

# WILTSHIRE

## EMBELLISHED WITH A MAP AND VIEWS

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By  
John Britton F.R.S.



**Chapter 32 - Cricklade**

**HISTORICAL**  
**TOPOGRAPHICAL AND**  
**ANTIQUARIAN**  
**Sketches**  
**Of**  
**WILTSHIRE**

The topographical and antiquarian annals of a county, when carefully investigated and judiciously developed, are calculated to afford much rational amusement and instruction; and also to furnish many useful facts towards elucidating the political, biographical, and civil history of a kingdom.

**John Britton FRA**



## CRICKLADE



### Painting Samuel Owen

London: [1811]. A most attractive antique print - a view across the meadows to Cricklade. Etched by William Bernard Cooke (1778-1855) from an original study by Samuel Owen (1768-1857). Originally produced for Owen's first series of Thames views "The Thames" (London 1809-1811).

**C**RICKLADE IS A BOROUGH town situated in a flat tract of country on the southern bank of the river **Isis**, or **Thames**, which has its source not far from the town. Concerning the origin of this place much diversity of opinion has prevailed among antiquaries and historians. **William of Worcester** relates that it was formerly called **Chelysworth**, and constituted part of an ancient parish of that name, extending six miles in circumference .1 In a tract intituled **Historiola Oxoniensis**, it is affirmed that a University was established here by the **Britons**, over which several **Greek** philosophers presided; and that this seminary was afterwards translated to **Oxford** by the **Saxons**. The authenticity of this account, however, though confirmed; is some writers think by the etymology of the term **Cricklade**, they conceive to be a corruption for **Greeklade**, is regarded by **Camden**, **Stukeley**, and others, as a monkish fable, and altogether undeserving of credit; In this opinion

we fully coincide, but we are nevertheless satisfied that **Cricklade** is a town of great antiquity. **Stukeley** supposed it probable, that it was originally a **Roman** station, as the road which connected **Corinium** (**Cirencester**) with **Spinae** (**Spene**), runs through it. In the **Magna Britannia** it is stated on the authority of the **Red Book in the Exchequer**, that there formerly belonged to it 1300 hides of land, but the period to which the record refers is, not mentioned. This great extent of land most likely comprehended the whole hundred, which was entirely possessed, along with the manor by **Edmund de Langley, Earl of Cambridge, and Duke of York**. About the year 905, **Ethelwald** nephew and brother to **King Edward** the elder, pretending to dispute with that monarch his title to the throne, collected a large body of troops, chiefly **East Angles**, and advanced as far as **Cricklade** on a predatory excursion. Edward immediately marched to attack him but the prince withdrew with his spoil, before the royal forces could come up. From a MS in the **Bodleian Library**, it appears that **Canute the Dane**, also plundered this town in the year 1016.

**Cricklade** is a borough by prescription, and was formerly a populous and flourishing town, though it has shrunk now into a comparatively small one. It is governed by a bailiff, who is chosen annually at the **court-leet**, before the steward of the manor, and has a weekly market on Saturday, and several animal fairs. It first sent members to Parliament in the reign of **Edward I** and

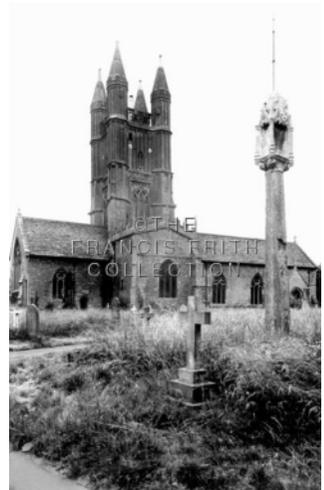


continued to do so with some intermissions till the time of **Henry VI** since which period the returns have been regular; but a change took place in 1784, in the right of voting at elections, which was before confined to residents within the borough, but is now enjoyed by the freeholders of the hundreds of **Cricklade, Highworth, Staple, Kingsbridge, and Malmsbury**. This extension of the elective franchise was the conse-

