

HANDBOOK
of
St Mary's Church, BRIDGWATER.
by
SYDNEY GARDNOR JARMAN.

1885

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Jarman wrote a thorough account of the church as it was towards the end of the nineteenth century, after the major restorations of 1850s and 1870s, and before the simplifications of the 1930s, and the major re-orderings of the 21st century.

His work is particularly valuable for its record of the numerous memorial tablets, windows and gravestones, as well as the bells, clock and organ.

Also his record of interesting topics in the parish registers, a subject which has not been examined since.

It was printed at the *Bridgwater Gazette* office, of which Jarman was editor then, and was illustrated by two rather dark engravings — one of the east end of the Church from St Mary Street, and the other of the North Porch. These have been omitted.

The footnotes (* and †) have been run-on in the text here.

The book concludes with 8 pages of typeset advertisements for Bridgwater traders. They are attractive examples of Victorian typography.

Digitised and edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich.

18/11/2019



The parish church of Bridgwater is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin. It is a large, effective, and handsome structure, and of its most noticeable exterior features is a tall, slender spire, springing from a substantial quadrangular tower of red sandstone. The latter is 60 feet and the spire 114 feet—said by one authority to be the highest in the county. In a terrific thunderstorm in the year 1814, the spire was split by lightning, and in the following year it was repaired with great difficulty, the work being done by a Mr. Thos. Hutchings, builder, of the town. A series of poles were lashed to the steeple, and the top was ultimately reached, and rope-ladders affixed. Mr. George Parker, then a boy, remembers making the ascent, and he remarks that the beautiful, view of the surrounding country repaid the hazard of the undertaking to prevent the recurrence of such a mishap, a long rod and lightning

conductor were fastened to the top of the spire inside, and bolted to the centre of the tower in the bell-chamber, and a huge weight was also affixed to it, as may still be seen. In this way the electric fluid now runs down on the inside of the spire, and is carried off through the upper window of the tower.

The fabric is principally in the Perpendicular style, which came in about the reign of Henry VII., but there are several evidences of earlier work, dating back as far as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In support of this it is shown that the tracery of the windows on the south side of the nave, west of the porch, consists of quatrefoils and segments of circles—a style which belongs to the time of Edward III. or Richard II —1327 to 1377; and there are also indications of earlier work. On the north side there are also windows evidently belonging to the same period, the one over the north door being particularly noticeable for its intersecting triangles within a circle, the angles being fitted with trefoils. It is what is known as a “Trinity window,” of which there are said to be only six original in the kingdom. It is pointed out that the word “trinity” here alludes to *hearts, spades, and clubs* being enclosed in a *diamond* shape, thus forming “three in one,” (See illustration on page 9) [but omitted here]. It may be taken as a certainty that no inconsiderable portion of the original fabric actually remains, although the restorers have from time to time been busy. It should especially be noticed that beneath the window of the north transept are two canopied recesses, each containing a mutilated and now almost shapeless effigy : these recesses are in the wall, and it may therefore be taken for granted they were made when the edifice was built, and represent the founders, or the founder and his lady, as it is scarcely likely, any other personages would be honoured in that manner at the time of the erection. These and other features of the church received a good deal of attention from the British Archaeological Association at their meeting held at Bridgwater in 1856.

The interior of the sacred edifice presents a noble appearance, and is

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universally a source of interest to visitors. In form the church is oblong (though it is believed to have been at one time nearer the shape of the cross), and it comprises nave, north, south and centre aisles, and chancel, the nave being divided from the aisles by two rows of five slender moulded piers, with ornamental bases, and capitals, supporting six pointed arches on either side. These pillars are undoubtedly thirteenth or early fourteenth, century work, because at that period "pillars in churches consisted chiefly in an assemblage of shafts not detached but united forming one solid and elegant column.*

* *English Encyclopaedia*. Vol 1, p 280, where it is also stated that "In the thirteenth century lofty steeples, spires and pinnacles were much the taste in building churches."

On either side of the main aisle the piers, are tied in with iron bars, which, are considered by competent authorities on archaeological matters, from their rough and uneven appearance, to have been beaten out by stone hammers, and are therefore of early workmanship, and probably inserted when the church, was built. A glance will show that these iron ties are intended to prevent the inner arches forcing out the centre piers. Another ancient feature of the church will be noticed in a boss which remains at the north-west corner, which is regarded as indicating that formerly the roof sloped down to this point, and which was probably raised when the tower was built.

There are evidences that the church has been restored, or the altar removed, on two or three occasions. The original altar would appear to. have stood at the commencement of the chancel, for on the right-hand side is a holy-water stoup and a piscina, and close by was a small door-way (probably a priest's), the jamb of which may. still be seen outside. A side altar is believed to have existed in is now the Corporation chapel, formerly known as the "Lady chapel" : a window faces east, and a piscina still remains in. the right-hand. Some .of the best ceiling of the whole church . is here, spreading out as far as the centre of the building : like the

rest, the wood is rich black oak, but here are massive ridges, carved at each joint, dividing the whole into twenty four squares. By the entrance to the second part of the chancel are the remains of an aumbry and piscina, on the right-hand wall, and signs of another small door-way. These were discovered in 1877, when some alterations took place, and tessellated work laid in the wall, and were judiciously restored under the directions of the Rev. W. G. FitzGerald. Inside was found a bottle containing some papers relating to the restoration of the church which took place in 1849. This restoration is thus referred to in a parchment now hanging in the vestry :—

"The accommodation in. this church, was increased by re-arranging the seats in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-three, by which means additional accommodation for 197 persons was obtained. A grant of £350 in aid of the undertaking was made by the ' Incorporated Society for promoting the enlargement, building, and repairing of Churches and Chapels ;' and a further grant of £200 by the Bath and Wells Diocesan Church Building Society', on condition that 834 seats, described in the annexed-plan should be set apart and declared to be free for the .*use of the poor for ever ; the provision of church-room previously to the alteration being to the extent of 827 seats, 200 of which number were free for the use of the poor. The word 'free' is marked on each' free seat.

RICHARD, Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells.

GEORGE ANTHONY DENISON, Archdeacon of Taunton.

Thomas George James, M.A., Rural Dean and Vicar of Bridgwater.

Gabriel Stone Poole,

Carey Bailey Mogg

William Baker

Robert Bagehot

Churchwardens

William Hayward Brakspeare, architect,"

Around the edges of this document we read further :—

"During the years 1849 to 1853 inclusive, the chancel, nave and transept-

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roofs of this church were entirely renewed, and the clerestory and south aisle walls rebuilt by voluntary contributions, aided by a rate upon the property of ye parish, amounting to £360. The eastern window, together with the tablets, were presented by Samuel James Remnant, and the stained window in the south transept by Thomas Ford, Mayor.

The plan referred to is also affixed to the vestry wall. The conditions as to the free seats were not followed for any long period, for as time went on, the expenses of the church increased, and the . sittings were gradually let in order to meet the demands, until now only about 300 remain. The alterations made in the church at that time were very extensive. An. entrance which existed at the western end was filled up, in consequence of the architect's report that the structure was unsafe, and that the tower and spire must forthwith be pulled down! It has recently been ascertained, however, that there is no cause for alarm, as the tower arch is in good condition ; the principal buttresses are fourteen feet thick. The wall was levelled and plastered in order to hang the large and beautiful picture now over the altar, it being thought that it would show it to better advantage. This was found to be a great mistake, and after a short time Mr. James, the then vicar, determined to restore it to its former position over the altar, but for some unaccountable reason a spirit of opposition manifested itself in the town, and a threat was made to riddle the work of art with bullets if it were moved. By the advice of Mr. E. C. Else the picture was lined with iron in order to render it more secure, and it was then placed where now seen.

