

# COMPTON BISHOP and CROSS

## THE STORY OF OUR VILLAGES

1953

### P R E F A C E

In compiling this small, and one feels, very inadequate story of our villages of Compton Bishop and Cross, the members of the Women's Institute have tried to collect together a jig-saw puzzle of stories, based on facts and perhaps fiction, and piece them together to form an interesting picture of life as it was and life as it is today, in this very charming corner of Somerset.

They are greatly indebted to H. Ashby, Esq., W. Eyles, Esq., W. Tyler, Esq., Rev, V. L. Lawson, E. A. Knight, Esq., author of "The Heart of Mendip", and other unknown writers for the many details they have given to our members, without whose help it would have been impossible to record this story.

*This book was compiled by the ladies of Cross and Compton Bishop. It was completed in time for the celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation on 2 June 1953.*

*Their names were never published so I can only guess that the ladies who developed this book were active in the many good deeds for our Parish including running a Jam Factory during the Second World War, joining the Parish Council, running social events and producing this historic record of our parish.*

*I have not been able to verify which ladies were the authors but I believe their names are included in the list, below, some of whom I knew:-*

*Hardwich, Webber, Millard, Ponitone, Stritch,  
Overand, Winnie Simpson, Dorothy Perry,  
Letty Offer, Mana, Squire, Butt,*

*Richard Parker*

## OUR VILLAGES - THEIR ENVIRONMENTS

COMPTON BISHOP, or COMPTON EPISCOPI as it was formerly called, is a large parish which includes the village of CROSS, and is situated mainly on the south slope of the Mendip Hills, about three and a half miles long from the west-north-west to east-south-east, that is to say along the line drawn from the little village of Loxton, and originally to the Union Workhouse in Axbridge, and two miles broad reckoning due south from Winscombe Hall at the edge of the Winscombe Parish, and originally containing approximately 2,350 acres, of which about eleven are water. Its somewhat irregular outline is determined largely by its natural features, a large part of its northern boundary being marked by the wall along the top of the highest points along Wavering Down, a wall which might well have marked the ancient roadway used when taking the wealth of the mines in the Hills down to the sea. Its western frontier is the Lox Yeo and its southern limit partly the Cheddar water and partly the River Axe. The parish thus includes land of very varying altitudes, from little more than 20 ft. above sea level on the west and south, to the 628ft. of the stony crest of Crook's Peak, and the roughly 700 ft. of the gently rolling summit of Wavering Down. The familiar ridge of Shute Shelve, one of the landmarks of the district at the head of the broad valley known from very early times as the Shute, or as in a charter of 1068, the Scyte, crowned by a few storm beaten Scotch firs, still retains a touch of picturesque beauty, not even destroyed by the erection of telegraph poles along its bank due to the march of time. In the seventeenth century, if not at other times, Shute Shelve was used, perhaps because of its commanding position, as a place of public execution, and it is reputed that the last public hanging took place at this point. An enclosure high up on the east road is called the "Hanging Field".

The top of Crook's Peak, although of no great height, is by far the most conspicuous hill crest of the whole range of Mendip, and it was used as a steering mark for ships in the Bristol Channel, and called on the Admiralty Chart by the curious name of "See me not". From its summit one gets a far reaching view of the surrounding country, mostly a wide expanse of level low lying ground, some of which has played a most important part in the history of our country. From here can be seen Glastonbury, Wells, Sedgemoor, Bristol, the southern coast of South Wales, and even as far as Monmouth and Gloucester.

Most of the countryside is a vast expanse of moorland, little of it much above sea level, and its innumerable small fields, bounded for the most

part by ditches - or rhynes as they are called in these parts - instead of hedges, for drainage, give the vista of a patchwork quilt threaded by a network of silver in the winter when the rhynes are full, while in the summer it is only marked in its divisions by the pollard willows of the banks.

The river Axe which winds its way slowly among the meadows is a small stream of great renown. It was long ago the frontier line between the conquering Saxons and the untamed tribes of what was then Wales. Of these tribes we have little knowledge, but it was in all probability they who built the many strongholds on Mendip. It was doubtless they who fashioned the stone implements and weapons, flint axe-heads and arrow points, saws and scrapers, that are so often turned up by the plough in modern times, many of which have lately been discovered by the recently formed Axbridge Caving Group. They have left no written record, except perhaps here and there a coin, like the word "Cuno" on the gold pieces of Cunobeiin. On the other hand, in the names of the rivers and hilltops they have left marks that will last for all time. The name of this little sluggish moving stream is of their bestowing, and like the Esk and the Usk, and the last two letters of the word "Thames", is the Celtic name for "Water". Westward from the mouth of the Axe, along the shores of the Bristol Channel run the rugged line of sand-hills over which shows the square tower of Berrow Church, with the white shaft of Burnham Lighthouse, the only real lighthouse in Somerset's sixty miles of Coastline; while to the left of Berrow, on the green plain between there and the banks of the Axe, rises the little hill known as Brent Knoll.

Along the hills above Cross and Axbridge was the Royal Hunting Forest of the Mendip, in which many Kings of England both before and after the Norman Conquest followed the tall red deer. The word "forest" it should be remembered, originally meant not a wood but a hunting ground, although it is clear from old records, that the Mendip Forest at least as late as the fourteenth century, contained many trees, especially oaks.

