

PREFACE

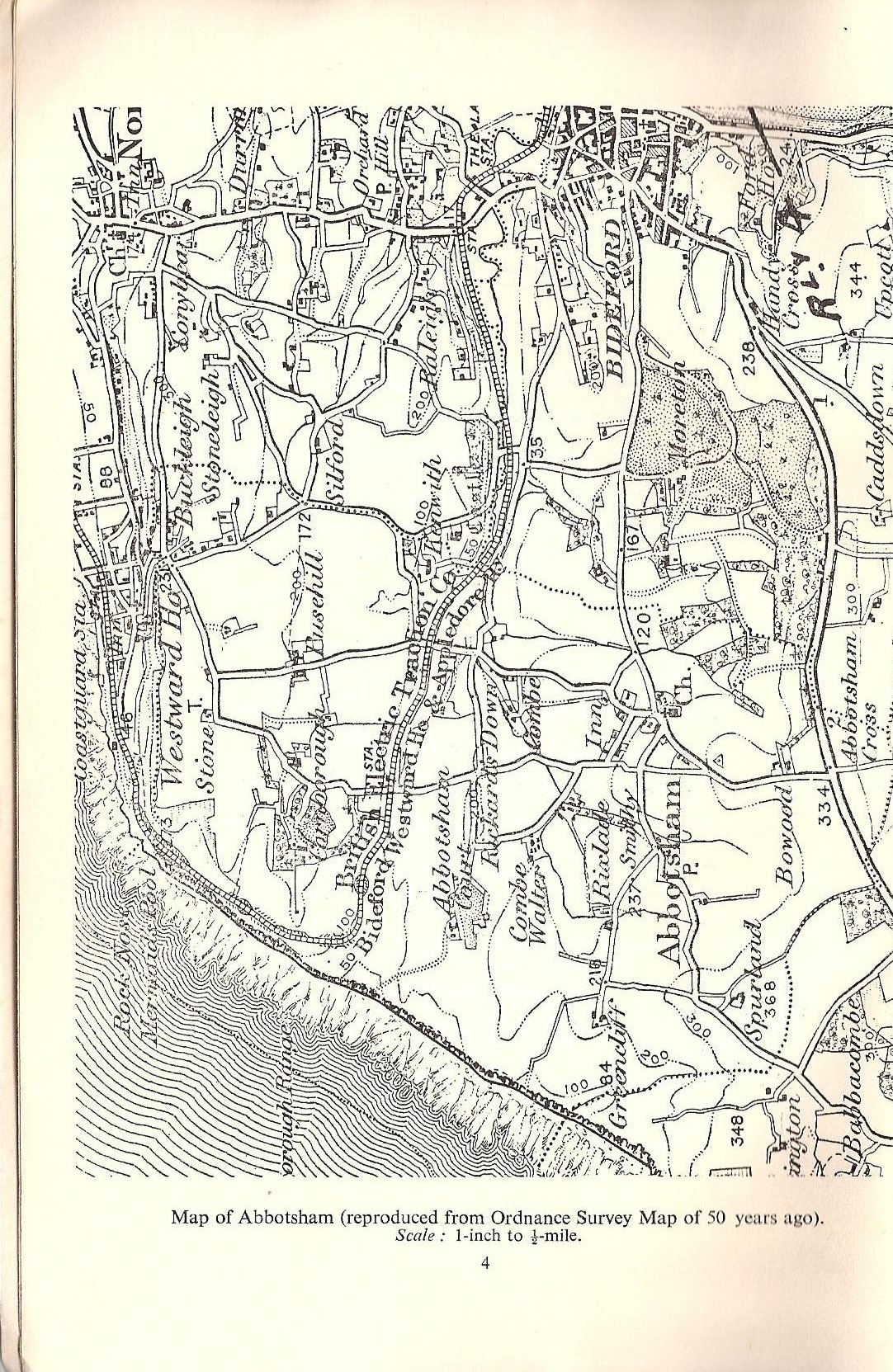
*In allowing these notes on Abbotsham to go to press, I am acutely conscious that I am no historian. I am all the more grateful to various friends, who are historians, for their help and encouragement. I wish to thank especially my friend and neighbour, the late Mr. W. H. Rogers,• Mr. H. P. R. Finberg who has restored Tavistock Abbey to remembrance,• Professor W. G. Hoskins who has rewritten the history of Devon, and illuminated it with his personal research, Mr. J. Benson the Secretary, the Rev. J. B. Castlehow, Mrs. M. C. S. Cruwys and other members of the Parochial History section. But for their assistance and insistence this paper would not have seen the light of publication. But Abbotsham calls for some recognition.*

*H.A.L.*

Cornborough,

Abbotsham,

July, 1956.



**CHAPTER I**

**WHAT IS ABBOTSHAM?**

PRESUMABLY every parish likes to think that it has an ancient history and if possible to connect that history with some reallandmark in the life of England. If so Abbotsham is favoured ;for its name goes back to the quite respectable antiquity of the Xth century, and it can make a claim, though perhaps not an undisputed claim, to the site of the IXth century battle, which was a turning point in the history of Saxon England. And it shared the fate of a great Abbey.

But first—what is Abbotsham? A North Devon parish,bounded by Northam, Bideford, Littleham, Alwington, and the sea, in the ancient hundred of Shebbear, the Parliamentary Division of Torrington, and the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple.

The most obvious, if not the most usual boundary of any division of land, is water. The adjoining parishes of Northam and Bideford are divided by a stream which has never to my knowledge risen to the dignity of a name. Failing water, a ridge is a useful boundary. But whoever first set himself to trace the boundaries of Abbotsham seems rather to have had in his mind the purpose of including every possible drop of water that could find its way into that indistinguished brook above a certain point in its course.

**Its Boundaries**

Consequently we find the parish spread out in a valley : an irregular rectangle with the Western side resting on the sea from Greenacleave, once Lake’s Nose, to Rock’s Nose, while the Eastern cuts the brook almost at right angles opposite what is now known as Kenwith Castle. The Northern boundary is a ridge, though it does not actually follow the crest. From Rock’s Nose to the old Quarry near the modern Northam reservoir it runs almost due East and West, crossing two well-marked cleaves, but keeping just below the Seaward face of the ridge. The line is marked bya continuous bank topped with thorn, in some places almost obliterated, but nowhere pierced by a gate—a true boundary fence. At its East end it crosses the gardens of several modern houses, but retains its position below the Ridge. The East boundary runs roughly North and South. Just short of the highest point, it turns due South to the old narrow lane from Abbotsham to Northam along a hedge pierced only by one modern gateway. Here some of the Buckleigh water escapes down a goyle into Bideford parish, which somewhat upsets the scheme of things, while the boundary follows the old road to the Northam entrance of Kenwith. At this point it forsakes fences, and strikes a depression which seems to mark the line of an old ditch, now filled in ; crosses a field and skirts the rocky mound which has been identified—correctly or otherwise—with the historic battle of Kenwith, and meets the main brook at its junction with its biggest tributary. From here, still running South, the boundary begins to rise and follows a line of gateless fences to the Bideford-Abbotsham road, and across it to the Bude or Bowood plantations, through which it goes to the Bideford-Hartland Road—again an ungated line. Here it strikes a ridge, but instead of following it Westward,as logically it should, strikes down the hill Southward into another basin altogether. For some reason the farm of Pennywell, which geographically belongs to either Littleham or Bideford, has been included in the boundary dispute of 1181. However that may be, the South boundary now ascends the upper waters of a deep cut goyle, which is later known as Jennetts stream, Westward, to its source on the Hartland road, where the disused Gipsy Lane took off, separating it from Alwington on the West.

**Its Original Character**

Here it resumes its original character of a watershed and turns North-West skirting the high land with the brooks running away to the Abbotsham basin. The lane is overgrown, and the boundary leaves it to sweep round the farm of Spurland, and to cross the narrow Fairy Cross-Abbotsham lane, and then makes North for the sea down a deep goyle of which the outlet is known as Boatlake, or Lake’s Nose. This boundary is again pierced only at one point, where a track from Spurland to Cockington crosses the goyle and brings us back to our original starting point.

Along the shore we find little cleaves carrying only a few hundred yards of drainage making for the sea, one of which, the misnamed Cornborough range, rises almost to the dignity of a valley. They end in gullies, up which the smallest of boats could just be piloted, approached by pack horse lanes, and in two instances furnished with old lime kilns.

And inside this framework the tributaries of the main brook spread out like fingers of a hand, with ridges between them running East and West to the “ wrist” at the parish boundary. The highest points, 300 feet each, are on the North ridge at the farm of Tealta, and on the South at Bowood, and both of these at the beginning of the XIXth century were crowned with now vanished windmills.

To take these valleys in order. The most Southerly runs from the Bowood ridge through the holdings of Bude, Barton (anciently Stone) and East Coombe, now a part of Winsford. On its Western slope lie the church and what is now the main village, though there seems reason to think that this was not the original settlement.

The next trickle of water starts again from the Southern ridge in what is now called Claycott, but was once Moortown, Ilydown,and Buckpool. It runs through Lendon, Redford, Shamland, Coombe Walter, and Coombe to Riccardsdown, formerly Rockyford, where it meets its southerly neighbour at a spot called Coombe Wakewell. Here was once a small watermill, of which no memory remains.

**Water flows to Bideford**

The third valley is the most open and looks as if it was a steady slope up from the sea. Actually the watershed is an almost imperceptible rise under Cornborough, and the water of all but the Western half mile flows to Bideford under Lake, Langdon, Pusehill and Kenwith, to meet its united brothers on the parish boundary. It is reinforced on its way by trickles from Lake and Pusehill, which make up the remaining fingers of the hand.

It is this Northern half of the parish which seems to have harboured the earliest population and contained the church, the Abbot’s manor, and the fields of his very lowly tenants.

A smiling landscape of small fields and undulating ridges, with the “ shillet” never far beneath the surface, and a bold face to the sea. It has little woodland, and can never, it seems, have had much more, for even in Domesday we only find two acres to its credit.

Trees seldom reach any great height or girth. Elm and beech and ash seem to be the principal and most luxuriant, For the most part the soil is too light and the slopes too exposed for oak, but in a few bottoms it does fairly, often accompanied by scrub holly. Silver fir does well in the wetter places, but it is probably not indigenous, and has not been widely planted. Sycamore is fairly plentiful, but rarely makes any growth. The various kinds of wild plum grew freely as scrub, and the hedgerows contain haw thorn, maple, elder, and occasional hornbeam.

There have never been plantations on any considerable scale, and the weather and soil conditions offer little inducement to forestry. But as farmland, Abbotsham enjoys a good reputation among its neighbours, chiefly for its mild climate, and the absence of clay. Wartime experience has shown that it contains little real wheatland, though yields up to 50 bushels per acre have been not uncommon. But for barley and oats the soil and the mild seaside atmosphere are highly suitable. “Cliffland for barley” is not only a slogan, but true; and for sower, maltster or feeder, in an average year, the outturn is high. At one time, as the old “rig and fur” shows, practically every acre of the parish has been ploughed, and it is fair to assume that the crops our ancestors raised were barley and oats rather than wheat. The pasture for cattle and sheep is good, though there are no water meadows to command exorbitant rents, and root crops of all kinds succeed, without producing the heavy tops which heavier land encourages. On the whole, a paradise for the Red Devon and the closewool sheep, but not for the arable farmer or the sportsman. In an appendix will be found a list of birds known to have nested in the parish. It was compiled by my friend Cecil Howell, then a schoolboy, later killed in a bombing raid over Germany as Squadron Leader R.A.F.

As the map shows, the parish lies apart from all main lines of communication which in this part of North Devon must centre on the bridge at Bideford. Two roads—one from there to the sea at Westward Ho !, and one from Bideford to Hartland and the West— just cut the high land on its East and West borders respectively, but have little influence on the parish.

**Ancient Trackways**

Abbotsham roads serve Abbotsham only. Beside the network of modern roads connecting the outlying farms with Bideford in the centre of the parish, there is a barely traceable cobweb of old tracks connecting sites no longer used. One such ran from Pepper- combe to the Abbot’s Manor house, and on to the sea beyond Cornborough, serving a number of little cottage sites now deserted. Another ran from the present church through the XVIIth century Manor house at Coombe, over the ridge at Langdon, past Mid Langdon farm, and up by the old holding of Orchard to Gainsborough, to the old church, and the sea below it. If the footpath from the modern church to the Hartland Road be added, there would be an almost straight line of communication by High Park, Winscot and Hooper’s Water from Gainsborough to Buckland Brewer. It seems not impossible that these deserted roads are the remains of a system of ancient trackways from the Clovelly Dykes past Peppercombe Castle to Gainsborough on the one hand, and from Gainsborough on the other to Buckland Brewer, and the castles which lay around and Hembury. As a glance at the map will show, the road from the Dykes to Hembury is still represented by a little used road through Woolsery, Powler’s Piece and Common Moor. Might not the Abbotsham trackways complete the triangle of three “ castles “ all visible one from the other? A curious little fact which may have some bearing on this is that the Peppercombe road, where it crosses each of the Abbotsham ridges, passes a borough or bury “Muchelborough, Shibborough, Yarnsborough, Hornborough to Gainsborough. Could these have been roughly fortified dug-outs or “sangars” above the route? The only other “borough” in the parish or the immediate neighbourhood is Hennaborough, the old name of what is now called Kenwith Castle—almost certainly a fortified site. The thought is suggested that Abbotsham in Celtic or early Saxon times was not as isolated as one would have expected, but had its place in a very rudimentary system of defence.

Whatever it may have been in Celtic and Saxon times, its subsequent history has not been either eventful or distinguished. It contains no mansion and since the dissolution of the Abbey of Tavistock, to which it belonged for over 500 years, it has formed part of no great estate. It has produced no outstanding personality, and been connected with no national event. It was, and is, a parish of small farms with one or two small landowning homes. No “plage,” but a sea coast so treacherous that the strongest swimmers are advised to leave its rocks to the lobster catcher and the prawner, both of whom make record bags when the moon is kind.

**CHAPTER II**

**EARLY RECORDS**

AND what is its history? The first recorded evidence is a much-disputed one. It comes from the 1Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and 2Bishop Asser’s Gesto Regis Aifredi, where we find that in 878 A.D. the battle of Cynuit was fought somewhere in Devon. The question is—where?

King Alfred at the time had been driven by a series of defeats to take refuge in Athelney, protected by Sedgemooor. The Danes were in occupation of Plymouth, and commanded by Hubba, the son of Ragnar Lodbrog, sailed round to South Wales, where they wintered, and thence across to the South-East coast of the Severn Channel. Their aim was presumably to take Alfred in the flank, while Guthrum attacked from the East and South.

A Saxon levy was collected by the 3Ealdorman Odda, and after being besieged in a roughly fortified camp, attacked the Danes at Cynuit, slew Hubba with 1200 (sic) of his men, and drove the remainder back to their ships. A successful rear-guard action enabled the Danes to carry off Hubba’s body, and get their ships away safely, but with the loss of their Raven standard.

