

I. THE BRIDGE

If I were asked to put a group of students in the way of learning something of the medieval history of this old river-port, I think I should begin by taking them straight to the Bridge. It is our *fons et origo*.

It is the hub of our universe. It is our godmother, and it is our name.

For the first thing that we know of this place is from the lips of its manorial representatives, the Domesday inquisitors, who entered it in their record as Brugie, which to-day would be Bridge.

The Saxon bridge therefore would seem to have preceded the Saxon manor which grew up in its neighbourhood on that same ridge of red marl which had made the bridge practicable in this low-lying river valley.

It seems just possible that it may have been a link between burh and burh in that ring of defences which Alfred's immediate successors threw around Wessex. We hazard the suggestion but we do not know.

When the manor changed its wide-acred Saxon lord Maerleswegen for the Fleming, Walter of Douai, it found an agnomen in the name of its new master, which might be spelt Walter, Water or Wauter, and was certainly pronounced Wauter. With this change in the place-name we may compare Stoke Courcy, Norton Fitzwarren, GCurry Mallet and others where the family name of the new lord is added to the Saxon name of the manor.

This bridge, which gave the manor its name, was presumably of wood, and it may well be that the timber of which its beams were made was felled in the neighbouring forest of North Petherton. And such, doubtless, it remained till great things happened at the close of the twelfth century, when William Briwer had come into possession of the manor, for in the last year he obtained a charter from King John, and Bruges or Brugeswalter became a borough.

William was very active in the next few years. A strong castle was built close to the bridge, and its triple-arched water-gate is standing to this day. The stones of the parish church show work of the early thirteenth century. And Leland, when he visited the place three hundred years later, was told that the stone bridge which he saw was "begon of William Bruer, the first lord of that towne, yn King Richard the first and King John's dayes." Of this more anon.

By great good fortune, Bridgwater has preserved a mass of her documents which

throw light on her history. To begin with there is a most important Ordinance of the Commonalty, undated but belonging to the early years of the borough, in which mention is made of the bridge. The Ordinance, which is in Latin, lays down various rights and local laws with the penalties for infringement, and one of the clauses, being Englished, reads thus:

We will, moreover, and grant that if any of us be elected to the office of steward of the Blessed Mary or of the Cross of the church of the said Borough or to the custody of the bridge of the said Borough and shall have taken the office or the bailiwick aforesaid attending on the said stewards, they shall give account of monies thence proceeding to the said stewards of the Gild and shall satisfy the same thereof as often as and whenever they are required by them.

The bridge fund would thus appear to have its special steward in this century, though later we shall find it more closely associated with the chapel of the Holy Cross than it appears to be at this time. The sacred duty of building and preserving bridges in the middle ages is well known to all who are familiar with Jusserand's delightful pages. There is no need to dwell on it here beyond pointing out how closely the bridge is linked to the chantries—one might say in the same breath. We shall find this religious aspect of bridge maintenance continuing till the New Religion comes in.

This bridge of William Briwer would seem to have lasted to nearly the close of the fourteenth century, and here seems an occasion to see exactly what Leland has to say. These are his words:

The ryver of Ivel [he should have said Peret or Perred, now Parrett] there joynith with the salt creeke, and arme of the se rennith crosse thorough this strete from south to north; and to passe over this arme there is a right auncient stronge and high bridge of stone of 3 arches begon of William Bruer. ... One Triveth, a gentilman, as I there lernid, of Devonshir or Cornewalle, finishid this bridge: and the Trivetes, beyng the armes that Triveth gave, appere there in a sheld yn the coping of the chekes of the bridge.

Leland's use of the words "begon" and "finishid" suggests that for well nigh 200 years Briwer's bridge stood incomplete, and that it was not until Sir John Trevet came to the rescue that it was actually finished. Whether complete or not, we constantly find the earlier bridge spoken of as "the great bridge" to distinguish it presumably from the South

bridge or Lyme bridge, which stood a little further up the river, probably made of timber and serving for foot-passengers. It has long since disappeared and been forgotten. The name occurs in a map published in 1835. There is no proof that it crossed the river, however; and it may simply have carried the path that ran along the east bank over the town ditch where this joined the Parrett.

The reign of Richard II has left us a fuller account of the town than any other — church, chantries, and gild accounts, and the roll for a whole year of the court leet. It is of this period that three deeds have been preserved to us which tell us something of the circumstances in which “the new bridge” was built. Of the three one is merely the duplicate of another so far as the text goes, so that we have only to deal with the actual contents of two.

The first is dated the 22nd of March, 1395. It is a parchment 4½" x 9¼" and is written in French — of a sort! Originally there were six seals set to it, of which one is but fragmentary and another has disappeared. The text, freely translated, runs thus:

To all those who shall see or hear these letters Thomas Lyons and John ffytelton send greeting in the Lord. Whereas John Cole, William Thomere, John Sydenham of Bruggewater [probably to distinguish him from Sydenham of Sydenham], Hugh Mareys, John Broke, and Richard ffournour are bound to us in CC pounds sterling and each of them in the whole, to be paid at a certain time and place, as appears more clearly by a bond made by them; therefore we the aforesaid Thomas and John ffytelton will and grant that if the commonalty of Bruggewater at their own charges well and suitably perform and accomplish all the work of the new bridge of Bruggewater after CCC marks devised by Monseigneur John Treuet have been expended on the said work that then the said obligation of cc pounds shall be null and shall lose its force, and otherwise shall stand fully in its force. In witness whereof the parties aforesaid have set their seals to these indentures. Written the twenty second day of March in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Richard the Second.

The second parchment is dated four days later and from it we learn that Lyons and Fytelton were the executors of Sir John Trevet's will. From the deed just quoted we know that they had bound six prominent burgesses, possibly officials of the Gild Merchant or of one of the religious gilds, to

see that the commonalty took on the business after 300 marks, bequeathed by Sir John, had been spent on the reconstruction of the bridge. The Big Six, in their turn, we learn from the later document, had bound all the rest of the commonalty, of whom seventeen are particularly mentioned, in similar terms to those in which they themselves had been bound by the executors. To this their six seals (one has disappeared) were affixed, and to the third document, its counterpart, the seals of the seventeen had been set and the great seal of the Gild Merchant — which was indeed the Borough Seal — with its conventional bridge on which is superposed a conventional castle.

