



Welcome to the second edition of our newsletter, we hope you enjoy it.

### County Editor's Report

This has been a busy time, especially during October. The text for Timberscombe has been drafted and editing is complete so hopefully it will go on the website soon. This is the last parish planned for the Dunster and Minehead volume. Research has begun for the Carhampton hundred article involving going through voluminous court rolls. Much new material has gone up on the Explore website [www.explore.englandspastforeveryone.org.uk](http://www.explore.englandspastforeveryone.org.uk) and this may be the home of more material in future, as the draft volume needs drastic pruning to fit our new size guidelines from Boydell and Brewer our publisher.



*Dunster Building Workshop.*

*Photo Adrian Wills*

### Fundraising

We were very pleased to receive a grant of £1,000 from Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society's heritage grants funds towards creating the maps for the Dunster volume. This demonstrates the ongoing support of SANHS for the Somerset VCH, which we really value. Almost all the maps have now been drafted and have gone to London for editing before they go for professional drawing. As a requirement of the grant the editor will be writing a piece about some of the maps, once they have been completed, for the SANHS newsletter.

We have also raised some money, mainly from preparing reports on excavation sites and giving talks and presentations, but much remains to be done if we are going to be able to employ an assistant to help with the Taunton area. Do get in touch if you can help or have any fund-raising ideas and don't forget the website [www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/somerset](http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/somerset) which allows you to donate easily on-line. Don't forget to say you want to support Somerset!

The website also contains updates, information on events and the big red books, work in progress and volunteering opportunities.

### Events

Two very successful events were held in October. The county editor participated in a workshop held at Dunster on Saturday 19 October. This aimed to introduce local people to the skills and resources for building recording with a view to setting up a West Somerset Building Record. We looked at maps and illustrations of the former priory area followed by a short exploration out-of-doors, seeing how old buildings have been preserved, materials re-used and finding out that what looked like an old thatched cottage is actually an early 20th-century building.



*The Dunster History Walk near Gallox Bridge*

On the 26th October we had our first VCH Somerset history walk looking at Dunster's 'lost' roads. There was great demand for the walk, which was fully booked shortly after publicity went out. We hope to give a programme of such walks next year, concentrating on less well-known aspects of West Somerset history. We have had some very positive feedback with many people wanting to do more walks and asking for suggestions about less well-known but historically interesting walks in the area.

### Looking forward

We are progressing with the establishment of our VCH Somerset Trust, which we hope to turn into a charity soon. This will put the Partnership on a more formal footing and make it easier to fundraise.

## History On Our Doorstep: Going.....Going.....



*A surviving sentry post*

This autumn has seen the end of an era in the neighbourhood of the Somerset Heritage Centre as World War II buildings were hammered into rubble and twisted metal.

In 1940 the area was cleared and levelled to create the largest military supply depot in South-West England. It took only two months to build and was known as 3 Supply Reserve Depot and was in the care of the Royal Army Service Corps who stockpiled food, fuel, vehicle lubricant, disinfectants, and medical and hospital supplies. The depot had its own extensive railway sidings, eight enormous sheds some of them triple units, road transit sheds and four rail transit sheds with branch lines from the sidings. The site had its own police station, medical and canteen facilities, sanitary blocks, first aid posts, five air raid shelters, five pump houses and c. 14 fire

fighting tanks and was protected by trenches, at least seven sentry posts and two pillboxes. Goods were brought by rail and the wagons unloaded into transit sheds. The stores were then taken by conveyors to pallets on trailers which were towed into the large stores. Outside the main area were cold stores.

In 1942 it became the United States Army's General Depot G 50 and an aerial photograph shows camouflage paint and netting on the buildings. From 1945 it was a British Army supply depot again producing ration packs. It was much smaller than the original site parts of which were taken to house military families. A film of the work of the RASC published in 1957 devotes its last frames to scenes from the Taunton depot showing supplies being loaded into one of the large warehouses while a locomotive draws wagons behind.



