



Cerne  
Historical  
Society

# MAGAZINE



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Autumn  
**2022**



**WELCOME to the Autumn 2022 issue of the Cerne Historical Society's Magazine, the twelfth since we started publishing it in April 2020.**

As we were putting the final touches to this issue of the Magazine came the unhappy news of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Mixed with the profound feelings of sorrow at her passing, we have also been fascinated by the protocols and rituals of the seamless Accession of Charles III and the funeral of Her Majesty. Some of these protocols and rituals go back to the very beginnings of the institution of our monarchy, with Egbert in 827. In this issue of the Magazine we are exploring what remains of Cerne Abbey, established in 987, and there was almost certainly an Anglo Saxon monastery here even before then. Cerne Abbas, created because of these monastic settlements, has therefore witnessed and experienced all the trials and tribulations of our monarchy and nation since earliest times. The Commonwealth between 1649 and 1660 was a short interlude in an otherwise unbroken line of the monarchy, between the reigns of Charles I and Charles II. We therefore salute the Accession of their successor, Charles III.

**God Save the King!**



Of the recent archaeological survey in Beauvoir Field **Dr Hugh Wilmott**, Senior Lecturer in European Historical Archaeology at the University of Sheffield writes:

### **New archaeological survey in Beauvoir Field**

***In June, archaeologists from the University of Sheffield undertook a new geophysical survey on Beauvoir Field. It has long been speculated that at least a portion of the late medieval abbey lay in this location. However, earlier resistivity and magnetometry surveys undertaken by Bournemouth University in 2011 proved rather disappointing and uninformative.***

*Over four days, the archaeologists focused on the southern portion of the field, close to the graveyard wall. They used a relatively new archaeological technique, ground penetrating radar (GPR). This works by emitting small energy pulses into the ground, which are then reflected back to the machine at different rates depending on what lies below, enabling the computer to create a map of the subsurface remains. While traditional geophysical techniques, such as those used by Bournemouth University, typically provide good results for features buried up to 1m below the surface, the GPR can penetrate many metres deeper. It also enables archaeologists to see below the ground in 'slices', allowing them to assess the extent and preservation of archaeological remains at various depths. It's a time-consuming technique, as the GPR is physically pushed along a line of carefully placed tapes at 25cm intervals, so only about 1/3 of Beauvoir was surveyed in June.*

*The results, however, are most encouraging, and although further processing of the data needs to be undertaken, some conclusions can already be made. The GPR clearly shows the presence of buried walls, but at a depth that didn't allow earlier surveys to detect them. Three ranges of buildings forming the cloister are present, as are hints of other structures around these. The monastic church seems to lie to the south, roughly occupying the area of the current graveyard, and so was mainly outside of the survey area. The size and arrangement of the abbey buildings closely mirror those at Sherborne. This also has a cloister to the church's north rather than the more traditional positioning to the south. Indeed, the GPR seems to suggest there is a prominent feature in the cloister that resembles the surviving conduit house at Sherborne, which was subsequently relocated to Cheap Street.*

*Further survey and analysis are still required, and Sheffield's team hopes to return in 2023. However, the survey undertaken so far has at last provided a definitive location for the principal abbey buildings, although at this time the wider layout of the precinct remains to be defined.*



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I would like to thank Hugh and his team for all the work they have done to date. Shortly after Hugh's visit I had the pleasure of meeting Jonathan Wilcox, Professor of English at the University of Iowa, who was visiting Cerne for a few days. He is a specialist in the literature, language and thought of early medieval England and an authority on Ælfric, the Benedictine monk, writer and scholar who lived in Cerne Abbey from its foundation in 987 until 1005 when he became Abbot of Eynsham. He very kindly provided me with copies of his work on Ælfric and has most generously allowed me to use them in order to write the article about Ælfric which is in this issue and which is mainly based on his work.

Ælfric is a very important figure in the history of Cerne Abbey. He received considerable attention at the time of the Millennial celebrations of the foundation of the Abbey in 1987, particularly in the fascinating lectures given by F.H.Farmer and Professor Katherine Barker but I believe he has received little attention over the last 30 years. It is perhaps time he was honoured in Cerne as he has recently been in Eynsham, but maybe by a statue rather than a plaque.

Another figure of great interest in the history of Cerne is St Edwold, the hermit who lived here in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. A most interesting article was written about him by Laurence Keen, Dorset's former Chief Archaeologist, at the time of the Millennium celebrations and with his kind permission we are republishing it in this issue of the magazine.

The next meeting of the Society will take place at 7.30pm on Thursday the 27<sup>th</sup> October at Minterne House. Lord Digby has very kindly agreed to give a talk on Kenelm Digby, a 17<sup>th</sup> century ancestor, courtier and diplomat. It should be a most interesting evening.

**Gordon Bishop – Chair of the Cerne Historical Society**

**Gordon may easily be contacted by using the form on the website [cerneabbashistory.org/contact-us/](http://cerneabbashistory.org/contact-us/)**





## Programme announced for 2023

**JANUARY 26<sup>th</sup> AGM and Party**

**FEBRUARY 23<sup>rd</sup> On the Parish: Voices of the Sherborne Poor**

Luke Moulard

**MARCH 23<sup>rd</sup> Women's Suffrage in Dorset: Forgotten Stories**

Karen Hunt

**APRIL 27<sup>th</sup> Studland and Poole's part in D-Day**

David Warhurst

**MAY 25<sup>th</sup> Chesil Beach: A People's Solitude**

Judith Stinton

**JUNE 22<sup>nd</sup> Revising the Dorset Pevsner**

Michael Hill

**SEPTEMBER 28<sup>th</sup> Turnpikes and Dorset Coaching Days**

Rob Curtis

**OCTOBER 26<sup>th</sup> The Princess and the Slave: A tale of two women in Iron Age Dorset**

Martin Smith

**NOVEMBER 23<sup>rd</sup> The Treasure Act and Portable Antiquities Scheme –**

Ciorstaidh Hayward-Trevarthen



# Ælfric

This blue plaque honours **Ælfric Grammaticus**, also known as **Ælfric of Cerne** and **Ælfric the Homilist**, who was Abbot of Eynsham from its foundation in 1005 until his death in 1010. It was unveiled in the Market Square, Eynsham, Oxfordshire on the 1st July this year.

Ælfric, a Benedictine monk, scholar and teacher, was a consummate and prolific writer in Old English. He wrote homilies, lives of saints, pastoral letters, translations of parts of the bible and other works including a colloquy, i.e. an imagined conversation to help his students learn Latin, and a Latin Grammar (hence the name *Grammaticus*). Of the corpus of all surviving Old English, comprising some 3,900,00 words, some 570,000 are the works of Ælfric; i.e. he wrote 14.65% of the surviving corpus of Old English.



One distinguished academic and historian specialising in the Anglo-Saxon period has described Ælfric as “a man comparable both in the quantity of his writings and in the quality of his mind even with Bede himself”. Another has said that he was the most educated, prolific and influential writer in English before Chaucer.

What the plaque does not say is that Ælfric wrote the vast majority of his work when he was a monk at Cerne Abbey in the period between 987 and 1005. He wrote other works after that whilst he was Abbot of Eynsham including his *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*, a homily for Christmas and a number of homilies for Pentecost, but that was a very small part of his output compared to that at Cerne. Thus he is most appropriately called Ælfric of Cerne.

Nothing is known of Ælfric’s birth or family, although it seems likely that he was born between 945 and 950. His standard West Saxon dialect indicates that he was probably born in Wessex. What is known is that he was educated and trained in the cathedral school of Winchester under the influential reforming bishop St Æthelwold (c906-984), probably between 963 and 984. In his works Ælfric refers to himself as “alumnus Æthelwold”. It was a time when the monastic revival of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, which came through the Rule of St Benedict with its insistence on obedience to the abbot, on the common life and on celibacy, was at its height.