A sum of 300 marks or £200 represents a considerable outlay and might well mean a new bridge and not merely the completion of Briwer's. It may be useful to compare with this expenditure the sum spent on building a new slip on the south side of the bridge a century later. Fortunately the complete account of this undertaking, dated 1488, is preserved, and from it we learn that the total cost of building this slip was £20. 7s. 5d. or about a tenth of the amount of Sir John Trevet's bequest. *

Like other medieval town bridges, the “great bridge” had houses on and near it, from which the borough derived rents so long as they were occupied, and was at constant expense for their upkeep and repair.

For dawbyng and mendyng, the house at Brigge, id.

For dabbng, and spikyng the tenement on the bridge, iis.

For reparacion of the howse apone the burge; — for spekis and yerdis, vid.

[Odgers: “Some MS. Accounts of the Commonalty of Bridgwater,” *Som. Arch. Proceedings*) 1877, vol. 23.]

There is yet another document, or rather a draft of a document, which throws some light on the maintenance of the bridge. From the names of the vicar and the mayor, it can be fixed in the year 1485 or thereabouts. The “great bridge” had once more fallen into disrepair and money was needed for its restoration. In this appeal we have brought home to us very clearly the medieval view that the construction and upkeep of bridges was a holy privilege and duty for all Christians which brought with it a corresponding blessing. The Latin of this draft is unspeakable but the tenor of its contents is as follows:

To all belonging to Mother Church, to whose notice these present letters shall come, Master Richard Croke, Bachelor in the faculty of theology and vicar perpetual of the parish church of the Blessed Mary the virgin of Bruggewater in the diocese of Bath and Wells, Nicholas Job, Mayor of the aforesaid town, and the commonalty of the same, salvation in that Water [whence] has flowed salvation for all who are! to be saved. Know that; we by our, unanimous assent and consent, of our faithfulness and care, have; ordained and by. these, presents constituted our beloved in Christ, Robert Johnson and. William Grey, our true and lawful proctors and messengers [*nuntios*], special and general, to collect and receive from any of the faithful in Christ and devoted to God their alms, gifts and bequests in the name and honour of God, and all benefactors together with all the rest of their brethren and sisters of the chapel, of Holy Cross of the same church, and of the high cross standing in . the midst of the High Street, as ;well as of the fabric of the bridge of the town aforesaid which is crazy and broken down [*debilis et ruinosus*] on account of the divers and many vehicles from all over the country which daily come and go, as well as being subject to the rush of the tidal wave [the head of the tide, locally known as the "bore"] against the said bridge, to the serious hurt of the same and to the great danger of all the people coming and going from divers parts of the Realm of England. This bridge cannot be duly maintained and repaired without the alms of Christ's faithful for which great indulgence is granted as appears indented by the lord pope in his Bull.

This adds one more example to those already known of the grant of the favours of the Church to those who helped of their substance or handiwork to maintain the bridges and roads.

So far I have found no trace in the muniments of any chapel on the bridge, but that there was one we know from the plea recorded by the Franciscans of Bridgwater shortly before the suppression of their House that their income had greatly fallen off, and that one of its few remaining sources was their service of the chapel on the bridge.

Trevet's bridge stood for 400 years. It was demolished in 1795, and was replaced by an iron structure. But after the Middle Ages it played a more important part in the country's history, perhaps we should say in the country's military history, than ever it had before. Bridgwater Castle was occupied, by

the royalists under Sir Hugh Wyndham when Fairfax, in July 1645, came before the place, Eastover soon fell before the parliamentarians, but the narrow bridge formed a sufficient obstacle to their further advance, until an unexpected surrender brought this last key to the west under their power.

Once more the tramp of armed men was heard over Trevet's bridge. In his ill-advised campaign the Duke of Monmouth brought his troops from Taunton, and the proclamation which had been made there was repeated on the Cornhill at Bridgwater. The men passed over the bridge and were camped in Castle field, whence they were led on their fruitless marches, until once more returned thither, they issued forth to the fatal fight on Sedgemoor.

"About eleven a-clock at Night" says Oldmixon, "I saw the Duke of Monmouth ride out, attended by his Life-Guard of Horse and tho' then but a Boy, observ'd an Alteration in his Look, which I did not like ; for not being able to judge of the Goodness or Badness of his Cause, I ran down with the Stream, and was one of its Well-wishers."

II. ST MARY'S CHANTRY

We have already learned from the thirteenth century Ordinance of the Bridgwater Gild Merchant that the stewards of St Mary, of the Holy Cross and of the Bridge were alike responsible to the Seneschals of the Gild.

Long before the borough fathers began to broaden the church on either side with chapels in honour of the Holy Trinity and of St George, long before we hear of chantries of St Katherine or St Anne, the chapel of St Mary's chantry, on the east, we presume, of the high altar, appealed to the devotion of the faithful. Often in the thirteenth century were gifts and bequests made to this altar, and sometimes the altar of the Great Cross above the rood screen was a sharer.

Such is the gift of a rent charge rising from a tenement described in a deed bearing the date of 1267.

Be it known to all present and to come that I, Eustace of Hymiok, have given, granted and by this my present charter confirmed in support of the upkeep of the chantry of the mass of the blessed Mary in the parish church of Bruggewater twelve pence of yearly rent to be gathered yearly from the whole of the Tenement wherein I dwell in Bruggewater on the south side of the Tenement of John Savan.

The rest of the deed, which is in Latin, is

formal and gives such powers of distraint to the proctors of the chantry as were necessary should any hitch in collecting a rent charge arise.

