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Literary Somerset

Written by James Crowden

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LITERARY SOMERSET

JAMES CROWDEN



First Published in 2010 by
Flagon Press
Forge House, Fore Street
Winsham, Chard
Somerset TA20 4DY

www.james-crowden.co.uk

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ISBN 978-0-9562778-0-0

British Library and Cataloguing-in-Production Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from
The British Library.



Design by Andrew Crane
Typeset in Bitstream Carmina
Printed and bound by Butler Tanner & Dennis
Frome, Somerset

THE COUNTY OF *SOMERSET*, commonly call'd *Somersetshire*, is a large and plentiful County. On the north the Severn-Sea bears upon it, on the west it bounds upon Devonshire, on the south upon Dorsetshire, upon the east upon Wiltshire and part of Gloucestershire. The soil is very rich, especially for grain and pasturage, tis very populous and tolerably well furnished with havens. Some think that this name was first given it because the air is gentle, and as it were a *Summer air* in those parts… in which sense the Britains at this day call it *Glad arhaf* translating the word out of our language.

But the truth is, as in summer time, it may really be called a *Summer-country*, so no less in the winter season be called a *winter-country*: so wet, moist and marshy it is for the most part; which creates a great deal of trouble to travellers. However I shall not scruple to believe that this name was certainly given it from *Somerton*, formerly the chief town of the County, since *Asser*, a very ancient author, calls it everywhere, the county of *Somertun*.

WILLIAM CAMDEN 1584



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Asser died c.909: *Monk, scholar; lived in Somerset*
Official speak 1: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
St Dunstan died c.988: *Monk and poet; born near Glastonbury*
Official Speak 2: Domesday Book 1086
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Alexander Pope 1688–1744: *Poet, critic and essayist; often visited Bath*

David Hartley 1705–1757: *Philosopher and physician; lived in Bath*

Tobias Smollett 1721–1771: *Novelist and dramatist; lived in Bath*

Christopher Anstey 1724–1805: *Poet and writer; lived in Bath 1770–1805*

Richard Sheridan 1751–1816: *Novelist and playwright; lived in Bath*

William Thomas Beckford 1760–1844: *Novelist, art critic, travel writer; lived in Bath*

Rev Thomas Robert Malthus 1766–1834: *Political Economist; died in Bath*

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John Gay 1685–1732 *Poet and playwright; visited Bath 1721 and 1724*

Samuel Johnson 1709–1784: *Essayist, poet and lexicographer; visited Bath in 1776*

Laurence Sterne 1713–1768 *Novelist; visited Bath c.1756*

Horace Walpole 1717–1797: *Art historian, novelist and man of letters; visited Bath 1766*

Edmund Burke 1729–1797: *Author, orator and philosopher; visited Bath 1753, 1756–7, 1792,1797*

Oliver Goldsmith 1730–1774: *Poet, novelist and playwright; stayed in Bath 1762 and 1771*

Hester Thrale also known as **Mrs Piozzi** 1741–1821: *Diarist and author; lived in Bath 1776–1780*

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Thomas De Quincey 1785– 1859: *Author; Bristol, Bath and Wrington*

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Mary Shelley 1797–1851: *Novelist; lived in Bath*

Emma Marshall 1828–1899: *Novelist; Clifton, Wells and Weston-super-Mare*

Christina Rossetti 1830–1894: *Poet; lived in Frome*

Elizabeth Eleanor Siddal 1829–1862: *Artist's model, poet and painter; stayed in Clevedon 1855*

Helen Buckingham Reeves 'Helen Mathers' 1851–1920: *Novelist; born in Misterton*

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Thomas Ken 1637–1711: *Bishop of Bath and Wells; buried in Frome*

Richard Alleine 1610–1681: *Puritan Divine and author; born at Ditcheat*

Joseph Alleine 1634–1668: *Author; lived in Taunton, died in Bath, buried in Taunton*

Parson James Woodforde 1740–1803: *Diarist and food commentator; born Ansford, Castle Cary*

Parson William Holland 1746–1819: *Diarist; lived in Over Stowey*

William Lisle Bowles 1762–1850: *Poet and critic; lived in Uphill*

Rev John Skinner 1772–1839: *Camerton*

Rev Sydney Smith 1771–1845: *Essayist, reformer and very lively wit; lived in Combe Florey 1829–45*

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Henry 'Orator' Hunt 1773–1835: *Rabble rouser, political agitator and radical author; did time in Ilchester Jail 1820–1822; Lord of the Manor of Glastonbury*

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Mary Scott 1751–1793: *Poet; lived in Milborne Port and Ilminster*

Charles Prestwich Scott – CP Scott 1846–1932: *Editor of the* Guardian; *born in Bath*

Sir Isaac Pitman 1813–1897: *Pitman's shorthand; lived in Bath*

Walter Bagehot 1826–1877: *Economist, journalist and wit; born in Langport died in Langport*

Sir Arthur Pearson 1866–1921: *Founder of* The Daily Express; *born in Wookey.*

Lord Beaverbrook – Max Aitken 1879–1964 *Newspaper tycoon; owned Cricket Court, Cricket Malherbie and other Somerset farms*

Lord Rees-Mogg 1928– : *Journalist and editor; born in Bristol, lives near Mells*

Christopher Booker 1937– : *Journalist; lives at Litton*

Rosie Boycott 1951– : *Journalist and editor; lives near Ilminster*

Graham Harvey 1943– : *Journalist, playwright and agricutural advisor; lives in Luxborough*

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Evelyn Waugh 1903–1966: *Novelist and noted wit; lived in Combe Florey*

Auberon Waugh 1939–2001: *Novelist, journalist and critic; born at Pixton Park, Dulverton*

Alexander Waugh 1963– : *Author and journalist; lives near Milverton*

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Richard Jefferies 1848–1887: *Journalist, novelist and nature writer; visited Exmoor 1882*

Sir Francis Carruthers Gould 1844–1925: *Political cartoonist and author; lived in Porlock*

Ernest William Hendy 1873–1950: *Poet and ornithologist; lived in Porlock 1923–1950*

Berta Lawrence 1906–2003: *Novelist, writer and poet; lived in Wembdon 1932–2003*

Victor Bonham Carter 1913–2007: *Author and publisher; lived at East Anstey and Milverton*

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Laurence Whistler 1912–2000: *Glass engraver, Aisholt*

WH Davies 1871–1940: *Often visited Somerset*

Edward Thomas 1878–1917: *Visited Somerset on bicycle 1913*

Rupert Brooke 1887–1915: *Visited Clevedon with his Cambridge friends in the summer of 1909*

Siegfried Sassoon 1886–1967: *Buried in Mells*

Monsignor Ronald Knox 1888–1957: *Priest, crime writer and broadcaster; lived in Mells and buried in Mells*

Isaac Rosenberg 1890–1918: *Born in Bristol*

John Jarmain 1911–1944: *Taught at Millfield*

C.H. Sisson 1914–2003: *Translator, novelist and critic; Langport*

Charles Tomlinson 1927– : *Lived in Hinton Blewett*

John Mole 1941– : *Born in Taunton, lived in Kingston St Mary*

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John Steinbeck 1902–1968: *Lived near Bruton 1959*

Anthony Powell 1905–2000: *Lived at The Chantry, near Frome*

David Cornwell alias **John le Carré** 1931– : *Thriller writer; lived in Pilton and Coxley; taught at Millfield*

