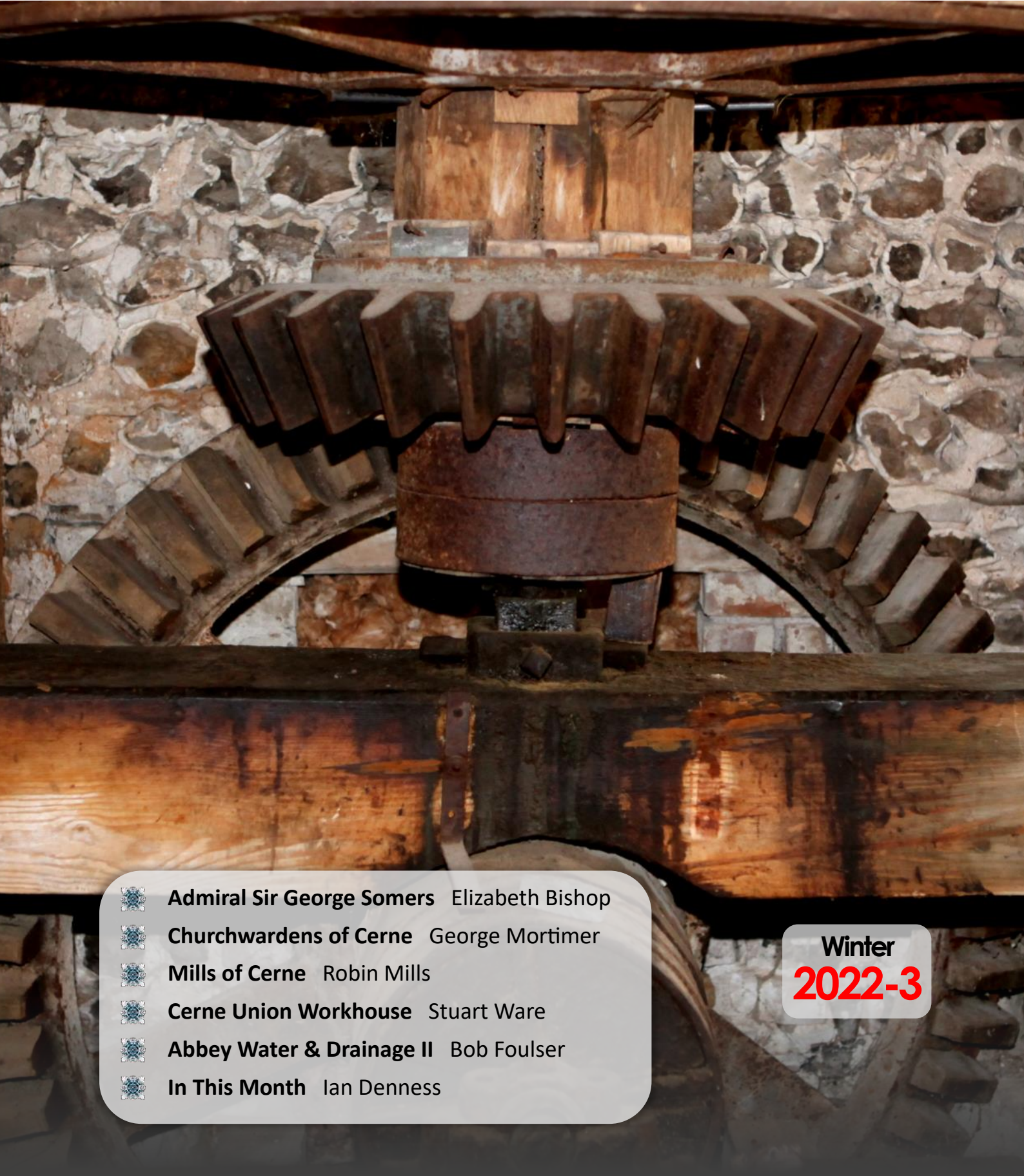




Cerne  
Historical  
Society

# MAGAZINE



**Admiral Sir George Somers** Elizabeth Bishop



**Churchwardens of Cerne** George Mortimer



**Mills of Cerne** Robin Mills



**Cerne Union Workhouse** Stuart Ware



**Abbey Water & Drainage II** Bob Foulser



**In This Month** Ian Denness

Winter  
**2022-3**





Welcome to the Winter 2022/23 issue of the Society's magazine. I would like to thank all the contributors for the wide range of excellent articles they have produced. I am sure that you will find a great deal to interest, enlighten and entertain you within them. I would also like to thank Andrew Popkin for yet another beautifully designed issue. As on all previous twelve occasions, he has made the magazine extremely attractive and a great pleasure to read.

We are planning to get a 2022 All in One edition, similar to those for 2020 and 2021, printed at the beginning of February. It will contain the Spring and Summer 2022 issues and this Winter issue of the magazine. Because there was no Autumn issue last year it will have slightly fewer pages than the previous editions and therefore cost £9 rather than £12, plus P&P of £4 if you live more than 2 miles from the centre of Cerne and are unable to collect it from 17 Abbey Street. If you would like a copy please transfer £9 (or £13 if you want it posted to you) to:

**Account name: Cerne Historical Society**

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Please notify us by email to [cernehistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:cernehistoricalsociety@gmail.com) when you have done so and tell us whether you would like to collect your copy or have it delivered by hand (if you live within 2 miles of Cerne). If you are unable to pay by bank transfer please deliver or post the payment to me at 17 Abbey Street, Cerne Abbas, DT2 7JQ.



Our 2023 AGM will take place in the Village Hall at 7.30 pm on Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> January (**not** the 23<sup>rd</sup> as stated in the Parish Newsletter). As in the years before the Covid pandemic began, the AGM will be followed by a party, which I very much hope all members will be able to attend. Free wine and non-alcoholic drinks will be supplied by the Society but we would be very grateful if those attending could bring a plate of party/finger food with them.

May I politely remind you that membership subscriptions for 2023, which remain at £10, are now payable. If you have not yet done so, we would be very grateful if you could pay your subscription before the AGM by transferring £10 to the Society's bank account, the details of which are set out above, and then notifying us you have done so by email to [cernehistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:cernehistoricalsociety@gmail.com). You will then be able to collect your membership card, which contains details of our programme for 2023, at the AGM, if it has not been delivered to you beforehand. Alternatively please deliver or post the payment to me at 17 Abbey Street, Cerne Abbas, DT2 7JQ or pay at the AGM.

Finally, I am delighted to say that Dr Hugh Wilmott and his team from Sheffield University and Dr Helen Gittos from Balliol College, Oxford will be coming down here again in the summer to continue the research into the site and history of Cerne Abbey that they began last year. I expect to be able to provide more details of that proposed visit at the AGM.

Gordon Bishop - Chair

January 2023

**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)







**Elizabeth Bishop**

## **Admiral Sir George Somers (1554-1610)**

### **Founder of Bermuda**

Earlier this year we were delighted to welcome old friends from Bermuda. It turned out that they were keen to visit Lyme Regis and we readily agreed assuming they were interested in fossils. However, we couldn't have been more wrong as their interest turned out to be in Sir George Somers of Berne Manor, Whitchurch Canonichorum (between Lyme Regis and Bridport) whose ship was wrecked on the coral islands of Bermuda whilst on its way with urgently needed supplies for an early settlement in Jamestown, Virginia. This is the story of Admiral Sir George Somers and the forming of the colony of Bermuda, now a self-governing British overseas territory about 650 miles east of North Carolina, USA and consisting of seven main islands and about 170 named islets.



George Somers was born in a house in Broad Street, Lyme Regis and was a neighbour and boyhood friend of Walter Raleigh (both known as risk-takers and adventurers). He was the son of John Somers, merchant, and his wife Alice and soon became a competent mariner, first going to sea as a young boy. George became a merchant-trader, Lyme Regis being conveniently situated for trade with Spain and France and having the advantage of the unique breakwater called The Cobb which provided shelter for local ships. By the age of 28 he was doing well enough to marry (c. 1582) Joan Heywood (aged 19) who brought with her the ownership of three Lyme houses as her dowry.

Trade prospered and the young couple were able to buy Berne Manor and nearby Orchard House with some 300 acres of land for £600 in 1587 and the manor of Upwey, south of Dorchester in 1589.

However, during the mid C16th all was not well between Spain and England and bitter rivalry between the two powerful countries was to erupt into one of the biggest sea battles in history. Spain was creating an empire in the 'New World' and bringing back to Spain galleons full of gold, silver, precious stones, dyes and sugar which were being attacked by English privateers. In addition, Spain was Catholic while England was Protestant and Mary Queen of Scots had passed on to Philip II her claim to the English throne before she was executed in 1587. In 1588 a huge Spanish Armada approached the south coast of England: Somers, resourceful and efficient, coordinated Lyme Regis's defences and sent three ships to join the massive and ultimately successful sea battle with the Spanish in the English Channel and North Sea. It may well have been these events which turned Somers from a merchant to being a privateer, joining Sir Francis Drake's unsuccessful invasion of Portugal and subsequently using his seafaring skills to take many prizes while sailing near the Azores. These enabled him to buy Waybay House, a 1,000 acre manor near Weymouth.



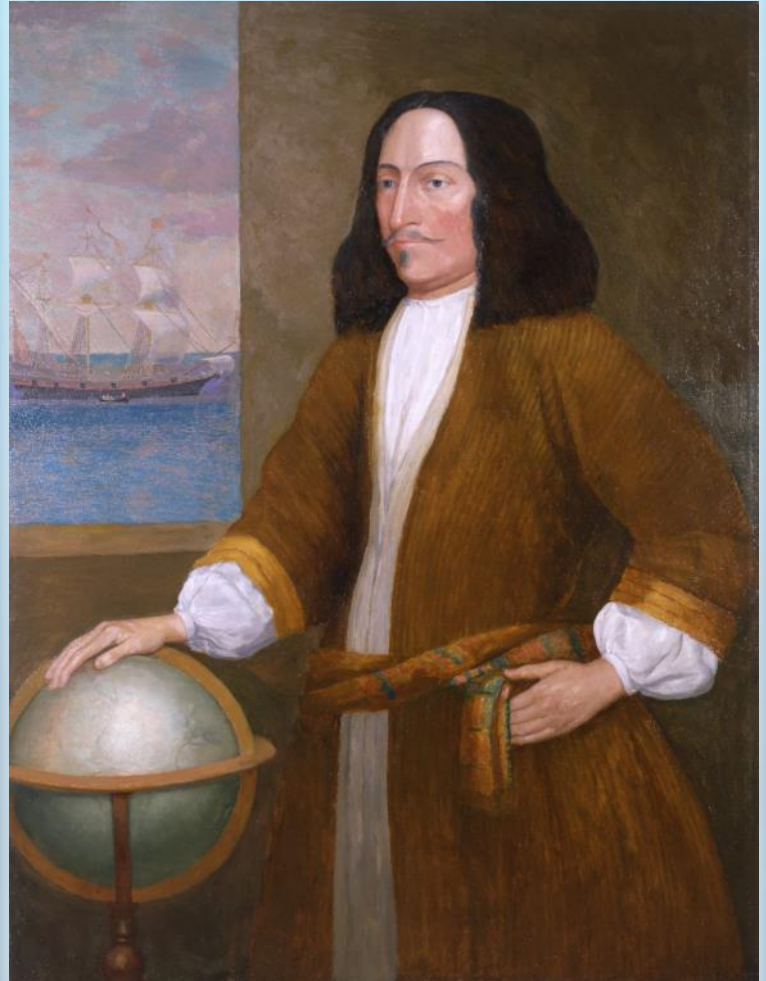
*The Cobb at Lyme Regis*



George's father and brother both died in 1590 with the result that he became head of the family shipping business and the guardian of his two nephews, Nicholas and Matthew; sadly, he and his wife had no children. During the late 1590s George jointly led a six-vessel privateer fleet that pillaged much of the Spanish Caribbean and in 1597 was part of another expedition to the Azores. In 1600 Somers joined the Royal Navy, commanding several of Her Majesty's warships and playing a vital role in preventing a Spanish invasion of Ireland. Somers' reputation as a sea captain grew, as did his wealth: he was described as "a lamb on land, so patient few could anger him: and.....a lion at sea, so passionate few could please him".

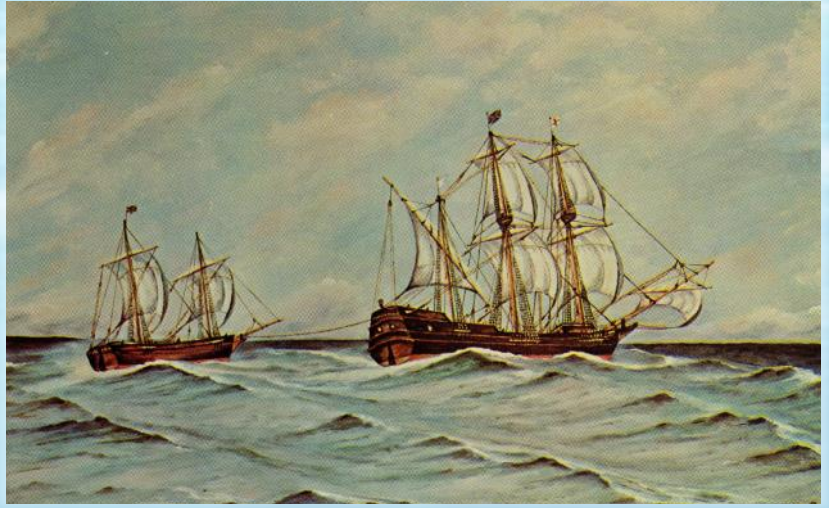
In 1603, aged almost 60, he retired from the sea, was knighted by King James I and, in 1604, elected MP for Lyme Regis, becoming the town's mayor in 1606.

However, James I wanted to colonize the east coast of America (New England). Somers was one of the chief promoters of the Virginia Company of London, the first settlers of which had arrived in Jamestown in 1607. Known as an excellent seaman, Somers was called out of retirement to be Admiral of a fleet of nine ships with 500 to 600 new settlers on a desperately needed resupply mission to Virginia. His flagship, the *Sea Venture*, and the rest of the fleet set sail from Plymouth in 1609 with Sir Thomas Gates aboard who was to be governor of Jamestown. A month later a hurricane scattered the fleet. The *Sea Venture*, suffering a serious leak, had the great good fortune to come across the uninhabited islands called the Bermudas by the Spanish, probably unknown to English navigators. The captain of the ship was able to drive the *Sea Venture* onto a reef and all passengers, crew and cargo were safely unloaded. The *Sea Venture* itself was, unfortunately, severely damaged. Apparently six ships of the fleet reached Jamestown and two others were lost in the storm.



Over the next 10 months Somers organized the building of two new ships, there being little hope of rescue from such remote islands. Despite the Bermudas, fortunately, having plenty of available food and timber, this was a period of severe conflict since Gates and Somers disputed who should be in charge, the latter arguing that he should be since the voyage had not been completed. Somers busied himself overseeing the building of the ships, charting the islands and fishing and hunting daily for the whole company. Meanwhile, tensions rose there being mutinies and violence among the castaways; Gates executed a gentleman and his co-conspirators who had planned to escape with stolen supplies.

The newly built ships, the aptly named *Deliverance* and *Patience*, set sail for Jamestown leaving two men behind perhaps to keep a claim to the islands. They reached Jamestown in May 1610 to find only 60 desperate survivors (out of 240) of famine, disease, freezing cold and attacks by the indigenous population. (This figure of 60 does not seem to tie in with the earlier arrival of six resupply ships with new settlers aboard unless few, if any, fancied staying). Gates decided Jamestown should be abandoned but as they were leaving they met a warship carrying the new governor, Thomas West, Baron De La Warr, with a years-worth of supplies and so all sailed back to Jamestown. De La Warr ordered Somers' ships to return to Bermuda for more supplies and to recover the two men left behind. The *Deliverance* was blown off course so loaded up the ship with fish and returned to Jamestown. Somers, with his nephew Matthew, made it to Bermuda in *Patience* but there, tragically, he died either of exhaustion or, perhaps, "of a surfeit of eating of a pig".