There are many such gifts and, after a century has passed by, the veil is lifted and we are allowed to get some idea of how the proctors of the chantry used the money with which it was so liberally endowed. Bridgwater is fortunate in possessing one of the earliest series of chantry accounts extant. They run from 1368 to 1387 with two gaps only —one of five years and the other of one year. It is notorious that medieval balance sheets are apt not to balance, and, written in paragraphs as they are and in roman numerals, the wonder is that they ever do balance. That of 1369, which will serve as typical, appears to have worked out correctly, and the wardens, Adam Leyborn and Nicholas Ferour, and their clerk are to be congratulated. The original is in Latin. First, the credit side of the account is shown beginning with a balance of £6. 14s. 8d. The receipts are placed under two headings: (a) rents of assize, or fixed rents, (b) outside receipts, *receptiones forinsece*,

a) Ordinary rents, £5. 6s. 4½d. Increase in Dodyng's Cottage, 1s. 6d.; Increase in cottage opposite Vicar's tenement, 6d.; New rent of two cottages in Friarn St. late Thomas Somer's, 3s.; Acre of meadow at Bouremede, 2s. John Halewey's tenement, 2s. —£5. 15s. 4½d.

b) Candles sold for various funerals, 7s. 2½d.; 2 veils sold, 1s. 6d. ; 1 pan sold, 10d. ; John atte Watere and Richard Diere's line for land at la Slape, 1s. ; 13 lb. wax [at 7½d] ; John John Betere, 8s. 1½d. ; 14 lb. wax John Morcok, 2s. 6d. ; 8 lb. wax [at 1s, 1d] Adam Westeleigh, 8s. 8d. ; various debts from preceding year, £2. 13s. 2d. — £4. 3s. 0d.

The debit side is also divided under two heads: (c) rents unpaid, and (d) expenditure.

c) 2 cottages, late T. Somer's, 4d. ; tenement, late Godwyne's, 1s.; tenement, late Bokeland's, 1s.; tenement, late Spicer's, 1s.; Richard Clerc's tenement, 2s. 6d. — less 2s. = 6d.—3s. 10d.

d) 9 lb. wax at 7½d., 5s. 7½d.; 3 gallons oil at 1s, 1d., 3s. 3d.; 1 pottle oil, 6d.; 4 gals. oil at 1s, 4d., 5s. 4d.; 3 qts oil, 1s.; 3 gals, oil at 1s., 3s. ; 1 pottle oil, 8d. ; 1 gal. oil, 9d.; wax making for feasts of Purification and Assumption, 6s. 5d.; Robt. Croil, for wax making, *per annum*, 2s.; making 1 "spere" [spar] for a house in North St., 1s. 4d.; making a chest in the

church, 10½d. ; repairing a chalice, 6s. 7½d.; chaplain's salary, £4. 6s. 8d. ; chaplain for drink, 4d.; Provosts for burgage rents, 4s. 2d.; parchment, 4d.; washing vestments, 4d.; making this account, 2s.; chaplain's stipend between Michaelmas and Easter, £2. —£8. 11s. 10d.

We thus have a balance to the good of £7, 17s, 4½d From this the wardens appear to carry forward £5 to their successors in office, and this leaves £17s. 4d, From this sum they make a further deduction of debits of divers tenants whose names they have passed on to the new wardens in a schedule, and finally declare themselves to be owing 9s, 1d.

On the *dorse* of the parchment is an account of the stock in hand of oil and wax. Credit and debit are shown as with the money. Of wax 4 lb. had been received as rent, 9 lb. had been bought, 115 lb. received from funerals; total 128 lb. On the other side, 38 lb. had been used for the feast of the Assumption, 25 lb. had been sold, and 65 lb. passed over to Thomas Ingilby and Walter Dodde, their successors. Of oil they state they have bought 12 gals. 3 quarts, which corresponds with their account, and have used 12 gallons in keeping a lamp burning in the choir of the church through the year. Total, say they, 12 gals. 1 qt., " And there remains half a gallon of oil." Probably it was difficult to balance.

It will be remembered that in the previous century Edward I had tried to check the continual gifts of land to the Church. Land thus bestowed ceased to owe him military service, and the Crown was by so much the loser In 1391 an extension of Edward's Statute *de la Religiosis* was made so as to cover land given to guilds and fraternities and even to the "Mayors, Bailiffs, and Commons of Cities, Boroughs and other Towns, which have a perpetual Commonalty." Thus we find that when the Gild Merchant of Bridgwater wished to re-found and endow the chantry of the B.V.M. they had to obtain a special licence from the king. Gross has printed the text of this licence in his *Gild Merchant* vol. 11. p. 353. It is granted to the two seneschals of the Gild and is dated 28 September, 1392.

In the following spring (4 May, 1393) the seneschals endowed the chaplain of the chantry and laid down the rules governing his duties and perquisites.

To all the sons of Holy Mother Church to whom these presents shall come John Sydenham and Walter Holmoure, seneschals of the Gild Merchant of the town of

Bridgwater and the commonalty of the same town in the diocese of Bath and Wells, eternal salvation in the Lord.

Let it be known to all of you that by the special licence of our most illustrious prince and lord, Lord Richard, by the grace of God King of England, the second since the Conquest, granted to us in this respect, the statute of mortmain notwithstanding, we, John and Walter, seneschals, and the commonalty aforesaid, give, grant, and by this our present charter confirm to Master: Robert Northover, chaplain of the chantry of the Blessed Mary in the parish church of Bridgwater aforesaid, who now is, and to the successors of the same Master Robert Northover, chaplain in the said chantry, in aid of their maintenance for ever, and to perform and celebrate services or divine offices and all other, duties hereunder written, in the aforesaid parish church every year for ever, ten messuages, five acres of ploughland, three acres of meadow and forty shillings of yearly rent with their appurtenances in Bridgwater. To have and .to hold [&c]. Rendering therefor yearly to the chief lords of that fee the services therefor due and customary. And we, John and Walter, seneschals, and the commonalty abovesaid, our heirs and successors, are held to warrant [&c].

