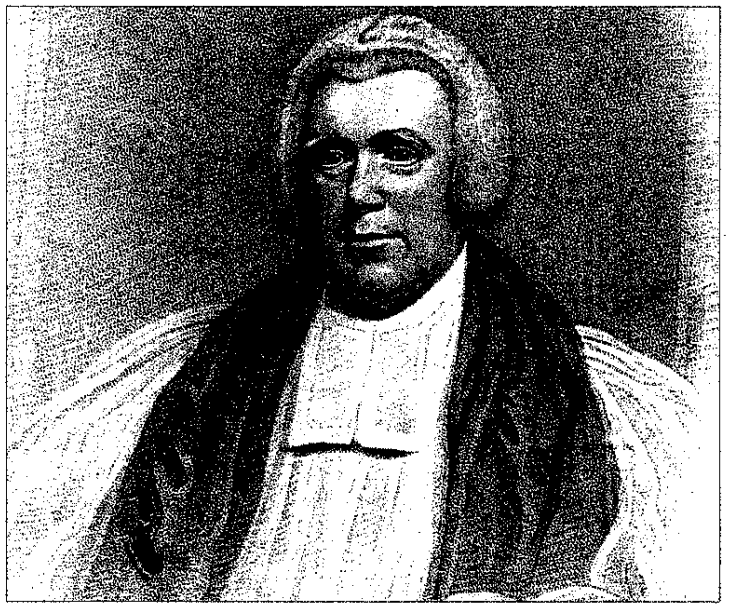
Follies and Fossils : Bishop Law and his circle

Michael Poole

(A revised and shortened version of a lecture given to the Society on 9th November, 2001)

The Right Reverend George Henry Law, Doctor of Divinity, Fellow of the Royal Society, and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, is not one of the best-remembered of Somerset's bishops. No cathedral-builder like Jocelin, no dispenser of water like Bekynton, and assuredly no saint like Thomas Ken, he played little part in affairs of state. Law was emphatically no Thomas Wolsey or William Laud. Yet, at a time of great change, both in the English Church and in the life of the country, he made a not insignificant impact on the city of Wells and on the communities around it. He deserves rehabilitation.



George Henry Law, after Sir William Beechey, R.A.

In many ways Law remained an eighteenth-century figure in a nineteenth-century world. Born in 1761, he proceeded from Charterhouse School to The Queens' College at Cambridge, where he graduated as Second Wrangler and Senior Chancellor's Medallist. After a brief spell as a fellow of his college, various clerical appointments followed in quick succession – a prebendal stall at Carlisle (where his father was bishop) and parochial charges in Cumberland, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. In 1812, through the influence of his brother the Lord Chief Justice, and the personal favour of the Prince Regent, he was nominated to the see of Chester. Twelve years later, on the death of Bishop Richard Beadon, the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, honoured a long-standing pledge to appoint Law to a more generously-endowed see. So Law was translated to Bath and Wells, and stayed here until he died. There is evidence that the bishop himself requested the translation.

At Chester, and later in his new diocese, Law played a prominent part in a revival of diocesan life which Arthur Burns has identified recently as pre-dating the Oxford Movement and the Government-inspired Church reforms of the 1830s and 1840s. Small livings were augmented, churches and parsonage-houses improved, and attempts made to abolish the system of pew-rents. In Somerset, a Church Building Society was started, a Curates' Fund launched, and efforts made to improve standards in Church schools. The office of rural dean was revived, having been in abeyance since the seventeenth century.

November 1830 saw a change of Government in Britain with the fall of the First Administration of the Duke of Wellington and the rise to power of the Whigs with Earl Grey as Prime Minister. The Whigs were committed to the reform of Parliament, and set about drafting bills to effect change. Most of the bishops had been appointed by earlier Prime Ministers, and were strongly Tory in sympathy. They therefore opposed the projected measures in the House of Lords and played a big part in defeating the reform programme. Twenty-one bishops (among them Law) voted against the passing of the reform bill in October, 1831. Only two supported it. Anti-episcopal feeling ran high throughout the country and the bishops suffered a number of indignities. Law himself was threatened by a mob who threw stones at his carriage when he consecrated a new church. When rioters attacked the cathedral and bishop's palace in Bristol, Law became seriously

alarmed and ordered the raising of the drawbridge over the Palace moat in Wells – the last time this was done with serious intent. So agitated indeed did Law become that he rented a house in Torquay for six months, to flee from the populace at Wells and wait out the expected insurrection. But eventually the bishops gave way, more especially when William IV threatened to swamp the House of Lords with a sufficient number of new peers to ensure the safe passage of the reform measures.

