

THE DUCKWORTHS AND THE BUILDING OF ORCHARDLEIGH HOUSE

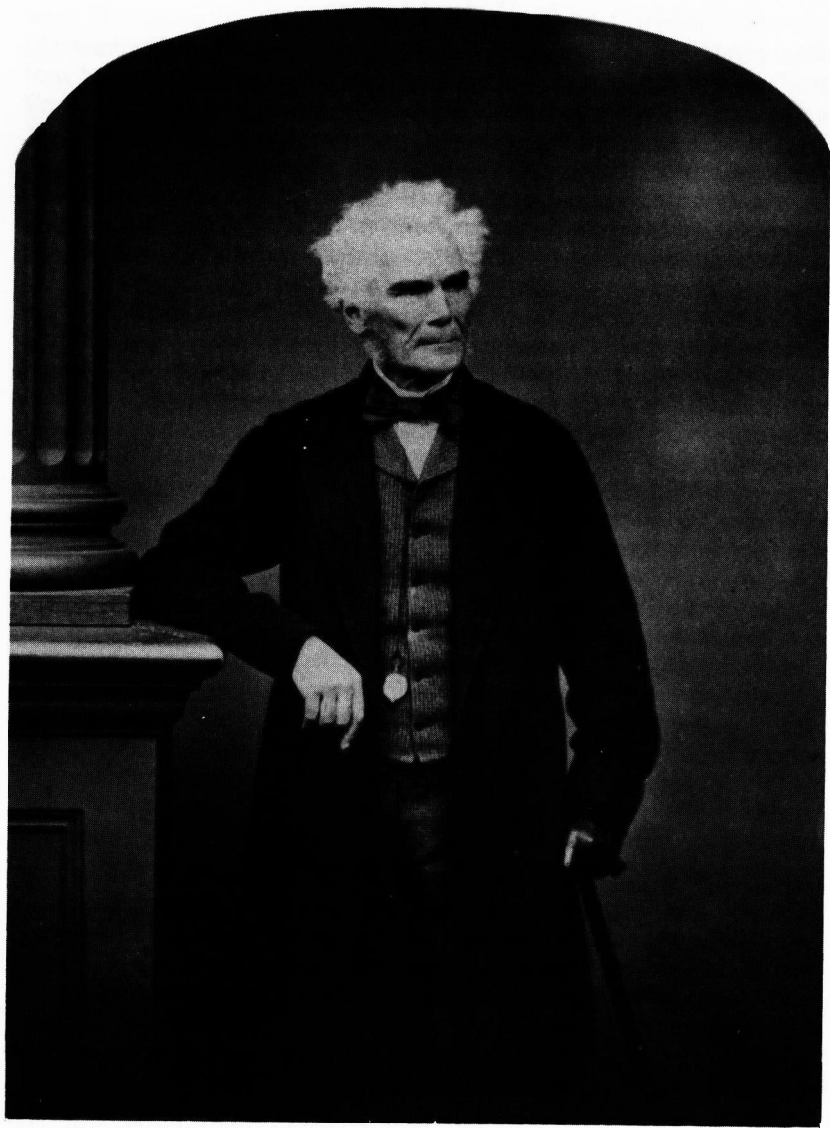
by *Michael McGarvie*

The author extends his warmest thanks to Arthur Duckworth, Esq., of Orchardleigh Park, for his generous help and co-operation in the compilation of this article. He is particularly grateful for the loan of the diary of the Revd. W.A. Duckworth, for the benefit of Mr. Duckworth's own reminiscences and for the pleasant hospitality of Orchardleigh. All the illustrations are from Mr. Duckworth's collection photographed, with his kind permission, by the National Monuments Record.

The Duckworths bought the Orchardleigh estate, near Frome in north-east Somerset, in 1855. They were the last family to become associated with Frome who can be described as manorial not only in the sense of owning several Lordships of Manors, but also in having power and influence over the local community and a feeling of obligation towards it. Their newness was all the more striking as they bought Orchardleigh from Richard Henry Cox, receiver in bankruptcy of the flamboyant Sir Thomas Champneys, who claimed, with more pride than truth, that his family had been there since the Norman Conquest or for 25 generations. The Duckworths joined such old established families as the Seymours of Maiden Bradley, the Thynnes of Longleat, the Boyles of Marston Bigot, the Horners of Mells, and the more recently arrived Jolliffes of Ammerdown, and fitted effortlessly into the pattern of the Frome establishment like a hand into a well-cut glove.