quence of repeated instances of venality and corruption, some of which are noticed in the note below.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest notice which occurs respecting the lordship of this town is in the ninth year of the reign of **Henry IV** when it appears that **Philippa**, the widow of **Edward, Duke of York**, left it to **Richard, Earl of Cambridge**, her husband's heir, she having held it in dowry, with other of his estates from the period of his death. In the reign of **Henry VI** it was in the possession of the **Hungerfords**; for in the seventh year of that monarch we find, that **Sir Thomas Hungerford** having obtained a licence, with that intention, made over the advowson of the **church of St. Sampson**, together with the reversion of the manor, adjoining the town, called **Abingdon's Court**, to the dean and canons of **Salisbury** for the repair of the spire of that noble edifice; and for the support of two priests to pray for the good estate of the king, **Sir Thomas** himself, and **Katharine** his wife their lives, avid for their souls after their decease. What family next obtained possession of it is uncertain, but at the commencement of the last century it was the property of **Neville Maskeleyne, Esq.** who sold it, in 1718, to **William Gore, Esq.** whose son and heir **Charles Gore, Esq.** conveyed it in 1762, to **George Prescott, Esq.** and he, the year following, to **Arnold Nesbitt, Esq.** This gentleman retained it till his death when he bequeathed it to **Paul Benfield, Esq.** from whom it was purchased by the late **Earl of Carnarvon**, in 1792. In 1811, the present Earl sold it to **Joseph Pitt, Esq.** present representative for the borough and hundreds therewith connected.

**The borough of Cricklade** is situated partly within the parish of Cricklade, St. Mary, and partly within that of **Cricklade, St. Sampson**, which together according to the population returns of 1811, contain 879 houses, and 1556 inhabitants. The town consists principally of one long street, in the centre of which stands the town house supported upon ten pillars.



From an inscription on the southeast side, this building appears to have been erected in 1569, when the town was probably much more extensive and important than at present. The places of public worship here are the parish **Churches of St. Sampson and St. Mary** and a Methodist chapel. **St. Sampson's** is a large, ancient church, built in the form of a cross, with a handsome tower in the centre, which rests upon four pointed arches. The summit is adorned by an open balustrade, and four angular pinnacles, with niches and pedestals. On the south side of the church is a chapel, now the entrance porch, which was built by one of the **Hungerford's**; and more to the east is another, surmounted by large battlements, and displaying in the centre, the figure of a lion couchant.

The north aisle, called **Widhill** aisle, belongs to the **Earl of Radnor**, who pays for keeping it in repair. The tower is elegant, and is open to a considerable height within, where it is ornamented with several shields of arms, among which are some charged with the bear and ragged staff; the cognisance of the **Earls of Warwick**, one of whom it is said contributed largely to the expense of building the structure. The only monument of note is a large slab of black marble, in memory of **Robert Jennor, Esq.** citizen and goldsmith of London, who founded the free-school here, and bestowed a variety of donations for other purposes. He also built eight almshouses in **Malmsbury**; and the church of **Marston Maysee**, in this county. He died ill 1651, aged 67. St. Mary's church is old, and, its tower is covered with ivy. It consists of a nave and two aisles, with a chancel. The arch between the latter and the nave is semicircular, with **zigzag mouldings**. In the cemetery belonging to this church, stands one of the **stone crosses anciently erected** in such situations to remind those going into church of the sufferings of the Saviour. It consists of a single stone. The top of the shaft is terminated by a cluster of niches, filled with sculpture. In the middle of the street is another **stone cross**, similarly ornamented.<sup>3</sup>

The only monastic establishment in Cricklade was an hospital dedicated to St. John Baptist. At what time it was founded is unknown, but it is mentioned early in the reign of **Henry III**. This house is supposed to have stood near the bridge over the **Isis**, and was under the government of a



**St. Mary's Church**

warden or prior. At the Dissolution, its revenues were valued at £4 10s, 7d. ob. per annum.

**ROBERT CANUTUS**, a writer of eminence, who lived in the twelfth century, was a native of **Cricklade**. He was at **Oxford**, and became chief of the canons of **St. Frideswide** in that

city. He wrote some comments both on the Old and New Testament; and formed a Collection from **Pliny's Natural History**, which he dedicated, under the title of "**The Garland**," to **King Henry II**.

About two miles north-east from **Cricklade** is the village of **Down-Ampney** where **Lord Eliot** has an ancient seat. The parish consists principally of fertile meadow land, skirting the banks of the **River Thames**; and through it runs a small stream, which **Leland** called "**Ampney brook**." This formerly divided the counties of **Wilts and Gloucester**; but the course of the current having been a little altered, an artificial boundary is now defined, and the gardens are thereby situated in the two counties.

