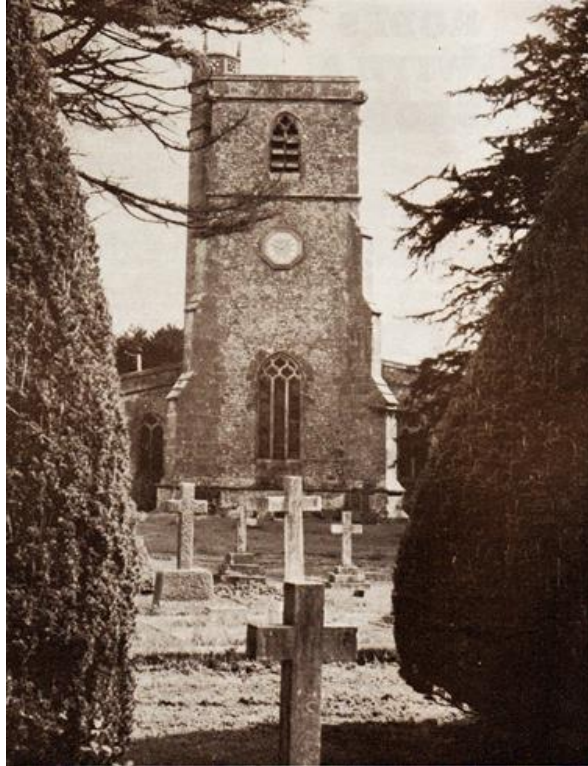


Maiden Bradley



Portrait of a Village

Maiden Bradley— a strange name, the origins of which seem to have been lost in time. It is possible that the first part of the name came about as the result of the endeavours of a certain Margaret Bisset, for it was that good lady who founded a hospital for leper maidens in the twelfth century, the remains can today be found a mile or so from the village on a site now occupied by Priory Farm. Of a Bradley we could find no trace.



Priory Farm

Approaching from the south, through the wooded hills that are all about, one first encounters the 14th century church, watched over by two proud yews standing sentinel in the churchyard. Not exceptionally outstanding from an architectural point of view, though set in pleasant surroundings, the church has a tall tower of which the turret has a graceful pierced parapet. Entrance is gained through an ancient nail-studded door with fleur-de-lys hinges, and immediately noticeable are the Jacobean box pews, each bench-end surmounted by a shell, that relieve the basic plainness of the interior.

The east window bears a picture of the conversion of Paul, who is seen lying on the ground beside his terrified horse, another rider struggles with his rearing horse, and men-at-arms are pressing around. Another window pictures harvesters watched over by angels. A third window is inset with fragments of glass from Burton Hall in Leicestershire, in memory of those who did not come back.

Perhaps the most striking possession of the church is a large and elaborate monument to Sir Edward Seymour, Speaker of the House of Commons in the reign of Charles II, by Rysbrack. Unfairly, perhaps, he is best remembered by many for the occasion when, at Charing Cross, his carriage broke down (the modern car is obviously not without its ancient counterpart). Alighting from this stricken vehicle, he stopped the carriage behind him and ejected the highly indignant owner, leaving him with the observation that he could hardly expect to ride while the Speaker of the House of Commons was walking. Sir Edward was, though, remembered for other things, not least his readiness to accept bribes for political services. Of him Macaulay once said : "It was strange that the haughtiest of human beings should be the meanest, that one who seemed to reverence nothing but himself should abuse himself for the sake of one quarter day".



Monument to Sir Edward Seymour

Our stay in the peaceful church, disturbed only by the occasional lorry rumbling uphill, came to a reluctant end, and we sallied forth into the village itself, through streets lined with houses old and charming, and came across a wayside fountain with water laid on by the Duke of Somerset in 1891. Inscribed on the fountain, above an age-darkened fox's head, were the words :

Drink, travellers, drink to Bradley's purest rill
Which, strange to say, runs quite a mile up hill;
Then to your panting steeds let all attend,
An honest horse is surely man's best friend.



The Fountain in the main street.

A little way from the fountain is the 17th century post office, first a private house and later an inn. The general stores are to be found behind ancient walls, its interior discernable through mullioned windows.

Maiden Bradley is also noted as being the birthplace of Edmund Ludlow, it was he who was a member of the court that tried King Charles the First, and one of the five who signed his death warrant. After his campaign in Ireland, Oliver Cromwell sent Ludlow there as second in command to General Ireton, on whose death Ludlow became Commander-in-Chief. When Cromwell became Lord Protector, Ludlow, as a refused to recognize such an office, and went into retirement. He was allowed to live in peace and remain unmolested, but left the country at the time of the Restoration. He died in exile in the year 1693, and his remains can be found in St Martin's Church at Vevay, near Geneva, where he is buried along with the four other Regicides,

Near the church are the remains of Bradley House, home of the Dukes of Somerset. Built about 1700 it was except for the present occupied wing, largely demolished in the early 19th century.



The crested gates of Bradley House, home of the Dukes of Somerset

We left the little village, one that like so many others has obviously seen better days, to its slumbers, certain in the knowledge that the passing of the years will see little change, and that if it were possible for us to return in a hundred years time we would find it just as it is today – a little settlement dozing quietly amongst the wooded hills around.



(Original source not recorded.)