*Hauliers' premises in 2010*

*Same premises in 2013*

Taunton was the only such depot by 1963. It was the best equipped to handle the thousands of tons of food needed by the army, four fifths of it tinned, and RAF. In 1965 the depot was transferred to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps but its closure was already planned and its work scaled down. In March 1966 Edward du Cann, then MP for Taunton, made an impassioned plea to the House of Commons to save the depot but it closed in October 1966 and surviving buildings were used as trading premises.

In the early 21st century pressure for redevelopment led to the destruction and clearance of most of the site to create a large business and trading estate, new homes, and a new road system to bypass Norton Fitzwarren. By 2010 only about four wartime stores survived and a few other structures.

Now a further phase is under way as land is cleared for more housing and premises formerly occupied by hauliers were demolished. The buildings thrown up in a few months in 1940 have not fallen easily to modern demolition equipment!



*Gone 19 November; only one warehouse left standing*

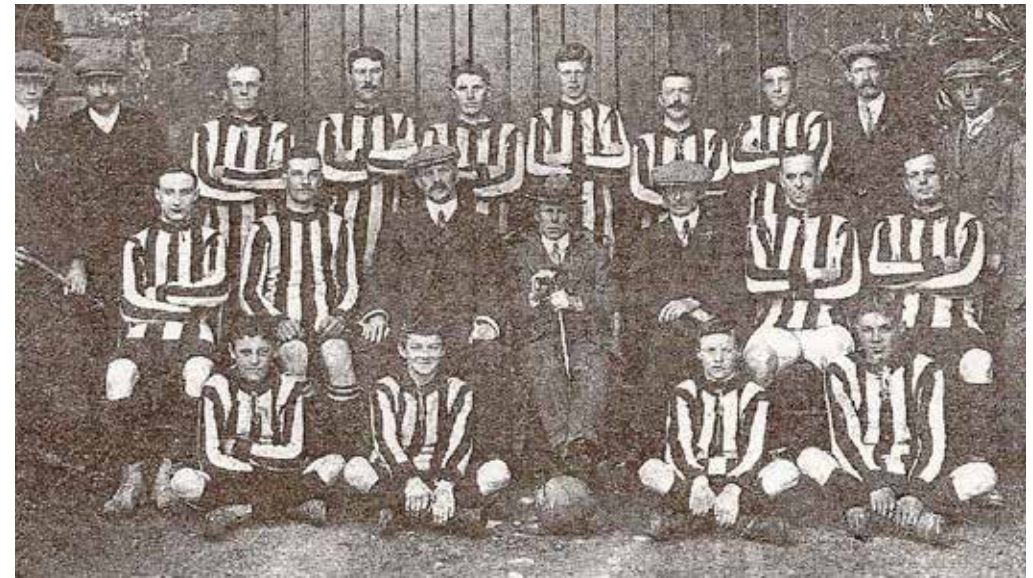
## Dr Emilien Edouard Frossard Bishops Lydeard's 'Greatly Beloved Physician'

Wednesday 29 January 2014 is the 80th anniversary of the death of one of Bishops Lydeard's most respected citizens. Dr Emilien Edouard Frossard was born into a noble Protestant family from the Hautes-Pyrénées in the south of France, many of whom found their way to England. He also had English antecedents, one of whom was associated with Edward Jenner's pioneering work on small-pox vaccine in Gloucestershire. He graduated in medicine at King's College Hospital London and for a time was assistant surgeon to the famous surgeon, Lord Lister. In 1889 Dr Frossard came to Bishops Lydeard and stayed in medical practice there until his death in 1934, at the age of 68.



*Dr Frossard's grave at Bishops Lydeard*

He was much loved and respected by all for his professional abilities and personal integrity; it was said of him that, "Most of his patients were so poor he did not charge them, so he himself was often in debt." He also played a notable part in village life, arranging athletics in 1893, captain of the cricket team, chairman of the Working Mens Institute and organiser of numerous village entertainments and concerts. In 1911 he was presented with a motor car paid for by the residents of Bishops Lydeard and the surrounding district, a very substantial gift. This 1912 photograph shows him with the village football team, founded in the same year. He was medical officer to the German Officers POW camp at Sandhill Park during the Great War, in which all three of his sons served.