It is satisfactory to learn that in all probability that unsightly wall will ere long come down, and other improvements be effected in the church. Previous to the restoration referred to (1849) a gallery existed at the bottom of the church, in which was the organ, where the choir sang in front, and on either side were seats for school boys and girls. In front of this singing gallery was a large and handsome coat of arms, bearing the date 1712, and which now finds an obscure place on the

western wall. The font, now standing near the south entrance, formerly stood in an open space (still shown) a few yards from the western wall, and when the western entrance is again thrown open it will be replaced in its original and proper position. The canopied recesses now seen in the south, wall were placed there to relieve the deadness of the wall, and also to correspond with some original ones in the north wall, one of which is supposed to have led down into the crypt or vaults. Up to that time the old uncomfortable box seats were in vogue, and had two steps leading up to them, but they were replaced by modern benches, the ends only being used again, although, they showed no elaborate carving. The pulpit stood close to the centre aisle, on the left on entering from the north door, but it was altered to its present far preferable position. The old sounding board, very massive and handsome, is still extant, and is in the possession of a builder in the town. The piers and arches were thoroughly renovated, some of the former being very insecure and unsightly. As an instance of the condition of some of them, it may be stated that the one against which the singing-gallery stood, contains 140 new pieces. The rood-screen is a beautiful piece of Perpendicular work of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, and the pulpit, of oak, splendidly carved in ecclesiastical designs, is of the same massive pattern and age. There..-are several initials and monograms on the former, which stood, at the entrance-to the chancel, but being halved, the portions were placed on either side .of the choir-stalls. A more beautiful pulpit it would be difficult to find. A second screen stood inside, in the Tudor style, and this was also removed, and placed in front of the Corporation chapel. This latter screen is beautifully and elaborately figured and carved, and it is evident the best work of the period was put into it. It is not so old by a century as the other, but the carving is of a more elaborate character. It is formed of open work, the pillars especially being noticeable for their elegant designs, and the uprights and panels are also exquisitely cut in various fantastic designs,

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which have been frequently copied by, and for London artists. On a board in the front are the words, in old 'Roman letters, " Feare God · Honour the King." The extreme beauty of the screen is somewhat hidden owing to the indifferent light in which it is placed.

At the restoration of the church in 1849, there were destroyed three " squints " or hagioscopes, which are thus referred to by Parker, in his *Glossary of Architecture*.

" In Bridgwater church there is a series of three openings through three successive walls, in the same oblique line, to enable a person standing in the porch to see the high altar. It seems to have been for the use of the attendant who had to ring the sanctus bell at the time of the elevation of the host."

It is, however, far more reasonable to suppose that these openings were meant for ex-communicants and leprous people to witness the elevation of the host without entering the actual precincts of the holy place. It is supposed that the leprosy was introduced into the town at the time of the Crusades, when Somersetshire sent the flower of her chivalry to accompany the King to Palestine. In the western part of the town there was formerly a hospital for lepers, dedicated to St. Giles, but endowed with little or no land.*

*. *Leland's Itinerary*, vol. ii., p. 97. This hospital was somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Priory of Minorites, where either Friarn- street or Silver-street now stands.

It seems, therefore, probable that the lepers were led to the north porch (then separate from the church) and on the ringing of the sanctus bell were allowed to witness the elevation of the host through the squints. The first orifice was in the porch itself, and still remains, together with three of the gratings. The latter are made of bars of very peculiar workmanship, and evidently extremely old. The fourth set of bars was removed many years ago, probably to admit of bread being handed out to the: poor, thirty-four loaves being given away from the church every Sunday afternoon, in accordance

with the will of Gilbert Bloyse, who died in 1717. The space between the porch and the squints in the second wall was formerly paved with rubble stones. At the restoration, however the wall was taken down, and the north chapel made twice its original size. There is a screen here, with a glass back, the wood of oak, being beautifully carved and figured. It is said that its extreme beauty tempted Sir Gilbert Scott, just before he died, to have it copied, and a man came from London for the purpose. The letters "A.H." are in a conspicuous position in front, underneath being smaller monograms of "I.H." The third of the series of squints was in the large pier against which the. pulpit now stands. The original orifice was probably closed up at some period since the Reformation, and was discovered when the church was last restored, but it was feared that the pier was not strong enough to allow of its being re-opened, and it was therefore made solid. Another squint formerly existed in a wall which stretched across, where the organ now stands, and was probably made there when the high altar was removed. In the chancel wall near this pier will be seen the situation of the rood loft, the jamb being still left .

Over the north doorway is a parvice, or priest's chamber, now used as a chapel. The front and side, facing inwards, were at one time of wood, but a wall was built there at the restoration. There is a figure head at each corner, with chain armour indicated ; they are believed to be original work, and one of them is situated in a very singular, position. From this chapel an old staircase leads up to the roof of the church, where there was formerly a promenade. (It is also thought possible by some that at one time a portion of the buildings now occupied by Mr, Curry and Mr. Hooper, opposite the north porch, was connected with either the parvice or the promenade, because the side of the house contains some carved woodwork of the same period. It is more probable, however, that the woodwork in question was at some period removed there from the church).

The north porch, archway is of very early work, and is in a fair state of preservation. The best sculpture is seen

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outside, and at the bottom of each, side of the arch is a head, representing Moses and Aaron respectively. In a corner of the porch is an old stoup, removed there from the interior of the church at some forgotten period. In this porch at the time of the battle of Sedgmoor, the story goes that some of the horses of the army of the ill-fated Luke of Monmouth were stabled.

Over the south porch is a small chapel corresponding with the parvise on the opposite side, and like the latter, having a carved free-stone front. It was formerly faculty seat belonging to the Harvey family, of Bridgwater Castle, and afterwards, through the same family, becoming appurtenant to the Old Globe Hotel property.

It contains a very brilliant coloured window, presented by Mr. Henry Salmon (*Henricus Salmon: Dono Dedit*). There is a handsome stained window in the Corporation chapel, given by the late Mr. Thomas Ford, Mayor of Bridgwater, in 1852. An inscription to that effect will be found inserted in some devices across the top of the sections, where there is a representation of the borough arms, and also those of the donor himself— Azure, three lions, rampant, argent. There is another stained glass window in the chancel, erected "To the memory of Benjamin Good, who died November 19th, 1768, aged 69." It represents the patriarch Jacob, with his younger sons Joseph and Benjamin. Mr. Benjamin Good was Mayor of Bridgwater on three occasions— in 1752, 1758, and 1763.

The nave of the church is handsomely paved with Maw's red and encaustic tiles, of a diamond pattern, and elaborate in design. Still more elaborate is the paving in the chancel, increasing in beauty as it reaches the sacrarium, where the whole of the floor is covered with the old Romish and mosaic marble, and has been, considered equal to any in the kingdom. The dado of the chancel, reaching to the windows, is entirely covered with beautifully designed encaustic, relieved by large medallions, and the noted and costly Italian mosaic gilt. The five steps of the chancel are of beautiful Derbyshire polished marble, the rises of which, from

first to fifth, contain a passage from the *Te Deum Laudamus*, finished on the last step with "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." Two faculty seats still exist in the church, both of them in the east chapel. They are appurtenant to Binford House, the residence of the late Mr. Richard Smith, and the original grant of them is dated 1736, being ratified in vestry 1850,

Against the west wall of the church are the remains of some "miserere seats," or monk stalls. They were originally in the chancel, two on either side, and at the time of the restoration were removed from the sacrarium, where the broad tops were used as a credence table. These stalls were peculiar, inasmuch as the occupant had to be very careful when resting on the narrow seat, for unless he sat upright it would suddenly overbalance and slip from under him. This will account for their being vulgarly designated "miserere seats." The frames of three are now left, but only one of the actual *seats* is now remaining, and that is let into the wall over the centre frame. As already stated, there were four of these seats originally in the sacrarium, one being now missing. That one may still be seen in the workshop of Mr. Charles Baker, of Backstreet. Its history may be traced thus: At the restoration it was not thought thought using again, and Mr. James, the then vicar, gave it to Mr. Joseph Chant, and for some years it found a place in a bower. From his hands it passed into the possession of Mr. Samuel Perrett, and thence to the present owner. Doubtless, for a consideration, it might find its way back to the church. These seats are of massive black oak, handsomely carved, apparently of the same date as the screen and pulpit. On one side is the monogram "I.C."

In the vestry is a picture of the interior of the church as it appeared in 1831, which gives one a good idea of what alterations were made at the restoration in 1849-52, and shows the original positions of the rood and chancel-screens. At that time the vestry stood on the site of the present altar, but a new vestry was built on the left, the space being taken from the churchyard, and the chancel was thus made considerably larger. The present

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vestry contains tablets of bequests by Robert Blake (1592), William Blake (1667), Admiral Robert Blake (1657), Barnard Sparke (1658), and Gilbert Bloyse (1717.)