The site of this important battle has been much disputed.

Camden quotes 4Asser and says that the site was somewhere on the coast (of Taw and Torridge) but could not be identified.

5Baxter agreed.

6Westcote (1630) mentions that Northam with many others claimed the site and gives the name “Castle Hennaburgh” and Kenith Castle.”

Pole does not mention the battle and hardly mentioned either Northam or Abbotsham.

7Risdon, under Appledore, quotes the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and when he says “Some have sought (for the site as for ants’ paths but found it not, unless they guess Hennaborough,” seems to support Westcote.

So do the maps of Bowen (1759) and Dunn (1765).

In 1804 Mr. R. S. Vidal of Cornborough wrote a long article in Archaeologia (see Appendix), in which he showed good grounds for identifying Kenwith with the farm till then called Hennaborough, or Henni Castle. Unfortunately he seemed so intent on establishing a claim to originality that he hardly mentions any of the 17th or 18th century writers above quoted.

The identification was scouted by Stevenson, the editor of Asser, but accepted by the owner, who changed the name to Kenwith, and by the Ordnance Authorities who describe it as” site of battle.” I have yet to hear a more likely site given. The one small difficulty (absence of drinking water) raised by Vidai is easily met by the probability that 1,000 years ago the stream, still brackish at high tide, was a salt “ pill “ like other tributaries of the Torridge, and served as a moat under the Saxon position. Like the Lea, it may even have been navigable for the light Danish and Saxon ships, which would give the site increased value from an invader’s or defender’s point of view.

I think myself that the claim is fairly made out and that the parish history starts in 878 A.D.

1Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 871.

2Asser de Rebus Gestis Elfredi, Cap. 54.

3Ethelweard d. 998. cf. Cynuit by J. J. Alexander, D & C, N & Q, XVI.,

p. 311.

4P. 35, folio cd. 1675.

5L.22 Baxter Glossarium Anhiquita turn Brittanicarum.

6Devonshire Book V, Cap. xxviii.

7Risdon Chor, Description of Devonshire, cd. 1 723, p. 94.

**CHAPTER III**

**ABBEY OF TAVISTOCK ENDOWMENT**

IT was a pleasant lordship which, in 981 A.D. under the name of ‘Hame’, Earl Orduif transferred de jure uxoris to the Abbot of Tavistock, as part of its foundation endowment. Who the lady was, or how she acquired the viii we do not know. But it has been shown by Mr. H. P. R. Finberg, the historian of Tavistock, that she was the Aelfwynn from whom Alwington takes its name. She certainly owned a number of manors in the neighbourhood. There does not appear to be any royal deed of alienation from folkland, but Ordulf’s power to dispose of it was never disputed. He was uncle to King Ethelred, who confirmed the Grant, and possibly inspired it. And with the Abbot it remained until the dissolution in 1539, when it was surrendered to King Henry’s Commissioner.

In the Exeter Domesday we find in the Lands of the Church of Tavistock:

“The Abbot has a Manor called Hame, and it rendered geld for two hides. These can be ploughed by twenty ploughs. Of it the Abbot has one virgate and one plough in demesne, and the villeins have one hide and three virgates and fifteen ploughs. There the Abbot has 21 villeins and 6 bordars, and 4 serfs, and six head of cattle. And 4 swine and 118 sheep, and 2 acres of wood And 6 acres of meadow, and 40 acres of pasture This manor renders yearly a hundred shillings, and when the Abbot received it, it was worth sixty shillings.”

The Exchequer Domesday relates that

“The Church itself holds Hame. In the time of King Edward it paid geld for two hides. There is land for twenty ploughs. In demesne are two ploughs and four serfs, and twenty one villeins and six bordars with fifteen ploughs. There are 6 acres meadow and 60 acres of pasture and 2 acres of wood. Formerly it was worth 60 shillings. Now it is worth 100 shillings.”

This compares with twenty ploughlands in Northam and eight in Littleham, the other two ‘hams‘ which surround Bideford. (They were all held before the Conquest by Brihtric). It is, I believe, usual to reckon the ‘ ploughland’ in Devon at 80 acres. This would give 2,000 acres of arable land, whereas the area of the modern parish is 1673 acres, against the 2,800 acres of Northam, 1,324 of Littleham and 3,902 of Bideford.

**75 Per cent Under Plough**

Whatever the size of the North Devon ploughland may have been, these figures suggest that the Abbot’s Hame was mostly cultivable, if not indeed valuable land. This is borne out to some extent by the small extent of the woodland; and at least 75 per cent. was actually under plough.

The 6 acres of meadow were presumably along the course of the little stream from Coombe to Kenwith. If we assume 10 tons of hay from this a year, it did well ; but this did not afford much winter keep for the 17 plough teams of 8 oxen. Whether there were horses or not we have no means of knowing, as they were not agricultural stock, and so of no interest to the Domesday Assessors. Probably the Abbots’ demesne plough oxen and his riding pony got most of the hay.

Why the Commissioners raised the local estimate of pasture from 40 to 60 acres we do not know. It seems to have been unusual. This was presumably the waste land unfit for plough, and was probably accounted for by the tops of the ridges and their steep sides towards the sea, covered in those, as in these days, largely by gorse and bracken. The plough oxen lived hard, when they had grazed the stubble bare and shared the downland turf with the 118 sheep. Northam with 340 sheep can have had little accommodation to offer, and we can only hope that there were fewer rabbits.

In order to arrive at the population of the Manor, it is probably reasonable to assume that the 21 villeins and 6 bordars, who were all the free tenants, had each a family of 5. This would give 135 persons in addition to the 4 serfs, and some functionaries of the Abbot.

We may guess a Domesday population of 150 against the 350 of the present day.

The Abbot, of course, was not resident. There is a tradition that he had a manor house, and that it was on the site of Shebbertown, called in the XVth century Shebbertown Court, and now Abbotsham Court. There are no remains of any ancient building to support this theory, but it is possible. It has also been suggested that the place was used as a sanitorium for sick monks from the low-lying meadow land of Tavistock, which is again quite possible, but supported by no evidence whatever.

It is not necessary here to enter into the questions of Church and State policy which impelled Ordulf, or his royal nephew, to endow a new Monastery at Tavistock. They have been dealt with at length by Mr. Finberg in various articles which have appeared from time to time in the Transactions of the Devonshire Association, and in his delightful History of the Abbey. But it is curious if the site of the first recorded English victory over the Danes was incorporated by a Danish ealdorman in the estate of his new Abbey, which the Danes were shortly to sack.

**Little Known of Abbots’ Rule**

What is more curious and regrettable is that we should have so little information as to the Abbots’ rule in their manor. The bulk of the social history of England in Norman and Plantagenet times has been gleaned from the records of various great ecclesiastical foundations. In the nature of things we should expect these to supply the most complete, if not the only, written data of the domestic proceedings of the Manor Courts and Estate Management.

If the so called Maynard Cartulary is ever recovered, we may find a wealth of information as to the Abbots’ proceedings in their various Manors. At present we can rely only on such deeds as Mr. Finberg has been able to find, and unfortunately there is practically nothing which concerns Abbotsham, except the boundary dispute with Alwington.

For the endowment itself we have ample evidence. The original deed has disappeared, but it seems to be recited at length in an Inspeximus of Edward Ill reciting former deeds of Henry III. Oliver’s *Monasticon.*1

What we do know is that the Abbey which Ordulf founded, was the first Benedictine foundation in the West of England; that it was planned on a lavish scale and richly endowed, and was probably intended as an example of the regular religious houses with which it was proposed to cover England, in supersession of the irregular foundations of Mass priests which had hitherto existed.

The earlier Abbots were able and distinguished men, with a body of devoted monks, and this can hardly have failed to exercise an influence on the village now handed over to their entire jurisdiction. The Abbot was relieved of all Royal service except the three duties of roads, bridges and defence. There must at least have been some headquarters of the demesne, and it probably housed a steward, some lay brethren, and the 4 serfs, together with the Abbot’s teams of oxen. It may well have had a steading for the oxen of the tenants,if the custom of requiring them to lie in for so many days of the year prevailed in North Devon.

**Was Shebbertown the Manor?**

There is no obvious reason for rejecting the tradition that the manor was situated at Shebbertown. Indeed there is one small piece of evidence in its favour. The old name of field No. 336 is‘Old Town field’, and the name of the steep lane alongside is Old Town Hill. Ploughing at the time of the last war revealed a number of stone setts, as if from the floors of houses, a lot of light cindery soil, and many stones. There may of course be other explanations of these facts, but they are quite consistent with a theory that some manorial retainers were housed here, and that this was the site of the demesne steading and cultivation. It adjoins Shebbertown and the old Peppercombe to Gainsborough track.

There is no mention of a church in the parish until the year 1184 A.D.2 when Bartholomew Iscanius, Bishop of Exeter, granted and appropriated to the Monastery of Tavistock the church of ‘Abbedesham’. There was therefore a church already in existence a hundred years after the Domesday Survey, and probably a good deal earlier, as it had revenues which were worth transferring to the Abbey. It was presumably served by members of the Abbey under the Abbot’s direction, and one would expect to find it somewhere in the neighbourhood of the manor.

There is every reason to believe that the earliest church was on the site of the field still known as ‘The Chapel Field’ but occupied by a modern bungalow, on the seaward ridge to the North, about ¼ mile from the hamlet of Buckleigh and just under a mile North East from Shebbertown, with which it was directly connected by the trackway already mentioned. It is an uausual site for a church, but there can be no doubt that at least a chapel stood there overlooking Bideford Bay; and the Vicar of 1582 believed that it was the old parish church. Between it and Shebbertown, in the trough of the Cornborough valley, are the remains of several old holdings, not necessarily of Norman date, but suggestive of the conclusion that quite a number of the Abbot’s 27 tenants were to the North and East of Shebbertown, where now there are only half a dozen scattered farms.

To gather up the deductions from Domesday Book, we find a parish fully cultivated and highly rated, with a population rather less than half that of the present day, largely privileged tenants, with a sufficient amount of stock, mostly resident in the Northern half of the parish, and governed by some representative of the Abbot of Tavistock, who probably cared for their worship and instruction.

1Oliver Monas! icon No. T

2Dugdale’s Monasticon, 1. pp. 489 sqq.

**CHAPTER IV**

**DISPUTED BOUNDARY AGREEMENT**

OUR next document is a Latin transcript of an Agreement, or one part of an Agreement, between Richard Cophin, who describes himself as owner of ‘ Alwineton and Cokemetone in his fee’, and the Abbot and convent of Tavistock, owners of Abbedesham, concerning the disputed boundary between their lands. The Agreement is in Latin, and the agreed boundary described in English, evidently as being the language of the men from the neighbouring parishes who were summoned to demarcate it. The existence of the document had been known to us for a long time. It is quoted by Risdon and Pole, but only as evidence of the antiquity of the Coffin family! It has been left to a modern archaeologist, Mr. H. P. R. Finberg, to find the original in a collection of Tavistock deeds. With his kind permission I give his translation from Charter (XXIX) in his *1Early Tavistock Church*. I have had the pleasure of perambulating this boundary with ‘Mr. Finberg and Mr.W. H. Rogers, and various questions arise from the Agreement,

In the first place, what was the actual boundary?

Secondly, why was it necessary to define it?

Thirdly, what was the status of Richard ‘Cophin’?

As to the first, though many of the points mentioned are no longer identifiable, we had little difficulty in reaching an agreement.

The ‘double ditch’ is where the modern boundary of Abbotsham and Bideford cuts the brook known as Jennetts Water—a deep chasm opposite Pennywell Farm. The boundary, as now, followed Jennetts Water across the Littleham and Hartland roads to its source in some fields near Gipsy Lane. Whatever the features were described as a ‘Thurs wecge’ and a ’hola beorn‘,it continued along Gipsy Lane till that enters Westacott Farm ; from that point it followed an unbroken hedge to the top of the valley which runs down to the sea at Boat Lake—now the obvious and logical boundary. But from this point the jurors followed a different line altogether to the sea.

Trendlebury is doubtless a field still called Trindley or Trennel about lOO yards North-west of Cockington Farm ; the Hidden Well is probably a hollow containing water another lOO yards to the West. Whatever Woolacumbe may have been—possibly an old name for the adjoining Babbacombe Farm, or even a faulty transcription of Babbacombe—the boundary went to the sea somewhere between Cockington and Babbacombe Cliffs.

The effect of this was to throw the whole of Cockington Head into the Abbot’s Land. This in face of Coffin’s claim to be Lord of Cokemetone is very surprising, and leads to the second question — why was the demarcation necessary?

The two gentlemen with whom I was associated, and whose knowledge of Mediaeval history is vastly greater than my own, think there is no doubt that Cockington was originally part of the Abbot’s land; that Coffin was landgrabbing, and that he succeeded to the extent that he got some part of Cockington and a solatium in the shape of 2 marks of silver and a provision for his latter end in the Abbey.

I find it difficult, with all respect, to accept this. In the first place Coffin described himself as ‘of Cokemetone’! He could hardly have done this if it had been common knowledge that Cokemetone was part of the Abbot’s Manor.

In the second place the deed itself describes the Boat Lake valley as lying between Cokemetone and Abbedesham.

In the third place Coffin records a consideration for agreeing to a new boundary.

The inference appears to me to be that the Abbot was advancing a new claim. Why, or on what grounds we shall never know. At any rate, all he got was a windswept promontory of steep land very close to the rock, a quarry and a strip of foreshore at some distance from his demesne. And he did not enjoy it for long, as century later, another Richard Coffin was offering to fight the Abbot’s tenant for it, Presumably by this time the 2 marks were spent, and the descendant of the original Richard did not value so highly the passport to Heaven which the Abbot had granted. The parties to this deed, which is earlier than any other in the Portledge MSS, can be identified.

The second and final act of this small drama is recorded in the fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical MSS Part I, pp 375-6. There are two deeds: in the first Richard de Cokemetone and Letice his wife commissioned one Richard de Pouleshotte to fight William FitzJordan for one messuage and one ploughland with the appurtenances in Cokemetone. The fee is 20 marks and the date is Wednesday next after the Assumption in 1290.

In the second document, William FitzJordan of Cokemetone reveals that, whereas he had impleaded Richard de Cokemetone and Letice his wife in full County Court before Sir Mathew FitzJordan, Sheriff of Devon, on the Tuesday after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin by writ of right as to one essuage and one ploughland in Cokemetone, as to which duel was pledged in the same County Court; at length by friends in the same Court intervening the said pleas was set at rest, namely that “by the tenor of these presents I have remitted and quit claimed unto the said Richard and Letice and their heirs all my rights and claim which I had or in any way have in the aforesaid tenement, namely in the whole vill of Cokemetone with its appurtenances without anything held back by me or my heirs for ever, So that neither I, the said William, nor my heirs or assigns shall be able to demand or assert any right or claim in the aforesaid tenements with their appurtenances, for eleven marks to me beforehand paid.”

In a third document Richard and Letice grant to their son Richard all that land in return for one pair of white gloves of the value of one penny at the feast of St. Michael.