Like so many of our noble and gentle families, the Duckworths emerged from obscurity at the dissolution of the monasteries when Richard Duckworth bought the Musbury estate in Lancashire which had belonged to Whalley Abbey. The estate was a modest one and it was not until the 18th-century when the Duckworths became successful lawyers and invested the proceeds of their industry in shrewd purchases of land that the family became wealthy. William Duckworth, who bought Orchardleigh, and who is portrayed in Sir Henry Newbolt's novel *The Old Country* as Joseph Earnshaw, 'a north country lawyer's son, rock-jawed and iron-handed' recounted the family's rise to fame and fortune to his sons after dinner one night at Orchardleigh on 16 February, 1871. His table talk was recorded by his eldest son, the Revd. W.A. Duckworth:

'My father, when only five years old lost his father, and was brought up by his mother at the family estate of Musbury. The neighbouring clergyman was a clever man and drew up the wills of the country round. He became my father's tutor and the boy was educated by him with a view to the church. After a few years the boy was sent to the flourishing village of Manchester, chose



'A north country lawyer's son, rock-jawed and iron-handed': William Duckworth, builder of Orchardleigh House.

the law instead of the church for his profession . . . and began to learn conveyancing in Chippendale's office. Finding the law in Manchester very imperfectly administered, he went to London and there became acquainted with a first rate lawyer. He hoped to have been called to the bar, but had no gift of public speaking.

So, after learning conveyancing thoroughly, he returned to Manchester where he soon became the leading man in his profession. One of the chief merchants expostulated with him on the too great strictness with which he conducted his business, saying it was impossible he could ever get on in Manchester if he went on in that way, discovering the slightest flaws in title deeds, etc., but young Duckworth persevered until his office cleared £6,000 a year, half of which was his own share of profit. He then began buying land, foreseeing that one day Manchester would become a great merchant city, tho' at that time trade was depressed by war'.

'The Chorlton and Darwen estates were purchased very cheaply. Darwen for £40,000. It now (1871) pays a rental of £3,000 per annum. The Chorlton land was then covered with old iron and dirt heaps. It has since been sold by the yard. My grandfather was determined that his children should have the best education money could procure. So he sent Sam to Cambridge and Eliza, Anna and little Will to Dr. Dalton of Sedburgh. Eliza and Anna learnt Latin and Greek and went to London to be finished at Mrs. Pope's school, where they made some valuable acquaintances for after life, amongst others the daughters of Chief Baron Richards. Will went to Eton before Cambridge. Whilst he was at Cambridge my father died from a fall off his horse; Sam succeeded to the Darwen and Musbury estates and became a successful lawyer in London ending with being one of the Masters in Chancery and at one time MP for Leicester. Eliza lived with him till he died. Anna married a barrister, Mr. Thomas Coltman, afterwards a judge. Will succeeded to the Chorlton estate, and a share in the conveyancing business in Manchester by which he made £2,000 per annum.'

So, William Duckworth, over the port, put in a nutshell the classic middle class recipe for success and advancement. The father of the tale was George Duckworth, of Musbury, who bought the Manor of Over Darwen in Blackburn in 1811, perhaps for £40,000, although on another occasion his son put the price as low as £26,000 or £27,000. This dedicated founder of the family fortune cannot have been easy to get on with. His wife left him to live with a dentist at York leaving her sister, Rachel Grundy, to take her place and bring up the four children. George Duckworth died in 1815. Of his daughters, Eliza never married, while Anna became in due time Lady Coltman. They both died in 1873. Samuel, the eldest son, born in 1786 was, as the narrative states, MP for Leicester, a seat which in the days before the great Reform Bill cost him £5,000, the electors having stood out for the highest bidder. He died in Paris in 1847 when his brother, William, the Will of the table talk, succeeded as head of the family.

By his first marriage to Hester Philips, of The Park, Prestwich in Lancashire, William Duckworth had four sons and a daughter, George (1826-1854), a Captain in the Dragoon Guards, who died in the Crimea, William Arthur, born on 17th March, 1829, Russell (1830-1914), Herbert (1833-1870) who died of peritonitis, (father of Sir George Duckworth, F.S.A., Secretary to the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments) and Sarah Emily (Minna) (1827-1918). In 1834 he lost his wife, leaving him with a young family. Although William Duckworth married again, the death of his first wife seems to have decided him to leave the North and he bought a house called Beechwood, near Lyndhurst, in the New Forest. While here he was asked by the Liberal Committee of Southampton to stand for Parliament and told it would only cost him £700. He wisely declined 'but was curious to learn afterwards the real cost. Two Liberal members tried but failed to get in and it cost them £7,000 each'. Without the absorbing interests of politics and the law, William Duckworth's thoughts turned towards the purchase of a new estate and indulgence in that fashionable pastime of the Victorian rich, building a mansion house. This had originally been intended for George who hankered after such an establishment and at one time William Duckworth had contemplated spending £90,000 on an Irish estate when the value of his railway shares should have risen sufficiently. Now a family seat was to be acquired for Arthur.