In addition to the restoration of 1849-53, which cost between £4,000 and £5,000, a number of important alterations and improvements were effected in the six months between February and July, 1878, at a cost of about £2,000. - A better system of lighting the church with brass standards was introduced, at a cost of £450, and the old gas brackets were discarded (though they are still allowed a place in the staircase leading to the belfry). The blue-lia paving of the church was replaced by tiles corresponding with those in the chancel, and in several windows of the church the square plain glass was replaced by diamond pattern Cathedral glass ; the roof of the parvise was restored ; the north entrance doors improved, and some of the plain bosses of the church were carved. A water-pipe heating apparatus was also fixed at a cost of £250, by which means the Church has since been comfortably warmed. The furnace is fixed in that part of the crypt formerly known as the " bone-house." The pillars, and arches, and stone-work generally in the church were scraped, cleaned, and thoroughly restored by Messrs. Bradfield and Sons, of Bridgwater ; and the whole work materially added to the attractive appearance of the interior. The re-lighting received particular attention, ten very elegant standards being erected in the nave, a very handsome corona of original design being fixed in the chancel, and two choice standards erected in the sacarium, constructed to throw the best light possible on the beautiful altar-piece. The re-opening of the church, after it had remained closed for six months, took place on Tuesday, July 29th, 1878, and was attended by the Mayor and Corporation of Bridgwater, " in state," the Bishop of the Diocese, Archdeacon Denison and a great number of the clergy and inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood. A public luncheon was afterwards provided at the Town Hall an organ recital held in the church, followed by a public service in the

church. The sum of £137 was netted by the day's proceedings, in aid of a debt which remained on the restoration of about £1,000. Towards this sum a vote of £200 was afterwards made by the Bridgwater Corporation, who are receivers of the tithes of St. Mary's, and the remainder of the sum was made up by subscriptions and the holding of a grand three days' bazaar at the Town Hall.

Four niches close to the roof...in the nave are now filled with statuary figures of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and were presented by Mr. James Cook, Town Clerk. In the chancel roof are ten figures of angels, carved in wood, which were placed there by the late Mr. John Browne,, a leading inhabitant of the town. A more recent gift to the church was the handsome eagle lectern, of brass, given by the Rev. H. H. O. Ruddock.

There are a number of interesting tablets and mural monuments.*

* Burying the dead in and near churches originated from the custom- of the primitive Christians frequently assembling at the tombs of the martyrs, to sing praises to God for their happy deliverance, and by other acts of piety to fortify their own minds patiently to endure like persecutions. Before the time of Christianity it was held unlawful to bury the dead within the cities or towns, but they were carried out and deposited in the fields. Towards the end of the sixth century Augustine obtained of King Ethelbert a temple of idols, where the King used to worship before his conversion, and made a burying-place of it, but St. Cuthbert afterwards obtained leave to have yards made to the churches, proper for the reception of the dead.— See *Dunsford's History of Tiverton*, page 305.

In the north doorway a tablet contains the following inscription:—

" Sacred to the memory of SAMUEL SMITH, Esq., who having for a long series of years sustained the several characters of Mayor and Alderman of the Corporation, and Collector of Customs, to the advantage and satisfaction of the public, and with honour to himself, willingly resigned his soul into the hands of his

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Maker, on the 1st December, 1795, aged 76.

But his merits as an upright magistrate, and faithful servant of the Crown, though great and conspicuous, were small in comparison with his many virtues. He was an affectionate Husband, a fond Parent, a kind Master, a firm Friend and an honest Man.

Ye, of all ages with Reverence tread,
Or lightly roam, these mansions of the dead;
Stop and contemplate, at this hallow'd shrine,
The glorious change from Mortal to Divine.
Live as he liv'd, the Paths of Truth explore,
Walk uprightly with Man, and God adore.

At the back of the pier against which the pulpit stands is a large tablet, on which is the following inscription, headed by a shield and coat of arms :—

“Near this place are deposited the remains of JOHN HARVEY, of this town, Esq., descended in a direct line from Sir John Harvey, Knight, who came into England with William the Conqueror; He was born in Bridgwater Castle, many years the residence of his family, the 1st of February, 1696 O.S., and died the 3rd July, 1771, having for many years buried his wife Sarah, daughter of Herman King, of Trowbridge, in Wilts, Gent., as appears by the adjoining stone erected to her memory. By her he had issue five sons, of whom two only survived him; viz., his second son John Harvey, Gent., who died, unmarried, in his 62nd year, and was buried at Wiveliscombe, in this county, and his fifth son, Robert Harvey, M.D., who hath erected this monument to perpetuate the memory of a most affectionate Father, and a most worthy man.”

The tablet referred to in the above is now against the south wall, and records the death of Sarah Harvey, on July 23, 1735, aged 29.

In the north chapel is a very conspicuous tablet, headed by a coat of arms, with the following inscription :—

“ Underneath are deposited the remains of JOHN EVERED, Esq., whose worth is here recorded, not to catch at the applause, but to excite the emulation of posterity. He very early applied himself to the study of the Law, and such were his

abilities, such his zeal and integrity, in the practice of his profession, that unassisted by interest or family connections, he retired after some years, with, a very ample fortune. But thinking that the public at large may have a just claim on his talents, which had been so successfully employed in the service of individuals, he took upon himself the laborious office of a Justice of the Peace; with what honour he discharged it, the whole country can testify. His generosity and hospitality, his behaviour in the different capacities of Husband, Father, Friend, and Master, need, no Panegyric. He ended a well-spent life November 5, 1785, aged 82. His surviving children have caused this memorial of him to be erected, the only tribute of their affection they now can offer.”

In the same vault are interred MARY, the affectionate wife of the above, who is described as being of a most humane and charitable disposition towards the poor ; and also, two daughters, MARY and Ann..

On the wall by the Corporation seats, are two tablets to the Anstice family ROBERT ANSTICE, Gent., who departed this life . April 3rd, 1815, aged 88 ; and HANNAH ANSTICE, died April 19, 1846. Robert Anstice was Mayor of the borough in 1825. One of these tablets is a brass one, and-between the two is a small and worn tablet, also of brass, containing an interesting elegy in Latin, in the peculiar, characters of the early seventeenth-century, we annex, a free translation to the original :—

*Stradlingus jacet hic generosa stirpe creatus,
Qui Burgistius ter modo Maior erat.
Hesperias adiit iuvenis mercator ad oras,
Orcades et rigidas, ut sibi quaerat opes.
At nunc in portu requiescens pace perreni,
Gavet, et Anglici fit comes ipse chori.
Post tenebras spero lucem.
Johannes Stradlingus filius eius unigenitus et
Haeres pictatis ergo posvit 1620.*

“ Here lies STRADLING, sprung from a noble race ; he was thrice Mayor of this Borough. In his youth as Merchant he went to the Spanish shores, that he might seek abundant and hard-earned wealth. From this time in Port, resting in everlasting

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peace, lie rejoices, and is himself made companion with the Angelic choir. After darkness I hope for light.

John Stradling, his only begotten son, and heir to his piety, has therefore placed this in 1620."

The John Stradling (the elder) mentioned above, filled the office of Mayor in 1604, 1611, and 1618.

Another brass tablet to the memory of Ann and JOHN TROTT, is inserted in a most peculiar niche nearly on a level with the floor on the right of the entrance to the chancel. The tablet was not originally there, but what the niche could have been meant for, except it were a figure, of which there are now no traces, it is not easy to determine. John Trott was Mayor of Bridgwater in 1711.

There are three memorials to the ANDERDON family, including a very large slate tablet at the right on entering the south door, the earliest inscription on which is dated 1707 (William Anderdon), and the next (*Ferdinandus Fil, bis Burgi hijusce Proctor*— "Ferdinand the son, twice Proctor of this borough"), 1727. The latter was Mayor of the town in 1717, and also in the year in which he died. Other monuments of this family will be found (1) in the wall at the left of the organ, (2) behind the organ, Edmund Anderdon, Alderman of Bath, and a magistrate of Somerset; and (3) in the floor at the foot of the pulpit. The latter simply details the death of CHARLES ANDERDON, Gent., died 11th December 1811, aged 78, and the first mentioned is apparently that of his wife MARY.

On a tablet in the east chapel is the brief record of the death of JEFFREYS ALLEN, on August 23rd, 1814, and also his wife. Mr. Allen was a warm supporter of the Bridgwater Infirmary, and made the Institution two or three valuable donations. He was the second President, in 1816-17. Only on one other occasion in the long history of the Infirmary has the compliment been paid of

In the Corporation chapel is a tribute to the memory of Mr. THOMAS GILL, upwards of 40 years a diligent instructor of youth, and during 26 years the

intelligent' and upright actuary of the Bridgwater Savings Bank. Born at Tiverton, May 14, 1779, he died in this town August 15, 1845. The tablet was erected by his affectionate pupils in grateful recollection of the distinguished kindness, zeal, and ability with which he attended to their moral and intellectual improvement.

