

THE HISTORY OF LONGLEAT

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The history of longleat by J. E. Jackson

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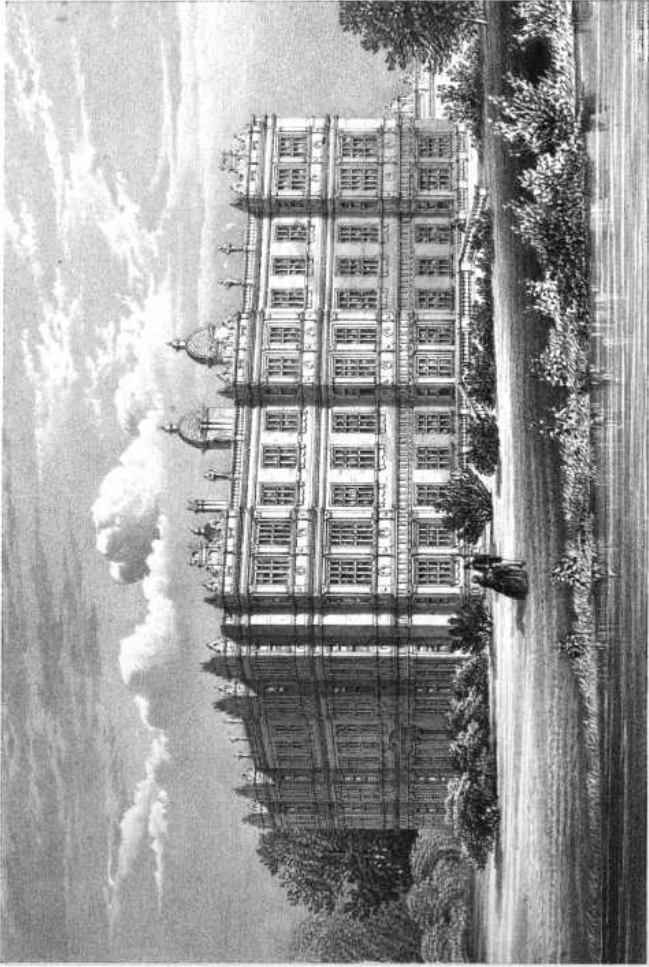
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J. E. JACKSON

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OF LONGLEAT**



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THE
HISTORY OF LONGLEAT.

BY THE
REV. J. E. JACKSON,
Rector of Kington-Belmont, Wilts.

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The History of Longleat.

By the Rev. J. E. JACKSON,

Rector of Leigh-Desamara.¹

BEFORE reading to you what I have been able, at rather short notice, to collect upon the subject of Longleat, I beg most respectfully, on the part of this Association, to thank the Noble Marquis for the opportunity he has so kindly given us of hearing its history on the spot. To myself the opportunity appears to be singularly favourable, since, after his Lordship's munificent hospitality, I may venture to presume that you will all be disposed to receive less critically the imperfections of this paper.

Being a Topographical Society, it is our first duty to know exactly where we are. We are in Wiltshire certainly; otherwise, we should have no excuse for being here. But though the house stands within this county, the woods and grounds lie partially in Somerset, which begins about three-quarters of a mile off on the way to Frome. As to the Hundred; so long as we followed the high road hither from Warminster we were within that Hundred; but from the moment of entering Longleat Park, we have been, and now are, in the Hundred of Heytesbury. With respect to Parish, a much greater nicety of distinction is necessary, for I believe the case to be that the library, and the south front of the house, are in one parish, and the rest in another. When the Noble Marquis writes his morning letters he is in Horningaham; when he goes to dinner, he is in Longbridge Deverill.

Having taken our bearings, the next question is, what is the proper meaning of the name of Longleat? It is a very peculiar one, perhaps unique. Sir Richard Hoare suggests that it may be derived from *longa* and *lata*, two Latin adjectives signifying

¹ This Paper was read from the garden terrace at Longleat, after the entertainment given by the Marquis of Bath to the members of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society, on Wednesday, August 8th, 1856.

