by Marjorie P. Lane.

To the Staff of the
Monmouth First Aid Post.

THE BARTON

1 Agincourt Square, Monmouth

BARTON is an old Northumbrian word derived from *bere* (barley) and *tun* (enclosure), meaning the demesne or courtyard belonging to the manorial estate which was not, however, necessarily attached to the manor itself.

The Barton, Agincourt Square, Monmouth, which comprised the buildings and ground behind the shops on the left of Church Street as one leaves St. Mary's Church, at the junction of street and square, has had a long and chequered history.

Among the old archives is a grant from Henry IV., as Lord of the Manor, to the Burgesses of Monmouth, which runs thus:

> "that the brewers of ale there, who were anciently held to pay to the King's ancestors and progenitors eight gallons of ale at every brewing, in the name of Castle Coule, during the time of the king or his heirs, dwelling in the said town, should now pay in lieu thereof ten-pence each brewing, except when the king, his heirs, or his councils holding his session there, were present in the said town in which case the ancient custom of Castle Coule should be observed."

The above brief grant confirms the fact that Henry IV. was Lord of the Manor, so that at one time in its history the Barton may have had some connection with the Castle.

Its history, however, may be traced to an earlier date than the reign of Henry IV., which covered rather more than the first decade of the fifteenth century for, with the exception of Monnow Bridge, built in 1270, it is, according to the deeds, one of the oldest buildings in Monmouth. Unfortunately its earliest records are lost, and we can only retrieve with any attempt at accuracy the history of three hundred and sixteen years. Its first existence was probably, as the name suggests, in the form of stables, granaries and outbuildings belonging to the Lord of the Manor.

AT one period in its history the back portion of the building where the V.A.D.s had their headquarters, was an inn known as the "Dolphin," which later changed its name to the "Golden Ball." At this time every third house in Monmouth was an inn. The number of these establishments was due, no doubt, to the markets, to which people came from miles around. Here also was a stopping-place for barges coming up the river. In those days public houses kept open to any hour of the day or night, which usually meant all day and all night, as travellers were constantly arriving.

This little corner of the Square must then have been the scene of great activity, for not only was it close to the markets, then held in the Square, but just opposite, approximately on the site now occupied by Messrs. Woolworth's stores, was the bull-ring This sport was among the favourite pastimes of the townspeople, and on bull-baiting days it was dangerous to allow children out of doors, owing to the riotous merrymaking of the onlookers and the ferocity of the bulls.

Outside the "Dolphin" would be the usual penthouse where the farmers stored their grain on market days, and for which the landlord would measure out as payment so much grain from each sack in a wooden measure. The houses were built with the first floor projecting three feet in front, to which the penthouse was built, and the market being held in the open Square, these penthouses were to be found all round, right along Church Street and Whitecross Street as far as Somerset House, then called "The Labour in Vain," which exhibited a sign depicting a white man trying to wash a black man white.

MARKET days must indeed have been busy for the "Dolphin," for from dawn until midday the place was a scene of continual uproar, as some five hundred horses laden with produce, grain or wool, came clattering into the town. A single horse usually carried one bag of grain, measuring four bushels, five horses twenty bags, which equalled two tons five cwt. The inns provided rough sheds where the farmers could stable their horses for a halfpenny per horse. Until 1755 the roads were too narrow to allow such a large and cumbersome vehicle as a waggon to pass along them.

At midday, dressed in their best drab cloth coats, velveteen waistcoats, corduroy breeches, and often wearing blue worsted boot-stockings instead of boots, the farmers would adjourn to the inns to eat their 1d. or ½d. cake, drink their pint of ale or cider, discuss the present day events and gather local gossip. The "Dolphin," like the other inns, would brew its own ale, and the soft water for the brewing would be bought at the rate of

6d. the half hogshead. The water of the Wye was put in barrels and delivered by a one-horse dray. The farmers' wives in their fur hats or mob caps, cotton dresses and coarse aprons, would put their cheese, butter and other produce on chairs brought out by the shopkeepers and placed beneath their overhanging windows so that some protection was afforded from sun and rain. Their favourite haunt was probably Church Street, then Butchers' Row, where the burly butchers carried on their business. The poultry market was held beneath the projecting fronts of the houses on the west side of the market place, the poultry being displayed on two long trestles placed there by the beadles.

Life was hard and simple for the countryfolk of that time, and coming into town a difficult and sometimes impossible journey owing to the awful condition of the roads. Even the streets of the town were little better than ditches. Monnow Street was as deep as a horse's back, with wells each side of the footpath, from which the residents drew their water, and a horse carrying a pair of panniers could scarcely make its way along it owing to its narrowness, In 1726 it was improved and acknowledged to be passable. Church Street, then the Cheapside of Monmouth, was also too narrow and far too muddy to admit a waggon, and railings were placed to prevent the shoppers from falling into the slush. Church Street owed its improvement to Sir John Stepney, M.P., who in 1767 altered it at his own expense. In compliment to him it was called Stepney Lane.