Isabel Colegate 1931– : *Lived at Midford*

Fay Weldon 1931– : *Lived in Pilton*

Penelope Lively 1933– : *Grandparents lived at Roadwater*

Nell Dunn 1936– : *Lived in Withiel Florey*

Dame Margaret Drabble 1939– : *Lives near Porlock*

Lindsay Clarke 1939– : *Novelist; lives in Frome*

Jeffrey Archer 1940– : *Novelist; grew up in Weston-Super-Mare*

Charlotte Bingham 1942– : *Novelist and script writer; lives near Brewham*

Polly Devlin 1944– : *Author and journalist; lives near Bruton*

Martin Booth 1944–2004 *Poet, novelist; lived in Drayton, near Langport*

James Long 1949– : *Novelist; his book* Ferney *is set in Penselwood*

Peter Benson 1956– : *Novelist; author of* The Levels

Andrew Miller 1960– : *Novelist; lives near Frome*

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George Bernard Shaw 1856–1950: *Playwright; visited Glastonbury Festival 1916*

Ben Travers 1886–1980: *Dramatist, novelist and screenwriter; lived at Berrow*

Robert Bolt 1924–1995: *Playwright; taught at Millfield School, Street*

Ned Sherrin 1931–2007: *Broadcaster and author; born at Low Ham near Langport*

Sir Tom Stoppard 1937– : *Journalist then playwright; lived in Bristol*

John Cleese 1939– : *Author and actor; born Weston-super-Mare*

Sir Anthony Jay 1930– : *Satirical playwright; lives near Langport*

John Fletcher 1946– : *Playwright; lives in Pilton*

Nell Leyshon 1961– : *Playwright and novelist; born in Glastonbury*

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Hugh Leach 1934– : *Travel writer; lives in Hinton St George*

Peter Steele 1935– : *Mountain doctor and travel writer; lived in Bristol*

Sir Ranulph Fiennes 1944– : *Explorer, author; lives near Exford*

Susan Farrington 1949– : *Travel writer; lives in Wiveliscombe*

Christopher Somerville 1949: *Travel writer and journalist; lives in Bristol*

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Frederic Thomas Elworthy 1830–1907: *Philologist; born in Wellington*

Sir Edward Burnett Tylor 1832–1917: *Anthropologist; died in Wellington*

Henry Fowler 1858–1933: *Lexicographer; lived in Hinton St George*

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Arthur Conan Doyle 1859–1930: *Historical Novelist and crime writer; author of* Micah Clarke

Bernard Cornwell 1944– : *Historical novelist; books set in Wessex*

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Parson William Holland 1746–1819: *Diarist; lived in Over Stowey*

Rev John Skinner 1772–1839: *Diarist and antiquarian; born at Claverton, lived at Camerton*

Robert Francis Kilvert 1840–79: *Diarist; educated in Bath*

John Bickersteth 1921– : *Diary editor; Bishop of Bath and Wells*

Sir Michael Holroyd 1935– : *Biographer; lives in Porlock and London*

Victoria Glendinning 1937– : *Biographer; lives in Bruton*

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Charles Palmer 1874–1940: *Doctor and author; lived in Yeovil*

Aubrey Herbert 1880–1923: *Orientalist, diplomat and author; MP for Yeovil*

Harald Penrose 1904–1996: *Test pilot and aviation author; worked in Yeovil*

William K Everson 1929–1996: *Film critic and author; born in Yeovil*

PJ Harvey 1969– : *Rock musician and song writer; studied in Yeovil*

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RF Traherne 1901–1967: *Wrote about* Glastonbury Legends

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John Michell 1933– 2009: *Author; wrote about Glastonbury and Ley lines*

Count Nikolai Dmitrievich Tolstoy-Miloslavsky 1935– : *Historian; lived at Cricket Malherbie*

Robert Temple 1945– : *Author; lives near Bridgwater*

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Elizabeth Goudge 1900–1984: *Children's author; born in Wells*

Roald Dahl 1916–1990: *Children's author; went to school in Weston–super–Mare 1925–29*

Dame Jacqueline Wilson 1945– : *Children's author ; born in Bath*

Angie Sage 1952– : *Children's author; lives in Milverton*

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William Makepeace Thackeray 1811–1863: *Novelist; often stayed at Clevedon Court*

George Gissing 1857–1903: *Novelist; visited Clevedon 1891 and 1894*

Rupert Brooke 1887–1915: *Poet; spent a summer holiday in Clevedon 1909*

J.R.R Tolkien 1892–1973: *Author; honeymoon in Clevedon 1916. Visited Cheddar Gorge*

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Capt Woodes Rogers 1679–1732: *Privateer, sea captain and author; born in Bristol*

Captain George Shelvocke 1675–1742: *Privateer based in Bristol*

Edmund Burke 1729–1797: *Author, orator and philosopher; MP for Bristol 1774*

William Combe 1741–1823: *Poet and author; born in Bristol*

Hannah More 1745–1833: *Lived in Bristol and Wrington*

Thomas Chatterton 1752–1770: *Poet; born in Bristol, committed suicide with arsenic*

Ann Yearsley c.1753–1806: *Lactilla – the milkmaid poet; lived in Bristol*

Mary Robinson 1757–1800: *Poet, novelist and royal mistress; born in Bristol*

Dr Thomas Beddoes 1760–1808: *Physician and scientific writer; lived in Bristol, died in Bristol*

Maria Edgeworth 1768–1849: *Novelist; lived in Clifton 1791–1799*

Joseph Cottle 1770–1853: *Author and Publisher; lives in Bristol*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1772–1834: *Poet; lodged at 2 Queen Square when lecturing*

Robert Southey 1774–1843: *Poet and biographer; born in 9 Wine Street, Bristol*

Thomas De Quincey 1785–1859: *Lived in Bristol, Bath and Wrington*

Hartley Coleridge 1796–1849 *Poet and biographer; born in Bristol, early years in Nether Stowey*

Thomas Lovell Beddoes 1803–1849: *Poet and playwright; born in Clifton, Bristol*

Charles Kingsley 1819–1875: *Author and historian; educated in Bristol*

Robert Louis Stevenson 1850–1894: *Poet, essayist and novelist; author of* Treasure Island

John Addington Symonds 1840–1893: *Poet and literary critic; born in Bristol, lived in Clifton 1868–80*

E.H. Young 1880–1949: *Novelist; lived in Clifton*

Isaac Rosenberg 1890–1918: *Poet and artist; born in Bristol*

Barbara Pym 1913–1980: *Novelist; lived in Clifton 1941–43*

Derek Robinson 1932– : *Author; born in Bristol*

Sir Tom Stoppard 1937– : *Playwright; lived in Bristol*

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Leslie Alcock 1925–2006: *Archaeologist; excavated at South Cadbury*

Mick Aston 1946– : *Landscape archaeologist; lives in Sandford*

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John Billingsley 1747–1811: *Agricultural Pioneer and author; lived at Ashwick and Oakhill*

John Collinson 1757–1793: *Antiquary; vicar of Long Ashton*

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Robin Bush 1943– : *County Archivist; lives in Taunton*

Christopher Culpin 1944– : *Historian; lives in Castle Cary*

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Gertrude Hollis 1863–c.1940: *Novelist and author; visited Wells often*

Christopher Hollis 1902–1977: *Author and politician; born in Wells, lived in Wells & Mells*

Ruth Tongue 1898–1981: *Folklorist; lived in Taunton and Crowcombe*

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Jonathan Dimbleby 1944– : *Lived near Bath*

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The Gossips

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to everyone who has helped to make *Literary Somerset* possible. Indeed it is a small miracle that the book has been researched, written and designed in just six months. I am grateful to Richard Watkins of Barrington for his initial listings and for sourcing many old books and illustrations, as well as for many long hours spent proof-reading and indexing. To Christopher Richards from North Somerset Museum Services, Weston-super-Mare for generously sharing his hoard of literary connections in that area. To my father Guy Crowden for access to Camden's *Britannia* and Stukeley's *Antiquities*. To Ivor Cornish of Bristol for finding several books including Agrikler. To Andrew Crane, the ever-vigilant designer, for his excellent design, artistic flair and endless patience – the book is now twice the planned size. To Pamela Egan of Wells for editing and proof reading and for rewriting the entries on Bishop Ken and Elizabeth Goudge; to Jenny de Gex of Pilton for picture research, editing and many long hours of project management behind the scenes; to Robert Dunning for his help in overseeing the early sections. Above all I am grateful to the writers of Somerset, both dead and alive, without whom this book would not be possible.