*The Patience and The Deliverance*

Somers had asked to be buried in Bermuda but only his heart and entrails are buried there under a simple cross, Matthew Somers taking the rest of his uncle's body pickled in a cask back to England to prove that Sir George was dead. Matthew should have returned to Jamestown with supplies but instead was desperate to claim his inheritance. However, there was doubt that the will he produced was genuine, his older brother being already in possession of most of Sir George's estate. Matthew was a troubled young man, trying unsuccessfully to get money out of the Virginia Company being referred to as Sir George's "pretended heir". Matthew next (in 1622), heavily in debt and writing from jail, petitioned James I for a share in the £12,000 value of a huge lump of ambergris, but his claims were again rejected and Matthew got nothing.

Sir George Somers' body was eventually returned to Whitchurch Canonichorum for burial and the *Patience* became famous in Dorset, sailing in British coastal waters but never returning to the New World.

Interestingly, news of Admiral Sir George Somers' voyage may well have been the inspiration for William Shakespeare's play, 'The Tempest', which was first performed in 1611. In the play Alonso the King of Naples' ship was wrecked on the 'Bermoothes Islands'.



The first intentional English settlers arrived in Bermuda in 1612 and to this day the islands are sometimes referred to as Somers' Islands. Bermuda became the role model for all mainland British Colonies in America bringing British laws, religion and language to the New World. Bermuda's motto is, appropriately, "Quo Fata Ferunt" or "Whither the Fates Carry Us".







*'The country parson doth often, both publickly and privately, instruct his churchwardens what a great charge lyes upon them, and that, indeed, the whole order and discipline in the parish is put into their hands...it being the greatest honour of this world to do God and His chosen service'*

*'A Priest to the Temple'* George Herbert (1593 to 1633)

If one looks carefully around the church (not during the sermon, of course!) you may have noticed initials or names associated with wall paintings or other artefacts. There are others that you won't see and would need wings to spot because they are on the roof. These initials and names are those of past churchwardens who have served the church over the centuries and sometimes others who deserved particular mention.

Before going any further, it is appropriate to dwell briefly on the historic role churchwardens have played in the life of the church. Until the Reformation the office of churchwarden was essentially and solely ecclesiastical. The primary function of the office at that time was taking care of the church building and its contents, including the responsibility of providing for the repairs of the nave (the chancel was the vicar's concern, in practice his patron's) and of furnishing the utensils for divine service. However, they were also responsible for the 'good order' of public worship, including attendance at the regular visits of the bishop or archdeacon at which they could report any ecclesiastical irregularities. An ecclesiastical court might then consider such irregularities and impose public penance or even excommunication. The surviving Churchwardens Accounts include mention of these visits and the cost of providing a handsome repast for the bishop or archdeacon. Whether one should renew this custom for the regular visits by our archdeacon today is a matter for the Parochial Church Council (PCC) to debate!

By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Tudor sovereigns had overlaid these ecclesiastical functions with a hotchpotch of miscellaneous secular duties. Local highways maintenance, introduced by statute in 1555, was but one example, as we heard at a recent talk to the Cerne Historical Society. Effectively, the parish was for centuries the local arm of central government. Examples of these multifarious duties are seen in the Churchwardens Accounts for 1686:

<i>Item. Paid for paviors for ye chancel</i>	<i>3s 6d</i>
<i>Item. Paid for ye Lord Bishop's visitation</i>	<i>17s 10d</i>
<i>Item. Given Thomas Deere a slave in Turkey</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>Item. Paid for 6 dozen sparrows heads</i>	<i>6d</i>
<i>Item. For wine and bread at ye sacrament at Whitsun</i>	<i>6s 4d</i>
<i>Item. Paid Robert Vincents son for a stoats head</i>	<i>2d</i>
<i>Item. Paid 3 labourers to mend Alton and Piddlehill ways</i>	<i>5s 0d</i>

And for 1694:

<i>4 Nov Item. For repairing of ye Giant</i>	<i>3s 0d</i>
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The reader may be curious, if not unsettled, by the apparent slaughter of seemingly innocent birds and other creatures in the Accounts. The Preservation of Grain Act of 1532 was passed by Henry VIII as a result of a series of poor harvests which, coupled with population growth, resulted in food shortages. War was declared on the wildlife population that was deemed a threat to food supplies. An official list came into being of supposed vermin and it was the duty of every parishioner to despatch these ‘pests’ at any given opportunity. The list included owls, sparrows, otters, foxes, hedgehogs and any other creatures that were seen as bad omens or competitors for food with humans. Duly despatched, these were to be presented to the churchwarden and a reward collected. The Accounts for as late as 1847 include an item for ‘79 dozen sparrows’ heads’ for which was paid 13s 2d. Happily we now live in more enlightened times and the preservation of our natural wildlife is a priority.

The secular duties imposed on church parishes continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they were gradually superseded by various Acts of Parliament. The Local Government Act of 1894 removed the last of these secular duties, with separate elected councils at district and parish levels. The present Cerne Valley Parish Council has its origins from this date. The Churchwardens of today are thus once again practising something akin to their pre-Reformation roles. It is worth adding that churchwardens had been exclusively men until 1918, when Miss Digby of Barton Lodge was elected. In 2023, both churchwardens are women. They will be grateful for no longer having responsibility for the ‘good order’ of their parishioners - or collecting sparrows’ heads.

The Churchwardens Accounts for St Mary’s survive from 1628. These are kept in the Dorset History Centre and are available to be read on Microfilm MIC/R/1448 and 1449. The handwriting in the earliest accounts, known as ‘Secretary hand’ is not easy to read as this page from 1679 (Fig 1) shows. This page records that a Robert fford carried out some drawing work in the church (Fig 2), as far as can be understood:

Robert fford for new drawing the King Armes (sic) and new writting (sic) The Lords Prayer and the Creed and 3 new ??? and for new making nine??? the sum of £2.5s.0d



Fig 1

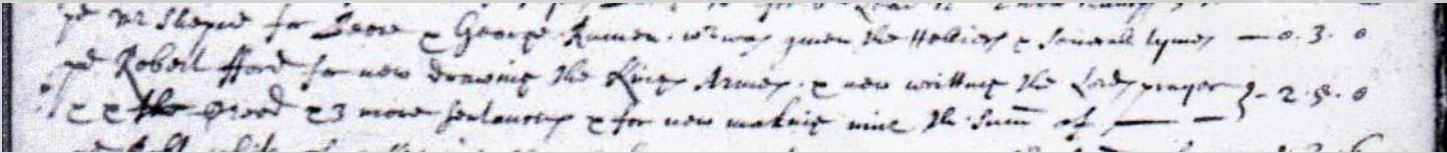


Fig 2



Robert fford was obviously an accomplished artist. The Kings Arms referred to had originally been painted on the, then complete, screen between the nave and the chancel until being 'deformed' (probably covered over with whitewash) in 1650, '*being commanded to do so*'. This was at the beginning of the Commonwealth following the execution of Charles I in 1649. The Kings Arms were redrawn on the screen by Robert fford in 1679, as recorded above, during the rein of Charles II. The Creed and the Lord's Prayer were also added at this time. The paintings survived until 1870, when the screen was opened up as we see it today. A photo taken about 1870 shows these paintings before the screen was opened up. If you look at the top of the screen today you can still see the remaining traces of the paintings.



Robert fford was also responsible for at least one of the cartouches on the north side of the nave and this has the initials 'TR' below it. (Fig 3).

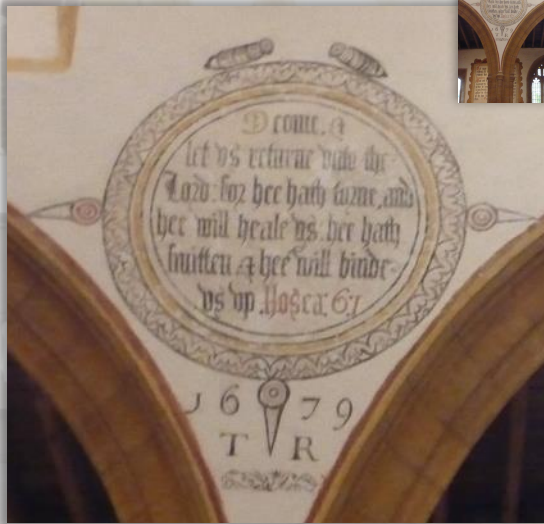
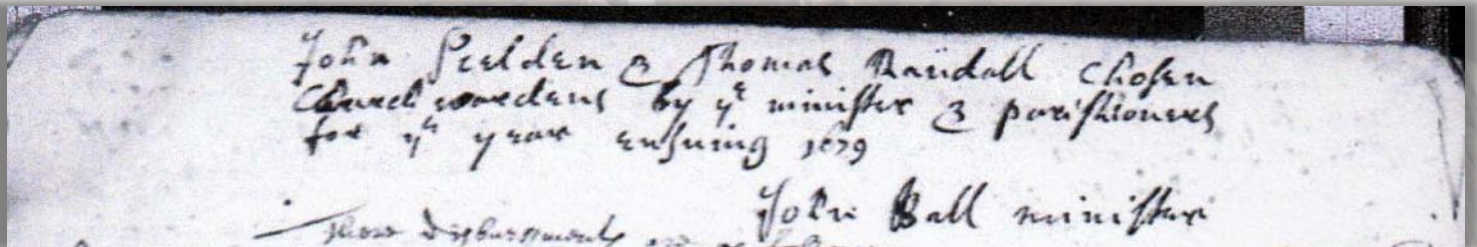


Fig 3

The top of the first page of the Accounts for 1679 records that **John Sidden** (?) and **Thomas Randall** had been elected as Churchwardens and parishioners '*for ye year ensuing 1679*'. (Fig 4) This has been endorsed by John Ball, Minister. The initials 'TR', therefore, almost certainly refer to this Thomas Randall. The initials 'GS' with a second cartouche were almost certainly for another churchwarden, as yet unidentified, but whether this cartouche was also drawn by Robert fford, and when, has yet to be discovered. The nave cartouches were whitewashed over at a later date and it was only during the major repair and reordering of St Mary's in 1960/1 that they were rediscovered and restored to their present state.

Fig 4



Another visible legacy of early churchwardens left to St Mary's can be seen as you enter by the west door. The decorative wooden screen (Fig 5), between the nave and the tower was erected in 1749. The date and the names of the two churchwardens are above the door. One of these, **W Jacob**, was the owner of the New Inn at the time.

Fig 5





Other visible legacies reflect historical developments in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century Church of England. William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to 1645, believed that the Reformation had gone too far in the name of 'Puritanism'. He wanted worship, and the furnishings of the church, to be more 'beautiful'. St Mary's has items which reflect his influence. One is the prominent 1640 oak pulpit which cost the parish a princely £9. 3s. 0d. Another not so immediately prominent is the altar table in the chapel at the east end of the south aisle. (Fig 6). Finely carved in oak, the edge of the top of the altar table bears the initials **BK 1638 WS**. It cost 12s. 0d. The initials are those of the churchwardens for that year: **Bartholomew King** and **William Sherring**. These two pieces of church furniture have fared better than the poor Archbishop himself. He was found guilty of high treason by an unsympathetic Puritan Parliament in 1644 and was beheaded at the Tower of London on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1645. Apart from reflecting that 'Puritanism' had apparently not taken hold to the same extent in Cerne Abbas as it did in other towns nearby, it is as well to ponder Archbishop Laud's fate when admiring these two pieces. The not insignificant expenditure involved may also indicate that Cerne Abbas was returning to relative prosperity in the aftermath of the economic shock following the Dissolution of Cerne Abbey barely a century earlier.



Fig 6

Fig 7



Moving outside and looking up at the south porch, you will see the names '**WILLI TULLEDGE** and **THO DUSSELL 1696**' (Fig 7) carved on a plaque on the arch above your head. They were the churchwardens when the south porch was built or restored in that year. That Thomas Dussell was a man of some note in the village can be seen on 18<sup>th</sup> century maps. The road from the north of Springfield in Duck Street to where the Giant viewpoint is today was called Dussells Lane. For what reason we know not, but he may have leased land or a farm from Lord Rivers in that area.







## St Mary's Roof and Other Churchwardens' Legacies

Let us now consider other legacies left by our churchwardens, but out of sight. On the roof there are surviving plaques fixed to the roof which record work down the years to maintain the watertight integrity of the church. The oldest of these is dated 1682 (Fig 9) and we have it on the authority of a Diocesan church roof plumber that this is the earliest such record he has seen in Dorset. The churchwardens named are **John Bartlet** and **George Farr**. The initials 'TSH' are almost certainly those of the plumber who carried out the repairs. Entries in the Accounts for 1682 are relevant, (Fig 10) of which these are extracts:

*Fig 10*

Item. Paid for ye carriage of the old lead  
and new lead to and from Dorchester 1. 2s. 00

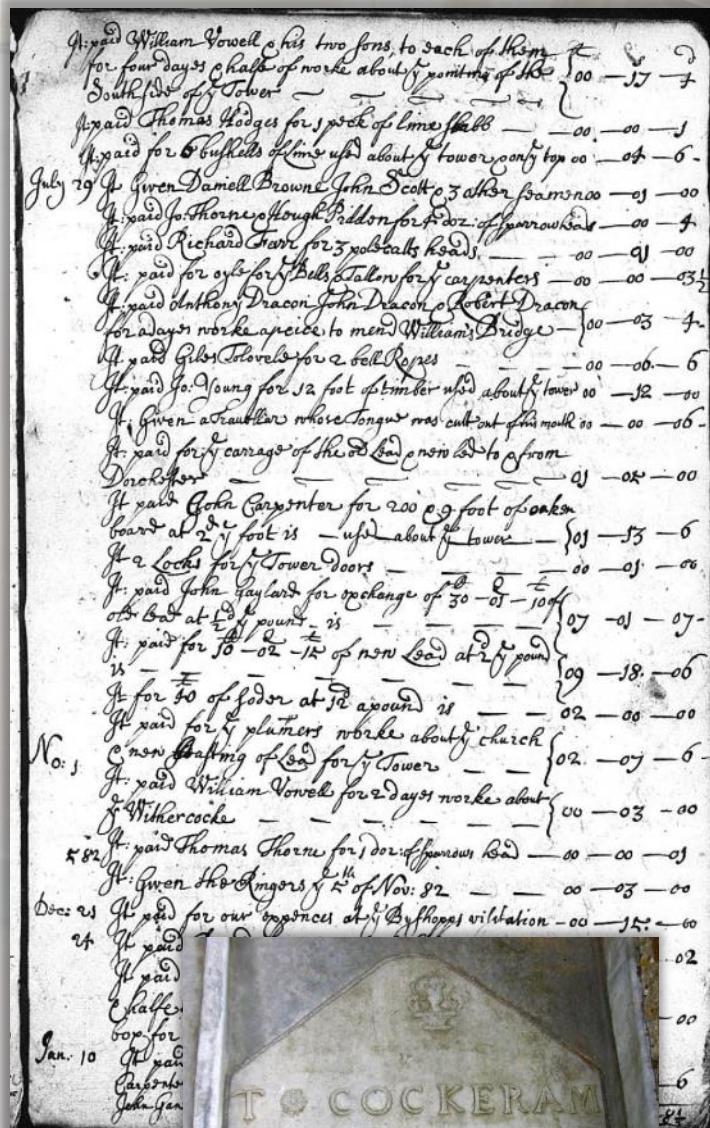
Item. Paid John Gaylord for exchange of  
'30 01 10' (its weight, units not clear)  
old lead at ½d ye pound 1. 13s 06

Item. Paid for '0 02 15' (again, units not clear)  
of new lead at 2d ye pound 9. 18s 06

Item. Paid for ye plumbers ??? about ye church and new ??? for ye tower 2. 7s 06



Fig 9



A sizeable outlay, but which appears to have stood the test of time until 1794, the date on the next plaque in chronological sequence.  
(Fig 11)

The churchwardens in 1794 were **T Cockeram** and **J Davis**. The Cockeram family appear frequently in village records back to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and were clearly of stature in the community.



