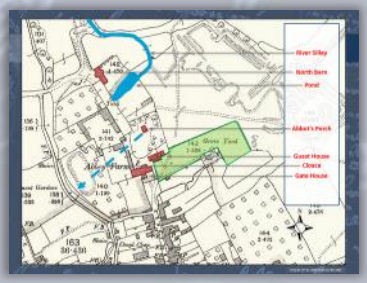
Although everybody can join in the speculation as to who the Giant represents, there is much more scope for the enthusiastic amateur to focus on unravelling the puzzle as to the precise location and extent of the Abbey church and all the ancillary buildings associated with a prosperous and influential medieval religious foundation.

Following the exhibition and other events to mark the centenary of the 1919 sale of most of our village by the Pitt-Rivers family, the Cerne Historical Society has turned its attention to the Abbey as its next major project. The village grew to support and service the many activities of the Abbey and benefitted from the wealth it created. Without it the village we know today would not exist.

To date, our research has coincided with the Covid pandemic and there has been little opportunity to share with the wider membership and village the progress that has been achieved. This was put right on the **24th February** via a **Symposium** in the village hall. The meeting was attended by over 80 members which reflects the interest the project has generated. Hitherto updates have been through the Society's quarterly magazine.

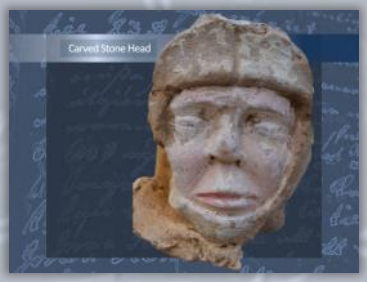
The evening began with several informative short sessions describing different aspects of the research. Firstly, George Mortimer provided a concise summary of the history of the Abbey from its formation in 987AD to its demolition shortly after the Dissolution in 1539, including the acquisition of its many estates and accumulation of much wealth.

The Chair, **Gordon Bishop**, then gave details of a number of facts about the Abbey of which we are relatively sure, including the site of the South Gatehouse, the route of the Silley, the canalised tributary of the Cerne that the monks built to bring water to the Abbey and the many other buildings which we know or can undoubtedly presume surrounded the Church.



Richard Wilkin whose hobby is the architectural drawing of old buildings, particularly of an ecclesiastical nature, then presented a very plausible description and drawing of what Cerne Abbey may have looked like, based on the likely space available and a few other clues, including the west front of the Abbey depicted on the abbot's seal of 1320.

Following on, **Robin Mills** reported on the request to the village last year to let the Society know of any building fragments or pieces of masonry which residents have found in their gardens or built into their houses, which may have originated from the Abbey. When the Abbey was surrendered to Thomas Cromwell's commissioners in 1539, it would have been swiftly demolished to render it unusable for worship. It effectively became a quarry as the various buildings were plundered. People have provided us with over 150 photos so far, of such relics and details of where they can be found. Robin showed us a selection of these to include carved mouldings, pieces of statuary, columns, human faces and complete windows included within present-day houses. At some point an expert in medieval monastic architecture will need to view and interpret what has been collected.



Chris Copson, an archaeologist by training, has developed the habit of his ilk of regularly visiting sites which may reveal pieces of evidence as to what structures may have been there in the past. The village burial ground regularly throws up fragments of floor tiles, consistent with what would be found in a church building or cloister. Chris presented photographs showing that many of these are of a quality and style to suggest an origin from a building of importance and status.

Finally, **John Charman** presented initial findings from a Light Detection and Ranging survey (LIDAR) conducted last December in Beauvoir Field and surrounding area which is immediately to the north of the burial ground and the most likely site for many of the Abbey buildings. A retired geologist, John used his connections to hire a specialist company at an advantageous price. Using a drone, the LIDAR 'camera' emits light in the form of rapid pulsed laser beams as it systematically sweeps across a programmed area at varying heights. The results appear as enhanced 3D images which can reveal features otherwise invisible from the ground, or more clearly defines features not so easy to interpret at eye level.

There followed a discussion period in which the audience of Historical Society members were invited to air their questions, suggestions or views.

Have we researched the connections/similarities between Cerne Abbey and Abbotsbury or Sherborne Abbey? The answer is that we have with Sherborne Abbey and a closer look at Milton Abbey is planned. A look at Abbotsbury is an interesting idea, although most of it was also demolished, because it is believed that there was a connection between this monastic site and Cerne Abbey.

If Eadwold was here about 100 years or more before the Benedictine abbey at Cerne, there may have been an Anglo-Saxon monastic settlement of possibly hermits gathered around an ecclesiastical building where they would meet for worship and eat. Are there any remnants? The answer is we don't know. There could well have been one: any such settlement may have been subsumed into the founding of Cerne Abbey.

There are remains of walls extending from the Abbot's Porch, suggesting it was connected to the rest of the buildings. Was the church closer to the Abbot's Porch than has been suggested? The area around Abbots porch is worth investigating. The Abbot's Porch was possibly even connected to the Guest House as the lines suggest. A resistivity survey by Charlie Leigh-Smith in his thesis on the water management of the Abbey confirmed the outlines of substantial buildings to the north and south of the Abbots Porch. Further research was limited by the fact that the site is now private gardens. He also noted that surviving abbot's halls elsewhere would have been substantial living and entertaining quarters and that there was no reason to think that Cerne Abbey would have been any different.

The question of the raised area to the east of Beauvoir field was raised. Was it a garden? The purpose of this area was unknown and there was no evidence that it had been a garden. They have been described as 'water parterres'. Richard Wilkins suggested that it might have been an apothecary area where herbs were cultivated. Another thought was that 'Beauvoir' means 'beautiful garden' and was a term which was used for a long time. Elaborate garden features were common in the Jacobean period; for example, the water garden at Binden Abbey, Dorset. The outstanding question was whether this area dated from the Abbey times or a later feature following the Dissolution.

The Symposium should be published! Was there a Library? Do any manuscripts exist? Aelfric of Cerne. Is there any evidence? E.g. Glastonbury Abbey had one of the largest libraries in mediaeval Europe, but only a few parchments survive. Anthony Garvey drew attention to the 'Book of Cerne', now in Cambridge University Library. It was a prayer book and cartulary and is publicly viewable. Otherwise, little appears to have survived the Dissolution.

There was scepticism about the existence of the River Silley. It looked unnatural and the falls don't stack up. Bob Foulser responded that at Minterne Parva there is a cistern, lined with blocks of limestone, where the Silley comes off the Cerne. He and John Charman had followed the water course all the way to Northmead where it disappeared. The course is clearly shown in the 1768 map as entering the Abbey site from the north from what is now Northmead. The water course disappeared when the present Northmead was formed with ploughing in the 1960s. John Charman thought that it was possible that a LIDAR extension survey up the River Cerne would reveal the contours. There is a spring line between where the relatively impermeable Lower Chalk overlays the relatively permeable Greensand.

Contd.

Contd. There had been discussion about a possibly surviving aerial photograph of Beauvoir having been taken during the 1976 drought. This allegedly revealed features of the Abbey foundations. It was suggested that such a photo might have been taken by a helicopter from the Portland RN Helicopter Base. That base no longer exists, but any such material might have been transferred to the RN Air Station at Yeovilton.

In the course of the questions Katherine Barker, a founder member of the Historical Society and a professional landscape archaeologist was sufficiently impressed to suggest that the symposium should be written-up as a monograph for publication.

Questions raised by the LIDAR Survey: *Addressed here by* John Charman

The LIDAR survey has given us for the first time a detailed topographic survey of the Abbey area. Now that we are in the digital era this type of survey is fast replacing traditional land survey techniques, and provides a set of high-resolution data that can be manipulated to give digital terrain models from virtually any angle.

Figures 1 and 2 show oblique aerial views (at 2x vertical exaggeration) from the south-east and south-west, respectively, and an inspection of these reveals a number of features which suggest that the Abbey was located in an area of considerable historical complexity of which the Abbey was only a part of the story. These raise several questions that have yet to be answered.

Figure 1 shows several circular features in the field north of the cricket field. (*Q. What are these?*) There are also a series of parallel ridges and furrows in Simsay, orientated on a north-south axis. (*Q. Are these related to the Roman finds in Simsay?*).

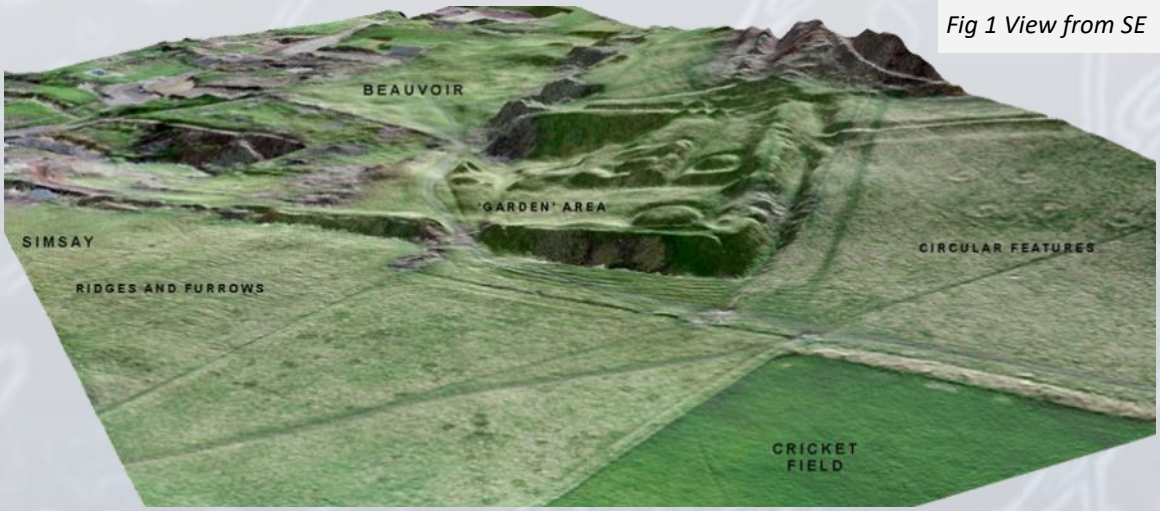


Fig 1 View from SE

The 'gardens' area is of considerable interest. The image suggests that the gardens are not raised features, but modifications to the original landscape and consist of a series of ditches and adjacent mounds formed from the soil excavated from the ditches. The geometric (*ornamental?*) nature of the excavations has presumably led to the 'garden' label in some publications. The garden area seems to drop gently in level from east to west (*Q. Did this continue to drop further west to the level of St Augustine's Well?*).

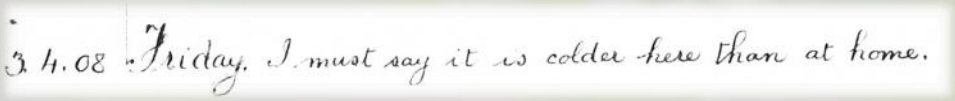
Figure 2 of the same area viewed from the south west further illustrates that the garden area is no more than an etching onto the original landscape. It suggests that it is not the garden area that is raised, but that it is the area of Beauvoir and the burial ground that have been lowered and flattened, representing a considerable modification to the original landscape. A scarp feature marks the line where the land to the west has been excavated below the garden area and then flattened out towards St Augustine's Well, which is now below the surrounding ground level. It also appears that this excavation intruded into the garden area (at 'X' on Figure 2).

Fig 2 View from SW

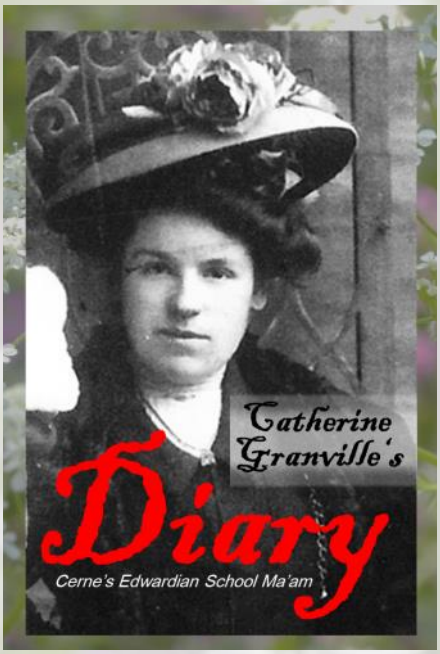
(*Q. Was this excavation and flattening carried out to produce a levelled area for the construction of the abbey and did the garden area pre-date the Abbey?*

A suggested scenario places the garden area as pre-Abbey in age and was imprinted onto a natural landscape that sloped gently to a natural spring – the site of St. Augustine's Well. Later excavation and soil moving produced a level platform for the construction of the Abbey and the burial ground.

The absence of any visible signs of the Abbey church in Beauvoir is frustrating but there have been potential indications of buried walls in the geophysical surveys carried out by Bournemouth University. Perhaps more significant are historical finds relating to the location of a Sepulchral Chapel and a tiled floor attributed to a side chapel of the Abbey Church.



