

**SOMERSETSBIRE ARCHEOLOGICAL
AND NATURAL DISTORY SOCIETY:
NOTHERN BRANCH; COLLECTIONS
FOR A PAROCHIAL HISTORY OF
FLAX BOURTON**

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GEORGE S. MASTER

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Northern Branch

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OF
FLAX BOURTON

BY
REV. GEORGE S. MASTER.

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*Gift of
William Endicott, Jr.*

THE COMMITTEE OF THE
NORTHERN BRANCH OF THE SOMERSETSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL
AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

have much pleasure in forwarding a copy of a paper on the Church and Parish of Flax Bourton, which the Rev. George S. Master, of Bourton Grange, has kindly written. Their best thanks are due to him, as also to the Rev. J. A. W. Wadmore, and W. Hill Budgett, Esq., from whose photographs the illustrations of the paper have been taken.

They hope to be able to obtain, from time to time, papers descriptive of other Churches and Parishes within the division of the County which they represent.



SOUTH DOOR OF FLAX BOURTON CHURCH.

FROM A NEGATIVE BY MR. W. H. BUDGETT.

Flax Bourton.

OCCUPYING the centre of a fertile valley, which extends from the river Avon at Bristol on the East to the Bristol Channel between Clevedon and Weston-super-Mare on the West, and bounded on the North and South by picturesque well-wooded ranges of mountain limestone resting upon old red sandstone, the Parish of Flax Bourton, notwithstanding its insignificance in size and importance, as compared with its adjoining neighbours, is rich in natural advantages. I note with approval the colour of its soil, and recall the satisfactory testimony to its value of no less an authority than Dr. Buckland, who, speaking to our Society in 1849, assured his audience that "let the soil be red and the soil will never be bad; let gentlemen buy their estates, and not sell them, upon the red soil."¹

The area of the Parish, comprising only 590 acres,² includes the beautiful limestone gorge known as Bourton Combe, with its grey precipices on either side, indigenous yew and elder trees growing out of the crannies of the stone, while from the summit is an extensive prospect, the city of Bristol, with the ranges of Dundry and Lansdown, the Bristol Channel, and the mountains of Wales, the slopes of Clevedon and Ashton, and the hanging woods of nearer Tynesfield. A nameless rivulet taking its rise at Barrow, flows westward to the Severn sea at Clevedon, and is joined at irregular periods, by an intermittent stream springing out of the limestone of the Combe, and thence called 'Stan' or Stone 'combe.' The high road from Bristol to Weston-super-Mare, and the main line of the Great Western Railway to Exeter bisect the Parish from East to West.

Its name is no doubt correctly explained as a 'ton' or village protected by a 'burgh,' or fence, at a period when the adjoining country was unenclosed, and as there is no evidence of any special cultivation of flax, to account for the prefix of that syllable, we may accept the

¹ Somerset Archaeological Society's Journal, I. i. 16.

² Called 640 in the census of 1841. Somerset Record Society, III. p. 330.

assurance of the Historians of the County that it was appended to distinguish that amongst several Bourtons in which the Cistercian Abbey of Flaxley in Gloucestershire possessed territorial interest,³ having obtained, in exchange for other lands at Regil, in the Parish of Winford, a farm still known as the 'Priory Farm,' and containing at that time about one hundred acres. A recent privately-printed history of Flaxley Abbey, the careful work of Sir Thomas Crawley-Boevey, Bart., its present possessor, makes no addition to this scanty notice, with which we must therefore be contented. The farm is now the property of Antony Gibbs, of Tyntesfield, Esq. There is nothing about the existing buildings to indicate any connection with a Religious House.

There were some distinguished persons named 'de Bourton' more or less connected with the neighbouring city of Bristol, as, for instance Simon de Bourton, Soneschal, in 1290, Mayor in 1291, 1294, 1302, 1304, and 1305, and Founder of the Eastern portion and Tower of the Church of S. Mary Redcliffe⁴: John Burtone, Bailiff of Bristol, 1391, Sheriff 1418, Mayor 1423, 1429, 1448, 1450; and Williana Burton, penultimate Abbot of the Monastery of S. Augustine, 1534-7, whose 'rebus,' a 'bur' issuing out of a 'tun,' is carved upon the reredos of the Cathedral, and may without impropriety be taken as significant of the locality from which, not impossibly, his surname was derived.

Flax Bourton has absolutely no manorial history, having been a 'member' only of the important Manor of Wraxall, and having shared the vicissitudes and changes of ownership of its manorial head, through the families of de Wrockshale, Morville, Gorges, Codrington, Bampfylde, &c., Sir Greville Smyth, Bart., and William Gibbs, of Tyntesfield, Esq., being later representatives of its more important land-owners. Unmentioned in Domesday, it is styled in subsequent documents 'Hamleta de Burton,' and in the 'Nomina Villarum' of Edward II., 1315-16, 'Bratton.'

³ Collinson's Somerset, III., 161. Rutter's N.W. Somerset, 16.

⁴ Barrett's Bristol, pp. 673, 677, 680.

From 'the Exchequer Lay Subsidies' of I. Edward III., 1327-8, we obtain the following list of its inhabitants and their assessments at that date^b:

BORYTON.

Atte Mulle Walterus	xij ^d .
Atte Mulle Johannes	xij ^d .
Atte Welle Adamus	ij ^s .
Berd Robertus	xij ^d .
Chark Willelmus	vj ^d .
French Robertus le	xij ^d .
Galopyn Richardus	xij ^d .
Hurdiche Rogerus	xij ^d .
Hurdwyche Willelmus	xij ^d .
Jacob Johannes	xij ^d .
Nel Thomas	xviiij ^d .
Pech, Johannes	vj ^s . viij ^d .
Smoddyng Johannes	vj ^d .
Smythe, Willelmus le	xviiij ^d .
Uphulle Thomas	ij ^s .
Vrench Johannes le	iiij ^s .

Summa xx^s. villate predictæ xxv^s. viij^d.

In 1532, John Blanche, of Burtown, bequeaths to the chappell of Burtown a bushel of whete, and the same to the churches of Wraxall and Barow.^c

In 1533, William Jenyns, of Burton, gives to "his gostly father Sir William Webster" (Chaplain of Bourton) iiij^d and ij drays of wood.

^b This was a tax of a twentieth of all moveable property upon those whose goods were worth 10/- or more. Somerset Record Society, III., pp. 236-7.

^c Weaver's Wells Wills, p. 10.