*Fig 11*



For example, a Thomas Cockeram (Snr) signed the Act of Enclosure of the common lands around Cerne Abbas in 1795 immediately below the signature of Lord Rivers who owned all the land around Cerne Abbas. We do not know whether these two 'Thomas Cockeram' were the same man or father and son.

However, we do know that the plumber on this occasion was a John Barnwells and received £11 10s 9d for his work; quite the most significant 'disbursement' in the Accounts for 1794 (Fig 12). The Barnwells name will reappear in this story, but the name lives on with the present No 9 Abbey Street, still known as 'Barnwells', the address at which the family lived for many years.

1794 Disbursements

Messrs. Coombs & Bowring Bill	8 6 7 1/2
In 2 Barnwells	11 10 3
John Willsburt	0 13 6
Ringers 22 Sept	0 5 0
J Barnwells	0 17 3 1/2
Ann Curms	0 0 0
Wm Oakley	10 12 6
Carriage from Weymouth	1 5 0
Turnpike & porterage	0 3 6
Form of prayer	0 1 0
Lead band	0 2 0
Timber from Mt. Coombs at different times	0 2 0
paid R Donding	1 2 0
Ge. Donding's Bill	2 10 7
20 Doy Sparrows	0 2 6
Jon. Conard's Bill	0 3 2
Thos. Dunsen	0 3 0
Wm Clarke's Salary	2 2 0
paid a la Church	0 3 0
paid for Church and fence	0 2 6

Fig 12



Fig 13

The next plaque in chronological sequence dates from 1800 (Fig 13). The churchwardens were **T Cockeram** (again) and **W Conway**. This plaque includes two small images of the Giant.

Later plaques are dated 1831 (Fig 14) and 1843 (Fig 15), with an additional plaque for 1843 recording the plumber, R Barnwell (Fig 16) see over, again with small images of the Giant.



Fig 14

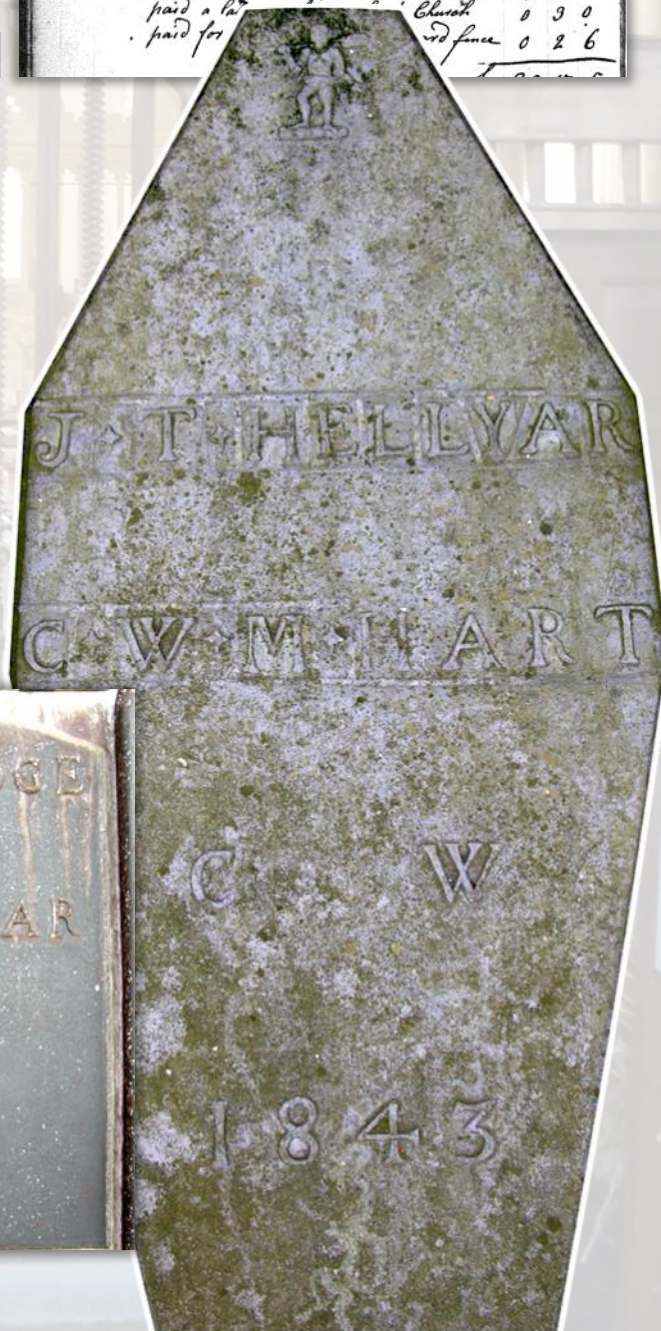


Fig 15





Fig 16

No further roof work appears to have been undertaken until the major repair and refurbishment of St Mary's in 1960/61. By this time the church was in very poor condition, probably reflecting the declining fortunes of Cerne Abbas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The roof of the nave had been condemned and much of the rest of the St Mary's was in much need of major repair and refurbishment.

The 1964 plaque (Fig 17) records the vicar, Cyril Taylor (the incumbent from 1958 to 1969), who was the driving force behind the refurbishment, and his churchwardens. Cyril Taylor was also a noted composer of hymn tunes and the hymn book used in St Mary's includes a number of his compositions. Perhaps the most well-known is called Abbot's Leigh (Nos 418 and 435 in the hymn book), named after the village in Somerset where he lived during WW2. There is also a cartouche on the



Fig 17

south side of the nave marking this major refurbishment, with the initials not of a churchwarden but of 'E II R' (Fig 18), a further sign of the long reign of Her Late Majesty.

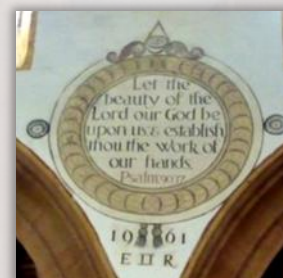


Fig 18

On a final note, the practice of recording the serving churchwardens following significant work on the church seems to have been in abeyance since 1961. The recently completed major works, with the complete replacement of the church's electrical installation and the fitting of a new lighting scheme, is surely an event worth recording for posterity. Why not a plaque for our present churchwardens, such as in the Flower Room where the new power distribution panel and lighting control equipment are sited? They will also be the first lady churchwardens to be recorded in this way in the history of St Mary's Church. Perhaps:

**Helen Smith and Carole Bradshaw**

**Churchwardens 2022**

*(Acknowledgements for this article to Vivian Vale and his treatise 'The Care of a Parish', the Dorset History Centre, and photographs by Jane Tearle and Richard Hartley-Sharpe)*





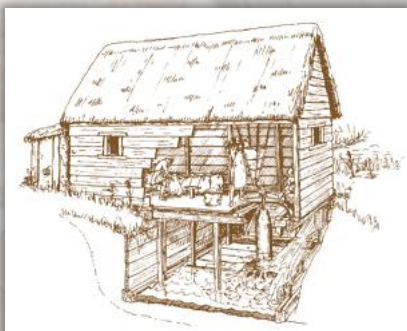


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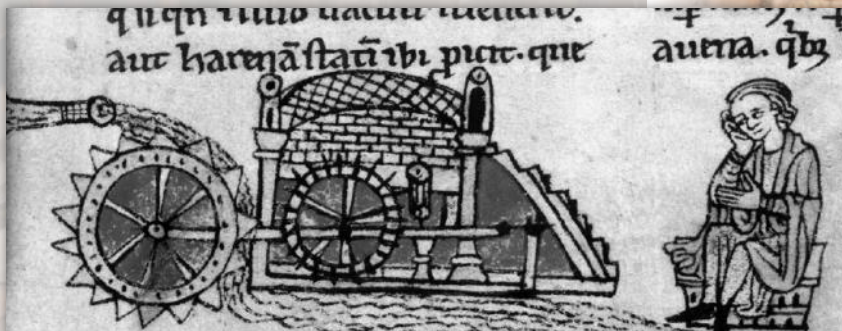
# Mills

*of the Cerne Valley*

Readers will be immediately relieved to discover that the subject of this article is watermills, not a potted history of the author's family, and focusses on those known to have existed between Up Cerne and Godmanstone. Watermills were the only form of non-horse powered machinery available in the pre-industrial age; they were the mills which ground locally grown grain into flour for breadmaking, crushed grain for livestock fodder, turned coarsely woven woollen material into cloth, and crushed oak bark for use in tanning.



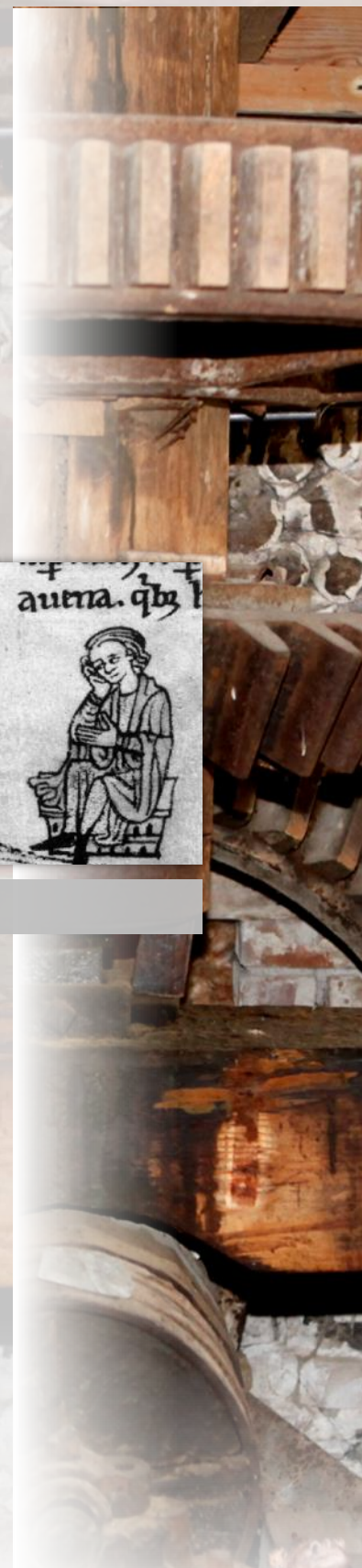
*Offa's Watermill*



*Medieval overshot mill*

Grinding grain to make flour, by hand using quern stones, goes back to Neolithic times. The earliest watermills have been dated to the Romano-British period. Investigations into King of Mercia Offa's royal palace at Tamworth, Staffs, carried out in 1971, found the intact timbers of a two-story Anglo-Saxon watermill, dated to the 8thC AD. It seems likely that a watermill was an essential part of Cerne's Anglo-Saxon infrastructure; indeed, the Domesday Book (1086 AD) records a mill at Cerne, value one pound, as well as mills at Up Cerne, Godmanstone and Charminster.

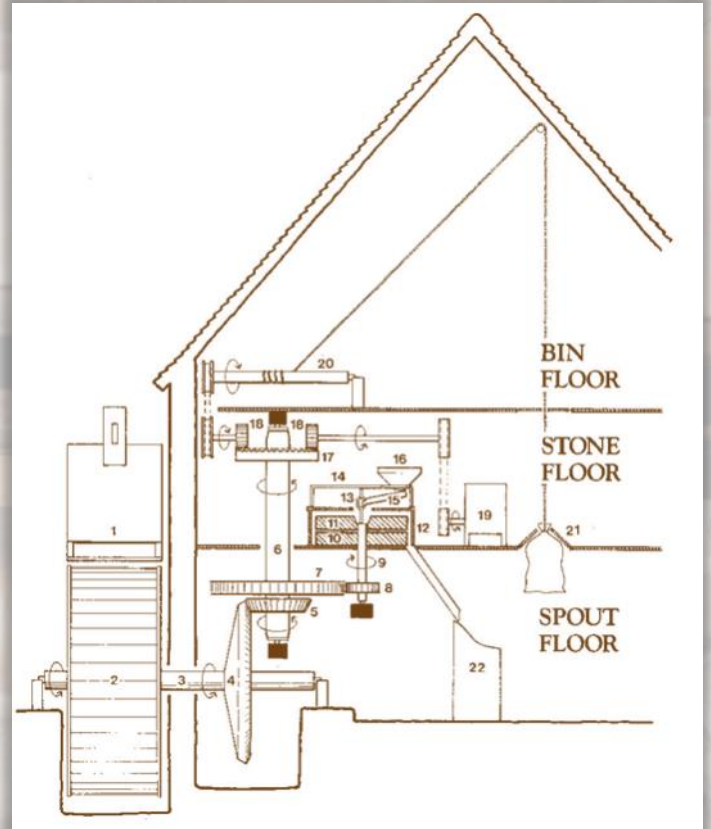
Water mills since the earliest days derived power from water flowing over a horizontally mounted wheel, the water descending onto a series of paddles or flutes causing the rotation, with a vertical shaft which would have directly driven the millstones mounted on a floor above the wheel.





In more recent times a vertically mounted wheel, the water flowing either over the top of wheel (overshot) or under it (undershot or breast-shot), has been the basic design right up to present-day. The drive from the shaft is then turned through 90 degrees via a large wooden peg or bevel gear. The ascending vertical shaft would drive first the millstones, then on the floor above them probably a grain cleaner (removing weed seeds and chaff), and lastly the hoist which lifted the sacks of grain to the top of the building. Milling required a carefully controlled flow of grain descending from the top floor hopper to the millstones, from where the flour was bagged for storage and sale.

Cerne's Abbey mill, which would have had medieval origins, is intriguing because we know it must have existed, but today there is little physical evidence of it. The Benedictine Abbey of Cerne would have without



*Operation of a Watermill*



doubt been milling grain to provide flour for the Abbey community, possibly as well as the rest of the village, throughout its existence. A.O. Gibbons, writing in the early 1960's in his book *Cerne Abbas*, refers to the Abbey mill having been situated just to the north of the former pottery (in what is now a wildflower meadow belonging to Beauvoir Court). Water supply to drive the mill wheel would have come from the man-made channel known as the river Silley, which arrived in Beauvoir field from the north, feeding a pond or leat; this is possibly still visible today as a depression in the ground, to the east of what was then a great barn, now known as Beauvoir Court. From there it was channelled across the existing track, also filling the stone trough beside it we can see today. Controlled by some form of sluice system, the water must then have been directed to the mill wheel via a penstock installed in a gulley to provide the necessary head of water. After which, it was a short distance for the water to return to the main river.

*Pryce's map 1768 showing Cerne Mills*



Without archaeological evidence, it is hard to be completely convinced about Gibbons' siting of the Abbey mill, but although the map of 1768 showing the course of the Silley fits with his description, by the date of the map the mill was where Mill House is today. The possible shortcomings of the original situation of the Abbey mill have been brought home emphatically by the summer of 2022's severe drought. The Silley no longer exists, but in a dry time if one diverts a proportion of a what is probably a much-diminished flow from the river Cerne to a man-made channel, one ends up with, at best, a trickle in both. It's difficult to imagine how in dry summers the Silley would have provided sufficient flow for the Abbey's drainage system, possibly the Abbey's fishponds, and to drive the mill. The spring-fed St Augustine's Well could have provided a clean water supply to the Abbey, but it's unreliable; at the time of writing (7-11-2022) there is still no flow into the well following the summer drought, despite there having been some 350mm (13.7in) rainfall since 1-09-2022.