Reserving to us seneschals and our successors for ever the faculty of presenting a suitable chaplain, confirmed in the holy order of priesthood, to the said chantry as often as and whenever it shall be wanting a chaplain.

Now the charges which the chaplain of the said chantry for the time being ought to sustain and support, and the offices which he himself ought to celebrate or perform, of which mention is made above, are these.

Namely, that the chaplain of the said chantry whosoever, who for the time being is, is to reside in it continually, and unless he be hindered by bodily infirmity, as frequently as possible, saving his honour and due devotion, to celebrate the solemnities of masses and to be present surpliced in the choir of the said parish church daily at each canonical hour, together with his clerk suitable for this end, whom the same chaplain shall provide for this at his own costs and charges only and entirely.

And to this end the same chaplain shall have and also occupy the place on the north side of the said choir nearest the entrance of the same choir, namely where the deacon of the said church was wont formerly to stand.

And the same chaplain shall be obedient and reverent to the vicar of the said church according to what is becoming to his rank and office.

The same chaplain also shall provide a lamp burning continually day and night for ever in the said choir and thirteen tapers burning in the said choir to be renewed yearly on the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary.

And the said tapers as often as they are so renewed shall weigh thirty and three pounds of wax.

Also two torches to be lit and to burn daily at the Elevation of the Body of Christ in saying the mass of the Blessed Mary in the said choir. These are to be renewed of sixteen pound weight every year on the aforesaid vigil.

Also two tapers burning at the daily mass of the Blessed Mary.

Also one candle of wax burning every night while the antiphon is being sung before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the said church.

Also he shall provide and maintain a warden to guard and regulate the Clock (unless he is willing himself to guard and regulate it) and at his own costs and charges alone and entirely shall provide and maintain all the lesser or small essentials of brass and iron pertaining to mending and maintaining the said clock.

And the said chaplain shall dwell where the chaplains of the said chantry were wont to dwell of old, namely in the house next to the vicar's house on the west side.

And since by an ancient and praiseworthy custom heretofore observed, one moiety of the wax carried with the bodies of the dead into the parish church aforesaid and placed over such bodies at the obsequies and on the day of their burial, belonged together with the small candles to the vicar of the church aforesaid; and since the other moiety of wax (only excepting all small candles) belonged to the chaplain of the chantry aforesaid, by our direction and that of our predecessors — parishioners of the parish church aforesaid — from a time and for a time whereof the contrary memory does not exist to man; we give and grant to the chaplain of the said chantry for the time being and to the chantry itself in accordance with these presents, in aid of the maintenance of the charges aforesaid for ever, the same moiety of wax (only excepting the small candles) which

from of old belonged to the chaplain of the chantry aforesaid as has been already declared.

In testimony whereof, all and singular, we have caused our common seal to be set to these.

Given at Bruggwater the fourth day of May, A.D. 1393 and in the sixteenth year regnant of King Richard the Second after the Conquest.

A parchment was sealed on the succeeding day which is difficult of interpretation. It contains a grant made by the rectors and the vicar of the parish church to the chaplain. The rectors were Wm Patehulle, the Master of the Hospital of St John the Baptist, and the brethren of that foundation of Augustinian Canons. The vicar was William Hurst. The grant made by them seems to have been an addition to the chaplain's stipend, given to him as a priest attached to the church. Here is a translation of the essential passage:

...a penny for every day, as often and whensoever two masses happen to be celebrated for the dead in one day at the high altar of the said church, at a funeral or on the day of an anniversary or of a trental, albeit one of the said masses be of St Mary or of the day, provided that a penny happen to be offered at the second of such masses.

It would seem that the chaplain might lay claim to the penny as his share of the offertory, whether he was present at the mass or not.

The 18th of the next month saw Robert Northover admitted by the Bishop to the chaplaincy on the presentation of the seneschals of the Gild Merchant. The document is sealed with a very fine impression of Ralph Erghum's seal.

There is one more parchment which concerns this refoundation of the chantry of the B.V.M. and which throws more light on the transaction with the king. It is dated a year later.

Be it known to all men by these presents that I, Theobald Wykham, sheriff of Somerset, have received from John Sydenham and Walter Holymore, seneschals of the Gild Merchant of Briggewater and from the Commonalty, of the same town 40s. which they owe to Anne, Queen of England, *de auro suo* of the fine of 20 li. in that the King granted and gave licence to the same John and Walter that they might give and assign ten messuages, five acres of ploughland, three

acres of meadow and forty shillings of rent with [their appurtenances] in Briggewater, which are not held of the King, to a chaplain celebrating the divine office daily in the church of the Blessed Mary of Briggewater, to hold in mortmain. Of which 40s I confess myself to be paid and am held by the presents to acquit the aforesaid John, Walter and the Commonalty thereof toward the aforesaid Queen. In testimony whereof I have set the seal of my office to the presents. Given at Briggewater the fifth day of May in the 17th year of the reign of King Richard the second.

As with all the preceding documents quoted, the original of this also is in Latin.

There is among the archives a Latin document giving a statement of the financial position of the chantry of the B.V.M. when the dissolution came. As the figures agree with those in an English account published in the second volume of the Somerset Record Society, the latter may as well appear here:

The Chauntrie of oure lady w^hin the same paryshe Church Is yerely worthe in Landes tenements and hereditaments in the tenure of sondery persones as maye appere particulerly more at large by the rentall of the same ix li. viij s. viij d.

Wherof in

Rents resolute p^d yerely xxviiij s.

And so.

Remayneth clere . . . viij li. viij d.

Plate and Ornaments. None but a chalice — viij oz.

Memorandum; John Tollor clerke of thage of xl yeres incumbent ther.

And so the chantry of St Mary had finished its course. When the end came, it ranked in wealth below that of the Holy Trinity. One wonders what had become of all the rich plate, ornaments and vestments of these chantries. One chalice is all that is reported in each.