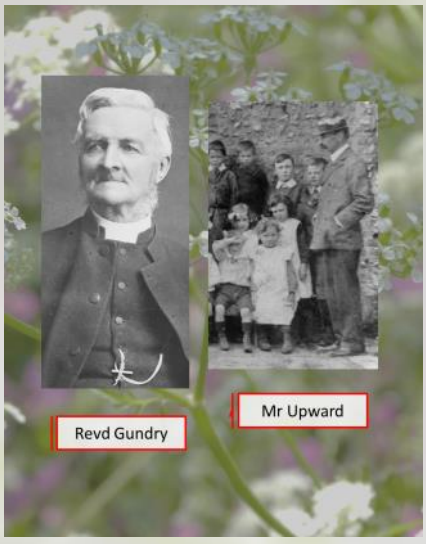
Catherine Granville's Diary – Now Available Online!



The 'Great Man' theory of history uses the deeds and actions of powerful individuals to describe, explain and analyse the events of the past. In many ways this makes sense; it is the people with the most agency who are best positioned to effect significant change during their lives. It would be difficult to understand the Holocaust without reference to Hitler, or to comprehend the decline of state ownership of UK industry and ignore the part played by Margaret Thatcher.

A problem with this approach is that it overlooks the experiences of the less powerful. But, for completeness, history should also focus, in addition to the contributions made by those with influence, on the activities of less effectual people. This group includes the vast majority of people that ever lived; people whose names are now forgotten, whose lives have largely gone undocumented, and who have left behind little in terms of legacy. But their stories are as much a part of history as those of the most powerful magnates.

One of these 'little people' was Catherine 'Kitty' Granville. A product of a lower middle-class family, who was born in Essex and raised in Kent, Granville lived a fairly unremarkable life. She was employed as a schoolteacher in Cerne Abbas from 1908 to 1910 before relocating to the West of England Institute for the Blind in Exeter. She lived through the bombing of that city during the Second World War and died, aged sixty, shortly after the end of hostilities in November 1945. It might have been expected that memories of Catherine Granville would fade and, within two or three generations, her life would have been wholly forgotten.



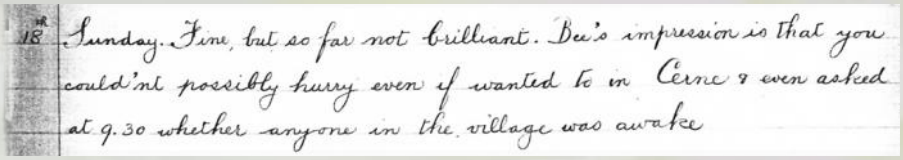
However, Granville's story has not been completely erased from history. Like many of her contemporaries, for many years she kept a diary in which she fastidiously recorded the events of her life – both mundane and profound – at the end of each day. Her journal documents the time she served as a teacher in Cerne Abbas and provides an intimate insight into life in the village during the final years of Edward VII's reign.

In 1994, one of Granville's descendants, Mary Brassington, presented a copy of some selected pages from these diaries to the Cerne Historical Society.

These were photocopies of the original handwritten documents and covered the entirety of the period of Granville's time in Cerne Abbas. Contained within these pages are numerous stories, village characters, and records of bicycle trips around much of the local area.

However, until recently it has only been possible to read Granville's diary in its original manuscript format. This presents its own challenges. First, although written in the neat handwriting style that might be expected from a schoolteacher, the copies are not always decipherable. Second, Granville frequently uses shorthand or abbreviated versions of people's names, making it difficult for anyone who is unfamiliar with her friends and family to follow much of what she records. Lastly, being a paper-based record, the text cannot easily be searched for entries of interest or to find references to specific places or people.

Each of these issues have now been addressed as the Cerne Historical Society is pleased to announce that Catherine Granville's diary is now available to view – free of charge – in a fully text-searchable digital format via the Society's website. The pages of the diary have been transcribed and captured as a single PDF document, allowing users to access, read, search and print excerpts from Granville's writing. In addition, this digital version includes an index of the shorthand names of the key people referred to in the text, along with biographical details of Catherine and her family, and extensive footnotes which explain the context and meaning of some of the more obscure entries.


18 Sunday. Fine, but so far not brilliant. Bea's impression is that you could'nt possibly hurry even if wanted to in Cerne & even asked at 9.30 whether anyone in the village was awake

This newly-published document can be viewed at https://cerneabbashistory.org/granvilles-diary/

Here are some diary entries which readers may find of interest:

- 31 March 1908: Granville's first impressions of Cerne Abbas.
- 9 May 1908: Recollections of an uncomfortable and stuffy journey from Dorchester to Cerne in an overcrowded carrier's wagon.
- 18 May 1908: The beauty of Black Hill in the springtime.
- 23 June 1908: A travelogue of Granville's jaunt by bicycle to Sherborne and back, including a record of the popular stories which were circulating about John Erle-Drax, the 'Wicked Squire of Holnest'
- 19 September 1909: Granville's impromptu visit on board the Royal Navy ship HMS Africa, which was moored off Weymouth
- 26 October 1909: Granville's first-hand experience of one of the frequent floods which plagued the village.
- 25 January 1910: The excitement that the General Election caused in Cerne
- 7 May 1910: The death of Edward VII and the popular attribution of this to the appearance of Haley's Comet.

There is much more to discover within the diary's almost one hundred pages. Collectively, Granville's journal provides a fascinating glimpse of what life was like in Edwardian Cerne Abbas.

Of Grotesques and Hunky Punks

Mike Parroy

One of the great joys of mediaeval architecture is its whimsical and quirky quality. We all stand in awe before the great cathedrals, but very often much fun can be found in examining the small details of ordinary parish churches or the surviving houses and halls.

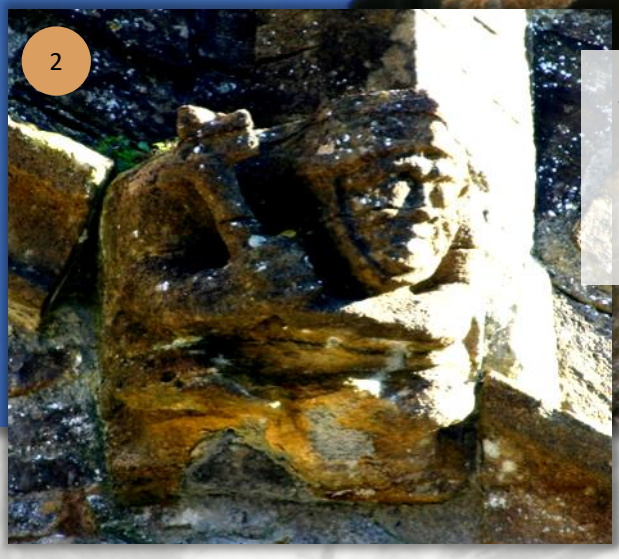
It is obvious that any church or cathedral had to have an overall structural plan and that the masons, executing that plan, had to conform to it. However, it is also clear that, apart from the main structural elements, the arches, columns, vaults etc., much of the detail was left to the skill and imagination of the carvers. To us this may seem rather curious, but it was apparently the normal procedure at the time. **"*The main lines of a building enterprise having been determined, the decorative and structural details of it were left, more or less, to the moment of their need*"** The Mediaeval Builder and his Methods, Francis B Andrews 1974 p.1.

The sheer scale of the churches and towers built in the C15th meant that there was ample room for decoration and for the carvers to show off their skill. At that period England was rather cut off from the mainstream of European architecture and developed what is a very local style. We produced the splendidly restrained and yet visually pleasing Perpendicular Gothic, whilst much of mainland Europe was erupting into the Flamboyant, in churches such as Amiens Cathedral.

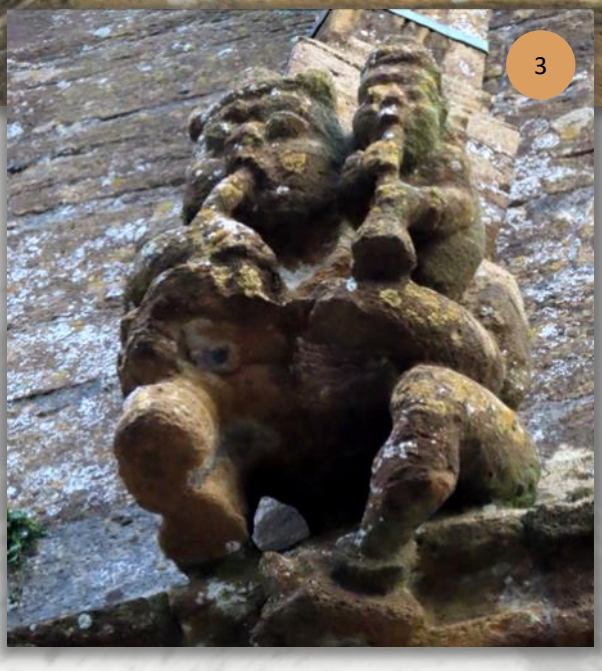
The unstructured mediaeval design process accounts for the curious menagerie of creatures who populate many churches. None of these carvings serves any structural purpose so they could be as odd and varied as the masons decided. They are not gargoyles, which are water spouts, but are simply on the building to add interest and to frighten or amuse. They are really worth close examination because they are beautifully executed and created so as to look correct when viewed from ground level.

The outside of St. Mary's, Cerne Abbas, built largely in Perpendicular, has an array of these sculptures.

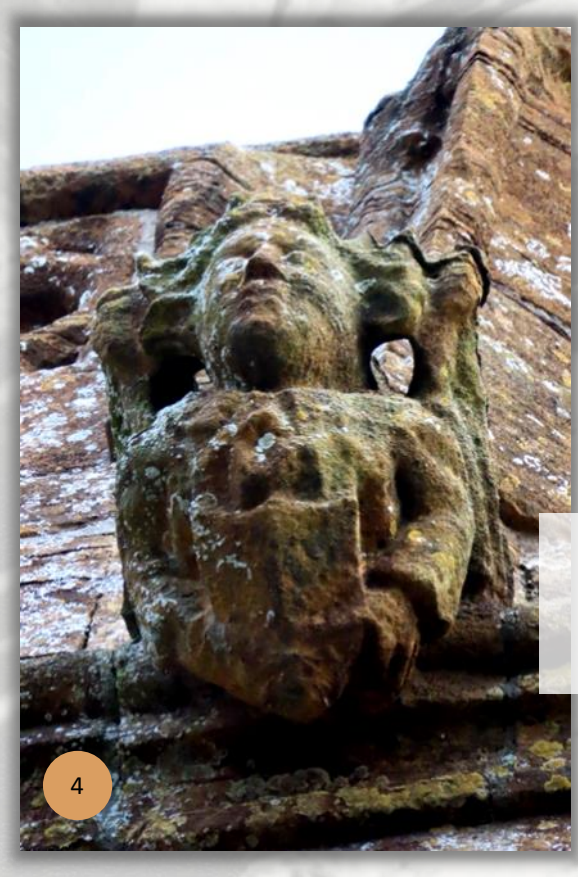
There are the not uncommon demons and animals unknown to science at the upper level (1) but they are predominantly people.



There are men brandishing clubs (2) and also, rather more unusually, a delightful pair of musicians playing horns (3).



Photos Mike Parroy



At the very top of the tower is a man apparently in a monk's cowl (4).

Just West of Cerne stands the wonderful Beaminster church. Pevsner says its West tower, built about 1500, is one of the most spectacular in Dorset "..up to the standard of the proudest of Somerset".

This is hardly surprising, given its 40 or so pinnacles erupting from every possible perch. This has some splendid carvings but, unlike Cerne, they are mostly of weird and wonderful beasts. Flanking the central religious figures are a sort of lion (5) and a sort of toad (6).

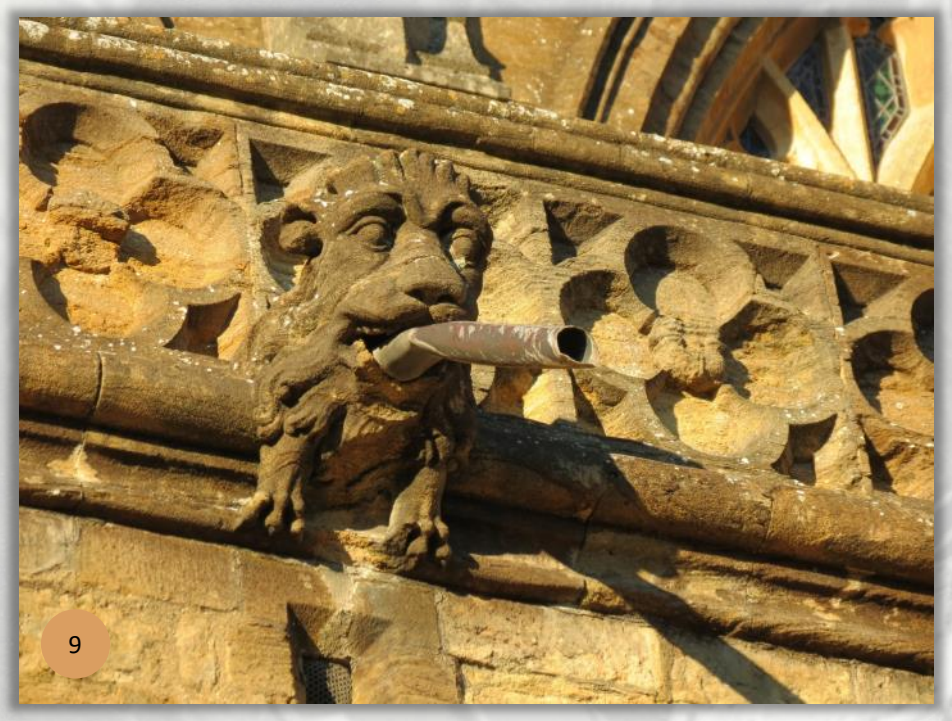
There is a wonderful gargoyle in the form of a wild boar's head (Fig 7). Inside the church, however, the carvings are all conventional angels and the like, a huge contrast with the exterior.

