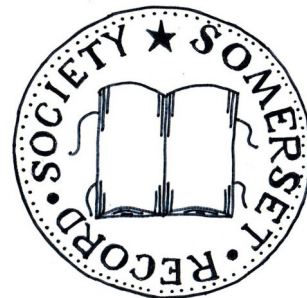


OFF THE RECORD

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOMERSET RECORD SOCIETY

ISSUE 5: SUMMER 2022



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2022 Somerset Record Society Annual General Meeting will be held in the Church Rooms of St John the Baptist, Axbridge Parish Church on Saturday 15th October. Doors will be open from 2pm and the AGM will start at 2.30pm.

The address for the Church Rooms is Church Steps, Market Square, Axbridge, Somerset, BS26 2AP. The Church Rooms are opposite the church entrance, a few steps down from The Square. There is level access from the public highway to the Church Rooms but note that the 'highway' in this case is The Church Steps.

There are two car parks, in Old Church Road and Moorland Street, signposted from The Square. There is also on-street parking on Cheddar Road and Houlgate Way, about 10 minutes walk from the Church. Note The Square limited to 1 hour parking.

Members will be sent papers for the AGM before the meeting. After the business meeting, Robert Dunning will speak on *Getting Ordained in Axbridge in 1489 and 1493*, followed by a talk from Jerry Sampson on *Axbridge Church*.

This meeting is open to non-members and the AGM will be followed by tea and biscuits. There will also be the opportunity to purchase publications by the Society.

COMMUNICATING WITH OUR MEMBERS

We are working on a number of ideas to improve our service to members and the general public. We have made a start with Off the Record and the new web site, both of which are now up and running. Now that the immediate effects of the pandemic are past we are looking at other possibilities, one of which is an email based newsletter for members.

This newsletter would be an occasional production, to be sent only to those members who would be happy to receive it. Initially, it would contain prior notification of meetings and events, as well as keeping members informed about the launch of new publications. In time we might extend its reach into other areas.

We hope that members will take advantage of this service. To do so, please email membership@somersetrecordsociety.org.uk

FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS

As members will know, we had intended to publish volume 99, which was entitled *Somerset Remedies and Recipes in the 17th and 18th centuries* last year. Indeed, a meeting was held to inform members about it. At the AGM, the Chairman reported the illness of the General Editor, Dr Andrew Butcher, who had been preparing this volume.

As a result, it was agreed by Council that the volume tentatively numbered 101 *Bath & Wells Ordinations, 1465-1526* be brought forward and re-numbered as volume 99, as it was almost ready for publication. The work was published in December 2021.

The next volume after volume 99 will be volume 100 *Archives and Interpretation: Somerset Records; Past, Present and Future*. This volume will give examples of the sort of things that the Society had published in earlier volumes, one example of which is described in the AGM minutes. It should be available later this year.

Council has decided then to bring forward as volume 101 *The Ashe Ledgers, 1631-66*, edited by John Gaisford.

As a result, the year of publication of Dr Butcher's volume will not be 2022.

During the recent pandemic, Council has considered the possibility of other volumes to be produced in parallel to our main series, similar to Maxwell Lyte's 'Historical notes on some Somerset manors formerly connected with Dunster'. As these do not fit into our main line, they would be available for sale to anyone who has a particular interest in the subject, rather than being distributed to all Members. More details will be released at our forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

If you would like to contribute an article to the next newsletter please email submissions to the editor at offtherecord@somersetrecordsociety.org.uk or post contributions to Miss Emma Down, 28 Gale Way, Tiverton, Devon, EX16 5FB.

Articles should be received by 31st March 2023. If you are submitting an image with your article please indicate that you have sought the necessary copyright permission for it to be reproduced.



BATH AND WELLS ORDINATIONS

At first glance *Bath & Wells Ordinations, 1465-1526*, Somerset Record Society's 99th volume, published at the end of 2021, might easily be dismissed as a rather boring record of obscure ecclesiastical history. It is, of course, the record of how and when nearly 4,000 men took Holy Orders and became, as some liked to declare, members of the 'clerical army'. They were men not only from Somerset but from the south-west peninsula, from Wiltshire and Dorset, from Bristol and from across Wales. There were a few from Ireland and the Channel Islands; and a few more from across southern England.