Late in 1854 he heard that Orchardleigh was for sale. William Duckworth was taken with the beauty of Orchardleigh, 'its high down and far horizon, its deep woods, and the stillness of its shimmering lake', and saw its potential for both the house and the estate were neglected. Mr. Cox had added to the estate the Manor of Lullington, bought from Lord Bath in 1820, but otherwise took little interest. Lullington village was so ruinous that an old man told Mr. Duckworth when he first visited it that it was not worth owning. The farms were dilapidated and the land undrained and choked with weeds. The old manor house of the Champneys is best described in the words of the fictional Aubrey Earnshaw in Sir Henry Newbolt's novel *The Old Country* which reflects the Duckworth view: 'it was ruinous and costly—a patchwork of inconveniences, with its narrow fourteenth century yard, low Tudor kitchens, and great Queen Anne front out of all proportion. Low lying, too, and damp, no doubt, close by the water from which the frogs were traditionally reported to have come at times in troops to serenade the drawing-room windows. Jammed against the hill it certainly was, on a platform so much too small for pleasure ground that the gardens had always been far off . . .' In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that negotiations did not run smoothly, but on 17th January, 1855 his son, Arthur, noted in his diary: 'Perhaps Orchardleigh may be

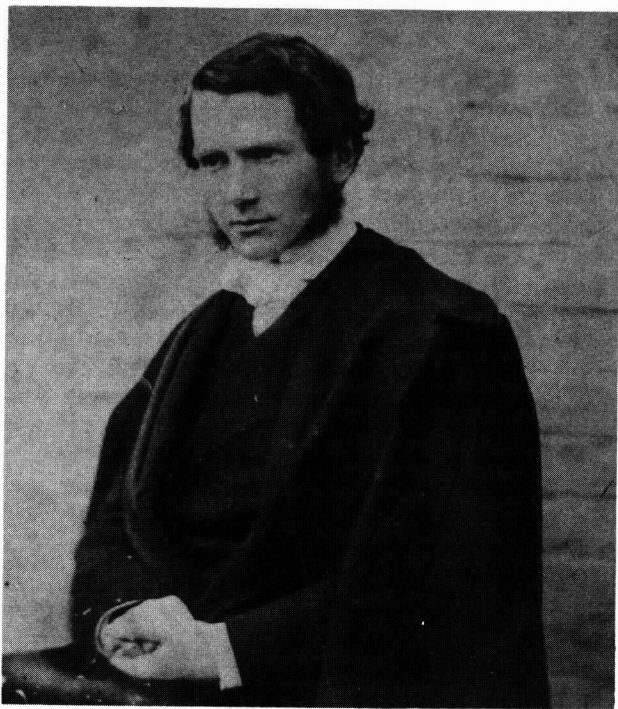
sold to my father after all' and a Mr. Webster was sent down to inspect it again, having already done so once. On 28th January there is another diary entry: 'News of my father having bought Orchard-leigh estate close to Frome, Somersetshire, and on 23rd February: 'Letter from my father to announce the purchase of Orchardleigh for 96,000 L.' William Arthur Duckworth was to see the new Orchardleigh House rise on its hillside and to know it and the estate for more than 60 years. His diary, although factual and succinct, provides many vivid asides and comments on family, local people and events. Before considering some of its rich store of *bon mots*, we must turn our attention to the diarist and his diary.

William Arthur Duckworth was brought up by his father and step-mother at Beechwood and went to Eton where he met F.H.



William Arthur Duckworth, aged 18, from a watercolour done at Beechwood, Hampshire in October, 1847 by Mary Ellen Yates. Now at Orchardleigh.

