

WEST COUNTRY CHURCHES - Vol. II, W.J. ROBINSON (published 1914).
HIGH LITTLETON.

The parish of High Littleton, situated amidst some of the most pleasant and diversified scenery in the county of Somerset, is eight miles distant from Bath and twelve from Bristol. It is quite a small neighbourhood, with but 193 houses. In 1841 the inhabitants numbered 1,116, in 1901 there were only 812, and at the present time they number over 1,000, and are increasing. The village stands on elevated ground, the highest portion being 516 feet above sea level, and from many points of vantage extensive views of the Mendip Range and surrounding villages are obtained.

The parish in some parts presents an attractive and picturesque appearance, while in the most populous part, the village street, there are many neat and comfortable-looking little cottage homes. For a mining village which for the last 150 years and until quite recently had found employment for the greater portion of the inhabitants at the large colliery in the parish, it is surprisingly free from the untidy and grimy appearance so often associated with the coal-mining industry. On the south of the parish, wide stretches of undulating, rich pasture are visible, but on the north and west the prospect is of a different description, for here the landscape partakes of woodland scenes, and the beautifully diversified character of the hills and dales, clothed, for the most part, in the more sombre tints of the forest, produce a wonderful effect of light and shade.

One of the most beautiful spots in these delightful woods is the romantic little ravine known as Stephen's Hill. Here the stream, which skirts the wood and divides the parish from Clutton, falls over a miniature precipice, its waters sparkling between the trees as it descends among the craggy rocks, forming a charming bit of scenery in the centre of an interesting and beautiful district.

The name Littleton speaks for itself, but the prefix "high" was added to distinguish it from other places bearing a similar appellation. At the time when Domesday was compiled the manor of Littleton, or Litelton, as it was then spelt, together with the manor of Hallatrow (spelt Helgetrey), which now forms part of the parish, was the property of the famous Bishop of Coutances, given to him by the Conqueror.

Geoffrey, Bishop of Coutances, is stated to have possessed 170 manors in various parts of the country, many of which were in Somerset and Gloucestershire. He was undoubtedly of very great assistance to King William, who handsomely rewarded his faithful services. He was a man of great bravery, and while professing to belong to the kingdom which disregards all earthly possessions, he won, by his sword, enormous wealth. He held the Abecies of Ely and Malmesbury, was Bishop of Coutances and Exeter, and Governor of Bristol and Northumberland. He died in 1093.

Domesday records that "Ralph holds of the Bishop (of Coutances) Litelton. Alwood held it in the time of King Edward, and gelded (paid tribute) for five hides." Hallatrow manor is described as follows: "Roger holds of the bishop Helgetrey. Four thanes held it in the time of King Edward, and gelded for five hides, wanting half a virgate of land." A virgate was about half [a quarter] a hide. The ealderman, or eldest of the tribe, was the chief title of nobility among the Anglo-Saxons. Thanes came next in different degrees, the highest being king's thanes. If a churl, who was next in degree below athane, possessed five hides of land, together with a chapel, a kitchen, a hall and a bell, he was entitled to become athane.

In their early stages the manors of Littleton and Hallatrow formed part of the property of the ancient family of GOURNAYS, of West Harptree, but at the end of the 13th century they were annexed to the Honour of Gloucester. The Honour of Gloucester was so called because it was originally Royal property personally held by the King. Robert, King Henry's illegitimate son, was created first Earl of Gloucester, and by his marriage with Mabel, the daughter of Robert FITZHAMON, he received the Honour of Gloucester separately from the earldom. He became the most powerful and wealthiest baron of the age, and held the highest rank in the kingdom next to the King. In the reign of Edward II [1307-1327] John le SORE, of Backwell, held the manors of High Littleton and Hallatrow of Gilbert de CLARE, Earl of Gloucester, by the service of one knight's fee. In the following reign [Edward III 1327-1377] they belonged to Walter de RODNEY, whose son Richard succeeded him. In 1376 the Abbot of Keynsham Monastery, Sir Walter ROMSAY, Knight, and Maud BASSET were certified to hold a knight's fee in the hamlets of Hallatrow and Littleton. The portion of land held by the Abbey of Keynsham continued in its possession until the Dissolution in 1534. The manors subsequently became the property of William GORE LANGTON, of Newton St. Loe, and Jacob Mogg, of High Littleton. They are now owned by Mrs. GREENHILL (nee Amy REES-MOGG).

