

# WRITING THE HISTORY OF SOMERSET

## FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND RELIGION

### Essays in Honour of Robert Dunning

Edited by Adrian Webb and Andrew Butcher

This volume, inspired by the work of County Historian Robert Dunning, is concerned broadly with the history of Somerset from the early middle ages to the twenty-first century. Providing a critical appreciation of Dr Dunning's extensive contribution to the local and regional historical and historiographical development of the county, it seeks also to extend that contribution in a series of original studies drawing on the county's abundant record collections and archaeological and antiquarian sources. The essays in this fascinating volume explore monastic, parochial, religious and heretical themes across the County of Somerset as well as the cultural, economic, and political lives and interests of lay landowners, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, identifying the wide variety of influences and inventions, ranging from agricultural to land-surveyance and cartography. At the same time, they place a new focus on particular communities, their activities, and the breadth of their connections within and beyond mere localities.

A final retrospective assessment of Dr Dunning's researches and personal and intellectual generosity reminds us how fortunate we have been to be his readers since the 1960s.

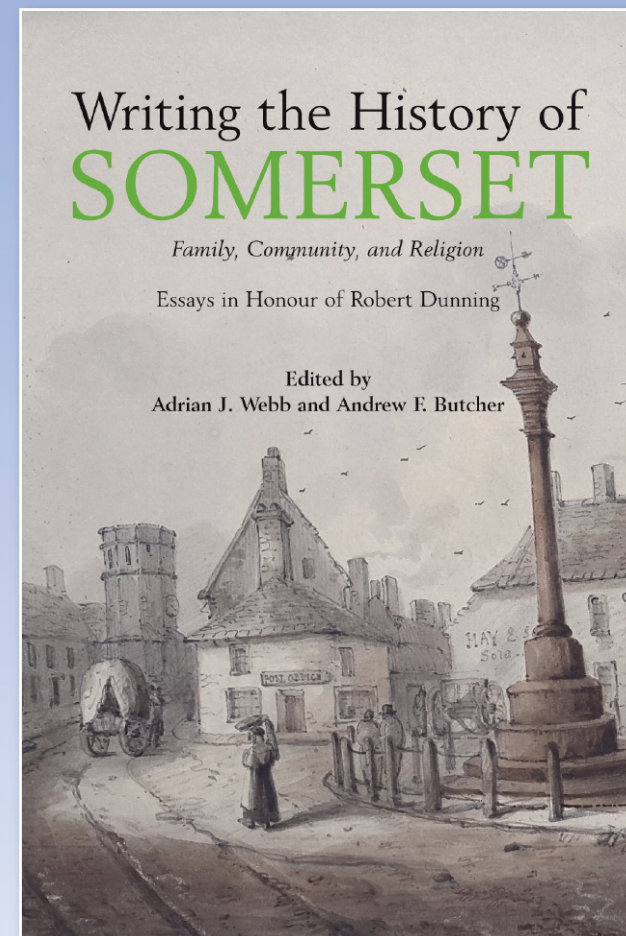
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3. St Lawrence in Somerset

BARRY LANE†

Editor's preface  
 Sadly, Barry Lane died in March 2017 before he could develop his arguments fully. In defence to his wishes, David Dawson and Teresa Hall, in collaboration with Barry's widow, Sue Ibbertson Lane, have prepared this paper for publication. We have tried to remain faithful to Barry's intentions and express them in his voice, in so far as we are able to discern them, from the material he left us and from our limited discussions with him on the subject. We are conscious that some parts, particularly the discussion of the topographical interpretation of individual churches in their setting, which requires much more extensive documentary and archaeological work, are presented as the germ of his ideas and must be left to others to develop. He explained his approach with reference to Leach-Williams: 'The intertwining of numerous strands of evidence is a method of constructing explanations that philosophers of science recognize as being closer to what actually happens in daily scientific practice than formal, sequential setting of hypotheses, the method about which researchers frequently talk. ... some arguments are like chains; they follow link after logical link; if one falls through lack of evidence or faulty logic, the whole argument breaks down. Archaeologists overcome this problem by intertwining multiple strands of evidence as in a cable or rope. Each strand is both sustaining and constraining, but if one strand is broken, the whole is not. This is the process presented here where the historical and archaeological evidence is exigent'.<sup>1</sup> Barry very much admired the work of the Victoria County History and of Robert Dawson and was adamant that he would contribute to this volume.

Introduction

During 2016, members of the Westbury Society were excavating an early 12th-century first floor hall house at Court House Farm in Westbury-sub-Mendip, which Dr Robert Dunning suggested had been built by John of Tours, first Bishop of Bath and Wells (1088-1122) at the same time that he was creating the deer park in the parish. Each Wednesday morning a glance at the nearby church clock tower, to check if it was yet time for coffee, would start speculation about who was St Lawrence, the dedicatee of the church, and when and how did that happen (figure 9). Team member Nicky Amor focused thoughts by raising questions about saints' relics and associated matters. It brought to mind an important lecture, given in 2005 by Dr Graham Jones entitled *Church Dedication: 'vest of salvation'*.<sup>2</sup> His support, advice and encouragement for this essay has been invaluable. Dr Michael Costen has

† D. Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave* (London, 2013), pp. 102-103.