It seems fairly clear that these three documents refer to the same land as the earlier agreement with the Abbot, though the concluding paragraph of the first seems to cover a good deal more than the solitary farm of Cockington originally ceded to the Abbot, and still lying between the twelfth century boundary and the present one at Lake’s Nose. Perhaps it was intended to cover possible development of that bleak headland.

But a more serious difficulty is that the Abbot is nowhere mentioned. He had farmed out the land to Master William at the time of the first agreement. We do not know who he was. In the later agreement in his place stands William FitzJordan, and what his actual status in Cockington was, we do not know. There was a William Fitzjordan, a relative of the Coffin family, and the simplest solution appears to be that he had been given the lease by the Abbot, and was making the best profit he could by coming to terms with Richard and Letice.

At any rate the Cockington Farm was transferred or re-transferred to Alwington, and there it has remained.

I am indebted to Mr. W. H. Rogers for the following information as to the dramatis personae.

Coffin was a Saxon underlord of Ordulf who was left undisturbed in his estate at the time of the Conquest, under the lordship of Baldwin, son of Hamelin of Cornwall, father of Baldwin.

The Gaifridus who agrees to the cession was son of Baldwin, and Nicholas the grandson, known as Nicholas de Middleton.

It is noticeable that in the later deeds, no overlord is mentioned.

But in 1184 the overlord was Herbert de Pinu,1 who held in right of his wife 10 fees of the Honour of Launceston, of which Alwington constituted two.

The name of Master William is interesting, as it is the first recorded in our history; and the fact that he held the land in farm shows that the Abbot was not at the time directly administering his manor. Indeed I have come across no document either in Abbotsham or Tavistock recording any action taken by the Abbot as Lord of the Manor, or patron of the Parish Church.

The Agreement was evidently drawn up many years after the demarcation, and from this onwards the Abbey papers fail us.

In 1234-6 Kirkby’s Quest records “Abbas de Tavistok tenet ‘Villam de Abedesham que pertinet ad baroniam suam de Tavistok‘ quam tenet de Rege.”

It remained in the possession of the Abbot and Convent till the Dissolution by Henry VIII in 1539. It seems probable that they regarded it as a granary, perhaps storing the proceeds in the Barton adjoining the second Church.

1See Appendix “D.”

2cf Finberg: D. & C. N. & Q., Vol. xxx, p.201.

3Feudal Aids 329.

**CHAPTER V**

**SUBSEQUENT MANORIAL HISTORY**

RISDON states that “Stanton was some time seized of lands which by coheirs came to the families of Dennis and Monk.” He does not state his authority, and I have not found any other reference to their names. But there is evidence in the Cary papers published in Devonshire Association Proceedings Vol. XXXIII1 of the existence of something like a submanor.

By a charter undated, probably between 1270 and 1328, Robert Abbot of Tavistock granted to Gervase Giffard son of Water Giffard of Clifford Lands etc. at Popesham, Easter Bowood and Wester Bowood in the parish of Abbotesham.

21n the reign of Edward I by a deed undated, Robert De Giffard Rector of the Church of Bratton Clovelly granted all his lands at Westerabow Wode in the Manor of Abbedesham with its appurtenances to the same Gervase Giffard “having and holding of the Abbot and Convent of Tavistok for homage and service “ — Consideration 10 Silver Marks.

31n 1309-10 there is a Charter between Gervase and Richard Giffard referring to the same lands, and again in l384-54 between Robert Giffard of Norpiderwin and Richard Giffard. In the same year5 there is a grant by one Simon Tirell6 of lands in Bouclif (Buckleigh) to one Henry Giffard—younger son of Gervase. And it is noticeable that one 7“Simon Gerways” (query, son of Gervase)witnesses deeds of transfer of land in Buckleigh in 1398 and 1411. 81n 1357-8 John De Boweye and his wife transfer their land in Bideford to Richard Giffard “of Bowood,” and it appears that their daughter Emma was married to Simon Giffard. In 1359 Richard Giffard leases lands and tenements in Bideford to John De Wynterborne and John de Boweye.

In 1410 in the course of a partition deed, Simon Gyffard of Bowood is declared to be tenant by the laws of England of a third part of all the lands and tenements of his father-in-law John Boweye. In 1437 his son John Gyffard “of Yeo” in the parish of Alwington with others obtains a release of lands etc. in Thorne, which is part of Buckleigh.

91n 1468 John Gyffard of Yeo devises to his son Robert all his lands in Devon, with certain exceptions “holding to him and his heirs for ever of the chief lord of the fee.”

The “Court Roll”

The effect of the above seems to be that the family of Gyffard of Yeo, partly from an original grant by the Abbot of Tavistock,and partly by succession to the family of Boweye, obtained during the XIVth and XVth centuries considerable lands in Abbotsham at Bowood and Buckleigh, the two highest points at the N.E. and S.W. corners of the parish. Those at Bowood adjoined their original manor of Yeo in Alwington. Those at Buckleigh adjoined the church. But there is no suggestion of any devolution of Manorial rights till 1514, when there appears in the 10Cary papers what purports to be an extract from the “ Court Roll” of Bowood to the effect that “to this Court came Thomas Loman and Emma his wife and received of Thomas Gyffard, arm : lord of the said Manor, one tenement with appurtenances in Westbowoode which John Joce formerly held.”

In 1561 there is an entry of ”Wilmota Giffard’s Manor Court.” “William Grater and Margaret his wife came to this court with William their son respecting a cottage and appurtenances called Lower Clevecott (Claycott?) within the said Manor which they hold for their lives.”

Signatures of Wilmota Giffard and George Cary.

Wilmota was the daughter and heiress of John Gyffard of Yeo, and married secondly George, son and heir apparent of Thomas Cary of Cockington in l56l.11 He died in 1581.

121n 1584 Thomas Gyffard granted to George Cary a release of all right and title in various Manors of which “Abateshame” is one. 131n 1598 there is a “final concord” between George Cary of Cockington and Robert Prowse respecting a messuage, garden,orchard, 40 acres of land, 50 of meadow, 50 of pasture, and 10 of underwood in Orchard and Abboteshame, and this land was shown as held by Sir Edward Cary of Stantor in a Manorial Roll of 1632.

There is no hint in the Valor Ecclesiasticus of Tavistock of the existence of a submanor, neither is there in the “Rentall” of 1632, which shows Sir Edward Cary knight of Stantor as holding 6 parcels of land in his own name, and portions of three others, of the rent of £1 6s. 7d. out of a total of £11 l8s. Sd. In each case he is shown as holding “ by sute of court and relife when it shall happen “—i.e. the ordinary tenure of an inferior proprietor.

**Sub-Manorial Rights Recognised**

I deduce from the above that during the last years of the Abbot’s lordship, when the Monastic Orders were already in the breakers, the powerful family of Gyffard, lords of an adjoining Manor (Sir Robert was M.P. for Barnstaple), managed to extort from the Abbot some recognition of Manorial rights in their Abbotsham land, which they were unable to keep as against the Crown, or the Crown’s transferees.

It appears from the *14lnquisitio Post Mortem* of 1503 that John Gaye of Goldworthy, gentleman, held the Manor of Goldworthy “worth beyond outgoings 10 marks of the Abbot and Convent of Tavistock in freesocage by 30/- yearly rent and suit of their court at Abbotsham.”15 This Parkham property is mentioned in an Inquiry of 1316 with “Abbidesham” as membrum ad “eandum.” It was afterwards owned by the Coffin family, who paid this yearly rent to the Lord of the Manor of Abbotsham well into the XIXth century. But, how and when the Goldworthy Manor, which does not even adjoin the parish of Abbotsham, came to be connected with it for the purposes of the Manorial Court remains unexplained.

1Trans. Dee. Assac. xxxiii, pp. 151 Sqq.

2Cary Papers No. 8.

3Cary Papers No. 118.

4Ibid.

5Ibid.

6Ibid. No. 36.

7lbid. No. 39.

8Ibid. No. 58.

9Ibid. No. 74.

10Caiy Papers No. 88 and 103.

11Brass in Torre Church

12C’ary Papers No. 112.

13Ibid. No. 116.

14Inquisitio Post Mortem 772.

15lbid. 374.

**CHAPTER VI**

**LAY LORDS OF THE MANOR**

FROM the *1Valor Ecclesiasiicus* it appears that the revenues of Abbotsham were set aside for the support of the Prior and brethren and not of the Abbot. The Manor was not transferred to the Russell family with other Abbey property. It was worth £14 5s. 2d. per annum. The Crown apparently kept the manor in their own hands until 1601.

From a writ of 2Oustrelemaine addressed to the Sheriff in 1561 it appears that Richard Coffin of Portlynch was seised of certain premises in Abbotsham held of Philip and Mary “as of the Manor of Abbotsham.” These the Sheriff was ordered to release to his son.

3In 1601 the Manor was granted by Queen Elizabeth to Richard Burrell, William Starkey and Alexander Lockwood with a number of other manors. They appear to have been something in the nature of speculators, and possibly only held the Manor for sale. There is no record of them in the parish. It was said to bring in annually £16 l6s. 4d.

In 1632, according to a very detailed “rentall” then drawn up by the chief tenants, the Lord of the Manor was James Walsh, a Barnstaple lawyer. He does not appear to have been resident, and held his ten properties in conjunction with other holders. I have not found any deeds executed by him.

At this time the chief tenants were Sir Edward Cary of Stantor, the Willets, and the Shebbears.

* In 1660 the Lord was Sir Arthur Northcott.
* In 1682 Baldwin Thomas.
* In 1687 Protodorus Pinney.
* In 1698 Thos. Allen.

These names do not occur in any document that I have discovered locally; but we now come to a live person. In 1736 John Willett of Coombe died, and is described on his Memorial tablet in the Parish Church as Lord of the Manor. When he became so, I have not discovered; but the family had certainly held land in the parish for over 100 years. In 1632 William Willett held Yarnesborough (now Cornborough Range)with two others; Leyster (now part of Lake) with Christopher Buse; and the Cottages known as Croftes, Hurnhay, and Coombe Walter with others ; Elizabeth Willett held Gairisborough with James Walsh. Curiously enough, none of the family occur in the Subsidy Roll of 1624 or the Protestation papers of 1641.

In 1665 John Willett “of Abbotsham, grandchild and heire of ‘Walter Levenand gent,” was a trustee of the Rectorial Sheaf. In 1676 to 1686 he leases various cottages in the village

In 1703 John Willett bought Keene “or Kyne in the Coombe” from Robert Berry of Parkham for £200, thus enlarging his estate of Coombe. In 1709 and 1725 he leases houses in Crofts and Hurnhay.

In 1732 John Willett died bequeathing his property to William Saltren of Stone in Parkham. This man apparently took the name of Saltren Willett, in which name he leased property in Crofts.

In 1753 according to the Bishop’s seating order in the Parish Church “J. Willett Esq. holds Coombe, Buckleigh, Gainsborough, ‘Lester, Bartine (sic) Edway and Keene.”

The Manor house at that time was certainly Coombe.

William Saltren Willett was succeeded by Augustus Saltren Willett who died in 1803, having moved his residence to Porthill in Northam.

At some time between then and 1824 the Lordship was purchased by Robert Studley Vidal of Cornborough, who held his courts regularly till 1842, when he died, leaving his property to his distant cousin.

Edward Urch Scaly took the name of Vidai, and held his Courts at the New inn till 1863. He died in 1884, leaving his property to his grandson, Edward Wilmot Eyre Granville Scaly Vidai. He died in 1907, and since then the Lordship has been unclaimed, though his nephew Lewis Scaly Vidai still holds Langdon in the parish.

The records of the Annual Courts from 1826 to 1864 are in my possession, but contain nothing of serious importance. They have the air of archaisms. The Lord of the Manor enjoyed a right to one-third of flotsam and jetsam; he managed the Manorial waste, and collected a small Manorial rent which was compounded by the last lord. The Abbot’s Manor house was probably at Shebberton, now Abbotsham Court; the Wiiletts’ was at Coombe; the Vidals’ was at Cornborough.

From 1842 onwards the parish was entirely directed and inspired by Mr. Vidai, his family, and his son the Rev. Prebendary Robert Walpole Scaly who succeeded to the living. Mr. Vidal was the principal landowner, a county magistrate, a supporter of all the local good causes, highly respected by all his neighbours. His death in 1884 was a real loss to the countryside.

Prebendary Scaly has been described as “the best parish priest in England,” scholar, organiser, sportsman and gentleman. From an outstanding schoolboy athlete, he became an outstanding Churchman, whose influence extended far over North Devon till his early death in 1915.

1Oliver Monasticon.

2Portledge Papers.

3Patent Rolls 344 Eliz

4Recovery Rolls 34 Chas. II 67.

5Ibid. 3 Jas. IT Rs. 191.

6Ibid. Trin, 10 Will. HI.

**CHAPTER VII**

**THE PARISH CHURCH**

THE earliest mention of the Church is in a confirmation of endowments to the Abbey of Tavistock by Bishop Bartholomew, who died in A.D. 1184. It is repeated in a 1Bull of Pope Celestinus III dated 1193. But as the Manor had by then been in the possession of the Abbot for over 200 years, the church was evidently in existence long before then. There is a further confirmation in 2Bishop Quivil’s register of 1283.

It was probably not on the site of the present church, but on the ridge overlooking the bay in the extreme North of the parish. This is clear from a terrier of Thomas Goodchild, Vicar (1582-1605) who reports to the Bishop “there is one acre and a house lying near unto the Chapel that in time of (illegible)was the Parish Church being distant from the Church that now is well near a mile.”

This is repeated in a report by Mr. Owen (1751-66) to Dean Mylles, now in the Bodleian. “Remains of an ancient chapel on the N. side of the Parish in high ground near the sea. Porch, walls and S. side of it yet standing, no name or further account of it to be found.”

The site is a field called “Chapel Field” (No. 143 of the Ordnance Survey). It was part of the glebe in 1842, but purchased in 1869 by Mr. Vidai and remained in the possession of that family till it was sold about 1907. A house has been recently built on the site, and the remains of the long walls were then discovered, but are not now visible. The existence of this old Church explains the fact that the present Perpendicular Church has a handsome Norman font. It also goes to explain why in 1398 the Rev. John Bollock, Vicar, took a grant in fee of land in Buckleigh, and in 1411 the Rev. Richard Beale and others took a similar grant — possibly the same land—from Richard Stanbury. These would adjoin the old Church.

No other account of this ancient building has come to light, and there is no record of when the present Church was built. The change was probably due to a southward shift of the population, and its extreme exposure.

The present Perpendicular Church stands in the Church yard at the junction of the roads from Northam, Bideford and Hartland, roughly in the centre of the village. It stands back from the road, with a triangular piece of Manorial Waste in front of it, and the School house (originally the Poor House) on the edge of the Churchyard.

It is cruciform, with a low embattled tower over the N. arm, a simple porch on the N. side of the aisle, and a vestry in the angle of the chancel and S. arm. Miss Cresswell conjectured that the tower was of the 13th, the chancel the 14th and the nave 15th century.