Sourcing the illustrations has been a real pleasure and I am grateful to photographers Neil Phillips, George Wright, Chris Chapman and Pauline Rook for allowing me to use their work. Thanks also to Nell Barrington, for research in the early stages, and final proof reading, to Helena Drysdale of Bruton, Hilly and Michael Cansdale of Wells, Wendy Miller-Williams of Frome library, to Marcus of Yeovil Waterstones; to Somerset County Council Tourism Department for helping fund some of the initial research work. This was followed by another small grant from the SCC Cultural Service Department based in Bridgwater. Thanks also to the staff of the Local Studies Library in Taunton and to Yeovil Library for allowing me to use their reference sections. The Arts Council was approached for a grant but sadly they felt that the project was not quite up their street, despite its obvious educational value.

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Thanks also to Flaydemouse in Yeovil for excellent scanning and to Butler, Tanner and Dennis of Frome for printing and binding.

Above all I would like to thank my partner Carol Trewin who helped me with the book, even though she was suffering from an acute form of leukaemia. Alas she did not live long enough to see the project finished but she did see the first proofs and approved.

INTRODUCTION

Literary Somerset is a powerful evocation of many different writers and their relationship with the county as well as the rich harvest of poems, prose and novels that interlace the pages of this book. Somerset is worthy of exploration and in many ways the sheer diversity of writers presents a microcosm of English literature. There are many signposts, some of the roads are well trodden but others less so, and all the more interesting for it. I also have tried to juxtapose interesting and unusual authors, to keep the book quirky, eccentric and above all, alive.

It is striking that one of the earliest stories to be told in Somerset is that of Aeneas and Dido which is exquisitely preserved in a 4th century mosaic discovered at Low Ham in 1946. This mosaic from the bath house of a large Roman villa, connects Somerset in a very visual way to Virgil, the Aeneid and the ancient mediterranean world of Troy, Rome and Carthage (end page).

It is also striking that the earliest surviving written poem in Anglo-Saxon, *The Ruin*, should be about a city which has great baths and rings and columns bound with iron. Maybe it is no coincidence that King Alfred, one of the few scholar kings we have ever had, should not only found an abbey at Athelney surrounded by the very marshes which held him safe in his hour of need, but that he should also translate *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, from Latin into English.

Here also lie the roots of the Arthurian legend which Thomas Malory immortalised in *Morte d'Arthur*. A legend that in the 1950s brought across from America none other than John Steinbeck who lived for a year near Bruton. Then again T. S. Eliot named one of his *Four Quartets* after East Coker, his ancestors' village near Yeovil, where his ashes are buried. Old Possum comes home at last. And what about William Dampier the 'pirate of exquisite mind' and his seafaring tales?

Literary Somerset is therefore more than just a reader's guide or an A-Z of writers, it is an intellectual jigsaw and should be approached as such. Each writer, each literary work and each place should be savoured, and sometimes they fit together in unusual ways. Ideas can often be very fluid and writers are always drawing on each other or on certain places for inspiration.

I have used the old county boundaries of Somerset which reach right up to the River Avon, to Bath and the very walls of Bristol itself. In the west there is Exmoor, the stags and the coast, in the middle the vagaries of the Somerset Levels and Moors, an impermanence which led to an itinerant and shifting way of life. Even the Anglo-Saxon name *Somersetae* means the 'land of the summer settlers', which itself echoes the earlier Welsh term for Somerset: *Gwlad-yr-haf* or 'green land' referring to the rich summer pastures. To survive in Somerset you often have to be flexible. Then there is the limestone solidity of the Mendips, the subtle folds of the Poldens and the ancient ecclesiastical centres of Wells and Glastonbury.

The writers themselves are just as varied and colourful. Many of the early writers were pushing the boundaries and taking risks. This shows in their work. It is no coincidence that Somerset was also a hotbed of non-conformity and anti-establishment ideas. As a young man of 25, Daniel Defoe was at the Battle of Sedgemoor in 1685, the last true rebellion in England. Defoe was fighting for the Duke of Monmouth and was lucky to escape the Bloody Assizes. If he had been hung, drawn and quartered we would not now have the pleasure of reading *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*.

Where would Somerset and poetry be without the odd shot of opium taken in port or claret, as laudanum? Where would we be without *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*? That heady year of 1797 when William and Dorothy Wordsworth, and Samuel Coleridge all walked those Quantock hills by night and set the local tongues a-wagging. Then there is Henry Fielding and his sister Sarah, the philosophers Roger Bacon and John Locke, the war poets, Siegfried Sassoon, Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke and Isaac Rosenberg. Writers as diverse as Arthur C Clarke and John Cleese, Margaret Drabble and Michael Holroyd, Fay Weldon and Penelope Lively, Jane Austen, Christina Rossetti and Mary Shelley. Then there is John Cowper Powys and RD Blackmore. The list is almost endless and constantly growing.

It is as if living in Somerset is a rite of passage for writers and for a while their work pulses with the landscape. One writer was imprisoned for perjury, one executed during the Boer War, one exiled by Queen Mary. One imprisoned for experimenting with gunpowder, one lost his fingers to frostbite, one walked naked across Afghanistan, one spent a winter in the Himalayas, two at least survived the Somme, one was killed at Arras and another lost his life in the Calvados region.

Writing is often a lonely task. You need a roof over your head as well as peace and quiet. These you can find in abundance in deepest, darkest Somerset, as well as a rich landscape to walk in that will inspire you to greater things. Somerset has a history of welcoming outsiders and yet it is also close to the cities of Bath and Bristol, which were centres not only of trade and wealth, but more importantly the hub of new ideas and conversation. Bath had the watering hole and Bristol had its muddy docks. More importantly those docks had links to the outside world, to vast oceans and the adventures of the New World and the Pacific.

When I first came to Somerset, I worked in Bristol docks as a ferryman and then as a boatman on the Bristol Packet and every day I saw the city and its architecture shimmering in the water. The docks then were still richly laden with earthy tales and heady stories. Occasionally we would go down the Avon Gorge under the famous suspension bridge from which, every now and then, people would jump off. The sand dredger crews would usually spot the bodies and fish them out from the mud banks. They got a £1 if they were found on the Gloucester side or 30/- if they were found on the Somerset side. Of course they were always found on the Somerset side. Occasionally the crews would find return rail tickets in the coat pockets and marvel at the distances these people had come to commit suicide. A few years later, when I settled down in Somerset, I came as a casual agricultural labourer, involved with cider making, sheep shearing, night lambing and forestry. I saw the landscape through more rural eyes and began to write.