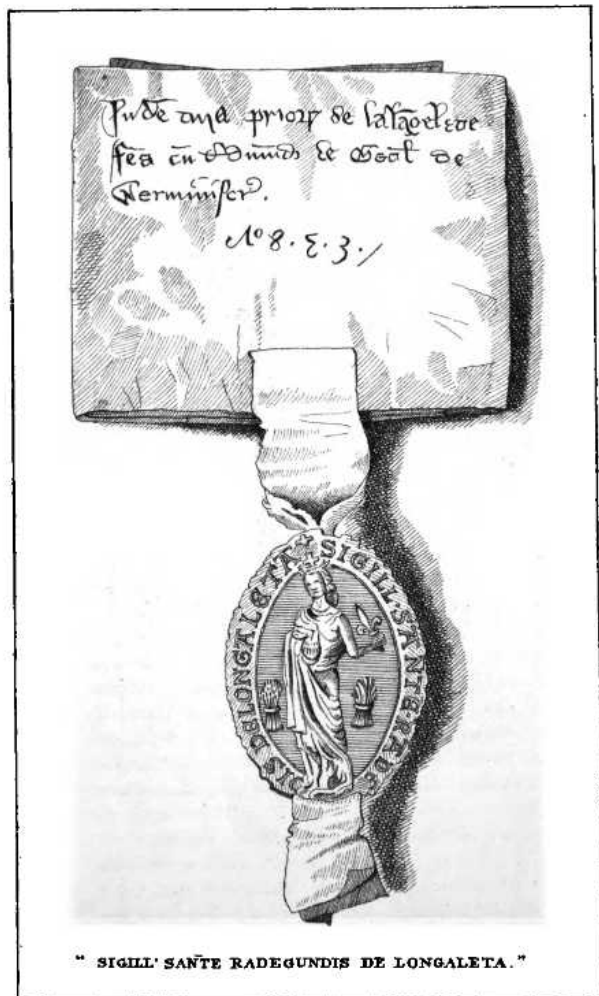
long and *broad*, as descriptive of the valley in which the house is situated. But to this explanation there are fair objections. First; adjectives, as we have been always taught to believe, are feeble parts of speech which cannot stand by themselves, but require something to lean upon. In the name of a place you always expect to find a *noun* substantivè, either simple or in composition: as *Warminster*, anciently *Weraminster*, (the church on the *Were rivulet*), *Bradford*, *Trowbridge*, and the like.

In the next place, if "*Longakata*" was the proper Latin name, how does it happen that it never occurs in any of the old Latin documents connected with Longleat? On the contrary, whenever the Latin name is used, as in a deed of 25 Edw. I.¹ the word is *Longa-leta*: and the derivation which to myself appears, without any doubt, the true one, is this. The word *leat* is an old noun, from the Saxon verb to lead, and signifies a watercourse or aqueduct. There is near Plymouth an artificial channel of this kind, a celebrated piece of engineering made by Sir Francis Drake for supplying that town with water, which bears the name of *The Leat*. The word also occurs in old Acts of Parliament. In Scotland a mill-stream used to be called a mill-*leat*². The changes here have been so great that it is of course difficult to say what may have been in ancient times, but it is most likely that the stream from Horningsham, which supplies the present lake, was originally used by some channel, for turning a mill. The late Mr. Davis, steward of this property, used to say that he believed there had once been a mill near the site of the house. [The Marquis of Bath here stated that this was the case; and that it stood near the old stables, *close to the house*]. His lordship's testimony came in very happily for the purpose: corroborating, without further question, this origin of the name.³

¹ Frynne, p. 710.

² *Lade* is a Scotch word for a mill-race or trench: and Baillie gives *millade* and *millade* as used in the same sense. *Lade* also signified the mouth of a stream. At Lechlade, in Gloucestershire, the little stream called the *Leach*, discharges itself into the *Isis*. So also *Crick-lade*. Near Nismes in France there is the Mill of Langlade: a close approximation to the *Mill of Long-leat*.

³ The Mill is marked upon an old folio plan of the gardens and plantations by H. Hulsbergh.