If you go into the glorious Sherborne Abbey, the grotesques and the fanciful are both inside and outside the church.

Photo above: Andrew Popkin

The crossing arches are Norman and above, glaring at you from the top of the arch facing the nave, is a large snarling somewhat catlike creature, (8) a total contrast with the dancing delicacy of the fan vaulting above it.

8



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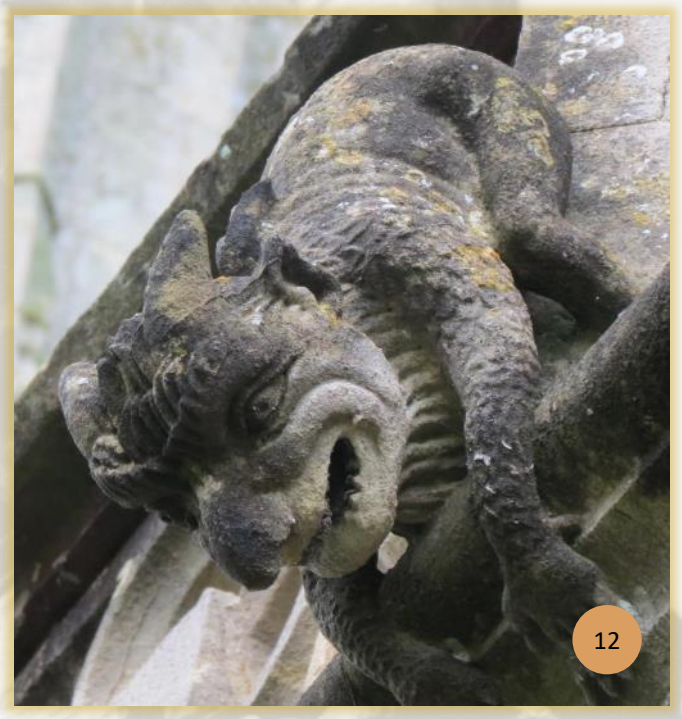
Outside the church are gargoyles as lions (9), as well as grotesques which are purely decorative, like a lion like creature with wings sticking out his tongue (10). There is no overall design, no theme, nothing except imagination and the freedom to express it.

The figures inside and outside, the gargoyles, misericords and roof bosses amaze and delight but the reason why they were carved as they were, and why those who could have vetoed them did not, is, frankly, a mystery. Some are blatantly pagan, the Green Man is an obvious example. Despite this, it is a symbol to be found in churches and cathedrals very widely, sometimes carved with horrible realism with tendrils emerging from the screwed-up eye sockets. There are various theories for these carvings, which try to explain their presence, such as the idea that they were a warning to the congregation of the perils of irreligion or that they were teaching aids for the clergy etc.. None seems to me to be remotely convincing. I think we simply have to accept that they are there, that they frighten and amuse, but also that we will never be able to grasp the logic or inspiration behind them.

10


11

In Somerset the soaring Perpendicular church towers, the glory of the County, are also covered with decorative carvings. They are known by the delightful dialect name of "Hunky Punks" and are something of a local speciality. Curiously, whilst with binoculars or long lenses we can get a real idea of the skill and craftmanship which made them, with the naked eye they are often merely dark projecting lumps of stone, hence perhaps the odd local name. It may derive from the word "hunkers" meaning squatting and "punk" meaning small (11).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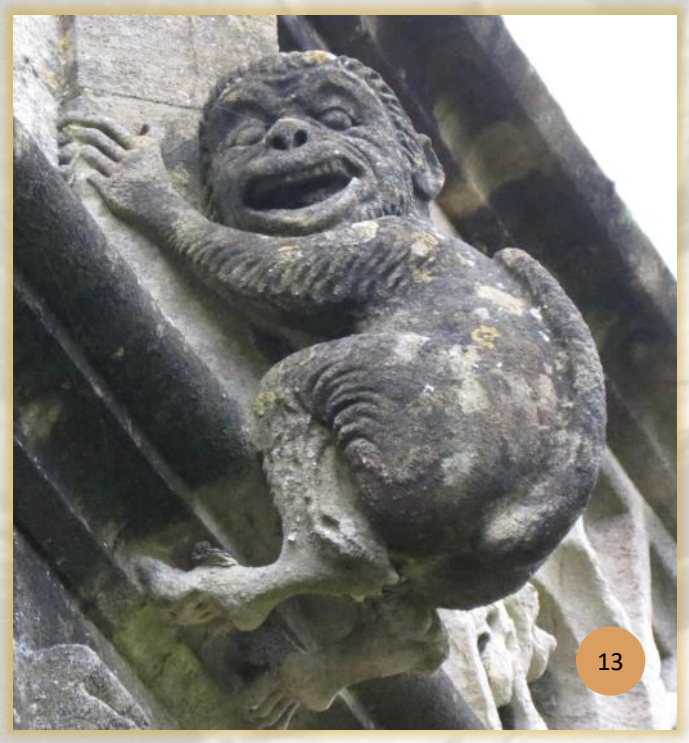
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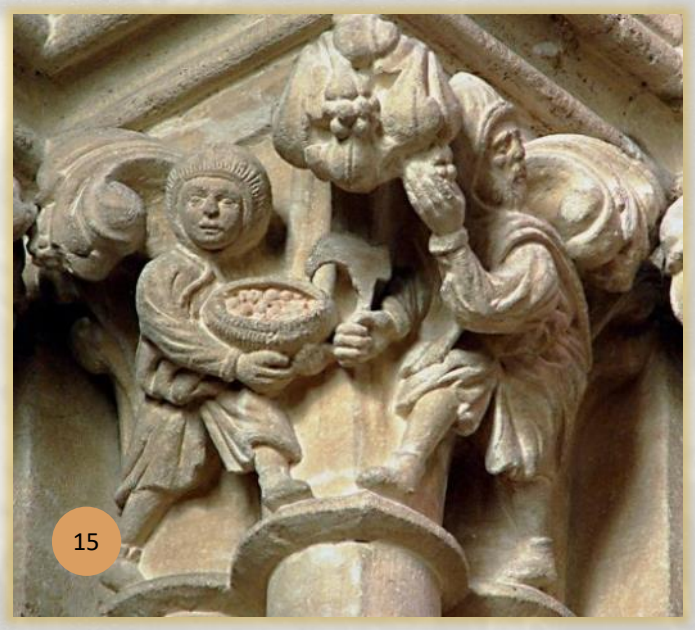
At Evercreech, just north of Bruton, there is a west tower which, Pevsner says, some consider as being the most perfect in Somerset, quite an accolade. On the parapets above the aisle of the church there are a series of "hunky punks". There is a tradition that the mason carrying out the work was lodging at a local pub. He fell out with both the vicar and the publican. He had his revenge, and the last laugh, in that the vicar is reputed to be the monster (12), the publican the monkey (13) and two notorious village gossips a pair of cats with intertwined tails, one wearing a dress (14).


14

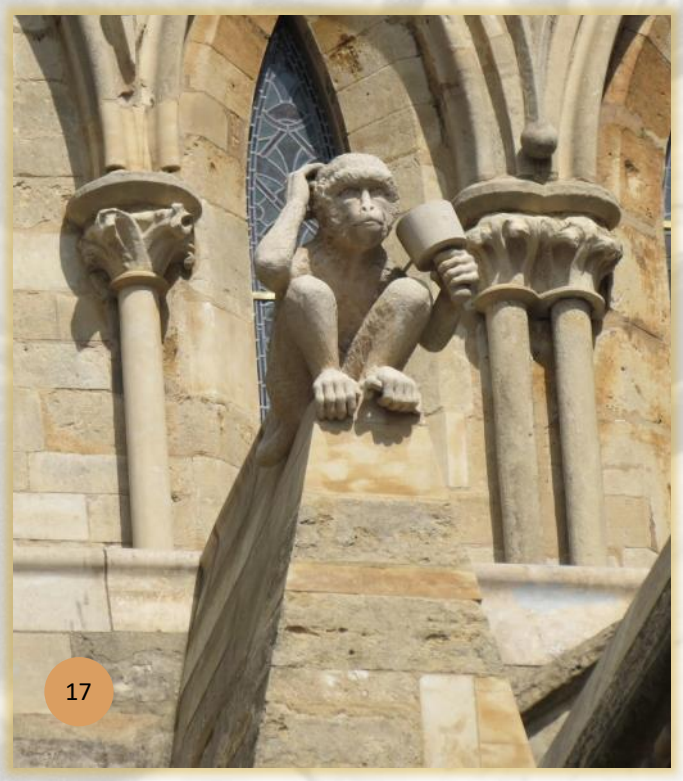
Photos Mike Parroy


15

Despite the detailed planning, even cathedrals can be quirky. Wells Cathedral, probably the first major church built in England in a purely gothic style and from Doulting limestone, has the typical stiff leaf carvings of Early English. However, in the South transept one of the column capitals depicts men stealing grapes, getting caught and beaten by the landowner. It is known as the "the Grape Stealers". It is unique. No other capital or carving is similar to it. The story does not seem to be derived from the bible. It is done with great vigour and skill and is, frankly, funny and is one of the most famous features of the cathedral and hardly surprisingly so (15). I once went to the top of the main tower at Wells, not presently possible. High up is a marvellous small sculpture of a fox with a cock pheasant in its mouth. The animal and the bird are carved in stunning realistic detail but from ground level one struggles to make out anything at all. To the man who carved it, it did not matter, because, of course, the all-seeing eye of God would note and approve his work and his devotion.

It is rather splendid that this whimsy has not stopped. The idea of medieval projecting gargoyles had a wonderful C20th expression in the famous eagles on the Chrysler Building in New York completed in 1930 (16).


16

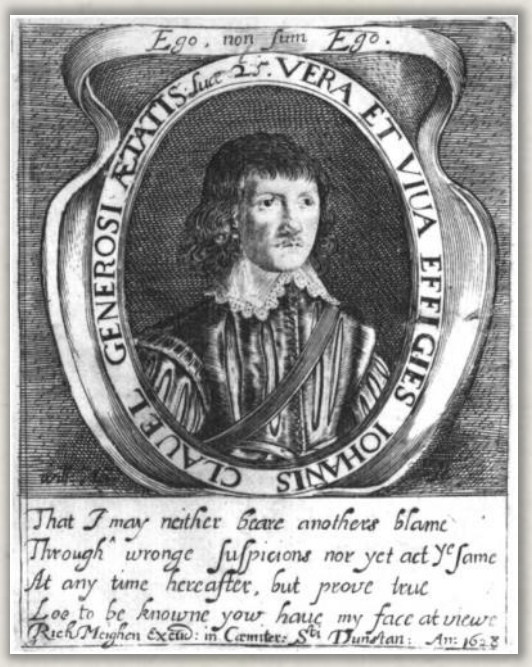

17

At Lincoln Cathedral, a carving on the top of one of the buttresses needed to be replaced. The new one shows a puzzled monkey holding a stone mason's mallet in his hand and a stone chisel in his foot. He will sit there to amuse and delight those who spot him for generations (17).

What all these carvings, great and small, show us is that the human imagination, and sense of humour, has not changed much over the centuries. These small stone carvings are quite simply fun to look at and leave a strong legacy of craftmanship across the centuries. Perhaps, they also give us little windows into the minds of their makers. What is great is that we can still giggle with them, as they certainly intended that we should.

Photos Mike Parroy

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF John Clavell



HIGHWAYMAN (1601-1643)

It is surprising how often research in relation to one story leads to the discovery of another of equal interest. Research about Round Chimneys, the farmhouse in Wootton Glanville (or Glanvilles Wootton) where the first Winston Churchill was brought up, is such a case. Looking into the history of the property revealed that Winston's father had bought it in 1630 from John Clavell, a man who had lived an extraordinary life in the early part of the C17th as a highwayman, barrister, doctor and author.

John Clavell was baptised at Wootton Glanville five miles south of Sherborne, on 21 May 1601. He was brought up at the manor house there, later called Round Chimneys, which had been bought in 1573 by his grandfather, John Clavell of Barnston (1541-1609). His parents were John Clavell (senior) and Frances nee Willoughby of Silton, widow of James Wickham. She gave birth to six children, John being the youngest and, after her husband's death, married for a third time.