Æthelwold was one of the three monastic bishops who headed the revival movement, the other two being St Dunstan (909-987) who was successively Abbot of Glastonbury, Bishop of Worcester, Bishop of London and Archbishop of Canterbury, St Æthelwold who became Bishop of Winchester in 963 and Oswald (925-992) who became Bishop of Worcester in 961 and Archbishop of York in 972. Under them a large number of monasteries were founded or refounded on reformed lines in England south of the Humber.

Ælfric’s own works indicate that St Dunstan also played a major part in his life. In giving examples of the first person pronoun in his Grammar, which was written in Old English, but designed primarily to explain Latin, Ælfric includes the following hypothetical dialogue:

## If you were to say now: who taught you?

**I would say: Dunstan.**

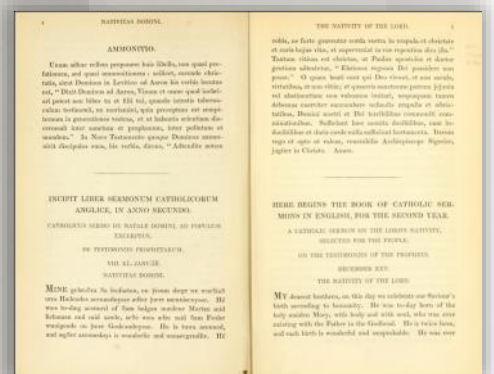
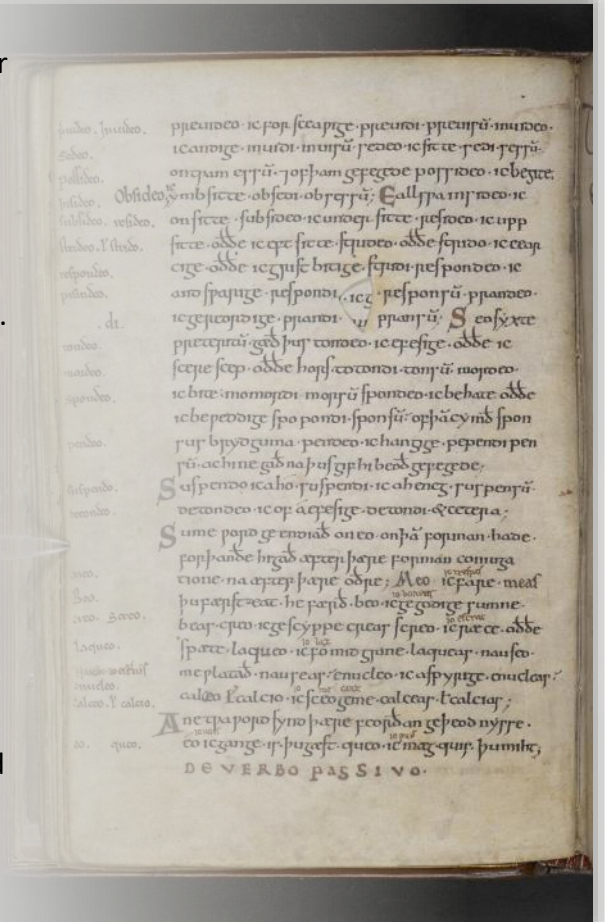
**Who ordained you?**

**He ordained me.**

Ælfric probably came from Winchester to Cerne at the time of its foundation in 987, but certainly before 990. In the Preface to one of his *Catholic Homilies* he says he was transferred from Winchester during the reign of Æthelred (978-1016) on the order of Ælfeah, Bishop of Winchester 984-1006, at the request of Æthelmær the thane. He also clearly states that his status was that of monk and mass-priest, not abbot.

Æthelweard, Ealdorman of the Western Provinces (c975-990) and his son, Aethelmaer, played an important part in Ælfric's life. They were both powerful advisers of King Æthelred and significant supporters of monasteries in Wessex. In the 'foundation' charter of 987 Æthelmær settled various estates on Cerne Abbey, including the land on which it and the village nearby stood. Those estates were augmented by gifts from other people. Æthelweard was himself a scholar: he translated the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle into Latin, which marks him as exceptionally well-educated for a layman of this period. Both their names recur in the Prefaces as Ælfric describes the motivation for his translations from Latin into the vernacular and the *Lives of Saints* were written for and dedicated to them. After his father's death in 998 Æthelmær founded another monastery at Eynsham to which he appointed Ælfric as abbot.

The most important of Ælfric's works were written between his arrival in Cerne (c987) and 995. They were the two series of *Catholic Homilies*, consisting of eighty-four homilies for liturgical occasions throughout the year, and the further thirty-seven homilies of *Lives of Saints* for festivals of saints. The homilies are essentially sermons providing an explanation in English of the Latin gospel reading from the mass. As such they could be read out by a priest to a congregation in the course of a church service on a Sunday or major saint's day that was celebrated in church. However, as well as their liturgical use they had a value as reading pieces both for pious layfolk and for monks and priests, providing access to the key ideas of the liturgy for anyone unable to understand the Latin readings.



*Ælfric's Homilies may be read at [Archive.org](http://Archive.org)*

The *Homilies* were inspired, at least in part, by the policy of King Alfred a century before to translate into English certain books, “those which are most necessary for all men to know” and to educate the sons of free-men in English. Alfred considered the success of the Viking incursions up to his time as a reflection of God’s wrath against the English for the decline of learning and falling away of ecclesiastical institutions. In the *Homilies* Ælfric also refers to Æthelweard and Æthelmær as part of his motivation for writing them.

The *Homilies* were very successful. In an article entitled *Ælfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care*, published in September 2012, Prof Jonathan Wilcox of Iowa University, an expert on Ælfric, wrote:

***“The most distinctive fact about manuscripts of the Catholic Homilies is that there is a great number of them – 34 of the first series with a further 50 postulated from the textual evidence. This provides an important clue about the Ælfric phenomenon. What can be recovered of the distribution of the Catholic Homilies shows that circulation took place on a massive scale and that Canterbury was at the heart of the operation ... The role of Canterbury indicates that Ælfric was not alone in discerning the need for a vernacular homiletic programme. The Church hierarchy, including Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury, to whom the prefaces are addressed, must have seen their potential value and provided massive and official dissemination. If that included circulation to the priest in the field, it would have involved thousands of copies, perhaps written in local (minster?) scriptoria.”***



We know nothing about the buildings of Cerne Abbey or its other occupants during the 18 years Ælfric lived there. It is likely that the monks took over an existing church on the land given to them by Aethelmaer. They may have also used other buildings already on that land as their living quarters and as places for other activities until they were able to construct new buildings. It has been conjectured by D.H. Farmer in his excellent Millennium Lecture entitled *The Monastic Reform of the 10th Century and Cerne Abbas* that “the monastic community at Cerne in its early days numbered about twenty. The number does not include the boys in the monastic school, nor the workmen or dependents of the monastery, who numbered perhaps as many again as the monks themselves.” In view of Ælfric’s composition of his *Grammar*, *Glossary* and *Colloquy* around 994 the school was undoubtedly a place of great scholarship and learning and would have been well attended. The need to make numerous copies of the *Homilies* to meet the demand for them would also have necessitated a sizeable scriptorium.

At the end of his article D.H. Farmer asks “What made Cerne special (amongst the monasteries of the 10<sup>th</sup> century)?” His answer, with which it is impossible to disagree, is: “Simply that it was the home for the most productive and notable scholar of his time for nearly twenty years. At Cerne the most comprehensive body of Christian writings was planned and executed. Far be it from the present writer to belittle the importance of antiquity or of artistic achievement, but the talent of the scholar and writer with an extensive educational programme for clergy and laity is surely no less deserving of the esteem of posterity.”

It is surely time that we found an appropriate way of honouring Ælfric, this towering figure of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, in the village where he lived for such an important part of his life.