The isolated and commanding position of Crook's Peak made its stony point an admirable point of vantage on which in ancient days, to light beacons in times of danger, and for years before the sailing of the Spanish Armada, the authorities at Banwell kept a pile of wood here, to be lit as soon as the news that the enemy's ships had been sighted should be announced, perhaps from the top of Dunkery. In the Banwell Churchwardens' accounts for 1580 is this entry:-

"Pd. the firste daye of July for one lood  
of wood for the Beaken and for carriage  
of the, same to Croke Peke.....5.0

This entry seems to suggest that the name of the Peak should  
be spelt with the "s", but in the very next year the Ban-well  
Churchwardens wrote:-

"Recd. backe our money for the Deaden at  
Croke Peacke .....2.9

which leaves the question of the spelling still unsettled. That some Spaniards  
did get to these parts is partly borne out by the finding of Spanish coins in  
this area, one of which was recently found in a farm garden bearing the date  
1624 over stamped and dated 1 672 for use in the Spanish Colonies. It is  
thought it may have been brought by a Spanish Mariner in the time of Philip  
IV of Spain.

Due south of Compton Bishop, below the road which leads from Cross to  
Bleadon, standing on the edge of the Moor, is what is known as the hamlet  
of Dunnett, formerly known as Dunate, consisting merely of a couple of  
houses, and distinguished in days gone by for its beautiful elm trees. Up to  
this day a point on this road is known as "Big Tree Corner", by reason of  
the two magnificent elm trees which stood each side of the corner, but  
which owing to traffic making them increasingly dangerous and the  
possibility of their suffering from the malignant "elm disease", were felled  
only a few months ago. A little further to the west of the ancient roadway  
that branches off at Dunnett Cottage, and on the bank of the Cheddar Water  
just where the stream joins the old course of the Axe - now a mere ditch - is  
another group of houses called Rackley, or according to some old maps,  
Rockley and even Ripley. This was once a place of great importance as  
a river port, even as far back as the Roman invasion. It stands on the Red  
Marl, a conspicuous bank of which can be seen above the road and as  
Canon Church pointed out - there is little doubt that this bank is the "Red  
Cliff" which gave its name to the place, a name which occurs in documents  
more than seven centuries old. The Romans used the River Axe for  
navigation, and until about 1790 the river was tidal as far as Clewer. The  
wharf at Rackley, remains of which can still be seen, was used for the  
shipping of lead and other minerals from the Mendip Hills, and later on coal  
was brought up from the Bristol Channel and South Wales in barges and  
unloaded here. Centuries ago this part of the country was sea, and it is  
believed that it was the monks of Glastonbury who built the sea walls, parts  
of which are still to be seen at Brean, that enables all this land to be

reclaimed. Two lines of the ancient roadway, one from Callow near Shute Shelve and the other following a slight hollow to the east of Cheddar and entering that village under the suggestive name of Redcliffe Street, lead down to the quay at Rackley, and one can easily conjure up the picture of the mules traversing the track along the top of Wavering Down to the quay at Rackley laden with lead from Priddy and Charterhouse, where it was shipped to Uphill and the sea. The place appears to be first mentioned in a Bull of the year 1178; preserved in the Wells Cathedral Library, by which Pope Alexander III confirmed to Bishop Reginald the possessions of the See of Bath among which were "Cumton with Radecliffe Port". A few years later, in 1189, the Bishop obtained from Richard I a grant of all the lead mines on the prelate's property, together with leave to create a borough and hold a market at "Radecliffe". In 1372 the Dean and Chapter paid Bishop Harewell Ten Pounds towards the expense of making a cut in the river bank at Radecliffe, no doubt to carry the flood water from the Cheddar stream into the Axe. In 1454 the Dean and Chapter leased to John Pedwell, vicar choral, a grange at Barton, and the fisheries in the "great course of water called Radecliffe Yeo" for fifty years at the rent of fifty-seven shillings and sixpence a year. Another allusion to the spot is found in the accounts of the Moorwardens of the parish of Cheddar:-

Anno Domini 1 633 - 1634  
 John Venn, Richard Cheesman, Moorwardens,  
 theer charges are as ffoloweth:- lb s d  
 Umprimis paid for the mowing of  
**the river** **111 1 11**  
 Tem pd John bolting for bringing up one of the hatches of  
 the Clyes whiche the water carried  
**to Recbcli.....xij**  
 Item pd Richard Hardwich for  
 hanging the same hatch in  
 his place againe .....**xij**

The placing of floodgates at Bleadon stopped the navigation of the river, and Rackley has long since ceased to be a port, but the primitive little quay at which barges used to discharge their cargoes can still be seen by the bank of the stream, together with the rambling old sheds in which were stored the salt, the coal, and the slate which in former days were brought up here from Uphill.



MANOR FARM, COMPTON BISHOP.



"NEW INN," CROSS

At the foot of the westerly slope of Crooks Peak is the little hamlet of Webbington, or Wiventon as it is called in the old records, where the kennels of the Winscombe Harriers, one of the largest packs in England were kept, which numbered before the first Great War, twenty-nine couples of hounds.

