

**GLASTONBURY  
ABBAY: ITS HISTORY  
AND RUINS**

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Glastonbury abbey: its history and ruins by J. Williamson

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**J. WILLIAMSON**

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Glastonbury Abbey:  
 ITS HISTORY  
 AND RUINS.

BY THE  
 REV. J. WILLIAMSON, M.A.,  
 INCUMBENT OF TREFALE, SOMERSET.

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"By whom is true antiquity enjoyed? Not by the Ancients, who did live in the infancy; but by the Moderns, who did live in the maturity of things." COLTON.

With Illustrations.

WELLS:  
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*Spencer 1855*

ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.



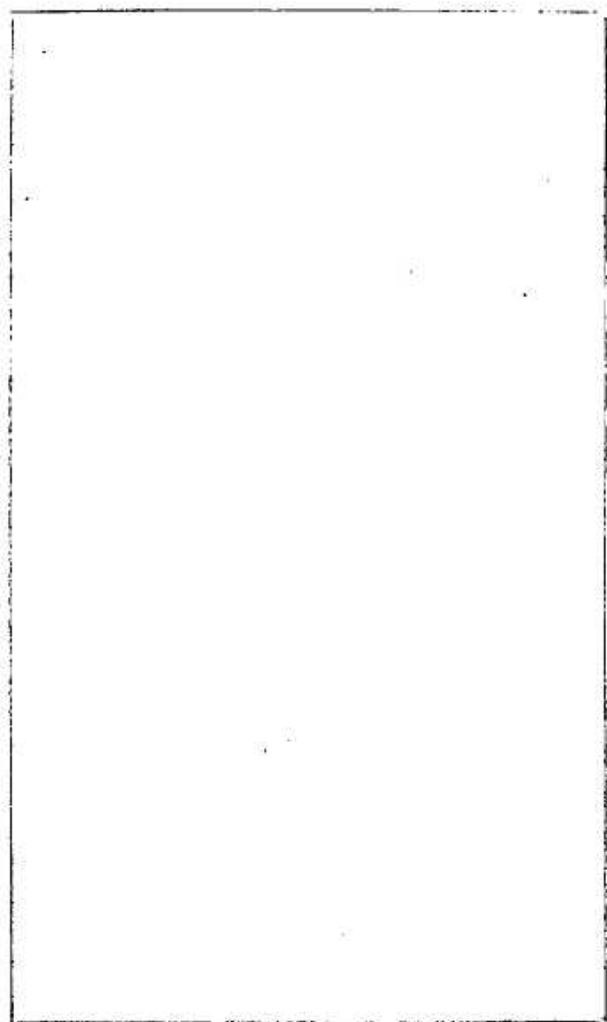
## INTRODUCTION.

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THIS small volume is sent forth by its author, with the earnest hope that it may afford some little information concerning a spot most dear to the Antiquarian, and deeply interesting to many whom the facility of modern travelling annually conveys to behold these noble and celebrated Ruins.

Much of its material was originally delivered at Glastonbury in the form of a Lecture. And as some brief and truthful narrative of the Abbey, was greatly needed and demanded, it was earnestly requested that it might be published as a sort of Historical Guide. Yielding to these solicitations, although conscious of many defects, the writer is thereby released from any apology for publishing these memoranda, which might have been considerably extended, if the antiquated documents and charters belonging to Glastonbury Abbey had been incorporated. These curious and ancient records are reserved, together with the writings of John of Glaston, Eyton, and others, for a larger work.

*Theale Parsonage,*  
*May 25th, 1858.*



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## Glastonbury Abbey: ITS HISTORY AND RUINS.

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**N**O spot in England is more enshrined in ancient Ecclesiastical renown than Glastonbury. It was thus our ancestors spake of this hallowed locality; "it is the first ground of God; the first ground of the Saints; the rise and fountain of all religion in Britain; the burying place of the Saints; it was here the first Church was built by the Disciples of our Lord!"

Justly hath it merited much of this exalted praise and honour. For as on the time-renowned Mount of Lebanon, amidst the noble cedars that adorned its graceful summit, one towered pre-eminent above its fellows in stately beauty and lofty magnificence,—even so amongst those venerable Abbeys which once embellished this Island, the Abbey of Glastonbury became conspicuous from its varied and interesting associations, its founders, and its wealth. Strange and enchanting are the tales of its first establishment; beautiful and brilliant is the halo which encircles the Avalonian Isle. And though this Abbey now lies, like some ancient tomb, in sad and mournful ruin, yet still it demands and enjoys intense veneration, as much for the influences—social, political and religious—it once distributed, as for its ancient artistic splendour and regal pomp.

Unquestionable authorities and wide-spread traditions give a striking and romantic description of the locality of Glastonbury anterior to, and for some centuries after, the invasion of the Romans. It was then an island; an island within an island. The whole of its area abounded with woods, marshes, and bogs. So forbidding and gloomy was once this celebrated spot, that it is said to have been selected as one of the homes of the Druids, where amidst its dark groves, they lived their secluded life, and performed their mysterious ceremonies.

The earliest known name assigned to this spot, is Yniswydryn, signifying the Isle of the Glassy Water. This poetic designation seems to have derived its origin from its surrounding waters, which reflected as in a broad mirror, God's beautiful sky. For even uncivilized nations oftentimes gave both to localities and persons graphic and highly poetical names, evidently originating from impressions made upon the eye and mind.

St. Benignus, one of its earliest Abbots, is said to have changed this name into Avalonia, about A.D. 440. Various are the derivations given to this word. Some maintain that it is derived from Aval, a British chief, to whom this Island once belonged. Others, with greater probability, assert that Aval signifies an apple, and Avalonia the Isle of apples. The apple appears to have been brought into Britain, by its earliest possessors; and especially by the CEdui, who anciently inhabited some portions of the country, now called Somerset. An old Latin author thus quaintly describes the Island;—(the translation is from Camden):—

“ The Isle of Apples, truly fortunate,  
Where unforced goods and willing comforts meet ;

Nor there the fields require the rustic's hands,  
But nature only cultivates the lands,  
The fertile plains with corn and herds are proud,  
And golden Apples smile in every wood."

When Saxon power became dominant in Britain, the name Avalonia was again transmuted into Glastonbury, signifying somewhat of its original appellation, the Saxon words *ton* for town, and *burig*, or *burg*, for borough being added.

The locality of Glastonbury possesses a remarkable, bold, and varied scenery. Vast, yet pleasing, is the view that presents itself to the spectator from the elevated points around where once stood Glaston's far-famed Abbey; its circumferential line from the summit of Tor Hill exceeding 140 miles. The circlet of this interesting Isle originally included, in addition to the site of Glastonbury itself, what is now known as the Tor Hill, Weary-all Hill, and Chalice Hill. And here in ages far anterior to the birth of Christ, amidst its marshy bogs, its reeds and rushes, dwelt some of our rude ancestors. Possessing patriarchal traditions and mystic religious ceremonies, generation after generation they lived, they worshipped, they passed into oblivion; like as, amidst autumnal storms, furious winds sweep away the many-tinted dying races of forest leaves. Even during the earlier times of the Abbey, records still survive, proving that when the cowed monks wished to visit the sacred shrine on the summit of the Tor, they went in armed little bands, to guard and protect themselves against the wolves that had their dwellings in the thickets which flourished on its steep acclivities.