If in 1411 the Church was on the old site, this is highly improbable; and the workmen who have recently stripped and renailedthe roof tell me they found no suggestion of difference in the ages of the chancel and nave.

The only pre-Reformation features of the Church are :

(a) the remains of a door leading from the Tower stairs, presumably to a vanished rood loft

(b) the oak bench ends

(c) the shields which take the place of hammer beams

(d) the Norman font.

The vestry was built in 1848. Under it is the vault of the Buck—now Stucley—family.

In 1853 a new window was opened in the transept, and two small windows were built in the chancel by the Vicar, Mr. Dansey, in which were placed memorial glass to a son of the Vidal family, and to the first wife of Canon Braithwaite.

In 1888 (1909) two small rectangular mullioned windows were uncovered in the chancel arch — a somewhat unusual feature.

The walls are plastered and painted over.

The roofs are waggon shaped, the nave being considerably higher than the chancel, plastered over lathes, the rafters being oak, stained, with bold carved bosses. The bosses in the chancel are considerably larger than those in the nave, and picked out with paint. Above is a secondary slated roof.

At the foot of each rafter on either wide of the nave is an angel bearing a shield. These bear varying devices. The last two to the W. on the N. Wall carry the arms of the Tavistock Abbey, but in an incomplete form.

The last but one on each side at the East end bear the Bourchier knot. Two others bear what may be the arms of Raleigh and Giffard. But the tinctures are wrong, and I have not discovered any connection between the parish and the families of Bourchier or Raleigh. The rest of the shields apparently represent various agricultural guilds. They were all repainted in 1846, the shields being alternately azure and gules, and the devices or and argent. This renders their identification difficult; but as a decoration they are a success.

Nave Seats

The nave seats are really interesting. They are oaken and bear in many cases the mark of the adze. The bench ends are boldly carved, evidently by an artist’s hand, and from the fact that one of them bears the arms of Bishop Vesey (1519-55) and another a bishop in full pontificals, it has been assumed that they were put up just before the Dissolution. Vesey had been Archdeacon of Barnstaple and may have taken special interest in the parish.

The devices include, besides some conventional designs, the Crucifixion : Christ bearing His Cross : Two Saints walking : Emblems of the Passion : A Wyvern : A Monkey chained, holding a flask (drunkenness) : A gross face (gluttony) ; the Vernicle : Two Anchors (Hope) : the Stafford Knot; The Cock, Pillar of Scourging; Cross and Crown of thorns; the Sacred Wounds: Two Shields (chevron between 3 fleur-de-lys and chevron between 3 birds heads erased) : Salome dancing : A skeleton ; A Mounted Man facing backwards (? Parthian).

The transept seating is of oak and comparatively modern. It may have been done in 1846, when we are told that the Church was ‘refitted with stalls etc. in good taste and liberality.’ The bench ends are well carved, but do not compare with those of the nave for spirit and execution. The only interesting ones are John the Baptist’s head with the initials SC/p ; and what appears to be a rebus (Sun and gate with crossed sword, staff and key).

The Chancel stalls are of stained deal with poppy head finials. There is a good carved wooden pulpit and a good eagle lectern with Memorial brasses. The whole of the East wall of the Sanctuary is covered by handsome carved oak panels of worshipping angels,and as reredos a good carving of the Nativity. The whole was put up in 1916 in memory of Prebendary Robert Walpole Sealy (Vicar 1881-1915) and his son, Edward, who died of wounds in 1915, by members of their family, who also floored part of the chancel with black and grey marble. There are some very bad Early Victorian, and some good modern windows, two of which contain portraits, in the features of the Good Steward, and of Hannah, of Mr. and Mrs. Vidai, of Cornborough.

Church Furniture.

The font, as already mentioned, is earlier than any part of the Church. It consists of a bowl with fluted ornament, still showing traces of axe cutting, on a stone pillar. Cable twist runs round the ledge, and between bowl and stem is a roll of plait moulding, the cable being repeated round the base. It suggests Norman work, and was presumably part of the Norman Church overlooking the bay.

The Church Goods Commissioners in 1554 found at ‘Abbottisham iii belles yn the towre their.’ There are now six, among them two of those mentioned by the Commissioners, with Latin inscription. Two more were cast by the Penningtons of Exeter, in 1631 and 1674. The last two were cast in 1885, and a cracked one was repaired, by Luxton of Loughborough. The old bells are really interesting.

The second of the original peal has the legend *In multos annos resonet campana Johannis*, and the stamp ‘William ffounder mefecit.’ It is possible that this bell was the work of William Dawe who worked between 1384 and 1418 in London. There are said to be three other bells of his in Devon, and they presumably came by sea. For this I am indebted to the Rev. John Scott. The fourth of the old peal bears the word ’lemosinary‘ stamped nine times in a small block letter, backward and upside down. It is meant for “Elemosinary’ and presumably means that they were the gift of charity.

In 1911 the bells were re-hung—the time of Prebendary Sealy, who was an enthusiastic ringer. ,

The Communion plate contains an Elizabethan chalice without a cover, bearing the initials J.C.—probably John Cotton, a Barnstaple goldsmith, who worked between 1568 and 1601. The original paten of 1720, and flagon of 1736 and almsdish of the same date, the last two presented by Thomas Saltren of Stone, were stolen from the Church in 1926. Another Paten was presented by the Pickard family. It bears an armorial device—Party perpale dexter Arg. 3 lozenges conjoined in fess ermine, with a crescenfor difference; sinister Arg. 3 lozenges conjoined in fess ermine —presumably the coat of a husband and wife of the 3Giffard family, possibly Robert Giffard of Halsbury and Elizabeth, daughter of John Giffard of Court.

Churchyard

The Churchyard contains no very ancient and no remarkable tombstone. It has a good cross of Cornish Granite, inscribed with the names of 13 parishioners who fell in the 1914-18 war, and 6 who fell between 1939 and 1945. It contains no yew trees, and no marks of arrow sharpening, though the Butthey adjoins it. The Registers are complete from 1653, and there is a typed copy of the Bishop’s transcripts 1598-1636 made by the Devon and Cornwall Record Society. There are copies of the Incumbents’ Terriers dated 1582, 1680 and 1744 and 1844. The latter shows 38 acres of Glebe, of which some has since been sold.

Incambents

The living is a Vicarage worth, according to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, £358 per annum, with a good house and 6 acres of Glebe. It has now been raised to £550. The Patronage originally rested with the Abbot of Tavistock, and the Great Tithes were allocated to the upkeep of the Prior and Monks under the order of

Bishop Bartholomew (e. 1186). At the Dissolution, the advowson was resumed by the Crown, though the first Vicar is said to have been appointed by Roger Norwood of Torrington “by permission of ’Hugh Pollard‘,“ (A Pollard owned land in the parish in 1519).

The Crown presented till 1876, when the advowson was purchased by the Lord of the Manor, Edward Urch Vidal, whose grandson, the Rev. Walpole Sealy is the present Patron.

The list of Vicars (see Appendix), complete from 1182, is hung in the Chancel. It begins with Roger de Filetham, and contains 39 names, the present Vicar being the Rev. Leonard Woolcott, instituted in 1954. The Abbot’s last Vicar, Thomas Hockday, remained in office till 1582; and John Luxton, appointed by the Parliamentary Conmission in 1652, was confirmed by King Charles at the Restoration. His predecessor, Nicholas Honey, was unsuccessfully pursued in the Star Chamber by some of his dissatisfied parishioners as a man of “scandalous life.” John and William Walter, father and son, held the living from 1783 to 1844, William being for some time Vicar of Bideford.

The list contains no name famous in Church or State; but they have left a tradition of unusual piety, harmony, and success.

1 Oliver Monasticon.

2 lbid. p. 97.  
3 Cary Papers No. 8 sqs.

**CHAPTER VIII**

**ECCLESIASTICAL**

**Tithes**

IT is not known to whom the Great Tithes were assigned at the Dissolution. They were then valued at £9 l3s. 4d. per annum. By 1598 they were in the hands of the Hacche family. They passed through various owners to the late Mr. H. T. Peard, from whose successors they were purchased by Queen Anne’s Bounty. The greater part of them were “merged,” presumably for cash, by the paycrs in 1842, at which time the remainder was valued at £32 p.a. In Mr. Peard’s time they amounted to £13 4s. 2d.

The Vicarial tithe was shown in 1842 as £123 12s. Od. the odd £3 l2s. Od. being assessed on the Glebe. At the present time it is shown by Quenn Anne’s Bounty as : £350.

The Glebe is shown in 1680 as 31 acres, in 1842 33 acres, in 1884 38 acres. The greater part of the Glebe has been sold during the last 60 years, and it now amounts to 6 acres, comprising the house, outbuildings and garden, and three fields, Nos. 686, 753 and 754.

No. 686, formerly the parish allotment, now contains the Parish Hall, and a row of six cottages built by the Rural District Council as well as some allotments.

**Churchwardens**

There is a list extending from 1607 to 1636, and from 1756 to 1813 there is a complete register of Church Warden’s Accounts during the incumbencies of Thomas Owen, Lewis Buck, John and William Walter. From then on there are the minutes of vestry meetings.

The income was derived from the Church Rate of £7 9s. 9½d.and 5s. 7d. rent on two fields. From it were paid rewards for killing vermin, the clerk’s salary, the expenses of the Archdeacon’s Court, the Sexton’s salary. Those, of course, were the days when the Wardens and the Guardians did much of the local Government work under the control of Quarter Sessions, when the right of the Ratepayers to elect the People’s Warden at the Easter Vestry was of real significance. But there are no records of that work.

**Chapel**

In 1733 the Vicar, the Rev. R. White, reported to the Bishop that there was in his parish no Meeting House for Dissenters, no Papist, and one family and two single women “called Independents.” The present Baptist Chapel, a very well-built little stone edifice, was erected in 1852. It is served by one of the Bideford Ministers.

**CHAPTER IX**

**EDUCATIONAL**

**School**

IN 1744 there was no School house, but the interest on a donation of £30 was applied according to the donor’s will, for the teaching of eight poor children to read English—by whom we are not told. It was probably the lapsed Cholwill’s Charity.

The West End of the present School house was built in 1851 “at the expense of Dr. W. C. Heywood of Kenwith.” It was built on the site of the old Poorhouse along the North edge of the Churchyard. It was originally designed as a residence for the “Dame” with two classrooms over, but was altered in 1875 to consist of two quite lofty classrooms 33ft. x l8ft. and i5ft. x l8ft.,to hold 100 children.

The log books are extant from 1875 onward. It was, and still is, a Church of England “aided” school. It has had for most of its career, two regular teachers and an occasional pupil teacher, and about the turn of the century was filled to capacity.

Owing to the reduction of children in the Parish, and the removal of those over eleven to Bideford in 1944, the numbers had gradually fallen to twenty, with one teacher, and it was scheduled for disbandment by the County Educational Authority when the Development Scheme was complete. But the numbers are now 25 and thechool has been raised to the status of a Church of England Aided School with two teachers.

Except for occasional lapses, the reports in the Log books show a remarkably high standard of teaching, and discipline, which is still maintained. The managers are the Vicar and a Church Warden, with representatives nominated by the Subscribers, the Devon County Council, the Parish Council, and the Diocesan Board of Education. They are responsible for the buildings, and general control of the School business, and they have always made it a practice to visit the School at frequent intervals.

There have been fifteen Head teachers. For the first fifteen years there were a succession of single Mistresses ; from 1890 till 1922 there were School Masters with their wives as Assistant; since 1922 there have been three Mistresses in succession. it seems to have been the practice of every Vicar to visit the School weekly. Until the late war, H.M. Inspector visited at least once a year, and the Diocesan Inspector twice. There is hardly a bad report among them. Many are enthusiastic in their praise, and from the visitors who were brought to see it one would imagine that it was regarded as a kind of “ show school” for North Devon. I was, in fact, so informed about 1925 by the Chairman of the County Education Committee. Beside the ordinary religious and secular primary instruction, the School provided classes in gardening, dressmaking, laundry and carpentering, and from time to time ran Evening Continuation classes. At one time it taught beekeeping and dyeing. These activities have now lapsed since the transfer of all children over 11 to Bideford school. The Free Church children often figure prominently in the Diocesan Inspector’s rçports, and were as much at home as those of the Established Church.

I think the results of 70 years’ good schooling are visible in the Church and Chapel observance of the present day parishioners.

**CHAPTER X**

**OF GENERAL INTEREST**

**Public Charities**

THE Report of the Public Charities Commission for Devon in 1826 mentioned three charities in Abbotsham, two of which are still administered.

*Shee’s Gift* of 20th March, 1627, left an annuity of £5 lOs. as a charge on a close called the Barton Moor, 22 acres, a parcel of the demesne of Coleridge in Mid-Devon, for the “Finding of ‘sustenance and relief for poor, aged, maimed, impotent and needy ‘people of the parish of Abbotsham.” The proprietor was allowed to deduct 20s. in respect of Land Tax, and the £4 lOs. is still received yearly.

*Poor’s Land*. The origin of this charity is unknown, but it must be of about the same date. In 1659 a lease was granted of “a tenement and mill with appurtenance called ‘Tealter’ for three ‘lives at a rent of 20/-.”

This tenement was divided into four portions marked with paint, but was apparently always let to one tenant, and a quarter of the rent, which by 1826 amounted to £6 5s. subject to deduction of 11/3 for land tax and 2/3 for chief rent, was paid annually to the Parish Officers for distribution among “such of the poor ‘labourers of the parish as do not receive constant relief.”

This undivided share was sold in 1890 to Mr. Pine Coffin of Portledge for £364 13s. 3d. and the proceeds sent to the Charity Commissioners.

The income of these two charities combined now amounts to between £13 and £14 per annum, and is distributed among the agricultural labourers who are householders in the parish, without regard to their means, by a Committee nominated by the Parish Council, with the Vicar as Chairman.

*Cholwill’s Gift*, referred to by the Commissioners as having lapsed, probably represents the £30 mentioned in the terrier of 1744, the interest on which was applied to the education of eight poor children. There seemed little doubt that the capital had been embezzled.

There are four small legacies in favour of the upkeep of the Churchyard, and one of the School.

**Public Hall**

Until 1920 the Schoolroom sufficed as a meeting place for the parishioners. As a memorial to those who fell in the 1914-18 war a Parish Hall was built by public subscription and the proceeds of various entertainments. It is built of stone, roofed with slate, and measures 8Oft. x 4Oft. with a kitchen and dressing rooms. It is vested in the Charity Commissioners, and managed by a body ofTrustees, four of whom are Churchmen, and four Free Churchmen, with the Vicar as ex-officio member, elected annually. It has a stage, and provides the venue for parish entertainments of all kinds, as well as a skittle alley, rifle range, and in times of war, a Drill Hall.

It cost £780 and was opened in 1925. It is free of debt, and being built on the Glebe, pays no ground rent. The skittle alley was added in 1954 by the voluntary labour of the Members of the Club.

