

CHRISTCHURCH IN REVIEW

PAST

"A very inconsiderable poor place, scarce worth the seeing.

"It is situate and set in a desolate corner ...
..... a very poor town."

DANIEL DEFOE, 1753.

&

IN THE FUTURE

"It is not unwarrantable to dream of the future of Christchurch as a great and pleasant cathedral garden-city beside the sea visited by all the peoples of the Earth for its fragrance, its happiness and its charm.

DR. CONYERS MORRELL, 1940.

BROTHERHOOD ADDRESS

C.T. April 6, 1940

Dr. Conyers Morrell, Medical Officer of Health for the Borough, made a profoundly interesting address to the Post-War Brotherhood at the Town Hall on Sunday last.

Attempting to interest, as the speaker most modestly phrased his opening, "with a few of the more salient facts," he nevertheless proceeded to hold his audience with a panorama of the past of this our local town.

WHEN CHRISTCHURCH HAD "ONE SLAVE."

Commencing with the primitive citizens of Hengistbury Head, Dr. Morrell passed in review down the centuries; he dwelt upon the earliest record of a census, the Domesday Survey, carried out in 1086.

Christchurch then contained "31 messuages in the town, upon which a yearly tax of 16 pence was paid. There were 21 villeins, 5 borders and one slave, while the woodlands of Twinham contained three villeins and three ploughs." A total population of about 200 persons in all, with habitations principally consisting of mud and wattle dwellings in the vicinity of the monastery.

"A DESOLATE PLACE."

"It was not until some 500 years later," said the lecturer, "that we are able to form some idea as to the growth of the population.

Prior John Draper, petitioning against the suppression of his house, pleaded that the church was the parish church for the town and hamlets surrounding, wherein he stated were 15 or 16 hundred communicants.

"Taking into consideration the area from which these communicants were drawn, I am of the opinion that the population of the town then cannot have been more than 700 to 800 inhabitants.

A COVETED OFFICE.

"The town was then described as situate and set in a desolate place. In a very barren country out and away from all highways. It is in an angle or corner, where there are no woods nor commodious country about it, nor nigh any good town ... it is a very poor town and slenderly inhabited."

At this time Christchurch boasted as its public officers: A Reeve (possibly the Mayor), two constables, a bailiff, and an ale-taster."

"In 1579 some attempt appears to have been made to improve the property of the town by the establishing of the manufacture of Frizados (a species of coarse frieze cloth). John Hastings, who had introduced the industry from Holland, petitioned Queen Elizabeth that "whereas he had brought to perfection the making of Frizados and other commodities in the port town of Christchurch he might be enabled to settle and see these workes to contynue to the better maintenance of the inhabitants and the better upholding of the same towne."

Whatever the result of his petition may have been, it seems unlikely that it succeeded in bringing any considerable—or lasting prosperity "to the towne," since Defoe had written in his "Tour of Great Britain, 1753," "On my way to the sea" (from Wilts) he writes, "I came to the New Forest."

CHRISTCHURCH DISMISSED.

Ringwood he describes as "A large thriving place, full of good new brick houses, seated by the side of a great watery valley." He found Ringwood busy in dealing in leather, stockings, druggets and "narrow cloth."

When Defoe reached Christchurch, "I fear," said Dr. Morrell, "the ale-taster must have been very neglectful of his duties for Defoe continues: "As for Christchurch it is a very inconsiderable poor place, scarce worth the seeing, although it returns two Members to Parliament."

FIRST REAL CENSUS.

"The first real census of the population of England was taken in the year 1801, since when they have been regularly recorded at ten years intervals; consequently, said Dr. Morrell, "we are able to follow with precision the growth of the population of Christchurch from the commencement of the 19th century until the present day."

In 1801 the town contained 290 inhabited houses, occupied by 308 families, with a total population of 1,410 persons. 150 were engaged in land work and 420 in various trades and handicrafts.

A "MIDDLING" PAST.

The 1811 census showed that the inhabitants had risen in numbers to 1,553 persons, and by 1841 had further increased to 1,922 residents.

It was in this year that John McCulloch published his "Geographical Dictionary," and in it Christchurch is described: —

"The town," it says, "presents no symptom of activity or industry. No trade or manufacture is carried on. The houses are of a middling description, and the actual appearance of the inhabitants, who are thereby scattered, give no evidence of prosperity."

"The church," he continues, "was a collegiate one of the ancient Priory. There are also two Episcal Chapels, a Roman Catholic Chapel, a Dissenting ditto, a free school of uncertain foundation, educating ten boys, a National and Lancastrian School and several charities. There are two breweries in the town and the manufacture of watch springs employs a few hands."

Here then, said the lecturer, "is a picture of Christchurch as it was precisely one hundred years ago."

REAL ADVANCE.