Midway in the wall on the left side of the chancel is a brass tablet to the memory of a former Vicar, whose labours have been already referred to. The inscription runs

In memory of the Rev. THOMAS GEORGE JAMES, .M.A., Vicar of this Church from 1849 to 1857, who died on the 26th day of February, 1864, .aged 51 years. During his incumbency, and mainly through his efforts, this Church was restored, and above 800 free sittings set apart for the poor for ever."

By the altar rails will be found one of the -most interesting monuments in the whole building, showing as it does an appreciation of departed worth seldom seen in connection with public bodies. It is a plain, unpretending marble slab, on which is imperishably recorded this high tribute:—

The Corporation of this Town, in testimony of their high regard for the incorrupt public and private conduct of MR. JOHN PHELPS, erected this monument to his memory. He died 25th September, 1782, aged 38."

John Phelps occupied the Mayoralty chair in 1781.

Another large tablet in the chancel is erected to the memory of JOHN DUNNING, ESQ., M.D. (died 1821) in His Majesty's Commission of the Peace, and Deputy Lieutenant for the county of Somerset; together with his wife, daughter, and co-heiress of Philip Baker, Esq. Underneath is a coat of arms, with the family motto, *Nec Teniere nec Timide* ("Neither rash nor timid").

A brass tablet in the north chapel is engraved as follows:—

In memory of Edward Sealy, Esq, of Bridgwater, died May 21, 1861, aged 85;... .

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Also of Elizabeth Ureh, his wife, daughter of the Rev. W. Lewis, late of Nether Stowey, in this county, died Jan. 3, 1865, aged 77. This tablet is erected by their affectionate and only son, Edward Ureh Vidal."

The principal monument in the church, and a source of much interest to visitors, is the one erected to the Kingsmill family, in the chancel. It represents Sir Francis Kingsmill, who died in 1620, reclining on his left side, his head supported by his left hand, and dressed in the armour of the period. Above him, in niches, kneel the effigies of his two sons, in civilian dress—Henrico Kingsmill, Armiger, who died April 22, 1621, and Francisca Kingsmill, "Generosa," died August 20, 1640. Entries of the three deaths will be found in the register, the former reading "Francisca Kingsmille, Milt.', July 25, 1620." The family of Kingsmill was for centuries settled at Sidmanton, Hants, and Francis, the principal subject of the monument, was knighted by the Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1605. What link of property or otherwise connected the family with Bridgwater is not known, though they lived in the town (possibly at the Castle), for some years. The following motto appears on the monument : *Per Fidem effecti sunt valide Bello* ("Holy people [saints] perfected by faith are powerful in war"). Also the following lines from Hebrews xii., 34 "Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to fright the armies of the aliens." There are some interesting devices on the marble, one of which is composed of a drum, trumpets, and banners, and another of a battle axe, arrows, spears, &c. A descendant of the family a short time since accidentally discovered this resting-place of his ancestors, after a search extending over many years.

There are several other monuments in the church, which do not call for special mention, to the families of Haviland, Witherel, Gardner, Cockerel, &c. According to Collinson, the Somersetshire historian, "divers of the Wrothe, Horsey, and other ancient families, are buried in

the church."

There are one or two interesting memorials in the floor of the side of the aisles at the bottom of the church* one of them being in the following peculiar form

George Beake, of this town, and Sarah his wife

She dyed 22 March, 1760, aged 68

He dyed 1 April, 1761, aged 67

This stone was erected by GEORGE, their only son, who afterwards found a resting-place beside his parents.

* The custom of laying flat stones in our churches and church-yards over the graves of the better sort of persons, on which are inscribed epitaphs, containing the name, age, character, &c., has been transmitted from very ancient times as appears from Cicero and others.—See *Brand's Antiquities*.

The others include memorials to JONATHAN WOODWARD (1717) and family ; MARTHA COLES (1729), MARY and BENJAMIN STANDFAST (1774 and 1805), HANNAH GALPINE (1705), WILLIAM and MARY PRIOR (1707 and 1709), &c., &c. These stones were laid in the aisles when the church was restored, and several others found places in the church-yard, to which further reference will be made. In one of the recesses of the south wall is a large stone, the cover of an ancient thirteenth century coffin, which was dug up in the church-yard some years ago. In the other recess is a large stone, with a coat of arms and the motto, *Non est mortale quod opto* ("What I hope for is not mortal.") .

It is an interesting fact that the registers of the church are, with a few notable exceptions, extant from the commencement of the reign of Elizabeth, in 1558. The first "christening" of which we have record is that of Thomas Jones, November 17th, 1558; the first vicar Henry Wills and the first churchwardens John Spark, Robert Demant, and John Somers.*

*The institution of churchwardens is of very remote antiquity, and they have at different periods been distinguished by various names, such as *Defensores*, *Praeposti Ecclesiae*, *Testes Synodales*, &c., In the reign of Edward III. they were known as "church-reeves"; thus as we read in

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Chaucer:

"Of chirche-reves and of testementes"

Their office is to "guard, preserve, and superintend the rights, revenues, buildings, and furniture of the church." In an old churchwardens' book belonging to the parish of Farringdon, Berks, under date of 1518 there is the following quaint form of admission:—"Churchye wardyns, thys shall be your charge, be true to God and the cherche, for love nor favour off no man wytychyn thys parriche, to withhold any right to the cherche; and to resserve the dettys to hyt belongtyhe, or else to goo to the devell"

The births of the town then appeared to average four per month, but gradually increased, and in 1574 had reached eight or ten. The earlier registers would appear to be copies, unless one vicar and the same churchwardens were connected with the Church continuously for forty years. The same names as above are given until November, 1598, when the churchwardens changed to William Francis, John Campden, and Richard Charley, but Henry Wills continued vicar until 1601. He first signed his name as "Vicar of Bridgwater" in 1600. Among the christenings we find that of Robert Blake (September 29th, 1598), the celebrated Admiral. Sometimes baptisms other, than in the church were recorded, as the following: "July 17th, 1703. George, son of Samuel and Mary Cudrington, baptised in the Dissenting Meeting" And again: "October 26th, 1712, Vincent Stocker, son of Edmund Stocker, and the woma (*sic*) a Quaker, his wife." Occasionally the baptisms were not confined to infants, for we read: "March 8th, 1712. Thomas Wills, a young man about eigheteen yeares of age, was baptised by me, William Allen." In 1750 the christenings numbered 15 to 18 a month, and in one month reached 23. The population of Bridgwater must have increased considerably from 1710 to 1750. In 1751. the numbers again decreased, only 58 being entered for the year, including one in July, and none in November. In the following year the number was 59. In April, 1762, only one birth was registered, while in August of

the same year there. were *nil*. Under May 22nd, 1766, there is an interesting entry—"Sarah, a black girl belonging to Mrs. Loman, christened." In 1770 there were 106 baptisms, 97 in 1771, 110 in 1772, and 106 in 1771. In 1800 the number had risen to 109, 55 being males, and 51 females.; In 1802 a further increase took place, and in 1810 the baptisms reached 170. In 1821 they were 188, 217 in 1830, 278 in 1812, 131 in 1852, and 110 in 1862.

With regard to the marriages, the first of which we have any record is that of Richard Bond and Joan Hooper. November 18th, 1558. In 1645, between July and September, blanks are left in the records of births, deaths, and marriages, that being the period of the siege of Bridgwater. Only the bare names of the contracting parties are given throughout the registers, until recent years. Among the names found in the early registers are . Blake, Hodges, Manship, Baker, Ball, Lockyer, Popham, Stone, Stuckey, Bayne, Baiium, Bond, Allen, Poole, Leake, Halcombe, Hemhery, Tuthill, &c. Under the year 1689 there is an entry to the effect that the Presbyterian preacher had undertaken to marry in his synagogue.