Downstream from Kettle Bridge we no longer need to guess where, post dissolution, Cerne's mill was, arriving at the Mill House in Mill Lane. The building we see today is chiefly constructed of brick, which on close inspection is typical of the late 18thC/ early 19thC. The flat fan shaped voussoir arches over the windows are of that era. However, there are numerous different building styles and



materials, some earlier in origin to much more modern, indicating extensive rebuilding and modification at different times. A section of dressed ham stone, possibly part of a window frame, is visible in part of a retaining wall, which may have had Abbey origins. It is safe to assume that this is not the first mill building to have existed on the site. The infrastructure supplying water to it might have been constructed in Abbey times, when the Abbey mill fell into disuse through the difficulties outlined above, or post dissolution. In 1609 the mill, which had been in the hands of the Crown since the dissolution, was granted to Edward Ferrers and Francis Phelipps, both London gentlemen, but we have no evidence of where said mill was. Further documentation records changes in ownership and rights all the way up to 1911, when the miller was H. Derriman.

The river we see today between Kettle Bridge and the Mill House is a man-made channel allowing a large volume of water to be stored upstream of the mill. A sluice beside the waterfall just upstream of the mill controlled the level, allowing the surplus water to return to the stream below via the waterfall. When flow was required to turn the wheel, another sluice behind the mill building allowed a fast stream to enter the millrace behind the house, then descending to drive a wheel which was mounted vertically to the south of the existing house in an attached building. This, the mill machinery, and the tailrace, has all disappeared. It is unfortunate that I have been unable to find images of any kind illustrating the mill machinery as it was before the mill closed.



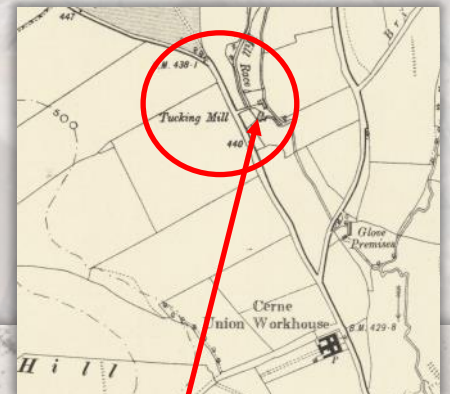


The mill on this site last turned in 1933, William Holland being Cerne's last master miller. In its final years water power to the mill was derived from a turbine rather than a wheel. Conveniently sited, the Duck Street bakery backed on to Mill Lane, and as can be seen in the photo there was a bridge connecting sheds presumably associated with the mill across Mill Lane to the back of the bakery. Mill Lane must have been the most congested street in the village. Farmers delivering grain with horses and carts would have had to first negotiate the busy forge with horses being shod outside, and then having unloaded their sacks at the mill, the carts had to be unhitched so that they could be turned, re-hitched, and led back past the forge. Patience must have been a necessity amongst horses and their drivers.

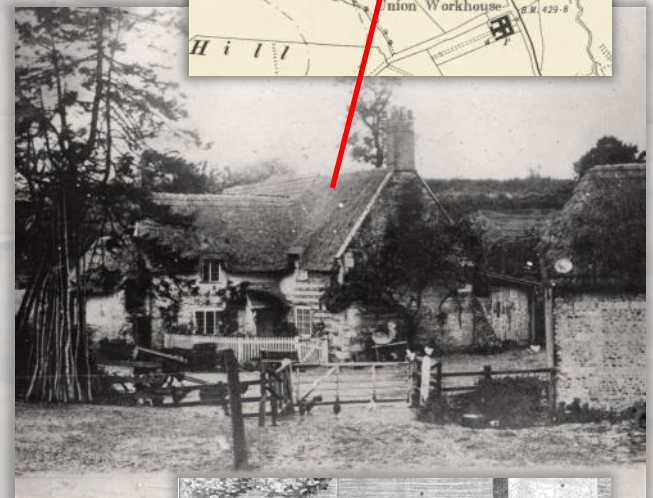


A mile or so north of the village, powered by the Cerne's tributary which arises at the Great Pond at Up Cerne, another watermill originally served a different purpose.

Beside the Up Cerne road stands a yew tree, below which in the

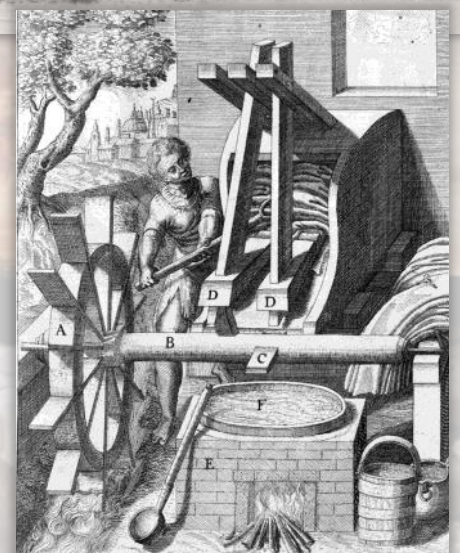


adjacent field was Up Cerne's tucking mill. It was demolished in the early 1960s along with most of the rest of the cottages and barns of the village, a process reminiscent of the Highland Clearances. There is a video of Mrs Mione Fox, who was born and brought up at the tucking mill, on the CHS website, interviewed by Jonathon Still in 2014. She relates how her parents and grandparents lived there, and how after they left the mill, a beautiful old building with banded flint and stone walls, with a range of outbuildings, it was burnt, then bulldozed. Tucking mills used water power to drive large wooden hammers which pounded coarse hand-woven woollen material, for two purposes. One was to cleanse the wool of oil and dirt, and the second was to thicken the material by matting the fibres together. This process used a substance known as Fuller's Earth, which is why the mills were sometimes called fulling mills. Mione Fox's mother remembered the remains of the hammers used in the wool processing left in an outbuilding, but all the metal mill machinery was sent for salvage for the war effort in WW2.



Having been washed after the fulling process, the material was spread out and dried on tenting frames, secured by tenterhooks, giving us the expression of being "on tenterhooks", describing a state of suspense because of uncertainty about future events - a feeling all too familiar to us today.

In 1746 the lease on the tucking mill was granted to Robert Farr of Cerne, gentleman, for a yearly rent of 13s/4d. The property was described as "*All that Fulling Mill or Tucking Mill lately converted to a Grist Mill*", indicating that the mill was by now serving two purposes. In 1862, the mill was in financial difficulties, and milling ceased there in 1875.





A mere 300m or so further downstream, beside the A352 just north of the junction with the Up Cerne road, was the glove premises. The Mill Archive ([www.new.millsarchive.org](http://www.new.millsarchive.org) – a first class resource) lists this as a corn mill, but it is not known when milling ceased, or whether glove making was carried on at the same time. Photographed in the early 1960s it was a substantial house and set of outbuildings, all of which suffered the same fate as the tucking mill in the Up Cerne clearances of that time.



Research into tanning in Cerne Abbas for a previous article in this magazine revealed that there were also two bark mills in Cerne, crushing oak bark for use in the tanning process. One was somewhere on the Tanyard premises, presumably water driven, of which today there is no evidence. The other was said to be on Acreman St, and was horse driven.



South of the village of Cerne, another mill stood beside the road shortly before the turning to Nether Cerne. This was one of the two mills of which Nether Cerne boasted; one was driven by a magnificent iron water wheel, powering machinery in a barn processing grain for animal feed. This wheel is now part of the collection at Castleton (Water) Mill Museum, in Sherborne, as it is the oldest wrought iron wheel in the country, made by local company Maggs of Bourton in north Dorset in 1819. Of the other Nether Cerne mill, as marked on the map close to the main road, only ruins in the undergrowth remain. The rusting iron wheel, tumbledown walls, pits and gullies evoke scenes of past industry, now atmospherically bedecked with hart's tongue fern and ivy. The wheel was of iron construction, and similar in design to the one rescued and housed by the Water Mill Museum, known as a wide breastshot wheel, which developed a comparatively large amount of power from a small head of water.

The wall with a doorway in it, and remains of a pitched roof behind it, are all that remain of what may have been the miller's cottage, although there are no windows to be seen. Census records every 10 years start with Elizabeth Burrough as miller in 1841, and end in 1901 with Frederick Baker. There is a later record of a George Baker as miller in 1915, but it is unknown if he was the last.





Standing at right angles to the road in the centre of Godmanstone is another Cerne valley mill, also mentioned in Domesday Book. The half of the existing building nearest the river, which still contains the mill machinery, has the date 1826 inscribed in the north wall. Its bottom paddles removed, the breast-shot water wheel still hangs in the river channel which passes beneath the building, its shaft connected to the wooden gears inside. Godmanstone Mill last ground grain commercially in 1939, but continued to process fodder for livestock and pump water to a reservoir for a few further years. It is said freshly baked bread during wartime time was unavailable; it was too tasty and tempting, the theory being that if it was at least a day old, less would be eaten. During WW2 bread was never rationed, only being put on the ration in 1946.

From before WW1 rural mills such as those in the Cerne Valley were facing the threat of competition from industrial facilities with huge roller mills, sometimes steam driven, based in ports to take advantage of imported wheat. They only stood a chance if situated close to a plentiful water supply and surrounded by good wheat growing land. During WW2 many were stripped of their iron machinery for the war effort. The 1950's saw continued rapid decline in numbers of country mills, and the rise of the mass-produced white sliced loaf did nothing to help.

From its source a short distance north of Minterne to its confluence with the Frome near Wolfeton House, Charminster, our beautiful little chalk stream, which one imagines provided basic needs - and spiritual inspiration - for the earliest settlements in this valley, has also over centuries provided the power for processes which enabled the development and sustenance of the valley's communities. In all, I have found information on some 11 water-driven installations, far too many to describe in this article, over the river's length of approximately 8 miles. In the climate emergency of 2022, when every source of clean renewable energy should urgently be receiving our attention, a fine example was set by our ancestors who harnessed, without lasting environmental damage, the power they needed from this magical watercourse. There may well be potential for the future.

*I am much indebted to the following for their generous help with research.*

*Den and Jess at the Mill House, Cerne Abbas*

*Edward and Sophia Gallia, Nether Cerne*

*Harriet Still, Oxford*

*Helen and Charlie Brown, Nether Cerne*







# *Cerne Union*

*Rateable Value of the respective Parishes  
correctly copied from the latest Valuation  
Lists in force*

Last summer our plumbers were pulling up the floorboards in the attic when they found two handwritten notes. One was dated 20<sup>th</sup> March 1887 and signed by William Brach, Union Clerk. It listed the rateable value of the 21 parishes that made up the Cerne Union, including Cerne Abbas (£4353), Buckland Newton (£8687), Piddletrenthide (£5143), Minterne Magna (£2663), Up Cerne (£1230) and Nether Cerne (£774). The smallest was the ancient hamlet of Gorewood (£38), which is no longer in existence.

I had already started to research crime and punishment in Victorian Dorset ready for publication next year but, on discovering the handwritten notes, I put this to one side. I was intrigued to know why parish unions were established in the first place and how this was connected to the development of union workhouses. Naturally, I had a specific interest in discovering more about the Cerne Union and its workhouse.

The political and social turmoil during the 1830s and 1840s influenced the development of union workhouses. The industrial revolution was rapidly changing the social landscape in this country. Other European countries were still reeling from the French Revolution. However, there was the fear in Britain that this would lead to a loss of control over the rising classes of agricultural workers who were migrating to the towns and cities. In June 1830 William IV, the third son of George III, came to the throne. During his reign (he died in 1837) he personally opposed any parliamentary reform that would reduce the power of the throne and the landowning aristocracy. This period saw the rise of middle classes of men (not women) with small incomes of their own, surgeons, solicitors, teachers, tradesmen and military officers etc. I discovered that a number of these were elected to the union Board of Guardians that oversaw the new union workhouses, including the Cerne Union Workhouse.

*Rateable Value of the respective Parishes  
correctly copied from the latest Valuation  
Lists in force*

<i>Parishes</i>	<i>£</i>	<i>£</i>
<i>Cerne Abbas</i>	<i>4392</i>	<i>4353</i>
<i>Alton Pancras</i>	<i>2174</i>	<i>2174</i>
<i>Batcombe</i>	<i>1219</i>	<i>1212</i>
<i>Buckland Newton</i>	<i>8687</i>	<i>8687</i>
<i>Cattislock</i>	<i>4903</i>	<i>4856</i>
<i>Chiselborne</i>	<i>2542</i>	<i>2532</i>
<i>Frome St Dunstons</i>	<i>1639</i>	<i>1626</i>
<i>Gordonstone</i>	<i>1480</i>	<i>1485</i>
<i>Gorewood</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Hinsbury</i>	<i>928</i>	<i>928</i>
<i>Helpsall</i>	<i>1480</i>	<i>1470</i>
<i>Mappowden</i>	<i>2831</i>	<i>2831</i>
<i>Mollbury Bubb</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2006</i>
<i>Melcombe Horsey</i>	<i>2157</i>	<i>2153</i>
<i>Minterne Magna</i>	<i>2663</i>	<i>2663</i>
<i>Nether Cerne</i>	<i>774</i>	<i>774</i>
<i>Piddletrenthide</i>	<i>5143</i>	<i>5137</i>
<i>Tilkeane</i>	<i>3145</i>	<i>3135</i>
<i>Sydling St Nicholas</i>	<i>4540</i>	<i>4540</i>
<i>Up Cerne</i>	<i>1230</i>	<i>1230</i>
<i>Wootton Bassett</i>	<i>2527</i>	<i>2527</i>
<i>£</i>	<i>56498</i>	<i>56372</i>

*Dated 20<sup>th</sup> Dec<sup>r</sup> 1887*  
*William Brach, Clerk*



We are fortunate to have written records from 1834 to 1838 that provide an understanding of the interconnected events during this period: Dorset History Centre possesses the Minutes of the first Cerne Union Board of Guardians meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1835, as well as proceedings of the Cerne Petty Sessions for 1835. Both meetings were held in the New Inn. Then we have the records of the Justices of the Peace (JPs) at Dorchester Quarter Sessions who, until 1936, appointed the JPs at Cerne Petty Sessions – there were 30 villages in the Cerne Division. A third piece of the jigsaw can be found from the records of the Crown Court Assizes in Dorchester at the time of the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs in 1834. I have discovered possible links between a number of JPs who had connections with the Cerne Union Workhouse, Cerne Petty Sessions and Dorchester Assizes. But this will have to wait until I have carried out further investigations. I should mention that a further valuable piece of evidence may be found in the records of the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales. The Commissioners had to approve the design and development of Union Workhouse, as well as carry out inspections.

Prior to 1834 the poor in Cerne Abbas and surrounding villages were supported by the parish rates. This was the result of growing numbers of the 'able-bodied poor': farm labourers and many involved in local 'cottage industries', such as spinning, glove-making and weaving. The old workhouse was in Duck Street (Bridge Street), with a garden in Lime Kiln Lane. These were purchased by the Pitt Rivers estate for £110.



The introduction of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was seen by the government as a major piece of reform. It empowered parishes to form 'Unions' and to establish workhouses. The Commissioners believed that the workhouses would reduce expenditure of local parish poor relief, by placing paupers in an institution instead. They also thought that this would lead to a reduction in the numbers of paupers applying for relief.

Sir Francis Head, an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner reported that *'The very sight of a well-built establishment would give confidence to the Board of Guardians; the sight and weekly assemblage of all servants of the Union would make them proud of their office; the appointment of a chaplain would give dignity to the whole arrangement, while the pauper would feel it utterly impossible to contend against it'*.