Image: Google street view

Image: Photo © Mike Searle (cc-by-sa/2.0)

John, senior, was poor at managing money and, by the time of eldest daughter Elizabeth's marriage to Robert Freke of Faringdon near Shroton in 1615, he and Frances had separated. The wedding was a sumptuous affair, probably paid for by Frances and/or Elizabeth's husband, and they had many children. At around this time John senior became indebted to his son-in-law.

To add to John senior's troubles, a petition of c.1617 by Thomas Knoyle, uncle of an infant whose affairs were in the hands of John senior and his older brother, Sir William, claimed (successfully) that they had mismanaged the child's estate at Sandford Orcas and were unfit for the wardship.

The document states that ***'John Clavell being a maryed man hath for many years past lyved from his wife and is most Infamous in that country for his dishonest Conversacion with a woman of his near kindred whom he keepeth in his house…….'***

The same document refers to his elder brother, Sir William of Smedmore, as being physically and morally unfit to hold a wardship as he has '***Impotency of body'***, ***'hath not bine at Church a longe time'*** and his '***life hath bine no fitte example for the ward…..'*** Sir William was, it is true, leading an unorthodox private life but as we shall see he became an important influence in John junior's life.

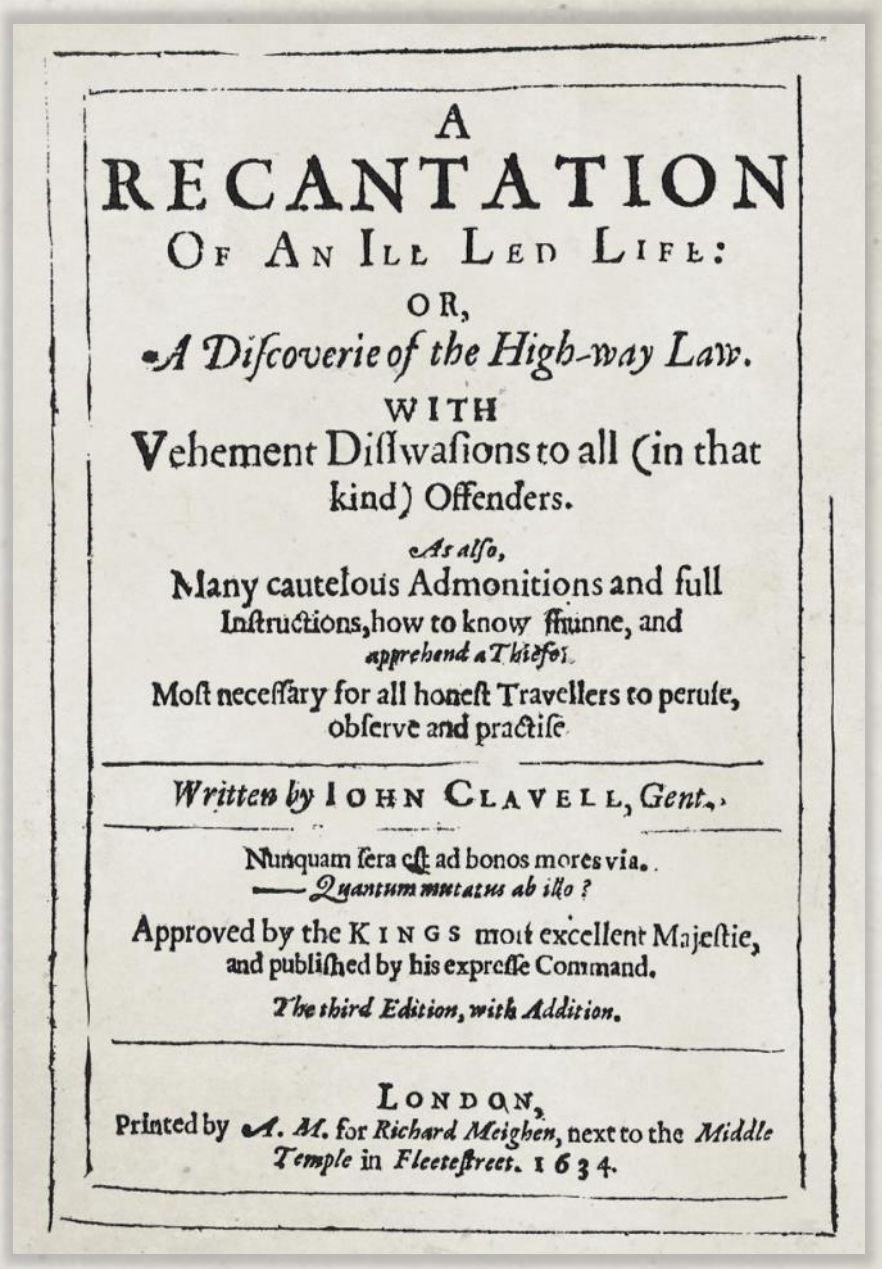
Brasenose College. Andrew Shiva/ Wikipedia CC BY-SA 4.0

Despite an unsettled home John was well educated, probably at Sherborne, before going up to Brasenose College, Oxford where he was admitted on 10 April 1619. Sadly, the opportunities Oxford offered were wasted as John left in disgrace in 1621 having been arrested in London following theft of college silver to the value of £37. Why he stole the silver is not known; perhaps he was desperate for money and was not able to get help from home; he may have been trying to keep up a social life with wealthy fellow undergraduates who at that time were inclined to ***'drunkenness, licentiousness and idleness….'*.** However, John was very fortunate to be granted a pardon for his crime, almost certainly thanks to his uncle William's intervention probably through the Irish nobleman Adam Loftus, the Lord Chancellor of Ireland.

John senior died in 1623 but had failed to make a Will. His son John, charged with administering the estate found, to his dismay, that there was not enough ready money to settle his father's outstanding debts. The sale of Round Chimneys required the agreement of his mother and sister which may have contributed to John's difficulties in dealing with the sale of the house later. John entered into complicated financial arrangements with his brother-in-law and with William Banks, goldsmith and money lender, who pursued him relentlessly having him chased, arrested in the street, imprisoned in Newgate Prison and generally terrorising him; at this time he was forced to put his seal to a deed 'selling' Round Chimneys to an associate of Banks.

In 1624, having received nothing from his father's estate and making a disaster of his attempts to sell Round Chimneys (which years later and after many legal difficulties he successfully sold to John Churchill), John took to the road and became the leader of a small band of highwaymen probably based in Beaconsfield.

In six months John and his band are recorded as having taken £140 cash, articles valued at £40 and two horses. However his career as a '***gentleman of the road'***, as he called himself, was short of anything that could be called romantic or even sensational, although enough to gain him considerable notoriety as a '**great highway robber'**. He was arrested in December 1625, tried and sentenced to death at the King's Bench bar on 30th January 1626 despite pleading '***that he neuer had stricken or wounded any man, neuer taken anything from their bodyes as rings & neuer cutt their girts or saddles or done them whom he robbed any corporall violence.'*** In fact he had stolen personal items from at least one of his victims so his claims cannot be taken as true.



A
RECANTATION
OF AN ILL LED LIFE:
OR,
A Diſcoverie of the High-way Law.
WITH
Vehement Diſſwaſions to all (in that kind) Offenders.

As alſo,
Many cautelous Admonitions and full Inſtructions, how to know ſhunne, and *apprehend a Thiefe.*
Moſt neceſſary for all honeſt Travellers to peruſe, obſerve and practiſe.

Written by IOHN CLAVELL, *Gent.*

Nunquam ſera eſt ad bonos mores via.
—*Quantum mutatus ab illo?*

Approved by the KINGS moſt excellent Majeſtie, and publiſhed by his expreſſe Command.

The third Edition, with Addition.

LONDON,
Printed by *A. M.* for *Richard Meighen*, next to the *Middle Temple* in *Fleeteſtreet.* 1634.

He was extremely fortunate to be almost immediately reprieved as a result of a general amnesty on the occasion of Charles I's coronation on 2nd February. However, John remained in prison at least until November 1627 and subsequently wrote ***'A Recantation of An Ill Led Life',*** a long and rambling poem romanticising the lot of the highwayman but also expressing regret for his crimes although his protestations have an insincere, self-pitying ring about them. In the second edition of '*A Recantation*' he appeals to his mother and sister to accept Joyce whom he had married on 1st January 1625. He says she is of '***humble origin***', nursed him through ***'mortal sickness'*** and had ***'gained him free*dom'**. She certainly did not gain him freedom and he may well have exaggerated his illness to gain sympathy. However, Joyce proved to be a loyal wife, probably dying 5 or 6 years after their marriage.

By 1628 John, a reformed character, was receiving an income from sales of '*A Recantation'* and writing poetry and at least one play, desperately trying to get into his uncle Sir William's good books with an eye to inheriting his Smedmore Estate. Sir William, having no children of his own and separated from his wife, Mabel, was outraged at his nephew's appalling behaviour which had brought disgrace to the Clavell family and needed a lot of convincing that John had truly turned over a new leaf. However, Sir William was once again prepared to help his nephew and it was decided in 1631 that John should go to Ireland where he could help his uncle's lawyers claim back Sir William's property at Carrigrohane, Munster.

Smedmore House cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Mike Searle

Once in Ireland, John took full advantage of his uncle's contacts in Irish society becoming popular and successful and making important and influential friends. However, Sir William clearly did not trust his nephew and John wrote rambling, verbose letters justifying himself and his purchases, complaining at being followed and at repeated recriminations from his uncle. In addition, John claimed that he had suffered serious illnesses which he was fortunate to have survived. John's charm and claim to be Sir William's heir, may have convinced Irish society but his uncle remained deeply suspicious.

During a spell back in London in 1634, John acquired money but was secretive about how he made it, telling his friends that it came from his uncle. Returning to Ireland, early in 1635 John married Isabel Markham, a child only 9 years old, heiress of a rich Dublin vintner, friend of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Loftus. Loftus wrote approvingly of the marriage to Sir William at the same time telling him that he had made John a barrister. It is unlikely that Isabel would have come into her inheritance before John died in 1643 but John claimed that Markham gave him the staggering sum of £7,000. There is no record of John having children by either marriage.

During John's second spell in Ireland he became known as a physician as well as a lawyer. No licence to practice as a physician was required in Ireland at that time so he was able to build up his practice and claimed to be very successful. His 'cures' are remarkable, making use of herbals and folklore cures embellished, perhaps, with his own ingredients. Below is a 'taste' of his some of his more gruesome prescriptions (not for the squeamish):

'**For the Plurisie**

…..The Drink: Take a quart of white wine' (so far so good);' put thereto the dung of a horse, whole as it cometh from him, bound in a clean linen cloth, with 2 races of ginger finely beaten or grated, and let it boil until the patient drink thereof, having the plaster at his side.'

'For the Falling Sickness (Epilepsy)

Take a live raven and put it into a hot oven till it be burnt. Then take the powder and drink thereof morning and evening in a little ale.'

'For sore eyes or anything grown in them

Take the marrow of a goose wing, and ear wax; for a woman a man's ear wax, for a man a woman's ear wax; mingle it well together and put a convenient quantity in the eye…….'

John claimed to have tried all his recipes himself but it is difficult to believe he had suffered from jaundice, dropsy, epilepsy and certainly not pregnancy! Nonetheless he does seem to have gained the reputation of being a 'Physical lawyer'. Never doubting his own abilities, John wrote, probably to Lord Loftus, '….I may justly say that with loud acknowledgement such as are great and learned and have made it the study of their life cannot come near me' and so on in the same vein.

John died in 1643 after a further spell of litigation in London trying to sort out claims against him. He probably died of pleurisy. He died before Sir William so, after all his strivings, never inherited from him and nor did his young wife. Although he seems to have made a success of his legal and, perhaps, medical careers and been socially successful in Ireland he never hesitated to boast of his achievements (real or imagined) and appears to have been untrustworthy throughout his life.

The Story of Cerne's

Water Meadows

In the dreary post-Christmas days of January and February, when although daylight hours are lengthening bit by bit, it is in our nature to long for green shoots and growth to start bursting forth, and the sooner the better. For the people of earlier times the prospect of an improved diet after winter's long weeks and months of poorly preserved foodstuffs could be a matter of life and death. For farmers, any technique which would produce earlier grass growth for livestock, shortening what is known as "the hungry gap" when winter fodder is running low but grass growth is still some way off, would be most welcome, as well as crucial for the benefits to people's nutritional heath derived from the resulting milk, cheese and meat. Farmers often refer to early grass as "Dr Green", acknowledging the resulting improvement to their animals' health, and the drive to find ways of increasing production from a given area of land has always been part of every farmer's mission.

The benefits of periodic flooding of riverside meadows, mainly to increase soil temperature and boost its fertility, were realised in medieval times, the aim being to bring forward spring grass growth and to increase overall productivity. Various primitive methods were used to allow a shallow covering of water, periodically "floating" or "drowning" the sward in a meadow, usually in late winter, the prime purpose being to protect it from frost.

The zenith of these techniques arrived in the early C17th, and although they could be found in many areas of the country, the meadows along the chalk streams of the south of England lent themselves most readily to being flooded, thanks to the free-draining nature of chalk soils allowing the ground to quickly dry out after flooding, and grazing to then take place with minimal damage. The complex layout of water meadows which became hugely successful is known as "bedwork". The Barton Farm meadow conforms to this design, seen in this schematic plan.