The first "buriall" recorded is .dated June 1, 1560, and the name George Palmer. In the following year there were 19 burials. Among the early ones were: May, 20, 1581—David Price, preacher; August 25, 1588—Edward Bredgor, scholemaister; May 7, 1621—Antony, a tawny Moore. In no case is the age given, and the entries are nearly all characterised by extreme brevity, as "Farmer Sym's child." Very often the name is not given (especially, in the case of children) thus: "A child over the bridge going to Hame." Again: "An old Souldiere, out of the Black Boy," and "A young man out of Mr. Moore's house" Mr. Moore was the Presbyterian preacher. The first Quaker mentioned is under May 20, 1699; "Burt's wife, a Quaker, in the Quaker's Yard in Roper's Lane." Other religious bodies are quaintly alluded to, as "September 9, 1692—Tobias Weller, Anabaptist Holder Forth," and "April 25, 1627—Robertus Saltern, *verbi Dei Minister* (Minister of the word of God)." On very rare occasions some remark is

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given, as in the case of "Edw. Raymond, a bitter persecutor of ye vicar and a proud attorney, October 20, 1725." Under this was added, doubtless by some admirer-of the Edward Raymond referred to (who was twice Mayor of the town—in 1719 and 1725) : "But not half so proud, spiteful, and ignorant, as the then pretended vicar, Laurance Payne, was." The churchwardens, signed each leaf of the register, and under date 1690 these names appear — John Miles, George Thomas. Appended is the following remarkable entry, apparently in the handwriting of the vicar — "This Mr. Miles was the honestest churchwarden that hath been this one and twenty yeares.' He whited the church for twenty shillings, whereas before at several times they paid £5 or £6 for washing. He also new-lay'd the pavement, which no importunity could prevail on the others to doe, tho' they had church monies; in their hands, May the curse of sacrelidge lye upon such perjur'd wretches as. alienate or consume what is given for the reparation of God's house." In another hand, is. added: " This would . be thought no severe imprecation if the history of-these sons of women thus, pretended to be sons of the. church was written and transmitted to posterity."

Another entry worthy of notice is the following : "In the year 1683 the vicar was rated to the poore by order of William Masey, who was then Maior, as he had been three yeares before. In the time of his Maioralty he commanded the Minister to be rated to the poore, tho' it was never known in this parrish, and when he . was' made Maior in this year in perfect spight .he commands it again. Whoever judges this man a lover of the church or any thing that relates to it knowes not the man. This man afterwards carry'd himself with , that insolency -and tryanny to all sorts of people that the inhabitants, whether Churchmen, Presbyterian, or other, joyn'd together to ring, out the belles for joy at his departure into .Ireland, where he was preferr'd, and where it was thought he was poysonid."

Under the year 1614 two entries recall an almost forgotten, superstitious custom.: "The 20th October it was certified by

William Allen, Vicar,' and Alexander Popham, churchwarden, that . Samuel Tucker, the son of Elizabeth Tucker, widow, was not at any time before touched for the distemper commonly called-the King's Evill" There is a further entry, somewhat similar to the foregoing : " 1684. In this year, October 29, it was certified for George Davis, son of John Davis, mariner, that he was not; at any time, touched by his sacred Majestie for the distemper commonly called *otrand* the 'King's Evill.' "

In 1591.(33 Elizabeth), 199 burials took place, which-may be taken as a fair average, though occasionally, probably through epidemics, we find the monthly average somewhat higher. In 1679 there is an ominous blank in the register,; explained by the following quaint entry : " From August 28, this yeare, to 1680, one . Jolin Haddon, then parish clerk, had the names of the persons and they are dead together with him." The disordered state of the neighbourhood during the Great Rebellion is shown by the-remarks placed against thenames of those buried. Thus in August, 1644, two deaths are certified as *Pethertonix, bello occisj* (killed in. war at Petherton) ; and at frequent intervals the entry is simply *Miles, ignoti nominus* (soldier of an unknown name), and sometimes is. added to this *gladio occisus* (killed by the sword). There are several, burials of soldiers *bombarda occisus* (killed in bombardment), one slain in a duel, and two *reste strangulato* (hung). Another has reference to the place where the gallant Robert Blake, himself a Bridgwater man, was successfully resisting a prolonged attack, against great odds, by Prince Maurice and the Royal troops: " July 4, 1644. *Josephus Wotton ob regem pugnando apud Lyme Regis, bombarda intersectus* " (Joseph Wotton, in fighting for the King, was killed at Lyme Regis in the bombardment). It is probable that this Joseph Wotton was the son of the vicar of Bridgwater, and such would account for the unusual course proceeded; with, in bringing his body to Bridgwater for burial.

For some years after 1683 the burial entries were endorsed to the effect that certificates had been received that the

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bodies had been buried in woollen, and after wards linen appears to have been used. In 1700 we find the first mention of an almshouse : " Feb.9, Edward Escott, of the Aim's Howse." The leaves which are missing in the registers would appear to have been cut out at an early date, for under the year 1696 is the following declaration : "This register book was this day deliver'd to. Laurance Payne, vicar of Bridgwater, by Richard Coles, clerk of ye parish, in ye presence of us whose names are underwritten, and it appears yt in sevl places of this book leaves have been cut out." The declaration was not fully attested, however, for no names appear "under written." In the summer of 1711 there must have been some fatal disease raging in the town, as the burials are numerous, including five on one day in September. The inhabitants numbered only about 2,200 at that time. On Sept. 9, 1705, was buried John Rugg, vicar of Cannington, and on Nov. 12, 1720, William Pyne, vicar of Wembdon. During ; 1729 and 1730 a children's epidemic raged in the town, and the deaths in some months reached the high total of 27 and 30, principally children. In the year 1800 there were 83 burials, 104 in 1810, 88 in 1820, 141 in 1830.

There was formerly a certain amount of ceremony with regard to the appointment of parish clerk, to judge from the following : I hereby nominate and appoint John Player, of the parish of Bridgwater, in the county of Somerset, to be parish clerk of Bridgwater aforesaid, in the room of Thomas Woodham, lately deceased. Given under my hand-and seal, the 4th day of April, 1770, JOHN COLES. The above is a true copy of my appointment of John Player to be the parish clerk of Bridgwater. JOHN COLES, vicar of Bridgwater."

The church possesses a very valuable quantity of silver Communion plate, the total weight of which is over 200 ounces. The most ancient bears date 1574, and consists of two patens and one chalice, very thin, and now never used. The next is a handsome beaten silver chalice, presented by Sir Francis Kingsmill in 1620, and bearing the following inscription: *Calix Ecclesæ Bridgwatriensis Ex dono Francesci*

Kingsmill Generosi (" Bridgwater Church, Chalice, the gift of Sir Francis Kingsmill"), with the Kingsmill coat of arms in the centre. The largest article is a massive silver flagon weighing 98½- ounces, and 15½ inches high, on which is inscribed : *Deo et alteri suo. Cœnophorum hoc summâ cum humilitate dedicabunt Parochiani de Bridgwater in Festo Resurrectionis. Domina. Anno 1725.* A translation of this inscription cannot fail to be interesting — " To God and His Altar, "this 'wine-holder' was, with great humility, dedicated by the Parishioners of Bridgwater on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, in the year 1725 " There is no record extant of the circumstances under which this handsome gift was subscribed for and presented to the church, but the fact redounds to the credit of the good people of Bridgwater of 1725, Another silver chalice and paten were presented by "Mary Lushe to ye parish Church of Bridgwater Anno Dom. 1728." A coat of arms accompanies the inscription. In the register we find an entry that " Madam Mary Lushe " was buried October 5, 1728. Among the remaining articles (there being eleven in all) are two other silver patens, without any inscription or date, but the make and pattern are of about 1600.

The organ is a very handsome and costly instrument, valued at about £1,600. It has splendidly illuminated metal pipes, forming a frontage both toward the western and southern aspects. It was built in 1871 by Mr. Henry Willis, of London, the builder of the organs in the Albert Hall and the Alexandra Palace, &c., one of the first makers in the country. The contract amounted to £800 (raised by subscriptions and a grand bazaar), in addition to which he received the old organ, a very small instrument. It is not known whether the latter, which was built (or extensively renovated). in 1682, was the original organ of the church. Many of the old pipes were used by Mr. Willis, but little else was found to be of any service. In 1878 it was decided to add a *vox humana* stop, with tremblant, which was done at a cost of £50. The organ is a three-manual instrument, containing thirty six draw stops, six composition pedals, and about 2000 pipes.

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The interior has been characterised as a marvel of scientific skill. The action is pneumatic ; and every stop is complete throughout, the latter being an important and expensive consideration. It is voiced to two separate pressures, and the tone, besides being remarkably sweet and rich, is also very deep and powerful. There are two pairs of bellows, the blowing of which is the work of two men. Previous to the opening, Mr. E. J. Hopkins, the organist of Temple Church, London, examined the instrument, and his certificate set forth : "The interior arrangements of the organ are most conveniently made, and the construction of the entire instrument is most neat and finished; the voicing is well balanced, even, sweet, full, and prompt-speaking in its respective parts and combinations." There were grand opening services held in the church in September, 1871. On the front of the instrument is a brass plate with the following inscription:

"This organ was erected A.D. 1871, at a cost of £800. The Committee appointed to procure it hereby record their high appreciation of the exertions of JOSEPH K. SMITH, ESQ., of the Friars, Bridgwater, one of the churchwardens, to whose great energy and perseverance the successful termination of the undertaking is mainly to be attributed.