III THE LAW COURTS

When Bridgwater received its charter in A.D. 1200 the manor court with its machinery for settling civil suits, such as concerned debt, detinue, trespass and the like, and for policing the manor, was replaced by the borough court, which in the years following carried out the same duties. But some things were not quite the same. The status of the court, like that of the new burgesses, was definitely raised. In the court of a justice on eyre, instead of being represented by the reeve and four men, the borough was now present in the person of twelve of its

burgesses. This privilege was one of the most distinctive characteristics of a borough.

That Ordinance of the Commonalty already mentioned, belonging probably to the days of Edward I, tells us some of the pleas with which the borough court expected to concern itself. The two seneschals or stewards are to have power to punish offenders against the ordinances here laid down.

...We will, moreover, that if any of us brings a charge against any of his peers of theft, forgery, neifty (i.e. of being born in bondage), adultery or excommunication, and be convicted thereof before the seneschals aforesaid, he shall be amerced and bound to our commonalty in twelve pence and shall make satisfaction to the other in accordance with the judgment of his peers.

We will also and grant that if any of us shall implead any his peer in whatever cause without the borough aforesaid, unless justice in amity — *quod iustum fuerit via amoris* — be denied to him by his adversary in the view of his peers in the borough aforesaid, he shall be amerced and held to the commonalty in twelve pence.

...We will and grant that none of us in the said borough shall buy meat or fresh [*frixas*, metathesis for *friscas*] fish before the third hour in order to sell at a profit, and if any of us does so, he shall be held to the commonalty in the price of the fish or flesh so bought or sold.

The curtain is raised higher when we reach the latter part of the fourteenth century. For a whole year, beginning in Oct. 1387, we have the roll of the borough court. We may assume that it sat in the Gildhall and before the two seneschals, for their expenses are usually charged at the foot. It met invariably on a Monday, and in this twentieth century the borough justices still sit on a Monday. The first business recorded consists generally of failures to appear either as prosecutor or defendant in pleas of debt, detinue, etc., or to carry out the precepts of the last court.

Then follows the police business, the cases to be dealt with by a Court Leet. For this purpose the area of the borough was divided into twelve wards — nine within the gates and three without — 1, Without the East Gate; 2, Eastover; 3, On the Weir; 4, Damyet; 5, 'Twixt Church and Bridge; 6 St Mary Street; 7, High Street on the N. side; 8, High Street on the S. side; 9, Orloue Street; 10, Friarn Street; 11, Without the West Gate, toward the park; 12, Without the West Gate, toward Kidsbury. Each of these wards was in the charge of two wardens, who seem to have surrendered their

office in October, either to be reappointed, or replaced. In turn each pair gave an account of the ward for which they were responsible, and as a rule announced simply that all was well in their bailiwick. But sometimes, at least in one or two of the wards, there are breaches of the peace which have to be reported.

Estovere. Henry Hopere and John Pympol, wardens, present that Elota, servant of John Sydenham rightly raised the hue on Agnes, servant of Reginald Spencer.

Agnes — the little hussy ! — was found to be at fault, and was fined 3*d.* Sometimes, of course, the boot was on the other leg, and then the payment of the fine fell on the false or hasty accuser.

St Mary St. Wm Glover and Thos. Scidifa; wardens, present that Agnes Avenes wrongly raised the hue on Richard Deighere. So she is fined [3*d.*]. Surety, Wm Stede.

A more serious assault may double or treble the fine.

High St. on the S. side.... And that Joan, the wife of Rd. Tredegold drew blood, against the peace, of Alice Bercorn. So she is fined [6*d.*]. And that the same Alice rightly raised the hue on the said Joan. So she is fined [3*d.*]. Sureties, the Wardens.

The heat in July may have been the cause of an outbreak of violence, which seems to have exceeded in warmth the ordinary assaults of cooler months.

St Mary St. Walter Deigher (who did not appear), and Lewis Bouchour present that John Wilet (6*d.*) drew blood, against the peace, of Lewis Bouchour. So he is fined. Surety, Robert Muleward. And that the same John (3*d.*) made an assault, against the peace, with a club on the said Lewis Bouchour. So he is fined. And because the said wardens (2*d.*) did not produce the said club, they are fined: And order was made that the said club be brought at the next court. And that the said John (6*d.*) drew blood, against the peace, of Alice, wife of the said Lewis. So he is fined. Surety, Rob. Muleward. And that the same Alice rightly raised the hue 011 the said John (3*d.*). So he is fined. Surety, as before. And that the said Lewis (6*d.*) drew blood against the peace of John Wilet. So he is fined. And that the same Lewis (3*d.*) made an assault against the peace, on the said John. — So he is fined — with a fork. And because the Wardens (1*d.*) did not produce the fork, they are fined. And order was, made to produce it at the next court. And that the same Lewis made an assault, against the peace, with a "polax" on

the said John Henton [*sic*]. So he is fined. And because they did not produce, the said "polax" they are fined.

Altogether a pretty quarrel! But the court seems to have acted quite impartially between John and the warden. The clerk seems, to have wearied of inserting the fines or to have, become muddled—it was the middle of July—but he added a marginal note of the total cost of this; little affair as 2s. 9d.—a heavy amount for those days.

After the reports of the wardens have been dealt with, offences against the assize of bread, of ale, etc., are considered.

The provosts (or reves) of the borough present that John Everard (2d.), Wm Bakere(2d.) and Joan Bakeres [i.e. "bakeress"] (2d), bakers, have made white bread of short weight, as weighed in their presence. This is the first offence.

Lastly the proceeds of the court are summed up, as well as the costs, which are the expenses of the stewards and the purchase of parchment. The "perquisites" or profits vary from 2s. 7d. to 10s. 11d., the stewards' expenses are regularly entered at 2s. and the cost of the parchment as 2d. When there has been a sitting of the Court of Piepowder, of which more anon, its proceeds are added, varying from 4d. to 10d.