Literary Somerset is therefore a drawing together of many threads and ideas, chance acquaintances and friendships. It is not meant to be a definitive list of writers. It is a first trawl, as the fishermen say, a starting point for readers to explore and indeed conduct their own research into their own part of Somerset. More than anything else I hope that it will encourage people to visit the county and to re-read many old books as well as trying new authors. Writing *Literary Somerset* has been a fascinating journey.

Enjoy this rich feast of words and pictures.

James Crowden
Apple Day – 21st October 2009



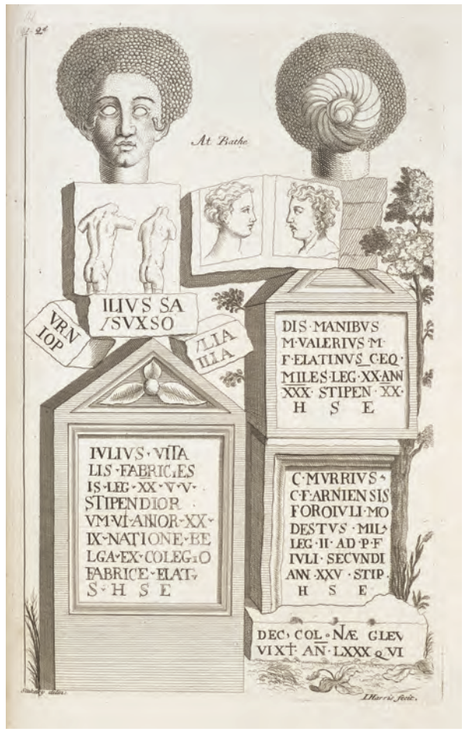
Ruins of Glastonbury Abbey by William Stukeley 1724

PART ONE

FROM BATH TO EAST COKER

1 FROM THE RUIN TO THE WIFE OF BATH

GEOGRAPHICALLY Somerset was a key part of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex and it is no coincidence that some of the earliest literature in the English language should be associated with the county. With the Danes on the doorstep, it was a rough time when language and politics were being hammered out line by line. Poetry concentrated on tales of noble deeds and the fighting spirit, devotion and banishment, mystery, death and loneliness. The same language also kept historical chronicles and marked significant events. We still marvel at the strength and elegance of the Anglo-Saxon poetry and can only wonder at the literary gems that might have been lost.



Author of The Ruin – c.8th century AD

POET / Visited Bath with parchment in hand

The identity of this brilliant wordsmith, the anonymous wandering poet, still remains a mystery today. *The Ruin* is believed to be the earliest poem in the English language and describes the poet's feelings and impressions of wandering round the ruined city of Bath three centuries after the Romans left. The original copy survives in the Exeter Book on two leaves of badly scarred parchment charred around the edges. The fine-wrought description of the overgrown ruins can only be of *Aquae Sulis*, an important Roman city that we now know simply as Bath. The poem is incomplete. It is, however, a very powerful piece of writing and a fine example of the English language that was once spoken in Somerset, the land of the *Sumorsetae* or the summer settlers. The best translation from the Anglo-Saxon is by Michael Alexander of Stirling University who now lives in Wells.

The poem includes such wonderful composite words as *gravesgrasp*, *earthgrip*, *horngabled*, *mood-glad*, *goldbright* and *broad-dominion* words which inspired poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins and writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien who was himself an expert on Anglo-Saxon.

THE RUIN

Well-wrought this wall: Wierds broke it.
The stronghold burst….

Snapped rooftrees, towers fallen,
the work of Giants, the stonesmiths,
moulderеth.
Rime scoureth gate towers
Rime on mortar.

Shattered the showershields, roofs ruined
age under-ate them.
And the wielders and wrights?
Earthgrip holds them- gone, long gone,
fast in gravesgrasp while fifty fathers
and sons have passed.

Wall stood,
grey lichen, red stone, kings fell often,
stood under storms, high arch crashed-
stands yet the wallstone, hacked by weapons,
by files grim ground…
…shone the old skilled work
…sank to loam crust.

Mood quickened mind, and a man of wit,
cunning in rings, bound bravely the wall base
with iron, a wonder.

Bright were the buildings, halls where springs ran
high horngabled, much throng noise;
these many meadhalls men filled
with loud cheerfulness: Wierd changed that.

Came days of pestilence, on all sides men fell dead,
death fetched off the flower of people;
where they stood to fight, waste places
and on the acropolis, ruins.

Hosts who would build again
shrank to the earth. Therefore are these courts dreary
and that red arch twisteth tiles,
wryeth from roof ridge, reacheth groundwards…
Broken blocks…

There once many a man
mood-glad, goldbright, of gleams garnished
flushed with wine-pride, flashing war-gear,
gazed on wrought gemstones, on gold, on silver,
on wealth held and hoarded, on light-filled amber,
on this bright burg of broad dominion.

Stood stone house; wide streams welled
hot from source, and a wall all caught
in its bright bosom that the baths were
hot at hall's hearth; that was fitting…

Thence hot streams loosed ran over hoar stone
unto the ring tank…
…It is a kingly thing
…city…

Translated by MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Saint Aldhelm c.639–709

Bishop, Poet and Scholar / Died in Doulting



Aldhelm is said to have been the son of Kenten or Centwine, brother of King Ine. Aldhelm quickly rose to be Abbot of Malmesbury Abbey, a post he held for over 30 years. He was a great administrator and became the first Bishop of Sherborne. More importantly he was a learned scholar, well versed in Latin poetry and Anglo-Saxon literature. He attracted many pupils and in Somerset founded a place of learning at Frome. His many works include *De Laude Virginitatis* a Latin treatise on the virtues of virginity and chastity addressed to the nuns of the double monastery at Barking, in Essex, founded in 666. Aldhelm later wrote a shorter poetic version of this treatise which was very popular. His letters are also well known: *Epistola ad Acircium* contains a treatise on the number seven and another one on metre and metrical feet for Latin poetry. He wrote many poems in Latin; one poem even describes a journey through the west of England. He also left over 100 riddles and is said to have written many poems in Anglo Saxon, but none survives though they were often turned into songs and recited in the time of King Alfred. St Aldhelm was a pioneer of Anglo Saxon literature: The Venerable Bede thought very highly of him.

On 25th May 709, whilst on a walking tour through his diocese, Aldhelm died in the church at Doulting. His body was carried to Malmesbury in Wiltshire where he was buried. The 25th May is still celebrated as his feast day. King Ine dedicated the estate to Glastonbury Abbey. Doulting is a famous quarrying area and much of the freestone was used to build Wells Cathedral and additions to Glastonbury Abbey.

To see: At Doulting there is a holy well dedicated to St Aldhelm from which springs forth the River Sheppey, which eventually runs into the River Brue. Both the parish church and the primary school in Doulting are named after St Aldhelm. There is also a magnificent early chapel set on the Purbeck clifftops in Dorset, dedicated to St Aldhelm.

Alfred 849–899

Scholar, King and translator / Spent a wet winter in Athelney · Founded Athelney Abbey

Born at Wantage, Oxfordshire, Alfred was an excellent scholar who wrote several books. He laid out his legal code in *The Book of Dooms* or *Deemings*. He translated Pope



Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, *The Universal History of Orosius* and *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by the Venerable Bede. Alfred also made an English translation from the Latin of *The Consolations of Philosophy* by Boethius. In 878 he was trapped in the Somerset marshes around Athelney and began his guerilla campaign against the Danes, as well as undertaking a local bread-making course. Ten years later, in 888 he founded Athelney Abbey. Today Alfred is widely commemorated - there is even a baker in Glastonbury called 'Burns the Bread'.