Dated, 21st September, A.D. 1871.
WM. G. FITZGERALD, Vicar;
Charles Knowles,
John Trevor, Churchwardens.
Edward Hikes,

Mr. Charles Lavington has been organist for eighteen years, his predecessor having been Mr. Andrews. It is but bare justice to say that he is a complete master of the instrument; his manipulation is artistic and thorough, and it is a striking proof of the public appreciation of his playing that the greater portion of the worshippers remain to hear the voluntaries played after service on Sundays. Mr. A. Burch is the deputy organist. The singing of the church is led by an efficient surpliced choir of nearly sixty voices — a choir, considered by many to be second to none in the county. There is more cause for congratulation to the members when it is said that their services

are voluntary, even to the provision of the music. This does not apply to the choir boys, who receive a small consideration for their services, according to the number of attendances they make. This is provided for by a bequest made by Miss Elizabeth. Axford, who died July 28th, 1847, the following being a clause in her will: —

" I give and bequeath the sum of Three Hundred Pounds to the Vicar and Churchwardens for the time being of the parish Church of St. Mary in Bridgwater, and their respective successors, in trust to invest the same in the names of them, the said Vicar and Churchwardens, in the public Stocks or Funds of Great Britain, at interest, with power to alter, vary, and transpose the said Stocks or Funds from time to time as they shall think proper, and in trust to apply the dividends and income arising therefrom yearly towards the support of a vocal choir in St. Mary's Church aforesaid. And I direct that the said dividends and income shall be paid by the said vicar and churchwardens to such persons, members of the said choir, and in such proportions as the organist for the time being shall consider most deserving thereof, and shall by any memorandum in writing under his hand direct to receive the same."

Mr. Lavington is also a successful trainer of the choir.

One of the principal features of the church is the magnificent and renowned painting (measuring 18ft. by 8ft.), which now serves as an altar piece. It represents " The Descent from the Cross," with John, the beloved disciple, leaning mournfully over the body of Christ, in the anguish of silent grief. Near the feet of Jesus the Virgin Mary has fainted in the arms of Mary Magdalene, who hangs over her with a mingled expression of grief, dismay, and, tender affection ; and near the head is perhaps the most striking figure of the group, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, kneeling, her arm extended, a tear falling from her cheek, and the whole attitude finely expressive of her breathing a prayer to heaven. The subject is not treated with that fervid, vivid imagination which a modern artist might have called to his aid, but there is a great amount of

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quiet, eloquent beauty about the picture. The choice of colours, the tone, the manipulation, are all faultless. It has often attracted such men as Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the latter has been known to have remained some Hours in the church studying it. Unfortunately the name of the gifted painter is shrouded in obscurity, and very little is known of even the circumstances under which it was placed in the church. It is believed to have been taken out of a French or Spanish privateer daring the last war with France, and sold as a prize at Plymouth by auction, where it was purchased by the Hon. Lord Anne Poulett (named after Queen Anne, who was his godmother), who represented the town in Parliament for many years, and who presented the picture to the town thus honouring him. There are diverse opinions as to whether it is of the Spanish or Italian school. The Right Rev. ~~the Lord~~ [Deletion in the original text. TW] Bishop Clifford considers it to be the latter, remembering a similar work by an Italian artist. Haydon, the painter, expressed the same opinion, although the style of the hair, and the blue hand across it, suggest the possibility of its being a Spanish work. Be that as it may, the picture is an interesting and very valuable one, and has attracted more than one good offer. The inhabitants, however, have very naturally declined to part with their prize, although an effort was once made to purchase it with a view to its being placed in the British Museum. Mr. George Parker gives the writer an amusing incident connected with it. About fifty years ago it became evident that the picture required cleaning. It had been under the care of the old parish clerk, whose name was ; Johnston,* and who was himself a teacher of painting, and he denied that there was anything the matter with it.

*A portrait of Mr. Johnston, painted by himself, may now be seen in the Committee room at the new Municipal Offices.

It was decided, however, to have it examined, and Haydon, the histories painter, came to Bridgwater for the purpose. He gazed at it for some time in silence, and at last exclaimed, "Where is

the picture ? I don't see it!" whereupon the clerk took his stick and walked out of the church. By Haydon's advice the picture was sent to London and carefully cleaned of its accumulated dust and local varnish. The work cost about £50, but it was money well laid out, and the picture was restored to what was believed to be its pristine beauty. It was also cleaned and varnished about 28 or 29 years ago, an artist being engaged to do the work in the church. The picture was removed by Mr. King (one of the present-ringers) and three others, and the artist was asked by the late Mr. Abraham Squibbs whether he was acquainted with its equal, and he replied "Certainly not in England." Two splendid copies of this picture have been made by Mr. A. Squibbs, photographic artist, of Queen Street, Bridgwater : one, an oil painting, is in the possession of Mr. S. Chapman, one of the churchwardens, and the other, a crayon drawing, was copied for Mrs. James Cook. Mr. Squibbs has also produced a good cabinet and other photographs of the picture.

Immediately under, the picture is the communion table, which is of carved oak, and probably of the same date as the Corporation screen. It has six finely carved legs. In its original position in the chancel it covered an old and worn copper plate, whereon Mr. George Parker informs us was engraved

"Tho' hungry Death hath gulphed into his maw
Both sire and child, being first ground in his jaw,
They shall arise when the righteous

Judge shall say,

'Arise, ye dead !' at the resurrection day."

Around this table the yearly parish meeting was formerly held to pass accounts, elect churchwardens, &c.

An interesting relic of the church may now be found at "The Castle," a quaintly-built residence in Queen-street, the property of Mr. C. Hook, of "The Golden Key." Here may be seen the old south door, which was replaced by a modern one at the time of Mr. James's restoration. There is no ornamental work about it except a neat beading around the panels. but a very interesting feature of it is the massive hinge, of true ecclesiastical type;

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some five or six feet long. A smaller doorway opens in the centre, and the bracket and wheel around which a weight used to run (down through a kind of box on the outside) to close the small door, are still to be seen. The original fastening and lock also remain, the latter being fixed with nuts and bolts. The door was placed in its present position by the late Mr. John Board, who built the house, of Portland cement, in a style as near as possible his idea of what William de Briwere's famous Castle of Bridgwater was some four or five centuries previously, the site of which was where King's Square now stands, not a stone's throw away.

The oldest of the doors of the church are those at the entrance to the tower, in the west porch, formerly the main entrance to the church. They are unquestionably ancient, and present, a very rugged and time-worn appearance. The lock and key are of such dimensions as make one smile at the workmanship of his long-forgotten ancestors. The lock measures eighteen inches by nine, a foot in length, and the wards about the size of a modern padlock. and the key is a ponderous instrument of above a foot in length. The west entrance has a finely panelled arch, and carved spandrels.

The tower and spire date from the fourteenth century, and judging from the character of the details of the masonry the work seems to have been continuous throughout, from base to summit. The buttresses are of fourteenth century origin, and have fourteenth century weatherings, and the belfry stage (which has fourteenth century windows) is arched over at the angles to receive the spire, so that the latter was in contemplation from the base upwards. The old staircase requires renovation very badly; some of the steps are in a dangerous condition, and one or two of the newels, or stone uprights of the centre, are missing, and are replaced by wood! Be the tower repaired when it may (and the west end of the church is shortly to be given over to the hands of the repairers) it will not be one whit too soon. The old doorway which led to the singing-

gallery is still seen, although walled up. The bell chamber contains eight bells, all of exceedingly good tone, one of them being what is termed a "maiden" bell (*i.e.*, cast to the right tone, and requiring no chipping). The following are the inscriptions on each :—

First (or treble): "Glory to God in the highest. Cast by T. Bayley, 1745."

Second : "On earth peace, good-will towards men. T.B., 1745."

Third: "1650, N.C."

Fourth: "W.P., G.P., H.A. Anno Domini, 1617."

Fifth: "*Sanctae Mariae*. Anno 1634." (The canons or portions fixing this bell to the framework are missing, having been at some time broken off).

Sixth: " From lightning and tempest, good Lord deliver us. A.R., 1721."

Seventh: "William Brethwen, William Bryant, churchwardens. A.R. 1721."

Eighth (big bell): " Recast by subscriptions obtained 1867. Taylor, and Co., founders, Loughborough, 1868. John B. Hammill, Mayor.