The parish contains two solitary stones neither very large or conspicuous which, according to idle legend, were in the early days hurled from Shute Shelve in a throwing match between the devil and the local strong man. The stone thrown by the former stands a distance of a mile and a furlong from Shute Shelve, in a little hollow in the field opposite the mouth of Bourton Lane, on the south side of the road from Cross to Compton Bishop. It is rather massive, a roughly hewn block of Dolomite Conglomerate, four feet high, thirty inches broad, and twenty-seven inches thick. It may have been only a rubbing post for cattle, but it is also possible it may have been a boundary mark of the Mendip, Hunting Forest in which this Manor was for a time included. The other stone lies a mile and a half from the throwing point due south of it and a mile due east of Lower Weare, in the fourth field from the high road to Bridgwater on the right side of Cheddar water. Too small for a rubbing post, it may have been set up as a boundary mark on the edge of the Mordaunt property, or on the line between the parishes of Compton Bishop and Axbridge which runs not far from the spot. No trace remains of any ancient cross which may have given its name to the chief village in the parish, but it has been suggested that it stood at the point where the roads to Cross and Axbridge separate, and that it was from it that the distances to and from Cross were reckoned.

In the autumn of 1898 some labourers digging out the foundations for the Pumping Station of the South Marsh Waterworks, about one hundred yards west of the White Hart Inn, found at a depth of eight feet in the red marl, a curious ancient ornament, a slender bracelet or bangle of stout twisted wire of pure gold, and made into the shape of a heart, three and a half inches long by two and a half inches broad. This is now in the Greenwell collection at the British Museum.

It is thought by antiquarians that this parish is not one of the many Comptons described in Domesday Book, but that at the time of the survey it formed part of the great manor of Banwelle, then the property of Bishop Giso who owned one twelfth part of the County of Somerset, or more than any landlord except the Abbot of Glastonbury. The earliest allusion to this appears to be



in the Charter of Edward the Elder, dated 904, which states that in return for the liberty of Taunton, the King had received from the Bishop of Winchester ten hides at "Cumbtune" and twenty at Banwelle. Giso, Bishop of Bath, says in his autobiography, that King Canute gave the Manor of Banwelle, including Compton Bishop, to Dudoc, who afterwards became Bishop of Bath, and bequeathed the property to the See. Moreover, it is clear from the copy of a highly interesting charter in Wells Cathedral Library, that William the Conqueror, only two years after his accession, confirmed Giso in possession of the manor and thus it became Compton Episcopi or Compton of the Bishop.

In the reign of Edward VI the manor passed, according to Collinson, into lay hands. The family of Prowse, many of whom were buried in the parish church, owned it for several generations, and finally towards the close of the eighteenth century, through his marriage with the daughter of the last male heir of the line, it became the property of Sir John Mordaunt, descendant of that Osbert le Mordaunt who fought for the Conqueror at Hastings, and who is named in the Roll of Battle Abbey. The name of the founder of the house is still kept up, and a descendant is Lord of the Manor at the present day. There is a monument to the Prowse Family in Axbridge Church, but all the property lies outside that parish.

The parish of Compton Bishop at one time extended as far as the wall on the west side of Ilex Lodge, the old workhouse, and therefore included what is now known as West Street. In the Axbridge Town Trust Museum is a Charter under the seal of James I, part of which reads as follows:-

"Whereas we are credibly informed that in the street commonly called the West Street of Axbridge, within the parish aforesaid, and to the said borough adjoining (nevertheless without the ancient liberties of the said borough) many riots, routs, unlawful assemblies, contentions, and offences are committed by divers disorderly Persons continually resorting to the same said West Street, to the contempt of us and officers of our said borough and in violation of our laws, and to the injury, prejudice and disturbance of our good and faithful subjects and we desiring a remedy have granted to the Mayor Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough aforesaid and their successors the Mayor Recorder and Aldermen for the time being and other of them for ever that they may and shall be the Justices of us our heirs to preserve and keep the peace of us as well within the Borough aforesaid the liberties as also within the said street palled the West Street, and to chasten and punish all persons offending against the aforesaid borough or street aforesaid."

This surely shows that part of our original parish, at any rate in earlier times, must have been of a most unruly tendency. This part of the parish as far as what was known as "Chubb's Lane" was taken into the district of Axbridge, many years ago, and the boundary was further altered to come only as far as about half way up Cross Lane and up to the Railway line, about twenty years ago.

Both Compton Bishop and Cross stand upon Red Marl, famous for its fertile soil, which accounts for so much Market Gardening being carried on in the vicinity. Above the marl runs a fringe of Dolomite Conglomerate, very narrow except above the village of Cross, and on the western side of the Shute. This formation, which is an ancient sea beach containing fragments of older rocks deposited during one of the five submergences of the Mendip Hills, Provides a fine looking and durable building material. In it occur those rough agates called, from their shape,. "potato' stones". During the making of the railway in 1868, many remarkably fine specimens of these were found in the tunnel and in the cutting at Shute Shelve, 'many of them containing hollows lined with beautiful crystals of quartz and of carbonite of lime, some as clear as diamonds, some red with iron, others tinged with manganese varying from the softest shade of amethyst to almost inky black. Many of the main characteristics of the villages are their caves, of which there are three in this parish; one half way between the villages of Cross and Compton Bishop and two near Compton Bishop itself. The first of these which is at the foot of the hill, a quarter of a mile due east of the top of Bourton Lane, has only been partially explored. It was discovered about 1904 by a man who, while quarrying for stone, broke through the rock into the side of a natural shaft leading down into a spacious chamber some sixty to seventy feet high with galleries ex-tending out of it. The smaller one of the two at Compton Bishop which is called the Fox Hole, appears to be little more than twenty yards long, and is not far above the high road to Bleadon, nearly due south of the White Rock. The large and intricate cave called "Denny's Hole" is about two hundred yards to the east of the Fox Hole and somewhat higher up the spur of the hill. Its steeply sloping entrance leads down to the lofty and very picturesque archway of a large chamber whose roof and walls were, when the cave was first discovered apparently towards the close of the eighteenth century, beautifully decorated with stalactites all of which, however, have been carried away. Several passages lead off from this chamber, and one of them especially winding and narrow, opens out into a further cavern Still unexplored.