## George Mortimer      Spinning and Weaving in Back Lane - a Local Industry

With thanks to Graham Clark for his research and contribution to this article

The demolition of the dilapidated garages and subsequent redevelopment work adjacent to No 47 Back Lane (Ypres Cottage), marks the end of the final traces of a site where, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the

19<sup>th</sup> century, there existed workshops for a spinning and weaving business in Cerne Abbas. It cannot be certain when the business started, but we know from the 1798 Admeasurement Survey, site No 133, that the site, which included what is now No 30 Long Street and the land up to Back Lane where the workshops were shown, was in the possession of William Clark. The Universal British Directory of 1793 to 1798 describes William as a 'watchmaker and linen draper'. However, an insurance policy taken out in 1796 with the Sun Fire Office of London describes William as a 'draper linman and watchmaker'. A linman's business was flax related and usually involved the weaving of twine (twine being flax already spun).




William appears for the first time in Cerne in the Churchwarden's accounts for 1780. He received 2s 6d for a '**Brass collar, Nutt and Screw for the dial**'. In the early 1780s the clock and chimes seemed to be causing considerable problems and expense for the Churchwardens. The unprecedented scale of spending on the clock at that time suggests that a new clock and dial were installed and William started earning a regular salary of about two guineas a year. This arrangement continued until the early 1790s. Thereafter, he seems to have repaired the clock on various occasions rather than having a fixed annual salary. Was this the spur to diversify into spinning and weaving? Or did he take over an existing business? We have no way of knowing either way, but we do know that the business thrived in the first few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. William also continued as a watchmaker, with his business premises in a house below Abbey Street opposite the Market House. This house was burnt down in the early 1930s, its site now subsumed into the garden of 1 Abbey Street.





In 1806 William was granted a Letter Patent for **'Improvements in a Machine for spinning Hemp, Flax, Tow and Wool'**. 'Tow' was a coarse, broken fibre, removed during processing flax or hemp. The improvements were **'calculated to save the heavy expense of currents of water, erecting spacious buildings, waterworks, steam engine & and to spin hemp, flax, tow and wool, at such an easy expense, as to bring it within reach of small manufacturers, and constructed upon such safe and easy principles, that no length of experience will be necessary to enable children to work the same'**. Using children to work factory machinery was still possible until 1833, when the Child Labour Act was introduced. Even then, child labour did not entirely go away, the Act only setting limits: **'No children were to work in factories under the age of nine. A maximum working week of 48 hours was set for those aged 9 to 13, limited to eight hours a day; and for children between 13 and 18 it was limited to 12 hours daily'**. Even this continuing employment of child labour in factories is unconscionable by our standards today, but not perhaps so in less fortunate countries even now. Whether William employed children is not known, probably not, but the option was possible when he took out the Patent.

The business clearly flourished, with a sizeable workforce, from a report in the Dorset County Chronicle for December 1828. This reported how **'Mr Clark's dowlas (a coarse linen cloth) factory was then visited by this terrible whirlwind, which possessed sufficient power to force down the roof and one of the side walls; but the fall of the roof being impeded by an apple tree, the work people, of whom about a dozen were at the time engaged in the building, were providentially saved'**. Another account, in the Hampshire Telegraph, describes how the wind **'then carried away the roof of Mr Clark's weaving factory, and threw down the walls to the floor of the first storey; the preservation of life here was singularly providential; fifteen females were at work on the ground floor, and two or three of them had left the room scarcely above a second when the tempest passed'**. Whether this was the total workforce, or there were more 'providentially' not there at the time, we do not know, but the business must have been a significant source of employment in the village and the local area.



Dorset County Chronicle 11 December 1828

Where did the workforce live? It is likely that many were housed in the range of cottages, probably built in the early 1820s, opposite the factory on the south side of Back Lane, now Nos 12 to 20. William Clark had purchased the lease to 'Back Lane Field' in 1815, probably to provide grazing for horse transport associated with his spinning and weaving business. It was very conveniently located just across the lane from the business. Evidence that the cottages date from the 1820s is gleaned from William's will of 1832. In the will his son, William Henry, was given **'all that Close of Meadow Lane called Backlane Meadow together with three Cottages lately built on part thereof'**. His other son, Robert, received **'all those the four most Westernmost Cottages lately erected by me in Backlane aforesaid together with the gardens belonging to the same'**. The field and cottages were still in the possession of the Clark family when they were sold as Lot 66 at the 1919 Auction of the village.

As to when the spinning operations ceased is not clear, as the last reference to a spinning shop was in William's will of 1832. It is possible that spinning operations had already ceased by then. Certainly, weaving had ceased by 1850. A possible indicator to the changed circumstances for the business may be contained in William's will. The will stipulated separation of the property that was No 133 in the 1798 Admeasurement Survey by a wall **'to be built within twelve months next after my demise'**. This wall, which split the property by a north-south wall, survives to this day.

This wall can be clearly seen superimposed on this recent photograph, where the spinning and weaving businesses appear to have been separated by the wall. The photograph, taken from the church tower, also shows more recent changes. For example the public toilets, lower right, were built by Dorchester Rural District Council on the site of the old Wesleyan Chapel in about 1968. You will also note that the garden to Ypres Cottage stretched to Long Street at the time the photograph was taken. This frontage to Long Street has since been built on as No 30A Long Street. However, a right of access from Ypres Cottage onto Long Street remains.



Memories of William's business lived on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1920s, Joseph Benwell Clark, the distinguished Victorian artist who came to live at 'Barnwell's' at 9 Abbey Street, recalled his grandfather's linen weaving loft in Back Lane. The lower part had become a stable, presumably after all operations ceased, which could explain its 20<sup>th</sup> century transformation into garages. The weaving loft had by then become a tailor's workroom with **'as many as 6 hands employed constantly'**. Joseph also remembers 'Old John Childs', who was formerly one of the weavers, **'when Cerne was a manufacturing town, in my grandfather's weaving loft. This was before the introduction of steam shut up local works'**. John Childs appears in the 1841 Census as a 'weaver', which suggests the weaving shops were then still in operation. He lived in one of the cottages in Back Lane, but the absence of any other 'weavers' in the census strongly suggests that the weaving business was almost extinct. However, one can only admire at this distance in time, the entrepreneurial business spirit of William Clark who, in his lifetime, seized the moment and brought employment to Cerne Abbas, particularly during the general economic and agricultural depression that followed the end of the Napoleonic wars. However, the business eventually succumbed to the rise of mass production of the same fabrics elsewhere with the Industrial Revolution, similar forces that brought about the end of the brewing industry in the village.

On a final note, you may have spotted that No 47 Back Lane was also called 'Ypres Cottage'. This was the name given to it by Clive Fox who lived there until he died a couple of years ago. His father was an Army nurse in WW1 and subsequently went to work with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in France and Belgium between the wars and again after WW2. Clive spent much of his youth at Ypres, hence the name he gave to his final home in Cerne Abbas.





## Robin Mills - Keeping Shop for the Local Community

**A third instalment of Bryan Palmer's memories of boyhood in wartime Godmanstone.**

*Extracted from Bryan Palmer's previously unpublished "Life's Rich Tapestry – an Embroidery of Yarns", this chapter describes his mother and aunt opening a simple village shop in the building next to the Smiths Arms, now being run by his Grandad, in 1942. There are encounters with local characters, and the increasing numbers of Allied troops passing by...*



From the outset, Mother had decided against selling basic rationed foods in the shop because dispensing such meagre weekly allowances of butter, margarine, cooking-fat, cheese and bacon from bulk supplies would be too fiddling and the paperwork involved too complicated. Instead, she decided to concentrate on sweets, cigarettes, tobacco and tinned, (or pre-packaged) goods. We then sat down and, between us, wrote out our first order for the Wholesalers in Dorchester. In due course the goods arrived in a couple of very large cardboard boxes. To begin with, memorising the retail prices of each of the large number of different items was not easy. We therefore had to stick little price tags to the shelves under each stacked pile. We also kept a printed price-list handy in the till drawer, in case of a dispute. Many of the tinned goods at that time were on points which meant that, with each sale, we had to snip out the appropriate number of printed coupons from each customer's ration book with a pair of scissors. These points, which were categorised as either "A", "B", "C", "D" etc, each had a nominal value and, every so often, we would have to sort them all out and send them off, with a completed return form, to the Ministry of Food. It was one evening, sometime later, that Auntie Win and I had been sat at the kitchen table sorting out the previous quarter's accumulation of points, while Mother was busy ironing. We had arranged hundreds of these tiny scraps of paper into neat piles according to their various categories and were about to start counting them up when Polly (the parrot), who had been sitting quietly on Win's shoulder, decided to take a closer look. She had sidled her way down Win's arm and was just setting off across the table top when the cat suddenly jumped up and startled her. Furiously flapping her wings as she tried to make an emergency take-off, Polly, in turn, startled the cat who promptly bolted taking the table cloth with him. Win and I looked at each other in dismay as our whole evening's work fluttered gently down, all over the kitchen floor. In running both the shop and the pub, we automatically became a focal point for the exchange of village gossip and there was little that went on in the surrounding area that we didn't get to hear about. We felt that we had to remain aloof from this tittle-tattle and try as best as we could to remain strictly neutral.

