

**GENERAL HISTORY (1700—1800).—
MAKING DUNBALL AN ISLE — BLOYSE'S
CHARITY — PRESENT OF PLATE TO THE
CHURCH — THE " KING OF THE BEGGARS ' "
VISIT TO BRIDGWATER; AN AMUSING SCENE
— THE MARKET HOUSE ACT — A GUARDIAN
ASSOCIATION — FIRST PETITION TO
PARLIAMENT AGAINST THE SLAVE TRADE —
REMOVAL OF THE OLD STONE BRIDGE.**

IN the early part of this century a somewhat singular event occurred at Dunball. One morning a deep cut of 40 yards was discovered across the then isthmus, the work having been done by some persons unknown during the night, and who were never discovered. Dunball was thus made an isle.

1701.—Several earthen urns and a fibula were found in digging near Chedzoy Church. Human coins have since been found in several other parts of the village.

1711.—A fatal epidemic visited the town this summer, causing a large number of deaths, as many as five occurring in one day. The inhabitants then numbered only about 2,200.

1717.—This year died Gilbert Bloyse, who by his will left a bequest, according to the terms of which about 34 loaves, are given away to the poor from an aperture in the Church porch every Sunday. The following inscription on an old panel in the Church refers to the bequest:—

Gilbert Bloyse, of this town, clerk, by his last Will, dat. 25 Feb., 1717, gave to John Gilbert, Esq., John Allen, DR.M. Physick, Edw. Raymond, gent, and Tho. Phelps, grocer, Five Pounds and Four Shillings, to ye intent that they, with ye churchwardens, should for one year after his decease distribute two shillings in bread on Sunday every week in ye Parish Church of Bridgwater, equally amongst twelve poore people of ye said Burrough and Parish; which they have done accordingly. He also by his will gave to ye said John Gilbert, John Allen, Edw. Raymond and Tho. Phelps, and their heirs, an annuity of Five Pounds and Four Shillings, clear of all Taxes, &c., issuing out of his Messuage or Tenement and Lands at Moorland, in ye Parish of North Petherton, for ever, to ye intent they shall provide Two Shillings' worth of bread weekly, to be by them and ye said churchwardens distributed on Sundays in ye said Parish Church, amongst twelve poore people of ye said Burrough and Parish for ever, having special regard to and

preferring ye poore not receiving alms before such as shall receive alms. And for ye better continuing ye said charity, he willed that when two of ye Trustees should dye ye survivors shall by writing, under their hands, elect two other Trustees in their room, and so toties quoties when ye Trustees shall be reduced to ye number of two.

1721.—The estates of Robert Knight, Sutton Mallet, &c., were this year seized and confiscated, he being cashier to the notorious South Sea Bubble Company, and the proceeds went towards relieving the sufferers from the company's failure.

1724.—A massive silver flagon, weighing nearly one hundred ounces, was subscribed for publicly, and presented to the Church. It bears the following inscription:—*Deo et alteri suo. CEnophorum hoc summa cum humilitate dedicabunt Parochiani de Bridgwater in testo Resurrectionis Domina Anno 1725.* A translation of this inscription cannot fail to be interesting—"To God and His Altar, this wine-holder was, with great humility, dedicated by the Parishioners in Bridgwater, on the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord, in the year 1725."

1728.—A silver chalice and paten were presented to the Church by Madam Mary Lushe, who died shortly afterwards.

1729 - 1730.—The town was visited by a children's epidemic, and large numbers died.

1744.—Bampfylde Moore Carew, the notorious "*King of the Beggars*," visited the town, and practised his arts of deception with much success, deceiving various well-known gentlemen, including Sir John Tynte, of Halswell, and Mr. Justice Crosse, of Broomfield, pretending to be a West Indian castaway. A short time afterwards he again netted a harvest in Bridgwater, but on this occasion entered the town in his own name. The following record of his visit is preserved among the borough documents:—

BOROUGH AND PARISH OF BRIDGWATER.

The information of Sarah Leakey, of Bridgwater aforesaid, widow, taken before Wm. Binford, alderman, one of his Majesties' Justices of the Peace for the borough, who saith—That she now keeps a common ale-house within the Borough. That yesterday, about noon, Banfield Moore Carew came to informant's house and desired to lodge; there was a woman with him he called his wife, and a girl, his daughter, and the informant believes the said Banfield Moore Carew

is a common stroller, and hath nothing to subsist on but what gentlemen give him. That this said Carew came into her house very drunk and greatly intoxicated.