During his time at Chester Law had been much exercised by the need for an adequate supply of clergy for his widespread and populous diocese, which at the time included the growing towns of Liverpool and Manchester. Oxford and Cambridge were geographically remote in what was still a pre-railway age, and their colleges were too expensive for many prospective ordination candidates. Trinity College, Dublin, and the Scottish universities were equally unsuitable, if not more so. So Law decided to start a college of his own. The result was St. Bees College, in Cumberland, which offered a two-year course for non-graduates. *The Gentleman's Magazine* politely patronised the new venture, and Wordsworth embalmed the college in verse:

> "Oh, may that power who hushed the stormy seas,
> And cleared a way for the first Votaries,
> Prosper the new-born College of St. Bees."

In view of the success of his earlier undertaking it is not perhaps surprising that Law should be anxious to promote a somewhat similar establishment in his new diocese. Wells Theological College opened in 1840. In several important ways the new college differed from the one in Cumberland. From the start, all students were to be graduates. The course lasted for one year instead of two. There was none of the boarding-school atmosphere and arrangement that characterised St. Bees. Indeed, there seems to have been only one college rule – no smoking in the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral on Fridays during Lent. The social *ethos* at Wells was quite different from that at the other college. In the first ten years at Wells there were six younger sons of peers and one heir to a baronetcy. At least a fifth to a quarter of early students, it has been estimated, had some aristocratic or gentry connection.

Not everyone approved of the new venture. Some bishops believed that colleges like this at Wells encouraged effeminacy or Tractarianism (perhaps

both), and many heads of college at Oxford and Cambridge refused to give testimonials to men proposing to spend a year at Wells, which they saw as an implicit criticism of their own institutions and the instruction they gave. But despite these initial prejudices, the college at Wells succeeded in establishing itself on a sound footing, and in playing a distinguished part in English Church life for nearly a century and a half.

Wells Theological College can fairly be regarded as a pioneering undertaking. The college at Chichester, established some five months before the one at Wells, was too recent a foundation to serve as a prototype. St. Bees, as we have seen, was established on quite different lines. Durham was a university from the start. King's College in the Strand soon became a part of the newly-founded University of London. University College (The Godless College in Gower Street) was awash with Benthamites and Utilitarians, while St. David's College at Lampeter became a kind of embryo Welsh university, granting its own degrees.

Throughout his life Bishop Law was an enthusiastic antiquarian and archaeologist. Soon after his arrival in Wells the bishop turned his attention to The Palace, his principal place of residence. Imbued with the "romantick" notions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Law set about demolishing the southern and eastern walls of Bishop Burnell's Great Hall in order "to make a more picturesque ruin." With help from the architect John Buckler the bishop also repaired the Palace Chapel and converted Bishop Jocelin's *garderobe* into a study. A museum of mineralogy and fossils was established in the Undercroft. This museum, probably the first ever to be established in Wells, was started in 1826, and was superintended by two of the clergy of the diocese, Richard Warner and John Skinner. The latter took much the more active part. It was at Skinner's suggestion that the pillars and vaulting of the Undercroft were coloured to imitate freestone. The windows were filled with stained glass of his own design, to each of which he affixed Latin rhymes having allusion to the name of Law. One example must suffice:

Bonorum nostrum opifex,	(Designer of our property,
Dat et dabit sua Lex.	the Law donates, and will donate, its own.)

The collection comprised pottery, coins, glass, tesserae and stalactites. Many of the specimens came from Banwell. A Mr. Mead of Chatleys, near

Frome, sent a large hamper full of fossils, while the Reverend Benjamin Richardson of Farleigh Hungerford contributed some pieces of armour and "a monastic coffin" dug up at Hinton Charterhouse. With the permission of the Dean and Chapter the cathedral was ransacked "for the appropriation of any of its contents which were of no value".

The contents of Law's museum seem to have been dispersed when the bishop died, but it is possible that some of the specimens survive in the collections of the modern museum.