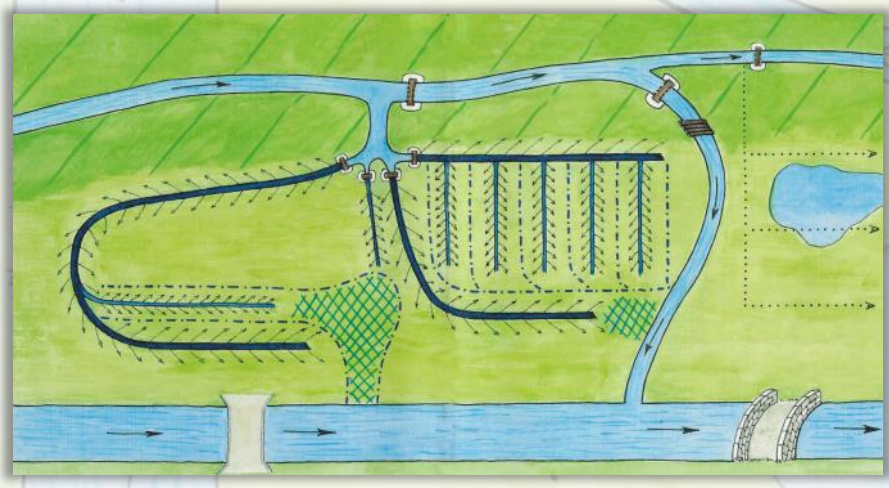
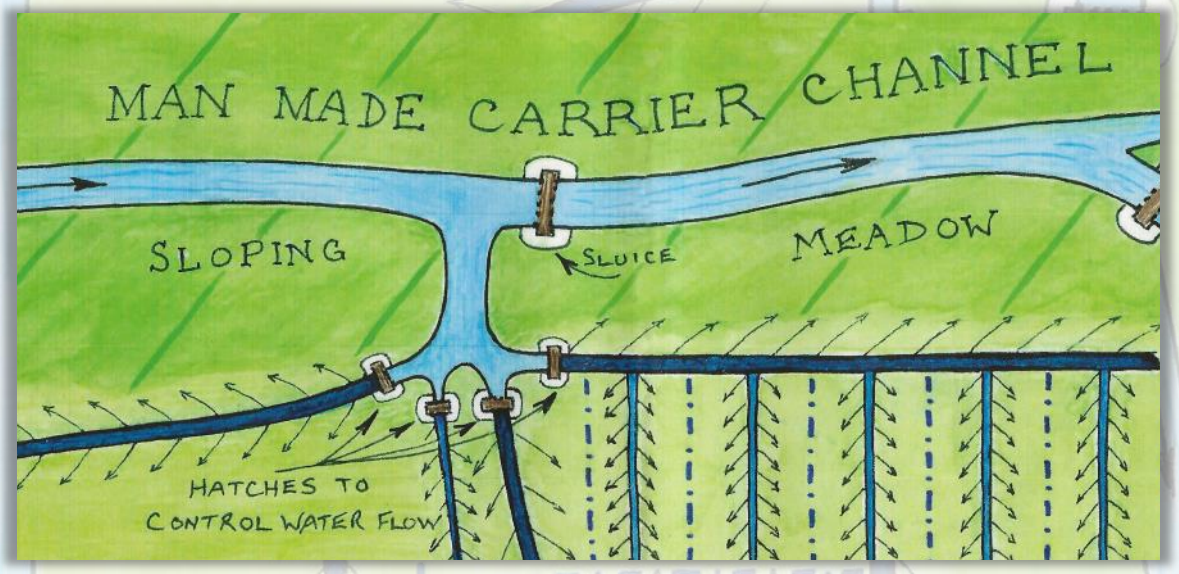


Photo Andrew Popkin

Water Meadows

It consists of a man-made channel called the “carrier” or “head main” which diverts water from the river, carrying it at a slightly higher level to enable the irrigation of roughly parallel ridges created in the field, which have “gutters” carrying the flow of water dug along their tops. These are tapered towards their ends, and a “stop” of wood or turf would maintain the level of water in the gutters before it flowed down the slopes either side of the ridges into drains, and returned to the main river.



It was essential the layer of water was shallow, and constantly flowing, to help the soil to warm up and oxygenation to take place. Soil fertility improved both from the minerals in the water, and from silt which settled out in the grass. The water level in the whole system was controlled by sluices and hatches in the carrier, and in the various channels taking water further along the meadow.

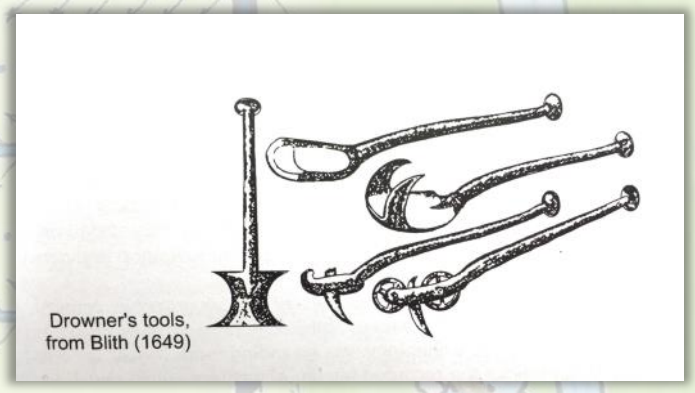
The first records of a fully functioning bedwork system come from the Manorial Court Book of Affpuddle, where in 1605 the landlord Sir Edward Lawrence was a pioneer, and by 1630 extensive water meadows were all along the Piddle and Frome valleys. In Cerne it is thought that the carrier stream and the meadows to the south of the village it supplies were dug around 1650, and from the aerial photographs we can see the remains of channels and drains in patterns in the riverside meadows all the way from the Tithe Barn to Pound Farm. In fact, the river Cerne’s water meadows extended at intervals to where it meets the Frome at Charminster, where the road into Dorchester straddles large water meadows right to the edge of town.

Water Meadows

In 1650, Barton Farm at that time was owned by Thomas Freke, a descendant of Robert Freke, to whom the Cerne Abbey lands were passed at the end of the C16th. By the time it was sold by the Pitt Rivers family in 1919, the whole farm comprised some 822 acres including "a fertile water meadow and pasture", indicating this part of the farm was considered a distinct asset.

Perhaps less well known in Cerne is the small former water meadow which lies just to the south of the village hall, known as Mill Mead, now reverted to a rich wildlife habitat of alder, willow, rosebay willowherb, bramble and nettle. Before construction of the village hall in 1998, archaeological work revealed the site of a C17th water meadow system of "significant local and regional importance". The ridges, drains and water courses are still just visible.

Although water meadow systems were hugely expensive to set up and maintain, it is estimated there were about 100,000 acres of water meadow constructed in England between the C17th and C19th, the vast majority being in chalk stream areas. Labour intensive to operate, highly skilled workers were needed for a successful system. They were known as "drowners" or "mead men", who used a variety of specialised tools to keep the channels free flowing. Their work was most in demand in January/February when the first drowning took place; after grazing, often a second drowning later in the season would stimulate autumn growth. In winter there was much to do in repairing damage to channels from treading by grazing animals, known as "righting the works".



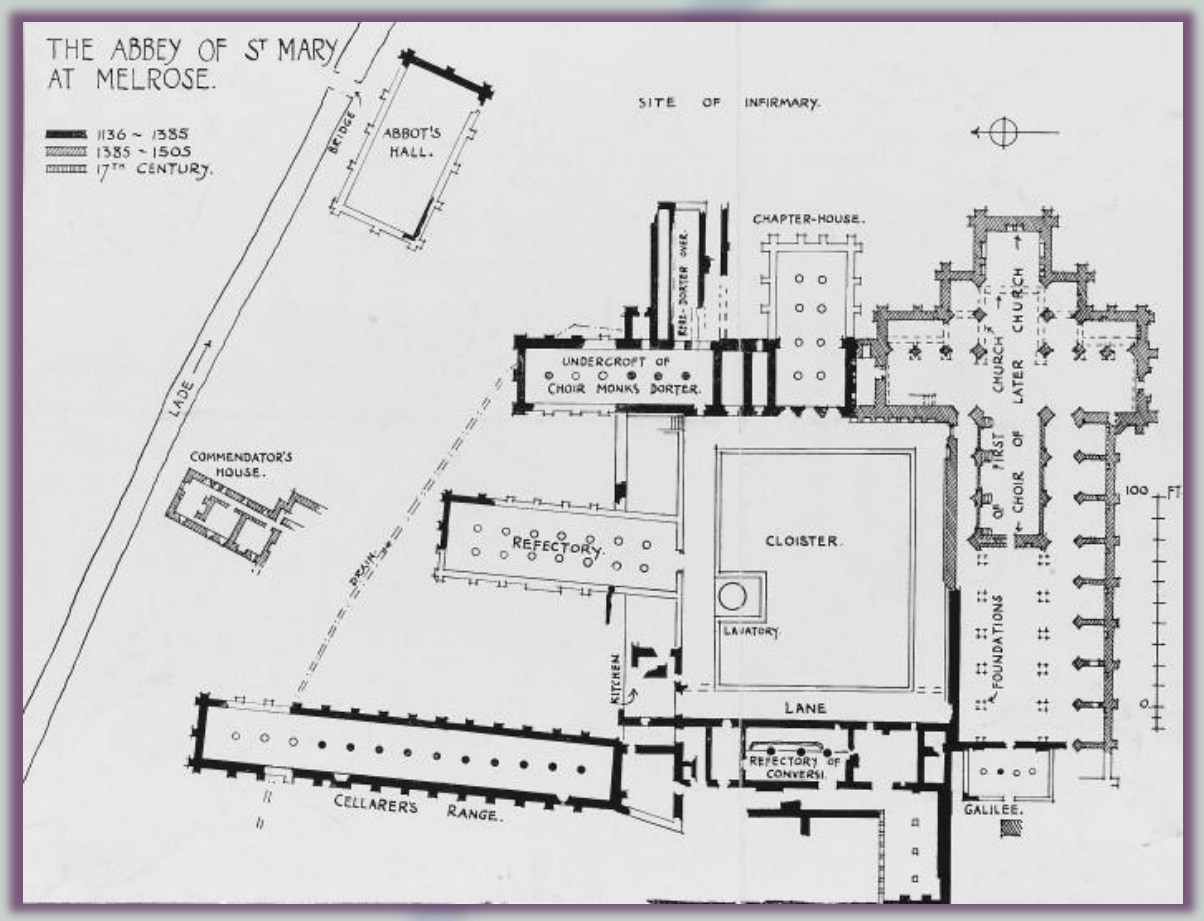
Drowner's tools, from Blith (1649)

Marsh Orchid on Barton Farm Water Meadows. Photo Robin Mills

After the heyday of the water meadow in mid-C18th to mid-C19th, farm mechanisation and the eventual introduction of artificial fertilisers which stimulate early growth brought about their decline. Today, from a farming point of view, management of Cerne's water meadows only allows occasional lightly stocked grazing by sheep, cutting for hay or silage being severely hampered by the undulations in the ground. However, as a location for Barton Farm residents and villagers to take gentle and peaceful walks, and school children to learn about and enjoy all manner of riverside wildlife, they provide huge value.

Benedictine abbeys were founded in remote spots and were self-sufficient. They therefore required farmable land and, of course, water. Water engineering was critical for providing fresh water and power for milling, but also to manage waste from the abbey monastic buildings. Medieval Benedictine abbeys all reflect a basic plan with variations determined by the local geography. Consequently, evidence from water management near an abbey site can give information on its probable layout even when, as at Cerne, very few physical remains are visible.

This article tries to pull together some of the water management evidence surrounding the probable site of Cerne Abbey. But for reference purposes we start with a discussion of Melrose Abbey.