**Public House**

There is one public house, the New Inn, formerly belonging to the Cornborough Estate, but purchased in 1907 by Messrs. Arnold & Hancock, brewers of Milverton. The lessee is Mrs. Tucker, in whose family the conduct has been for a great number of years, and the house, a picturesque thatched building on the Abbotsham to Northam road, is still a village forum; in fact it attracts a considerable clientèle from outside the parish.

Of less general appeal are the Skittle Club and the Rifle Club, which meet once a week during the winter months, and provide a focus for some competition spirit. There was at one time a Football Club, which flourished after the Great War, but as in so many N. Devon villages faded out with the Victory boom.

There is a very live and successful Women’s Institute, though with no permanent home of its own.

**The Pound**

The one-roomed shed opposite the Barton in the angle of the Bideford and Northam Roads, No. 917 in the Tithe Map of 1842 was listed as the Pound. It was apparently held by R. S. Vidal, as Lord of the Manor, but adjoined No. 777 belonging to the Barton to which it now belongs. It is said to have been used by Mr. E. U. Vidai, the succeeding Lord, as a stable for carriages waiting at the Church, and one of the buildings in Mr. Pickard’s “Roundell in Teaton” was used—if required—as the Manorial Pound.

**CHAPTER XI**

**ABBOTSHAM AT WAR**

WHETHER or not the Ealdorman in 878 A.D. impressed any local warriors into his levy we do not know. He was probably much encumbered by their wives and children. There is no record of any further military operations in or round Abbotsham. But certain preparations were made.

**Armada**

In 1569 Muster Rolls of all parishes in Devon were drawn up by three Commissioners, of able men, horses, furniture and armour. The Commissioners were Sir John Seintleger (of Annery),Sir Arthur Champernowne and Piers Edgecumbe. They found in Abbotsham eight men :— John Collecotte, Charity Lecke, Roger Beaple, John Lake, Thomas Shebbeere, Symon Gyste, Leonard Sherman and Symon Gorwill, each with 1 large bowe, 1 sheaf of arrowes,1 stele cappe, 1 black bille. Beside this the Community were assessed to find :— 1 Corslet,1 Pike,1 Caliver and 1 Morion. There were 2 Archers, 3 Harquebuseyes, 2 Pikemen and 4Billmen including 2 of the above. There is no record that they were ever called to stations.

The numbers seem very small when compared with the Protestation return of 157 men over 18 in the year 1641, of whom only 10 represent the former possible fighting men. Again there is no information as to what part, if any, they took in the Civil War.

**Napoleonic War**

In 1793 in view of a possible invasion of North Devon by the French operating from Ireland under General Humbert, it was resolved at the County Headquarters to draw up plans for defence. No action seems to have been taken till November 1803, when the resolution was published with a copy of the General’s captured orders. It is noteworthy that no Abbotsham gentleman appears to have been important enough to be called in Council.

Orders were issued to all Ministers, Churchwardens and

Overseers to make returns :—

(a) Of men between 15 and 60, distinguishing those capable and incapable of bearing arms

(b) Aliens and Quakers

(c) Females, distinguishing those incapable of removing from danger.

Plans were drawn up with the objects of ;—

(a) Driving away stock and consuming, or in the last resort destroying, other means of subsistence

(b) Preparing a list of all such stocks and stores for compensation

(e) Enrolling volunteers to bear arms

(d) Enrolling pioneers

(e) Enrolling a corps of guides

(f) Enrolling carters

(g) Enrolling millers and bakers

(h) Enrolling bargemen.

The duties of each section were minutely prescribed. It is to be noted that there was apparently no impressment, and the enrolment both of men and transport was to be entirely voluntary, to be paid for by the Government.

A Superintendent was appointed in each parish — in Abbotsham Mr. R. Studley Vidal of Cornborough. He summoned a meeting at which were appointed :—

(a) The Glebe field for rendezvous of stock

(b) The Churchyard for general assembly

(e) The Church gate for carts, 2 of them with tilts, under Joseph Stone

(d) A baker—Rachel Stone, with 6 bushels of meal for the poor and infirm

(e) 3 farmers as conductors and overseers ; 3 more as drivers of stock and 6 others as assistants.

It is curious that not one of their names is now represented in the parish.

A list was drawn up of 6 “decrepid” men and 10 women allotted to carts ; another of owners of stock, containing 5 Gentry and 14 Farmers ; another of villages along the 2 prescribed routes — Somerton in Somerset and Dartmoor.

Overseers were directed to supply tar, oil and Spanish Brown to mark the parish bullocks with a broad stripe between the pins. There were 12 carts each with 1 horse ; but 6 were noted as so poor that “no more carts were in the Parish than what the Superintendent considered absolutely necessary for the removal of the sick and infirm with necessary provisions.” There were 15 Pioneers, each having 1 shovel, I billhook, with 7 felling-axes and pick-axes, 2 spades and 1 saw. These were told off for the public service.

There were stringent Örders from the County to avoid turnpike roads, which were to be left free for the passage of the King’s troops. There was also a notice from Lieut. General Simcoe, commanding at Exeter, recommending that all persons possessing fowling pieces and not actually enrolled in the Public Service should form themselves into associations of not more than 12 for the very essential purpose of cutting off predatory parties of the enemy, should they effect a landing. Instructions were issued as to enrolment, supply of ammunition, loading, ramming, levelling and finally of firing arms.

I have found no record of the valiant youth of Abbotsham who were enrolled in these associations, nor of persons serving in the Yeomanry, or in any other capacity in the Napoleonic wars, though there can be no doubt that many did so; and there is no reason to believe that the emergency orders of removal or destruction of property were ever put in force.

Modern Wars

Defence measures taken in the two Great Wars of 1914-18 and 1939 were nation-wide, and it does not seem necessary to detail the measures in the former. In neither case was the area directly threatened. In both there was eventually conscription of all able-bodied men of fighting age, not required for urgent civilian duties. In 1914 and again in 1915 a committee was formed to encourage voluntary recruiting. The list of those who actually served in the Forces is hung in the Parish Hall and totals 91. Of these 13 fell in battle or died as a result of wounds, and their names are recorded on the Churchyard Cross.

There seems to be no record of any local defence scheme actually drawn up. Committees were formed to provide comforts for the troops, to collect subscriptions, to make extra clothing, and to stimulate production of food. A fair proportion of those shown as serving in the forces were actually employed at home.

For Hitler’s War on the other hand, the material is so copious that the difficulty is to select salient points suitable for a Parish History. The number of officers and men who served at one time or another in the Regular Forces is 49 men and 6 women. Into their exploits it is frankly impossible to enter. Of them 5 did not return, and their names are inscribed with others on the Cross. In 1940 an entirely new and originally voluntary citizen Army was formed, on the appointment of Mr. Winston Churchill as Premier. It was called originally the Local Defence Volunteers, and the name was changed in August to Home Guard. Abbotsham formed a section of the 5th (Bideford) Battalion Devon Home Guard, under the command of Colonel D. C. Crombie, D.S.O., late Indian Army. It was finally attached to the Northam Company under Lieut. H. A. Lomas, of Cornborough, who was also Battalion Chief Guide.

The History of No. 5 Battalion is set out at considerable length in the C.O.’s War Book compiled at the end of the War by Colonel Crombie. The section took its full share in all the operations there recorded. It was only once called to the Alert—in September 1940 on the eve of the Battle of Britain ; but trenches were dug on the only likely aeroplane landing ground, under Cornborough. The numbers fluctuated as men were called up in regular service, and the maximum at any time was 32. The writer was succeeded in August 1942 by Lieut. P. K. Spurner. In February 1942 service was made compulsory, with a minimum time of 24 hours in any

four weeks.

During the summer months, when landings were considered possible, though improbable, a guard was mounted by night on the Cornborough Watch Tower. They were relieved during the day by a most public spirited roster of Ladies. Beyond the frequent passage overhead of aeroplanes making for South Wales, no enemy was sighted.

**Home Guard Armament**

The arming of the Home Guard has been the subject of much humorous comment. Its original official equipment was not much superior to that of Queen Elizabeth’s day. The L.D.V. was armed with such weapons as they possessed or could borrow.

Failing these, they were encouraged to use loaded sticks, cudgels, knuckle dusters or truncheons.

These were supplemented gradually by borrowed rifles, then

by an Army issue of Ross .303, then by a crude form of bomb — a Molotov Cocktail filled into glass bottles and sealed with two fuzes. But by the end of April 1941 the whole battalion was adequately armed with Ross Rifles, Browning Automatics, Lewis and Vickers Guns, Projectors and Mills Grenades. To those were afterwards added Northover Projectors, Spigot Mortars, Sten Guns to replace the Tommy Guns, and finally the U.S. .300 Rifle to replace the Ross.

In 1942 no little amusement was caused by the news that an issue had been made of Pikes—iron pipes with bayonets attached. To be truthful, the Pikes never left Battalion Headquarters, and were eventually called back to Ordnance Stores. In 1939 they might have had their uses, but 2 years later they merely “adorned a tale“, as they had in Napoleon’s day.

The Home Guard was “stood down” in November 1944, though not officially disbanded till December 1945. But before this there was a memorable event in which Abbotsham took a prominent part.

An Inter-Battalion Challenge

In July 1944 the C.O. 5th Battalion challenged the 4th (Barnstaple) Battalion to a Shooting Match of Falling Plates and China Cup Competitions, and a special prize for the team which could knock down all its plates in the shortest time. In each case the team had to run 100 yards to the firing point. The date fixed was the 17th September 1944 and the venue was Cornborough Range. The targets were on the old Butts with the sea behind them. The two Battalions paraded in strength and there was a large crowd of spectators. Lunch and tea were provided in marquees and served by members of the Women’s Volunteer Service to as many as a thousand people. Amid great excitement, out of 16 teams, the China Cup Competition was won by a Squad of the 4th Battalion—eight men armed with rifles and a machine gun. This last made the score on a four-foot target after all the plates had been knocked down by the rifles. The time allotted was 1 minute and 40 seconds. The Falling Plate Competition—a straight forward time match on the eight plates, was won by an Officers’ Team of the 5th Battalion in the wonderful time of 40 seconds including the run. Eleven teams competed.

At the conclusion, the O.C. 4th Battalion was adjudged the winner of the Match, and they marched off with a band, preceded by an enormous gauntlet on a pole, which had been flung down on their arrival by Colonel Crombie.

No German force effected a landing on the shores of Great Britain.

The Home Guard was never called on to face an invader. But its existence undoubtedly acted as a deterrent. It added enormously to the confidence of our people. And locally it drew together in the various parishes men and women of all ranks of society. It is pleasing to reflect that Abbotsham played the part allotted to it with enthusiasm and credit.

**CHAPTER XII**

**A THOUSAND YEARS OF, PARISH LIFE**

FOREGOING pages give a brief outline of the history of the parish—manorial, ecclesiastical and educational — as far as it can be gleaned from public and private documents that have come under my notice; and of the public buildings which have come down to us.

The story is meagre, and gives but little indication of the lives of the people who have lived in the parish for the past 1,000 years.

The reason is not far to seek. The parish has stood outside the main current of national life; it has produced or harboured no great men ; and it has been dependent on no great national institution. The Battle of Cynuit, if it was really fought here, represents its one intrusion into History, brief but glorious.

The Lords of the Manor, until the XVIIIth century, seem to have been non-resident, and as far as the parish was concerned, mere shadows. It might have been expected that the records of the Tavistock Abbey with its 600 years of Manorial tenure would have yielded some information, but though there have been most carefully collected, and partly published by Mr. Finberg, no entry of any interest concerning Abbotsham has come to light except the account of the XIIth century boundary dispute already described. Whether the whole system of boon-works, reliefs, heriots, wardships and rights of milling and pannage which was incidental to the fully fledged Manorial system, really flourished in North Devon seems open to doubt.

To start with, in Abbotsham, there is no trace of an open field. There are no remains of a closely inhabited village site. Where did the 21 “villeins” and 6 bordars live with their 15 plough teams? Is it not reasonable to suppose that they lived on separate holdings more or less as modern farmers do? And does it not follow that there were separate tenancies in the Abbots’ Manor subject only to some fairly light contribution toward the upkeep of the Abbey?

**Many Transfers of Land**

Transfers of land from one tenant to another by deed are quite common from the end of the 14th century. The first grant of land by the Abbot of which we have a record was the above mentioned deed of Abbot Robert to Gervase Giffard in the reign of Edward I.

This was followed by a succession of deeds granted by the Giffard family, in which the grantee is described as ”tenant having and holding of the Abbot Convent for homage and service.” There is no mention of a permission from the Lord of the Manor.

There is a whole series of transfers of land in Orchard Lake and “le Mersche” ja Hornborough from the year 1395 to 1542. These may perhaps not be relevant, although there are such properties adjoining one another in Abbotsham, they are always described in the deeds as being partly in Northam, partly in Bideford, where no properties of that name can be traced. But they certainly imply no servile tenure in the neighbourhood. In 1362 Emma Webber sold land in Boclyve (Buckleigh) to Edmund Standbury “to hold of the chief lord of the fee for ever.”

In 1398 his son Richard sold land in Bocliffe, probably the same, to John Bollock the vicar, under the same proviso.

In 1411 Richard sold land in Boylecliff to Robert Beale clerk and others. (Beale was not the vicar, but may have had some connection with the Church nearby.) No mention of the Lord. In 1437 Ric Blake of Exeter sold land in Thorne, adjoining Buckleigh, “which he had of gift Foffment of Walter Mandewilic of Tavistock to John Gifford of Yeo and others.”

In 1499 William Gervon sells to Thomas Tremayle and others unspecified messuages, lands and tenements in Abbotsham and other parishes which he held by gift and enfeoffment of Robert Giffard.

These deeds which happen to have come down to us prove this much, that the holder in Abbotsham had a heritable and transferable interest in the land, subject only to the payment of certain dues and services to the Lord of the Manor. There is no trace of servile tenure at least from the XIVth century onwards. In fact the theory advanced in *Anglo-Saxon England* appears to be supported: that “the Domesday clerks seem to have adopted the word *villanus* as the simplest possible description of the peasant, who to them was the typical villager—the man bound to supply customary labour on the Lord’s demesne as the holder of one of the recognised tenements on which the village economy was based. . . . They cannot be blamed severely if they included under this description many whose labour services, if any, were negligible in amount, and by whom the independent traditions of the ancestral ceorls were jealously preserved.”

But it would be interesting to know what view the Abbot took of his tenants’ rights and liabilities.

The *Valor Ecelesiasticus* at the Dišsolution shows the rent of the tenants as £14.l2.ll. The detailed list of 1632 totals £14.lO.54 which suggests that the actual rent of the various holdings in the Abbot’s Lordship was as there shown, varying from 32/- and 20/- for the customary tenants in Barton land and Stone (probably old demesne land) to a few pence for the various cottages. The highest rent otherwise was 11/1 for Cornborough. Assuming the acreage to have been then, as now, 1758, this works out at about twopence per acre, which even at the money value of the XVIth century was hardly a rack rent.