Bishop Law was an early pioneer in the appreciation and preservation of ancient glass. Early in the century he apparently acquired at auction in London what has been described as "a wagon-load" of glass from a church at Rouen. Some of this glass can still be seen in the Cathedral and The Palace at Wells, as well as at St. Cuthbert's Church. More "Law" glass is to be found in the Church of St. Nicholas and St. Mary, Stowey, some ten miles from Bristol, in the bishop's summer residence at Banwell, and in the east window of Weston-super-Mare Parish Church.

For centuries the manor of Banwell was an important possession of the bishopric of Bath and Wells. The chance discovery (or rather re-discovery) in 1824 of a large cavern on the hillside containing the bones of bison, reindeer, bears and wolves encouraged Law to build a small summer retreat, of *cottage orné* design, as a place of escape from Wells. The bishop believed that the discovery of so many animal remains was irrefutable proof of the reality of Noah's Flood, and he encouraged visitors to the site to inspect his finds. William Beard, a local farmer, dubbed "Professor" by the bishop, was employed to superintend the arrangements and to act as guide.

Life at Banwell was clearly more agreeable than residence in Wells, and Law increasingly spent more and more time away from his cathedral city. The bishop, aided by one of his sons, laid out gardens and grounds covering some seven acres. It seems that Law's original intention was to provide a public park for the people of Banwell, but to this day the estate is still in private possession.

Scattered around the little estate are several architectural follies which Law caused to be erected – a Druids Temple, The *Osteoicon* (a kind of ossuary), a Prospect Seat, and a gothic (or rather gothick) Summer House

covered in pebbles rifled from the beach at Weston-super-Mare. Local people were paid so-much a bucketful for bringing them over to Banwell from Anchor Head. Crowning the hill is The Tower, built in 1840 of local blue lias with Bath stone quoins.

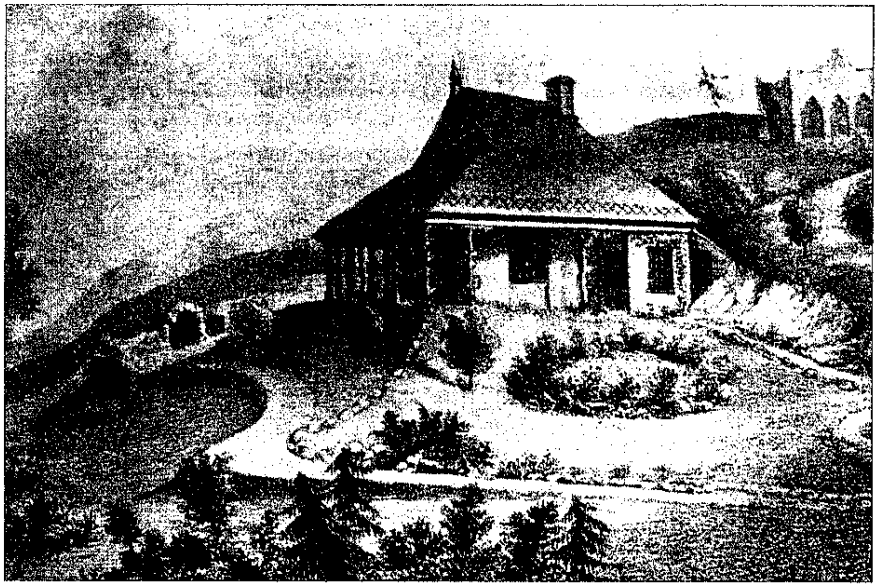
Several of the Banwell follies bear small plaques inscribed with rhymes encouraging the reader in the Christian way of life. One example must suffice:

> "Here let the scoffer of God's holy word
> Behold the traces of a deluged world.
> Here let him learn in Banwell Cave to adore
> The Lord of Heaven, then go and scoff no more."

The authorship of these edifying verses has been much debated. Perhaps the most likely candidate is the Reverend William Lisle Bowles, Vicar of Bremhill in Wiltshire. *The Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as divine, poet and antiquary, which sums him up pretty well. A product of Winchester and of Trinity College, Oxford, Bowles had been a chaplain to the Prince Regent before his appointment to a residentiary canonry at Salisbury. Bremhill abounds in verses of Bowles's composition, which appear on gravestones in the churchyard and elsewhere in the village. They are highly reminiscent in style of the pieties to be found at Banwell. Bowles was a close friend of the bishop and is known to have visited The Caves on a number of occasions.