Courtesy: Courtaulds

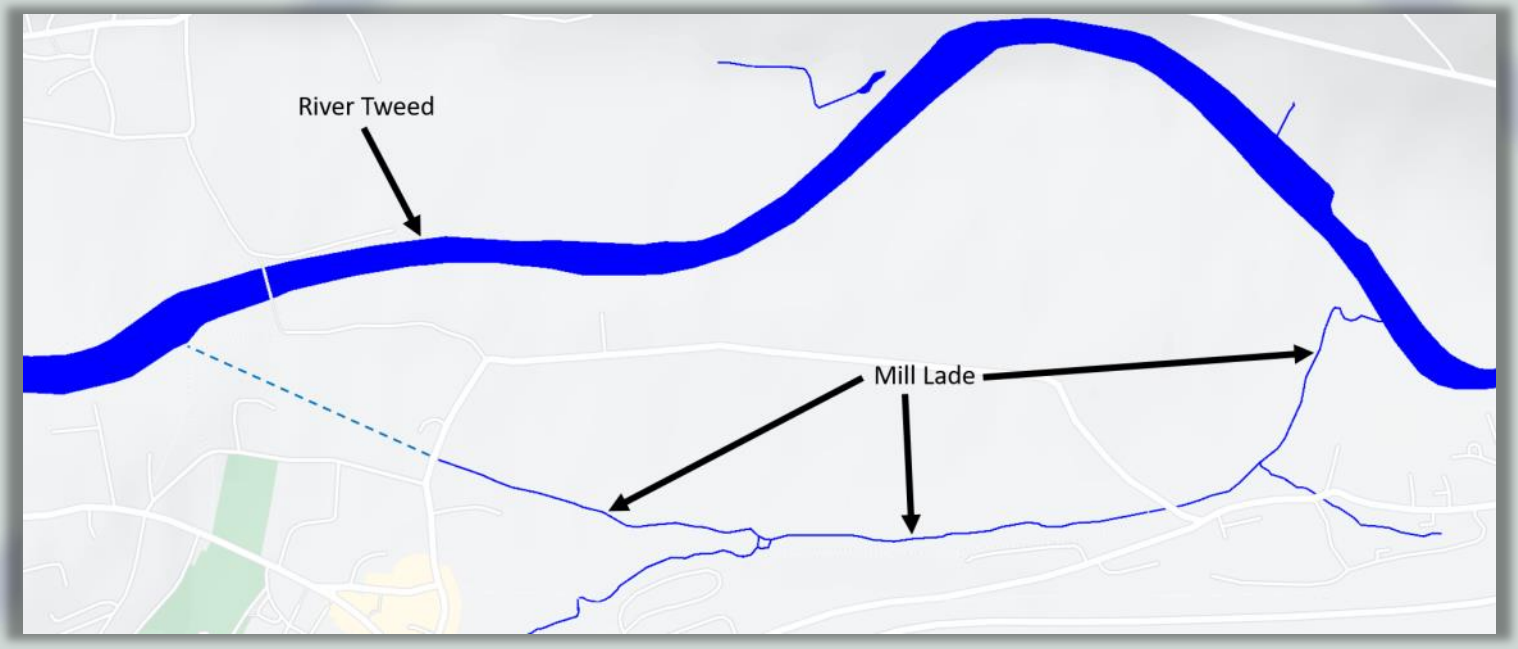
Melrose Abbey

David I founded Melrose Abbey as a Cistercian monastery in 1136. The Cistercians were a branch of the Benedictine order. The abbey suffered several times at the hands of the English and faded away as a monastery as a result of the Scottish Reformation with the last monk dying in 1590.

Unlike Cerne the remaining ruins are substantial and the plan above shows the cloister to the north of the church. However, more significantly for this discussion, there is a drain serving the reredorters (latrines) of the lay brothers (bottom left) and the monks (central). The stream on the left on the plan is labelled Mill Lade (lade=leat=water channel).

The plan indicates that water to feed the drain was extracted 160 m upstream of the plan and also that the drains discharged into the Lade further downstream. Mill Lade is itself a diversion from the River Tweed flowing W-E on the image above.

From its offtake from to discharging back into the Tweed is a distance of about 2km.

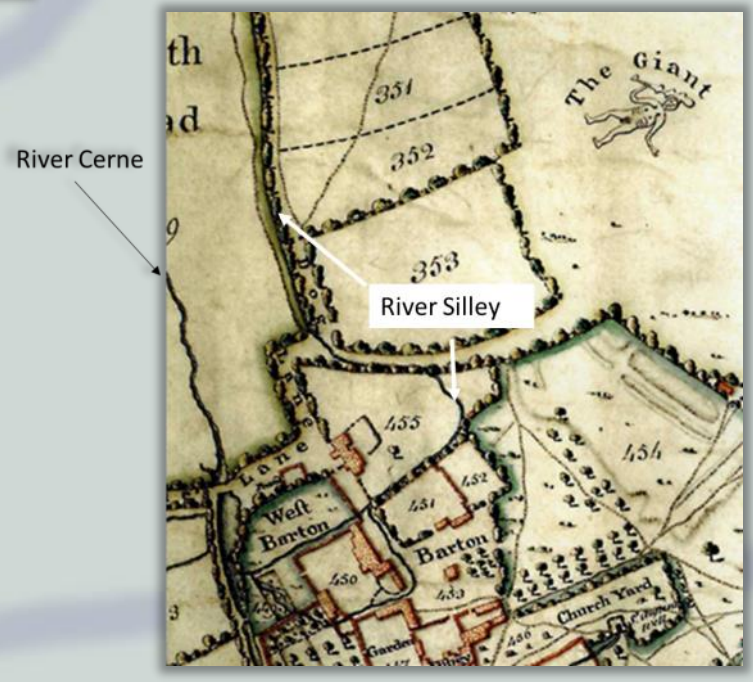


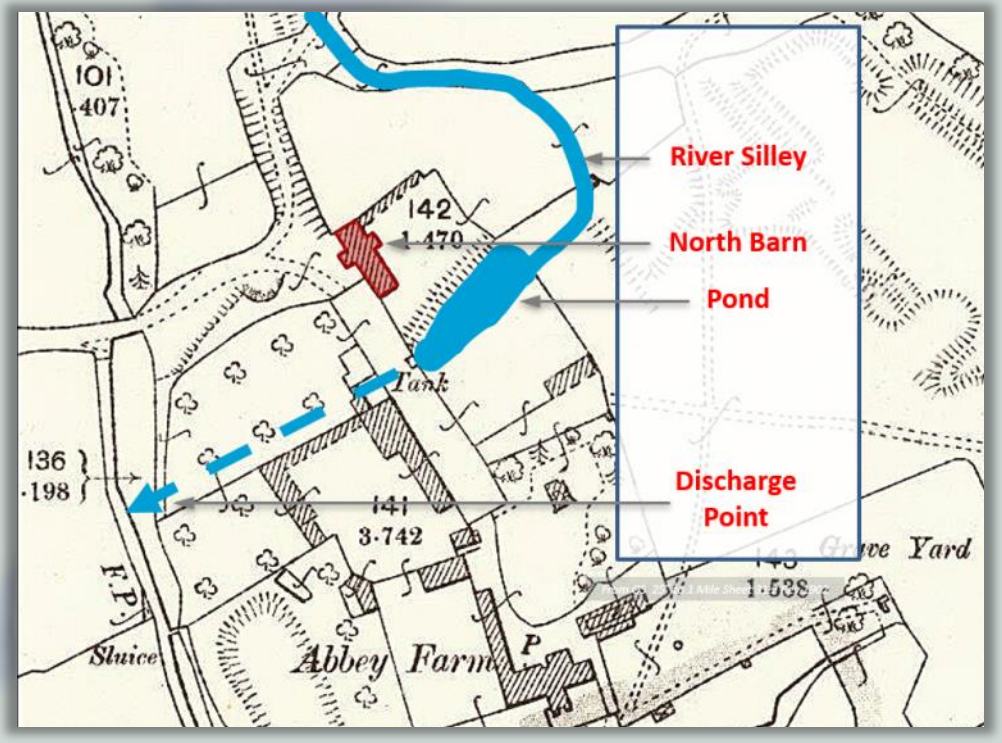
Cerne Abbey's Water Works

Of course the River Cerne is one of the reasons for the siting of the abbey. Above Kettle Bridge (17th century or earlier) the river follows its natural course. Below the bridge it has been canalised to form a mill stream. However, much further upstream at Minterne Parva the monastic water engineering starts with a stone lined cistern which diverted water from the River Cerne into what was known as the River Silley.

The Silley's route at the Minterne Parva end can be traced southward along the spring line until it reaches what is now known as North Mead. Beyond this its route has been lost due to ploughing but it appears on the 1768 map as shown in the extract (right). The Silley's position on the slopes below Giant Hill confirm its man-made character as do the sharp turns below field 353. Its total length of about 2km is similar to Melrose's Mill Lade.

The Silley entered the Cerne Abbey area above Beauvoir Court (North Barn) at roughly the point indicated below.





This source of water from the north suggests an abbey arrangement with the monastic quarters on the north side of the abbey church as at Melrose. Another local example of this unusual orientation is at Sherborne Abbey.

The 1768 map shows that the Silley skirted around approximately on the line of the existing fence passing to the south of the earthwork bank shown below which may have formed part of a fish or mill pond.

Level with the SW face of North Barn it divided on the 1768 map, one branch continuing straight on to flow into the canalised River Cerne where a tunnel opening still exists about 25m south of the bridge.

The first branch flowed SSE for 40m before turning WSW (on an axis with the Abbot's Hall porch) to make a loop as shown above re-joining other branch to discharge into the River Cerne. Until now there has been no apparent reason for this loop but it seems likely that, by backward extension, it was associated with the Abbot's Hall.

A recent archaeological field evaluation in support of the development at Beauvoir Court opened two trenches. At the southern end of one of the trenches a ditch was found. Designated ditch 109, it was determined to run ENE-WSW and was said to be possibly prehistoric but *"it appears to have been comprehensively re-worked in the medieval or early post-medieval period".* The orientation of ditch 109 is the same as the supposed connection to the Abbot's Hall and in the WSW direction it would connect up with the branch of the Silley flowing SSE from North Barn toward the Abbot's Hall.

Projecting back in the opposite direction toward the Beauvoir field it would pass close to the South Barn

Given this context it is very possibly part of the abbey drainage system. It reinforces the hypothesis that the monastic buildings were to the north of the abbey and suggests that by the time of the 1768 map, 250 years after the dissolution, some of the water distribution features had disappeared. As at Melrose the drain would have served reredorter(s) sited at the periphery of the monastic complex.

Conclusions

Mill Lade at Melrose was constructed to provide water from the river Tweed to the abbey and into which waste from the abbey was disposed downstream where it eventually re-joined the Tweed.

The 1768 map shows the route of the Silley from the cistern diverting water from the River Cerne to where it discharges back into it again.

The River Silley must have had a similar function to Mill Lade in supplying water to the drainage system and because the Silley enters into Beauvoir field from the north it is most likely that the monastic buildings lay to the north of the abbey church as they do at Melrose.

The 1768 map shows a residual distribution network in and below Beauvoir which has made little sense. However, the recent discovery of a ditch in a position and with an orientation that fits in with the residual system suggests it may be a drain from the monastic complex in a similar fashion to that evident at Montrose.

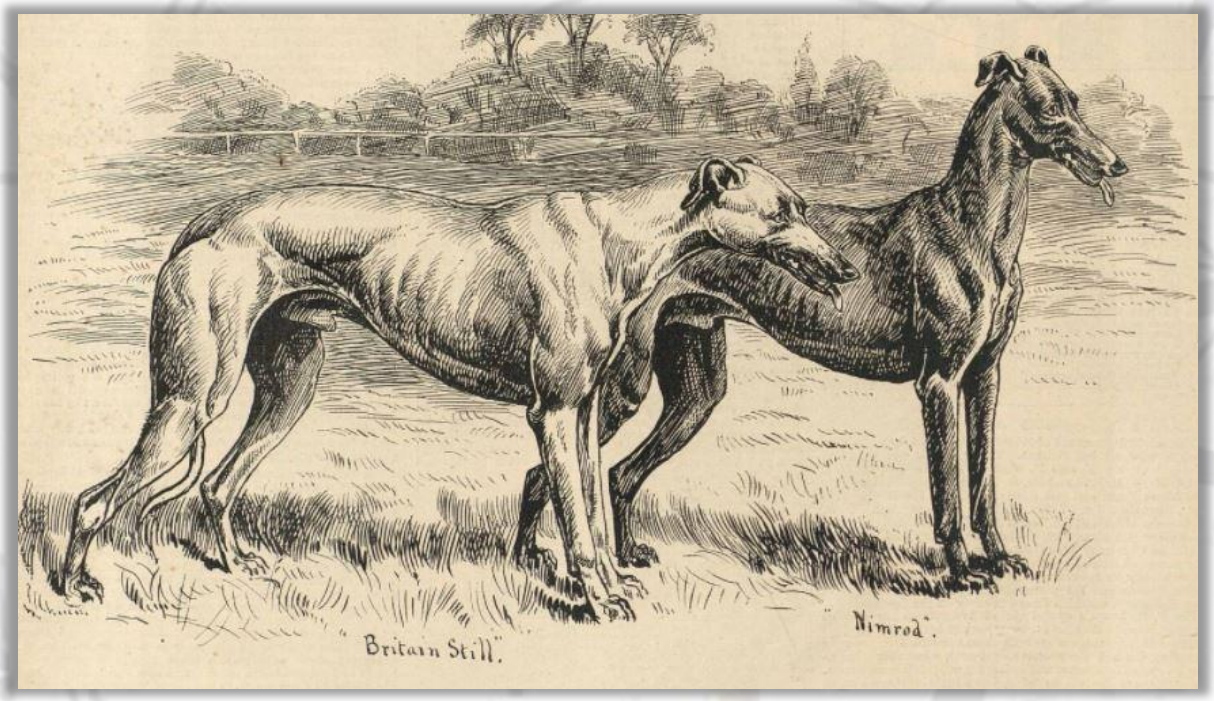
Tracing the newly discovered ditch past the outbuilding and back into Beauvoir might form a strategy for locating at least a reredorter building.