By the **Domesday Survey** it appears that this manor, or lordship, belonged to **Rudolph de Todeni**, when that work was compiled; but it soon afterwards came into the possession of the, Crown. In 1250 it was the property of the **Villers family**, from whom it was purchased by, **Sir Thomas Hungerford**, the first constitutional speaker of the **House of Commons**. This gentleman obtained from **Richard II** the liberty of free-warren in this manor, A.D. 1385, and his descendants continued possessors of it till about the year 1645. In the time of **Henry VIII** **Down-Ampney** belonged to **Sir Anthony Hungerford**; who, to use the words of **Leland**, "hath here a faire house of stone."

The oldest part on the present mansion, with the "Gate-house" represented in the annexed plate, appear to have been built by **Sir Anthony**, as his arms, and some devices of that age, are carved in various places. On the wainscot of the great hall at present the kitchen, is the date of 1537.

Bridget daughter and heiress of **Sir Anthony Hungerford**, having married **Edmund Dunch, Esq.** afterwards created **Baron Burnel**, thereby conveyed **Dawn-Ampney** to another family: from whom it was purchased by **James Craggs, Esq.** secretary of state to **King George I.** This gentleman dying intestate, the present property became jointly vested in his three sisters, one of whom, married **Sir John H. Cotton, of Cambridgeshire**, and resigned **Down-Ampney** to her other sisters. These bequeathed it to the late **Edward Craggs Eliot, Lord Eliot**, from whom it descended to his son and heir, the present **Lord Eliot**. By this nobleman the mansion-house of **Down-Ampney** has been rendered a comfortable, though rather a small, family residence; and the grounds, plantations, and all the buildings on the estate, have been greatly improved.

Contiguous to the mansion is the **parish church**, the oldest part of which is said to have been built by the **Knights Templars**, to whom the impropriate tythes were granted by **Edward I** in the year 1260. The church consists of a nave, chancel, transept, and side ailes, with an embattled tower at the west end, crowned with an elegant spire. Under the window, in the south transept, is the tomb of **Sir NICHOLAS DE VILLERS**, and his lady, the statues of whom are represented beneath an "arch of the ogee form, which prevailed during the greater part of the fourteenth century, especially ill the tombs of the crusaders."<sup>4</sup> **Sir Nicholas**, who was much renowned for his martial achievements, accompanied **Edward I** in his wars in the Holy land, and is here represented as a crusader in mail and surcoat, with his legs crossed, his feet resting on a lion, and on his left arm is a shield, bearing the **cross of St. George**, charged with five scallop shells. Beneath the figure is an inscription in **Saxon** characters, which, though much mutilated, appears to have been in the terms:

"Hic jacet de Villers, qui obiit X ... die  
mensis Junii Anno Domini M CC L XXXXIII"

**POULTON, or PULTON** is a considerable parish, situated about two miles to the north of **Down-Ampney**. Though politically belonging to Wiltshire, it is environed by the county of **Gloucester**, and, according to

the parliamentary returns of 1811, contains sixty houses, and 305 inhabitants. This place, **Tanner** informs us, was the site of a **Gilbertine priory**, founded by **Sir Thomas de Sancto Mauro**, or **Seymour**, in the reign of **Edward III**. It was dedicated by him to the Virgin Mary, and annexed as a cell to the priory of **Sempringham**, in **Lincolnshire**. At the Dissolution, it contained a prior and three monks, whose revenues were valued at £20. 3s. 2d. These, with the site and buildings of the priory, were granted, 36 **Henry VIII**, to **Thomas Stroude**, **Walter Earle**, and **John Paget**. Leland who visited **Pulton** a few years before this event, remarks, concerning the priory, as follows:- "I noted a little beyond **Pulton village**, **Pulton priorie**, where was a prior and 2 or 3 Black Chanons with him: I saw in the waulles where the Presbyterie was 3 or 4 arches, where there were tombes of gentilmen: I think that there was byried sum of the Sainct Maurs; and of a surety, St. Maur, founder of it, was buried there.<sup>5</sup>

**HANNINGTON** is a small village and parish, situated about four miles to the east of **Cricklade**. According to the parliamentary returns of 1811, the parish then contained 87 houses, and 412 inhabitants. The village, which is built in the form of the letter Y, is extremely rural and picturesque in its appearance. **Hannington-House**, adjoining, the seat of ---- **Montgomery, Esq.** is a large respectable old mansion, with extensive and well wooded inclosures attached to it.