## OUR VILLAGES - PARISH CHURCH

The parish Church, dedicated to Saint Andrew, stands in a commanding position on the easterly slope of the hill encircling Compton Bishop, a little to the south of Crook's Peak. Its foundations are possibly Saxon, while the main portion of the church is in the Perpendicular style of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The porch is a bold and beautiful specimen of the late Norman or early English period, built about the thirteenth century, when the round headed arches of the Norman style were giving place to the pointed arches of the later early English period. Compton Bishop Church porch is a rare local specimen of this Transitional period.

The pulpit is an extremely fine carved stone example also assigned to the fifteenth century and had been acclaimed as one of the finest in Somerset. There is a curious and unusual early English double Piscina with an Aumbry or small cupboard over it in the south wall of the chancel, which is dated about the late twelfth century. The Font is Saxon, and believed to be the oldest object in the church. Its elaborate oaken cover is dated 1617 and Jacobean. The east window is the oldest in the church and contains some very beautiful specimens of old stained glass, which is believed to date back to about the fourteenth century. Unfortunately, during the last World War, this glass was badly shattered by blast from enemy action, and is now rather mutilated. Part of the roof of the Chancel is the original and is in a very good state of preservation. There are several tombstones in the chancel floor dating about 1690 to 1720. The writer of these notes remembers taking two gentlemen, who were very interested in rubbings of church brasses and stone work, over the Church one afternoon, when one excitedly got down on his knees and exclaimed, "Oh here are some full size cherubs." Certainly there were some there engraved on the tombstones, and apparently these are very rare, only the head and shoulders being usually depicted.

It is rather remarkable, but from the foregoing description one will see that at least six or seven different periods are represented in the architecture and ornaments of our Church.

The Communion plate consists of five pieces, two chalices and a paten of silver and a pewter plate and tankard. The smaller cup bears the inscription under its foot, "Compton, A. Prowse, 1763", the date letter, however, being for 1636. The donor was Abigail, daughter of Dr. George Hooper, Bishop of Bath and

Wells, and wife of John Prowse of Axbridge and Compton Bishop. She died November 15th, 1763, aged 79. The larger cup, quite plain, like the other is inscribed "Compton Bishop Anno Dno 1674", and also bears the initials "T.R." below a crescent, struck thrice, while the paten has the same mark.

Six bells hang in the tower, the first and sixth are inscribed:-  
"Mr. John Fry and William Wickham, churchwardens, 1773, a Bilbie."

The second and fifth are merely marked "W. W. Bilbie 1711", while the third and fourth have no inscriptions. These bells were last rehung in 1938. For many years there was a set of Chimes in the belfry, but when the bells were last rehung they were hung in such a position that it was not possible to ring them anymore and they were eventually disposed of. The last inhabitant to ring the chimes was Mr. Tom Starks, who has lived near the Church all his-life. A peal of bells is rung each Sunday of the year, and on special national occasions up to the present time, under the captaincy of Mr. F. Paramore.

The ancient Church registers of this parish, which were begun in 1641 by "Edm. Cobbe, Vicar" and were continued until 1807, are contained in a picturesque old volume made of parchment and covered in vellum. There is ground for thinking, as the rather long gaps in the registers of Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths occur at different times, that there were originally three books, which were eventually bound into one volume. The entries for the first twelve years were in Latin, and are somewhat difficult to decipher, partly because of the style of the writing and partly from the effect of time. With comparatively slight exceptions the records-have been all well-kept, although some of the oldest entries have, apparently as an afterthought, been crowded in on tops of pages far removed from their rightful position, and although - as noted above - there are considerable gaps with no entries at all. After one of these, which lasted from 1716 to 1736, is this note:-"The Book lost or mislaid all this -time." As if to atone for the misfortune, the entries some years after this period are carefully printed instead of being written,

It is not easy to determine how far back the names of people now living in Compton Bishop are to-be found in this very old book, but those of Millard, Day, Say, Stock, and Butt occur very early, as do those of Brent, Tripp, Roe, Somons and others which are in use in neighbouring parishes. The records do not, as a rule, present much of general interest as they merely mention names and dates. Occasionally, especially in the eighteenth century, we come on more details. Here, for example, is a curious note relating to the burial of a man who was doubtless a well-known character in the district:-

1729, A. Old Millard, commonly call'd  
Puss Millard famous for finding Hares.

