

INTRODUCTION

The original volume was small quarto in format, and here the format is A4 . The footnote numbers were not continuous, but began anew on each page, so here they have been re-numbered continuously and placed at the end.

This version was digitised from the editor's personal copy. The table of contents at the beginning has been added anew.

Edited by Tony & Jane Woolrich, 14/08/2019

The figures enclosed in round brackets (...) refer to the order of the documents in this volume; those in square brackets [...] to the order in Dr. Birch's catalogue in the Town Clerk's office

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One of the main objects of the publication of these records is to provide material for those who wish to study the development of the English borough. The present volume brings us to the close of a period in the evolution of our administration, that of the Stewards of the Community or Common Stewards, who had been known as the Stewards of the Gild Merchant when they used the common seal in the thirteenth century. Their rule will henceforth be replaced by that of the Mayoralty.

During these last years of the Stewards' regime the life of the burgesses seems to have passed smoothly enough in peace and quiet. They spent their days in pursuit of business and pleasure. They continued to import the wines of France and Spain from the vintage countries, and dyestuffs to aid them in their manufacture of Bridgwater cloth whereon they grew rich. They entertained the king's players and they paid their own piper and called their own tune. Feast-days were ever interrupting the course of trade and commerce but were no doubt welcomed as pleasant intervals in a life of toil with its long hours from sunrise to sunset. .

The internecine wars which broke out about the middle of our period do not seem seriously to have affected the even tenor of their life. Not one of the pitched battles was fought in their neighbourhood and they did not suffer the horrors of

rapine and pillage which befell other English towns. Presumably their sympathies were Yorkist, for the lordship of the Mortimers,, lacking male heirs, had passed to the house of York, and though some tenants of the castle manor may have been summoned to the standard, the town was never called to suffer in the cause of either Rose, white or red.

The ceremony of blessing the town referred to in the common bailiff's accounts for 1455 and 1456 seems to hint at something untoward having happened, but there is nothing that points to what it may have been and we are left guessing.

There are a goodly number of bailiff's and churchwarden's accounts in the period, always furnishing something of interest and throwing light, on the common life of the medieval borough and the medieval church. The last will and testament, a document often so valuable for the researcher, is represented but sparsely. The ecclesiologist will rejoice, however, in an inventory of church ornaments and vestments; detailing fabrics and colours and showing us the beauty and brilliancy as well as the occasional gloom and sombreness of. the services of the medieval church.

A number of notes from the record of lawsuits are here, by far the greater part in the calendar of extraneous documents at the end of the volume. There is reason to suppose that they were among the papers

of John Brokhampton, at one time under-sheriff of the county (858). The valuable Summons of the Green Wax (880) has already been published in full in vol. xxxix of this series, where it is preceded by an introduction.

The second of our Letters of Confraternity, this time emanating from the Hospital of the Holy Trinity and St. Thomas the martyr in the city of Rome, belongs to this period (809).

The tragic figure of Sir Humphrey Stafford, afterwards earl of Devon, appears now on these pages. The royal pardon (826) and the paper having reference to the constableness of Bristol castle and the wardenship of Kingswood forest (827) have probably found their way into the borough chest by reason of John Kendale's position as an executor of the earl's will.

French now disappears from our documents ; on the other hand, there is an increase in the use of English. Where Latin is still employed, a word-for-word translation of the more interesting portions has been added to the text of the original.

Of seals the most interesting are that of the Duchess of York, a fine though imperfect impression; that of the City of Bristol; that of the bishop of Worcester; and a clear shield of arms of William Carent, esquire.

#### THE LORDS OF THE BOROUGH

Edmund, earl of March, the last descendant of the Mortimers in the male line, had died childless in 1425, and as his younger brother Roger had predeceased him, the succession passed to the elder sister Anne who had married Richard, earl of Cambridge, son of Edmund, duke of York, and grandson of King Edward III. In this way the lordship of Bridgwater castle and a third of the borough came into the hands of the house of York.