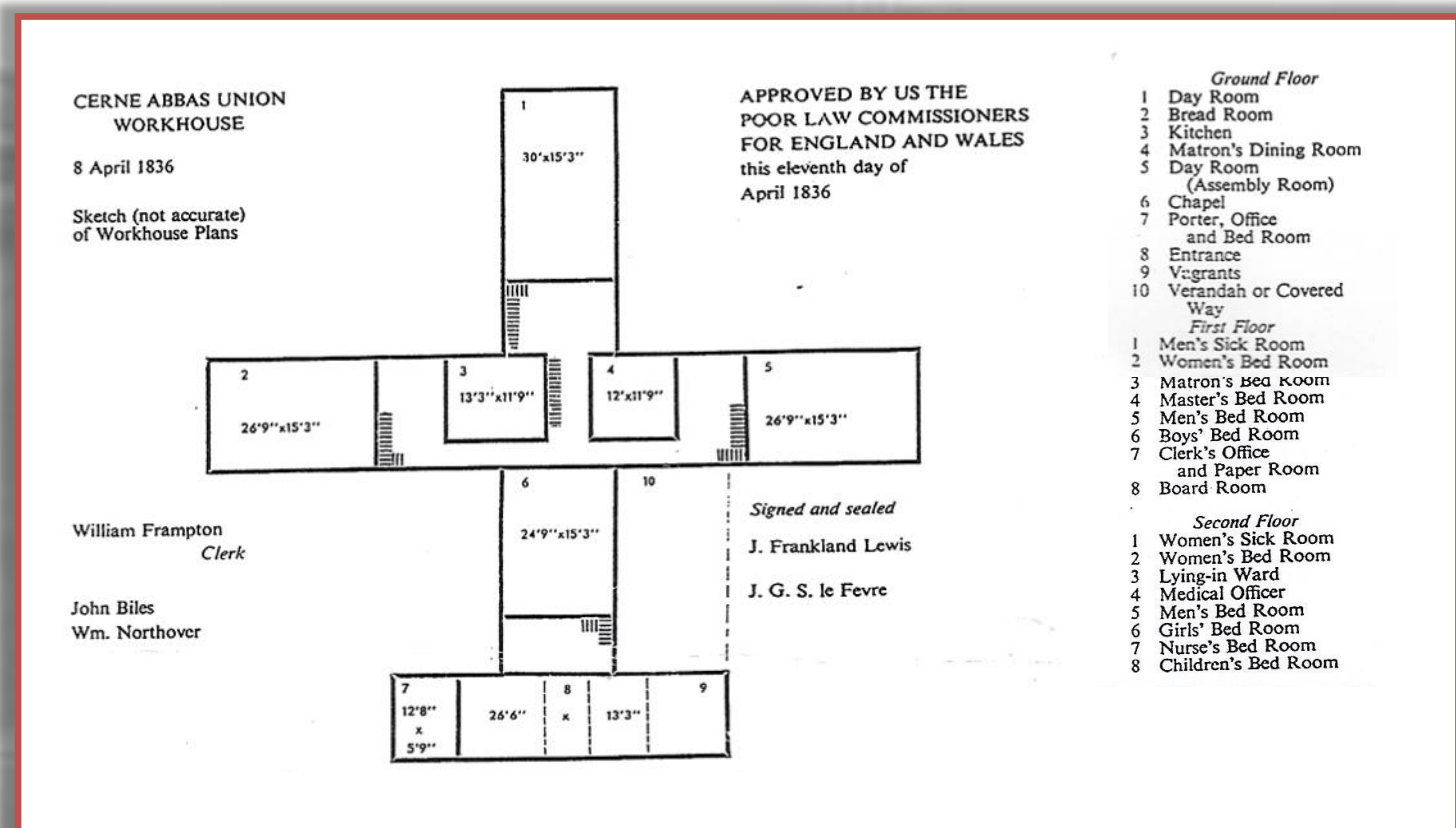
Workhouses soon became known as 'Bastilles' due to their prison-like designs, harsh regimes and restricted access to the outside. As with the development of Victorian prisons, their residents were called 'inmates'. This approach towards the poor reflected the Victorian attitude that was based on the misplaced assumption that the 'able-bodied pauper' was idle from choice. A commonly held opinion of the period was that the poor were largely to blame for their situation.

Dorset established twelve Unions set up between 1834 and 1836. They were based on the designs of Sampson Kempthorne, architect to the Poor Law Commissioners. His Y-shape and cross-shape designs were an adaptation of Jeremy Bentham's *panopticon* model for prisons. This placed the master's and matron's rooms at a central point of the workhouse where they could observe the inmates. Cerne Union Workhouse was 'Cross' shape, whereas Sturminster Newton was 'Y' shaped.



The twelve Dorset workhouses contained the sick, aged, 'feeble-minded' and orphaned, as well as paupers and vagrants. They were also planned to ensure the sexes were segregated (including mothers from children, husbands from wives). To prevent escape, the exercise yards were surrounded by high walls or outbuildings.

Each of the twenty parishes elected one representative to the Cerne Union Board of Guardians, except for Cerne Abbas which elected two. Rate payers had one to three votes according to the rateable value of their property or their poor rate assessment. Local JPs, which included most of the landed gentry, were *ex-officio* Board members.



According to the Minutes, at the first meeting of the Cerne Union Board of Guardians John Frampton was elected as the Clerk (salary £40 a year), John Samson, as Relieving Officer (salary £90 a year) and Herbert Williams, Esq. (a Dorchester banker), as Treasurer. All three had to submit securities. It was also agreed that each parish should pay one-eighth of its annual poor relief expenditure by February 1836 to cover the existing parish poor, pay salaries and administrative costs, as well as the hire of room in the New Inn. A planning committee was appointed to identify the new workhouse site and prepare plans to accommodate 130 inmates. The plans were approved by the Poor Law Commissioners on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1836

In November 1836 there were adverts in the *Dorset County Chronicle* and the *Salisbury Journal*, as well as local Sherborne newspapers for a married couple to be Master and Matron at a salary of £40 a year, plus a provision for coal, candles and food, with a board and lodging allowance. William Bartlett and his wife were appointed. By May 1837 the three-storey building was completed and ready for the reception of paupers - although there were further additions made during the rest of the year.

The Guardians did not consider what to do with vagrants and other casual poor until the following year, when they set aside accommodation for their reception.



The appointment of John Samson, the Relieving Officer, was an important element to the successful working of the Poor Law. His major role was to provide 'out relief' to the poor who were not in the Union Workhouse. Each week he had to present his Pauper Description Book for approval by the chairman, John James, Esq of Sydling House, or in his absence, the Rev John Davis, vicar of Cerne Abbas – both were *ex-officio* Guardians. A new Relieving officer was appointed in 1837. He was William Cave, having entered a £100 bond, naming William Clark of Cerne Abbas as his surety. There is a record of his itinerary as he went around the villages that were part of the Cerne Union to meet with the parish Overseer. While there he would distribute bread loaves and small amounts of money to paupers experiencing difficulties. In June 1836 the cost of 'out-relief' was £25 and by January it had risen to £55 4s 5d.



Bread played a central role in the form of 'out-relief' in kind. In 1836 James Dunning of Cerne Abbas won the contract for supplying bread to the Union. Another bread supplier was Charles Durden. The weekly order that year was for 540 loaves and rose to 600 loaves by early 1837.

The diet of the Union workhouse inmates was based on the Poor Law Commission Authorised Dietary Table No.1. There were specified diets for certain groups such as the 'able-bodied', unmarried mothers and the over 60s. It had a schoolroom on the premises. Women and children were taught netmaking.

The 1834 Poor Law Act stipulated that each Union should appoint paid Medical Officers. The Cerne Union appointed two from Cerne Abbas to cover the eight northern parishes (pop. 2,280), six eastern (pop. 2,647) and six western (pop.1,636). They were Alfred Davis who lived in Long Street, who covered the northern district, with John Fox, in Abbey Street, covering the other two districts.

Most workhouses were built to stop the inmates from getting out. Yet, from the outset the Cerne Union Board of Guardians decided that the 'able-bodied' should be allowed to work outside, until sufficient work could be provided within the workhouse. Piddle Valley was the only parish where there was the possibility of paid employment. Consequently, all parishes were ordered to send their able-bodied paupers to work in the Piddle Valley for breaking stones. This brings me to the second note that was found under the floorboards of our house: a signed receipt dated January 29, 1864, from George Toff on behalf of the Cerne Abbas Parish, for supplying 15 ½ cubic yards, delined from Hill Road, Plush at a cost of £1.7s 1 ½d. A.O Gibbons has also observed that the inmates of the Cerne Union Workhouse were paid token money, exchangeable at shops in the village, for work done in gardens, fields and workshops

In 1844 the Parliamentary Select Committee on Medical Relief severely criticised the Cerne Union for the way it handled the 1841 typhus outbreak in its infirmary section. As a consequence, the Guardians authorised the construction of a detached block behind the main building with new isolation wards and a maternity ward.





Despite this criticism, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1860 the *Dorset County Chronical* reported that “a Poor Law Inspector has recently paid an unexpected visit to the Cerne Union Workhouse, and reported that ‘I have found everything in exemplary order; the state of the establishment reflects credit upon all concerned in its management’ ”.

Unlike many other Union workhouses, the Cerne Union Workhouse was not considered necessary for conversion into a Public Assistance Institution and was sold after 1930.

I am grateful to Mrs Susan Mansel in Cerne Abbas who kindly provided additional information about the building until it later became a care home. Her grandfather, Thomas Harvey, bought the former Cerne Union Workhouse on his retirement as the village policeman in 1930. Mr Mansell’s mother was a nurse. Thomas Harvey had three daughters and seven sons - two were killed in the WW2. The building and rooms had not changed, retaining its original ‘Greek Cross’ design. From then on the building provided many services: carpentry classes, shoe repairs, confectionary sales and the sale of garden produce to villagers. It also supplied cooked meals to the local school as well as providing a taxi service and coach trips to the seaside. The Royal British Legion met there between the two wars. During WW2 the Home Guard used the grounds to store live ammunition in readiness for any invasion.

During the 1950s part of it became a Youth Hostel, which was used regularly in the 1960s by a touring group of 50 cyclists and a group of Brownies from Preston. Dorchester Council kept a snowplough and other de-icing equipment in the grounds, which proved useful during the freezing winters, particularly 1962/63, to clear the road to Sherborne and the surrounding villages.

Known as ‘Giant View’, its last owners were Victor and Ivy Millicent Harvey – son and daughter of Thomas Harvey, who died in 1961. They put it on the market for sale by auction in

Dorchester on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1989 for conversion into 10 flats and two cottages. However, it was purchased for conversion into a care home. The external features still retain aspects of the original workhouse design.



## Bibliography

A.O. Gibbons, *Cerne Abbas: Notes and Speculations on a Dorset Village*, The Friary Press, Dorchester, 1962.

Elizabeth O. Cockburn, *The Cerne Abbas Union Workhouse 1835-1838*, in the ‘Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society’, Vol 94, pp.89-95.

The Countryside Treasures Survey Team, *Dorset Workhouses*, Dorset County Council, 1980.

### Other useful sources

Peter Higginbotham has an extensive website on workhouses in this country that includes many of his publications on this subject.

Gertrude Himmelfarb explores the concept of pauperism in *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, Faber and Faber, 1984. Of particular interest is a section on Jeremy Bentham (pages 78-85). He is seen by many as the father of the New Poor Law.

A.N.Wilson offers a good background to the development of workhouses during the Victorian period through *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* (Atlantic Books, 2020) explores Dicken’s experiences of growing up under the shadow of the workhouse and prison that informed his writing, particularly *Oliver Twist*.

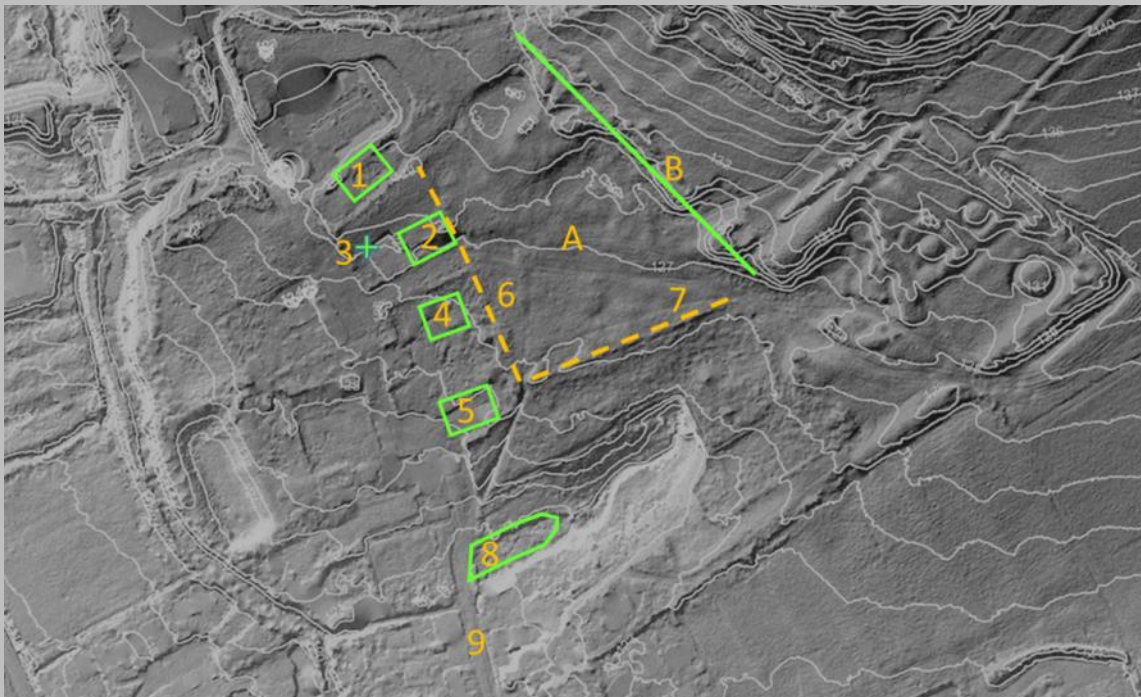






## Introduction

In 2021 Cerne Historical Society commissioned a LIDAR (light detection and ranging) survey and John Charman has provided a map with a 1 metre contour interval of the field containing the scheduled monument.



- A Abbey site
- B Man made escarpment
- 1 Beauvoir Court pond
- 2 Tin roofed barn
- 3 Medieval ditch findpoint
- 4 Abbot's hall porch
- 5 Guest house
- 6 "Cerne Abbey" garden wall
- 7 Burial ground wall
- 8 Pond
- 9 Abbey Street

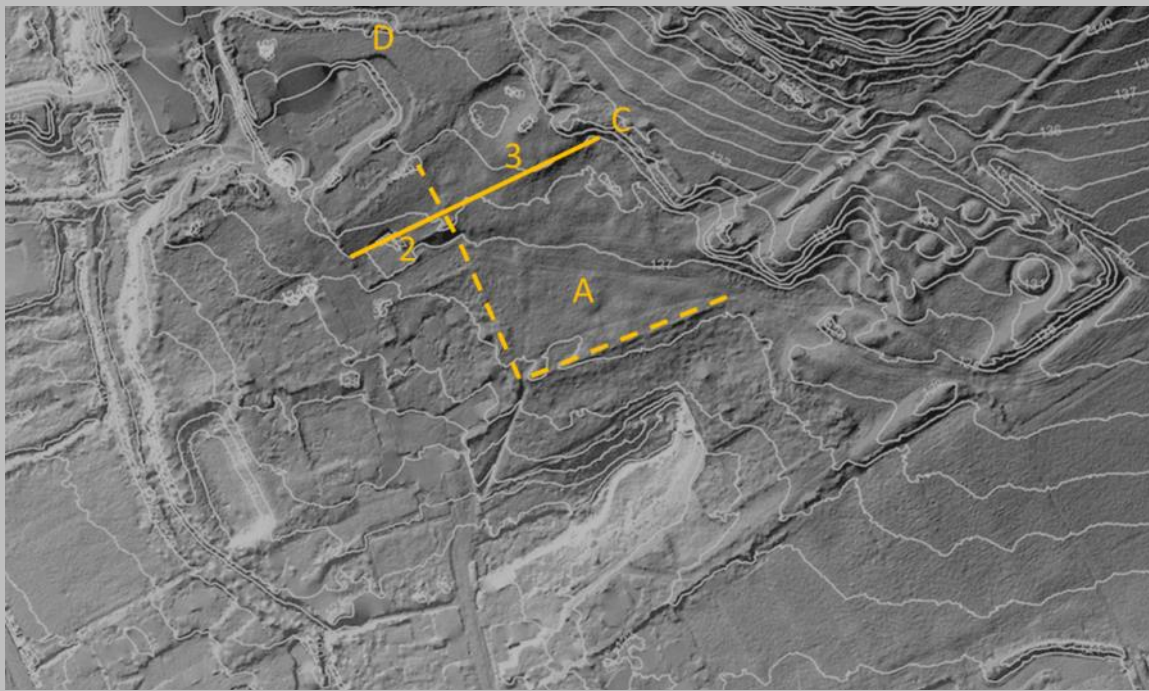
An earlier article (Spring 2022) drew attention to the importance of water management in trying to identify the possible layout of Cerne Abbey. The article suggested that a recently discovered ditch could be the remains of an abbey drain and its trajectory could be projected into Beauvoir to possibly locate the monks' latrine (also referred to as a reredorter).