Taken on oath this 22 day of August, 1744.

Before me, Wm. Binford. SARAH LEAKEY.

While he was in the neighbourhood he visited Lord Clifford, at Cannington, whom he appeared to have known in his younger days. St. Matthew's Fair being then held he appeared there upon crutches, as a poor miserable cripple, in company with many of his brethren, whose object was to deceive the generously-inclined public. To such an extent did the nuisance extend that the Mayor jocosely said he would make the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk! In view of this end he had them all apprehended and confined in the dark house at the gaol one whole night. The next morning a gentleman visited them in their miserable apartment, and pretending greatly to befriend them, advised them, if any of them were counterfeits, to make haste out of the town, otherwise they must expect no mercy from the Mayor, unknown to whom he had stolen the keys. He then unlocked the doors, and forth issued the "disabled" and "infirm" prisoners; the lame threw aside their crutches and artificial legs and made exceedingly good use of their natural ones; the blind made shift to see their way out of the town, and the deaf listened attentively to the advice of their supposed friend and followed his counsel with all speed. The Mayor, with several aldermen and gentlemen, were in hiding on the opposite side of the gaol, and were amused spectators of this highly diverting scene, calling out to stop them, not with any intention of capture, but only to add a spur to their speed. Indeed, one of them was so alarmed that instead of running across the bridge he jumped into the river and swam to the opposite side. In short, so well did these cripples ply their limbs that not one of them was taken again, excepting a real lame man, who, in spite of the fear and consternation he was in, could not mend his decrepid pace. He was brought back to the Mayor, who, after rebuking him for his vagrant course of life, generously relieved him, and several other members of the Corporation were also kind to him. *

1750. — John, second Earl of Egmont, commenced to build Enmore Castle, a

"curiously constructed and very ugly house," since demolished. Another residence of the same name is now the seat of Mr. T. Palfrey Broadmead.

1758. — An entry in one of the books of the Corporation, under date October 26, gives us an opportunity of comparing market prices with those of to-day Best wheat, 5s. per bushel; seconds flour, 4s. 6d.; best wheaten flour, £1 1s. 4d. per sack; barley, 2s. 9d. per bushel; oats, 1s. 10d.; white peas, 4s. 6d.; beans 2s. 8d.

1779. — An Act was passed in this year, entitled "*An Act for erecting a Market-house, and regulating the markets within the borough of Bridgwater, in the county of Somerset, and for paving, cleansing, lighting and watching the streets, lanes and other public passages and places within the said borough.*" Under this Act trustees were appointed, and the first meeting was held on the 9th of July, 1779. The Market-house was accordingly erected, several houses being demolished for the purpose, and did good service until ultimately it was found far too small for the increased business transacted. In 1826 an Act of Parliament was obtained for enlarging it, and the same Act. continued in effect the one previously in force. The trustees were empowered to borrow a sufficient sum to enable them to make the necessary additions, the principal (and interest) being repaid out of the "*rents, tolls, piccage, stallage and other profits.*" A handsome and commodious Corn Exchange was added in 1875.

The second Act, as well as the first above mentioned, provided for lighting and watching the streets, lanes, &c., but the imperfect police system, as far as regarded watching, led to the establishment, in September, 1837, of a "*Bridgwater Guardian Association,*" which had for its object "*the protection of persons and property from felons and other offenders.*" To attain this object a committee was empowered to offer rewards for information leading to the conviction of offenders against the person or property of either of the members. These rewards were as follows.

Murder, Highway Robbery, Burglary, or Felony, in Dwelling-house, or setting Fire to any House, Barn, Outhouse, or to any Mow, or Stack of Corn, Grain or Wood, any Sum not exceeding £15. 0. 0.

Stealing, Killing or Maiming any Horse, Cattle or Sheep, any sum not exceeding .£10. 0. 0.

Receiving, Buying, or Selling Property, knowing the same to have been Stolen; Stealing or Damaging any Waggon, Cart, Plough, or any Implement of Husbandry, or any Hay, Seed, Corn or Grain, Threshed, or Unthreshed, Gates, Posts, Rails, Hurdles, Ironwork from Gates, Poultry of any kind, Pigs, or Fish, or any article or articles from or out of any Shop or Warehouse, where the same may be for sale or otherwise, any sum not exceeding. £10. 0. 0.