Cambridge ultimately became involved in a plot the object of which was to put Anne's brother, the earl of March, on the throne. It was revealed to the king when he was about to embark for France and his Agincourt victory, and Cambridge and his associates suffered the fate of traitors.

Thus in 1454 we find Anne's son, Richard, duke of York, in possession of the Mortimer lordship of the borough. The fee-farm which was due to be paid to the lords through the hands of the reeves had fallen in amount. The duke had therefore appointed a commission to enquire into the matter, and the answer, eight months later, is given in the report of which we have a copy (773). The commissioners find that the total shortage amounts to 75s., of which the duke's share is 25s., and that it is due to certain tenants who, finding that they could no longer support the burdens laid on them, had forsaken their tenements, allowing them to fall into decay.

On the last day of the year 1460, Richard fell in the battle of Wakefield Green. He was succeeded in his claim to the crown as well as in the dukedom by his son Edward, earl of March, whom we find under that title, in company with the earls of Warwick and Salisbury, issuing letters of safe-conduct to John Davy, a burgess of the borough.

Edward assigned his fee-farm of Bridgwater to his mother, the dowager, as portion of her revenue, and when the question of its diminution recurred it was in her name that the correspondence was resumed. A petition, of which the copy is undated, was addressed to the queen-mother imploring her clemency and announcing that since the duke's commission had assented to a depreciation of 25s., there had been a further fall of 10s. in the portion due to the York lordship.

In November, 1461, the queen-mother appointed under her seal a commission of four to enquire further into the matter and to find out what really was the state of the borough finances. Attached to this document is a strongly worded protest from her receiver summoning the reeves to pay the full amount, which is now, however reduced by a pound from the £9. 0s. 0½d. quoted in the burgesses' petition (819).

#### THE BOROUGH

In this volume there are a dozen community accounts besides a 'parcel' and a memorandum. Of these annual accounts those dated from 1453 to 1462

run consecutively with the exception of that of 1459 which is missing.

The borough revenue is almost entirely derived from two main sources — from houses and gardens belonging to the community, and the charges and tolls at the quayside.

The largest property leased by the town is a tenement in the street 'twixt, Church and the Bridge. It had belonged to John Warde, a prominent merchant, and may be that which is the subject of the deeds, Nos. 580 and 582 in the previous volume.<sup>1</sup> The tenant who held it from the year 1441 is John May, a merchant; at one time constable of the borough (821), who held it for the life of his wife Margaret, formerly the wife of John Warde and who pays a yearly rent of £1. 6s. 8d. or two marks. We have no knowledge of how this property had come into the hands of the community or why their bailiff pays, Henry Fortescue the larger yearly sum of £1 16s. 8d. on account of it. The mention of John Fortescue, whose wife is said to have formerly been the wife of Warde, is perplexing (824, 850). The tenement is pronounced vacant in 1467 (850)

Beside the two chief sources of revenue the income from fines paid in order to have the freedom of the Gild was small. Apart from these there was but very little, though mention might be made of occasional court issues and loans of the common seal.

The expenditure side of these accounts throws more light on the town life of the fifteenth century than the few items of income. The burgage or chief rent, amounting to some 3s., is paid to the lords of the town through the local reeves or, as they are beginning to be called, port-reeves. The holding of such property naturally i a good deal of outlay on repairs to houses, and similar work has to be done on owned buildings such as the Great Bridge, the Lyme Bridge, the town gates almshouse which stood outside West Gate. The quay and its equipment make constant calls on the burghal treasury. The crane needs new slings, new hawsers, new pulleys and an unceasing supply of tallow and tar. The bushels for measuring salt and dry goods are forever in need of replacement or repair. So is the 'common'

plank. The porters or cranemen receive a special yearly payment for clearing away the silt ('woos' or 'sclyme') which collects at the base of the quay.

Then there are professional fees. Counsel is retained for an annual fee of 13s. 4d., for we do not yet have a borough Recorder. The Town Clerk receives half that amount for his services besides what may be given him for special bits of work. The common bailiff puts in a claim for 3s. 4d. to meet the costs of writing his 'parcels' and 'this, account.' The burgesses who represent the borough in Parliament receive fees to meet their outlay in journeying, board and lodging.