**This article reconciles the earlier observations on the possible abbey water drainage system with the Lidar survey and introduces a possible explanation of the bumps at the northern end of the site.**

## LIDAR Survey

While the topography from the Lidar showed no direct evidence for the Abbey, attention was drawn to the plateau area, marked A, and the obvious scarp, marked B above.





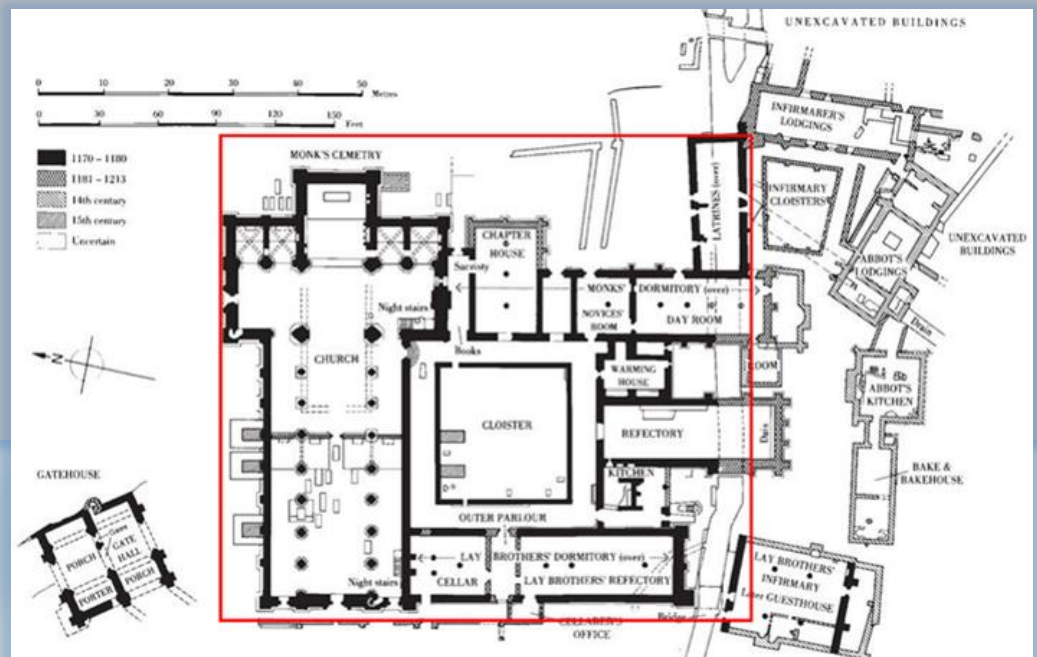
- A Abbey site
- C Sculpted corner
- D Point Silley enters
- 2 Tin roofed barn
- 3 Medieval ditch

However, a telling detail from contour pattern could be at the point marked C which looks especially sculpted to accommodate the corner of a building. The projected drain aligns with the corner as shown. This alignment may be best observed in the field by standing by the north east corner of the tin roofed barn, looking east at a tree that now stands in the corner.

## Roche Abbey

Melrose Abbey was used in the earlier article as a model monastery because its cloister was on the north side of the church, its main drain was clearly delineated within the abbey complex and the Mill Lade closely paralleled the River Silley in that it was sourcing water from a river (Tweed) and disposing of it back downstream. This time the model monastery is the **Cistercian Roche Abbey** founded in 1147, the excavated ground plan of which is one of the most complete available. At its height it supported a community of around 60 choir monks and 115 lay brothers.

Ground Plan of  
Roche Abbey,  
South Yorkshire



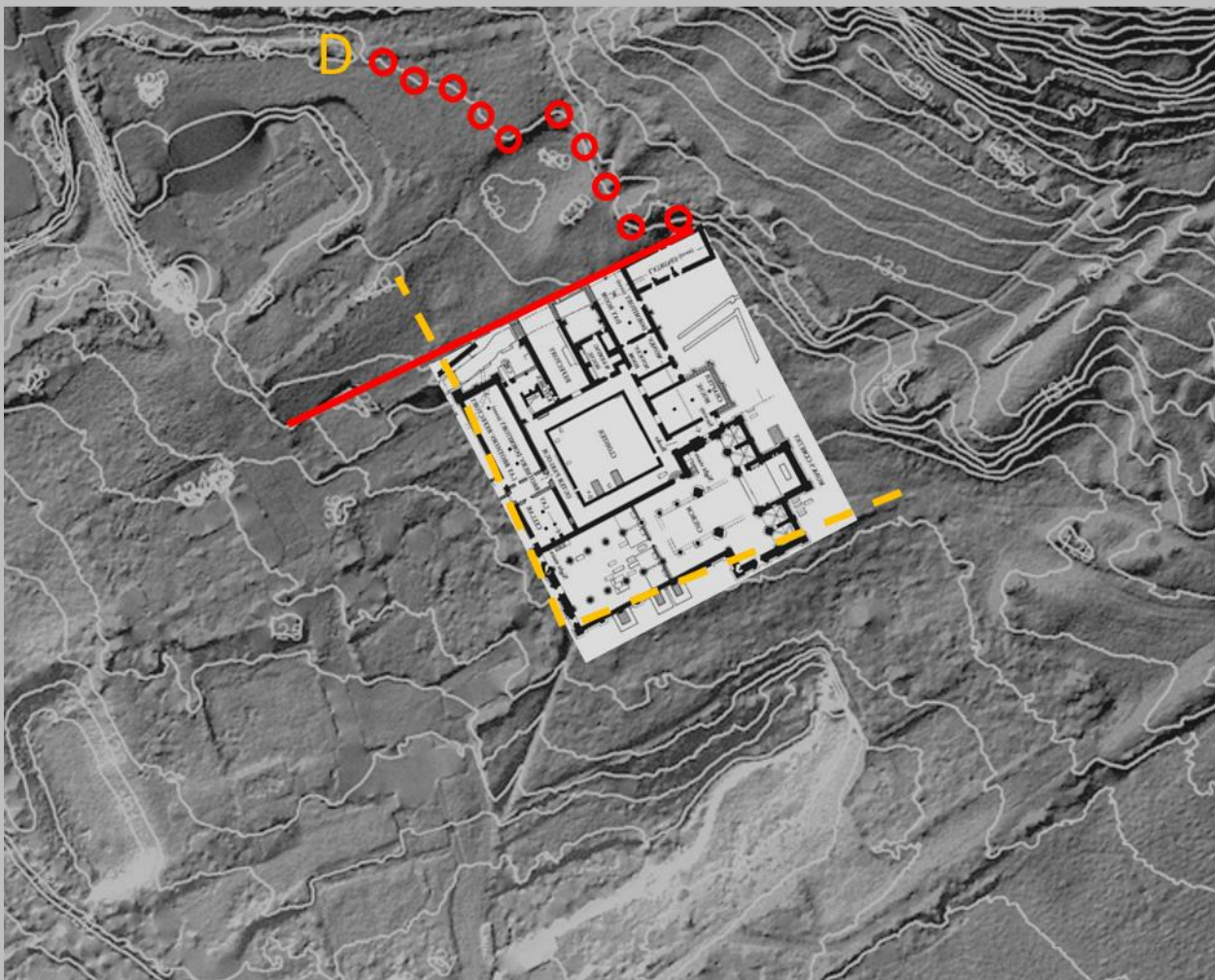


The abbey church is about 65m long and the principal 12<sup>th</sup> century buildings fit snugly into a 75m square shown in red. The reredorter for the monks is in the south east corner, attached to the monks' dormitory as is usually the case although the detail of this often varies to accommodate the local topography.

### *Location of Cerne's monastic complex*

The early Roche buildings, flipped so that the cloister is on the north side of the church, may provide an approximate model for Cerne Abbey. In the picture below it is located on the Lidar topography to fit into the corner identified above and oriented with the supposed drain.

The main point is that the model fits in very well and **occupies the whole of the flat space in Beauvoir**. The monks' latrine is now located in the northeast corner. Most remarkably the supposed drain passes right beside this latrine. To the south the boundary closely follows the present burial ground wall.



If the drain did exist, the question is how did water from the River Silley, which the 1768 map shows enters the site at D, get to service the drain? The LIDAR contour at D, where the river Silley enters the site, may be followed round and shows that the top of the drain is more or less level with the River Silley at D making flow to it perfectly possible as highlighted in the figure below.



## “New” Ponds

What has long been recognised as a mill, or fish pond was located where the Beauvoir Court pond now sits. The mill pond is identified as area ‘a’ on the Lidar map below.



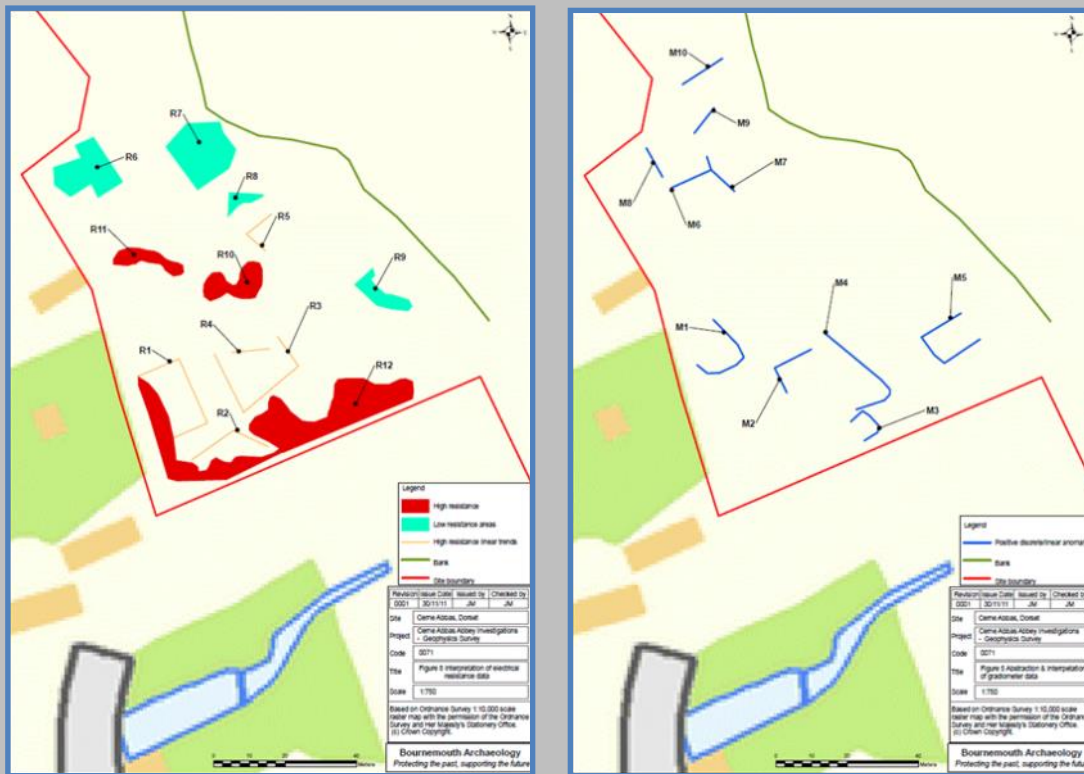
A rapid change in direction of the contour discussed above, and the photographic image below the contour data, strongly suggest that there was an additional pond ‘b’ between where the River Silley entered the site and the monastic buildings. Offtakes from this could have served the abbey drainage system with part of the flow feeding on down to the millpond. There is a suggestion of a third pond ‘c’ between the upper pond and the mill pond.

These two ponds are most easily identified in the field by standing in front of the cattle trough looking down toward Beauvoir Court barn.



## Bournemouth Geophysical Survey

In 2012 Bournemouth University's archaeological consultancy was commissioned by Cerne Historical Society to carry out resistivity and magnetometry surveys in Beauvoir field. The results at the time were thought inconclusive.



The resistivity map is affected by a number of factors such as the underlying geology, soil moisture and porosity and the presence of sub-surface features. A low resistivity response will be recorded if the current passes through a high conducting feature, such as a moisture retaining feature, like a back-filled ditch. The turquoise areas of the resistivity survey are associated with low resistance.

Magnetometry works by detecting small changes in the earth's magnetic field, recording magnetic fields that are associated with alterations in the magnetic enhancement of the soil, due to human activity, such as episodes of burning, soil disturbance or depositions. The survey revealed a number of linear features.

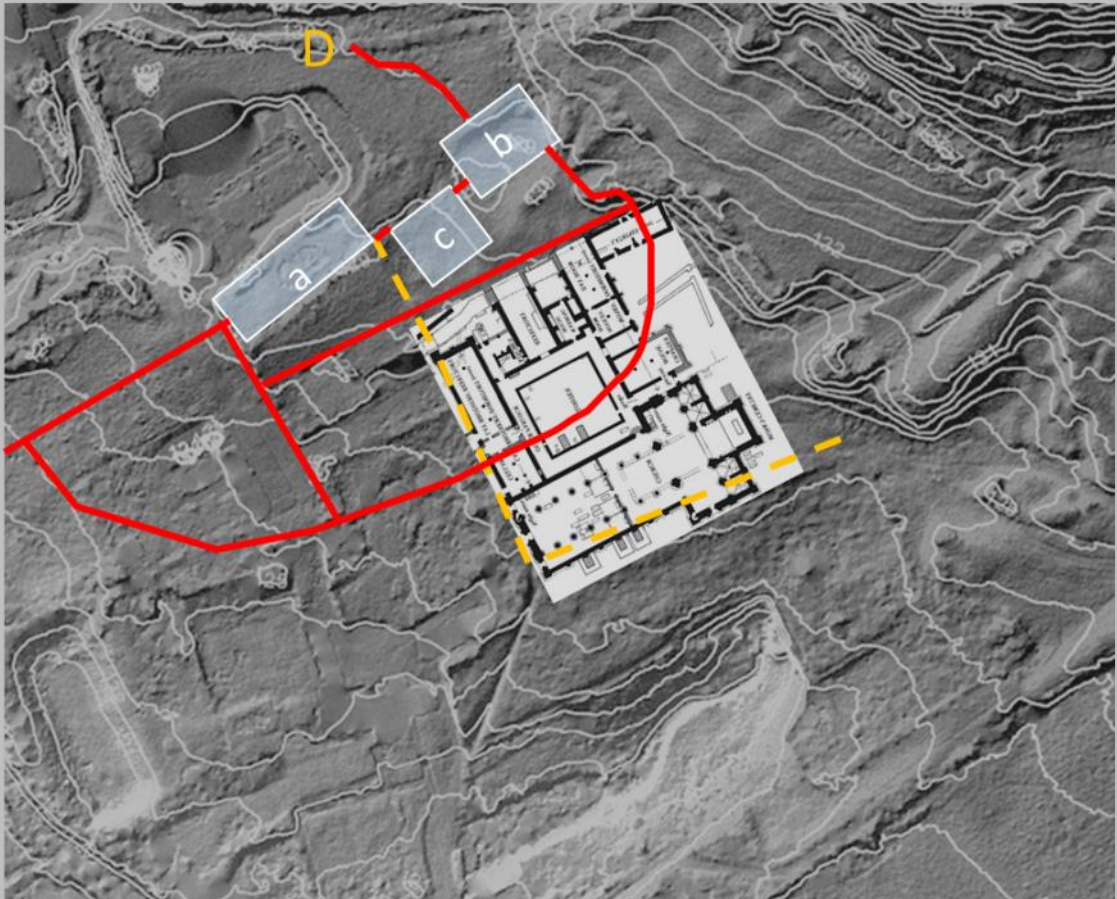
The area of the hypothesised ponds is toward the top of the interpretive maps and both surveys suggest areas of man-made activity. Area R6 coincides roughly with the smaller pond 'c' (see p17) while R7 corresponds roughly to pond 'b' (see p 17)



## Reconstruction of Drainage system

In the earlier article it was noted that after leaving pond 'a' the drainage system divided with a southern arm picking up the reredorter drain discussed above and going on before turning west roughly in line with the abbot's hall porch. Gibbons reports that a drain from the abbot's hall was discovered in the 1940's during excavations related to the modern water system.