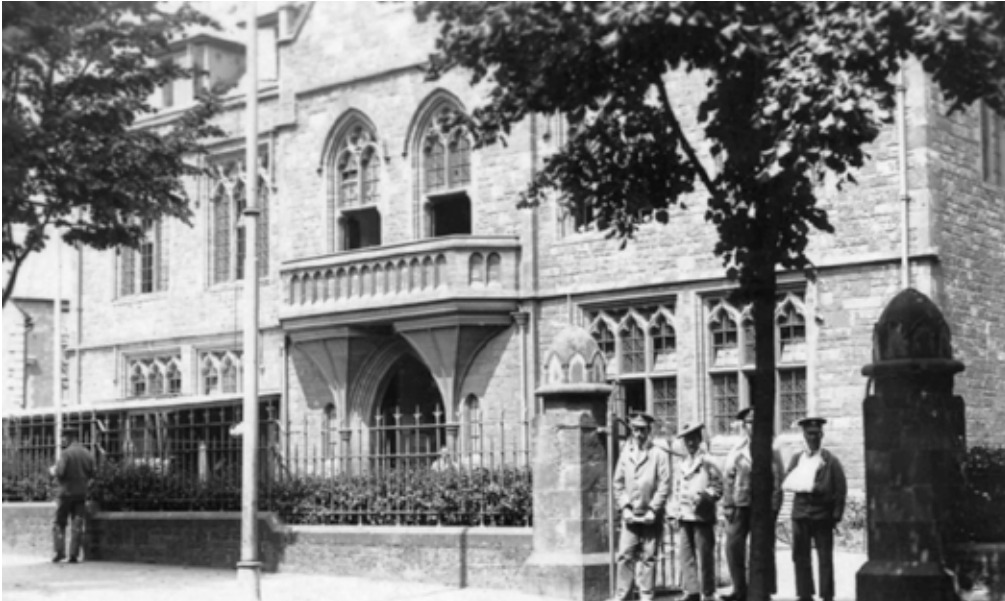


*Bishops Lydeard Football Team in 1912 with Dr Frossard in flat cap seated to the right of Captain Benson (with stick)*

In later life, Dr Frossard suffered severely from asthma and it was considered that a midnight visit to an urgent case in the cold January air brought on an attack that proved fatal. Bishops Lydeard church was packed for his funeral, after which he was buried in the west section of the churchyard. Four days after his death the Somerset County Gazette carried a very long report of his funeral; with lengthy lists of both mourners and floral tributes.

*Simon Dacey - Thanks go to David Rabson who provided me with the Somerset County Gazette report that this article is based on, with additional information from Bishops Lydeard Revisited, by David Hinton.*

## Change Of Use: From Public Hall To Hospital



*A group of convalescent soldiers outside Bank House (Minehead Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital) c.1917*

The old hospital in the centre of Minehead stands empty, on the market since a new community hospital was built on the outskirts of the town in 2011. The Grade 2 listed building was designed by James Piers St Aubyn in 1888/9 to serve as a public hall. Upstairs, and approached by a double-branching staircase, was a large auditorium where popular concerts, plays and public meetings were held. The hall belonged to a company of local business men but the project soon proved unprofitable and the building was taken over by the Wilts and Dorset Bank and became known as Bank House. In 1914 the Wilts and Dorset was taken over by Lloyds and Bank House became redundant. It was soon to become a convalescent home for wounded soldiers.

In 1905 the National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War were reconstituted as the British Red Cross Society and branches set up across the United Kingdom to recruit individual supporters and be prepared in the event of war being declared. This was followed in 1909 by the setting up of the Voluntary

Aid Detachment (VAD) scheme and volunteers (VADs) were trained to supplement military medical forces in times of war.