The yearly festival of Corpus Christi is the occasion of gifts of wine to each of the religious houses, that is, the Hospital and the Grey Friars, and also to the parish vicar. On one occasion the work of Our Lady's chaplain on the fertour on which the Host was borne in procession is recognized in the same way. The bailiff also records a payment for collecting rods for the occasion, and the pipers of Ash Priors from over the Quantock hills were hired to enliven the festivities. The town, it may here be mentioned, had a piper of its own and provided him with a cloak (793).

The dividing-line between the civic and ecclesiastical functions of the community is ill-defined if indeed it exists at all. In some of these accounts the burghal authority is concerning itself with church finance. It buys a box in which to keep church money, it appears to superintend church collections, providing refreshment on the occasions, and to pass money over to the churchwardens. It defrays the cost of issuing summonses against defaulters to these church rates.

On one feast of the Assumption the civic authority erects a pavilion ('selde') in the churchyard for the accommodation of the abbot of Glastonbury. When it has been decided in the year 1455 to seek an ecclesiastical blessing for the town; the bailiff enters various sums laid out in that connection.

Municipal hospitality was by no means neglected. From time to time, there are : charges for wine given either to prominent burgesses or to more or less distinguished visitors. Alexander Hody, who acted as

Counsellor to the borough, was so honoured on several occasions, and a breakfast was given on his setting out for London (728). Wine was given to Thomas Alyn, the duchess of York's auditor; and to William Browning who acted for her in respect of her lordship of the borough; he was sheriff in 1463. William Stafford, another recipient of the town's hospitality, had been sheriff in 1437 and again four years later. The tragedy of Sir Humphrey Stafford belongs to the period of the next volume. The duchess of Exeter received not only wine but a gift of two oxen which she seems to have passed on to the Grey Friars. The lords of Botreaux and Audeley were also honoured. So too was Richard Chokke, afterwards lord chief justice.

The stewards are seen here (747) presiding over an arbitration between two townsmen. They are not themselves the arbitrators who are four in number and are chosen by the two parties concerned in the dispute. The judgment of the four is given.

Again we find the stewards (831) hearing evidence on oath in the Gild hall in a case which concerned Bridgwater not at all. To begin with, the evidence had been submitted to Humphrey, lord Stafford, and he had ordered Richard Chokke to hear the witnesses on oath in the church of the Grey Friars at Bridgwater. Chokke, in turn, sent the witnesses on to the Common Stewards, again to 'swear upon a book,' and this took place two days later. The Stewards then issued the report which is here given.

#### REPRESENTATIVES, IN PARLIAMENT

During the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V parliament met with great frequency. In Henry VI's reign of nearly forty years longer intervals occurred in which no meeting, and in Edward IV's time the gaps grew wider still. During covered by this volume parliament met eleven times, and Bridgwater was in all but three of them so far as records go.

Re-elections were less frequent than for many years past, and two of those named below were chosen more than once during the period. John Kendal was elected to two subsequent parliaments.

The names of the borough's representatives are these: —

- 1447. Robert Cotys, Thomas Burgoyne.
- 1449 (Feb.). John Maunsel, jun., Wm. Gosse.
- 1449 (Nov.). Reginald Sowdeley, Thomas Dryffeld.
- 1450. John Hille, Wm. Howell.
- 1453. John Maunsel, jun., Wm. Warde.
- 1455. Thomas Lewkenore, Wm. Plusshe.
- 1459
- 1460. Wm. Gosse, John Croppe.
- 1461.
- 1463.
- 1467. John Kendale, James Fitz-James.

The House of Commons list gives "Robert Cotys, jun. (uncertain)," as an alternative to Thomas Lewkenore, in the parliament of 1455.

Some of these names are unknown to our records. Representatives are beginning to be forthcoming from outside the borough, and by the time of Elizabeth one only of each pair was usually a burgess.