To see: The Alfred jewel in Ashmolean Museum Oxford. The site of Athelney abbey, near East Lyng. Also a statue on Alfred's Tower near Stourhead dated 1770.

Asser died c.909 AD

Monk, scholar, translator and biographer / Lived in Somerset

Asser was a Welsh monk who came to the court of King Alfred as a scholar and translator. He read aloud to the King and together they translated several works including Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. In return, Alfred gave Asser the monasteries of Congresbury and Banwell on Christmas Eve 886, along with a silk cloak and a quantity of incense "weighing as much as a stout man." Not a bad Christmas present. Asser later became Bishop of Sherborne.

In 893 Asser wrote his famous biography called *The Life of King Alfred*. Even though it is only 20,000 words long it is one of the most important sources of information on King Alfred. It is contemporary but not complete, as Alfred lived another six years. Some say it was written for a Welsh audience. The earliest copy dating from around 1100 was once owned by Leland but then became part of the Cotton Library in Westminster which was destroyed by fire in 1731. Luckily a printed version of *The Life of King Alfred* had been made in 1574 by Archbishop Parker. It is the only one to survive.

Official Speak 1: **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was originally compiled on the orders of King Alfred and subsequently maintained and added to by generations of anonymous scribes until the mid twelfth century. A slightly flawed but very important record of early England.

EARLY EXAMPLES RELATING TO SOMERSET:

AD 845: "This year Alderman Eanwulf, with the men of Somersetshire, and Bishop Ealstan, and Alderman Osric, with the men of Dorsetshire, fought at the mouth of the Parret with the Danish army; and there, after making a great slaughter, obtained the victory."

AD 878: "In the Easter of this year King Alfred with his little force raised a work at Athelney; from which he assailed the army, assisted by that part of Somersetshire which was nighest to it. Then, in the seventh week after Easter, he rode to Brixton by the eastern side of Selwood; and there came out to meet him all the people of Somersetshire, and Wiltshire, and that part of Hampshire which is on this side of the sea; and they rejoiced to see him. Then within one night he went from this retreat to Hey; and within one night after he proceeded to Eddington; and there fought with all the army, and put them to flight, riding after them as far as the fortress, where he remained a fortnight. Then the army gave him hostages with many oaths, that they would go out of his kingdom. They told him also, that their king would receive baptism. And they acted accordingly; for in the course of three weeks after,

King Guthrum, attended by some thirty of the worthiest men that were in the army, came to him at Aller, which is near Athelney, and there the king Alfred became his sponsor in baptism; and his chrism-leasing was at Wedmor. He was there twelve nights with the king, who honoured him and his attendants with many presents."

St Dunstan died 988

Monk and Poet / Born near Glastonbury



Dunstan was educated at Glastonbury Abbey and at a young age came to the attention of King Athelstan and became part of his court. In 940 he became Abbot of Glastonbury, a post he held till 956. During this time he not only expanded the Benedictine abbey, but built up a reputation for serious scholarship. Dunstan wrote many complex poems in Latin, one of which has survived and is called *'May you deign to look, O Christ, on Your unworthy abbot Dunstan.'*

A manuscript called *St Dunstan's Classbook* exists in the Bodleian library in Oxford. It is divided into four parts. It has a drawing on the cover of Dunstan kneeling down praying to Christ, possibly drawn by himself. Throughout his life he was extremely prone to visions. Sadly very little survives of his own work, though many books have annotations and corrections thought to be by him in the margins. He was also a keen embroiderer and painter and played the lyre.

In 959 he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, a post he held till his death. He was a deep inspiration to the Benedictine movement and laid down certain stipulations regarding the behaviour of monks towards cloistered nuns. A Benedictine monastery for 10 monks was established on the site of Westminster Abbey by King Edgar and St Dunstan at the end of the 10th century. A local boy who made it to the very top.

Today the community school in Glastonbury is named after him.

To see: Glastonbury Abbey.

Official Speak 2: **Domesday Book**, 1086

A very different document to the Anglo Saxon Chronicle, the Domesday Book is an accurate description of who owns what in the newly acquired Norman kingdom. The authors and compilers of this unique national survey, which was compiled in Latin, were often trusted king's men, barons and bishops, sheriffs, clergymen and clerks. The information was gathered swiftly in one year. Many of these compilers remain anonymous but one name exists of a commissioner on the South-West circuit, that of William, Bishop of Durham. Somerset was split down into about 628 manors with such wonderful names as Appley, Swang, Swell, Pillock's Orchard, Perry, Horsey Pignes, Deadman's Well, Barrow Gurney, Clewer, Bawdrip, Discove, Hamp and Shovel. Many still remain, though some have disappeared off the face of the map.

The entries give a good insight into the wealth of the county at the time. Five vineyards were documented in Somerset, at Glastonbury, Meare, Panborough, North Curry and Muchelney. The entry for Muchelney reads thus:

St Peter's church, Muchelney, has 4 carucates of land which has never paid tax in these three islands *Michelenie, Midelenie* and *Torleia* (Thorney). In Lordship two ploughs, vineyard, 1 arpent, 4 slaves, 3 villagers, 18 smallholders with 2 ploughs, 2 fisheries, which pay 6000 eels, meadow 25 acres, woodland 12 acres, pasture 100 acres, 1 cob, 21 cattle, 6 pigs 30 goats. The value was and is £3.

NB An arpent is an old French measure of land based on the actus, a Roman unit of measurement. Equivalent to about 100 square perches, but was elastic between 5/6th of an acre to about 1¼ acres. It is still used in Quebec and Louisiana where the conversion ratio is 1 arpent = 0.84 acres.

Geoffrey Chaucer 1343-1400

Translator, author and satirist / Deputy Forester, North Petherton

Considered by many to be the "father" of modern English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* as well as many other works including *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Parliament of Fowles*. English, which had been the main language in Anglo-Saxon times from *The Ruin* onwards, was now back on the literary menu and slowly superseded Latin and Norman French.

Geoffrey Chaucer was probably the only son of John and Agnes Chaucer, who were wine merchants in London. At 14 Chaucer became a page in the household of the Countess of Ulster, whose husband Lionel was one of Edward III's sons. In 1360 Chaucer was captured in Reims by the French and then ransomed back to Lionel. Chaucer returned to London and married in 1365. He had now become an esquire in the royal household. At this point he translated the popular French poem *Le Roman de la Rose (The Romance of the Rose)*, for which he became very well-known. He then wrote a Dream poem called *The Book of the Duchess* to mourn the death of the wife of John of Gaunt.



In 1374 Geoffrey Chaucer was made Controller of Customs for the port of London. In 1381 he wrote *Troilus and Criseyde* during the Peasants' Revolt and in 1389 he was appointed Clerk of the King's Works by Richard I, a job that made him responsible for the upkeep of royal buildings. Two years later in 1391 he retired from this lucrative London job, but was then appointed Deputy Forester of the Royal Forest of North Petherton. This was a less demanding post, part sinecure, which allowed him enough time to continue writing. In 1391 Chaucer produced *The Treatise of the Astrolabe* and between 1392-1395 most of *The Canterbury Tales* were written and published. In 1393 Chaucer was awarded 10 pounds by the King for services rendered. His depiction of *'The Wife of Bath'* in Tale and Prologue makes her arguably one of Somerset's most famous medieval residents, as agony aunt, purveyor of chick-lit, saucy and seductive, wise and witty, a woman who had learnt to wrap men round her little finger. She is supposed to have lived in Northgate Street, Bath. Chaucer's son, Thomas Chaucer was later made Constable of Taunton Castle, so there remained a close connection with Somerset.

