

MEMORIALS OF ASH PRIORS

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Memorials of Ash Priors by Arthur Wilfrid Baynham

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ARTHUR WILFRID BAYNHAM

**MEMORIALS
OF ASH PRIORS**

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BY

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Vicar of the Parish.

JAMES G. COMMINS
230 HIGH STREET EXETER
1908

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Dedication

TO MY PARISHIONERS

IN THE HOPE THAT IT MAY BE FOUND TO
CONTAIN SOME USEFUL AND INTERESTING
INFORMATION

PREFACE

I HAVE to thank those who have helped me in writing this little book. Sir Wroth P. C. Lethbridge for an introduction to Mr. Arthur Humphreys, who kindly put me in the way of consulting some valuable sources of information respecting the ancient history of the place, also for letting me see Sir Roper Lethbridge's little book and pedigree of the Lethbridge family. Sir Prior Goldney has not only assisted me with the loan of books, but also with the store of knowledge which he carries with him. Mr. J. Houghton Spencer has given me much information respecting the Church. Mr. T. Clarke, from his intimate connection with the family, has rendered me much assistance in my account of the Lethbridge family. I am indebted to Mr. R. W. Marston for his translation of the "Compotus" and for explanation of the terms which occur therein.

The principal books which I have consulted and from which I have frequently quoted are Collinson's *History of Somerset*; *The History of Taunton*, by James Savage; *English Village Communities*, by F. Seebohm; *English Architecture*, by Thomas Dinham Atkinson; *The Title Deeds of the Church of England*, by T. Garnier; The Rev. H. T. Ellacombe's *Bells of Somerset*; *The History of Taunton Priory*, by Thomas Hugo.

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INTRODUCTION

IT has been said, "If there were no written histories of our country we should be able to construct one from things as they are. The past is summed up in the state of things as we find them to-day. But it is especially from words employed in the denomination of places and physical features of the country that we may glean a knowledge of the past. All such words are or were at one time significant, and if we can determine their meaning they help us to construct something of our history." It is so in the case of this little village, it being one of three places in the county of Somerset which take their name from the sort of trees which abound in the district.

It is thought that before the Norman conquest, when the ancient British Christians worshipped in little wattled churches, in many places there would be nothing but a little hut, containing a font, placed most probably under some large tree under which the strolling preacher was in the habit of taking up his position when preaching to the people. In course of time a stone cross would be erected, and hence we have the village or churchyard cross, on the steps of which the preacher stood, as his predecessors had stood

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under the tree. A tree has always marked a spot, and served as it does to this day as a place of meeting, and carrying on business, pitching camps and holding courts. You may see this everywhere in India. The judge when he goes on tour through the districts, pitches his tent under the shade of a great tree. He holds his court under a tree in the open air. The traveller rests under the shade of a tree during the heat of the day, because in the daytime it is always cool under a tree. If he sleeps in the open he chooses a tree, for under a tree it is always dry and warm at night. If he died in the districts far away from a burying ground he was buried under a tree. The natives set up their gods under trees. In connection with these remarks I will mention an incident which occurred one evening when I was sitting writing this account of Ash Priors. A man was shown in to me who had come to see me on very important business, one who had lately left the parish and gone to live where the Knights Templars formerly had their hostel. "Well!" I said, "where are you living now?" "At Stalford," he replied. "Where is that?" "Between here and Halse, on the bounds of the two parishes." "How do you get there?" "You go along the road to Halse," he said, "and turn up the lane on the right hand by the 'old ash.'" "Ah! there you are," I said, "that is just the illustration I want for my book." The tree referred to is an old ivy clad ash just opposite the turning.

The identical tree from which the place took its name must have disappeared long ago. The tree shown in the photograph is merely a typical ash tree on the roadside, which I leave my readers to identify.

Ash Priors, no doubt, derived its name from the



The Ash (*Fraxinus Excelsior*).



The Old Parish Chest.