Most of them, it can confidently be assumed, lacked the social contacts to become rectors or vicars, let alone anything better; and a good many were content to be just acolytes, qualification enough to become some gentleman's clerk or some baron's bailiff, any religious function long forgotten. A few, of course, went on to higher things, including the young William Atwater of Cannington who became confessor to Henry VIII (what amazing secrets he must have been told) and bishop of Lincoln, spiritual ruler of people in ten counties between the Humber and the Thames; and John Hilsley, bishop of Rochester, a significant figure in the history of the Reformation. Two others were the last two abbots of Glastonbury. Several became distinguished lawyers; a few contributed to the musical tradition of Wells cathedral and other churches.

Monastic historians will note how many from the religious orders are included, making reconstruction of communities possible. They may also note the involvement of monastic houses in providing guarantees of financial solvency of would-be clerics (known as titles) who had no prospect of immediate employment. Glastonbury was never involved in such trade, though its dependency of Burtle and St John's hospital in Wells appear frequently. Others may notice the significant increase in numbers of candidates in the 1490s, part of the transformation of the Church in the years before the Reformation changed the religious landscape. Yet others will note the significant number of Welshmen.

The names, at least with their diocese of origin and sometimes their parish, offer the family historian a vast amount of new material for the period before parish registers begin to make their appearance. There is just enough, given that these men possessed a minimum standard of education, to hint at schools across Somerset and elsewhere, including the school in the tiny priory at Barlinch.

The lists also raise important questions about travel over long distances and about communications. How did men discover where a bishop could be found; how easily did they get there? They were, undoubtedly, men of great determination.

Robert Dunning

INTRODUCTION TO WELLS WILLS

The probate records for Taunton Archdeaconry were deposited at Exeter Principal Registry and were thus destroyed by enemy action on the night of 3/4 May 1942, when the Probate Registry was destroyed in the bombing during the Exeter Blitz of WWII supposedly in retaliation for the RAF bombing of Lubeck.

By great good luck not only had some indexes been made by private enterprise and were not in the registry, but the Society of Genealogists bought them, presciently, before the war. They list in 13 booklets (some of which are bound together) some 50,000 probate documents, though there is some duplication. An internal note says "Xd to here 17/9/94" so we may assign their compilation to the last decade of the 19th century.

The booklets list the documents in various courts, with the names of the testator and his/her parish and the year. There is also a reference to books, which are, of course, sadly no longer extant. The occupation is not given, except for clergymen. The lists do provide a rough indication of when a person died, which can be checked in the appropriate parish register, if that survives for the period in question. The searcher should see if an abstract exists, not as hopeless a task as one might suspect. As an ongoing process, primarily thanks to the work of Sir Mervyn Medlycott, the location of over 15,000 copies of wills and administrations for Somerset have been determined, and a list of the results were printed in 1993. Since that work most of the abstracts have been printed in two Somerset Record Society volumes, both of course available in the Society's Library. After 1780, most wills should have at least some details recorded in the central records at the National Archives.

The Society has long been anxious to make these available to all searchers, not just in its Library. In any case, they are arranged under the various sections in alphabetical but not lexicographical order, making them very difficult to search. Digitization and the work of volunteers has made this possible; a list of those who worked on this project is appended.

The notebooks are in various hands, some easier than others, and occasionally the page numbers have been buried in the binding. However, these have been checked, with the aim of providing as full a list as possible.

In this index, all Christian names have been standardised to the modern norm as have the place-names. In the absence of English Place-Name Society volumes for Somerset, I have used Youngs' Administrative Units for the standard spelling. Occasional help has been provided by two other works. Places smaller than a parish have had the

parish added (in square brackets) by me. There remain a small number of unidentified places. Surnames have been left strictly as they are written in the notebooks. In one or two cases, there seems to have been errors, mainly where Christian and surname appear to have been inverted. Where this is the case, both the Ms form and the suggested correction have been entered.

Alias type entries are repeated in the notebooks, except when they have same initial letter. In these cases, I have added an entry under the second name. In cases such as tuitions, where more than one person, normally children, are listed, separate entries for each have been provided. Occasionally, it has been necessary to use a 'Notes' field for something unusual – this field has also been used to indicate the clergy and the very occasional knight or peer.