Three other entries of burial about the same period may be quoted:-

1742. Jun 13 A. Chimney Sweeper, no clue to his name.

1763. Dec 11th Charles Scarce, one of ye deaf and dumb  
brothers aged about 70.

1763 June 16th John Basket, a stranger

In the same list of interments are the names of two old soldiers:-

1740 George Darling, an out pensioner of Chelsea Hospital.

1769 Apl, 13th, Mr. John Stock, an out pensioner and who  
was with ye King at ye Battle of Dettige.

The records of Chelsea Hospital show that George Darling served in "the 2nd Regiment of the Guards now the Coldstreams, from 1700 to 1714, a period, which included the war of the Spanish Succession and Marlborough's career of Victory. During the earlier part of the war the regiment was in Spain, Some were thrown into Gibraltar after its capture by Rocke and suffered disastrous defeat at Almanza. The fact, however, that this old Compton Bishop pensioner was invalided out of the Service in 1714 "disabled by wounds and rheumatic pain" would seem to suggest that he was one of the companies of Guards which took part in Marlborough's later campaigns. The other pensioner, John Stock, served in the 53rd Foot, (afterwards the Duke of Wellington's Own, and now the West Riding Regiment), from 1740 to 1744, and he was, as the Chelsea records show, "wounded in the right thigh at Dettingen and thereby disabled."

One entry in the Baptismal register, among lists seldom giving more than the dates of births and the names of parents, may be worth quoting:-

1768. Aug. 7th, Bapt. Sarah Cross, so nam'd for being dropt at Cross by  
someone unknown, abt. a year ago.

The book also contains notes on money contributed by parishioners in aid of people in distress, in towns as far away as Pontefract, Rippon, ffordingbridge, and many other places, for example:-

"Inhabitants of Watchet.in order to the reparation of their key or peirei the  
summe of six Shillings."

"Collected ffor some that received

Losse by the Turks and their', release

(?) from Captivity, December 9th:1660, the summe of ffower shillinges"

It was likely enough, except that these "Turks" were doubt-less Orsair Algerines, then  
and for long afterwards the terror of the narrow seas.

"for the inhabitants of Ilminster in the County of Somerset in Consideration of their losses sustayn'd by fire, the summe of ffiveShillings."

"1662 ffor theincouragement of ye Fishing Trade."

The Churchwardens accounts have, with slight exceptions been regularly kept since 16774, but they contain few points of general interest. Many of the entries refer, as would be expected, to repairs to the Church, such as:- "Plastering Church Porch...." "Church Whitelimed...." "N. door of Church mended" It may be remarked that there is no north door at the present day, the north aisle having been built about the year 1859. In 1758 the Churchwardens paid sixpence for "a i a qr. of holland7to mend 'the minister's surplice." Two entries refer to the bells, of which two w,ire recast in 1711, and two moreA.n1773 as we learn from their inscriptions:-

1711, bells taken down, repaired :and weighted, taken to Wells:

Sept. 1773, Sheet of Stamp paper\_ for drawing contract for the bells.

One of the most interesting entries is one made early in the reign of Queen Anne;-  
1705, Mason pd 2s. 6d. a day for 31 days  
mending tower wh. was broke by the great tempest Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> 1703  
.....£3.17.6.

This was the terrible hurricane known as the "Great Storm", one of the worst ever recorded-in these Islands. In the two days while it lasted twelve men-of- war with more than 1,800 men on board were lost within sight of the coast. The Eddystone Lighthouse was swept away, with its builder, Winstanley and his men. At Wells, Bishop. Kidder and his\_ wife were killed in bed through the falling of on of the chimney stacks of the Palace. In addition ' to the note quoted above Defoe says in his "The Great Storm" :- "The tower of Compton Bishop was much shattered and the leads that covered it were taken clean away and laid at in the churchyard ; the house of John Cray of that place received much and strange damages, which together with his part in the sea wall amounted to £500."

As is usual in these old parish records, we find many entries of rewards paid for the destruction of "vermin" of various kinds. A shilling was paid for, the-killing of



St. Andrew's Church, Compton Bishop.  
From Crook's Peak.



St. Andrew's Church  
Shewing Stone Pulpit.

either fox or badger (the latter was always entered as a "gray"), fourpence for a polecat or a hedgehog, and two pence for a stoat. Sparrows were destroyed in great numbers, though it is probable that the numbers given include many other small-birds. Thus take two examples:-

1709 for killing sparrows  
@ 3d. dozen . 13.3  
1723 30 dozen sparrows @ 4d 9.10

Entries in the Overseer's poor book are interesting in giving details of the prices of things a century or two ago. In 1740 for example, butter was from 4d. to 6d a pound, cheese 2d, "taters" were 5d and 6d. per peck, and apples 6d. Coal was then 15/- a ton and a whole shoulder of mutton was 1s 1½d. Meat must have been cheaper still in 1753 when the price of a "leg of beef" is put down as "10d." –

Allusions to Compton Bishop Church in the Bishops' registers at Wells contain little of interest and seldom do more than name the incumbents, the first of whom to be mentioned, Will. de Ludlow, was instituted in 1312. The following passage from Bishop Drokensford's register refers in all probability to depredations committed during the time of that Vicar:-

"1316, Apl. 19 Two Canons commissioned to repeat sentence-of excommunication against unknown offenders who, three years before, had stolen Tithes Sheaves at .Compton Bishop."

In the register of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury 'for the year 1333, it is recorded that two men and a woman who had been found guilty of certain transgressions and excesses, were sentenced to be "flogged round the church on Compton Bishop on three Sundays of Feast Days."

Just inside the churchyard, a little to the east of the south porch, there stands a fine old cross of stone, probably set up in the fourteenth century, and consisting of a slender octagonal monolith twelve feet high, with massive and well-cut socket supported by four rows of steps. A hole near the top of the shaft may have held an iron support for a piece of sculpture or canopy. The modern stone cross that now forms the finial was put up about the year 1850, when the whole of the structure was repaired.