Ian Denness

March  ***1884 - Canine near-Victory***

With a population that has only occasionally reached more than a thousand souls, it is perhaps unsurprising that the history of Cerne Abbas should be short of nationally acclaimed athletic heroes. What might come as a shock, however, is that those of which it might justifiably be proud have largely been forgotten. Such an example of our village's collective amnesia applies to a nineteenth-century celebrity who, in March 1884, was awarded the silver cup for coming second in a high-profile national sporting contest, only narrowly missing out on the gold cup AND beating a reigning national champion in the process. It is time to restore this forgotten Titan to his rightful place in the annals of Cerne.

This local hero was called Nimrod – named after the biblical hunter - and he was a jet black greyhound. He was owned by Henry Norman, a native of Cerne Abbas who, by the early 1880s, was making his living as a tanner in the village. Clearly successful, in 1883 he moved, with his family, into his recently-leased residence at Barton Lodge. It is not clear precisely when Norman acquired Nimrod, but the dog came with an impressive pedigree; its father was Misterton, the winner of the Waterloo Cup – the 'Wimbledon' of Hare Coursing – of 1879.



Nimrod and Britain Still - Illustrated Sporting News - 5 April 1884 p14

Norman was keen for Nimrod to follow in its family's footsteps and had his dog trained in the art of 'coursing', a now-illegal sporting event in which two dogs compete against each other to chase, catch and kill a live hare. During 1883, Nimrod gained a number of admirers through his success at coursing meetings throughout Dorset and the South West. These local victories emboldened Norman to enter Nimrod to a national coursing competition the following year, the Gosforth Park Cup.

March  **Continued**

The Gosforth Park Cup had been held annually since 1881 on a private estate sited in the north of Newcastle. It was soon established as a highly prestigious coursing event, second in standing only to the Waterloo Cup. The 1884 contest attracted 128 competing greyhounds, with each owner paying the required ten guineas entry fee. The winner would be awarded the Gosforth Gold Cup – itself valued at 50 guineas – and prize money of £500. The runner-up was to receive winnings of £200 and a silver cup worth 15 guineas. The event was held over four days, from Wednesday 19th to Saturday 22nd March, in glorious weather.

The tournament was structured as a straightforward knockout. A draw was made for the first round in which pairs of dogs would compete in one of a series of sixty-four courses. The winner would continue to the next round, with the losing dog was eliminated. A further five rounds would see the field reduced to two finalists, who would compete for the Gold and Silver Cups.

Nimrod beat his first-round opponent, Mariner, on the opening day before triumphing over both Sambo and Clyde Pilot in the subsequent rounds held on day two. Friday saw Cerne's champion canine overcome Imogene in the fourth round and Markham in the quarter final. The scene was set for the semi-finals and the final course, which was held on the Saturday.

In the semi-final Nimrod had been drawn to face Mineral Water who, in the previous month, had been declared the victor at the Waterloo Cup meeting. Consequently, the bookmakers at Gosforth Park saw little prospect of Nimrod reaching the final. However, the contest proved a lot tighter than many expected with their heat having to be re-run when the first course was declared a tie. The second attempt was more conclusive – it was reported that 'Nimrod was well clear for the turn, and after some give and take work the south-country dog just won'.

For the final race, Nimrod was to compete with Britain Still – another sire of Misterton - for the Gold Cup. The bookies made the latter the favourite, offering odds of 9/4 on the Derby-based greyhound. Their judgement proved correct; Britain Still took the lead from the start and, by the turn, led Nimrod by two and a half lengths. The Cerne dog closed the gap in the later stages but, ultimately, was unable to catch his opponent and had to settle for second place and the Silver Cup.

The news of Nimrod's near-triumph in Newcastle was greeted with much pride back in Cerne Abbas and Norman was briefly fêted as a local celebrity. He continued to course with Nimrod, but never again reached the heights achieved in March 1884. Still, the winning of the Gosforth Silver Cup was no small achievement, and one worthy of a toast to a forgotten local hero this coming 22 March – Nimrod's Day!

April  *1925 - A Shakespeare Festival*

The last edition of the *Cerne Historical Society Magazine* featured a look back at the development of popular entertainment in the Cerne area. Included in the articles was a brief mention of a theatrical presentation which consisted of the 'successful performance of a few short Shakespearean pieces' and which led to the founding of the Cerne Abbas Players theatrical troupe. This event, which was staged on April 23rd 1925 – the anniversaries of both Shakespeare's birth and his death – and was billed as the 'Cerne Abbas Shakespearean Festival', received extensive coverage in the local press and led to a short-lived popular enthusiasm for classical theatre in the village that has not been matched since.

The festival was the idea of Eleanor Frances Hall, the spouse of Cerne's vicar, the Rev. Charles Hall. Rev. Hall had transferred, with his wife, to Cerne in March 1925, having previously served as the rector at Stock Gaylard, near Lydlinch. Before their move, Mrs Hall had been instrumental in establishing choral and dramatic groups in Lydlinch, Bagber and Bishops Caundle. So it was no surprise that after her move to the Vicarage in Back Lane, Eleanor Hall immediately got to work on setting up a similar group in her new home village.

MRS. HALL PRESENTS

'THE FOLK O' CERNE.'

ON THE EVE OF SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHDAY,

THURSDAY, APRIL 22nd,

IN THE GREAT TITHE BARN, CERNE ABBAS

(by the Courtesy of JOSEPH SPRAKE, Esq.),

at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.,

IN THE VERY DROLL SCENES FROM

"TWELFTH NIGHT,"

concerning the Tricking of Malvolio, and in the

"MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM,"

showing the Quarrel of the Fairy King and Queen and the Entrance of the Man with the Ass's Head, with a little Ballet of Fairies.

Western Gazette 9 April 1926 p4

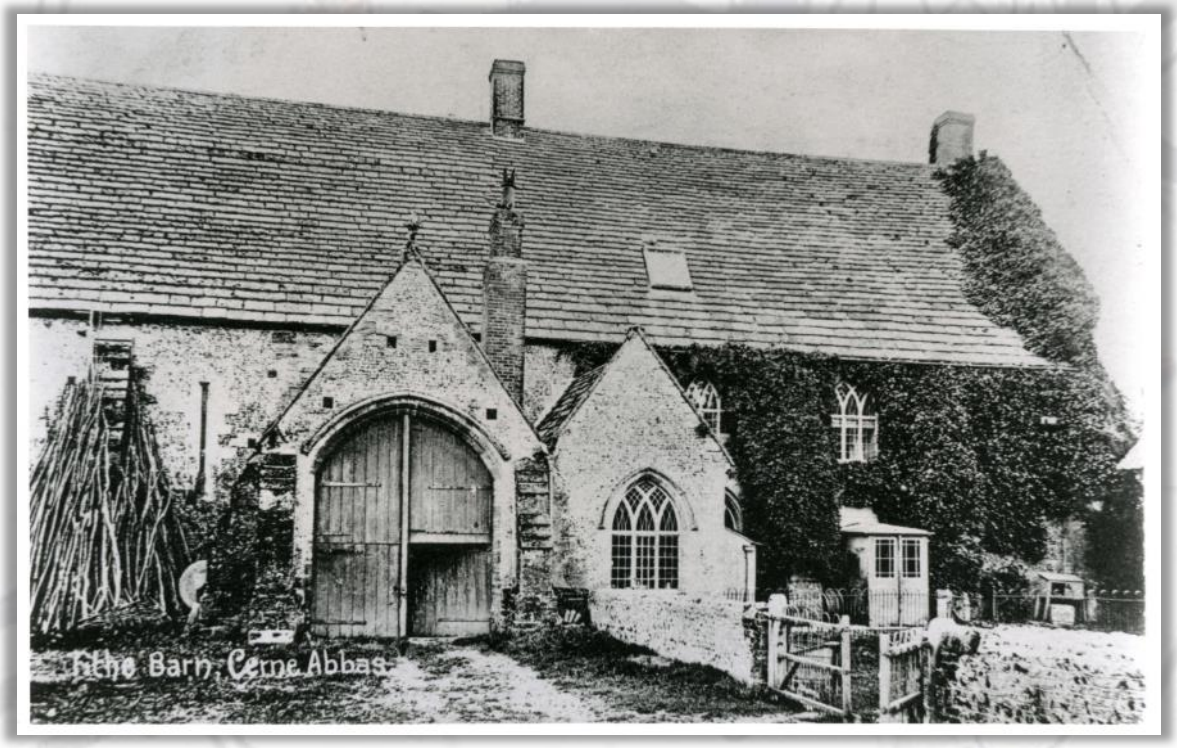
Producing the Shakespeare Festival within a month of Eleanor Hall's arrival in Cerne was a remarkable achievement. Unsurprisingly, she recruited some of her Lydlinch and Bagber friends to feature in the performances, but several of those that appeared were amateurs from Cerne and the surrounding villages. There was little time to construct much by way of scenery and the costumes were homemade. Despite these necessary measures, the overall impression given by both was 'wonderfully effective'. The one-off performance was hosted in the village's medieval Tithe Barn which, courtesy of farmer Joseph Sprake, was flooded with electric light for the occasion. After the event Hall thanked Sprake who 'so generously lent them that barn, had it cleaned, and let them run over his sacks of corn and frighten the rats'.

April  ***1925 - Continued***

The evening's entertainment consisted of excerpts from three of The Bard's plays, interspersed with dancing and choral recitals. The first performance was the suicide scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the Hall's thirteen-year-old daughter Elizabeth took the role of the eponymous heroine. A reporter from the *Western Gazette* noted that 'the silence that held the audience in the scene in which Juliet took that fatal drug broke in rapturous applause as the curtain fell'.

The mood was lightened by the female members of the Lydlinch Players who appeared next, acting out a scene from *The Taming of the Shrew*. This was followed by a performance of part of *Richard III* in which Ernest Frizzle, a dairy farmer from Lydlinch, played the title role and Eleanor Hall portrayed Margaret Beaufort. The solo dancing interlude was performed by Margaret Blathwayt dressed as Ariel, and the choral pieces consisted of Elizabethan glees and madrigals executed by the Bagber Quartette. The entertainment ended with a rousing communal rendition of *Jerusalem*.

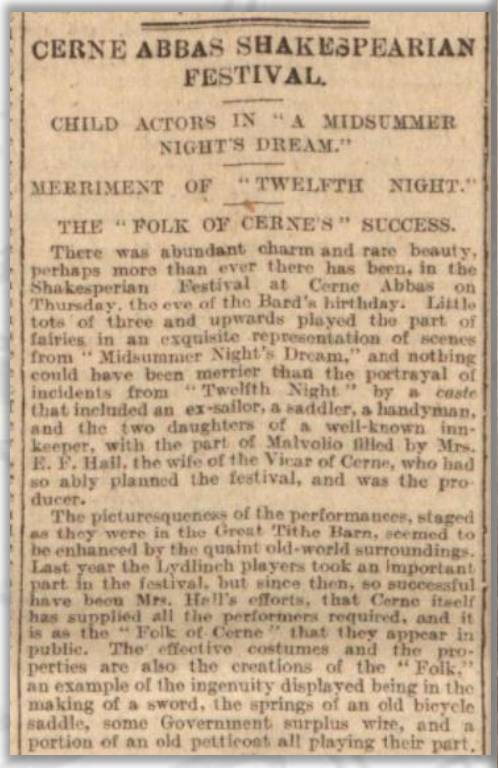
Eleanor Hall was keen that the evening should serve as the impetus for setting up a theatrical troupe in Cerne. With that in mind, she had invited a representative from the Bath-based Citizen House Players to attend and address the audience on 'how community players are made, that is, how people of a place can be their own actors'. Hall followed this with a proposal that, if Cerne's would-be thespians would form a committee, she would support them in any way she could.



April  **Continued**

And that is indeed what happened. The Folk o' Cerne - later to be renamed as the Cerne Abbas Players - were formed a few weeks later, and the Shakespeare Festival was staged for a second time in 1926, this time with a cast drawn solely from Cerne residents. The performances were sold out and, briefly, the establishment of a Shakespearean troupe in the village was keenly discussed. But, despite Eleanor Hall's enthusiasm, the idea failed to develop further. Perhaps, with the centenary of the original festival fast approaching, it's an appropriate time for the residents of Cerne to reassert their love both for Shakespeare and for public performance?

The cast of A Midsummer Night's Dream as performed at the Tithe Barn on 22 April 1926'



CERNE ABBAS SHAKESPEARIAN FESTIVAL.

CHILD ACTORS IN "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM."

MERRIMENT OF "TWELFTH NIGHT."

THE "FOLK OF CERNE'S" SUCCESS.

There was abundant charm and rare beauty, perhaps more than ever there has been, in the Shakesperian Festival at Cerne Abbas on Thursday, the eve of the Bard's birthday. Little tots of three and upwards played the part of fairies in an exquisite representation of scenes from "Midsummer Night's Dream," and nothing could have been merrier than the portrayal of incidents from "Twelfth Night" by a *caste* that included an ex-sailor, a saddler, a handyman, and the two daughters of a well-known innkeeper, with the part of Malvolio filled by Mrs. E. F. Hall, the wife of the Vicar of Cerne, who had so ably planned the festival, and was the producer.