But twice. in the year, at Michaelmas and Hocktide, the View of Frankpledge is taken, when the proceedings become more varied and interesting; The stewards now receive 3s. 4d. instead of 2s. and the fines run up to a total of £2. 14s. and £2. 13s. 2d.

The ordinary business is first proceeded with, but after the reports of the wardens have been taken, the presentation of twelve freemen is taken on oath of all sorts of offences against the laws and customs of the borough, as for example:

That Wm Blacche (3d.), John Tannere (3d.) and Richard Vikerys (3d.) wash their skins and other nuisances—*putridines*—in the same brook at the rear of their gardens, to the annoyance of their neighbours, and order is made to cease this under a penalty of 40d. And that Wm Blacche and Richard Saltere (2d.) allow their timber to lie in the common street to the annoyance of passers by. Order to move it before next court under a penalty of 40d. And that John Hegge, John Horloc and Lewis Boucher throw the insides of beasts and other *putridines* by the corner of the churchyard opposite the burgages of Thomas Hermyte and John Sely to the annoyance of

passers by. ... And that Wm Bal (6d.) made a rescue on Wm Tannere, late provost of the borough, in the discharge of his office....And that John Ruddok (3d.) and [others] allow the highway round their stalls in the market opposite their burgages to remain full of holes and muddy—*profundam et lutosam*, so that people to their detriment cannot cross there....And that Richard Maynard (6d.) and [others] are common regrators to the serious detriment of the community... And that Richard Maynard: (3d.) and [others] are following two trades, namely the trade of butcher and that of "piemaker." ...And that Thos. Fout (3d.) and [others], common inn-keepers, are making horse-bread in their inns, of short weight....And that a foreign—*extraneus*—butcher from Shapwyke [a village 10 miles distant] is selling raw-meat privily and especially in Richard Maynard's house, against the ordinance....And that John Hegge and Thomas Fout (6d.), millers, have taken tolls wrongly and against the assize....And that [certain men, including three Tauntonians], cloth merchants, called "drapers," stand outside the common merchants' stalls on market days and against the custom of the town of Bruggewater to the prejudice of its... liberties.... And that Wm Delamere (6d.) made a rescue on John Lombe, Bailiff, taking from him two oxen which he had tried to impark at the suit of Walt. Willam, being in the custody of the Friars. And because John Vikerys (3l.) and Rich. Debill (3l.) hid them, they are fined. And that the same John Lome, bailiff, pursued the same parties as far as the bailiwick of Orelouestrete and there rightly raised the hue on the said Wm Delamere (6d.)....And because John Aubyn (3d.) and Wm Bakere (3d.), the wardens there, hid them, they are fined.

The twelve freemen having made their presentments, the "tasters" next come forward with theirs. They first name various brewers for fine against the next law-day, and say that they have handed a schedule containing these to the bailiffs.

Next they present that Richard Havene (3d.) and [others] have sold wine and beer by false measure and unsealed. And that Henry Houperre 4d.) has made beer harmful to men's bodies....And that Thos. Fout and Joan Coleman have tapped—*tappaverunt*—and sold beer outside the assize.

At Michaelmas the Tasters are chosen, and at the same time the Affeerers, the persons who assessed the fines, are named by the bailiff, for that court.

The precepts to remove timber, to mend roads, to clear channels, to remove nuisances, were not always obeyed directly, and in subsequent monthly courts the same names reappear and fresh fines are inflicted. On one occasion the whole commonaity is ordered to clear the channel that ran from the Cornhill to the bridge.;

The Court of Piepowder, which has been mentioned, was not peculiar to Bridgwater. It was associated with markets and especially with fairs. It was composed of merchants, and in Bridgwater appears to have been presided over by the provosts. Its *raison d'être* was to allow of summary justice being done in the case of disputes as to weight, measure, or quality that might arise in the trafficking among the buyers and sellers—the “dusty-feet” folk (*pieds poudres*). In the roll before us there are entries of profits derived from the Piepowder Court in eight months out of the twelve, and though the highest amount recorded is for the month during which St Matthew's fair was held, it is not much more than in ordinary months, and if Mid-summer fair was held after 14 June, it shows no result whatever.

Piepowder Courts were general, but there is record of a Court, which, so far as is known, was peculiar to this borough. On Monday in the octave of Hilary, 19 Jan., was held the Dorneday or Durneday Court. I have found no other record of its proceedings except in this particular roll, though; there are three Bridgwater Court rolls in the Record Office which give the total of its profits along with those of the Court Leet and the Court of Piepowder. In 1388 the clerk merely records that 71 suitors of the court are fined 6*d.* each for non-appearance, and one who has not paid rent in arrear “as the custom of this town requireth.” That is all, and we are left to guess the meaning of this scanty record. In an unexpected quarter another reference ‘to the court has recently turned up. This is a small parchment containing a deed, unfortunately badly stained, from which it appears that the lessor requires his lessees to keep him without liability on “les durne- dayys.” The suitors of the court would appear to be the holders of burgages in the borough and include the abbots of Dunkeswell and Muchelny, and the Prior of Taunton, each of whom is known to have had property in Bridgwater. A durn is a door in various dialects, and in the west country a “pair o’ durns” to this day signifies the jamb of a door. But what this court sat for is still an

unsolved puzzle.

IV THE RELIGIOUS HOUSES .

Two religious corporations were established in Bridgwater in the thirteenth century—a Hospital of Augustinian Canons at the East Gate and a House of Grey Friars not very far from the West Gate. The former owed its foundation to William Briwer, the latter to his son, who bore the same name.

The Hospital must have been founded not later than 1213, for in that year it was, we know, possessed of five acres in the vill. In the next year William endowed it with the tithes and advowson of the parish church which he had recovered some years before from the Priory of Bath.

Saving one hundred: shillings granted to the prior and monks of the church of , Bath by the said William annually, paid half at Easter and half at Michaelmas. And be it known that the cleric to whom William and his heirs shall grant that church shall do fealty to the monks or their successors and pay the aforesaid one hundred shillings. This concord was made in the presence of Savaric, bishop of Bath, and with his consent¹.