Inside the south porch, on the east side, has been placed an oaken plaque recording the names of all the Vicars of the parish from 1312 to the present time. This was presented by members of the Mothers' Union in Commemoration of Festival of Britain year 1951.

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## OUR VILLAGES - THEIR INHABITANTS AND OCCUPATIONS UP TO THE TWENTIETH- CENTURY

The village of Compton Bishop was once more populated than it is today. Even within the last hundred and fifty years a hundred houses are reputed to have been pulled down or abandoned, A good many cottages especially near Rackley have been demolished within living memory leaving no trace beyond long grass grown mounds.. To this reduction two causes have contributed. One is the extensive conversion of the land from arable to pasture and the other to the discontinuance of the coaching traffic at: Cross,'

The first known Lord of the Manor: was probably the Rev, Prowse. He was a big landowner and it is supposed lived at the old Manor house near the Church now Manor Farm, There is also in Axbridge Council; Chamber an oil painting of "T Prowse" 1708-1767, who was Recorder for Axbridge from 1735 to 1766, and further still in the history of this family we have recorded that Abigail , daughter of Dr, George Hooper, Bishop of Bath and Wells,, married a John Prowse of Axbridge and Compton Bishop, and she it was who with her daughters embroidered the beautiful altar frontal still to be seen in Axbridge Church to this day,

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Another family whose name is still mentioned to this day is that of "Wickham", There is a painting which hangs also in Axbridge Council Chamber, and is reputed to be a Gainsborough of "A. Wickham" 1600 – 1640 and the narrator telling our member this history believes that it is probable that the family tree goes back as far as Bishop de Wyckhame, whose vault is in Wells Cathedral. There are members of this family still living within a few miles of Compton Bishop 'at the present time.

On the old Bridgwater Road at Cross stands Brewery Farm, whose products were a staple commodity throughout the South Marsh area of this district. The Collings family were then, about sixty years ago, conducting one of the very few farm breweries to be found in England as a survival of the

remoter days when most agriculturalists of any consequence brewed their own ale. The undertaking was unique in this part of the country for, although on the other side of the Mendip side of the Mendip the Castle family owned the bigger and more flourishing Banwell Brewery, that business was run on more modern lines, and consequently with more modern and sophisticated methods. On the other hand, the Collings stood for the order of things which existed long before the introduction of chemists and chemicals into the trade had ever been dreamed of. Theirs was just plain honest to goodness beers and ales brewed of malt and hops, with none of the extraneous ingredients which more go-ahead concerns favoured and it is doubtful if any of us have ever tasted any since. It was the real "nut brown ale" of old England and no cellar or larder throughout the South Marsh was ever without a barrel of best, as far as can be remembered cost but a shilling a gallon, and even the lighter "harvest ale" at eightpence or ninepence was a delight to the palate. It was only when the local world became a little more educated and its palate demanded something with "alien kick or bite" that there could have been any falling off of the country demand but even then the few little country inns that the Collings owned did a brisk trade, and it was only when the bigger breweries -threw out their tentacles that they were eventually swallowed up in the larger concerns.

Patty Moore, and sister of Hannah Moore records in "Mendip Arrivals" that she and her sister went to Cross in September 1789 to begin enquiries which eventually led to the opening of a Sunday School in Cheddar, which it is recorded was opened there on October 23rd 1789.

Dorothy Wordsworth also records in her Diary that "she and her brother William lay at Cross on their walk back from Cheddar Rocks." They evidently walked from Alfoxden (near Quantock Head) to Cheddar Cliffs and back to Cross in one day, walking home the next day, (dated 1798 or 1799.

Cockfighting was a sport that was Carried on at the top of the Mendip Hills, the fight taking place in the hollows, while bull fighting was indulged in above what is now the railway.

There has been for many years a school at Cross Corner, the first headmaster to be recalled being Mr. Smith. It was afterwards kept as a private school for many years by a Miss Baxter, daughter of one of the Vicars of Compton Bishop, and a Miss Walters.

The Church School situated below the Church was built about the year 1840, and served the two villages of Compton Bishop and Cross. This, together with the school house was completely demolished by a German bomb in 1940, and is now housed in the building mentioned above, thus bringing this building again into use as a school. It is now a Junior Primary School and has this year, 1953, again become a Voluntary Controlled Church School.

As in most villages on important main roads, there was a Toll house which was situated on the opposite corner to this school building, on the road from Bristol to Exeter.

Nestling in the crook of the hills at Compton Bishop was a house known as "The Rectory" which was the residence of the Lay Rector, a position which has long since ceased to exist, It was originally supposed to be a Nunnery and it is interesting to note that the lawn in front of the house, on which stands a fine old mulberry trees shaped like a fish, a fish being a sign or symbol of ecclesiastical property. This house and grounds are now owned by the South Western Hospital Board, and on account of the Suitability of the climate in the district, is used as a Hospital for Children in ' the county of Somerset who are suffering from, or who have tendencies towards, chest complaints.