**CHAPTER XIII**

**PRIVATE PROPERTIES**

THE earliest complete list of private properties extant is dated 1632 and described as “A Rentall renewed and made out by ‘severall antient Rentalls theire taken perused and carefully ‘examened by William Shebbeare, George Middleton, John Willett, ‘John Wood, William Gist, Richard Buse, John Osborne and ‘Wil1iam Willett.”

The Lord of the Manor is James Walsh, a Barnstaple lawyer. He holds 4 acres in Rowlisland, which is part of Cornborough, and may have included the house, though there is nothing to suggest it. He held shares in Yarnsborough, Rowlisland, Gainsborough, Wyihays, Clifton in the N.W. portion of the parish, Barton, Stone, Crofts, Hurnhay and Claws in the village; Buckpool, Redford, East Rixlade, and Westacott on the West. In each of these cases the holding is with other proprietors, and described as “houlding a farthing (or a fraction of a farthing) in free soccage by sute of Court and Relife (sic) when it shall happen by the rent of . . .“ This is hardly the tenure which one would expect for the Lord of the Manor and principal landowner of the village. I have discovered no further reference to him whatever, and he is not mentioned in the preamble, nor in the Subsidy Roll of 1624. I have been driven to the conclusion that, like his predecessors, he was a non-resident owner, either by purchase or inheritance; but it is a curious coincidence that Cornborough and Rowlisland disappear from view

until they were purchased about 1750 by Thomas Kenny, a Bideford Merchant.

The two first names on the roll refer to owners of property outside the parish. Richard Coffin of Portledge pays annually 30/- and 22 pence for Goldworthy in Parkhaam, and the Coffins continued this payment till the beginning of the last century. Goidworthy, a small cluster of cottages and two farms near Horns Cross belonged to Tavistock, and presumably paid its manorial dues at Abbotsham. When the Crown sold the Abbotsham Manor in 1601 this Goldworthy tribute must have been included in the price. But I think its continued inclusion in the Manorial rents of Abbotsham effectually disposes of Lyson’s statement that the Coffins were Lords of the Manor in 1621.

Some similar transaction must account for the 2lsd. which John Arscott paid for Annery in Monkleigh. This Manor is among those made over to the Abbey by Ordulf’s deed.

The principal “tenants“ in Abbotsham itself are Sir Edward Cary of Stantor, representing the Giffard interest, and John William and Robert Shebbeare, John Willett and William Leigh, Esq. (?of Burrough) and the Heirs of Hendry Lawrence. Richard Coffin with two men, possibly his tenants, holds Northmaster, now part of Greenacleave on the Alwington border. The Feoffees of Hartland — presumably the Abbey—hold half of Lendon. There are 30 other holders of farms or portions of farms ; and it is interesting to note that only two of these names are represented in the parish to-day. The Manorial Rent is shown as £14.lO.61 nearby corresponding with the £14.12.ll shown as the annual value in the *Valor Ecclesiastjcus* of 1540.

Some attempt has been made below to give an account of the principal properties as they stand to-day.

**Abbotsham Court**

The old name of this property until about the middle of the XIXth century was Shebbeare Town or Shebberton. There is no documentary evidence that the site was the residence of the Abbot’s factor, but it seems not improbable.

The earliest part of the present House contains a stone on which the date 1565 is cut. The owners then were the yeoman family of Shebbeare, and their history was recorded in some detail by one of the family who signed himself C.E.S. in an article published in the Bideford and North Devon Gazette of Dec. 29, 1920.

There are two members of the “Shibburge” family in the Subsidy Rolls of 1332 and 1524, in the Muster Rolls of 1569, and three as occupiers of land in the Subsidy Roll of 1624; but none of these mentions the property till the “ Rentall” of 1632.

It was occupied by members of the Shebbeare family till about the middle of the XVIIIth century, though the senior member appears chiefly to have lived in Okehampton, of which several were mayors during the XVIIth century. it was sold to the family of Hatherleigh, who held it till 1840, when it was acquired by Mr. John Richard Beste of Botleigh.

It then passed to Mr. Taylor, whose son sold the house to Mr. Houghton I.C.S. and the agricultural land to Mr. Skidmore Ashby. It was eventually purchased with a small acreage by Major General John Arkwright Strick, C.B., whose family still hold it. The open stretch of downland between it and Cornborough was purchased by Major G. J. E. Lomas in 1937 from the Trustees of Mr. Skidmore Ashby. It was used for some three years as a racecourse, but failed to attract enough spectators to pay its expenses, and was let as grazing to the adjoining owner. The remainder of the land is farmed partly with Rixlade and partly with Lake.

**Barton**

This property apparently included another called Stone. In spite of the much discussed name, which seems to have indicated that it was held in demesne by the Abbey; and in spite of the fact that it adjoins the Church and contains probably the best land in the parish, there seems to be no mention of it before the Dissolution.

In the rentall of 1632 there is an entry:

“James Walsh Esq. being Lord of this Manor his Customary Tenants.

**Bartonland** Walter Heard per Annum XXXII S.

**Stone** Phillip Rowe Widdow per annum XX S.”

This definitely suggests demesne property, but when it ceasto be such, does not appearIn 1756 the property, which was not included in the Bishop’s seating order, was held by William Saltren Willett of Coombe, and in 1777 by his son Augustus, who were lords of the Manor.

It was bought later by John Turner, and in 1833 his brother Richard Turner pays a Manorial fine for it. He held it in 1842 and 1856, and the property is still held by his family, round whom most of the Parish Activities centre.

**Bowood**

An account of the earliest history of this property in the ownership of the Giffard family is given in the discussion on the submanor. It passed from them through an only daughter Wilmota to her second husband George Cary of Stantor. In 1632 it was held by their son Sir Edward Cary with shares in various other properties. How long the Cary family held it I do not know, but in 1775 part of it was apparently held by Dr. Buck. Mr. L. W.Buck bought the rest of it with Pennywell in 1846 and it continued in that family till 1914 when it was sold by Sir Hugh Stucley to Mr. Squire.

The attractive old house and part of the land is now in thepossession of Mr. Surtees Baylis. The farm was sold to the Pickard family, and is now owned by Mr. Grigg.

The remains of the windmill which once stood here have entirely disappeared.

**Buckleigh**

This part of the parish has never been held as a separate estate, but consists of various small properties, transfer of some being recorded in the XIVth century. They are mostly now private houses with one small farm. For some years there was here a successful boys’ school, originally the Junior School of the United Services College at Westward Ho !, and afterwards under various private schoolmasters. This is now a Country Club. The whole of this area has been transferred for administration, but not ecclesiastical, purposes to Northam Urban District.

Chaltaborough and Shamland

These two properties were inherited by the Pickard family from Mrs. Mary Brayley in 1836, and were farmed together till 1939 when Chaltaboro was sold to Mr. W. J. Powell. Mr. Charles Pickard, our oldest parishioner, and former churchwarden, farmed Shamland until his recent death. The house and outbuildings of Shamland have been little altered, and are an interesting survival of the XVIIIth century farm.

Claycott

This is a small property, the occupation of which was the subject of a lease by the owners of Bowood to William Orator and Margaret his wife in 1561. In 1632 it was in the hand of the Lord of the Manor, James Walsh. It was acquired by the Turner family in 1825 and is now farmed by Mr. John Moase, whose family have been carpenters and wheelwrights for three generations, as a tenant of Mr. Turner.

Clifton

Formerly Clyston, this is a small property adjoining the site of the original parish church. It has passed through many hands and been united to various other properties, but its chief interest lies in the fact that in 1569 it was owned with Langdon by Sir Richard Grenville. It was then successively occupied by Nicholas Dillon and Rose Geifrey, and sold to Oliver Pearde. Pearde sold it in 1575 to George Cary, and in 1632 it formed part of the major holding of Sir Edward Cary of Stantor. It was later united to Shebbertown and to Kenwith and is now owned and farmed by Mr. Alexander Tucker, who has transferred part of it to a large and successful holiday camp.

Coombe

There is little doubt that this was the chief property in the parish from the middle of the XVIIth century to the early years of the XIXth. No record of it during the Abbot’s lordship has come to light. The property consisted of land in a ring fence of roads starting from the village pump to the Smithy, from there by the old bridle road now called Rocky Lane, to the top of the hill over looking the Cornborough valley, and so to Riccardsdown corner, and the high road from Northam to Abbotsham. At various times it included certain of the cottages in the village, called Claws and Hurnhay, which it is impossible now to identify.

The house was either built or added to by Daniel Berryman and his wife in 1616, whose plaster label of 1632 is on the walls of one of the sitting rooms.

It was acquired in the middle of the XVIIth century by the Willett family, and John Willett held it to his death in 1736, when he bequeathed all his property to William Saltren of Stone in Parkham, including the lordship of the Manor. William Saltren Willett was succeeded by his son Augustus, who appears to have been a vigorous magistrate and lord of the Manor. The property was sold some time before 1824 to Mr. Richard John Turner and remained in that family till 1945 when, after disposal of various outlying fields, and the residence of Keene, which had been held with it, the house wassold to Captain Eric Bean the present owner.

**Edway, Gainsborough, Stone and Willhay**

These smallholdings seem never to have had an independent existence. Though probably held by small tenants they were attached to one or other of their more considerable neighbours. They crown the hill above Cornborough and Pusehill, and may at some time have held an ancient stronghold, as they stand at the apex of four old roads; and they adjoin the original parish church. But of this there is no evidence whatever.

**Crofts and Hurnhay**

These are names which occur in various leases by the Willett family in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. They appear to relate to cottages and gardens in the village.

**Coombe Walter and Coombe Wakewell**

These are small farms generally owned by adjoining landlords, but let separately.

Coombe Walter was sold in 1561 by William Seward of Stokentynhed with some cottages to Robert Jagard of Abbotsham, and the tenant was John Panter. In 1632 the Willetts had it. In 1753 it was held by Thos. Cholwill, who was succeeded by

his son Digory. In 1807 the Vicar, John Walter, died owner of it. It later passed

to Mr. R. S. Vidal of Cornborough, Lord of the Manor, and fromhim to his cousin and successor Edward Urch Vidal. It was left to the grandson of the latter, E. W. E. G. Sealy Vidal, and sold in 1907 to Mr, John Turner. After his death it was sold to Mrs. Kiernander of Rixlade, and by her to Major G. J. E. Lomas.

The farm house is a good one, unusually large for the size of the property, and has been occupied as a Guest House.

An old road, now disused, ran through the farmyard to Rixlade, where it joined the old main coast road, now overgrown.

Coombe Wakewell contained the house now known as Coombe Cot, formerly Gibbs, now a separate residence. It has had a number of owners, among its more important neighbours. By the middle of the XVIIIth century it was held by John Willett, and

passed to his heir Thomas Saltren. The Wiiletts sold it apparently to Richard Street, from whom it was purchased by Mr. Richard Turner.

**1Cornborough**

This is apparently the property called Hornborough, owned by Richard Attewater in 1395, and transferred then by him with two others named, as now, Orchard and Lake, to one Walter Broyt. The three holdings adjoin, and are the subject of no less than 15 transfers recorded in the Catalogue of Ancient Deeds. The only difficulty in the identification is that they are described sometimes as in the parish of Bydeford, sometimes of Northam, and there is no mention of the Lord of the Manor. There are no such properties traceable in either Bideford or Northam, and there is no reason to suspect a change of boundaries which would bring them into any parish but Abbotsham. It seems reasonable to assume that they are the three known now as Cornborough, Lake and Orchard.

They were made over by the Broyts to their daughter Joan Beapellin 1453 and in spite of various transfers — possibly fictitious — they were held by John Beaupell in 1490 and remained in that family till at least 1542, when John Beaple of Fremington granted them to his son William. There seems reason to think that the Beaupells or Beaples were non-resident, and there is nothing to show how the land was occupied or even if a house stood there. The property disappears from view till the Rentall of 1632, by which time it had become Quarnborough, and was held by Robert Sheber, presumably of Shebbertown.

In 1750 it was bought as a residence by one Thomas Kenney of Bideford, and the Vicar reported to Dean Milles that he had built a “summerbox“ — the present watch tower ; but what land he held with it it is hard to say. It is valued in 1784 at £20. On Kenney’s death in 1772, Cornborough passed to Dr. Hewish. By 1804 it was held by Mr. Robert Studley Vidai, the author of the brochure on Kenwith.

Mr. Vidal acquired the Lordship of the Manor from the Saltren Willetts and proceeded to hold Manorial Courts at the New Inn. The record of these Courts prior to 1824 is interesting, but has the appearance of a deliberate archaism, as already noted.

On Mr. Vidal’s death in 1842, he left all his property to his distant cousin Edward Urch Sealy of Bridgewater, on condition that he lived at Cornborough and changed his name to Vidal. This was done, and Mr. E. U. Vidal reigned as Lord of the Manor till his death in 1884. His property by that time included the separate holdings of Lake, Orchard, W. Pusehili, Stone, Gainsborough, Edway, Langdon, Coombe Walter, Rowlisland, Tucksland and “Armitory” (the hill on which the Tower stands). The house, hitherto an undistinguished farmhouse, with a bare hill behind it, was nearly doubled in size to accommodate a numerous family, and surrounded by judicious planting of trees.

It was left to the minor son of the Squire’s eldest son, but occupied by Mrs. Vidal till 1897, when Mr. Edward Wyndham Eyre Granville Sealy Vidal took possession. He sold it in 1903 to Mr. David Carlile Wingate.

In 1910 it was sold to Miss Lilian Fleming, and in 1912 to the present writer.

**Greenacleave or Greencliff**

This is a farm situated on the coast, bounded on the West by the stream known as Boat Lake, which is the parish boundary so hotly disputed in the 12th century. It

now includes the three small holdings known as North and South Middleton and Northmaster in the Rentall of 1632. By 1825 they were united under John Sloly of Torrington, and in 1840 were sold to Mr. Richard Turner, whose descendants held them till 1937 when the farm was bought by Mr. George Jackman, who in turn

sold it to the present writer. It is still farmed by the Jackman family and is the centre of a valley sloping to the shore on the edge of which stands the remains of a lime kiln. It is traversed by a public footpath which, by popular tradition, was regularly used by smugglers.

**Kenwith**

The house which, as already mentioned, has been accepted as occupying the much disputed site of the battle of Cynuit, was called until the early years of the XVIIIth century Hennicastle or Hennaborough. As such it does not appear in any Abbotsham records. The boundary of Abbotsham and Northam runs across the field to the East passing East of the house, and it is possible that the farm was treated as part of Northam. It is not mentioned in either the “ Rentall “ of 1632, or the Bishops seating order of 1753, or the list of Estates drawn up by the overseers of the Poor in 1784. In 1815 the recorded owner is Henry Nantes, and presumably

it was during his ownership that Mr. Vidal made his enquiries into the site of Cynuit.

By 1840 it was owned by Dr. W. C. Heywood, a considerable benefactor of the parish, who built the village school. He occupied it with some intervals till his death in 1855. It was then acquired by the Vicar, the Rev. E. Dansey, who preferred it to the then much smaller vicarage. He died in 1876 and the house was occupied till his death in 1896 by the family of General Hickman Molesworth.