I call the living : mourn the dead; '

I tell how days and years are fled ;

For joy, for grief, for prayer and praise,

My tuneful voice to heaven I raise."

(Also a representation of the borough arms.).

When the latter bell was being hoisted to its place, the rope to which it was attached broke, and the bell fell, but was fortunately caught in one of the huge beams of the flooring in the clock chamber, which it broke nearly short off, as may still be seen from the west porch. Without any appendage, it weighs 1 ton 7 cwt. 3 qrs. 4lbs., and the clapper 60 lbs. The first death-knell rung from it was for Mrs. Symons, the mother of Mr. Alderman Symons, and the first wedding-peal after its erection was in honour of the marriage of Miss Lilly, daughter of Mr. Edward Lilly, of Castle-street. All the bells were refitted and re-hung in 1879, by Mr. Luxton, of Winkleigh, at a cost of £80. The ringing is performed from the ground floor, in the west porch. Behind the wooden louvres in the four belfry windows there remains,

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some of. the original window tracery, of the same character as the west window.

The clock is one of first-rate manufacture, erected by-Messrs. G. and W. Cope, of. Nottingham, in 1869, In the front is a plate with the following inscription : "Erected by voluntary contributions obtained by_ John B. Hammill, Esq., Mayor, 1867." Above this is a capital representation of the town arms (*Sigillum Majoris Ballivor et Burgene villa de Brigewater.*) The clock is fitted with all the latest improvements, the escapement being what is known as the double three-legged gravity. It strikes the quarters (the Westminster) as well as the hours. It has a compensating pendulum, eight feet long, with a sweep of three feet, and weighing 5 cwt. The weights are three in number, and are much heavier than the pendulum. In the same chamber, and connected with the clock, is the machinery for playing the chimes, "Home, sweet home" being struck out on the bells above, three times in each twelve hours—at one, five, and nine o'clock. It originally played an old and now forgotten hymn tune, and at one time it was decided to alter the tune to "The Blue Bells of Scotland," but that intention .was never carried out, and ultimately the chimes were altered to "Home, sweet Home." It is not known when these chimes were placed in the tower, but the machinery is very old. They remained silent at one time, when they were thoroughly repaired by the late Mr. Beale, organ builder, of Bridgwater, at the expense of Mr. John Sealy. The machinery has to be wound up daily, but once a week suffices for winding the clock. On an old door leading to the clock chamber, is the following interesting inscription :—.

" Illuminated Clock and Bell, subscribed for 1867. New tenor bell, rung for the first time August, 1868. Cast of new metal by Taylor and Son, Loughborough. New clock set going February 16, 1869 ; made by G. and W. Cope, Nottingham. — C.H."

The clock-dial is fixed at the top of the tower, and faces direct east, the. hands, one of which measures 3 feet 6 inches, being moved by rods connected with the works below. The face is about 24 feet in

circumference, and is sufficiently roomy to accommodate a small tea-party ! The dial is of glass, and the face is illuminated by night, the gas being raised and lowered by its own machinery, which can be altered to suit the different' seasons of the year. It remains illuminated all night, but at twelve o'clock it lowers the gas, and at five in the morning rises it again. The clock, and chimes are in perfect condition, it being evident that especial care is bestowed on the former. They are under the care of Mr. S. R. Cookings, of High-street. Many years since, there was a one-handed dial lacing south, for the benefit of the Vicar, the vicarage being in St, Mary-street, where Mr. Parminter now resides.*" Traces of the aperture in the tower may still be seen.

* As the old parsonage house forms an interesting connecting link with the church, we subjoin a few particulars. The sitting room is noticeable, where the handsome ceiling is divided into squares by oak beams, (a very massive one at the centre), a beading running round each, with a shield, monogram, or device carved at joint and angle, and which are apparently the same workmanship as the organ screen in the church. There were formerly two very quaint windows in this room, the street (and from one of which the Vicar was enabled to see the time by the extra dial in the tower,. mentioned above), but these have unfortunately been closed up. There is also an amount of carving in other parts of this interesting residence, in the construction of which an immense parcel of oak was used.

A parapet runs around the summit of the tower- from which springs the slender spire. The sides of the embrasures are in a very insecure condition, and are liable to be loosened at any time in a rough wind. A new parapet is urgently required. The battlements are particularly interesting from the fact that the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth, accompanied by. Lord Grey, toiled up the winding staircase on Sunday, the 5thi July, 1685, and from the battlements discerned with a telescope the Royal troops, 4,000 in number (by whom, he was afterwards defeated) mustering at Westonzoyland. What is believed to be the

1885
17

GOB.
H.P.
1694

I.M.I.R.
1697

The churchyard is somewhat disappointing as regards memorials. True, there are a great many old tombstones, but all those of any great age are undecipherable, being apparently of stone not calculated to withstand the elements. At any rate, the finger of time has obliterated the names and dates of a large number of them. The principal monument of any consequence is that under which members of the members the Oldmixon family rest, including the celebrated John Oldmixon, who was descended from an ancient Somerset family. He is described as having been a violent party writer, and malevolent critic, who would scarcely have been remembered beyond his native town had not Pope, in resentment of his abuse, condemned him to immortality in his "Dunciad."*

He said, and climbed a stranded lighter's height,
Shot to the black abyss, and plunged downright.
The senior's judgement all the crowd admire,
Who but to sink the deeper rose the higher
— *The Dunciad*, Book ii., 283

his body was brought to his native place and interred in St. Mary's Churchyard. ' He was: the author of a *History of the Stuarts*, a *Critical History of England* (two vols.), a volume of Poems, some Dramatic Pieces, &c., "none of them," one authority remarks, "worthy of notice, his principal talent being that of falsifying history." The inscriptions on this tomb are for the most part obliterated.

A neat stone against the north wall has the following inscription :

“Let sculptured urn and monument proclaim
The bold achievements of the son of fame;
This stone but marks the mem’ry of a man,
Who thro’ Life’s varied vale unruffled ran ;
In him did Nature three great titles blend,
Those dearest titles—Husband, Father, Friend ;
These he fulfilled thro’ many cheerful years,
Then died—but died not destitute of tears.”

NICHOLAS BIFFEN, born September 17, 1766 died October 3rd, 1819.

Many of the stones have sunk so much as to be nearly hidden from sight, while over others trees wave their leaves and branches. Against the wall by the south entrance is, a memorial recording the death of a centenarian—

“ JAMES HARTNALL, died February 26, 1866,
aged 102 years and six months.”

In one of the paths are a number of stones which were removed from the church when the tessellated pavement was laid. There is little to be gathered from them : one is to the memory of "JOHN GILBERT,; Alderman of the Borough, and three times Mayor ; " another to the family of Roger Hoar, the latter having also occupied the civic chair. He may have been the " Roger Hoar " mentioned as having been pardoned under the gallows on the Cornhill where Judge Jeffreys hung ten or twelve of the inhabitants who had espoused the cause of the Duke of Monmouth. Another stone is interesting inasmuch as it refers to some members of the family of Dr. John Morgan, an educational benefactor to the town. On this stone, which is beautifully cut, is a device, a portion of which represents a full-length skeleton.

Other stones bear the names of
" George Grove, for 82 years parish clerk

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of this church ; " Chapman, Manchip, Balch, Burroughs, Codrington, &c. ; and there are several with Latin and Greek inscriptions. The yard was closed for burial purposes in 1851, and the new burial ground at Wembdon was consecrated by the Bishop of Jamaica on September 10th of that year. Originally there were houses all round the churchyard, separated only by a path, the same as is still seen on the north and west sides. All those on the east side were removed some thirty or forty-years-ago, and at intervals some of those on the St. Mary street side disappeared from view, ' There is still a block which . much disfigures the appearance of the churchyard, but it is understood that satisfactory terms cannot be come to with the owner, and thus a public and much-needed improvement is kept in abeyance. The churchyard was formerly enclosed by " an old wall, which was superseded by the present preferable iron railings. The yard has recently been drained, and in some places levelled.

The first reference to any church in Bridgwater is about 1220. On the foundation of St. John's Hospital by William Briwere, in the early part of the-reign of Henry III., the tithes* of this parish were appropriated to that institution, and the Master and Brethren thereof had the advowson of the vicarage, which in 1292 was valued at eight marks.