2 FROM GILDAS TO MORTE D'ARTHUR: INVENTION OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

SOME OF THE MOST ENDURING associations in Somerset are the Arthurian Legends centred upon Glastonbury. To some they are real historical events, to others they are luminous myths. The truth probably lies somewhere between the two. What is fascinating is to see how the myth was first developed from scant fact and then relocated and re-woven over the centuries into an enduring legend.

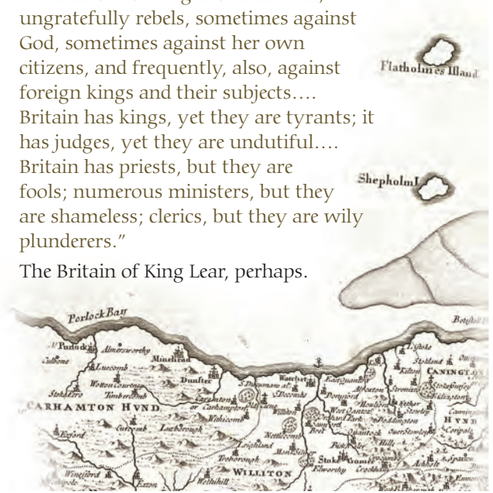
St Gildas the Wise 516–570

BRITISH CLERIC AND HISTORIAN / Lived on Steep Holm, died in Street

Gildas is thought to have been come from Wales. After his studies he is said to have travelled to Ireland, Rome, Ravenna and to Brittany where he is credited with founding the monastery of St Gildas de Rhuys. This information comes from *Vita Gildae auctore monacho Ruiensi*, written by an anonymous Breton monk in the 11th century. Another later version, *Vita Gildae auctore Caradoco Lancarbanensi*, was written by Caradoc of Llancarfan in Glamorgan, in the 12th century. This says that Gildas also studied in Gaul for seven years, preached in Wales and eventually came to Somerset, where he wrote his famous historical work *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae or On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*. This was later used by The Venerable Bede, who paid tribute to Gildas as the only surviving historian of that period. Gildas's history work, although not always accurate gives a rich flavour of the times. He has an endearing up-front writing style that would make him the envy of any newspaper editor today when referring to Britain:

"This island, stiff-necked and stubborn-minded, from the time of its being first inhabited, ungratefully rebels, sometimes against God, sometimes against her own citizens, and frequently, also, against foreign kings and their subjects…. Britain has kings, yet they are tyrants; it has judges, yet they are undutiful…. Britain has priests, but they are fools; numerous ministers, but they are shameless; clerics, but they are wily plunderers."

The Britain of King Lear, perhaps.



Gildas is said to have lived on the island of Steep Holm (or Shepholm)in the Bristol Channel for seven years where he survived on small fish and sea birds' eggs. He founded an oratory and for company had his friend St Cadoc, also in retreat on Flat Holm, the island next door; and from time to time they would visit each other. Ghosts of monks are still seen there…

After seven years of self imposed exile Gildas was harassed by pirates from the Orkneys who took his servants and his furniture. He then crossed over to Somerset and built a small church near present-day Street on the banks of the River Brue. He wore only a vest made of goat hair. When he died he was reputedly buried within Glastonbury Abbey which was remarkably convenient for pilgrimage.

Interestingly Gildas does not mention Arthur by name at all, but in the year AD800 another writer from Wales, called Nennius, wrote *Historia Britonum* and this included for the first time the twelve battles of Arthur. It was this work which gave the monks plenty to chew on even though Arthur appeared to be a Welsh hero. Some scholars dispute whether Nennius wrote *Historia Britonum* but they all agree it is an important work.

By the 12th century Caradoc says that Arthur killed Gildas's brother Hueil and later repented on bended knee. Later Caradoc mentions how Gildas intervened between King Arthur and a certain King Melwas of the 'Summer Country' who had abducted Guinevere and brought her to his stronghold at Glastonbury, where Arthur soon arrived to besiege him. It is from this *Life of Gildas*, not from Gildas himself, that the Arthurian legend derives Guinevere or *Gwenhwyfar*. Here you have the first basis of the well known plot involving Lancelot and Guinevere, as well as the Isle of Avalon and Glastonbury itself, which is called Glastonia or *Ynisgutrin*, the island of glass. In Brittany, however, they firmly believe that Gildas died there and is buried in Rhuys. His feast day is 29th January. So it was these historical embellishments to the *Life of Gildas*, using the words of Nennius, which became the foundation stones of the Arthurian legend, not the words of Gildas himself.

No doubt the ingenious PR skills of the Somerset Monastic Tourism Department had its own agenda. Caradoc was a friend and contemporary of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Fiction, imagination and the powers of storytelling adroitly filled in the large gaps left by sparse historical fact. Certain elements of both stories may well be true. Scholars still debate the life and historical work of Gildas but in so doing put to one side the Arthurian legends which cannot be proved one way or another. Some think that if Arthur existed at all, it was as a composite mythical figure used to inspire rebellion against the invading Saxons and his name was used laterto swell the abbey's coffers and encourage wealthy pilgrims.

Geoffrey of Monmouth 1100–1155

CLERK & HISTORIAN /Introduces Arthurian legend to Glastonbury

Geoffrey wrote *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain), which mentions Arthur. He leans towards Arthur being of Welsh descent and living initially in Cornwall, possibly at Tintagel. This is based on the *Historia Britonum* a 9th century Welsh-Latin historical compilation attributed to Nennius. He also used Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* and Gildas's sixth-century polemic *De Excidio Britanniae*, expanded with material from Welsh legend, genealogical tracts, and Geoffrey's own imagination. Lastly, Geoffrey also wrote the *Vita Merlini (The Life of Merlin)* at a point between 1149 and 1151.

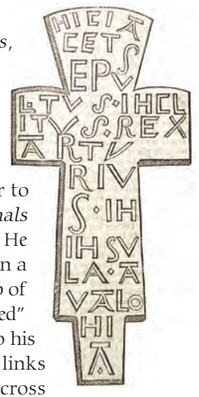
William of Malmesbury 1080/95–c.1143

Monk and historian / Produces a history of Glastonbury

Inspired by The Venerable Bede's history, William of Malmesbury was employed by Glastonbury Abbey to produce, around 1120, his *Gesta Regum Anglorum (Deeds of the English Kings or Deeds of the Kings of the English people)* which spanned from 449–1120. He also wrote *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis*, Enquiry into the Antiquity of the Church of Glastonbury. In the early editions William does not mention the link between Arthur and Glastonbury but after the fire which destroyed the abbey in 1184 and the cessation of government subsidy, the links between Arthur and Glastonbury miraculously appear.

Gerald of Wales c.1146–c.1223

Monk and historian / Also writes about Arthur and Glastonbury



Also known as *Giraldus Cambrensis*, Gerald was archdeacon of Brecon, a medieval clergyman and chronicler. Born in Pembrokeshire, he was of mixed Norman and Welsh blood, his name being **Gerald de Barri**. He was called over to witness the excavations after the *Annals of Margam* had first told the story. He left a description of the inscription on a leaden cross which was found on top of Arthur's tomb which was "discovered" in 1191 in Glastonbury and refers to his wife *Guinivere*. This inscription links Arthur to Glastonbury but the cross disappeared in the 18th century. The only remnant of it is the illustration in Camden's *Britannia*.