Mother sometimes had difficulty in understanding the local Dorset dialect and when old Mrs. L--- came into the shop one day complaining bitterly that "That mis'rable oldooman oon't gie I snarya hagg". She was completely nonplussed until I translated it for her as "That miserable old woman wouldn't give me a single egg". Young Mrs L--- (old Mrs. L---'s daughter-in-law), who was a rather prim and lady-like little woman, surprised us once by announcing that her husband had just come home on "embrocation" leave.



If she said it once, she said it a dozen times during the ensuing conversation and we had the utmost difficulty in suppressing our mirth. Poor Mr. L--- was captured a few months later and spent the rest of his war in a German P.O.W. camp in Bavaria.

It was now July, 1942, and having finished with Cerne Abbas Village School for good, there was the long summer holiday to enjoy before starting at the Grammar School in Dorchester. This was a golden opportunity to thoroughly explore our new surroundings. On the far side of the main road, opposite the garden gate between the house and the old pub, was a long wall that bounded Colonel Beaver's grounds, with his big house almost hidden among tall trees. Turning left, green-painted iron railings running along the roadside, fenced off a small meadow between the pub and the Post Office. Kept by Mr. and Mrs. Tim Crabb and his mother, old Mrs. Crabb, this building was set almost at right angles to the road and the upper story corner actually jutted out a little over the road. In the months to come, as army convoys began to come through the village in ever-increasing numbers, this over-hang became quite badly scored by high-sided trucks scraping beneath it. A path, which ran in front of the Post Office, passed over a little bridge across a small tributary of the river which served as the mill-race to operate a large wooden mill-wheel inside the Mill. Access to a stone shelf beside the mill-wheel could only be obtained by paddling in the stream under the bridge and this was a great place to hide when it came to playing games of hide-and-seek. The path twisted and turned across the meadow beyond and crossed the main river over a flat-decked wooden bridge and then to a gateway into "Fifty Acre Field". The hedge on the far side of this field ran along the foot of Cowdon Hill which towered some four hundred feet above the village. This chalk hill was the southernmost of a south-to-north line of downs that formed the eastern side of the valley. In a series of spurs and re-entrants (known locally as "bottoms") East Hill and Bow Hill overlooked Nether Cerne and Black Hill and Giant's Hill dominated Cerne Abbas and beyond. Along the ridge, almost in a straight line from its Roman origins, was a narrow metalled road (the Old Sherborne Road) which branched off the main road just outside Dorchester and rejoined it again north of Minterne Magna, at Middlemarsh, to continue on to Sherborne.

It was along this narrow road that the army must have kept their hill-top battery supplied but this had long since been abandoned. The wooden huts had been taken away, leaving the bare slabs of their concrete foundations. The big circular, moon-craters, in which the search-lights and guns had been emplaced, were now empty and forlorn. The odd piece of spent carbon-arc welding rod could be found littering the site, providing some clue to its former use.



In the months to come, new huts would appear to house troops of the U.S. First Army Group, as Dorset became a vast camp in the slow military build-up that was to be the prelude to the D-day invasion of Normandy. But, at this particular moment, the wind-swept hill-top, with its short springy turf, was home only to a flourishing population of rabbits. Their droppings could be seen everywhere around the entrances to their countless burrows, under golden-flowered gorse bushes with which the upper slopes of these hills were crowned. From the far side of this narrow road, the panoramic views to the East were simply breathtaking. Under the summer sun, the rolling countryside stretched away in a patchwork of fields, dotted with isolated farms and small villages nestling between rounded hills. Over everything hung a blue haze which deepened in shade as the eye reached towards the distant horizon. Several of the green hills bore the distinctive imprints of very ancient defensive earthworks. These were a grim reminder that war was probably as old as Man himself. Only the means of waging war had changed down the centuries, as the white vapour trails of aircraft flying high in the clear blue sky, and heading due south, testified.

Mr. and Mrs. Best and Col. and Mrs. Beaver, although they could have been described as the local gentry, were really very generous towards the local community. The Beavers' extensive grounds were frequently opened to the general public for Garden Fetes and other communal activities and the Bests allowed us village kids almost unrestricted access to their farm buildings and the fields and woods to play in. The Colonel was a tall and rather private man. Walter Stuart Best, on the other hand, was a dapper man who wore his hair parted in the middle, and was what was known as a "Gentleman Farmer". In keeping with their positions in the social hierarchy, the Colonel was given some high rank in the County's Home Guard and Mr. Best became the village platoon's sergeant. Their wives, too, assumed prominent roles in local voluntary organizations: Mrs. Best as Commandant of the village St. John's Ambulance Brigade and Mrs. Beaver as President of the local W.V.S.

Although we were living deep in the heart of the Dorset countryside, we were constantly reminded that there was a war on. Apart from the obvious facts of war-time rationing and the black-out regulations, evidence of war-like activities were all around us. Squadrons of fighter planes and bombers (now, mercifully, mostly allied) often flew overhead and long convoys of army trucks and tanks thundered down our village street with increasing frequency, chewing up the tarmac as they did so. Since my bedroom directly overlooked the main road, the passage of night-time army traffic filled the darkness with a deafening, undulating, roar as each vehicle passed beneath my window and the whole building shook to its very foundations. A misguided official in Whitehall had earlier directed that all road signs should be obliterated in order to confuse an enemy invader. In practice, this unfortunate measure only succeeded in thoroughly confusing our own troops. On more than one occasion, I was approached by a harassed motor-cycle dispatch rider, at the head of a long column of military vehicles, with a plaintive plea: "Where the Hell are we, lad?"

All these war-like activities had a profound influence upon us youngsters and our play was almost totally dominated by war games. We were lucky in having free access to all the farm buildings in which to play "Commandos" and to practice house-to-house fighting in. I had "borrowed" a length of old cart rope and had used it to rig up an assault course up the steep side of the deep chalk pit in the neighbouring woods.



As each of us, in turn, went through the course, the rest of us would let fly at him (or her) with lumps of dried dirt fired from catapults. As each dirt lump struck the wall of the pit, it would burst into a cloud of dust in a manner satisfyingly resembling an impacting bullet. Each catapult was readily made from a suitable "Y"-shaped hazel branch selected and cut from the hedgerows. The upper ends of the "Y" were then carefully split down for about half an inch and the ends of long strips of rubber inner tube wedged into the splits and tightly bound up with string. As a refinement, a missile holder could be made out of the leather tongue cut from an old boot. With practice, a half inch diameter ball of earth could be fired, with tolerable accuracy, over a range of about twenty yards or so.

As I had previously discovered in Weymouth, a flask of tea was equivalent to a ticket of admission to inspect military equipment at close quarters. A signals truck, parked on the roadside near our house one hot afternoon, excited my curiosity. The parched occupants readily accepted my offer of tea and, by way of exchange, I was given a first-hand demonstration of the power of their transmitter. Invited to say a few words into their microphone, I heard the sound of my own voice a few moments later emerge from their loud speaker. The radio operator solemnly informed me that my voice had travelled all the way around the globe and I was most impressed.