About 1876 it was bought by Mr. J. R. Pinecoffin as a dower house to Portledge and occupied by various tenants, ending with Mrs. Pine Coffin. On her death in 1928 it was sold successively to Dr. Driver, to Mr. Byers and to Major Roller. During the war of 1939-45 it was lent by Major Roller to the Devon Red Cross, and

run successfully by the Countess of Orford as a Convalescent Home for Service men. It then passed to Brigadier C. H. M. Peto, D.S.O., who retired from the Army at the close of hostilities, and captured the Barnstaple constituency for the Conservatives. Abbotsham had the distinction of housing its Member of Parliament till the re-distribution of seats in 1951 transferred the whole Bideford area to Torrington. Brigadier Peto continued to represent Barnstaple till he retired in 1955 and the house was sold in 1954 to Lt. Cdr. L. C. Harding, R.N.V.R,

**Rixlade**

This is a farm adjoining Greenacleave, with a very pleasant old-fashioned residence. It was held in 1632 by the Shebbers and seems to have been generally attached to Shebbertown till 1846 when it was bought by Mr. Richard Turner. His descendants sold it to Mr. Skidmore Ashby, and it is still in the possession

of his widow. The property was increased in 1912 by the purchase

of most of the farm land of Shebbertown, which is still farmed with it.

**Westacote**

This farm on the West boundary of the parish, includes the old holdings of Loatham and Spurland. From time to time they have been in the possession of the Coffins, Lords of the Manor of Alwington, but in 1632 they appear curiously enough as part of the demesne land held by James Walsh as Lord of the Manor and his “ customary tenants.” After various transfers, Westacote is now in the possession of Mr. N. Trewin.

**Keene or Keane**

This is represented by a residence and garden now belonging to Mr. R. B. Richardson late of the Colonial Civil Service.

In 1569 it was included in a grant by Sir Richard Grenville of Stowe with Clifton and Langdon, but of what it then consisted seems doubtful. In 1575 it was sold to the Cary Estate, who held it in 1632. By 1703 it was in the hands of Robert Berry of Parkham who sold it for £200 with three cottages to John Willett of Coombe, and it became merged in that estate, with which it was valued at £30, iñ 1784. In 1842 it is shown as owned by Mr. James Smith Ley who does Reeve for it in the Manorial record of 1854.

Mr. John Turner bought it and it was let to various tenants till 1934 when it was purchased by Major Christopher Rawdon. He sold it in 1946 to Major Alastair Campbell, R.A., who sold it to the present occupier in 1951.

1Chancery Catalogue of Ancient Deeds, Vol. VL

**CHAPTER XIV**

**ABBOTSHAM OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO**

I CANNOT close this account of the parish better than by reproducing an article contributed to the old Parish Magazine of October 1893.

It was written by Mrs. Vidal, widow of Edward Urch Vidal, the Lord of the Manor, grandmother of his successor, and Mother of the Vicar.

**FIFTY YEARS AGO**

On this occasion of the Harvest Thanksgiving our attention was drawn in the sermon preached at the Morning Service to the changes which have taken place and the general improvements and advancement in comfort etc. which have been made during the last fifty years. I think a little account of Abbotsham as it then was, may not be uninteresting to those whose memories do not extend so far back, and also, as changes are very gradual, perhaps the conditions of 50 years ago are more distinctly impressed on the mind of a person entering the parish about that date, than in the recollection of older inhabitants, I must begin with the church, which was once graphically described to me as being ‘ damp, dirty and smelling a good deal of vaults’; the defective state of the state of the flooring, the fact of its only being open on Sundays, and having no means of warming it, being quite sufficient to account for all this. The windows were some of them square with wooden frames filled with a common glass, which admitted into the S transept a glare which it was thought necessary to subdue by a large white calico blind.

Instead of the seats with their carved ends, equalling in all but antiquity the much admired seats in the nave, the transept was filled with high wooden erections of different sizes according to the pretensions of their owners ; some 2 or 3 being square and roomy, some too narrow to be entered except sideways, but all alike of worm eaten deal; and some adorned with ragged green baize and little red curtains.

The ribs of the roof were painted a lively blue, the carved angels a brilliant yellow. The flooring was uneven, the walls stained with damp and mould, while the entrance gate was a common wooden one.

The music consisted of various instruments, conspicuous among which was a large bass viol, which was carried away after service in a blue bag, to do duty during the week in a public house in Bideford.

The Vicarage in those days was a square house of the plainest description, and the garden a dismal patch of ground with a few melancholy evergreens and no flower beds. Instead of our present commodious and handsome room, the school was a wretched place with a stable underneath, which did not conduce to the sweetness

of the close, ill ventilated apartment.

The stables, or horse stall, at the side of the Church gate were for the use of those who rode to Church, which was a very common practice. The Schoolmistress taught reading well, but writing was quite unknown to her; and her one arithmetical formula, in addition to the multiplication tables was the ‘100 pence is 8/4’.

But let us give honour where it is due. She taught the girls good practical needlework and the boys to ‘mind their manners’, and both alike their duty to God and their neighbour as set forth in the Ch. Catechism, better than many a modern and accomplished certified teacher.

A Roman Emperor is reported to have said that he found Rome built of brick and left it marble. Those who can recall this village 50 years ago can say they knew it composed of a collection of thatched cob hovels, and now see it largely increased, and rebuilt of substantial stone, and slated houses with gay gardens in front and creepers over the porches, giving pleasure to the eyes of all who pass.

And let us think of those who do pass now! A carriage was then rather a rarity in our lanes, and we have now in the summer a four-horse coach daily, besides swarms of breaks and yellow carts, both unknown articles in those days. Perhaps the fact, that in many places you might drive for half a mile or more in a road so narrow that not even a man on horse back could pass a carriage, but would have to turn round and ride in front till a gateway could be found, and that the hills which are steep enough now to alarm visitors from far countries, were then in many places much steeper, may-be the reason why riding, which was then almost universal for all ages and classes, has given place so much to driving.

Now, too, we have a post, a boon which is perhaps only thoroughly appreciated by those who can remember the necessity of sending to Bideford to receive and post letters. Having spoken of the pretty gardens, I must allude to the Cottage Garden Society which will keep its Jubilee in 1895. It was the first Society of the kind in the neighbourhood, though they are now numerous, and extend from Hartland on one side to parishes beyond Torrington on the other. The improved cultivation of gardens, and general taste for flowers is certainly to a very great extent to be attributed to them.

These are some of the principal changes of 50 years. There are many things, and those of the best, which have not changed.

Our church is greatly beautified, and our vicars have changed; but the words of praise and prayer have not changed. Our houses are more numerous and better, but the same sunny sky is over them; our fields are larger and better cultivated, but the same glorious blue sea washes their coasts.

Generations may pass away, but the kindly hearts of Abbotsham, I think, will still remain, and the pleasant greetings and friendly welcome given to all who enter the house continues as of old. In the next 50 years I who write, and a very large proportion of those who read these lines will be called to leave our homes on earth. Let us humbly hope that we may all meet again in the country which needs no sun, and where there shall be no more sea.

**Appendix “A”**

**AN ENQUIRY**

**RESPECTING THE SITE OF**

**KENWITH OR KENWIC CASTLE IN DEVONSHIRE**

**by**

**ROBERT STUDLEY VIDAL, ESQ.**

**IN A LETTER TO HENRY WANSEY, ESQ., F.A,S,**

**Read February 9th, 1804.**

**From “ARCHAELOGIA” Vol. 15, 1804**

January 25th, 1804.

Dear Sir,

I am induced by the suggestion contained in your very obliging letter to send you what particulars I have been able to collect respecting the site of Kenwith or Kenwic Castle ; a fortress the history of which I should suppose can never prove uninteresting to Englishmen, since it is intimately connected with one of the most brilliant exploits that adorn the pages of our annals.

To establish its claim to the particular attention of every lover of antiquity, I need only mention that by the fortunate sally of an intrepid band of Anglo-Saxons from Kenwith Castle, to which the Danes had lain siege towards the close of the nineth century, the main western army of these ferocious invaders was routed, 1200 of them, including their principal leader, killed; their consecrated Standard taken, and the gloomy aspect of affairs so entirely changed that our Immortal Alfred was enabled to leave his hiding place and again to assume the command of his armies and the government of his people.

An affair so illustrious, one is naturally led to imagine, might have served to immortalize the spot on which it was achieved, but the fact proved far otherwise. A succession of ages gradually threw a veil over the glories of the place so that in the time of Camden every vestage of this once renowned fortress was considered as obliterated; that eminent antiquary, in his description of the North of Devon, observing that Kynwith Castle formerly stood somewhere near the junction of the rivers Taw and Torridge, but that it was not now to be found. The learned Baxter, corroborating this account, says that it had long before been swallowed up by the sea, “inclytus iste locus jamdudum mari absorptus non amplius comparet.” (Baxt. Gloss, sub voce alovezgium). The Annotator on Rapin likewise remarks (Vol. I, p. 92) that no footsteps of this Castle were to be found.

That these conclusions were, however, far too peremptory, and probably drawn in a moment of negligence or haste, will, it is presumed, evidently appear from the circumstances I am about to adduce in order to prove that not only the site of the Castle, but also the enemy’s entrenchments and the lines by which the defeated Danes sought to regain their ships, may clearly be ascertained even at this day.

Of the many accounts given of this memorable affair by our ancient historians, none seems more clear and circumstantial than that of Asser, whose relation is also entitled to particular notice, from its pointing directly to the leading features by which the scene of this desperate conflict was characterised. Our confidence in the justness of his description acquires considerable strength from his telling that he himself had seen the place. The brother of Hyngwar and Haelfdene, he informs us, having sailed from Wales with a fleet of twenty-three ships and landed in Devonshire, many of the King’s servants or officers retired with their followers, and shut themselves up for safety in the castle of Cynuit. Thither the enemy repaired ; but found on his arrival that it was impossible to attack the place with a prospect of success in any other way than by siege of blockade. “Cum Pagani” says he “arcem imperatam atque omnino immunitam, nisi quod moenia nostro more erecta solummodo haberet cernerent (non enim effringere molicbantur quia et ille locus situ terrarum tutissimus est ab omni parte nisi ab orientali, sicut nos ipsi vidimus) obsidere cam coeperunt putantes hommes illos manum cito daturos fame et siti et obsidione coactos; quia nulla aqua illi arci contigua est.” (Asset’ de Gest. Aelfredi sub ann. 878).

Having some years since read the narrative, it appeared to me very extraordinary that no traces of the castle should remain, nor any tradition exist of the place where it once stood ; and on coming into the North of Devon, I determined to explore such parts of the county as might appear likely to lead towards an object so deserving of research.

From the name Cynwit of Kenwic I was led to conceive that this fortress might have been situated towards the higher end of some branch or marshy reach of a river; but whether the name was given in allusion to its situation (and which I must confess there is very great reason to doubt) or not, certain it is that in a situation nearly corresponding to the persuasion I then entertained, a spot presented itself answering in every particular except one to the description given by Asser of the site of Kenwith Castle. It is situated towards the upper end of a small valley on the north west side of Bideford and at the distance of a little more than a mile from that town. Though it has but little claim to regard either on the score of magnitude or commanding aspect, yet there is something in the natural cast of the place that strikes the eye as very remarkable, but of which a conception is not easily to be formed without seeing it.

A general idea of its appearance may perhaps be conveyed by describing it as a small hill, or natural mound, rising with rather an abrupt acclivity on all sides except the eastern, towards which point it is connected by a sort of isthmus with some neighbouring high ground. The hill at present is so thickly enveloped with trees and shrubs that its original outline is not strictly discernible. Looking at it from the west (in which point of view the isthmus is entirely hidden) I should suppose it must have taken much the shape of a regular truncated conoid ; for on going to the top I found it terminated in a level oblong area of about thirty-three paces long by fifteen wide.

A farm house and its offices occupy the northern side of the isthmus ; and this singular place now bears the name of Hengist farm, a fanciful appellation bestowed upon it, as I understand, within the last twenty years ; for on making enquiry amongst the old people of the neighbourhood I learnt that previously to the purchase of it by the present owner it was never within their memoryknown by any other name than those of Henniborough of Henni Castle, names to which you may be sure I did not listen with indifference, since they tended so directly to strengthen the opinion J had entertained on a first view of the spot. Kenwith, or Kenwic, it will readily, I should suppose, be allowed, might in the course of time by a very easy corruption have been shortened to Kenni or Henni. But I would not wish to give more consequence to this sort of evidence than it may deserve ; the mere remnant of a name, if unsupported by other circumstances, I am ready to admit is at the best but an equivocal kind of proof; and in the present instance I wish it to be considered in no other light than as corroboration of other particulars.

There are at present no remains of military works perceptible at Henni Castle. I deemed it would be in vain to search for the foundation of a building, since it is not probable that any ever existed here. Asser expressly says that Kenwith Castle (and you will recollect that he had seen it) was fortified in no other way than by walls erected after their manner ; and his description of it altogether seems to imply that the artificial means of defence were very slight and imperfect, and that the strength which enabled it so completely to defy the attacks of the Danes was chiefly derived from its natural advantage of position. Our enquiries indeed in regard to Henniborough are completely limited in this respect; for the sides of the hill are so thickly planted with trees and shrubs and are cut in to such a variety of walks, that were we ever so well informed of the manner in which the hand of art might have formerly assisted nature in rendering Kenwith Castle nearly impregnable, we could never hope to discern any traces of it in this place. From some old people obtained all the information that can now, I believe, be gained on the subject; and this amounted to nothing more than that many years since the remains of something in the nature of a bank with a pretty deep fosse were to be distinguished on the northern and western sides about halfway down the slope. A walk and quickset hedge now occupy the line of this fosse and bank on the north side, but on the west I apprehend every vestige is done away.

Having met with a spot so nearly corresponding with the description given by Asser, my next step was of course to enquire whether a tradition still existed of anything remarkable connected with it ; but though I made generally known my desire to learn any popular history that might be attached to this old place, and listened with every possible degree of patience to many foolish and inconsistent tales, yet I never could in this way obtain a single particular worth attending to, or that I could find had the least bearing towards what I considered as the genuine history. I say this in regard to the stories of the common people, but few of the better informed inhabitants of the neighbourhood appeared to have given the subject the least attention. One or two of them had read what is said in Camden and seemed to think it not improbable that Henniborough might have been the site of the old castle there spoken of, but I could not learn that anyone had ever gone beyond this, or examined the place so as to ascertain how far conjecture was in this case supported by circumstances, or in what degree the peculiarities of this spot answered to those of Kenwith Castle as described by Asser.

Finding therefore that the subject thus remained as it were altogether unexplored, yet conceiving such authorities as Camden and Baxter to deserve more respect than hastily to be rejected on the slight ground of bare supposition or conjecture, I determined to investigate the matter regularly, taking for my guide those leading circumstances mentioned by our ancient historians.