ST LAWRENCE IN SOMERSET

also generously shared his Somerset research, particularly his sources and database of dedications to St Lawrence in the county.

The significance of relics

Miracles and the relics of saints, that is either fragments of a saint's body or an object closely associated with them, were essential tools in the early phases of the conversion of the Irish, British and Anglo-Saxons to Roman Christianity. Beale makes many references to relics and miracles in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* written about 731. His first story concerns Germanus of Auxerre's visit to Britain about 429 to combat the heresy of Pelagianism and how he cured a young girl of blindness with a little bag, containing relics of saints, that he kept hanging around his neck.<sup>3</sup>

When, shortly afterwards, Pope Celestine sent the Roman deacon Palladius to be the first bishop of the Irish in 431, it is quite likely that he also sent with him those relics of Peter, Paul, Stephen and Lawrence, which were treasured by the church of Armagh two or three hundred years later.<sup>4</sup> Church dedications to these four saints are common during the first few centuries of the conversion of Britain.<sup>5</sup> The Second Council of Nicaea, held in Turkey in 787, promoted the canon that every altar should contain a relic and relics were central to the rite of consecration of a church, of which dedication in its patron saint's honour was part, carried out by a bishop. Relics were frequently deposited in a cavity in the high altar slab. The ceremony remains the case in modern Catholic and Orthodox regulations.<sup>6</sup>

Augustine brought with him relics, as well as 'all such things as were generally necessary for the worship and ministry of the Church',<sup>7</sup> when he was sent by Pope Gregory to Britain to convert the Anglo-Saxons. Part of Pope Gregory's instructions to Augustine included the passage, '... the idol temples of that race should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them. Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them'.<sup>8</sup>

Following the Reformation, dedications are just a name, with little or no meaning. Joe Betrey illustrated this well by reproducing a letter from Richard Layton, one of Thomas Cromwell's agents in the West Country, written on 7 August 1555 to his employer, showing his contempt for the monks and his scorn of their superstitious reverence for relics.<sup>9</sup>

† L. Shirley-Price, trans., *Rule: A History of the English Church and People* (Harmondsworth, 1967), I, pp. 18, 59.

† K. Hughes, 'The Celtic Church and the Papacy', in C. H. Lawrence, ed., *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1995), p. 5.

† W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the English Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 264.

† Canon VII.

† L. Shirley-Price, *Rule*, I, p. 29.

† L. Shirley-Price, *Rule*, I, pp. 30, 107.

† J. Betrey, *The Suppression of the Monasteries in the West Country* (Gloucester, 1989), pp. 170-1.



5. A view of the 'Burrough chapel' (Burrow Mump) at Lyng engraved by Samuel Sparrow and published in 1785. (© S.A.N.H.S., Brounedge Collection.)



6. A sepia and grey watercolour and pencil drawing of St Decuman's church, Watchet, from the south-east by W.W. Wheatley, 1845. (© S.A.N.H.S., Brounedge Collection.)



7. The Lady Chapel at Glastonbury, 2009. (© N. Hinton, 2009.)



8. The tomb of Ralph of Shrewsbury in Wells Cathedral. (Photograph by Michael Blandford, © Dean & Chapter of Wells, 2017.)



20. An extract from a survey of Parls Living in Kingston, 1604. (S.H.C., DD/WY 47/3/L)



Above left: 21. Helena, Marchioness of Northampton (1553-1635). Her second husband was Sir Thomas Gorges and she was the grandmother of Thomas Smyth. (Wikimedia.) Above right: 22. Sir Hugh Smyth (1572-1627). (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery)



Above left: 23. Thomas Smyth (1609-1642) (North Somerset & South West Heritage Trust, 2017). Above right: 24. Alice Smyth (d.1676), daughter of John 1st Lord Poultrel and wife of Thomas Smyth (Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.)



25. The extension to Ashton Court built by Thomas Smyth during 1633-1635. (Joseph Betrey.)



40. Examples of Day and Maeren's published survey. The top three examples are on the original 'canvass' as advertised in 1775. The bottom was mounted on a finer cloth probably much later. (S.H.C., DD/WG/MAP/29 and DD/CM/157 reproduced with kind permission of the South West Heritage Trust; S.H.C., DD/RE/4; DDSH 8) (© Adrian J. Webb.)



41. Interior of Campton Martin church in 1835 by J. Buckler. (Reproduced with kind permission of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society from the Pigott Collection.)



42. Cutcombe church in 1849 by W.W. Wheatley. (Reproduced with kind permission of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society from the Brounedge Collection.)



43. The interior of Charlcombe church in 1857 by W.W. Wheatley. Although dated 1857, this image gives a flavour of the cluttered state of some of the churches seen by Rack in the 1780s. (Reproduced by kind permission of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society from the Brounedge Collection.)