Although Mum had spent most of her life in a semi-rural environment, she was still essentially a "townie". With a deep-seated fear of encountering a mad bull, she was always very nervous of cattle for she was never quite sure which were cows and which were bulls. Returning one day on foot from Nether Cerne, she was just approaching



*Tim Crabb turning hay*

the outskirts of Godmanstone when she found herself confronted by a herd of young heifers being driven slowly along the road towards her. She stopped, anxiously trying to find a way of avoiding them, when she was spotted by Farmer C---, who was driving them. Now, this local character was noted for his extremely loud voice and his almost inexhaustible vocabulary of unprintable expletives. "Stand right where you are Missus and turn 'em b-----s down the lane there!" he bawled and then set about beating the backsides of those beasts nearest to him with his stick. Poor Mum was petrified as the whole herd was stampeded towards at her. "That's right Missus", he yelled at her encouragingly, "Just stand there and wave yer b----y arms about and send 'em down that b----y track there!" Rooted to the spot with fear, mother closed her eyes tightly and did as she was bid, fully expecting to be trampled to death at any moment.

Then, when she opened her eyes again, some minutes later, the entire herd had, somehow, disappeared and only the sound of Farmer C---, still bawling out oaths at the top of his voice, could be heard coming from behind the tall hedges that bordered the narrow track-way that led down to the river. It took two cups of tea to calm mother's shattered nerves when she finally tottered home, ashen-faced, and related to us, in graphic detail, about her terrifying ordeal, and we all had a good laugh over it. With the advantage of youth I was, perhaps, more adaptable and was, by now, thoroughly countrified and took an active part along with the other village children, in the seasonal round of hay-making, harvesting, threshing and potato-picking. With the minimum of machinery available at that time, each of these tasks was largely manual and back-breaking. Nonetheless, a few hard-earned shillings were a welcome addition to my modest regular allowance of pocket money.





Chris Copson

## Medieval Encaustic Tiles from the site of Cerne Abbey

The presence of a number of fragments of Medieval encaustic tiles – tiles decorated with an impressed design filled with a white slip – is significant in that these were high status artefacts usually associated with ecclesiastical buildings or royal palaces. A concentration of these in the area of the Cerne Abbas Burial Ground may well be a pointer to the location of major monastic buildings and potentially the Abbey Church.

Over the course of some years, 31 fragments of C14<sup>th</sup> – C15<sup>th</sup> decorated encaustic tile have been recovered from the Burial Ground and adjacent field areas on the probable site of the monastic church of Cerne Abbey. These are all unstratified finds, the product of grave spoil, rabbit and other surface disturbance and it is possible that this concentration, largely in the area of the North wall of the Burial Ground, suggests the actual location of the abbey church. This is further inferred by the presence of a heavy spread of demolition rubble up to 1m deep containing mortared flints and fragments of Purbeck limestone and Ham Hill stone observed across the entire area, principally in grave cuttings.

No complete tiles were recovered with the exception of some small triangular or rectangular edging tiles, but the fabric of the surviving fragments appears largely uniform – a hard, slightly sandy orange body with a pale brown glaze. Most exhibit a degree of wear. Fragment size varies from less than 50mm to some larger pieces comprising third to half of complete tiles.

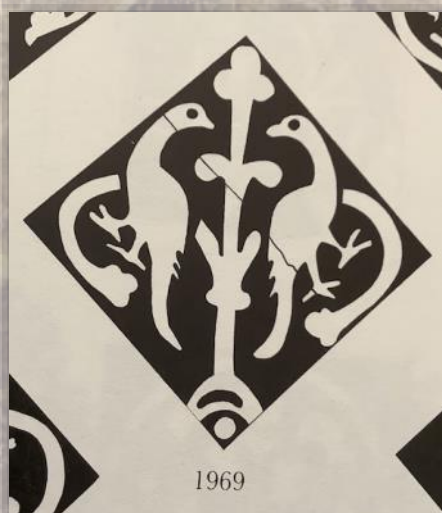


Average complete tile size would seem to be approximately 130mm square, although the absence of full tiles makes this uncertain. Most of the larger fragments exhibit keying scoops to the rear face, some retaining a lime mortar.

The absence of complete tiles and lack of recent breaks suggests that whole tiles were lifted for reuse at the time of the destruction of the abbey buildings.



The lack of substantial fragments makes the identification of patterns difficult, but two partial tiles of a design featuring a lion passant within a circle (sim. Eames 1791) are present, along with three fragments decorated with opposing birds in a tree (sim. Eames 1969). As is usual with tiles of this type, the design has been impressed into the body fabric before being filled with a white pipeclay and glazed overall.



One fragment comprising approximately 25% of the full tile appears to feature a design of opposed crescents.

The current sample does not apparently feature any designs intended to form geometric patterns, suggesting that the floor as a whole was comprised of simple repeating patterns.

The smaller edging tiles, used to infill a design, take two forms: triangular green glazed tiles of 70-90mm size and two square tiles with a size of 60mm and 50mm respectively, the larger having a yellow glaze and the smaller pale cream. Both types were produced by scoring a full-size tile prior to firing, enabling it to be broken into quarters. It has been suggested that the green glazed tiles may be Flemish imports (Hyde900, item No.15).



In terms of design and production, the tiles present would seem to have been manufactured by tilers of the Wessex School when compared to large assemblages from Hyde Abbey, Winchester and complete floors from Winchester College. Tiles from Fordington Church, Dorchester, suggesting the presence of a tile kiln, appear to be of different manufacture. These lack keying scoops on the rear and are repeatedly pierced to prevent blowing out during firing., (author, pers. comm.)

**References:**

\*Eames, Elizabeth, Catalogue of Medieval Lead-Glazed Earthenware Tiles in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities British Museum. British museum Publication, 1980.

\*Hyde 900: catalogue of the Medieval Encaustic Floor Tiles, Stuart and Glenday, 2018, [www.hyde900.org.uk](http://www.hyde900.org.uk)







(This article was first published in 1987)



**Laurence John Keen** OBE FRHistS FSA, is a British archaeologist, historian, author and art expert. He served as the County Archaeologist for Dorset from 1975 to 1999 and was President of the British Archaeological Association from 1984 to 2004. In 2000 he was awarded the Order of the British Empire for 'services to archaeology'.

**A sixteenth-century list** of twenty-four saints' relics venerated in the abbey church of Cerne includes, along with Mary Magdalene, Stephen and the head of Sebastian, Edmund the martyr. Monastic bone collections are notoriously suspect. But there is a link between Cerne and Edmund (841-870), king of East Anglia, martyr and saint; a link which suggests that part of Edmund's skeleton may indeed have been venerated at Cerne and, furthermore, adds credibility to the texts which extend the history of the abbey to

beyond 987 and the millennium which is now being celebrated. The link also resurrects a local personality, a saint of royal blood, whose existence Cerne would appear to have forgotten completely.

Edmund, son of King Alkmund of Saxony, became king of East Anglia in 855. The Danish army invaded East Anglia in 869-70 and Edmund led his army against them. He was defeated and captured. Refusing to renounce his faith he was killed at Hellesdon in Norfolk in November 870. A considerable cult grew up, centred on the abbey church in a town which was to become known as St Edmund's, where his body had been buried.

On Edmund's death it would seem that the East Anglian crown was offered to his brother Edwold. Apparently, he was so overcome by his brother's death that he declined the crown, retired from the world and became a hermit living near Cerne. Both the twelfth-century chronicler William of Malmesbury, and the sixteenth-century antiquary John Leland, who no doubt derived much of his information from William, give a sketchy outline of Edwold's renunciation of the fortunes of a worldly life. Leland records that Edwold lived near a 'silver spring' or well, a spring which St Augustine is said to have created. A well, called 'St Austin's' or 'St Augustine's', still exists north of the parish church. But the association with St Augustine is as spurious as the involvement of St Augustine with Cerne: another example, like Abbotsbury's supposed link with St Peter himself, of a monastic tradition established to produce ancient evidence for contemporary privileges.