In 1908 Mrs B M Dawson Thomas came to live in Minehead and soon after her arrival formed the Red Cross VAD of Somerset 14; an enterprise that seems to have been received with enthusiasm by the local community. There were regular training sessions which included two field days each year attended by an inspector from the War Office. Photographer Alfred Vowles recorded the detail of one Porlock Field Day showing the clerks outside the clerical tent, VADs making Bovril, the 'cooks' eating lunch near the field kitchen and a men's detachment of stretcher bearers'.

The outbreak of war in 1914 transformed the unit from a training group to one on active service. By this time a number of mules had been sent to Minehead to be trained for use at the front. The War Office ordered Mrs Dawson Thomas to find a house suitable for hospital use where men injured in accidents with the unbroken animals could be nursed by the VADs. She eventually took over Avalon in Blenheim Road.



*VADs making Bovril, etc, etc, at a training camp at Porlock c.1912*

When the mules left in 1915, orders were received to find larger quarters for a convalescent home for wounded soldiers and Mrs Dawson Thomas obtained Bank House on loan. The home (later known as Minehead Auxiliary Red Cross Hospital) was staffed by the VADs with Mrs Dawson Thomas as commandant and Dr Hamilton Ollerhead as medical officer. At first there were 50 beds and for a time the Wesleyan schoolroom next door housed extra patients. A later annexe enlarged capacity to 120. Patients were fetched from the hospital in vans lent by local tradesmen and boy scouts helped by pushing convalescents in wheel chairs to the sea front. There were outings and entertainments and the attention and care received by patients was much appreciated. There were hospital rules (curfew at 8.30pm!) but the needs of the soldiers were paramount, both physically and spiritually, and one patient describes the nurses as giving all that was best in them so that 'we sick and wounded from the harrowing toil of grim and awful war may recover in some measure that, in the execution of our duty, we had lost.'



VADs and convalescent soldiers outside Bank House c.1915 Dr Hamilton Ollerhead sports a bow tie and sitting beside him is Mrs Dawson Thomas, commandant.

Mrs Dawson Thomas received the MBE and Bank House later became the Luttrell Memorial Hospital.

### Hilary Binding

Thanks to the Dawson Thomas archive for information and photographs.

## Wiveliscombe and The Black Death

On the evening of Thursday 24 October Tom Mayberry presented 'the Bishop and the Black Death' to an audience in Wiveliscombe church. People were also able to see Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury's register, probably the first time it had been in Wiveliscombe since large sections of it were compiled there in the mid-14th century.

This small town in West Somerset played a significant part in the story of the Black Death in Somerset. The terrible outbreak of bubonic plague throughout Europe began in the Genoese citadel at Caffa in the Crimea, which was besieged by an infected Tartar army. The Tartars catapulted their dead soldiers into Caffa infecting the Genoese defenders. As the Genoese travelled home they took the plague to Constantinople, the Arabian Peninsula and the ports of the Mediterranean. Despite the drastic measures taken at places such as Messina and Milan to avoid the infection it spread rapidly through a population with no immunity to this deadly disease and already weakened in many European countries by famine after a succession of poor harvests, deteriorating climate and war.



In Wiveliscombe church: Mary Siraut, Jane de Gruchy and Tom Mayberry

In England as in other European countries there was a large and growing population following two centuries of benign weather and expanding agriculture. There were also expanding towns, a flourishing woollen industry and extensive trade with considerable movement of people along the roads and across the seas. England was therefore very vulnerable when the plague arrived in June 1348 at the port of Melcombe Regis in Dorset. The disease spread rapidly along Somerset's routes leaving a trail of death and resulting chaos as communities lost their leaders and farmers at places like North and South Cadbury where most of the tenant farmers, and presumably their families, were killed.

Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury, a zealous reformer and builder in the diocese, probably realised very quickly that the clergy, who attended the sick and dying as a matter of course, were among the most vulnerable. He made the decision to move from Wells to a favourite residence, his palace at Wiveliscombe. He gave orders for prayers but lost many clergy and in some parishes he made several appointments

over the winter of 1348-9, when the plague was at its height in the county, and gave permission for laymen and women to hear the confessions of the dying.