Mary Elton of Clevedon Court made a visit to The Caves in 1837 and described her experience with humour and a little scepticism:

> "Little tallow dips lighted us down the steep and slippery stairs, and we splashed about, and the water dripped on our bonnets, and we listened to the guide, and stared at the bones. The cave was extremely wet and dirty owing to the rains, but well worth seeing, the bones being in such immense quantities. My bone was a buffalo's – how Rob's bone was transformed into such I do not know, but suspect a worthy cow or some such thing expired.... We had a fatiguing walk to Mr. Beard's cottage, the discoverer of the bones, who is a character, and has jokes and witticisms ready for all visitors.... He is a funny little man and made much of a wonderful collection of elephants' bones...."



Ornamental cottage on Banwell Hill erected by Bishop Law (from John Rutter's Delineations of the North-Western Division of the County of Somerset and of the Mendip Caverns, *1829.)*

Bishop Law was a frequent visitor to Weston-super-Mare, where his son, the Archdeacon of Wells, was Rector. He usually stayed at Claremont Lodge, a fine Regency-style mansion with views across the Channel. Together with the Lords of the Manor of Weston, the Smyth-Pigotts of Brockley Hall, the Law family played a major part in transforming a small fishing village into a leading holiday resort. The Smyth-Pigotts laid out streets, planted the woods on the hillside and supervised the rebuilding of the tower and nave of the Parish Church. The archdeacon extended the church, caused schools to be built, provided a site for a town hall, and paid for its erection. Plans were made for the division of the ancient parish, which prepared the way for new churches. Ellenborough Park and Crescent were named after Lord Ellenborough, one of the bishop's sons, a former Governor-General of India and First Lord of the Admiralty. But the Laws' crowning glory at Weston is unquestionably the great east window given to the Parish Church from the bishop's apparently inexhaustible supply of glass. Contemporaries valued it at £500 – an enormous sum for a single window in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Weston-super-Mare Parish Church

A panel in the window presented by Bishop Law, reproduced in Freda Derrick's Gothic Wanderings in Somerset, *(1930), in which a late twelfth or early thirteenth century Flemish provenance is proposed. Woodforde however suggests that the glass is not medieval, but designed in the early part of the nineteenth century in the style of the thirteenth century. It is the lettering that first shows up the date.*

One of Bishop Law's most attractive qualities was a sincerely-held wish to alleviate the hardships of the poor. Originally a staunch Whig, he appears with the passing of time to have become increasingly conservative. Tory paternalist probably best describes his outlook as Bishop of Bath and Wells. In June, 1833 he found himself at odds with some of his episcopal brethren in his support for the Duke of Richmond's Bill to provide public relief for distressed agricultural labourers. Later, when the Great Western Railway Company built its line through his diocese, Law licensed missionaries to minister to the navvies, an arrangement that earned him a rebuke from a former Head Master of Shrewsbury, now Bishop of Lichfield, on the

grounds that his plan would lead to an itinerant conventicle system for which there was no canonical authority.

At a more practical level, Bishop Law has some claim to be regarded as the originator of the horticultural allotment. For thirty years he had rented small parcels of land to the labouring poor, and on his arrival in Somerset the practice was extended, both at Banwell and in Wells. Indeed an interest in allotments seems to have been a major concern in the Law family. One of the bishop's brothers was the author of a work on *The Poor Man's Garden,* a study of allotments and their management.

It would be interesting to discover more about Law's allotment schemes. In Wells the allotments occupied some sixty acres of the Park (near Gate Lane). The lessees paid an annual rent of twelve shillings a rood (¼ acre). Clearly there was nothing radical in Law's intentions. Indeed his schemes may well be seen as a means of tying labourers loyally to the land, and of preventing an exodus of the workforce to areas offering more lucrative employment.

Law's work in promoting these small-holdings is commemorated in the embroidery covering the back of one of the thirty-nine canopied stalls in the Quire of the Cathedral. Below the red cocks and stars taken from his armorial bearings are the words *Novate vobis novale* (Break up your fallow ground) – a quotation from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah (Chapter 4 and part of verse 3).

Law's domestic interests and concerns are probably best revealed for us in the *Journal* of the Reverend John Skinner, Rector of Camerton, near Bath, from 1800 to 1839. Skinner, like Law, was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and the two men frequently accompanied each other on archaeological excursions. A product of Trinity College, Oxford, Skinner was some ten or eleven years younger than the bishop. He was a frequent visitor to The Palace, and, from time to time Law would drop in at Camerton rectory (often unexpectedly) for an early breakfast on his way to Bath and elsewhere.

