

The Christchurch That Might Have Been Industries Which Spelt Prosperity Allowed To Go Town That Now Lives In The Past

Christchurch has often been referred to as "the town which lives on its past," and during the summer, despite the somewhat freakish weather experienced, thousands of visitors again invaded the town, attracted by its wealth of historic interest, and among them was the usual influx of Americans.

But daily now visitors are diminishing in number, bearing out the statement that the town lives on its past. It is really without an industry, unless the salmon fishing and farming be classified in that category; This, however, has not always been the case. Christchurch had had flourishing industries, and if the wishes of certain men in days gone by had been fulfilled it might easily have become a big and prosperous town.

Christchurch has never enjoyed much prosperity. It appears that there was no special industry in early times, although the salmon fisheries must have given occupation to many persons and are reputed to have at one time produced nearly £1,000 yearly.

The Christchurch Hundred was in 1538 described as "having no goods or commodious country, nor nigh no good towne, but only the sad poor towne of Christchurch, which is a very poor towne and slenderly inhabited."

A "DYING" INDUSTRY.

The reign of Queen Elizabeth witnessed the establishment in the "decaied towne" of Christchurch by John Hastings of the manufacture of "frizadoes after the manner of Harem, for which he obtained a patent in 1569. It is said that this patent was essentially for dyeing and finishing cloth and was supported by the Dyers' Company. The fabric produced by Hastings was generally exported to Spain and Portugal.

Hastings, who had introduced the industry from Holland, saw quite a future for it in Christchurch, and petitioned the Queen that whereas "with great charge, cost and travails" he had set up and brought to perfection the making of frizadoes and other commodities in the port town of Christchurch he might be enabled to settle and see these works continue to the better maintenance of the inhabitants and the better upholding of the same town." But the Queen was not impressed, and the idea came to nought.

In the reign of Charles II., the Earl of Clarendon, who owned the Manor, was anxious to improve the town, and was bent on making the Avon navigable from Salisbury to Christchurch. An Act for the purpose was actually secured, but was not put into effect.

EMPTY DREAMS.

At this time there was a man who dreamed great dreams in respect of Christchurch. His name was Andrew Yarrington, and he reported the place as being convenient for building ships, and suggested an outlay of £2,000 upon a port to prevent landings, but nothing was accomplished in this direction either.

As a harbour Christchurch has, of course, been of little value, being practically inaccessible except to vessels drawing but little water.

The presence of ironstone in the Christchurch cliffs attracted the enterprising Yarrington who wrote in 1687 that it seemed to him

"the King might have all his iron made and guns cast at very cheap rates."

At a later date hundreds of tons were sent out by the Hengistbury Mining Company. When the removal of the ironstone was found to be increasing coast erosion by destroying the natural breakwater on the beach it was no longer allowed to be shipped.

[Reference to this fact was made at an inquiry at Bournemouth last week, reported in these columns.]

Septaria for cement making was also dredged from various parts of Christchurch Bay.

The value of the Christchurch fisheries was fully recognised in the thirteenth century, and the catches included salmon, whitefish, lampreys and eels. The lamprey fisheries were still active in the fifteenth century. To-day Christchurch has still a big reputation for its salmon, which are taken with nets, although the past season, as shown by figures printed recently, has been a bad one.

FORMER HOSIERY TOWN.

The knitting of silk stockings and also gloves was once a thriving industry in the town, and it is on record that in 1799 many women were thus employed at 4s. a week.

The most important industry, however, was the manufacture of fusee-chains for watches and clocks, introduced by Robert Cox, who at the end of the eighteenth century was giving employment to a large number of women and children in the three factories devoted to it. The goods were exported to far parts of the world. Also young women were engaged in straw plaiting.

But to-day all these industries with the exception of the salmon fishing, are things of the past. Although big development improvements are being undertaken in Christchurch, which is growing rapidly, it is doubtless chiefly on its past that it will continue to thrive