The village pump of Compton Bishop was along the wall of the old Church School, and there are various wells and springs in the neighborhood, one of which was opposite

Dunnett Farm, and another at what is now known as "Newtown".,

At Cross is a three storied white painted house known as "Newton House". Many years ago this was occupied by a Miss Card, who it is reputed was engaged to be married to a sailor. When all the preparations were made, even to the wedding breakfast, the news came that her fiance had been lost at sea. She was so distracted that she refused to have any of the wedding preparations altered, and they were left to go musty, and the room full of cobwebs and dust. She only left the house once a year when a carriage came and took her to the Bank for her financial business, when tradition has it that she always wore trousers, one leg red, and the other blue. Eventually she left, and the house has since reputed to be haunted by her ghost. It is said that Charles Dickens, when on one of his journeys from London to Exeter to report accounts of the Elections for the newspaper he represented, stayed at the Wellington Arms at Cross, and was told of the story of Miss Card, and it was from this story that he wrote the well-known book "Great Expectations". In 1700, When the Lighting and Window Tax were enforced, some of the windows in Newton House were blocked up to evade the tax.

The village "pound" was situated opposite the toll house on the corner of the old Bridgwater Road, while the police house until done away with, was on the opposite corner to the Wellington Arms.

A former occupation of the inhabitants of Cross was the manufacture of soft felt hats, the material for which may have come from the coarser leavings of the 'wool from the sheep on the hills, after the best wool had been sold at the wool sales at Axbridge to the Flemish weavers.

There was once a Tannery in the orchard below the Manor Farm at Compton Bishop. The Hill above, and the cottage below still bear the names alluding to the making of leather on the old maps of the district. Teasels, as they called in old documents "Fuller's Thistles" were formerly grown in this parish, and their escaped descendants are still to be seen by the roadside or on the margins of the Moorland ditches.

Near the gate of a house and garden just beyond the old schoolhouse at Compton Bishop is a so-called Holy Thorn, a reputed descendant, of which there are many in Somerset, of the Hawthorn which Turner in his "Herball of 1551" says grew in "ye parke of Glassenbury" and "was greene all the winter", and which according to the legend, sprang from the staff of Joseph of Arimathea. It is fabled that the tree at Compton Bishop flowers on Christmas Eve and that its blossoms fall next morning.

Like all villages, a Whipping Post was set-up in 1715 but this has long since disappeared. To the, south-east of White Rock the site of a very small chapel is pointed out, but no trace of the building can now be seen. It is locally supposed to have been dedicated to St, Denis, whose name is said to survive in the adjacent cave called Denny's Hole referred to in a previous chapter. A building believed to have been a chapel, still stands near to the Webbington Cross roads, but is now used as a private residence. Another building that has disappeared was the water mill, which stood on or near the site of the offices of the Loxton Limited Dairies Company, where the axle of the water wheel was found twelve feet below the present surface.

Two bequests have in times past been left for the good of the parish. In 1669 Thomas Morse left the

sum of one pound yearly to be given, half at Easter and half at Christmas, to four or five of the oldest poor who were not receiving weekly pay. In 1728 William Cray probably the same man whose estate suffered so severely from the Great Storm of 1703, gave seven acres of land at Badgworth, the rent of which was to be applied to "teaching poor children of this parish in the reading English until they shall be perfected therein". In 1913 the Fund was reported: to be in suspense, under the Board of Education, and no use was then being made of the interest, but this bequest is called upon from time to time for help in the cost of maintaining children of the village at school or university.

It is said that in former times no house was allowed to remain on the village common land unless the roof was on and a fire lit on its hearth within twenty-four hours of its commencement. A passage in the Overseer's book of that time recommended parishioners to see to it that the squatters' dwellings were pulled down before the roofs were on, as such cottages were only nurseries for vagabonds and thieves. Up to about sixty years ago one still stood up the hill beyond the church, and a row on the upper road. In the Overseer's book for the Poor are allusions, as late as 1763, to a Parish Poor House. This was a thatched cottage standing in what has since become part of the Churchyard near the yew trees, where masonry and old pots and platters are still sometimes found when a grave is dug. A small building near the Church may possibly represent the Church House, that is, the public wash house, brewery and bakery mentioned.

One of the oldest houses in Cross was undoubtedly the one now known as "Fairfield" and occupied at the A

was being cut as per sketch map. It will be noticed, on all the stone milestones along the main road that the mileages are given as "so many miles to Cross", indicating the importance of this place. A good deal of its stable accommodation however, was where the "New Inn" on the opposite side- of the road now stands, and most of the cottages around that area were Inns or stables connected with this all important coaching traffic. The roads around Cross were probably better than in most parts of the county owing to the local stone before mentioned being obtainable, and we read that "Mr. Gabriel Stone of Somerset Farm, near Axbridge" was the first man in the district to make really good roads, and he made his roads so smooth and dry that it made both horses and coachmen careless, "so that they often Grippled on this road more than on roads which were worse." It is reputed that Queen Victoria has slept at .the Wellington Arms more than once on her way from Windsor to Exeter. Some of the names of the old coaches conjure up pictures of a means of transit long since past, but which always' come' to one's mind in thinking of the "good old days" Some of their names were "Nonpariel", the "Exquisite", the "John o' Groat", the "Self Defence", the "Alcasta" and. curiously enough .the "Westonion". An old resident, James Hardwidge who was born at Cross about 120 years ago, was said to have remembered when there were as many as thirteen public houses in the parish, and there was much fighting and quarrelling among the inhabitants. The majority of people left only remember three public houses in the parish, "The Ring of Bells" near Compton Bishop Church, now demolished, and the "White Hart" and the "New. Inn" which are still flourishing.