However, two accounts of St Edwold's life provide details not only of him living on bread and water and working many miracles, but of his hermit's cell with the 'silver spring' not in Cerne itself but on a hill four miles to the west of Cerne Abbey. Edwold died on 29 August, though it is not known in which year. He was buried in the cell, which he had built himself, by a priest. The spring is said to have had many curative properties, for eyes, withered limbs, and sundry diseases.

Although there can be no certainty that a monastic community was in existence at Cerne in the ninth century, it is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. Were there one its refoundation in the tenth century under the Rule of St Benedict would be consistent with the monastic revival under King Edgar (959-975). Aethelmaer, ealdorman and son of the West Saxon chronicler, Æthelweard, was certainly responsible not only for establishing the new community at Cerne and endowing it in 987 with numerous estates, but also for arranging that Ælfric, a monk at Winchester, should take charge of the teaching in the abbey sometime after October 984. It is not certain that, Ælfric was abbot of Cerne, but he may have been before he was appointed abbot of Eynsham in 1005, an abbey which Æthelmær had founded. The same Æthelmær with the assistance of Dunstan exhumed the body of St Edwold so that it could be translated to the cathedral at Sherborne, but the bones refused to be moved. Bishop Dunstan and the people present prayed. With the suggestion that the relics should be carried to Cerne all was well. Accordingly, the relics were carried with great honour to the church of St Mary at Cerne on 12 August.

The year of the translation is difficult to establish. Since Dunstan is called bishop, it may have been when he was either bishop of Worcester (957-959) or bishop of London (959), as in late 959 or early 960 he was made archbishop of Canterbury. Although it is known from an inquisition of 1440 that King Edgar had endowed Cerne with the manor of Muston before his death in 975, a date before 960 for Edwold's translation to the new abbey church would place the start of the new foundation at Cerne at least fifteen years earlier than has been proposed hitherto. It is interesting, however, to note that Dunstan was also present in Dorset, at Shaftesbury, in 980 when King Edward's body was translated from Wareham.

The original dedication of the monastic church was to St Mary, with St Peter and St Edwold being added. The importance of St Edwold is shown in an indulgence of twenty days, granted by T. (Thomas or Theobald), archbishop of Canterbury, to all those who shall visit or send any gift to the church of Cerne on the yearly feasts of St Peter or blessed Edwold the Confessor. Two other indulgences were granted by Jocelyn, bishop of Salisbury (1142-84). The first for fifteen days to all 'parishioners who shalt have contributed their alms' towards the rebuilding of the monastery, 'trusting in the merits of the blessed Edwold': the second, for twenty days to all who 'have visited the church of Cerne at the yearly feasts of the blessed Peter, chief of the apostles, and the blessed Edwold the Confessor'.

An inquisition held on the death of Abbot Richard de Osmyngton in 1356 records that there was at Cerne a fair, held annually on the feast of St Edwold, patron of the abbey, that is 'on the third day after the feast of St Laurence'. St Laurence's feast-day is 10 August. St Edwold's translation was on 12 August, so the feast of St Edwold referred to in the inquisition is the saint's deposition, celebrated on 13 August, for which sequences are known in a manuscript which was once at Cerne.

Given the clear importance of St Edwold to Cerne it is surprising that so little should survive of his cult. It is also now extremely difficult to establish where his cell 'four miles to the west of Cerne' would have been, since all memory of it seems to have disappeared: it need not necessarily have been on land with which the abbey had any association. The compass point in the original text and indeed the measurement of four miles cannot with certainty be taken to be correct. The quest for St Edwold's cell and original burial place may be a fruitless task. However, it may be worth noting two places which, if not necessarily candidates for being the site of St Edwold's cell, have important connections: the first, Stockwood with St Edwold, the second, Hermitage with Cerne Abbey. Stockwood, or Stoke St Edwold, lies about five and a half miles north-west of Cerne. The chapel there is dedicated to St Edwold and is apparently the only dedication to the saint to have survived.

Hermitage, four miles north of Cerne, is a likely candidate from its place-name alone; there is a well too. Here, in the heart of the Blackmoor Forest, was a settlement of hermits. The early history of the house is obscure, and it is not until 1296 that the hermits are mentioned in an account roll of the earldom of Cornwall under Fordington, of which Hermitage was part. The hermits had a chapel dedicated first of all to St Laurence and then to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The house was later known as the free chapel of St Mary, called 'le Hermytage'. This was granted to Cerne Abbey in 1513. There is nothing beyond this to suggest any link with St Edwold. But it is worth noting that the forest of Blackmoor was part of the earldom of Cornwall. Before this earldom was established, its antecedents were no doubt part of the lands under the control of the ealdorman of the Western Provinces. This may have given Ealdorman Æthelmær the authority to exhume St Edwold's body from the hermit's cell.

It would be interesting indeed to know where St Edwold's cell and first burial-place was. However, we should content ourselves with the fact that the Franciscan brothers at Hilfield, only some three miles from Cerne, carry on the monastic traditions of the neighbourhood, and hope that during the millennium celebrations of 1987 St Edwold is revived and his feast-days celebrated once again in Cerne.





Ian Denness



September



**1920 - The Revival of the Cerne Park Races**

The morning of Thursday 16 September, 1920, was greeted with a great deal of excitement by the sporting community of Cerne Abbas. Anticipation for the day ahead had been growing ever since it had been announced that it was the date set for the 'revival' of the Cerne Park horse and pony races. Although these races were only established about a decade earlier, the upheaval caused by the First World War meant anything that predated the conflict could be seen to possess an 'old world' quality. So, the prospect of the race meeting provided a much-welcomed indication that life was, finally, returning to some kind of normality.

The revival was driven by the effort made by a number of influential locals. Captain George Edward Mitchell of Dorchester and the Cerne-based estate agent, Arthur George Nobbs, both acted as the race secretaries. In addition, a number of local farmers formed the event's organising committee, while the course was laid out by Bertram Tite, a farmer from Alton Pancras, who also acted as the race starter. The event benefitted from the active support from many of the local landowners, including Nathaniel Batten of Upcerne and Charles Martin of Upsydling.



It is not entirely clear where the races were held. It is known that the course was laid out on land which belonged to Arthur Louis Marsh of Francombe Farm, the farmhouse of which still stands on the west side of Acreman Street. Marsh's land included many of the fields which extend between the present-day Casterbridge Care Home and the road which leads from Cerne up the hill towards Sydling. However, contemporary reports mention that numerous

spectators were able to gain a good view of the proceedings from 'the road', suggesting that the races were staged in the valley which runs parallel to the Sydling Road.

In This Month

There were nine races scheduled, all of which were over flat ground. Four were open to horses, one of which was solely restricted to entries from owners who lived within eight miles of Cerne Abbas. A further four races were arranged for ponies, again with one exclusively for animals from the locality. The final race was set aside for donkeys. Collectively, the prize money available at these races was in the region of £150. This was funded through a combination of entry fees paid by the owners, the financial patronage of local landowners, and from



the money paid by the attending spectators who were charged 2s. to enter the course and a further 3s. to access the more exclusive and well-patronised 'reserved enclosure'. Cars (of which there were several) and carts were charged 10s. entry and a further 2s. 6d. to park at the side of the track.

Further amusements were provided to keep the crowd entertained. After the equestrian events were completed a series of foot races were run, along with a tug-of-war contest and various tournaments for children. Live music was performed throughout the afternoon courtesy of Joseph Stevens' String Band, and the ensemble continued to play at the dances which were held in the paddock that evening.