Kenwith Castle, Asser tells us, was assailable only towards the east, and in this respect Henniborough exactly corresponds with this direction. Since the place could only be attacked on one side, on that side I was naturally led to look for the work of the besiegers, and I have very little doubt in saying that on the high ground to the east of Henniborough (and to which I have before observed that it is connected by a sort of isthmus) may plainly be discovered traces of a military work ; not indeed appearing to have been completed, but as we might reasonably expect, most perfect on the most exposed or weakest point, or that towards the enemy.

Necessity, it seems probable, drove the Anglo-Saxons to make their desperate sally on the Danes before the latter had finished their entrenchment, and independent of this we may well suppose that many parts of these works have since mouldered away under the hand of time, or been effaced for the convenience of agriculture.

The greater part of what 1 consider as the Danish entrenchment is situated at the south-western corner of a large piece of coarse firzy ground bearing the name of Silford Moor. This field is part of an estate which has been supposed to have acquired the name of Silford from the circumstances of the mansion house standing near where a small brook is crossed by a road. This derivation may of course be thought natural, and J will not take upon me to say that it is not the true one, though it leaves us in doubt as to the meaning of the epithet Sil ; but T cannot help observing that an etymology more complete and ccrtainly far from being either strained or improbable presents itself in the two Anglo-Saxon words Sel-fyrd. Selfyrd, which literally means the great camp or great military station and it appeard to me by no means unlikely that the farm might have taken this name from the remains of the Danish entrenchment in one of its enclosures.

The force of the enemy must have been considerable, and the station which he occupied might well perhaps deserve the eppellation of the great camp, and having probably long been referred to by the name Sel-fyrd it in after times ommunicated this name to the farm or estate to which it was attached. (For translating fyrd a camp or military station, I have the authority of Aelfric himself, Gloss. 56 col 2, line 13 ; and in regard to the meaning of Sel I am supported by the opinion of many of our most learned antiquaries. See Gibson’s *Reguloe Generales* at the end of this Ed. Of the *Saxon Chronicle* p. 7. *Baxter’s* Glossery 38, 84, 141, 252; also what is said in *Camden’s* Brit. Vol. 1, p. 60, 127, of Silbury and Silleston.

At some future time, I hope to examine this place more minutely, and you shall be informed of the result; for the present I will pass on to the consideration of some of the particulars connected with the history of Kenwith.

It seems to be a fact established beyond doubt that the leader of the Danes was slain in this affair. Neither Asser, the Saxon Chronicle, Florence of Worcester, nor Henry of Huntingdon, mentions his name ; but since, he is stated to have been the brother of Hynguar and Healfdene, and Asser afterwards speaks of the sisters of Hynguar and Habba, and we do not read of any other brother, it appears probable that Habba or Hubba was the name of the leader who fell on this occasion, The only circumstance that militates against this conclusion is that Brompton and some other historians say expressly that Hubba was slain at Chippenhan; but what must strike everyone as particularly inconsistent, they immediately tell us that he was buried in Devonshire. Very few, if any, I believe, will attach much credit to the account of Hubba’s being killed at once place and buried at another so far distant: it is certainly much more reasonable to conclude that he was killed near the spot where he was interred ; and if it can be ascertained that he was buried in that part of Devonshire near where Kenwith Castle is reported to have stood, very little doubt will remain of his having been the Chieftain who fell in the sally from that fortress.

Now almost every historian who mentions the fate of Hubba says that the place of his burial was called Hubbaslow or Hubbastow, and that it was in Devonshire; but in no part of Devonshire whatever do we meet with anything like a place of this kind except at Appledore near the mouth of the Torridge ; where on the beach a small way above the town is a spot distinguished by the name of Whibbelstone; a name so nearly similar in sound to Hubbaslow or Hubbsatow that I think the most scrupulous etymologist could scarcely expect the word to have been transmitted more distinctly through the lapse of nearly a thousand years. Hubbaslow is said

to have been a Tumulus or heap of stones raised (after the manner of the northern nations) by way of monument over the place of interment.

Whibbelstone, however, does not at this day exhibit any such memorial, neither could I after the most diligent enquiry find the least remembrance or tradition of it; but on pressing the question repeatedly I was at length brought not indeed to the heap of stone, but to what I think there is every reason to consider as the real and original Hubbastow. it is a rough slab of rock about four feet in length by three wide lying on the open shore, but at present sunk so nearly on a level with the surface of the beach that though it is very conspicuous when pointed out, or to anyone near it, yet (sic) might often be passed by at a small distance without being perceived.

The shore at this place is well sheltered, its slope even and gentle, and in every respect favourable for the lying of shallow vessels ; I have therefore but little hesitation in assigning this as the point at which the Danes made their descent and from which they re-embarked after having performed the funeral rites of their leader.

I now come to the mention of a circumstance that appears strongly to mark the line by which the Danes retreated, and presents itself as a connecting link between Whibbelstone and Henniborough. The Danes we may suppose on finding themselveoverpowered would naturally endeavour to make for their ships by the most direct route; but though their discomforture was general,we must not overlook the information of Ethelwerd, who tells us that they at length recovered the matter so far as to make it in the end rather a drawn battle. In order to accomplish this they must have rallied at some point between the castle and their ships, and made such a determined stand as effectually to check the pursuit. The

struggle here, it is probable, was to the last degree violent and bloody ; and about two-thirds of the way in a direct line fromHenni-borough to Whibbelstone is a spot, which by its name of Bloody Corner seems to be expressly pointed out as the place where this dreadful and conclusive effort was made.

I have thus endeavoured to bring into one view the leading circumstances which induce me to think that Henniborough was the site of Kenwith Castle, but on the other hand, fidelity obliges me to notice one particular that obstinately opposed itself to this conclusion, and which I have not been able to remove entirely to my satisfaction. It is said by the historian to whose description I have so often referred that the Danes imagined thirst as well as hunger would soon compel the besieged to surrender. “For,” adds he, “there is no water contiguous to the place.” (Asser obi supr.). Had he said there was no water in the place, no difficulty would have occurred ; but as the passage stands at present, it goes nearly to confuse the supposed identity of Henniborough and Kenwith; for it happens that two streams or rivulets have their junction on the south-western side of Henni-borough, and as it were immediately at its base.

The words of Asser are clear and positive, and I see no other way of reconciling this part of his description with the present state of Henniborough than by supposing that in his time the water either had a different course and outlet, or that it might then have diffused itself without any certain direction over the whole area of the valley, so as to render it n kind of swamp or morass, and that it was subsequently guided into its present channel as into a drain. There are one or two other conjectures which might be hazarded on this point; but I fear you will think this letter to have been already extended far beyond its proper bounds. I will therefore only request that in whatever I may have advanced you will consider me as speaking with great diffidence, and by no means pretending to decide on a subject so remote and obscure.

I am, Dear Sir,

Your obliged friend and servant,

ROBERT STUDLEY VIDAL.

Henry Wansey, Esq.,

SALISBURY.

**Appendix B**

**ABBOTSHAM VICARS**

1269 VICARAGE FORMED NO VICARS MENTIONED

Vicars Patrons

1282—Jan.4 Reginald de Filetham. Abbot & Convent of Tavistock

1305— Richard de Whiteledge, on whose resignation ditto

1326—Jan.17 John de Wynscote, exchanged with ditto

1336—Sept.25 John Batyn, on whose death ditto

1350—Mar. John Knight exchanged with ditto

1378—Oct.28 John Bullock on whose resignation ditto

1400—Mar.17 John Downe on whose resignation ditto

1437—June16 John Notte on whose resignation ditto

1466—Aug.8 John Hele ditto

Circa 1487— Robert Ayasse on whose death ditto

1499—Jan.13 John Hawke MA. on whose resignation

1521—Apr 20 Lawrence Clapam on whose death

1531—Nov. 3 Hugo Joanes on whose resignation

1536—Jul 26 Thomas Hockaday on whose death

1582—Aug 10 Thomas Goodchild on whose resignation Roger Norwood

grant from High Pollard

1605—Jul19 William Risdon B.A. on whose death King James

1615—Nov.10 Robert Leach M.A. on whose resignation King James

1616-Nov 18 James Gundry on whose death King James

1622—July 3 Nicholas Honey B.A. King James

i652—Jan 31 John Luxton appointed by Parliamentary Commissioners.

1660—Sep 15 John Luxton S.T.B. on whose death King Charles II

1676—Aug. 8 Thomas Pugsley on whose death King Charles il.

1685—Jun 25 Thomas Hill on whose resignation King James II.

1686—Aug. 2 William Beare B.A. on whose death King James II.

1719—Feb. 2 Samuel Burgess M.A. on whose cession King George I.

1729—Dec 20 Zachariah Mudge on whose cession King George II.

1733—Jul 14 Richard White on whose death King George 11.

1751—Sept18 Thomas Owen B.A. on whose resignation King George II.

1766—May 14 Lewis Buck L.L.B. on whose resignation King George Ill.

1783—Jun 20 John Walter on whose death King George Ill.

1807—May 8 William Walter on whose death King George III.

1844—Jun17 Horace Lewis Knight Bruce on whose death Queen Victoria

1848—Aug22 Edward Ashford Sandford on whose cession Queen Victoria

1851—Nov27 Edward Dansey on whose death Queen Victoria

1876—Mar10 Philip Richard Pipon Braithwaite BA. on whose resignation

Edward Urch Vidai

1881—Apr20 Robert Walpole Sealy Vidai M.A. on whose death Edward Urch Vidal

1915—Apr21 James Arthur Kempe M.A. on whose resignation Mrs. Sealy

1927—Mar18 Edmund Arthur Du Cane MA. on whose resignation Mrs. Sealy

1938—Jul12 Basil Montford Challenor MA. on whose resignation Mrs. Sealy

1946-Nov27 Walter Henry Smith O.C.F. on whose resignation

1954—Feb11 Leonard Woolcott B.A.

**Appendix C**

**LIST OF SCHOOL TEACHERS**

5 Jan., 1875 Miss E. C. Willey

31 Feb, 1876 Miss R. Billing Miss L. Billing (Asst.)

12 May, 1876 Miss M. Warren

14 Sep, 1877 Miss M. A. C. Skinner

15 Sep, 1879 Miss K. Chalk

26 Sep, 1881 J. Craig

20 Apr, 1884 Miss A. Abraham

10 Feb, 1890 Mr. T. J. White Mrs. T. J. White (Asst.)

6 Oct., 1890 Mr. N. Gilbert Mrs. N. Gilbert (Asst.)

4 July, 1892 Mr. F. Nutt Mrs. F. Nutt (Asst.)

4 July, 1898 Mr. A. Ireland Mrs. A. Ireland Miss E. Thompson(Assts)

30 July 1900 Mr. C. Hooper Mrs. C, Hooper (Asst.)

Miss B. Bale

1922 Mrs. S. Beer

1937 Miss G. Kerswell

1944 Mrs. Cotton

**Appendix D**

*RICHARD COPHIN to all the faithful, present and future, who shall see this writing, greeting. Know that all strjfe between myself and the abbot and con vent of Tavistock touching the disputed boundary (“super metarum uarietate “) between their land of Abbedesham and my land qf Aiwintone and Kokemetone, which is of my fee, has been laid to rest for ever and ended in this wise.—the abbot and con vent of T. have granted me, and to Peryn my heir after me, full brotherhood in their Church of Tavistock, to receive the monastic habit there whenever by God’s inspiration I shall wish to do so; and in the meantime I am to have a monk’s full daily board-allowance (“corredium “) as often as I go thither. Moreover, Walter, abbot of the same (e. 1154-c. 1168), and Master William, who while he lived held the aforesaid land of Abbedesham in farm from the abbot and convent, gave me two marks of silver for that I reasonably suffered the bounds between Abbedesham and my land to be defined by the oath of twelve lawful jurors 1from four neighbouring Bocland (a word or two probably missing; perhaps the sense is “twelve jurors from four neighbouring manors, Bocland, x, y, and z “).*

*The bounds are as here written.—*

*From the double ditch &c. &c.*

*At the perambulation and defining of these bounds there was present with me my lord Geoffrey Fitz Baldwin, and Nicholas his heir, who by their assent have jointly with inc granted and confirmed this. Wherefore, lest our posterity in any wise infringe this grant, by us reasonably made in the presence of several knights and lawful men, I have confirmed this recital (“ expositam rerum seriem “) by the affixing of my seal and have recognized it before the whole shire of Exeter (or “at Exeter “). Moreover, in the presence of abbot Baldwin e. 1174-1184), 1 have guaranteed that the above-written bounds between my land and Abbedesham shall be observed on my part, and I have promised on oath that if any during my ljfetime shall attempt to violate the same or to trespass upon Abbedesham, I will with God’s favour again have the same bounds set forth (“ disrationabo “) by myself or by one of my people. Witnesses. William Dacus, Richd. de Boccumb, Jodí de Launcell, Henry de Alneto, Ralph de Lega, Hamelin de Legh, Fulk de Veten Ponte.*

The boundaries given in the vernacular are difficult to follow. Mr. Finberg gives the following free rendering : “from the double ditch on the west of Adjavin, that lies between the land of Bideford and Abbotsham, up along the stream to the streamhead, and so to the Giant’s Way, from the Giant’s Way North over the Hollow Tump; from the (other) Hollow Tamp on the West of the way to the ditch that lies between Cockington and Abbotsham ; from the ditch southward to Trendlesbury; to Durnwell, to Woolacumbe and thence out to the sea.

It is interesting to note that the “Durnawille” or Hidden Spring has recently come to life. A few years ago, the tenant noticed an overflow of water below the wet patch mentioned in the text. He dug and found a masonry wall, long overgrown, clogged with silt and water, with a fallen tree lying across it. He opened it up, connected it with another smaller spring, dug a cistern, and has piped it to the main farm.

*1 per invamentum duodeim legalium invatorum de quatuor vicinis I3ocland. ..“*

**Appendix E**

**BIRDS FOUND NESTING IN THE PARISH**

Barn Owl Marsh Titmouse

Blackbird Meadow Pipit

Blue Titmouse Merlin (Twice)

Bull Finch Mistle Thrush

Buzzard Moorhen

Carrion Crow Nuthatch

Chaffinch Partridge

Chiffchaff Pheasant

Chough Pied Wagtail

Cirl Bunting Raven

Coal Titmouse Red-necked-Shrike

Common Whitethroat Redbreast

Corn Crake Rock Pipit

Cuckoo Rock Dove

Dipper Rook

Garden Warbler Sedge Warbler

Goldcrest Skylark

Goldfinch Snipe

Grasshopper Warbler Song Thrush

Great Titmouse Sparrow Hawk

Green Finch Spotted Flycatcher

Green Plover Starling

Green Woodpecker Stone Chat

Grey Wagtail Swallow

Hedge Sparrow Swift

House Martin Tawny Owl

House Sparrow Tree Creeper

Jackdaw Tree Sparrow

Appendix E ctd.

Kestrel Twite

Linnet wheatear

Little Owl Wood Lark

Long-tailed-Titmouse Wood Pigeon

Mallard Wren

Magpie Yellow Hammer

Revised Version 24/8/35. C.M.H.