IN the reign of Henry VIII. the construction of pavements caused great excitement. The roads, too, were improved, and the "Dolphin," a busy inn in a busy corner of the town, changed its name to the "Golden Ball." In time this was pulled down, and a town house, with a lovely garden attached, stood in its stead. This, too, had its day, and in 1624 another was erected which became the town house of Mr. Roberts, of Drybridge, a member of an old Monmouth family who have lived at Drybridge for several centuries. Upon the eaves of the roof was carved the date, 1624. It may still be seen if you look high enough. It was then a black and white timbered house with diamond-pane windows. Waugh, in his little *Guide to Monmouth* (c. 1875-8) gives us a good description of the house:—

"At one time the stranger to Monmouth was continually reminded of its great antiquity by various erections of an early date, the last 40 or 50 years have, however, played sad havoc with these interesting memorials of the middle ages Before modern innovations, Mr. Coates's house in the "Bull

King" was generally admitted to be the best example of old domestic architecture in the town. The date 1624 is comparatively late; but the *tout ensemble*, consisting of high-pitched gables, highly ornamented barge-board, octagonal shaped windows with carved scroll work, superb brackets and sculptured medallions, affords even now an interesting study to the collector of old materials."

IN 1807 the property was owned by Mr. William Addams Williams. Then for close on one hundred years it was an ironmonger's shop. In 1816 Joseph Coates appears to have had the front portion, and in 1827 obtained the back premises in the Barton, which afterwards became the Red Cross headquarters. In 1849 Mary Coates was carrying on business there, and was followed by her son, Joseph, who was Mayor of Monmouth in 1877.

In 1882 Mr. W. Honeyfield bought the premises from Joseph Coates. Later it was taken over by his sons, W. & J. Honeyfield, who also carried on as ironmongers. In the top floor of the building were stored the masks and torches used in the torchlight processions. It was Mr. Honeyfield who had the present bridge built from the front, connecting the shop with the offices.

In 1900, when King George V. and Queen Mary, then Duke and Duchess of York, came to visit Monmouth and stayed at the Hendre, the extra baths required for the visit were painted at Mr. Honeyfield's. The petrol for the car in which the Hon. Charles Rolls took them on their first motor drive from Monmouth to Chepstow was stored at the same shop in two gallon tins. Mr. Honeyfield was Mayor from 1891 to 1895. He retired from business in 1916 when the premises were taken over as a bootshop by Messrs. Cash & Co. During the last war, 1914—1918, it was used as the Y.M.C.A., with the Red Cross headquarters as a carpenter's shop.

IN 1931 the Wye Valley Arts Club took up its abode in the Barton. The dirty, dilapidated warehouse and carpenter's shop were completely transfigured, though still in keeping with its period. Its white walls and tiny windows were brightened by gaily-coloured shutters designed by Mrs. Marcus Holmes, depicting fifteenth century scenes. Here, for seven years, local talent was fostered, and expressed in practical form its love and appreciation of art and drama. Exhibitions were held, plays

and concerts produced, and stimulating lectures delivered. The architecture of the fifteenth century made an agreeable background to twentieth century art.

In 1937 the Arts Club was unfortunately dissolved. The Barton awaited further changes.

The British Red Cross Society took it over, and on January 20th, 1938, its new local headquarters were opened by Dame Beryl Oliver, D.B.E., R.R.C. The room was little altered: only its old walls and timbered roof must have watched with wonder as the plays often enacted on its stage gave place to First Aid demonstrations. The beautiful pictures which had from time to time hung on its walls were replaced by black and white anatomical charts. The lectures were no longer on the arts, but on the mind and body of man. Day by day to these lectures came young women in neat navy blue uniforms, efficient, eager and ready to help humanity in her day of pain and suffering.

1939 DAWNED with peaceful days, then grew ever more restless as it drew near the brink of unknown terrors, till suddenly, throughout the world, the cry of war called us to arms, to sacrifice and greater service. Monmouth must be prepared, her nurses, her A.R.P. services, they must become more eager to equip themselves for their ministry to their fellow-citizens in the horrors of war. The Barton became a scene of greater activity still, more lectures and still more lectures for the increasing number of members who were enrolling.

A Friday night in the Summer: the sirens wail their summons to duty. We all go to our posts. Overhead a few big bombers pass on their destructive course. 3 a.m.: the night is rent, not only by the drone of planes, but also by ghastly explosions, crashing glass, tumbling bricks — Bombs. — What damage has been done? Four casualties are brought to the First Aid Post at the Monmouth Hospital. One of these lived at the Barton.

Other members of the Staff arrive with murmurs of Agincourt Square, flying glass and clouds of dust. No time for inquiries now: our help is needed, our skill is put to the test.

5 a.m.: We have done our best to help; casualties have been attended to, sent home or made comfortable in a hospital bed: now we hear what damage has been done.

The Barton has been bombed. Its walls are shattered, the Red Cross headquarters is a heap of dust and mortar.

So the Barton turns yet another page in its history.

What does the next page hold?

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