Stealing from the Person, Cutting, Lopping, or Damaging any Trees, Wood, or Underwood, Hedge Breaking, Stealing Eggs, Robbing Orchards or Gardens, or Stealing, Destroying or Damaging, with intent to Steal or Destroy any cultivated Root or Plant used for the food of Man or Beast, or for Manufacture, any sum not exceeding £5. 0. 0.

1782 (Sept. 25).—The death occurred of Mr. John Phelps, who was Mayor the previous year, and who had been otherwise connected with the Council. Such was their appreciation of the deceased, and their high regard for his incorrupt public and private conduct, that the Corporation erected a monument to his memory in St. Mary's Church.

1784—An entry in the Council Books under December sets forth an order "*That the Receiver do pay unto William Tuckett, Esq., Mayor, the sum of £65 for the support of his kitchen.*"

1785.—There were seventeen constables appointed for duty in the town.

In this year the Mayor and other citizens sent the first petition to the British Parliament for the abolition of the African slave trade. It is thus referred to by Mr. Clarkson, in his "*History of the Slave Trade*"

"In the year 1785 we find other coadjutors coming before our view, but these in a line different from that in which any other belonging to this class has yet moved. Mr. George White, a clergyman of the Established Church, and Mr. M. Chubb, suggested to Mr. Wm. Tuckett, the Mayor of Bridgwater, where they resided, and to others of that town, the propriety of petitioning Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade. This petition was agreed upon, and was as follows:— "The humble petition of the inhabitants of Bridgwater shows that, &c. This petition was presented by the Hon. Mr. Poulet, and Alexander Hood, Esq. (afterwards Lord Bridport), who were Members for the town of Bridgwater. It was ordered to lie on the table. The answer which these gentlemen gave to their constituents relative to the reception

of it in the House of Commons is worthy of notice. 'here did not appear' I say they in their common letter, 'the least disposition to pay any further attention to it. Every one almost say the abolition of the slave trade must immediately throw the West India Islands into convulsions and soon complete their utter ruin. Thus they will not trust Providence for its protection for so pious an undertaking.' "

This petition was followed by thousands of similar appeals, and contributed to the bringing about of the abolition of the trade in 1807.

1788.—The Unitarian Chapel, Dampiet-street, was re-built in this year, the old building dating exactly a century earlier. This accounts for the Chapel being sometimes called "*The Old Eighty-eight.*"

1795;—This year witnessed the demolition of the old stone bridge over the Parret, which had stood through five centuries. For a great number of years complaints had been made that there was a serious obstruction of the water-way by the three stone piers which supported the arches. At that time the principal portion of the river Parret as far as Langport, and the river Tone as far as Taunton, no canal or railway being then in existence, were navigated by numerous barges, laden with coal, &c., a considerable trade being done in that way. Owing to the tidal water being damned back in a great measure by the stone piers, the boats when passing through the centre and larger arch, had to make a dip, and particularly when following a heavy bore, and the water consequently turbulent, the barges often came to grief, and were swamped with their cargoes. It was, therefore, decided to have an iron bridge to span the river, high in the centre, and a very handsome structure was cast by the Coalbrookdale Company. The operations connected with the erection of this bridge extended over two years, and the new bridge was opened for traffic in 1797. It is an interesting fact to note that Mr. Robert Codrington (who resided at Ivy House, in Friarn-street) was Mayor for the year when the new structure was decided on, and was again elected to the office the year the bridge was completed, Mr. John Symes filling the chair in the interim. The borough coat of arms found a conspicuous place on the bridge, and on the same was the inscription "*R.C., Mayor/ 1795.*" During the period of erection a

temporary wooden bridge on piles was used to connect the two parts of the town together, and they were placed in a similar to those used at the erection of the present bridge.** The annexed illustration of the old iron bridge is from a photograph taken just previous to its removal.

Towards the end of the century there flourished in the town one John Chubb, or as he was better known, "Jack Chubb," a most eccentric gentleman. He made a series of drawings of old buildings in Bridgwater, several of which were afterwards lithographed, though copies are now very rare.



*See "*Apology for the Life of Mr. Bamfylde Moore Carew*," eighth edition, 1768, pages 326-8

** Many of the above particulars were gathered in an interview with the late Mr. William Blackmore in 1884, then the oldest inhabitant of Bridgwater, who at the age of 94 remembered many of the details.