*Tithes, by which the clergy are now legally maintained, were introduced very gradually, and were first given voluntarily, sometimes to the poor, and sometimes to the church, at the pleasure of the donor. By degrees the poor were excluded, and about A.D. 600 tithes, from being established as a custom, became in some instances, legal rights, many estates being bequeathed with an obligation to pay tithes to particular churches. (See *Priestley's Birmingham Letters*) The first charter of tithes in England was made by Ethelwulph, King of the West Saxons, at Easter, 854, "for the health of his soul, the good of his people, and the prosperity of his kingdom." In 1392 power was given to the Bishop,

when any appropriation of a benefice was. made to a Monastery, to allot, according to the extent or value of the parish, certain lands, the produce of which would be sufficient to maintain the vicar,, and enable him to keep hospitality.

The church had before, been given by Fulke Paganel to the foreign abbey of St. Martin, Marmonstier, the possessions of-which in England were ` seized into the King's hands during a war with France.†

† See *Collinson's History of Somerset*, vol. iii., chap. Bridgwater

The living is a vicarage in the gift of the Lord Chancellor (in reality, the Crown). The Tithes, value about £300 a year, are held by the Corporation of. Bridgwater, subject to one or two payments as first charges, including a readership or lectureship of £33. 6s 8d per year, and £10 in lieu of Tithes at Horsey, to the vicar of St. Mary's, who, were it not for the living at Chilton Church accompanying it, would be poor indeed. The tithes also provide for a small endowment to King James's Grammar' School, which is now in abeyance pending instructions from the Charity Commissioners. According to the " Taxation of Pope Nicholas," the living in 1288 was worth £5 6s 8d (See *Taxatio Ecclesicistica Nicolai*, page 198). When the Royal Survey was. made in the twenty-sixth year of King Henry VIII., the living (according to John Ecton's " Thesaurus ") was worth £11 7s 6d, including Horsey. It is now held by the Rev. William G. FitzGerald, A.K.C., who was educated at King's College, and afterwards entered St. John's, Cambridge. He was inducted in 1864, in succession to the Rev. Prebendary Sadler,, who removed to Bedford, afterwards to Honiton, and under whom he had been curate for some years. The Rev. E. A. May is curate at the present time.

The following is a list of the Vicars of St. Mary's from the earliest record we can find :

1558 to 1604—Henry Wills.

1605 to 1637—John Devenish.

1638 to 1669—George Wotton,
(including his curacy from 1638 to 1643—)

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probably curate-in-charge.

1669 to 1719—William Allen.

1719 to 1727—Laurance Payne (who was connected with the church from ' 1696, signing his name as " vicar," though not actually such till the death of William Allen in Feb., 1719).

1728 to 1731—No record-of a vicar; registers signed by " John Wicksted, . curate""

1733 to 1740—Moses Williams.

1741 to 1742—No record of a vicar; Ben Burroughs curate.

1742 to 1785 John Coles.

1785 to 1786—George Rowley.

1786 to 1844—William Wollen, D.D.

1822 to 1844—James "Wollen, son of above, acted for his father, and was regarded almost in the light of a Vicar. ,

1844 to 1848—Daniel Nihill.

1848 to 1856—Thomas George James.

1856 to 1864—M. F. Sadler. He afterwards accepted the living of Bedford, and was made a Prebendary of "Wells Cathedral.

1864 to present time—W. G. Fitzgerald.

This list may be taken as being pretty accurate, although it is very difficult to trace the exact, years when the various persons became vicars. Two former curates of the church have recently passed away—The Rev. J. S. Wilkins, vicar of Haywood, near Trowbridge, and the Rev. G-. A. Rogers, vicar of Christ Church, Dover, The latter was the author of a number of religious . works ; and many present residents gratefully remember his ministrations in the town.

The second mentioned in the list, John Devenish, was a man of some note, as was also John Norman, " minister of St.. Mary's." These two were the clerical leaders of a movement in Bridgwater against religious persecution, and the new rites and ceremonies which Laud was trying to introduce into the Church ; and their work and efforts were vigorously seconded by young Robert Blake, who was afterwards the celebrated Admiral. His uncle, Humfrey Blake, was churchwarden,

and as such was 'on one occasion enjoined by the Bishop of Bath and Wells to do penance, for the crime of not " presenting "Devenish for ecclesiastical censure, for preaching as usual a lecture in the church on market day, and using a short prayer. . Devenish was afterwards suspended on account of these " lectures." John Norman was the author of several pamphlets and books, and was, in May, 1663, tried at Taunton, under the Act of Uniformity, for having unlawfully assembled and preached to a company. He was ordered to be imprisoned at Ilchester, where . he remained some years, dying in 1668. He was buried in the precincts off our church, as shown by the register : "Deb. 9, 1668. Johannes Norman, *Presbiter Doctus*"

The Rev. Wm. Allen, who died in Feby., 1719, was vicar of the church for the long period of fifty years (this statement being confirmed by a supplementary entry in the register), and was buried at Goathurst. It will be noticed that several of the vicars were connected with the church for thirty or even forty years. An amusing incident is related with reference to a former vicar, who when one of the Whitfield's came down to Bridgwater to preach, assisted to pump over him with one of the town, fire engines, brought out for the purpose.

The services in the church on Sunday comprise: Early celebration of Holy Communion at nine o'clock on the first and third Sundays in each month, and on other Sundays after the morning service ; morning service at eleven, afternoon at half-past three, and evening at half-past six. On Wednesday and Fridays there is a service at twelve o'clock, and during Lent service every day. Within the memory of some readers, in order that there might be an evening service, the Rev. John White Middleton was: appointed by a church committee as extra preacher, his ministrations being paid for by private subscriptions. He is described as having been a wonderfully earnest and vigorous preacher, and his local reputation is still brilliant. There are several pictorial engravings of him extant in the town.

There are forty-six free seats in the church, each representing six, seven, or

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nine sittings. The church will seat about 1,500. The sums received as pew rents provide for the payment of £60 yearly toward the salary of a curate, the salary of the organist, lighting, the church, attendants, &c.

Since the preceding was written three very handsome stained glass windows (supplied by Messrs, Clayton and Bell, London); have been placed in the east chapel. Two were erected to the Sealy family by Miss Sealy, of The Priory, Bridgwater, and depict eighteen scenes from the life of Christ. The first bears the inscription : " To the glory of God, and sacred to the memory, of the Sealy family, for some centuries resident in Bridgwater, many of whom are buried in a vault in the chancel of the church, about eleven feet from, these windows." Two scrolls have the texts, "Now hath Christ been raised from the dead," and ".Death is swallowed up in victory." On the second window are the texts, " I am the Resurrection and the Life," and " I know that my Redeemer liveth," and at the bottom runs the following inscription : "To the glory of God, and sacred to the memory of John Sealy, who died 15th December, A.D. 1864, aged 84 years. Also; of Emma, his wife, who died 25th August, A.D. 1825, aged 27 years. Also of their two sons, John Lovell Sealy, who died 25th July, A.D. 1876, aged 56 years, and Edward Grey Sealy, who died 31st October, A.D. 1864, aged 41 years." In each window, are representations, of the family coats of arms, with the mottoes, " *Confido* " (I trust"), and " *Concipe spes certas* " (" Conceive sure hope.") The third window, and the largest, was . the gift of Miss Plowman, erected to the memory of members of her family. It illustrates the text—" For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger and ye took me in : naked and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me *St Mattheiu. xxv., 35, 36.*

In another page we gave the names of the first churchwardens of which there is any record. The present churchwardens are four, in. number, viz., Messrs. C. Knowles, J. Leaker, S. Chapman, and H. Knight..

The parish clerk is Mr. George Lockyer, who is remarkably well informed on all points connected with the. church, and to whose intelligence and kindness we have been much indebted in the compilation of this work.

In an earlier portion of this book we alluded to the fact that the west end of the church is shortly to be given over to the hands of the restorers. That eminent architect, Mr. John D. Sedding (of the Diocesan Society, &c.), has, we understand, recently spent a day in making a minute examination of the tower, &c., with a view to the opening out of the western arch. His report, which is a favourable one, has received the acquiescence of the Lord Bishop of the Diocese, who has kindly promised his assistance in the work. It is hoped that the sympathy of the parishioners and general inhabitants will be aroused with regard to the matter.

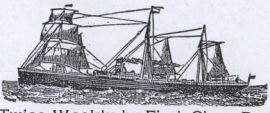
In conclusion, we may express a hope that we have, in tracing the events connected with the sacred edifice, aroused a more than passing interest in the beautiful parish, church of St. Mary the Virgin, Bridgwater, of which the inhabitants are so justly proud.



The typeset advertisement pages continue overleaf

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