The parish church is dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It is a handsome and well-built little edifice, and was re-erected, with the exception of the tower, in 1735. From the appearance of its low and somewhat insignificant tower at the west end, which is the only remaining portion of the former structure, it is probable the original church was built at the beginning of the 12th century.

The earliest known account of the church of High Littleton appears in records relating to the Abbey of Keynsham, to which it was appropriated in the year 1324. An interesting reference is made to this event in "The Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society for 1907." In an

historical paper on the Abbey of Keynsham the following extracts, taken from the Patent Rolls, are given:-

July 15th, 1310. "Licence for the alienation in mortmain by Gilbert AUMANY, of Keynsham, to the Abbot and Convent of Keynsham of a messuage, six bovates of land, ten acres of meadow, five acres of wood, a moiety of 50 acres of pasture and heath, five shillings of rent, and divers rents of 1lb. of pepper, 1lb. of cumin, and one gillyflower in Heghe Littleton by Palton, with the advowson of the church of that place."

1324. "Appropriation of John, Bishop of Bath and Wells, to Nicholas, Abbot of Keynsham, and the Convent of the Order of St. Augustine, founded by William, Earl of Gloucester, of the parish church of High Littleton, whereof they are patrons, in consideration of their loss, by fraud and oppression, of the great tithes at Stoke, in the parish of Chew, assigned to them at the foundation of their house."

May 30th, 1320. - "Licence for the Abbot and Convent of Keynsham to appropriate the church of High Littleton, which is of their advowson."

January 1st, 1335. - "Bishop Ralph, having allowed us to obtain the church of High Littleton to be appropriated to us, we, Nicholas, Abbot of Keynsham and the Convent of the same, bind ourselves for ever to say one collect, with convenient prayers, every day in the Mass of the B.M. for the healthful state of the said bishop whilst alive, and for his soul after death."

Another record dated 1544, states that after the overthrow of Keynsham Abbey a grant was made "in fee to William ROWSELL, of Donkerton [*Dunkerton*], of lands in Compton Dando, including the chief messuage and grange there in [*and*] the rectory and advowson of the parish church of Lytelton, late belonging to Keynsham Abbey."

The present church of High Littleton, which took the place of one which is described by Collinson as "a very handsome structure," is built in the early Perpendicular style of architecture, but when first erected was much smaller, and consisted of only chancel and nave. In 1824, to provide more accommodation, a south aisle was added, and in 1842 another aisle was thrown out on the north side. During the years 1885-6 the church was almost entirely re-built, at a cost of £3,000, under the Rev. E.C. STREETEN, vicar. The building now has accommodation for 350 persons, with 150 sittings unappropriated for ever.

The interior presents a fine and well-proportioned appearance. The nave arcades, of four bays each, are supported by clustered columns of graceful design, ornamented with shafts of grey marble at the angles. The reredos of white stone with pointed arches, the outer sections of which are very handsome, was erected "To the glory of God and in memory of Margaret, wife of Thomas JAMES, of Hallatrow, who died July 1st, 1887."

The font is of elegant design and well carved. It was erected "To the glory of God. In memoriam, Elizabeth STREETEN."

The pulpit is of white stone. The panels are handsomely carved in rose designs. It stands upon a pedestal, supported by crocketed pillars.

The church possesses numerous stained glass windows and brasses, but they are chiefly of modern date. On the south chancel wall there is an ancient mural monument to the HODGES family, inscribed as follows: "Here lyeth John HODGES, buried May 2, 1584. Also his son, Thomas HODGES, buried October 15, 1619. And Thomas HODGES, son of the above said Thomas HODGES, buried April 13 [30], 1616. And Thomas HODGES, son of the second Thomas, buried March 1, 1686, and his wife, Joan HODGES. Also here lyeth Thomas HODGES, son of Thomas and Joan HODGES, buried December 26, 1692. George [*buried Dec. 25th 1688, James*] buried June 28, 1694, and Joan, buried June 26, 1694, son[s] and daughter of the last Thomas HODGES." [*Robinson has perpetuated the errors made by Collinson in transcribing the inscription, and both omit a further 7 members of the family up to 1765*]