In January, 1215, six months after the interdict had been withdrawn, a charter was granted by King John “to the Hospital of St John the Baptist of Bridgwater and to the brethren there serving God.” It confirmed to the Canons

one hundred acres of land with their appurtenances in the vill of Brugeswalteri, which they hold of the gift of William Brewerre, and the church of Brugeswalteri with its appurtenances, save a hundred shillings to be paid to the monks of Bath yearly by the hands of the brethren of the same hospital. We confirm also to the same brethren of the hospital that they who wish to take burgages of the land of the same hospital shall have the same liberty both within the borough of Brugeswalteri and without the borough as the burgesses of Bruges have by a charter of the same William².

To this gift of the church of Bridgwater, the founder soon added that of the church of Isle Brewers, and before the close of the century, the Hospital was further enriched with the endowment of the churches of Lanteglos and Moorwenstow in Cornwall, and that of Wembdon, near Bridgwater. Later were added the church of Chilton Trinity, the chapels of Idstock and Huntstile, and the church of Northover. Beside these livings the Brethren possessed lands in Somerset and

Dorset.

The original care of the Master and Brethren was the maintenance of thirteen infirm persons besides the entertainment of pilgrims and religious who in the course of their journeyings might pass by the East Gate. But increased endowments brought increased responsibilities and before the close of the thirteenth century we find the Brethren have extended the work of the Hospital. In Bishop John's Register we find a

Bond given by Geoffry, Master of St John's, Bridgwater, in his Chapter, to Bp. de Marchia, to maintain six Chaplains celebrating daily in Hospital, in consideration of Bishop Burnel's benefactions [i.e. the impropriation of the Rectory of Wembdon in 1283], especially the appropriation of Morwenstow by Bp. of Exon. The six to make a complement of thirteen, besides Master, wearing the religious habit; the corporate funds to maintain also thirteen poor scholars living within walls, "*habiles ad informandum in grammatica*" who should be excused from full ritual that they may keep (*exerceant*) schools daily in the town; the Rector of the Schools in the town to send seven of his mendicant scholars for daily pittances from kitchen (gruel specified). [Then a long list of benefactors to share in the benefit of the masses, prayers, &c] These new objects not to abate the original duty of the House, viz. care of sick and stranger. The Bond to be, enforced by Bp.'s canonical authority. One copy to be enrolled in treasury of each Cathedral, each having assented and sealed. Wells, 5 Kal., Aug., 1298³

Thus was education of the young added to the Brethren's ministry to the sick. But this extension of duties produced unrest somewhere and we find the bishop, John of Drogheda, commissioning his official and a canon to sift rumours charging the Hospital with wronging the wayfarers of hospitality due to them. This was in 1325, and eleven years later there is evidence that the Master and Brethren were pleading poverty, for they are discharged from the payment of tenths on that excuse.

If for some reason the Hospital was not altogether popular at this time, in the last quarter of the century things had grown very much worse, and we find it the centre and apparently the cause of serious rioting. In 1379 there was controversy between the Bridgwater folk and the Master, Thomas Cadecote. In that year Thomas resigned, but not, it would seem, before certain people had

attacked him and the Brethren, broken in the door of their church, and kept them prisoners, refusing them permission to enter either church or hospital. There would seem to be some reason to suppose that the quarrel concerned the vicarage of the parish church of which the Master and Brethren were the rectors. Anyhow the name of Nicholas Frompton comes in, a priest who appears to have claimed the living. The only evidence that I have come across of his recognition as vicar is in a will dated July, 1383.

Item I leave to Dom. Nicholas Frompton, perpetual vicar of the church aforesaid, xii d.

This fracas led to the issue of a commission of oyer and terminer on 6 Feb., 1380 and again on 14 July, 1380, to hear the charge against the rioters, and on 14 April in the same year, William Camel, who was now Master, and the Brethren obtained a special protection touching the quarrel.

The next year, that of the Great Revolt, saw a renewal of the trouble. A large part of the country was seething with agitation and there are some features in the Bridgwater riots which are common to them and the risings in Kent and Essex. Professor Oman tells us that Frompton was in London at the time of the murder of the archbishop and the treasurer, and that in a week he was raising a mob in Bridgwater. Thomas Engilby, a yeoman, was, his fellow leader. Once more the Hospital was entered, and the Master compelled to grant the parish living to Frompton. Bonds representing debts owing to the canons were torn up by the townsfolk, and beyond that, the Master was forced to sign an undertaking to pay the town £200. Nor was the rioting without bloodshed. Engilby made raids on the village of East Chilton and the manor of Sydenham, and burnt the manor-rolls of Sir James Audley and of John Cole, the most prominent burgess during the reign of Richard II. He then marched to Ilchester after beheading Walter Baron, broke open the gaol there, caused Hugh Lavenham also to be beheaded, and carrying his head on the point of a spear to Bridgwater, fixed it with that of Walter Baron on the bridge.

Though both these leaders of revolt were condemned to death, they received free pardons in the spring of 1382.

In the *Close Rolls, Rich. II.* (11. pp. 104, 105), under date 13 Dec. 1381, we read:

Westminster. To the sheriff of Kent. Order

to cause proclamation to be made that all men desiring the benefit of the King's grace and pardon, except certain persons named in the King's court, the men of the city of Canterbury, the towns of Cantebrigge, Briggewater, St Edmunds, Beverley and Scardeburgh, shall, before Whitsuntide next repair or send to the said court to sue for charters of pardon for payment only of the fee for the great seal; as at the special request of Anne, his future queen, in this parliament the King has granted grace and pardon in general to singular his subjects in all parts of the realm willing to sue for the same, with the exceptions aforesaid....

The riots in Bridgwater seem here at least to find a place in conjunction with the General Revolt. Possibly the same atmosphere of dissatisfaction that surrounded the lives of the peasants in other parts of England, added to a local and more concrete trouble, produced the outburst.