Alexander Hody is recorded to have sat for the borough in the parliament of 1431 and 1433, and, according to Collinson, in five subsequent meetings from 1441 onward as one of the county members. If these were his only elections some explanation is needed of the breakfast recorded by the bailiff (728) as given in his honour on setting out to attend parliament in London. At the other end of our period is another puzzling entry. It is in the bailiff's account for the year ending Michaelmas, 1467. stated that 7s. are allowed to the bailiff which he had paid to Adam Hamlyn of the burgesses to a parliament at Leicester. But he was not one of representatives in that year, nor was a parliament held at Leicester.

#### TRADE AND COMMERCE

There are two documents in the Public Record Office which throw light on the relations which were possible in the later years of our period between Spanish and English merchants. They are two petitions addressed to George Neville, lord high chancellor. The first (P.R.O. — C. 1/28/473) is in the name of William Founs merchant

of Bridgwater, and his case, as he states it, is this.

On the 8th of December, 1458, he was in Bilbao, and John de Vessy, a merchant of that port, sold to him and John Hill, also of Bridgwater, nine tuns of wine, at 40s. the tun. A condition was attached to the sale, that if the wine was intercepted on its way to England, — for there was much plundering in the Channel at that time, — the buyers should be the losers if the privateers were English, but not if they were of any other nationality. The wine never reached this country, for it fell into Breton hands, and the Bridgwater merchants claimed that by the terms of the agreement they owed nothing.

When Founs next visited Bilbao with his merchandise he placed in the hands of a Spaniard named Perrons for safe custody sixteen whole wool cloths valued at four marks each. He accuses de Vessy of having conspired with Perrons, and of having procured the cloths from him on account of the £18 which de Vessy claimed to be due for the wine which had gone astray on the high seas. Founs took his case into the Bilbao court, but could get no redress, and, worse still, found himself committed to prison. He therefore appeals to the lord chancellor for his help. He says that John de Vessy was attached by a *capias in withernam* to appear before his lordship and begs that he will examine him on the matter. The names of two sureties are added — John Hylle and William Cave of Bridgwater.

The second petition (P.R.O. — C. 1/27-/184) is in essence a complete denial of the charge made by Founs and contains a counter-charge against him. John de Vessy and another Spaniard allege that they have been wrongfully imprisoned in Bridgwater for the past six weeks, and still are and likely to remain so, unless his lordship mercifully intervenes. This was due to John Bryce, the undersheriff of Somerset, who had sent warrants to the Bridgwater bailiffs for their imprisonment, and all at the instance of William Founs and John de Galys. A quite different story of their relations then follows.

Their case is that William Founs, John de Galys and Richard Botkyn, otherwise Founce, came to Bilbao and borrowed a

sum of 200 marks from a merchant named John de Surbarre; they failed to pay the money when it became due, and had been brought before the local court, and pleading guilty, had been imprisoned. William and John had escaped and had succeeded in reaching England, but Richard remained in the prison at Bilbao. All this, the petitioners explain, had nothing whatever to do with them. But now, merely because they happened to be Spaniards, they were thrown into this English prison as a measure of retaliation. They therefore beg his lordship to enquire into their case.

The names of Wm. Founs and Richard Botkyn occur in some of the Corporation's documents. (See Index.)

#### THE PARISH AND THE PARISH CHURCH

The long incumbency of John Colswayn continued through all the years covered by this volume. In the introduction to vol. lviii his purchase of Dorset property, now belonging to the Corporation, was recorded.: Thirty-three years later, in 1466, we find him transferring the ownership of these lands at Stower Eastover to what we should now call a trust, acting on behalf of the parishioners. , to be renewed from time to time as the trustees died out (845).