In January, 1830, Law organised a concert party at The Palace to which Skinner, along with upwards of 120 other guests, was invited. The music, Skinner records, was chiefly by Handel, together with pieces from Haydn's

Creation. These were sung by performers from Bath. Afterwards some amateurs (among whom was the bishop's grand-daughter) played and sang some voluntaries.

August 6th, 1828, was clearly a red-letter day for the antiquarian fraternity. Law, Bowles, Skinner and three other clerical gentlemen, accompanied by a footman, set out from The Palace in the bishop's coach for a visit to Banwell, breaking their journey at Cheddar in order to inspect the church. Bowles and Skinner were inspired to compose verses appropriate to the occasion, while Skinner sketched a view or two of the bishop's cottage and another of the interior of the cave. They returned to Wells just before lighting-up time, stopping briefly at Axbridge to enquire (unsuccessfully) after a gold coin that had been dug up on Brent Knoll.

A few weeks later Skinner was invited to stay with the bishop at Weston-super-Mare. The visit was not without an element of farce. On the road between Cheddar and Axbridge, Skinner and his horse became held up by a troop of gypsies and their train of donkeys. A carriage advancing from the rear was unable to pull up in time and ran against the hind wheel of Skinner's light phaeton. The vehicle overturned with a crash, and Skinner was sent headlong into the middle of the road, where he lay for an instant on his back, quite stunned. "On recovering my legs", the diarist records, "the first feeling was that of anger against the awkward fellow who had occasioned my degradation, but lo and behold: on looking into the carriage I found it was the Bishop of Bath and Wells". After "congratulations and explanations" Law conveyed his friend to Weston in his own carriage, where, after some refreshing tea, he was not sorry to go early to bed.

John Skinner's impressions of life at The Palace and of the bishop's archaeological and antiquarian pursuits can be supplemented by another source of a quite different kind – Emma Marshall's novel *Under the Mendips* in which she presents a picture of Wells during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Bishop Law figures prominently in the narrative. Mrs. Marshall resided in Wells for some twelve or thirteen years at The Bank House, adjoining Penniless Porch. She was a close friend of Dean Johnson's wife, and a frequent and welcome guest both at The Palace and at The Deanery. Clearly she was well-acquainted with the Wells ecclesiastical scene. Emma Marshall researched her work carefully, and many of the

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incidents in the novel can be verified from other sources. The Laws are depicted as kindly, gentle and hospitable, and we are given an attractive pen-portrait of the bishop's wife, Jane. Law emerges from the novel as somewhat susceptible to feminine beauty and to flattery, and to having a reputation as a match-maker. He uses his influence to obtain cadetships in the army and navy for the younger sons of neighbouring gentry – a point reinforced by Skinner's *Journal*. He lends books about moths and butterflies to visiting children. Clearly Mrs. Marshall was aware of the bishop's passion for natural history. Less convincing are the conducted tours of The Palace and its grounds in which Law imparts information of dubious historical credibility to his visitors.

In spite of his early academic attainments and the distinctions he achieved later it would probably be misleading to see George Henry Law primarily as a scholar-bishop. He was essentially a patron, a promoter, what nowadays would be called "an enabler". He undoubtedly attracted around him a distinguished circle of like-minded enthusiasts, both clerical and lay, among them Professor (later Dean) Buckland and Adam Sedgwick, the zoologist. The Bath and Wells diocese seems to have been fortunate in the first half of the nineteenth century in the number of scholarly-minded clergymen among its incumbents, some of whom were close friends (or relations) of the bishop. Henry Law, Archdeacon of Wells and Rector of Weston-super-Mare (and later Dean of Gloucester), had been Fourth Wrangler and then Fellow and Tutor at St. John's College, Cambridge. John Skinner of Camerton has already been mentioned. The Rector of Bleadon, David Williams, a Welshman of Jesus College, Oxford, was an early fellow of the Geological Society. His notebooks and specimens are now preserved in the County Museum at Taunton. At Bruton, Stephen Cassan of Magdalen Hall, Oxford, beavered away at episcopal biographies, producing volumes not just for Bath and Wells, but for Salisbury and Winchester as well. At Enmore, John Poole, a former Fellow of Oriel, was pioneering parish schools (and keeping Wordsworth and Coleridge at bay), while in the foothills of the Quantocks Sydney Smith was enduring life in his "healthy grave" at Combe Florey.