Sir Thomas Malory c.1405–1471

Knight / Author of Le Morte d'Arthur

Born in Newbold Revel in Warwickshire, Malory was the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, a romantic tale which relates the complex stories of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, the lady Guinevere, the wayward knight Sir Lancelot, as well as Camelot, Avalon, Tristan and Isolde and the Holy Grail, all wrapped in one. Malory was himself a very colourful character, elected to parliament twice but also managing to get the wrong side of the law on many occasions. During the 1450s he was charged with burglary, rape, sheep stealing, cattle rustling and deer poaching, as well as an attempt to ambush the Duke of Buckingham. Malory escaped from jail on two occasions, once by fighting his way out with a variety of weapons and once by swimming a moat. Bail and pardon was the preferred option. Many believe he actually started his writings within prison in the 1450s, with an ample supply of sharpened goose quills at the ready. Not the first or last to benefit from a little incarceration.

Le Morte d'Arthur was first published in 1485 by William Caxton, the original working title being *The hoole booke of kyng Arthur & of his noble knyghtes of the rounde table*. It is a compilatiion of the early writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, with many strands from French medieval romantic literature woven into the story for good measure.

Le Morte d'Arthur has remained a classic for over 500 years. There were later editions by William Copland 1557, Thomas East 1585 and William Stansby 1634. There were two editions in 1816 and Davison's 1817 edition was promoted by the poet Robert Southey. As recently as 1934 an original manuscript of the *Morte d'Arthur* was found by W.F. Oakshott in the library of Winchester College. This was one of the most important medieval manuscripts discovered in the 20th century and it has kept scholars in business ever since.

Malory divided his work principally into eight tales:

1. "From the Marriage of King Uther unto King Arthur that Reigned After Him and Did Many Battles" Arthur's birth and pedigree.
2. "The Noble Tale Between King Arthur and Lucius the Emperor of Rome" His battles against the Romans.
3. "The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot Du Lac".
4. "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney" brother of Gawain.
5. "The First and the Second Book of Sir Tristrams de Lione" The tale of Tristram and Isolde .
6. "The Noble Tale of the Sangreal" The Quest for the Holy Grail.
7. "Sir Launcelot and Queen Gwenyvere" The goings on in Somerset between Lancelot and Guinevere…
8. "The Death of Arthur" The end of the tale. The breaking of the Knights of the Round Table and the death of Arthur.

Arthur, whilst mortally wounded, is carried on a barge with damsels to the *Isle of Avalon* to be healed no doubt with herbal remedies and local mulled cider. These Arthurian legends were very popular with the Victorians and were a worthy subject of the Pre-Raphaelite artists. Damsels in distress and knights in armour were just what the Victorian mind needed to counteract the rampant industrialisation and empire grabbing, always looking back to a perfect world and social order where gentlemen were gentlemen and ladies ready to be entertained. Malory as a young man is included by T.H. White in his book *The Once and Future King*.

In 1959 the Nobel prize-winning novelist John Steinbeck came to Somerset with his wife and started working on his modernised version of *Le Morte d'Arthur*.



He updated the Winchester version. Steinbeck lived at Redlynch near Bruton. The book was never quite finished; Steinbeck got as far as Sir Launcelot and the death of chivalry. It was only published in 1976 after Steinbeck's death. See: entry for Steinbeck, page 128. By all accounts Steinbeck, who discovered Arthur in his childhood, loved his time in Somerset. Scholars have even detected Arthurian themes in several of his books including *Cup of Gold*, *Tortilla Flat*, *Of Mice and Men*, and many other writings.

The Arthurian legends, however tenuously connected to Glastonbury, are now deeply embedded in the Somerset landscape. *Le Morte d'Arthur* captured many people's minds and the myths that it wove are still very pertinent today, not least within the range of psychological archetypes. Many books about Arthur and Guinevere can also be found in the shops of Glastonbury, where they conveniently nestle alongside crystals, spirit catchers, South American weavings and dusty Tibetan Buddhas.



3 THREE WISE MEN

THESE THREE WISE MEN were incredibly influential in their day. They had a major impact on the philosophy of science and ultimately on philosophy itself. The search for empirical truth was always on their minds and laid the foundation stone for the scientific approach and ideas that today we take for granted. Locke's ideas on tolerance of religious practice are still quoted.

Adelard of Bath c.1080–1150

MATHEMATICIAN, SCIENTIST AND TRANSLATOR / Born in Bath and lived in Bath

Adelard's father Fastrad was an important tenant of Giso, Bishop of Wells. The next Bishop of Wells was John of Tours, the King's physician, who moved the episcopal seat from Wells to Bath. He may well have sent the young Adelard to Tours to complete his education. Adelard then travelled widely on the Continent and became an outstanding medieval mathematician who translated some fundamental texts from the Arabic. One of these was *The thirteen books of Euclid`s Elements of Geometry*. Originally written in Alexandria around 300 BC, *The Elements* had been translated from Greek into Arabic in the eighth century AD. No Latin version from this time has survived, so the translation was a major contribution to western science and understanding. This was cutting edge and a fundamental step in the Renaissance of science. To make the translation Adelard, who was based at Tours, went to Cordoba and disguised himself as a Muslim student. Apart from Spain he also visited Italy, Sicily, Greece and Antioch.

Other important texts he translated were *The Astronomical Tables of Al-khwarizmi* as well as treatises on astrology, the abacus and astrolabe.

He also wrote several original works of his own in letter and dialogue form to his nephew. *Quaestiones Naturales (Natural Questions)*, *the De Eodem et Diverso (On the Same and the Different)* and a short treatise *On Birds*.

Adelard had settled back in Bath by 1122 and is known to have lived at Bath Priory. Adelard was the first European scholar of his time to venture into the world of Arabic scholarship. This was crucial not just for philosophy but for science as well. His translations were used extensively by Roger Bacon a century later.

Roger Bacon 1214–1294

PHILOSOPHER AND SCIENTIST / Born in Ilchester

Roger Bacon belonged to a family that later lost all their possesssions around Ilchester in the unsettled reign of Henry III. Bacon went to Oxford when he was 13 and developed a passion for mathematics and science. He lectured at both Oxford and Paris. Later he became a Franciscan friar and was well known as Doctor Mirabilis 'wonderful teacher'. He was attracted to the recently re-discovered works of Plato and Aristotle as well as to scientific ideas that filtered through from the Islamic world by way of Spain. Bacon then developed and advocated new theories of scientific knowledge. These theories, branching away from medieval alchemy,



astrology, superstition and dogma, placed much greater emphasis on taking down empirical evidence and using actual measurements. Bacon thus helped to lay the foundations of modern scientific method with hypotheses and objective observations.

His early works include *Opus Maius*, *Opus Minus* and *Opus Tertium*. In 1271 he wrote *Compendium Studii Philosophiae* which attacked clerical ignorance; this did not endear him to the authorities. He was constantly suspected of heresy and magic and was often placed under house arrest. He was even imprisoned by the Catholic Church in Paris for practising witchcraft and experimenting with gunpowder.