*\*1 Itinerary, p. 299. Chelysworth, or Chelworth Great and Little are now only Tythings in the parish of Cricklade, St. Sampson, and we do not find any other evidence, but that above stated, that either of them gave name to the parish.*

*\*2 In the year 1771, in consequence of the double return of John Dewar Esq. and Samuel Peach, Esq. petitions were presented by both parties, on consideration of which the House of Commons declared the election void. A new contest accordingly took place, when Mr. Peach was returned but Mr. Dewar again petitioned, and succeeded in obtaining a decision in his favour. At the general election in 1710, the three candidates were Paul Benfield, John Macpherson, and Samuel Petrie Esq. of whom the two former were returned. Mr. Petrie, however, presented a petition, the*

*substance of which was, that the two successful candidates had been guilty of gross and notorious acts of bribery and corruption and that the returning officer had evinced manifest partiality in the execution of his duty. In consequence of this the House of Commons appointed a committee on the 4th of January 1782, to investigate the matter. The committee thereupon reported that Paul Benfield esq. was duly elected, but declared the other two not, duly elected.*

*At the election next subsequent to this event the Honourable George Richard St. John and Mr. Petrie opposed each other as candidates, in the room of Mr. Macpherson, when the former having succeeded in his election, the latter offered a petition against him, but afterwards withdrew it. In 1784, Charles Westley Coxe and Robert Adamson Esquires, both in the anti-ministerial interest, having been returned in opposition to Mr. Heaneage and Robert Nicholas, who were attached to the administration, the two latter joined in a petition against the return. This came to be heard before a committee on the 14th of February 1785, when it appearing that upwards of a hundred votes had been evidently faggotted, and that the returning officer had been guilty of gross partiality towards the sitting members, the petitioners were declared duly elected, and took their seats accordingly. History of Boroughs, Vol. III.*

*\*3 See Britton's Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain, Vol. I. where will be found a concise dissertation on crosses, and representations of various examples, in England.*

*\*4 Lyson's Gloucestershire Antiquities, p. 3, and pl. VI.*

*\*5 Leland's Itinerary, Vol. II. p, 22.*

**Previous chapter 31 - Wooton-Basset**

**Next chapter 33 - Highworth**



**BRITTON, JOHN (1771-1857)**, English antiquary, was born on the 7th of July 1771 at Kington-St-Michael, near Chippenham. His parents were in humble circumstances, and he was left an orphan at an early age. At sixteen he went to London and was apprenticed to a wine merchant. Prevented by ill-health from serving his full term, he found himself adrift in the world, without money or friends. In his fight with poverty he was put to strange shifts, becoming cellarman at a tavern and clerk to a lawyer, reciting and singing at a small theatre, and compiling a collection of common songs. After some slight successes as a writer, a Salisbury publisher commissioned him to compile an account of Wiltshire and, in conjunction with his friend Edward Wedlake Brayley, Britton produced *The Beauties of Wiltshire* (1801; 2 vols., a third added in 1825), the first of the series *The Beauties of England and Wales*, nine volumes of which Britton and his friend wrote. Britton was the originator of a new class of literary works. Before his time, says Digby Wyatt, popular topography was unknown. In 1805 Britton published the first part of his *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* (9 vols., 1805-1814); and this was followed by *Cathedral Antiquities of England* (14 vols., 1814-1835). In 1845 a Britton Club was formed, and a sum of 1000 was subscribed and given to Britton, who was subsequently granted a civil list pension by Disraeli, then chancellor of the exchequer. Britton was an earnest advocate of the preservation of national monuments,, proposing in 1837 the formation of a society such as the modern Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments. Britton himself supervised the reparation of Waltham Cross and Stratford-on-Avon church. He died in London. on the 1st of January 1857.

Among other works with which Britton was associated either as author or editor are *Historical Account of Redcliffe Church, Bristol* (1813); *Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey* (1823); *Architectural Antiquities of Normandy*, with illustrations by Pugin (1825-1827); *Picturesque Antiquities of English Cities* (1830); and *History of the Palace and Houses of Parliament at Westminster* (1834-1836), the joint work of Britton and Brayley. He contributed much to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and other periodicals.

His *Autobiography* was published in 1850. A *Descriptive Account of his Literary Works* was published by his assistant T. E. Jones.

Wiltshire - Cricklade - John Britton

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