A particular favourite of the bishop was the Reverend Richard Warner, once described as "the best-known man of letters in Bath". Some forty-four books are credited to him in *The Dictionary of National Biography*. His most

enduring work, a history of Bath, is still cited by modern writers. Warner also undertook archaeological investigations at Clausentum, the Roman settlement near Southampton. Francis Randolph, Vicar of Banwell, was another of Law's acquaintances. An Old Etonian and former Fellow of King's, Randolph rejoiced in a doctorate in divinity from Trinity College, Dublin. He collaborated with Law in connection with the opening of The Caves at Banwell. As a young man he had been engaged in secret service activities involving the Royal Family. Randolph was always known as Balthazar Randolph on account of a sermon in which he compared George IV with Balthazar. Apart from this sobriquet he was probably best known for devising a scheme for a redemption of the National Debt.

Another interesting personality was the Reverend William Phelps – the subject of a recent article by one of the members of our Society, Joan Hasler. At one time Phelps had been Master of the Cathedral School in Wells, and lived at the house known as The Rib. A prolific writer, Phelps was the author of an elaborate *History and Antiquities of Somersetshire*, which unfortunately was never completed. One of its parts was dedicated to Bishop Law. Unhappily by 1840 Phelps was virtually bankrupt, and Law was ordered by the courts to sequestrate his tithes and other income from his various benefices.

Yet another scholarly acquaintance of the bishop was the Reverend John Allen Giles, sometime Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, whose varied career (which included a spell as a prisoner in Oxford gaol) can be studied in the latest volume to be published by The Somerset Record Society.

Undoubtedly the most disturbing, certainly the most notorious clergyman Law had dealings with was Henry James Prince of St. David's College, Lampeter – self-proclaimed Lamb of God and founder of the *Agapemone* at Spaxton. Extraordinary scenes of revivalist fervour at Charlynch, where Prince was curate, obliged Law to intervene and to revoke his licence. Undeterred, Prince secured another curacy elsewhere, and married two rich old ladies in quick succession – the first his childhood nurse, the second the sister of his former rector at Charlynch. With ample resources now at his disposal, Prince set about building his Abode of Love, where he lived in style and comfort, with soul-brides to keep him company, until his death in 1899.

Since the crowning of Richard I in 1189 the Bishops of Bath and Wells, together with the Bishops of Durham, have "supported" English sovereigns at their coronations, Bath and Wells on the left, Durham on the right. On 28th June, 1838, it fell to Bishop Law to assist at the coronation of the young Queen Victoria. Contemporary accounts of the event, and not least Victoria's own *Journal*, suggest that the proceedings were less than well-managed. When the peers came to do homage, an aged nobleman slipped and rolled down the steps of the throne. The fact that he was named Lord Rolle convinced the foreigners present that this was some peculiar English custom. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Howley, pushed the Queen's ring on the wrong finger, and failed to give her the orb and sceptre at the right time. And Edward Maltby, the Bishop of Durham, more at home translating Greek plays than in officiating at public ceremonies, seems to have wandered off by himself half-way through the proceedings. Law's contribution to the confusion was to turn over two pages at once of the order of service and to inform the Queen that the service was over, when in fact there was still more to come. As a result the Queen retired to a side chapel, but had to be summoned back so that the service could resume.

It would probably have been better for Law's posthumous reputation had he died in 1840 rather than in 1845. By the end of the 1830s he had accomplished much. The life of the diocese had been invigorated, the allotment schemes were well under way, and the "theme park" at Banwell was more or less completed. The new theological college was almost ready to open its doors. Unfortunately, during the last years of his life, Law increasingly withdrew from diocesan affairs and took up permanent residence at Banwell. He had never spent all his time in Wells. Apart from extended visits to Weston-super-Mare he was frequently resident in Bath, where he rented accommodation in The Royal Crescent. During the Parliamentary sessions he appears to have stayed at Langham Place, in west London, near the site of the modern Broadcasting House.

The Dictionary of National Biography speaks of "a gradual decay of mind and body" which prevented the performance of his duties. There was no suffragan bishop. The archdeacons shouldered most of the work of the diocese. Ordinations and confirmations were apparently performed by the Bishop of Salisbury. There was no serious thought, or indeed possibility, of resignation. For a time the diocese was administered by Commissioners

appointed under Act of Parliament by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Local sources are understandably reticent, but material outside the diocese is more revealing. Bishop Blomfield's biographer (Blomfield was Bishop of London when Law was at Wells and had been his immediate successor at Chester) writes of an "interregnum" caused by Law's "infirmities". Too much power was granted to the rural deans, "generally speaking young and inexperienced clergymen", and unseemly disputes about patronage became the subjects of general scandal.