When money was needed for the expense of repairing the church fabric; Bridgwater did not raise it by means of church-ales, the medieval equivalent of the modern bazaar. A tallage, tax or rate was imposed on the parishioners, each being required to give a sum which was considered to be in proportion to his means. On some this due was levied personally on the humbler members of the household as well as on the head. This inescapable payment could be enforced on delinquents by a citation before the Court Christian, and instances of such compulsion occur in the accounts. Yet the faithful were not debarred from bestowing gifts *ex devotione* over and above what they might be required to pay to the general 'collection'

These tallages have been handed down to us in a sufficient number to show us how the system was carried out, and the few surviving lists have been tabulated to show their contents in a more comp-

rehensible and informing manner. The householders are originally arranged according to the ward in which they lived, but in these in tables are placed in alphabetical order, while remaining in their several wards. There were usually two collectors in each ward.

Restoration was carried out from time to time, and generally the lead and timber of the roof needed to be renewed. Timber was brought from Hamp and Enmore, and lead from Axbridge and Bristol.

In view of the question regarding the colouring of the interior walls, it is interesting to note that they were first cleaned; an operation taking five days, and the then whitened with chalk which was ground by the painter employed.

The large consumption of wax in the medieval ritual might well be made a subject of special study, and in these churchwardens' accounts there is abundant material such a purpose which might be supplemented from the accounts of other churches recorded in vol. iv of this series. The cost of wax does not vary greatly from year to year, but remains in the neighbourhood of 6s. a pound, which we may remind ourselves is the equivalent of a day's wages of a skilled labourer, a mason or carpenter employed on the church fabric. Tallow is used for candles, only at Christmas. In addition to the wax for torches, resin and wick-yarn are needed. The five tapers before the high cross, the font taper to be lit at baptisms, the great Easter candle lights, the small for the circular rele or trendel, which hung from the roof of the nave renewed regularly. Festivals and anniversaries or obits required their special lights. The taper for the Easter sepulchre, the lights for All Souls, the mind-tapers for the obits, the ordinary altar-lights — all these made constant demands on the wax.

Special attention may be invited here to the inventory of ornaments and vestments belonging to St. Mary's in 1447 (750), a document of rare interest which needs no summarizing but should be studied as it stands. By means of it we are enabled to picture in imagination the colour arid brilliance on the one hand and the sombre Lenten gloom on the other hand which

characterized an English parish church in the middle of the fifteenth century.

The manner in which such treasures came into the possession of the wardens is exemplified in a legacy received by John Colswayn a few years later (817). It consisted of a complete suit of vestments and included a cope, a chasuble, two tunicles, with albs, stoles, fanons, and all else belonging to a suit of vestments, wherof the grounde is crymesyn velevet and pounded with flores of gold.'

The payment of Peter's pence in 1456 (794) is the only instance recorded in our muniments.

#### CHANTRIES.

The most important records in this volume regarding the chantries are perhaps the two sets of documents in which William Magot (777-9) and William Gascoign (780-3) respectively leave property for the support of a priest to minister at the altar of the chapel of Holy Trinity. The details are of much interest.

We may note also the lease of a tenement by the wardens of Holy Trinity, Holy Cross and St. Katherine, acting jointly (727). The chantry of St. Erasmus also lets a house in Fore Street (786).

Church restoration extended to the chapels of Our Lady (754), St. George (754), and Holy Trinity (786).

There are no chantry accounts of the years of our present review.

Till quite recently it has been impossible to say on which side of the high altar the chapels of Holy Trinity and St. George were respectively placed. We could only guess. A will drawn up very soon after the dissolution now discloses the fact that St. George's lay on the north side.

#### THE HOSPITAL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST .

In the autumn of 1445 the bishop received the resignation of the master of the hospital at Wells, and the election of his successor lay with the brethren of the house who at this time numbered only two. In such circumstances they decided to ask the bishop himself, to nominate, and he consented. His choice fell on Thomas Yle, one of the brothers in the Bridgwater hospital, and with the assent

of the master, Thomas Pylton (or Pulton) and the convent, he was transferred to the Wells mastership (*S.R.S.*, vol. xlix, 159 to 163).

Four years later the mastership of the Bridgwater hospital also fell vacant, and the bishop confirmed the election of Roger Cory (*Ibid.*, vol. 1, 1641). This master was succeeded in 1457 by John Holford, of whose election a very full account appears in the bishop's register (*Ibid.*, vol. 1, 1647).