It was, however, during the next 60 years that the population increased, with the result that at the census taken in 1901 there were 4,204 persons occupying 942 houses.

In 1912 an extension of the borough was brought about under the Christchurch Extension Order, 1911, whereby it came to include a part of the Christchurch Rural District, the effect of which was to increase the population by 949 persons and the area by 1,500 acres.

In 1932, by the County of Southampton Review Order, the borough was further extended to include the Parish of Highcliffe and part of the Parish of Hurn, while Hengistbury Head and part of the Harbour (in all 387 acres) was transferred to the Borough of Bournemouth.

The general effect of this was to increase the acreage of the borough from 2,352 acres to 5,688 acres, and the population was added to by 2,664 persons. The Rateable Value became increased by 35 per cent.

At the last census in 1931 the population was 10,928 persons (23 per cent, were children under 14, and there were 1,125 females to every 1,000 males). The average age being 33.5 years for men and 33.6 years for women.

TOWARDS 16,000.

"Since the census of 1931 a very considerable increase of population has occurred and from a very recent survey taken in connection with the National Registration it now appears that the total population of the borough is 15,488. From 1933 to 1937 534 houses, 589 bungalows, 65 flats, and 12 new shops have been erected."

BOROUGH'S HEALTH STEADILY IMPROVES.

The general health of the borough has in like manner followed a progressively improving scale.

To take one given example of a cause of mortality. In 1941 the death rate from tuberculosis was 7.5 (seven persons out of every 1,000). Thirty years later it had fallen to 5.2. In 1906 the rate fell to 0.8—less than one person from 1,000 dying from tuberculosis. Today it is less than 0.4!

"The infantile mortality rate, or the number of infants under one year of age dying annually out of every 1,000 born, is another valuable index of sanitary conditions. From 1896 to 1905 this rate for Christchurch was that 129 infants out of a 1,000 born died within the first year. Whereas during the past seven years, 1931 to 1938, the rate has fallen to 55 only—and as compared with 60 for England and Wales.

"A remarkable indication of the better care which Christchurch mothers now take of their babies and of the much improved sanitary circumstances in which they are reared."

As late as 1871 there were no houses in the borough which had either main water supply or main sewerage. In 1901, 34 per cent. were still dependent upon well water.

IN 1899.

Let me take you back for a moment to the closing years of the last century.

"So serious was the insanitary condition of the town of Christchurch at that time that in the year 1899 the Medical Department of the Local Government Board sent a commission to the town to report upon its sanitation.

"It was found that out of every 900 inhabited houses, no less than 575 were supplied with water from a well, almost all of which were found to be either actually polluted or liable to serious pollution.

A FEARFUL PICTURE.

"The High Street well and pump was found to be largely polluted by sewage and totally unfit for drinking or other domestic purposes. . . . There was no regular system of drainage, and sewage liquid wastes and excreta were freely and carelessly deposited on gardens. The children of the National Schools (380 of them) drank water obtained from shallow wells, in which were broken crockery and pots and other domestic refuse, and frogs and toads, alive and dead.

"The incidence of typhoid and fevers was high, and the only surprising thing is that it was not higher.

"By the unremitting efforts and well considered policies of the Council, and through the assiduous labours of their technical advisers and borough officials, and by the loyal co-operation of the borough's employees, all this is past.

"In this short talk I have tried to tell you of the growth and health of your town from its humble and holy origin some thousand years ago to its present position as a fair-sized residential town and health resort.

"Little to-day remains, but a few picturesque stories of the once proud castle of Twinham, which dominated the valleys and from whose Keep flaunted the emblazoned banner of De Redvers.

"No longer exist the beautiful monastic cloister of John Draper and his Canons, levelled long ago at the evil will of a despotic and rapacious Prince.

"The ages pass, yet in manifold ways the mystic essence of Time still stands.

"The high courage, the dauntless temerity of Twinham's steel-harnessed warriors who long ago defended the castle . . . conjures pictures of to-day of the battle-clad sons of Christchurch, who go forth to defend your town; while the fraternal spirit of the kindly friars who once walked these streets . . . manifests itself in full virility in the many beneficent activities and in particular the benevolent aims of your Christchurch Brotherhood.

THE FUTURE.

"When Peace once again reigns on Earth, Christchurch, on account of its many facilities for healthful living, industry and recreation, and on account of its exceptional opportunity for housing development, must inevitably increase in population in wealth and prosperity.

"It is not unwarrantable to dream of the future of Christchurch as a great and pleasant garden-city beside the sea, visited by all the peoples of the Earth for its fragrance, happiness and enduring charm."

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- messuage** a dwelling house and its adjacent buildings and the adjacent land used by the household.
drugget a heavy felted fabric of wool or wool and cotton, used as a floor covering.
villein (in medieval Europe) a peasant personally bound to his lord, to whom he paid dues and services, sometimes commuted to rents, in return for his land.