Much of Law's earlier, more positive, work was discontinued. His successor, Richard Bagot, came to Wells as a place of retirement after the worries he had gone through, as Bishop of Oxford, during the Tractarian Movement. Soon after his arrival in Somerset he suffered from a "temporary mental derangement" (presumably a nervous breakdown). And no sooner had Robert John Eden, Third Baron Auckland, arrived from Sodor and Man, than the diocese was divided by the unseemly spectacle of Archdeacon Denison's prosecution in the civil courts for teaching the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. Arthur Burns, the latest writer to review the situation, can only reinforce the impression of disunity caused by constant disputes over educational policies and Eucharistic interpretations. In view of these unfortunate developments it is not surprising that the memory, and the reality, of Law's earlier, and very substantial achievements should to some extent have been eroded. Not until Lord Arthur Hervey arrived as bishop in 1869 was confidence restored once again.

Law died on 22nd September, 1845, at his favourite retreat in Banwell. He was buried at Wells in the Cathedral, in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, immediately to the south of the Lady Chapel. Only the name of the monumental mason, Allen of Wells, is visible on the grave stone. The bishop's name is obscured by a carpet. A memorial in Banwell Parish Church appropriately takes the form of a stained-glass window. Two portraits of the bishop hang in The Palace at Wells. A third portrait can be seen in the Town Hall. Yet another is on view in the Pump Room at Bath where he keeps company with such luminaries as Ralph Allen, "Beau" Nash and Sir Robert Walpole. There is a memorial to the bishop in the South Cloister of the Cathedral.

D.O.M.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

IN HAC AEDE, PROPE MARIAE SACELLUM,
CONDUNTUR RELIQUIAE
VIRI ADMODUM REVERENDI GEORGII HENRICI LAW, S.T.P.
BATHONIENSIS ET WELLENSIS EPISCOPI;
QUI SUPREMUM DIEM OBIIT 22 SEPT. MDCCCXLV.
ANNUM AGENS LXXXV.

CANTABRIGIA IN COLLEGIO REGINAE,
JUVENIS ADHUC
SUMMIS LITERARUM PRAEMIIS DIGNATUS EST;
MATURA DEMUM AETATE,
AD EPISCOPATUM CESTRIENSEM EVECTUS,
TANTA SOLERTIA, SEDULITATE, ET BENEVOLENTIA,
RES GRAVISSIMAS ADMINISTRAVIT,
UT MAGNO CESTRIENSIUM SUORUM DESIDERIO,
AD CATHEDRAM HUJUS DIOCESIS PROVECTUS ESSET,
UBI LEGIBUS ECCLESIAE VINDICANDIS,
FIDE CHRISTIANA DEFENDENDA,
ANGUSTIIS INOPUM LEVANDIS,
OPERAM NAVAVIT INDEFESSAM.

IN EODEM TUMULO SEPULTAE SUNT
JANETTA UXOR EIUS
ET FILIAE DUAE ANNA ET MARGARETTA
QUARUM MUTUI INTER SE ET ERGA SUOS AMORIS
DULCE EST MEMINISSE.

Glory in the highest to God the best and the greatest

In this building, near the Lady Chapel, are interred the remains of a man truly to be revered, George Henry Law, Professor of Sacred Theology, Bishop of Bath and Wells, whose last day and death took place on the 22nd September, 1845, in the 85th year of his age.

While still a young man at Queens' College, Cambridge, he was found worthy of the highest literary awards. In due course, in his maturity, he was advanced to the position of Bishop of Chester and carried out the most important duties with such skill, zeal and goodwill that he was further advanced, by the great desire of the people he knew at Chester, to the Cathedral of this diocese, where, in successfully promoting the laws of the Church, in defending the Christian faith and in alleviating the hardships of the poor, he worked indefatigably.

In the same tomb are buried Jane his wife and his two daughters, Anne and Margaret, whose mutual love for each other and towards their own it is sweet to remember.