The rest of their time the canons of St John's Hospital seem to have passed in peace and quietness so far as our documents tell us. We have glimpses of them from time to time managing their affairs under their successive Masters.

When the religious houses were suppressed they shared the common fate, of their brethren throughout the country and were expelled, from their hospital with the solace of a personal pension.

Leland, visiting the town soon after, says:

In the est parte of the town is onely the house or late college of S. John a thing notable: and this house standith partely withoute the est gate.

This college had prestes that had, the apparelle of secular prestes with a crosse on there breste; and [to] this house was adjoynid an hospitale for poore folkes.

Three or four years ago a worker on his allotment in Friarn Lawn struck his spade against a stone, which on further excavation proved to be the base of one of the pillars of the Friars' Church. This is the only relic that we have of the building, though it is possible that in a dwelling-house hard, by there are some remains of the Friary itself. Turning to Leland again we read:

The accustumer of Bridgwater hath translated this place to a right goodly and pleasaunt dwelling house.

The great William Briwer, founder of the borough, the castle and the hospital, died in 1226, the year in which Francis of Assisi also

died. He was succeeded in his barony by a son bearing the same names, and though Wm Briwer, the younger, did not long survive his father, his name is forever, associated in Bridgwater history with that of St Francis. For when, six years after the landing in England, the grey friars reached Bridgwater, it was Wm Briwer, the second, who built them a house wherein to lay their heads. Royal timber was felled for the building of the friary, for the forest of Petherton crept almost up to the south gate. The house stood within the borough by the Town Brook, while their meadows lay beyond in what are now called the Low Fields.

Among Bridgwater wills, of which some thirty are to be found among the borough archives, while others are stored at Wells, we find frequent mention of the Grey Friars. . Richard Cronte left them two trentals, that is. payment for two sets of thirty masses. Wm Diste, who had been admitted to their confraternity in 1409, left them four bushels of green peas. Joan Fote left them two bushels of wheat and two bushels of beans. In money they received legacies of 40s., 2s; 6d., 20s., 20s., 2s. 6d., 2s. 6d., 20d., and 2s. 6d. At the end they complained of a great falling off in charitable gifts, and that they had little beyond what they derived from the service of the chapel on the bridge. Such charity was all that a friar was expected by the rule of his order to live on, nor do we find the Little Brothers in Bridgwater possessing any tenements or lands beyond their immediate estate.

From time to time the brethren received to the benefits of their order certain lay members, and we have specimens of the Letters of Confraternity, sealed with the seal of their house, which gave admission to these confratres and consoroers. Here is the shortest of them translated freely. Indeed one sentence in the original is so condensed as to be unintelligible, and it is only by comparison with other letters that we can arrive at its meaning:

To his beloved in Christ, Wm Dyst and Joan, his wife, Friar William, Warden of the Friars Minor of Bruggewalteri, greeting, and by the merits of this life may they receive joys eternal.

Wishing to repay the devotion which, through reverence for God, you have towards our order, and which you have specially shown to our convent by the repeated display of your benefactions, by the authority of our father the Minister and the whole provincial

chapter and by the unanimous assent of our convent aforesaid, I receive you, by the tenor of these presents, to the privileges, all and singular, of the brethren of this convent, in life as well as in death; granting you full participation in all benefits which the mercy of the Saviour shall deem worthy to be effected through the same brethren; adding moreover by special grace that when mention shall be made of your obit, the same shall be done for you as is wont to be done for the brethren and friends of our order deceased. May you be happy in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his virgin and glorious Mother.

Given at Brugges in our local chapter, the xth day of January, A.D. Millesimo CCCC^{mo} nono (1409).

In the fourteenth century there was living in Friarn Street a family of the name of Somer. It is possible that the celebrated friar, John Somer, was of this family, for he belonged to the convent in the same street. He was at Oxford in 1380 and was well known as a distinguished astronomer and the author of calendars and scientific treatises. Chaucer mentions him in his treatise on the Astrolabe, where he speaks of

diverse tables of longitudes and latitudes of sterres fixe for the Astrolabie, and tables of declinacions of the sonne, and tables of longitudes of citeez and of townes; and as wel for the governance of a clokke as for to finde the altitude meridian; and many another notable conclusion, after the Kalendres of the reverent clerkes, frere I. Somer and frere N. Lenne.

In his *Short Chronicle* Somer makes several references to Bridgwater.

From Leland we learn that Wm Auger studied in the Franciscan convent at Oxford and was afterwards made warden of the convent at Bridgwater, where he died and was buried, A.D. 1404.

Robert Cross, who became Provincial Master in 1280 and in 1285 represented the English Province at the General Chapter of Milan, was buried in Bridgwater.

These are outstanding names among many devoted and learned men whom we can picture year after year serving their little church in Friarn Street and ministering to the wants of the poor of the borough.

Their house was closed when it had stood for three centuries. The church furniture, including a pair of organs, and the priestly vestments, the lead of the roof and the domestic equipment were sold. The library

was dispersed. Of this I am inclined to think that we still have some fragments remaining, for certain of the water-bailiffs' accounts are bound in parchments which are portions of books such as the friars are likely to have possessed.

With the disappearance of these two religious houses and of the several chantries, medieval Bridgwater may be said to have come to an end, and with the introduction of the new religion and the new learning, another atmosphere was produced. It is difficult to think oneself back into that old world whose thoughts must have been so different from ours, but it is by the collection of such data as I have reproduced here, and which from many sources are slowly finding their way into print, that the future historian will be able to draw his picture of the middle ages in our English boroughs.

End notes

- 1 "Feet of Fines" *Som. Rec. Soc.* vi. 19.
- 2 *Rotuli Chartarum*, 204, englished*
- 3 *Som. Rec. Soc.* 1 p. 268

Editorial note:

Dilks illustrated these papers with photographs on some of the archives and seals he had used in his *Proc. SANHS* paper on the Burgesses, and several of the mid C19 lithographs of John Chubb's paintings of Bridgwater. These have been omitted here

Edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich, 03/010/2019