Edw. III. 217

Seal of St. Radegund of Long-Lete A.D. 1334. [8. Edw III.]

The oldest document in which the name occurs is in Latin, dated A.D. 1280, (9 Edw. I.), near 600 years ago, in which the tithes of the church of Lallington near Frome, were granted to the Priory of "Lange-lete." Here therefore its regular history begins. It is quite certain that upon the very site of this house once stood a Priory of Black Canons of the Order of St. Augustine. It was founded about the year 1270 by Sir John Vernon, then Lord of the Manor of Horningsham. Very little is known about it: but it was dedicated to St. Radegund, a canonized French Queen, and was a very small establishment, consisting only of a Prior and some four or five brethren, maintained out of lands lying near or in adjoining parishes. There was a church on the spot, and in one part of it called the Chapel of the B.V.M., an altar was endowed in the year 1408, by Sir Walter Hungerford, of Farley Castle, with the Rectory of Rusthall (commonly called Rushall), near Pewsey, for daily masses for the souls of his family. That document is still preserved at this house. There were other altars in the Church, to St. Cyriac and St. Juliana, martyrs. The names of several Priors are on record. They had an official seal, of which an impression is attached to a deed, and an engraving is published in Sir R. C. Hoare's history. [*See Copy annexed*]. We have also a Latin inventory of their plate, Service books of various kinds, and certain vestments, of patterns, which, considering the profession of the wearers, seem remarkable enough. Amongst them is a robe of light red, figured over with birds in darker red; a gown of white silk, worked in with birds in gold; a third is a cowl of scarlet, powdered over with stage in gold; and lastly a cape of green velvet, covered with griffins. These devices may have been taken from the coats of arms of the donors: but though we often find altar-cloths and frontals bearing such figures, I do not immediately recollect having ever read any where of priest's dresses so adorned. The Priory stood here about 250 years. In 1529 the establishment was reported to have fallen into decay, partly from improvident waste of its means, partly from the diminishing number of its small Society. So by Letters Patent, dated 20 June, granted to Lawrence Campeggio, Cardinal Bishop of Sarum, and Peter Stanter, Esq., of Horningsham,

it was dissolved: and its revenue, or the little that remained, transferred to another religious Society, the Abbey of Charterhouse Henton, about twelve miles off, on the road to Bath. During the short time that it was attached to Henton, it was called the Cell of the Priory of Longleat. Ten years afterwards, in 1539, Henton Abbey itself was dissolved, its property was dispersed, and the site of this Cell of Longleat was sold by the Crown to Sir John Horsey, of Clifton Maubank, Co. Dorset; who in the following year, 1540, sold it to Sir John Thynne.

That the Priory stood upon this identical spot is proved by the discovery a few years ago, during some alterations in the interior of this house, of an old wall that had formed part of it and that had been worked up into the frame of the present house. At the same time several coffins of rude workmanship, containing skeletons, were found under the floor near the foot of the grand staircase. These were removed into Horningsham churchyard.

Until Sir John Thynne, in the year 1540, bought the old Priory, he was not in any way connected by property with the county of Wilts. His family came from Shropshire, and their name had anciently been Botteville.

And here I may observe, as not impertinent to this occasion, that the house of Thynne, Patrons of Archaeology in the 19th century, were in the 16th, working archaeologists themselves. William Thynne, uncle to Sir John, published one of the earliest printed editions in folio, of our old Geoffrey Chaucer: and Francis Thynne, son of William, was not only Lancaster Herald and a great collector of English historical antiquities, but also a writer: though, as often is the case, he laboured for others to reap where he had sown. "Whosoever," (says Fuller) "shall peruse the voluminous works of Ralph Holinshed (the chronicler) will find how much he was assisted therein by the help of Mr. Francis Thynne, seeing the shoulders of Atlas himself may be weary, if not sometimes beholden to Hercules, to relieve him."

Sir John turned his own abilities in a different direction, and one a great deal more profitable than Archaeology. One of his uncles had been Master of the Household to King Henry VII., and