The main index provided is, of course, in strict lexicographical order of surname, then Christian name, then year. However, an index has also been provided arranged by place-name and then chronologically. Finally, there are two small special indexes: one to the wills of clergy and the other to references to places outside Somerset.

It may be useful to list here the dates for which references survive for the Peculiar Courts and the number of documents contained in them.

Volunteers:

Mike Cooper, Tony Harding, David Horwill, Angela Johns, Doug Parrock.
Cliff Webb was responsible for checking, arranging and this introduction.

Cliff Webb

Sources:

1. Somerset wills index: printed & manuscript copies [1531-1850], Mervyn T. Medlycott, Weston Super Mare, Harry Galloway Publishing, 1993; Library copy at SO/G 70
2. Somerset Wills [c.1530-1800]: ed. Mary Siraut, Taunton, Somerset Record Society, vol. 89, 2003; Somerset wills 2 [1380-1859]: ed. A.J. Webb, Taunton, Somerset Record Society, vol. 94, 2008
3. Guide to the Administrative Units of England 1: Southern England: Frederic A. Youngs, Jr., Royal Historical Society, London, 1979
4. Somerset Place Names: Stephen Robinson, Wimborne, The Dovecote Press, 1992; The Place-Names of Somerset: James S. Hill, Bristol, 1914

Court	Numbers	Year Range
Peculiar of Ashill	120	1662-1845
Peculiar of Banwell and Churchill	753	1674-1857
Peculiar of Buckland Dinham	124	1637-1857
Peculiar of Compton Bishop	158	1647-1851
Peculiar of Compton Dundon	178	1678-1857
Peculiar of Cudworth	85	1626-1834
Peculiar of East Harptree	167	1657-1848
Peculiar of Easton in Gordano	320	1661-1856
Peculiar of Hazlebere	190	1676-1856
Peculiar of Henstridge	246	1665-1856
Peculiar of Ilminster	108	1625, 1673-96
Peculiar of Ilton	88	1678-1848
Peculiar of Kingsbury and East Lambrook	563	1661-1857
Peculiar of Litton	108	1661-1848
Peculiar of Pilton and North Wootton	458	1661-1856
Peculiar of St Decumans	482	1636-1857
Peculiar of Timberscombe	94	1689-1850
Peculiar of West Lydford	128	1669-1857
Peculiar of Whitelackington	74	1665-1837
Peculiar of Witham Friary	91	1669-1821
Peculiar of Wiveliscombe and Fitzhead	674	1656-1857
Peculiar of Wookey	370	1627-1858
Peculiar of Yatton	558	1660-1857
Grand Total	6,137	

THE DIOCESE OF EXETER

Dr Jonathan Vage has asked us to draw attention to his website with the title 'The Diocese of Exeter, 1250-1660: records, databases and writings'
www.oldlag.co.uk .

He writes in his welcome to it: 'This website gives free access to my research into the medieval and early modern diocese of Exeter ... Its main aim is to publish calendars of the late fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth century bishops' registers [and it already includes those of Bishops George Neville (1456-65) and John Bothe (1465-78)] and thus complete the sequence begun in the late nineteenth century. In 2022 I hope to add two more calendars and a database of men ordained at Exeter 1258-1645.'

David Bromwich

SOMERSET'S INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING AND TRADE 1400-1413

When *A Maritime history of Somerset* volume three was published in 2017, it contained a chapter entitled 'A Somerset mercantile community: The customs district of Bridgwater, 1320-1500', perhaps the fullest account of Somerset's maritime trade and those involved in that business so far published for the period in question. Happily, a determined project centred at the University of Southampton seeks to catalogue the entire stock of known information regarding vessels and mariners involved in England's international trade between 1400 and 1580.¹ Unsung historical heroes upload an expanding list of information which has revealed data sources for, as yet, un-researched Somerset trade in the early fifteenth century.