There was, however, no alcohol available at the course that day. This was not as the result of any high moral stance on the part of the organisers, but due to the decision of the county authorities to issue a liquor licence only for the hours 12.30pm to 6.30pm on the day of the event. The victualler who had requested the licence, the landlord of the Royal Oak in Dorchester, concluded that it was hardly worth while setting up a marquee for six hours of trading, and so he chose to withdraw his request.

The day was hailed as a roaring success. Thanks in part to the races being advertised in several newspapers throughout the southwest, entries were attracted from across Dorset and Devon. The fine weather that day also boosted the number of spectators in attendance, which the *Western Gazette* numbered at over 1,000. Yet it transpired that this revitalisation was to be a short lived one. There was no repeat of the event the following September, nor in any subsequent year. Despite the enthusiasm with which it was greeted locally, the Cerne Park races of 1920 marked the event's swansong, not its revival.

October 1918 Influenza hits Cerne



**The Arrival in Cerne of the Fatal 'Flu Pandemic**

It might be expected that the signing, on 11 November 1918, of the Armistice which signalled the end of the First World War would have been greeted with rejoicing by Cerne Abbas residents. However, the joy that was felt was tempered by a series of shocking deaths which had occurred in the village in the preceding weeks. At the time, the cause of these deaths was identified as 'influenza', a relatively innocuous-sounding diagnosis which belies the rapacious nature of the disease. The visitation of the virus to Cerne in that October formed part of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918/19, a consequence of which, it is estimated, up to fifty million people lost their lives worldwide.

Due in part to its relative remoteness, combined with its small population, Cerne Abbas fared rather better in the pandemic than many other British towns and villages. But the village could not avoid its impact entirely. The parish records show a notable spike in burials performed during the October and November of 1918. That year there were six internments, ordinarily the burial ground would receive one or two during these months. Any loss would have been met by a deep sense of grief among the deceased's friends and families, but any feelings of anguish and sorrow would have been magnified due to the young age of most of the flu's victims. For some villagers, the impact of the epidemic lasted long after its immediate threat had passed.

For Cerne Abbas, the first wave of the influenza outbreak, which arrived in Britain in April 1918, proved to be a mild one which made little impact on the village. Similarly, the pandemic's third wave, which occurred early in 1919, left the Cerne Valley relatively unscathed. But its much-deadlier second wave, which emerged during the autumn of 1918, was less merciful. The virulence and violence of the disease, and its horrific symptoms, which included bleeding from the nose, stomach and intestines, shocked medical professionals.



*Western Gazette*  
October 1918

It is difficult to establish the number of Cerne's population who contracted the virus during the second wave. But some of the village's fatalities were reported in the local press. One of the first to die was twenty-seven-year-old Alice Warren. She was the eldest daughter of the village grocer, George Cornick, who ran his shop from what is now no. 1 Abbey Street. She had married George Warren of Grimstone in 1913 and the newly-weds quickly started a family; daughter Winifred was born in 1914 and their son Leonard arrived the following year. Alice's husband was away in France with his regiment when, as reported



in the *Western Gazette*, she 'fell victim to the prevailing influenza outbreak'. Alice was ill for a week before she died on Thursday 24 October, and was buried in the Cerne Burial Ground on the following Monday.

In This Month



An even more tragic series of events befell the Thorne family. For many years Frank Thorne had been one of the established 'Carriers' of Cerne. In the days before motor vehicles were common, Thorne would offer to carry goods and passengers to and from Dorchester in one of his horse-drawn carts or, from 1913, the first of his petrol-driven vehicles. In 1909, Frank married Eliza, and they later had three children, Frank Jnr (born in 1913), Lucina (1915) and Edwin (1917). But, in mid-October, all five of them contracted the 'flu.

Although Frank Snr was extremely unwell, he managed to pull through. Eliza, however, was less fortunate, succumbing to the disease on 26 October, two days after the death of Alice Warren. She was forty years old. The Thorne's grief was compounded four days later with the death of young Edwin, also the result of influenza.

Eliza's father, the 69-year-old Cerne Abbas butcher George Green, died three days after that, although it is unclear whether he, too, was taken by the 'flu. Thus, within seven days, three generations of the same family – father, daughter and grandson – passed away.

Within two years of their bereavements, both George Warren and Frank Thorne had remarried, in part possibly to ensure that their young children might have a maternal influence as they grew up. But it is hard to imagine that the loss of their mothers, even at such a young age, would not have left some form of psychological scar on Winifred and Leonard Warren and on Frank and Lucina Thorne. For these children, and numerous others who experienced similar bereavements, the legacy of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic was felt long into the twentieth century.



**November**



## **1885 Cerne's New Parliamentary Constituency**



The 1885 General Election, which began on 24 November and lasted for several weeks, was novel for a number of reasons. These were a consequence of it being the first to be held since the passing of two important pieces of legislation: the Third Reform Act (1884) and the Redistribution of Seats Act (1885). The two acts were planned in combination to address some longstanding problems associated with outdated constituency boundaries and to refashion national politics to make it more representative of the British people.

Two local consequences of these Acts were the allocation of Cerne Abbas to a newly-established constituency and a reduction in the number of its parliamentary representatives. Prior to 1885, Cerne had been represented in Parliament by three MPs concurrently. These were elected to take the 'County Seat' of Dorset, a position which saw them serve as the Members for the whole of the 'rural' part of the county. (Dorset's urban 'borough' towns - Bridport, Dorchester, Poole, Shaftesbury, Wareham, Weymouth & Melcombe Regis - each elected their own MPs). In 1880, at the final General Election to be held under this arrangement, the MPs selected for the county seat were John Floyer, Edward Digby (both Conservative) and Henry Portman (Liberal).

This situation changed in 1885. The principal aim of the Redistribution of Seats Act was to redraw nationwide political boundaries in an attempt to create a greater degree of uniformity between the resident population numbers of parliamentary constituencies. Consequently, Dorset's existing constituencies were all scrapped and replaced with a simple four-way split into the component North, East, West and South Divisions of the county. So, for the first time, Cerne Abbas was assigned to the new West Dorset constituency. Further changes were enacted through the Third Reform Act. This saw the number of Cerne's parliamentary representatives reduced from three, under the old system, to a single member sitting for the whole of West Dorset. The Act also oversaw an expansion in the number of people entitled to vote. Previously, residents in the boroughs had more inclusive voting rights than those living in the rural districts.



*Henry Farquharson*

In This Month

The 1884 Act introduced parity across the country. Yet, despite this change, 40% of the adult male population still remained voteless, as did 100% of British women. In West Dorset, only about 8,000 of the district's 45,000 residents (18%) qualified to vote.



Herbert Carey Batten

The 1885 general election proved to be a watershed in Dorset's politics. None of the county's three sitting rural members put themselves forward at election, leaving the field open to a new generation of aspiring local politicians. The West Dorset Division attracted just two candidates: Henry Farquharson of Blandford was standing for the Conservatives, while the Liberals pinned their hopes on Herbert Carey Batten, a barrister whose father was John Batten of Uperne House. With only one seat available, the campaign proved to be a fairly bad-tempered and confrontational one. Farquharson referred to the local Liberals as 'liars' and a 'disreputable lot' while, in response, Batten accused Farquharson of inconsistency, describing him as a 'weathervane'. When the final votes were counted the result was an extremely close one, with Farquharson securing 51% of the vote to Batten's 49% and a majority of just 142.

The West Dorset constituency has been held by the Conservatives ever since (with the single exception of the period late in 2019 when Oliver Letwin had the whip removed and briefly sat as an independent). In the 137 years since 1885, the seat has, remarkably, only been held by seven individuals: Farquharson (to 1895), Robert Williams (1895-1922), Philip Colfox (1922-41), Simon Digby (1941-74), Jim Spicer (1974-97), Oliver Letwin (1997-2019), and Chris Loder (2019-present).