Of the four methods by which the head of a religious house might be appointed, the brothers chose that of election by scrutiny. There were two candidates who mattered — Thomas Yle, the master of the Wells hospital, and John Holford, one of the brothers. Roger Cory presided and we are told exactly how the voting proceeded. In the end Holford was declared elected. After his assent had been obtained, the brethren chanted the *Te Deum* and bore him to the high altar.

On the sixth of July of the same year, the bishop confirmed the original ordinance concerning the purposes and conduct of the house which had been promulgated by Bishop Jocelyn at the time of its foundation.

Two months later, on the presentation of the master and brethren, Thomas Hardyng, who for some years had held the chaplaincy of Our Lady's chantry (791), was installed in the rectory of Chilton (*S.R.S.*, vol. xlix, 1072). He held the incumbency for only four years. On his resignation he sought a pension. The bishop awarded one of £4 which his successor swore on the gospels faithfully to pay him (*Ibid.*, vol. xlix, 1382)

Unhappily, John Holford does not seem to have proved a worthy master. His example was far from good, he held the reins loosely and discipline was lax. Hugh Sugar, who had acted as counsellor at his election, visited the hospital on behalf of the bishop and laid on both master and brethren a series of heavy injunctions, including even the making of a dungeon, fitted with stocks and fetters, for the correction of erring brethren.

It is from this document that we learn more about the buildings and the hospital than we are able to obtain from any other

source. In addition to the church and the infirmary there was the refectory in which the brethren dined together; the dormitory to which they retired for rest and sleep; the church in which they transacted the business of the convent; the cloister in which they sought recreation and exercise, a parlour which looked out on the cloister ; a garden, wherein grew their herbs, simples and vegetables ; a stew or fish-pond for the supply larder; and a graveyard in which they were finally laid.

It was in this year that Bridgwater had its Lourdes. It had come to the ears of the bishop that things were happening at Wembdon which it were better should be looked into. He had heard that folk were flocking thither, drawn by the cures wrought at a well in that parish known as St. John's spring. He had, more specifically from the master of the hospital to the same effect. There had been a great concourse of people who came thirsting for the water and in fact drinking it. Moreover they were making offerings there in honour of Our Lady and St John the Baptist, and in such gifts the brethren of the hospital, or at any rate their vicar at Wembdon, were quite probably more or less interested. Many sufferers to whom for many years physicians had been in vain claimed here to have been restored to health and made their offerings at the spring. Now the bishop was a wise man and declined to be hurried into acquiescence in these cures. He had described the waters at Bath as a heavenly gift, but they had been known for many years to have healing properties. This Wembdon claim was quite new, at least to the bishop, and the matter must be looked into. To this end he directed two of his officials, both men learned in civil and canon law, to investigate the verity of the alleged cures and to acquaint him with the result of their enquiries.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE GREY FRIARS

The hearing of witnesses on oath in the church of the Friars in connection with a law case has already been referred to in the section on The Borough.

In the common bailiff's accounts for the year 1458 we gather that the ton made a gift to the duchess of Exeter of a yoke of oxen. No reason is given. The Borough

had given her a present of wine the year before (797) costing only 3s. And these oxen were much more valuable. It would seem that the duchess, perhaps embarrassed by the size of the gift, passed them on to the friars for the good of her soul, for the bailiff enters a charge of 3*d.* for having them taken to the friary.

#### TOPOGRAPHY

The Hundred Acres (735; 754) seems now to have sufficient houses to be regarded as a ward. It was by . the river to the north of Eastover, and was originally part of the Castle manor.

Field-names occur in the properties, devoted to the church by William Gascoign (780), and in a lease concerning Haygrove (814).

Lyme bridge crossed the river higher up than the Great Bridge, probably where the Lime Kiln Inn still marks the position of the lime kiln of earlier days. Presumably it was of wood only.

#### ENDNOTES

1) See No. 772

2 Dilks, *The Hospital of St. John the Baptist* in *S. John Baptist, Bridgwater*, p 78