First, Two Bridgwater vessels, the *Margaret* and the *Marie*, the masters being Richard Beaumont and John Grounce, were at Sandwich in 1400, along with many other vessels, on the King's business.² The *Marie* clearly survived as it was involved in the Gascon trade in 1403 when Nicholas Somering was the master, and the barge *Mary* (*Marie*?) seems to have been in Royal service again in 1415.³

Second, it is clear that probably every year at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Bridgwater vessels, and on one occasion a vessel from Combwich, sailed to Bordeaux in Gascony, the source of English wine imports at the time. The table below lists those Somerset vessels that subsequently departed Bordeaux with cargo. Whilst the database lists vessels, masters, ports of origin and destination, these particular documents do not indicate where the English vessels are destined. No doubt the destination was England, and more specifically the home port of Bridgwater since it is known that the average annual number of tuns of wine arriving in the port of Bridgwater between 1403 and 1413 was 104.⁴ Having made this very reasonable assertion, the situation is muddled, like the Parratt River, by the fact that two Bridgwater vessels are recorded to left Bordeaux in 1409 but no wine was recorded as entering Bridgwater during that year. Perhaps the ships were lost in storms or maritime violence on the way home since other vessels seem to have taken their place by 1412.

In addition, with regard to Minehead, in 1403 the town had three vessels, the *Dionis* mastered by John Bray, the *Thomas* mastered by William Russet and the *Marie* mastered by John Cook that were all involved in the early fifteenth century Ireland/Bristol trade.⁶ At the time, this mainly involved taking Irish fish for sale in Bristol. So far, the only reference to Minehead men involved in fishing off Ireland in the first decade of the fifteenth century was an incident in 1404 when an unnamed vessel and a group of Minehead men were taken by Spanish vessel when they were fishing near

Carlingford. The data above from the University of Southampton's database indicates that it might have been the *Dionis* that was taken, as John Bray is listed first amongst the Minehead men taken in 1404.⁷ In any case, it is not until the 1430s that the names of Minehead vessels engaged in this trade have previously been known.⁸

Date	Ship	Master	Notes
1401	<i>St John</i>	John Jane	T.N.A., E101/185/11.
1403	<i>St John</i>	Thomas Jane	T.N.A., E101/185/11. The <i>John</i> , involved in the Gascon trade, was, in 1410, owned by John Kedwelly of Bridgwater. (Ashford, Bridgwater, 117)
1409	<i>St John Barge</i>	William Langle	T.N.A., E101/184/19.
1403	<i>Laurence</i>	Nicholas Lynne	T.N.A., E101/185/11.
1403	<i>Nicholas</i>	John Neth	T.N.A., E101/185/11, Of Combwich. John Neth was involved with a group of Bridgwater men in stealing a boat in 1381 and was undoubtedly a relation of Nicholas Neth of Combwich, involved in at least two piratical acts in between 1400 and 1415. (Ashford, Bridgwater, 101, 109, 121-2)
1409	<i>Nicholas</i>	John Gens	T.N.A., E101/184/19.
1409	<i>Julian</i>	Nicholas Lieu (Lien)	T.N.A., E101/184/19.
1412	<i>Isabelle</i>	John Crown	T.N.A., E101/185/9. The <i>Isabel</i> , involved in the Gascon trade was, in 1414 owned by Richard Gardiner of Bridgwater and two Gascon men. (Ashford, Bridgwater, 109, 117).
1412	<i>Christopher</i>	Jenkin John (Johan)	T.N.A., E101/185/7. A Bridgwater vessel of this name was trading in the 1470s and 80s. (Ashford, Bridgwater, 117)
1413	<i>Christopher</i>	Jenkin John (Johan)	T.N.A., E101/185/9.

Hopefully further data will be uploaded onto the database and more nuggets of Somerset's maritime history will be eventually unearthed.

Philip Ashford

Footnotes

1. The merchant fleet of late medieval and Tudor England, 1400-1580 found at www.medievalandtudorships.org/ accessed October 2021.
2. The merchant fleet of late medieval and Tudor England, 1400-1580 found at www.medievalandtudorships.org/ accessed October 2021; T.N.A., E/101/42/5 Kings Remembrancer: Accounts various, 1400.
3. P. Ashford, 'A Somerset maritime community: the customs district of Bridgwater, 1320-1500' in A. Webb (ed.), *A maritime history of Somerset* 3 (Taunton 2017), 116-7.
4. Ashford, Bridgwater, 103.
5. T.N.A., CP40/483 f344 Michel v Feror et al, taking a boat, 1381.
6. The merchant fleet of late medieval and Tudor England, 1400-1580 found at www.medievalandtudorships.org/ accessed October 2021; E122/17/8 and 10, port of Bristol returns of tunage and poundage, 1403.
7. Ashford, Bridgwater, 88.
8. Ashford, Bridgwater, 89.