At the east end of the north aisle there is a chapel known as the "Children's Chapel." It contains a stained glass window illustrating Christ blessing little children, which was erected by subscription, as a memorial of the jubilee of Queen Victoria, 1897. The east window in the chancel of four lights represents the Resurrection, and was placed there "To the glory of God, and in memory of Henry Hodges MOGG, M.A., some years vicar of this parish, died 17th Jan., 1850. The memory of the just is blessed." On the north side of the chancel is a two-light window, illustrating Christ healing the sick. The following words are inscribed below:- "In memory of Mary Anne, second wife of Jacob MOGG, and daughter of William GAYE, of Newton Abbott, who died Feb. 28, 1872, aged 73." On the north wall of the chancel a marble tablet commemorates Sarah Hodges, only child of Jacob MOGG, who died in 1859, and Dorothy MOGG, who died in 1853. A brass below is in memory of Catherine Winifred, third daughter of Joan [*John*] and Sarah Hodges REES-MOGG, who died Dec. 7th, 1895. Two brasses on the south wall of the nave are in memory of the SCOBELL family. On the first is the following inscription:- "Sacred to the memory of Rev. John SCOBELL, M.A., died Sept. 1st, 1867; also of Eliza, his beloved wife, died March 30th, 1855." Both are buried in the family vault in All Saints', Lewes. The second brass bears the following inscription upon it:- "In memory of George Treweeke SCOBELL, Captain R.N., late M.P. for the city of Bath, of Kingwell Hall, in this parish, who died May 11th, 1869, aged 84; also of Hester, his wife, who died Jan. 27th, 1869, aged 91."

A window in the south wall, of two lights, illustrating St. Mary and St. John, is also to the memory of the same family, and below it are inscribed the following words:- "In loving memory

of John and Eliza SCOBELL." Next is another two-light window, with figures of St. Peter and St. Paul, inscribed as follows:- "In memory of G.T. SCOBELL, Capt. R.N., ob. 1869, by his nephew, S.C[G].T. SCOBELL." The third window in the same wall, depicting the Good Shepherd and the Light of the World, is "in memory of the Rev. E.C. STREETEN, 24 years vicar, 1891. C.S." The fourth window illustrates St. Joseph of Aramathea and St. Mary of Bethany, and bears the following inscription:- "1885. John George MOGG, J.P., D.L. Marianna MOGG."

A window at the west end of the south aisle, illustrating Justice, Truth, and Mercy, is "in memory of Edmund Crane STREETEN, M.A., 24 years vicar of High Littleton, from 1867 to 1891, who, when in his 71st year undertook to obtain funds for rebuilding the Parish Church as it now stands." A window on the opposite side, which illustrates Faith, Hope, and Charity, is to the memory of John REES-MOGG, who died in 1880, and his wife, who died in 1859. A brass on the north wall is "in memory of Isaac COWEN, who died Oct. 22nd, 1886, 50 years in the Service. He was Troop-Sergt. Major in the first Dragoon Guards, and afterwards Sergt.-Major, Ston Easton Troop, N.S.Y.C. Twenty-one years Clerk of this Parish Church."

Other tablets may be seen in various parts of the nave to the PURNELL, LANGFORD, SKEY, BRODRIBB, WEEKS, and BLINMAN families. The chancel rails are in memory of the Rev. A.M. FOSTER, the former vicar.

The tower, which is the only ancient part of the church, may probably date from late Norman days, judging by the curious turret on the east angle of the north side, which rises just above the second stage. In the belfry hang six good-toned bells, which were dedicated to the care of the vicar and churchwardens by the Ven. Archdeacon of Bath on March 5th, 1905. Built into the south wall of the churchyard may be seen several ancient tombstones, some dating from 1661.

The registers, which are imperfect, date from 1658. The living of High Littleton is a vicarage, the present incumbent being the Rev. C.H. BRADBURN, who was appointed in 1909.

The churchyard is well kept, and both church and churchyard are pleasantly situated on rising ground, imparting an imposing and dignified appearance, while the rustic charms by which it is surrounded tend to produce a scene of peacefulness and repose.

Opposite the church stands the Church House lately erected. It is a substantial and neat structure, built entirely by the parishioners. The house contains a fine hall, capable of accommodating 250 persons, in addition to which there are smaller rooms for various games, etc.