The map below incorporates all the information presented here of a possible drainage system for the abbey.



From the now extinct River Silley, water enters from the north; this necessitates a monastery layout in which the cloisters are to the north of the abbey church. The water feeds into high level pond 'b' which delivers water through two routes:

1. possibly through pond 'c' and onto the previously known mill pond 'a'
2. an onward supply to the abbey complex itself.

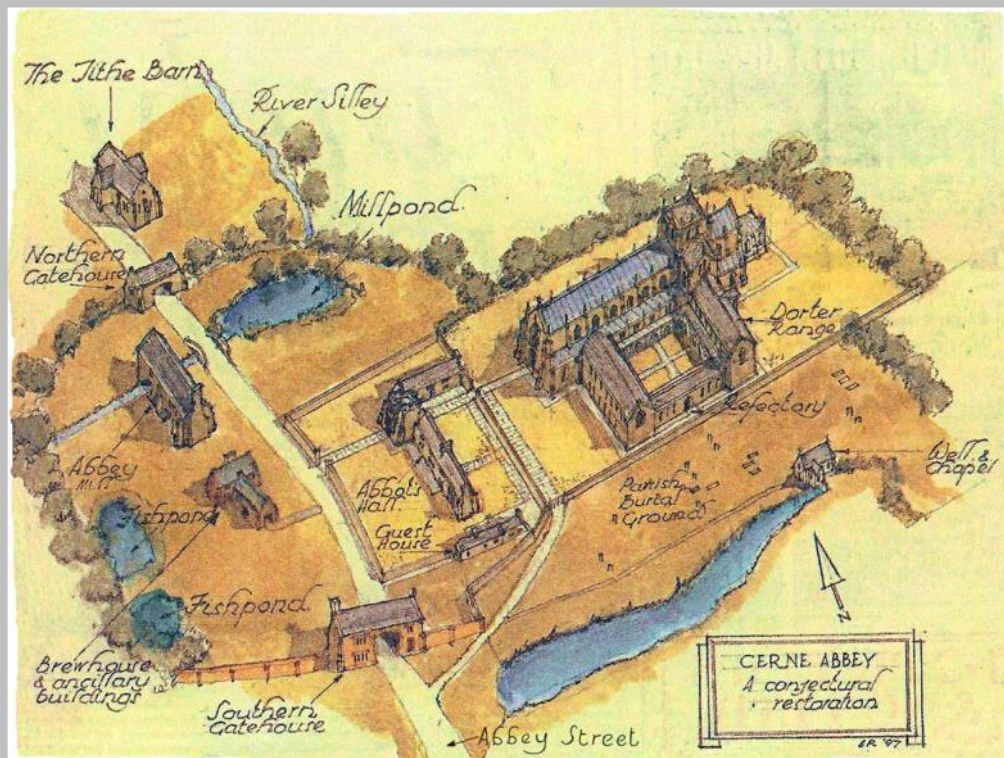
For the abbey complex, one supply evacuates the reredorter and possibly waste from the kitchen which would have been situated in the northern wing. The other route, through the cloister, could go on to pick up waste from the monks' hand washing station (lavatorium) and waste from the abbot's hall and kitchen.

As discussed previously, from pond 'a' part of the flow could go straight on to power a mill, and perhaps other abbey support activities, and part flowed to the south picking up the reredorter and abbots hall wastes before discharging back into the river Cerne to the west.



## Comparison with Previous conjectural restoration

Below is a reconstruction of the Abbey that has been widely circulated.



However, the contrast resulting from consideration of the abbey's drainage system could hardly be greater.

This suggests:

- 1 The abbey church was south of the monastic buildings.
- 2 The mill pond was complemented by at least one large pond to the east from which it was fed.
- 3 The monastic complex filled a much larger area than implied by the reconstruction. It sat upon the man-made plateau tightly bounded in the east by the shallow artificial escarpment, in the south by a secular burial ground, in the west by the abbot's hall, which was probably attached to the west cloister wing, and in the north by the ponds.







Ian Denness

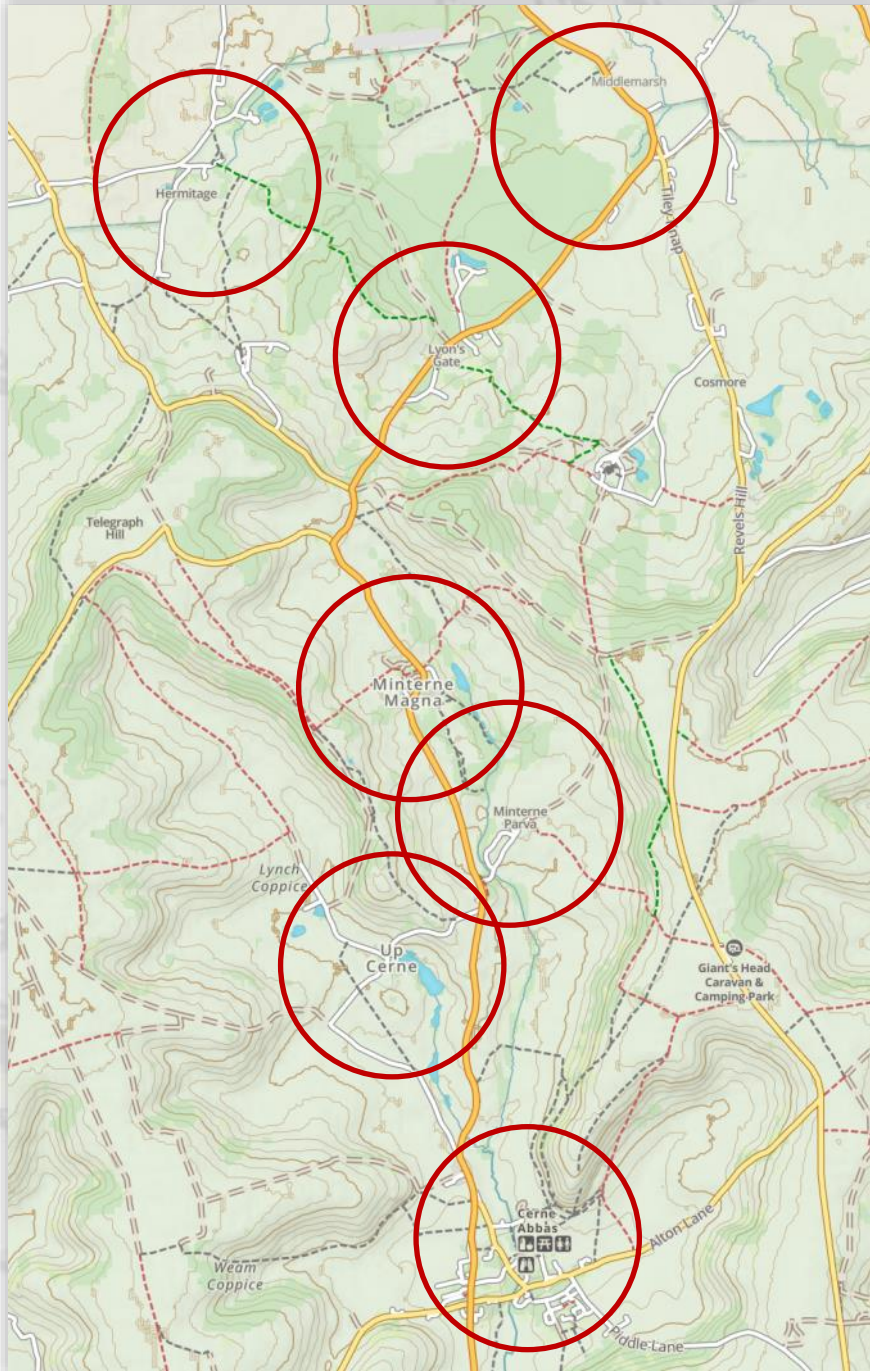


December



1899

### The Mysterious Death of a Cerne Abbas Postman

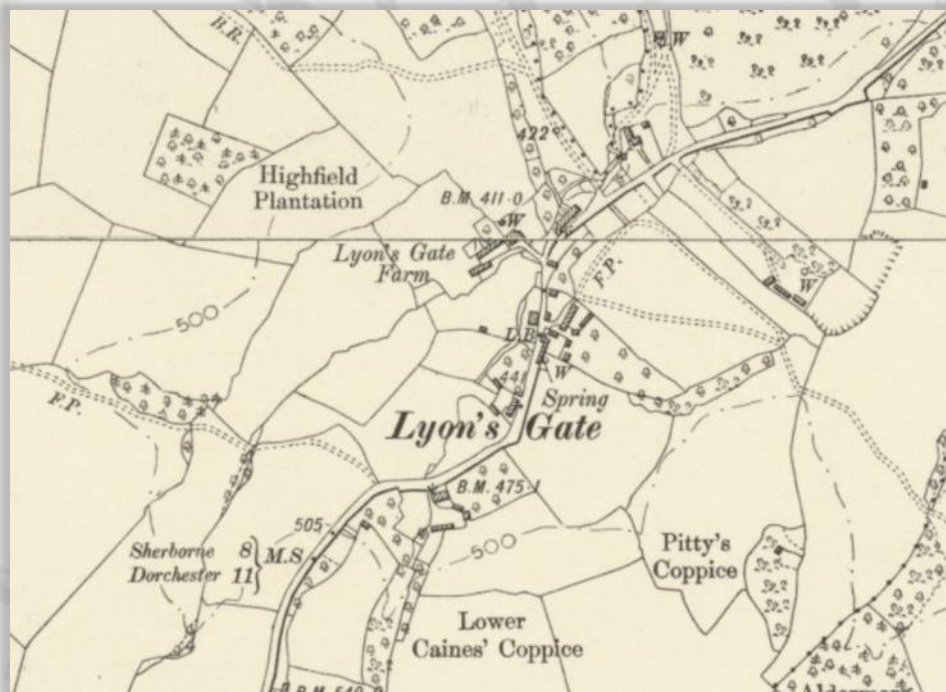


On the afternoon of Wednesday 27 December, 1899, the Cerne Abbas-based postman, Joseph Rogers, set off for his second round of the day. For the past seven years the thirty-four-year-old had served the residents that lived in the remote villages dotted between Cerne and the small settlement of Hermitage. His route, covering a distance of several miles over the county's hills, included the villages of Minterne Parva, Minterne Magna, Lyons Gate, and Middlemarsh. Rogers knew the district well, and he was equally familiar to those to whom he delivered letters, packages and parcels.

Two such customers, Edith Fox and Sarah Jeans, both received letters from Rogers at five o'clock that afternoon. Later they would comment that, at that time, the postman appeared to be sober and that 'there was nothing unusual in his manner'. But they were the last people known to have seen him alive.

What followed was, and remains, a mystery. Joseph Rogers did not return from his postal round that day. His absence was the cause of worry among those that knew him as it was wholly out of character. Rogers had served in Egypt as a sapper with the Royal Engineers between 1883 and 1890, during which time his character was noted as being 'very good' and his habits as 'regular'.





Three days after his disappearance a group of locals launched an informal search for the missing postie. The whole of Rogers' delivery route was scoured for any clues that might explain his disappearance.

One of the search party, William English of Lyons Gate, thought of taking a look at a nearby site where a pair of cottages had formerly stood. Here, covered by a thicket of brambles and protected by a set of railings, he found an old well. Peering down its shaft, English thought he saw something in the water. He immediately summoned the

policeman based at Hillfield, Constable Haines, and returned with him to the well. Haines established that the object in the well was human and, after fishing it from the depths, identified it as the body of the missing postal worker.

As was common at the time, Joseph Rogers body was conveyed to a nearby pub where it awaited inspection from the coroner, Mr Nantes. Arriving at the Good Hope Inn at Hermitage later that day, Nantes examined the corpse and found no signs of foul play. Apart from a small scratch to the face, the body was unblemished and showed no evidence of violence. Furthermore, the sum of £1 18s. 8d. was found in Rogers's pockets, implying that robbery could be ruled out as a motive. The coroner was at a loss to describe what had happened, and returned a verdict of death by drowning but, as was noted in the *Southern Times*, 'how the deceased came to be drowned there was no evidence to show'.



George Cornick

Joseph Rogers was interred in the Cerne Abbas burial ground the following day, Sunday 31 December. Among the chief mourners were the local Postmaster George Cornick, other employees of the Post Office, and Rogers' friends and family. Many in attendance were shocked by the unexpectedness of his death. As reported in the local newspapers 'it seemed difficult to realise that one who, only the Sunday previous, was alive and well, had met such a tragic end'. But, alluding to the discovery of the body down a well, the report went on 'but the open grave proved only too true a reminder of what had actually occurred'. The sudden downpour of rain which coincided with the committal would only have compounded the poignancy of the moment.



January



1888



### The Salvation Army and the No-show of the Bristol Trumpeter



Mention the Salvation Army today and thoughts of brass bands, smart uniforms and unsolicited offers to buy *The War Cry* might spring to mind. But what is likely to be overlooked is the radical social impact that the organisation had in the decades immediately after its foundation by 'General' William Booth as the East London Christian Mission in 1865. After achieving notable successes among the poor of the Metropolis, Booth broadened his ambitions to making his mission nationwide. After adopting the name of the Salvation Army in 1878, Booth's followers set up missions in Britain's larger cities. The Salvation Army was on the march.

By the mid-1880s the Salvationist movement was looking to spread itself through the more rural parts of the West Country. An advertisement published by the Bristol Branch of the movement, and which appeared in the *Western Gazette* in October 1884, requested buildings suitable to serve as Salvation Army centres (or 'barracks') 'in every town and village in the counties of Somerset and Dorset'. In specific demand were 'theatres, music halls, public buildings, warehouses, stores, skating rinks, large barns and malthouses'. Clearly, the Salvationists were not fussy.

This advert may well have attracted the attention of George Derriman of Cerne Abbas. Derriman lived and worked in the Mill located in Mill Lane, and was a devoted Nonconformist. His house had stood directly opposite the Methodist chapel, a facility which had been open for worship for at least 40 years. However, in 1883 the Methodists acquired a new, purpose-built chapel in Long Street (on the site of the present-day public lavatories), leaving their old building laying redundant. Derriman offered the Salvation Army an initial three-year lease on the property, a proposal which was willingly accepted. The old Methodist chapel was inaugurated as a Salvation Army barracks in June 1887 and its first 'corps', under the overall command of 'Major' Kyle in Bristol and the local control of the 23-year-old 'Captain' Florence Pugh, being established the following December.



Original Crest designed  
by William Ebdon 1878

In its early years, the Cerne Abbas barracks was well-attended, and its brass band would give regular Sunday performances in the village square. Such performances gave pleasure to some, but also stirred up a degree of antipathy among others, especially those who took exception to the Army's strident stance on teetotalism. Elsewhere in the country, the marches, performances and preaching of the Salvation Army attracted abuse, threats and occasionally violence from some sections of the public. Reports of fights involving Salvationists, and the subsequent court cases, regularly appeared in newspapers throughout the 1880s.