# Letters

Edited by George Mortimer

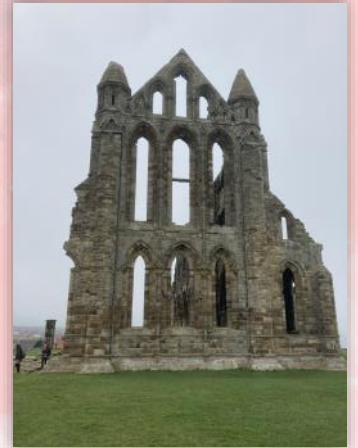
**Martin Reed** writes:

 *Dee and I visited Whitby Abbey and thought that, as a Benedictine foundation, Cerne Abbey may have been similar in design if not as large. We took photographs which might be of interest. Will this help in trying to reconstruct what Cerne Abbey may have looked like?*

Yours

*This letter was forwarded to Richard Wilkin who responded with the following.*

*Although there are clearly similarities in 'Benedictine' design, we do have to remember that the (partially surviving) church at Whitby was built in one hit from 1220 i.e. later, larger, to a single style and on a bigger footprint than what was probably an architectural accretion at Cerne. All this speaks out I think from Martin's excellent photos.*



 **Timothy McCracken** writes:

*I have started to research the naval hospital at Minterne Magna, and the personnel who served there during WW2. I came across the fascinating article by Bryan Palmer, included in your July 2020 magazine edition. I was wondering if there may be a high resolution image of the hospital staff - included on page 9. Also, if there may be any further information about the hospital, or personnel who served there, I would be most interested to hear.*

*This letter was forwarded to Robin Mills who wrote the article, who responded as follows:*

Dear Timothy,

*Your email enquiry has been passed to me as the person who supplied the article by Bryan Palmer for the CHS online magazine you came across. Bryan Palmer first got in touch with me around 2000, following a small publication I helped put together on the history of Godmanstone, to mark the Millennium. His memories of life as a boy in the valley during WW2 are remarkable. I last got in touch with his family about 2 years ago to ask permission to use his stories, and was informed he was very elderly and in poor health.*

*I am attaching the whole of the chapter mentioning Minterne House, most of which is included in the article, and the digital photo he supplied me with of the personnel there in 1941/2. This is all the information I have on the subject I'm afraid. I believe the National Archives hold details of wartime hospital personnel, or it might be worth trying the Dorset History Centre in Dorchester as they are usually helpful at the least.*

Kind regards

**Contd.**



## Letters

**Contd.** Timothy responded with a further email:

Many thanks for your email, photo and information - it is much appreciated. I believe I have found Bryan Palmer's father's navy records (attached from the National Archives) - which notes his service at Minterne Magna and specialism of X-Rays (as described in the article). His father's name was Sydney George.

Kind Regards

By the Editor

A copy of a page from the Bryan Palmer's father's navy records is shown. For those not familiar with Royal Navy records, this shows that Bryan's father was born in 1903 at Eastleigh, Hants. He joined the RN in 1925 for a 12 year engagement as an SBA (Sick Berth Attendant) specialising in X-Ray, which seems a far cry from his civilian occupation as a Baker. He had various ship and shore drafts and signed on for a further 10 years in 1936 to complete time for pension (22 years). At the outbreak of WW2 he was serving in HMS Boscawen, the Royal Navy Hospital at Portland. He subsequently moved to Minterne Magna on 1 April 1941. He was discharged to pension in 1947 as a Petty Officer (SBA). His character/efficiency rating was invariably VG (Very Good) and Superior through his naval service.

NAME: PALMER  
OFFICIAL NUMBER: M. 39251  
Christian Name: Sidney George  
Date of Birth: 15 Dec 1903  
Place of Birth: Eastleigh, Hants  
Trade or Occupation: Baker

Ship to which sailing	Rank	Rating and Discharge	Period	Rate	Days	Notes
Victoria (Nuclear Home)	PA	SBA-37	17-21		170	
Victoria (Nuclear Home)					190	
Victoria (Nuclear Home)					190	
Portland Naval Hospital		SBA	1936-40			
Minterne Magna		SBA	1941-47			

Character	Efficiency	Rate	Character	Efficiency	Rate
VS	Super	31.12.24	VS	Super	31.12.28
VS	Super	31.12.30	VS	Super	31.12.32
VS	Super	31.12.34	VS	Super	31.12.36
VS	Super	31.12.38	VS	Super	31.12.40
VS	Super	31.12.42	VS	Super	31.12.44
VS	Super	31.12.46	VS	Super	31.12.48

TIME TAKING AND CLASS FOR SERVICE

Class	Rate	P. D.	From	To

Ship to which sailing	Rank	Rating and Discharge	Personal Identification

Date	Rate	Class	Rate	Final	Completion
18 Nov 36	S. 76	36	36	36	

Date of Volunteering	Commencement of Term	Period
18 Nov 36	18 Nov 36	22 years

Remarks	Comments and Service Qualities

Remarks

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We wish Timothy's research into Minterne Magna's time in WW2 as a Naval Hospital every success and look forward to seeing the results if successful.

By the Editor

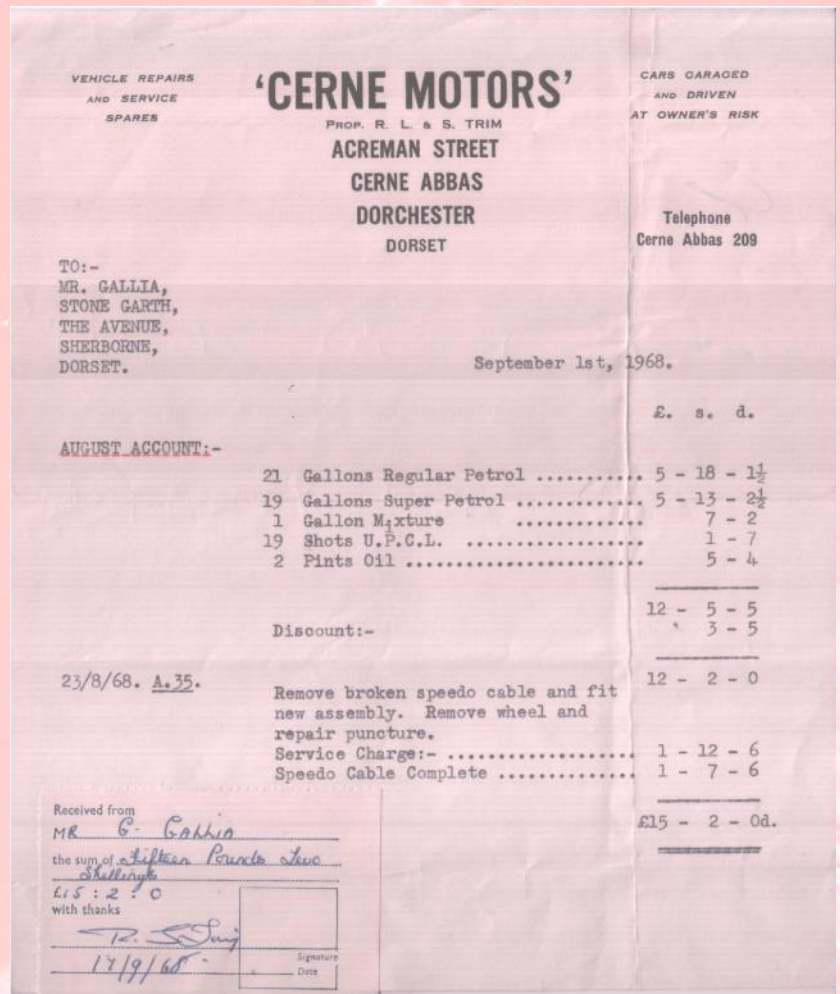


# Letters

By the Editor

A fascinating snapshot in time from September 1st 1968 sent in by Ed Gallia of Nether Cerne, for safekeeping in the CHS archives. Trim's garage was in Acreman street on the site of what is now Giant Close. It was then superseded by the wood turning business under the same ownership. If only fuel and services were still these prices!

Also of note is the telephone number of Cerne Abbas 209, before national renumbering.



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](mailto: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](http://cerneabbashistory.org)

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