John Locke 1632–1704

Philosopher / Born Wrington, raised in Pensford

John Locke was born in his grandmother's cottage next to the north gate of Wrington church. His father was a Puritan attorney and clerk to the Justices of the Peace in Somerset. He came from Chew Magna and had served as a captain of cavalry in the Parliamentarian forces during the Civil War. On his mother's side Locke's family were Puritan tanners. John Locke grew up in Pensford and his education at Westminster School and Christ Church College, Oxford, was sponsored by Alexander Popham, who had been his father's colonel. A clear headed and original thinker, John Locke produced many interesting papers and propositions. In 1683 he fled to Holland after the Rye House Plot, using his time there very wisely. Upon his return he published some of his most famous works: an *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, which are still studied today. One of the foremost philosophers of his day, he helped to kick-start the Enlightenment movement of the 18th century. His writings influenced Voltaire and Rousseau as well as David Hume, Adam Smith and the slightly rebellious Founding Fathers of the United States. His writings concerned the nature of government, money, the rise and fall of interest rates, supply and demand, and the links between property and labour, as well as the nature of self and education: ideas that certainly influenced Karl Marx. Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy* devotes no less than 38 pages to Locke. A real tribute. John Locke was a close associate of the First Earl of Shaftesbury and like the Earl was very keen on experimenting with fruit growing. Locke died near Harlow in Essex.



To see: a statue in the porch of Wrington Church.

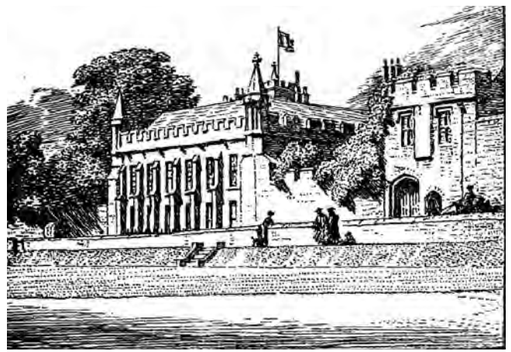
4 TWO HERBALISTS AND A LEG-STRETCHER

Exploring the natural world through the properties of plants and herbs was a direct result of the Renaissance and the uncovering of classical medical texts. Many learned men, including William Turner and Henry Lyte, were keen to classify these plants and more importantly to understand their healing properties. Travellers and voyagers to foreign parts were of particular interest as they were often able to bring back new varieties to stimulate debate and research. The 'leg-stretcher' was Thomas Coryate, who walked all the way to India in 1615 but died in Surat and so never returned to Somerset.

Dr. William Turner 1508–1568

Doctor and botanist / Dean of Wells

William Turner is often referred to as "the Father of English botany." As a medical doctor he saw the value in taking scientific observations, applying no doubt the philosophy of Roger Bacon. He was twice Dean of Wells in 1551–1554 and again between 1560–1568 under Edward VI and Elizabeth but was exiled under Mary. His *Herball* was written not in Latin but in English which was a great advance, and proved very useful to apothecaries. This predated Culpepper by about 60 years. *The Herball* gives names to many local plants which he grew in his garden at the Deanery in Wells. He advocated the therapeutic qualities of certain plants such as wormwood, feverfew and eye bright as well as the juice of the black poppy, ie opium. Turner also wrote a book on fishes and another on wine.



Henry Lyte 1529–1607

Herbalist and translator / Lived at Lytes Cary

Lytes Cary is in the parish of Charlton Mackrell, near Somerton. In 1577 Henry Lyte translated an important Dutch work, the *Cruydeboeck* of Rembert Dodoens (Antwerp, 1564) into English via the French edition. Lyte's translation of this book in 1578 was called *A Niewe Herball, or historie of plantes: wherin is contayned the whole discourse and perfect description of all sortes of herbes and plantes: their divers [and] sundry kinde*. It contains many



712 The sixth Booke of

Of the Peare tree. Chap. xlij.

The Kindes.

THere be diuers sortes of Peares, aswell as there be kindes of Apples, wherof some be rathe ripe, some haue a later riping, and some be winter Peares, some perish quickly, some last a longer time and may be wel kept: some be sweete and full of sap or iuyce, some fat and grosse, and some harde and drie, &c. So that it is not possible to recite all the kindes of Peares: wherefore we do adiuse the Readers to consyder the taste more then the proposition, or the time of the riping of Peares: for the taste doth best declare and giue notice of the qualities and temperature of Peares.

The Description. Pirus. The Peare tree.

THe Peare tree is as great or greater the the Apple tree, and higher, with a great body or stemme, and many great branches, the which for the most parte hao shute or mount vpright, a not one ouer another, as the branches of the Apple tree. The leaues be roundish, smoth, and bery greene aboue: but vnderneath most commonly they be whitish. The fruite for the most part is long, hode beneath, and narrowe, and harpe vpwarde towardes the stemme, bery diuers or cotrary, in colour, quantitie, proposition, and taste, as is aboue sayde. In the middle of the fruite there is a roare with kernels or pepplins, lyke as in the middest of the Apples.

The Place.

The Peare tree is planted in gardens and Orchardes: also it groweth sometimes in woods & wild vntoyled places, but they be none otherwyse esteemed, but as wildings or wild hedge Peares.

The Tyme.

The Peare tree flowreth in Aprill or May, and the fruite is ripe in sommer and Autumne.

The Names.

The Peare tree is called in Greeke Ἀπίδια, in Latine, Pirus: in Frenche, *Poirier*, in high Douch, Byrbaum: in base Almaigne, Peerboom.

The fruite is called in Greke Ἄπιον in Latine, Pirum, or as some do write Pyrum: in French, *Poyres* in high Douch, Byren: in base Almaigne, Peeren, in English, Peares.

The Nature.

All kindes of Peares are of a colde temperature, and the most part of them be

Peare illustration from page 712 of The Herball

pertinent observations and may well have been used by Shakespeare in his use of plant-lore in his plays. A copy of this book can be seen at Lytes Cary, which is now in the hands of the National Trust.

In the 17th century the garden at Lytes Cary was well known for having all possible kinds of fruit including 44 varieties of pear among them:

"The Antick Peare, the round green peare, the hundred pound Pear, the Capon Pear, the Sugar Pear, the Ruddick Pear, the Russett Sweatter, the Orrenge Peare, the Warden Pear, Pear pimpe, the Chesil or pear Nought, the Bishop's censor, the Weeten Peare, the great Kentishe Pear, the Norwich Pear, the Winsor Pear, Pear Bell, Pear Laurence, Pear Marwood, the Red Gennett, the Catherin Pear, the Bartholomew Pear, the Cary bridge Pear, the Somerton Pear an excellent pear ripe before Kingsdon's feast."

Of apples they had 'three score severall sortes, Plummes 15 divers kynde, Grapes 3 severall sortes, Cherries 1, Walnuts 3, Peaches 1, The almond tree, the Figg tree, the quines tree, The Barbary tree, the Cornishe berrie, the Philbert tree, the black bullies and the Sloe.'

These varieties were written down in 1618 by Thomas Lyte, Henry Lyte's son.

To visit: Lytes Cary, National Trust.

Thomas Coryate 1577–1617

TRAVEL WRITER / Born in Odcombe

Thomas Coryate, known as the 'Odcombe leg-stretcher' was an intrepid traveller who travelled throughout Europe and Asia on foot. He is credited with introducing the table fork and umbrella to England. For many years his leather shoes hung in Odcombe church. Today there is a carved replica of his shoes. He was one of the first travel writers; he brought back the story of William Tell and published the first version in English. Coryate belonged to the Mermaid Club, in Bread Street, London. Its members provided him with a mock passport before he



departed on his Eastern travels. He walked from Jerusalem to Agra via Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, a distance of about 3,300 miles arriving at the Moghul court in 1615. He then travelled very widely in India and died of dysentry at Surat, in Gujerat, near an East India Company factory.

To visit: Inside Odcombe church there is a replica of Coryate's shoes carved in hamstone by Eva Harvey, 2000.