Things appear to have been less confrontational in Cerne Abbas but, nevertheless, the newly-established corps were determined to leave a positive impression on the locals. An opportunity to do just that arose when the famous 'Bristol Trumpeter' was booked to appear at the barracks on Wednesday 18 January 1888.





From a contemporary perspective, it's not altogether clear who or what the Bristol Trumpeter was, or what he was planning on doing that was so special. The *Bridport News*, which was openly hostile towards the Salvation Army, sarcastically explained that it was anticipated that the Trumpeter would 'blow such a Gospel blast as would effectively exorcise Beelzebub, and permanently clear him out of the Cerne Abbas district'.

In the event, anyone who hoped to hear the Trumpeter's deafening fanfare was to be bitterly disappointed. Despite all the assurances given, the Trumpeter failed to appear on the night. It transpired that he had form in that respect. He had been booked to appear in the village twice previously, but on the first occasion he got lost on the way to Cerne and, on his second attempt, the axle arms of his trap got so heated that the wheels dragged, and he could not proceed'. A week later the *Bridport News* revealed that, due to a confusion of communication, he had mistakenly appeared at Yetminster on the night he was due in Cerne.

The Bristol Trumpeter never blew his bellowing bugle in the streets of Cerne Abbas. But his failure to do so did not inhibit the Salvation Army's mission to the village. The local barracks remained operational for fifteen years during which time the corps spread the Word both in the Cerne Valley and into neighbouring areas and was especially successful in the Piddle Valley. But, due to a combination of dwindling funds and Cerne's shrinking population, the decision was made in 1902 to close the Mill Lane barracks. Part of the building, which had served as a place of worship for decades, reverted to its original use as a storage room. The other part was commandeered as a garage in which was kept the village fire engine.



Mill Lane showing probable location of TSA barracks to the right



February

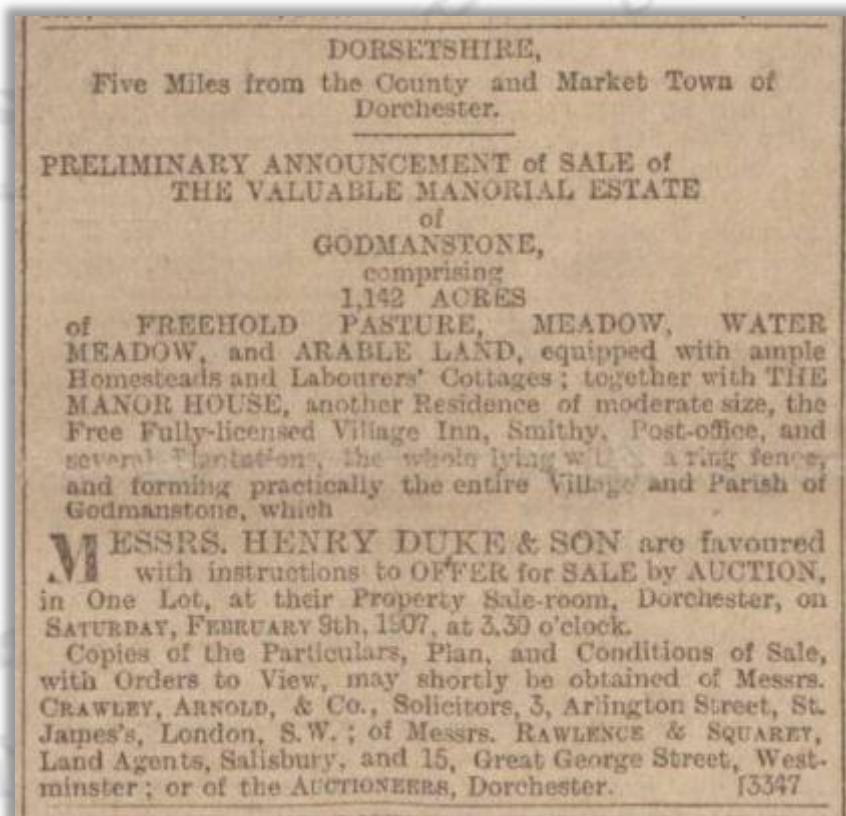


1907



## The Sale of Godmanstone

Members of the Cerne Historical Society will, no doubt, recall that the whole of Cerne Abbas village was put up for sale by auction in 1919 by its then-owner, Alexander Pitt-Rivers. But readers may be less aware that a similar fate had befallen Cerne's smaller neighbour, Godmanstone, some twelve years earlier. As with Cerne Abbas, Godmanstone was sold by auction and the availability of such a valuable slice of Dorset land attracted the attention of many of the county's landowning elite.



*Western Gazette 1907*

The first advertisement for the sale appeared in the newspapers two months in advance of the auction date. The notice in the *Western Gazette* proclaimed that the 'sale of the valuable manorial estate of Godmanstone' was to be auctioned as a single lot. This comprised 1,142 acres covering 'practically the entire village and parish' and included 'the Manor House, another residence of moderate size, the fully-licensed village inn, smithy, post office and several plantations'. Similar notices also appeared in some of the London newspapers.

For some reason the auction was delayed by a fortnight and was eventually held on Saturday 23 February 1907. It was staged at the sales room of Henry Duke and Sons in South Street, Dorchester at 3.30pm. There

was, reportedly, a large number of people in attendance to witness some 'spirited' bidding that afternoon. The auctioneer, Edward Duke, drew the attention of the potential bidders to the 'healthy, bracing and picturesque locality' of the Godmanstone estate and the opportunities it offered for excellent shooting, fishing and hunting, plus its proximity to both Came Down golf course and the 'good yacht anchorage' at Weymouth.



The bidding was started at £7,000. There appear to have been three gentlemen offering competing bids for the property: Henry Jesty a Bere Regis farmer, the brewer Alfred Pope of Wrackelford, and Angus Hambro, a 24-year-old member of the well-known banking family from Milton Abbey. At the end of the bidding process, Hambro emerged as the new owner of Godmanstone, his offer of £13,000 proving sufficient to deter any further bids from his rivals.

Angus Hambro was enjoying an interesting few years. A keen amateur golfer, he had first entered the British Amateur Championship in 1903, and reached the competition's semi final in 1912. He also appeared in the British Open Championship on four occasions, the first being in 1904. In addition to his exploits on the golf course, Hambro also served as the Conservative MP for South Dorset from 1910 until 1922, and returned to the Commons in 1937 as the Member for North Dorset. He was to die, aged 74, in 1957.



Angus Hambro

Despite purchasing the village, Hambro did not stay at Godmanstone for very long. In fact, it's by no means clear whether he ever lived there at all. A year after the sale, the Manor House was put on the rental market and, in 1909, the decision was made to sell all of the livestock, including a thousand sheep, that was held on the Godmanstone estate. At much the same time, Hambro put the entire estate up for sale once more. It was bought by Henry Duke, the brother of Edward and, like his sibling, an auctioneer. Henry Duke spent the next four years rebuilding, extending and renovating Godmanstone Manor House, with a view to making it his home upon his retirement. He eventually moved into his restyled dwelling in November 1913. Sadly, he had very little time to enjoy his new life in the country as he died a week later.

Ownership of the Godmanstone estate passed to Henry Duke's widow, Annie. She remained as a resident of the Manor House until she died in August 1937. On her death the estate of Godmanstone was finally broken up, and sold as individual houses, farms and businesses, finally shaking off the last vestiges of a feudal arrangement of land ownership that had survived since medieval times.







# Letters

Edited by George Mortimer

**Jennie Paterson** writes:

*We saw this reference to Cerne Abbey, photograph attached, on the fascinating timeline exhibition in Brownsea Castle, and thought you might be interested.*

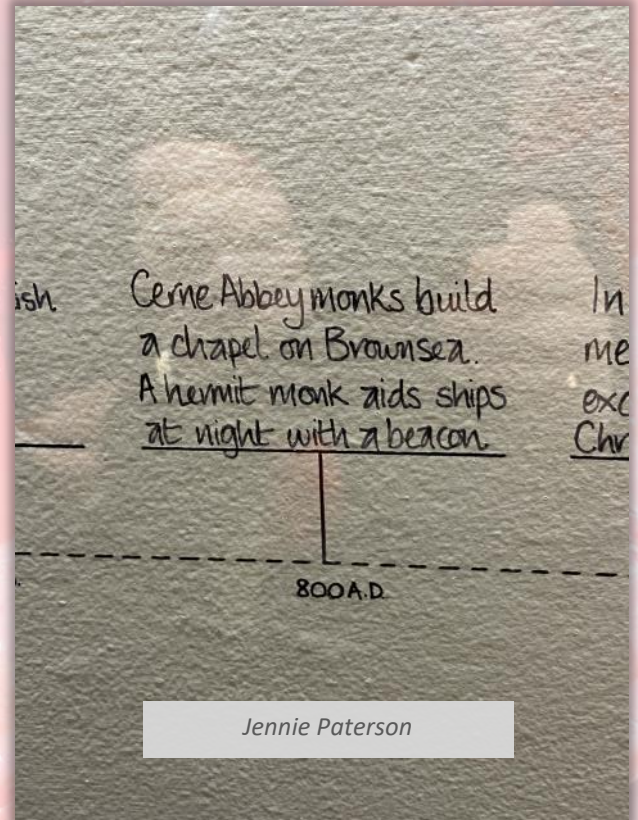
**Gordon Bishop**, our Chairman, has responded:

*Thank you very much; very interesting and well worth exploring further. It strongly supports the theory that there were monks at Cerne long before the "foundation" of the Abbey in 987. I note that Wikipedia says that "the first records of inhabitants on Brownsea Island occurred in the 9th century, when a small chapel and hermitage were built by monks from Cerne Abbey near Dorchester" but the only reference it gives is to John Sydenham's History of the Town and People of Poole written in 1939. I've managed to find and have a quick look at a copy of that online but I haven't found any reference to those first records. I'll try contacting the National Trust's Chief Archaeologist, Martin Papworth, to see if he can help.*

**By the Editor,**

Martin Papworth has responded as follows:

*I have been through the various sources for Brownsea and its links with Cerne Abbey and the first mention of the Island in reliable documents in 1015 when Canute sailed there. There is no mention of a chapel there, but there were burials found under the floors of a pair of cottages in close proximity to a stone structure and one of these was dated to 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century. The statement that the chapel was built in 800 is not founded on anything substantial. The 1015 date is mentioned in Hutchins History of Dorset and links with the Anglo Saxon Chronicle. Brownsea was definitely part of Cerne Abbey's lands, but the only documentary references I can find are 13<sup>th</sup> century. The origins of Cerne Abbey are difficult to pin down as you know and there was probably an early British Christian monastic site in Cerne Abbas, but the documentation for Brownsea doesn't help I'm afraid.*



Brownsea Castle [CC BY 2.0](#)

**Contd.**





## Letters

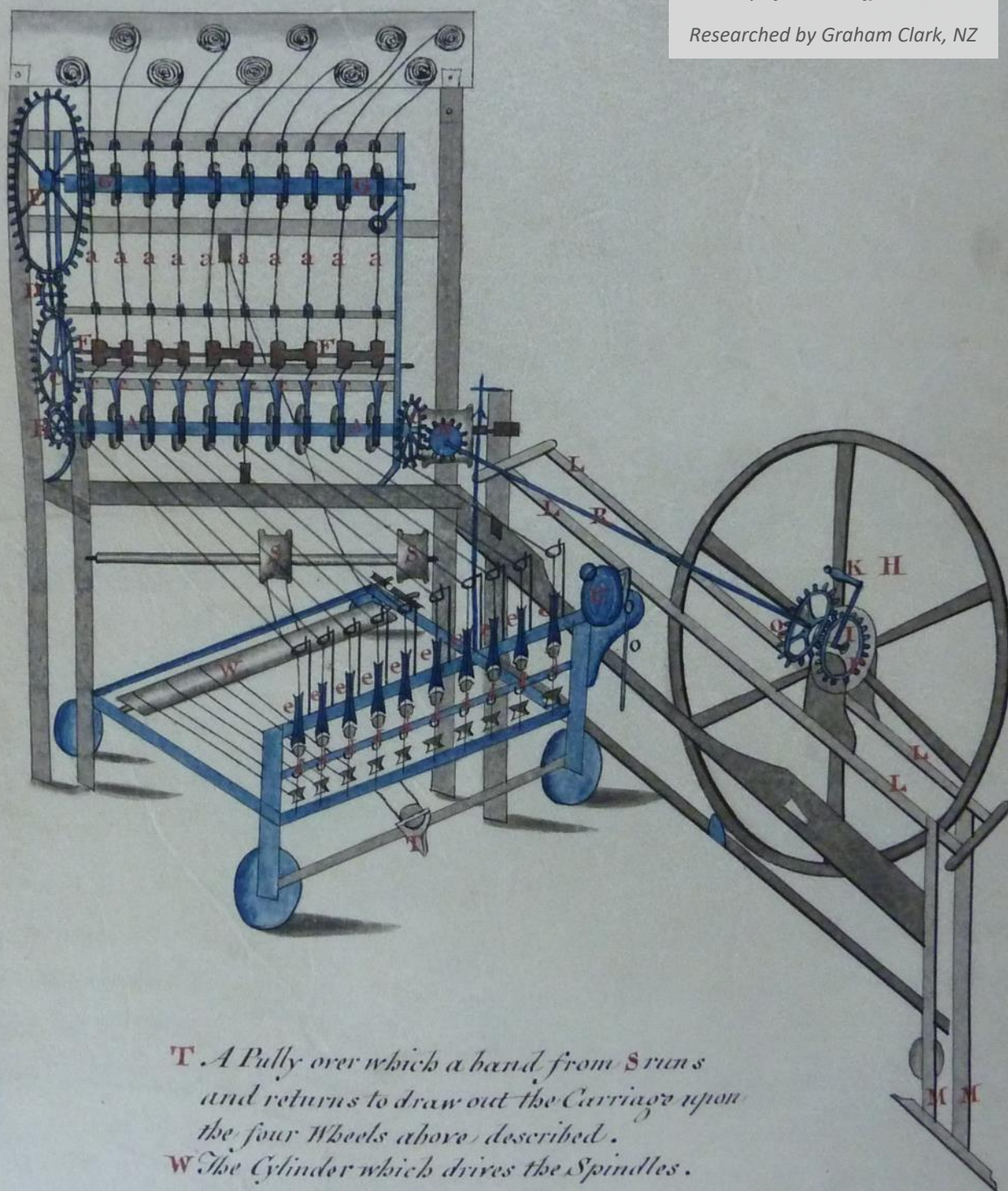
By the Editor,

Following the article about 'Spinning and Weaving in Back Lane' in the Autumn 2022 issue of the Magazine, readers will be interested in further information about the Spinning Machine patented by William Clark and an insight into his efforts to promote his invention.

*Fig: 1. Oblique View of Front.*

Courtesy of Patent Office, London.

Researched by Graham Clark, NZ



*T. A Pulley over which a band from S runs  
and returns to draw out the Carriage upon  
the four Wheels above described.  
W The Cylinder which drives the Spindles.*





## Letters

Contd.

*Clearly having an entrepreneurial streak in him, William determined that, having obtained his Patent, he would try to capitalise on it. He was probably also interested in attempting to recover the not inconsiderable associated costs involved to date. William therefore went into business with a James Bugby of Yeovil to promote his spinning machine. An advertisement was put in the Times of London in 1807 stating that the two men would be at the Globe Inn, New Compton Street in Soho at **'11 o'clock in the forenoon, on Thursday the 5<sup>th</sup> of November instant, where every necessary information will be given, and some of the most general samples of its spinning be produced by the said Wm. Clark.'** Further, **'if the application be from the six Northern Counties, namely York, Durham, Northumberland, Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire, they are to refer to J. Bell, Esq. of Whitehaven, Cumberland'**. A contemporary picture of the Spinning Machine is shown.*

*There is no known surviving evidence as to how successful William was in seeking to sell more of his spinning machines, but one has to admire his efforts in attempting to further his business outside the rural confines of Cerne Abbas.*



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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