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bishop Law has yet to find a biographer. Perhaps the best account of his life and work is the unsigned obituary notice in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1845 (Vol. 2, pp. 529-31). Canon Venables of Lincoln added little in *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Stephen Cassan attempted a sketch of the bishop's earlier career in his *Lives of the Bishops of Bath and Wells* (1829), but it is obsequious and fragmentary and reveals more about the personality of the author than about his subject. There are useful summaries of Law's sermons and charges in R. A. Soloway, *Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783-1853*, (1969).

There is no comprehensive up-to-date study of the Bath and Wells diocese in the nineteenth century. William Hunt's *The Somerset Diocese: Bath and Wells* (1885) is short and discreet in its revelations. Robert Dunning and W. M. Wigfield add a little in *Christianity in Somerset* (1976). The cathedral fares rather better. Philip Barrett's *Barchester: English Cathedral Life in the Nineteenth Century* (1993) contains much Wells material, and there is a useful and informative chapter by D. M. Greenhalgh on "The Nineteenth Century and After" in L. S. Colchester (ed.), *Wells Cathedral: A History* (1982).

For Wells Theological College see E. L. Elwes, *The History of Wells Theological College*, (1923). This can be supplemented by W. M. Jacob, "The Diffusion of Tractarianism: Wells Theological College, 1840-1849" in *Southern History*, Vol. 5 (1983), and by F. W. B. Bullock, *A History of Training for the Ministry of the Church of England and Wales from 1800 to 1874*, (1955). For "Law" glass see Christopher Woodforde, *Stained Glass in Somerset, 1250-1830*, (1946), and L. S. Colchester, *Stained Glass in Wells Cathedral*, (1952).

Nineteenth century Weston is described in Philip Beisly's *Weston-super-Mare: A History and Guide*, (1988), and in J. H. Brown and John Loosley, *The Book of Weston-super-Mare*, (1979). James Bond writes interestingly about Law's estate at Banwell in *Somerset Parks and Gardens: A Landscape History*, (1998), and Barbara Jones in *Follies and Grottoes* (1953; 2nd edn. 1974) describes in detail the bishop's "romantick" whimsicalities on the Mendip hillside. For Banwell generally see S. and J. Rendell, *Banwell through the Ages*, (1997).

Little seems to have been written about the early allotment movement. George Kitson Clark has some pertinent observations in *Churchmen and the Condition of England, 1832-1885*, (1973), and there is a little more material in Edward Hyams, *English Cottage Gardens*, (1970). For Law's schemes at Wells and in Banwell there are passing references in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and in Skinner's *Journal*.

Many of Law's friends and associates (e.g. Skinner, Randolph, Williams, Beard, Cassan, Poole) get entries in the *D.N.B.* John Skinner's journal, extracts from which have been published as a *Journal of a Somerset Rector, 1803-1834*, (paperback edn. 1984) is indispensable for any study of Law. Emma Marshall's novel, *Under the Mendips*, first appeared in 1885. The author's daughter, Beatrice, published a "life", *Emma Marshall, A Biographical Sketch*, in 1900. For a modern (1985) assessment of Emma Marshall's writings see Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*.

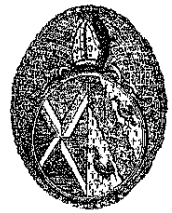
The Reverend John Allen Giles reveals himself at length in his *Diary and Memoirs*, published in 2000 by The Somerset Record Society (Vol. 86). And the antics of Henry James Prince are related with relish in Charles Mander's *The Reverend Prince and his Abode of Love*, (1976). Joan Hasler contributes an article about William Phelps in *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, (Vol. xxxiv, March 2000).

For background reading the following works may be useful:
Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Part I, (1966);
Bernard Palmer, *High and Mitred: Prime Ministers as Bishop-Makers, 1837-1977*, (1992);
Arthur Burns, *The Diocesan Revival in the Church of England, c. 1800-1870*, (1999).

Addendum:
D. J. Irwin and C. Richards, "Banwell Bone and Stalactite Caves, 1757-1826", *Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society*, 1996, 20(3), pp. 201-213.

I am indebted to Pat Robinson whose article "George Henry Law, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1824-1845" appeared in the Wells Natural History and Archaeological Society's *Annual Report* for 1993-94 (pp. 4-10), and to Richard Ellingworth for his felicitous translation of the Latin epitaph on the bishop's memorial.

A. T. Wicks's article on "The First Museum at Wells and some Barrow-Digging", which appeared in the *Annual Report* of the Society for 1932 (pp. 35-41), has been quarried for details of Law's Museum at The Palace.



Law's arms conjoined with those of the see of Bath and Wells