*Register of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury open at the page that speaks of the 'pestilence and eastern plague'.*

Although often criticised for abandoning Wells, the bishop probably made a wise decision, although he could not have known that West Somerset would prove one of the less severely affected areas of his diocese. He managed to hold communities together by ensuring they were not left without a priest and the plague did not seem to deter clergy from accepting parochial service. To have lost their bishop would have left Somerset without support through one of its worst disasters.

This difficult period did not diminish Bishop Ralph's affection for Wiveliscombe and it was there that he died in 1363.

## Historic Images Of Somerset



*Mules at Minehead Station in c.1914.*

From the 1890s North Hill at Minehead was used for annual military training, both for territorials and local yeomanry companies. In 1914 mules from Portugal were brought to the town to be trained for the front by their Portuguese handlers and, we are led to believe, by men from the West Somerset Yeomanry also camping in the area. Another photograph shows the mules trotting briskly up through Park Street. The mules were generally unbroken and many accidents occurred with injured men requiring nursing as a result.

In this photograph the animals seem so calm and steady that I think it must show their departure after training rather than their arrival. We can only imagine what horrors awaited them.

For more information on Somerset and the First World War visit the Somerset Remembers blog [www.somersetremembers.wordpress.com](http://www.somersetremembers.wordpress.com).

## Book review

Two valuable additions to the Somerset History bookshelf are EDMUND RACK'S SURVEY OF SOMERSET and HARVEY PRIDHAM: ANCIENT CHURCH FONTS OF SOMERSET.

These two publications by SANHS are a serious addition to the antiquarian studies in Somerset. In both cases the authors hoped and intended that their work should be published but it is not until the last three years that this has come about. Rack's manuscript is in the Ashton Court papers in Bristol Record Office and Pridham's is in the library of SANHS.

Edmund Rack was the first secretary of what is now the Royal Bath and West Agricultural Society and in the 1780's travelling round Somerset he collected material for the Rev. John Collinson whose history of the County was published in 1791. Collinson's volumes are essentially historical. Rack's Survey is more descriptive. He notes the number of inhabitants and dwellings in a village, he often describes the terrain and its current rental value and sometimes makes miscellaneous comments such as "a curious kind of freshwater is found in the brook below the castle" (Farleigh Hungerford) but in particular he describes in detail the internal appearance of churches which together with the drawings of the Bucklers and W W Wheatley and Sir Stephen Glynne's Church Notes (Somerset Record Society, 82), give an unrivalled knowledge of how Somerset churches looked prior to Gothic revival restorations in the 19th Century.

Harvey Pridham, son of the vicar of West Harptree, spent much of his life as an architect in Denver in the USA, but in the 1880's and 1890's bicycled around Somerset making notes and measured drawings of medieval church fonts – some 480 on the scale of ½ inch to the foot. SANHS bought these drawings for 100 guineas in 1908 to enable him to get medical attention for failing eyesight.

Central to the sacrament of baptism fonts were treated with veneration and respect and often if a church was altered or rebuilt the font would be retained. Again using the example of Farleigh Hungerford when the original parish church was enclosed within the bailey of the castle and a new church built nearby in 1443 the font was moved to it. When that church was reordered in 1833 and a new font installed the old one was moved back to the castle chapel, or Wells Cathedral where the font in its Anglo-Saxon predecessor was moved to the present building. Fonts thus provide evidence of the original church in spite of alterations and re-building apart from their intrinsic interest and the development of their design from a rudely shaped bowl to

15th century examples octagonal in shape with quatrefoil panels. To gather into one volume this complete range of fonts from the churches of Somerset is useful both in detail and overall coverage. One can but admire the commitment of Harvey Pridham to creating this archive.

Both are available from the SANHS office at the Somerset Heritage Centre, Brunel Way, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton TA2 6SF or online.



*The marriage panel from the seven sacraments font at Nettlecombe*



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