The picturesqueness of the performances, staged as they were in the Great Tithe Barn, seemed to be enhanced by the quaint old-world surroundings. Last year the Lydlinch players took an important part in the festival, but since then, so successful have been Mrs. Hall's efforts, that Cerne itself has supplied all the performers required, and it is as the "Folk of Cerne" that they appear in public. The effective costumes and the properties are also the creations of the "Folk," an example of the ingenuity displayed being in the making of a sword, the springs of an old bicycle saddle, some Government surplus wire, and a portion of an old petticoat all playing their part.

"A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM."

The scenes from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" were played by a *caste* composed, with one exception, solely of children. The scenery was of the simplest kind, but it was most skilfully arranged, and the fairy costumes were charming. The audience sat entranced at the pretty picture of the fairy bower, where, from a throne overhung with "sweet summer buds," Titania, the Fairy Queen, holds sway. Titania, in the person of Miss Elisabeth Hall, dances with wonderful grace, but is interrupted by the approach of the jealous Oberon (Cecil Fox). Anon comes the hapless, comical Bottom (Mr. Reginald Durose), "translated" by the mischievous Puck (Donald Everett), and the famous love scene is enacted, ending with the final awakening.

The little actors fully entered into the spirit of the piece, playing as to the manner born, and none more so than Donald Everett, the life and soul of the party, and one of the most taking Pucks imaginable. Titania was a luminous figure, who danced with rare grace, and the smallest performers of all caused great delight by their appearance as Peaso-Blossom (Betty Burge), Mustard-Seed (Eric Fox), Cobweb (Margaret Gibson), and Moth (Wilfred Gibson). Dorothy Philpott took the part of the first Fairy well, and fairy dancers included Winnie Warren, Grace Ilfitch, Jean Philpott, Jenny Hardy, and Betty Mabb. Their teacher had been Miss Hall, who also arranged the dances. Mr. Durose, who is the leader of the Congregational Church in Cerne, was excellently suited to the role of Bottom, his comical plaintiveness as the half man, half ass, being very funny indeed. Mendelssohn's incidental music was played as an accompaniment, and there were lighting effects by Mr. C. E. Hancock, of Sparkford. The flowers were made by the "Fairies."

VILLAGERS' CLEVER ACTING.

The actors who appeared in the merry episodes from "Twelfth Night" may be regarded as the forerunners of what it is hoped will be a firmly established band of Shakesperian players. It was no mean tribute to their skill in how quickly they had their audience laughing heartily at the undoing of the over-conceited steward, who was foolish enough as to believe his mistress entertained a passion for him. The acting was all the better for its great naturalness, and it was evident that those who took part had little to learn in the art of obtaining the correct atmosphere as speedily as possible.

A pleasant surprise sprung upon those present was to find Mrs. Hall herself filling the part of the unlucky Malvolio, for her name did not appear in the *caste*. Mr. George Warren, who is the church sexton, it seemed was unable to undertake the role. Nothing could have surpassed her portrayal, and she scored yet another distinct success. In the scene in the garden, in which Malvolio soliloquises over the supposed love-letter, her wealth of gesture and marvellous expression won well-deserved praise, and Malvolio's indignation on learning of the trick played upon him was excellently brought out. Miss Annie Smith shared the honours by her lively playing of the role of the saucy handmaid, Maria. Mr. Percy Burge as Sir Toby Belch was well matched by Mr. Walter Fox as that foolish knight, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, of the flaxen hair. Feste, the wise clown, had an admirable representative in Mr. Fred Philpott, who was at his best when, with deep, solemn voice, he took upon himself the personality of Sir Topas, the curate, and visited Malvolio in his prison. Miss Florrie Smith made an effective picture as the Lady Olivia, and a *caste* of rare merit was completed by Mr. Reg. Whitemore, as Fabian, the servant.

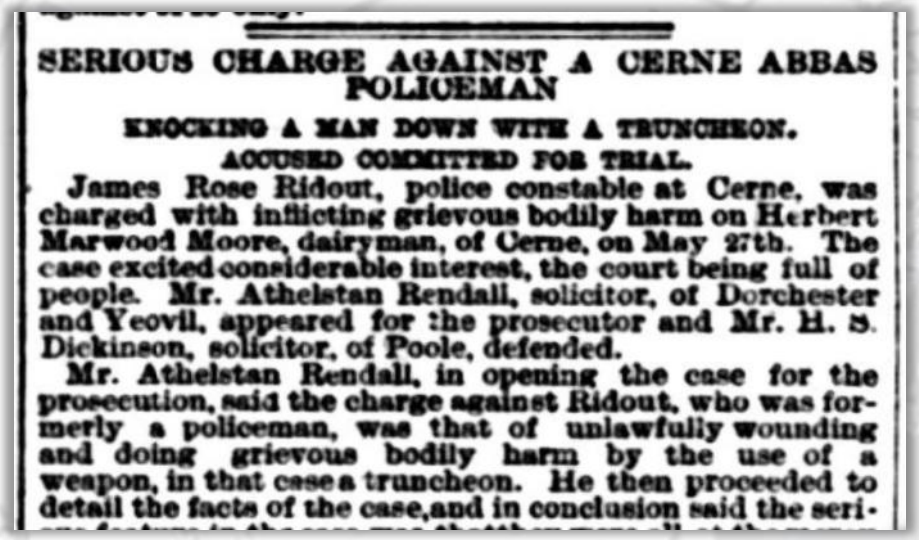
Two performances were given, and at each the Barn, kindly lent by Mr. Joseph Sprake, was well filled. For the success achieved the highest praise was earned by Mrs. Hall and the company of actors and actresses she has gathered around her.

Western Gazette 30 April 1926 p11

May  *1901 - Police Violence*

At 9.30 on the evening of 27 May 1901, the twenty-five-year-old dairyman, Herbert Moore, entered Cerne's Red Lion pub and ordered the first of the two drinks that he was to enjoy that night. Despite it being the traditional holiday of Whit Monday, he had chosen to spend his day helping out on his mother's farm and was feeling understandably thirsty. By 10.00 he was standing outside the pub in Long Street chatting to a group of his friends as he finished his second pint. Half an hour later he was sitting in the living room of Dr Dalton's house on Piddle Lane, dazed, and bleeding profusely from a severe head wound. The events of the preceding thirty minutes shocked many of Cerne's residents and ended the career of one of the village's resident policemen.

The policeman in question was twenty-six-year-old Constable James Ridout. Ridout had only recently been stationed at Cerne Abbas, having previously patrolled the beat at Shapwick, south east of Blandford, for at least four years. He arrived with something of a chequered record; in the month before his transfer, he had appeared in court on suspicion of poaching, although the case was dismissed through insufficient evidence.



SERIOUS CHARGE AGAINST A CERNE ABBAS POLICEMAN

KNOCKING A MAN DOWN WITH A TRUNCHEON.

ACCUSED COMMITTED FOR TRIAL.

James Rose Ridout, police constable at Cerne, was charged with inflicting grievous bodily harm on Herbert Marwood Moore, dairyman, of Cerne, on May 27th. The case excited considerable interest, the court being full of people. Mr. Athelstan Rendall, solicitor, of Dorchester and Yeovil, appeared for the prosecutor and Mr. H. S. Dickinson, solicitor, of Poole, defended.

Mr. Athelstan Rendall, in opening the case for the prosecution, said the charge against Ridout, who was formerly a policeman, was that of unlawfully wounding and doing grievous bodily harm by the use of a weapon, in that case a truncheon. He then proceeded to detail the facts of the case, and in conclusion said the seri-

Southern Times 29 June 1901 p3

The events of 27 May began when Moore and his friends were approached by Ridout outside the Red Lion. The policeman insisted that the men should 'move on' and, turning to Moore, demanded to know why he was not wearing a coat. Bemused, Moore responded that it was, frankly, none of his business, at which point Ridout then left the group and continued down Long Street.

Shortly after, Moore left in the same direction, heading back to his house in Acreman Street. Somewhere near the New Inn he met Ridout walking towards him. The constable apologised to Moore and asked him to 'forget' his earlier question about his coat, saying that he only asked it in order 'to frighten the other men'. Not being in a forgiving frame of mind, Moore declined the apology, and the two continued to talk as they walked down the road.

When they reached the police station, Ridout, without any warning, pulled out his truncheon and struck Moore a heavy blow on the back of his head. The dairyman fell to the ground and, while prostrate, was hit again by Ridout. Mildly concussed, Moore demanded that he be allowed to speak with Superintendent Ricketts – Ridout's boss – to complain. Ridout insisted that this was not possible as Ricketts had gone to bed. When Moore tried to ring the Superintendent's doorbell, he was pushed away by Ridout and received further blows from his assailant.

Eventually, Moore did manage to ring the bell and Ricketts appeared at the door. When he enquired what had happened and why Moore had been hit, Ridout claimed that it was because the victim was 'drunk, refused to go home, and had no coat on'. Quite why he thought that Moore's coatless status warranted the attack is not clear. After making enquiries to a few witnesses, Ricketts dismissed Ridout to his quarters and directed Moore to Dr Dalton for treatment. Shortly afterwards, Ricketts had Ridout arrested and charged with grievous bodily harm.

The case was referred to the County Court in Dorchester held on 3 July, where Ridout was placed in front of judge Hastings B. Middleton. Even before the trial, the decision had been made by the Dorset Constabulary to dismiss Ridout from the service, so it was as a private citizen that he stood trial. He was officially charged with 'unlawfully and maliciously wounding, assaulting and inflicting grievous bodily harm in and upon one Herbert Marwood Moore, of Cerne Abbas'. The jury found Ridout guilty, but his punishment was subject to some mitigation in consideration of his having already lost his job. The judge offered Ridout the choice of either paying a £3 fine or serving one month's hard labour in prison. Ridout chose to pay the fine and avoid incarceration.

From this point, Ridout's life took a turn for the worse. Having lost his job with the police, he and his family left Cerne and moved to Fiddleford, not far from his boyhood home of Okeford Fitzpaine. In the November of 1902 the ex-policeman made yet another appearance in court, on this occasion pleading guilty at the Sturminster Newton Petty Sessions to the charge of stealing sixpence worth of apples. Subsequent records show that he later found employment as an agricultural labourer, and it may be presumed that he worked as a farm hand until his death, aged 60, in 1936.

What actually happened between the two men on the night of 27 May remains unknown. Had they crossed swords earlier and the assault was a continuation of some disagreement? Had the recently-arrived Ridout been a little over-enthusiastic in trying to assert his authority on the Cernites? Did Moore incite the attack through some well-targeted insult? It's impossible to know, as is the extent to which Ridout regretted the seemingly spontaneous act which cost him his job and earned him the opprobrium of the inhabitants of Cerne.

Photo A K Popkin

Letters

Edited by George Mortimer

Editor's comment:

Only one letter for this issue, but another fascinating dip into our village history.

Diana Kimber writes:

I much enjoyed the last magazine of 2021, and especially the excellent article by Robin Mills on field names. He mentions the Droveway, running West from Yelcombe, past the Southern edge of the Burial Ground and its old vehicular gateway, towards a (now surfaced) yard. Would I be right in thinking that this yard might have held pens for animals, perhaps to be sold at the old Market?

Kind regards

Diana

This letter was forwarded to Robin Mills who responded with the following:

Dear Diana

So glad you enjoyed the article on field names. I couldn't say whether or not there was a holding pen for animals destined for the market at the top of Abbey Street as I have no evidence, but it seems plausible as it would have been fairly easy to "funnel" animals there from Yelcombe grazing, pen them up, and then drive them down Abbey Street to be sold.

There was a "pound" situated on the north side of the village close by the North Barn (now Beauvoir Court) on the northern edge of West Barton, shown on the attached map of 1768. In earlier times stray animals were a common problem (no barbed wire then!) and every village had one. Strays were locked in the pound, and the owner had to pay the tally man a fee to get them released.

Robin Mills

Letters

By the Editor

The Letters section of the Magazine is rather short for this issue. What we have provides us with another opportunity to gain an insight into times past, which can only be teased out and shared by contributions from you. If you came to the Abbey Symposium on 24 February, and there were nearly 90 of you there, questions were raised and discussed at the time. However, on reflection other questions may have formed in your minds afterwards. Was there something which you thought was missed or not followed through sufficiently? You may have memories of visiting Benedictine monasteries in UK and abroad, perhaps still active, and remember features which could help in building up a picture of Cerne Abbey in its heyday.

On this or any local history questions, let's hear from you. If you think you have something to contribute, however unimportant it may seem to you, it helps all of us to understand more about our local and national heritage. If you have specialist knowledge, share it.

The Editor looks forward to a bumper edition for the next issue of your Magazine!

The Letters Page Editor will be pleased to hear from you on any subject that will increase a mutual understanding of our shared history.

gcmortimer@btinternet.com or put a note through the door at 3 Abbey Court, if you prefer.

We reserve the right to publish if no objection is expressed in your email or letter.

This magazine may be viewed online at cerneabbashistory.org

The Summer 2022 issue will be published in June

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