## OUR VILLAGES - TWENTIETH CENTURY

We come now to our villages, as most of us at any rate, can remember them during our own lives. The century commenced with War, but we have no veterans of that campaign left among us to tell of any deeds of heroism that occurred during that time.

On through the Gay Edwardian era, and to the fateful years of the first Great War, although even this did not affect us to a very large extent, as wars were still being fought away from our lands. Some there are left among us who fought on various battle-fields during that time, and many tales they tell of warfare before so many of our war weapons were mechanized.

Then came the period between the first and second great World wars, the times of industrial slumps which had their repercussions on the prosperity of the farm and all who toiled for a living from the land. We, in our snail corner of the universe, became in turn conversant with the Films, with Wireless, and all the modern methods of living which the mind and ingenuity of man was producing for our benefit.

After what seems now only a short spell of years we were once again caught up in the throes of war. All of us remember those fateful days of September 1939, when we were told we were a "reception area" for evacuees from the large cities, and within a very short time we were opening our homes and offering shelter and comfort to families from as far afield as Dagenham, Hastings and London. The 'cockney accent was heard in our village school, and much patience was required to mix the town and country bred amicably together. We were, however, not to be such a 'safe Area' as had been anticipated, for very early in the war years we were hearing of bombs being dropped at random in neighbouring fields and villages. One remembers the first bomb crater at Weare, when one Sunday morning we all trailed across the fields to see what had happened, and even contributed to the Red Cross collecting boxes of the Nurses for the privilege of seeing **it**. Little were we to know that in 1940 we in Compton Bishop were to suffer severe damage from a stick of bombs dropped by an enemy raider when he had been turned back by our intercepting aircraft after trying to reach Bristol; . Our village school and schoolhouse were completely demolished, luckily without loss of life, the



windows of our village Church were all shattered by blast, and considerable damage was done to neighbouring property. The schoolchildren, after being housed in various temporary accommodations, were eventually to make their permanent school in the premises before mentioned at Cross corner. Whether the school on its original site will be rebuilt no one can at present say. We had a rest centre, Warden's Post and First Aid Centre manned in the Village. Where once stood a village pound, members of the Women's Voluntary Service opened a Jam Centre and thousands of pounds of jam were despatched to the cities. A 'New Neighbours Club' was opened for the evacuees. A very prosperous Savings Group was inaugurated, which incidentally is still continued at the present time to help swell the Exchequer we had our 'War Weapons Week', Our Warship week and many other special efforts.

At last came the time when hostilities ceased and our men and women from His Majesty's Services were returning home.

In order to recognize their service to the country in the cause of Freedom, a "Welcome Home Fund" was organized and on their demobilization each received an illuminated scroll, and a monetary gift, which was also given to the dependents of those who lost their lives during the campaign.

We could not let this record of the Story of our Villages pass without a mention of this eventful year, when our young Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in Westminster Abbey. Thanks to the wonders of television all our villagers were enabled to actually see the ceremony, either in their own homes or in our village Church. Every child was presented with a glass beaker in blue with the coronation date stamped thereon, and also a box of chocolates, at a Commemoration Tea - these being given by the Axbridge Rural District Council under whose jurisdiction these villages are governed - while from the Mothers' Committee of Cross School, each child received a Silver Crown piece specially minted for

Coronation year. The adults, not to be outdone in these festivities enjoyed a delightful supper in the marquee, erected in a field at the bottom of Bourton Lane, given and served entirely by the farmers in the district, followed by a Dance-.until midnight.

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## OUR VILLAGES – EPILOGUE

And so, readers, we come to the end of our story. We have tried to give you an interesting account of our village in the past. Like all villages we go with the march of time - our fields are no longer ploughed with a team of horses, but hard mechanical motor tractors are heard, the reapers and gleaners no longer go to the harvest fields but all is gathered in with a combined harvester, our hay is made into silage, our cattle and poultry are fed on patent foods, and our land is enriched with patent manures. Even our poultry in many places are kept in artificial light and produce their eggs on what is called the "Battery System". Houses built by the local Council have sprung up in our midst. Our children are taken to school by Coach or Bus, and provided with midday meals, and then at night are able to look and listen to the latest marvel of our age, "Television". The Adult members of our parish have their British Legion Club, their Football, Darts and Skittle Clubs, their Mothers' Union branch, and their Women's Institute. Do we ever stop to wonder where this is all leading to, and whether we are any better or any happier for all the Modern inventions and conveniences that science has given us?,

We have no thatched cottages a painter may dwell upon, but our houses are for the most part built of the natural grey stone quarried from the surrounding hills and have stood the test of time. In Compton Bishop we do not possess a shop or an inn, although we have a cottage which serves as our local Post Office from which, on a winter's night, peeps out a welcome glow from a paraffin lamp to the passers by on their homeward journey. The inhabitants are mostly of yeoman stock of the county and speak with the lilt of the true Zummerzet brogue, while the few newcomers to the district try and fit themselves into the scheme of life as they found it, and hope in time that they too may become one of the "oldest inhabitants."

While we cannot boast of anything spectacular or exciting in our history, we hope we have interested you sufficiently to make you realize that it is a part of England which is truly "England", unspoilt by the roar of furnaces, the whistle of trains, or the odours of petrol from road traffic, although we do have to take the roar of an occasional jet propelled aircraft as a sign of the times that may be yet to come.