Vivian, a lifelong friend, and the Earl of Cork and Orrery, who was to become his neighbour at Orchardleigh but whom one feels he respected but did not like. Having an elder brother, he, like so many second sons, entered the Church of England. This was a true vocation as his father was a Unitarian and allowed his children to choose their own faith. He attended theological college in Durham where in 1853 he found the streets 'black, narrow and steep and paved as bad as Edinburgh Old Town'. As a deacon he served at Ashbourne in Derbyshire where he had to dine with (amongst others) 'Mountfort (grocer) a very coarse fellow constantly spitting into his plate'. Here he 'attempted to lead the choir: failed miserable in the venite'. He kept his ears open as he was to do all his life for pithy sayings, profound observations, or a good joke and on 25 June, 1853 recorded Mr. Tyrwhitt on the Irish: 'prima facie pleasant company, always at bottom rogues'. On 12 March, 1854 he was ordained priest at Ripon Cathedral. Six months later on 10 September, 1854, the Vicar of Ashbourne took him aside to tell him his brother had died of cholera in the Crimea (a parishioner had seen it in *The Times*) and he became heir to the Duckworth fortune.



An early portrait photograph: W.A. Duckworth, aged 28, taken on 1st May, 1857.

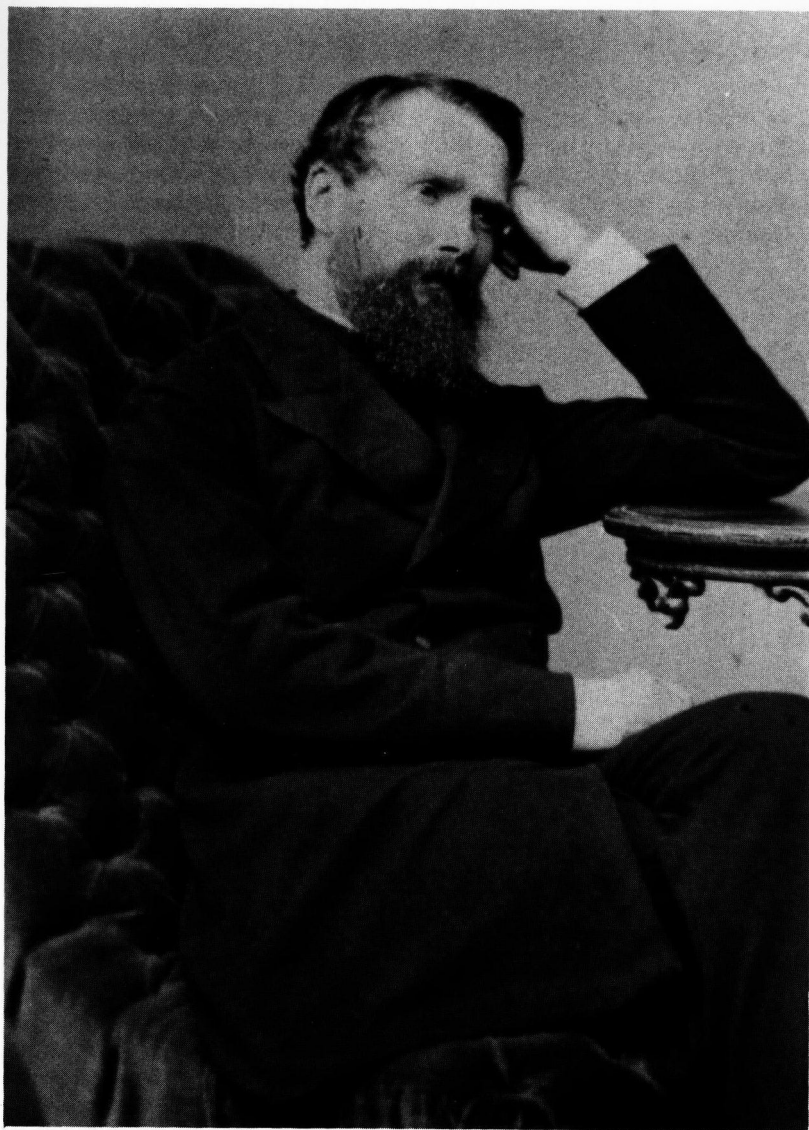
The Duckworths had a town house at 38 Bryanston Square and it was here that Arthur first met his future wife, the Honourable Edina Campbell, Ena, on 11 April, 1853. He wrote of Lord Campbell's daughters: 'the youngest Ina very pretty eyes & manner'. Henceforth the two families met socially and there seems to have been a friendship between his sister, Minna, and Edina's sister who stayed at Orchardleigh in December, 1858. In June, 1859, Duckworth and his brother, Herbert, dined with the Campbells in London. He 'took down Ena' to dinner and found her 'very taking'. The next day he called on the Campbells but they declared themselves not at home, but, unabashed, he waited for his mother and sister to arrive and went in with them. 'Ena fetched in by her sister: very satisfactory visit' he noted. The courtship had evidently proceeded some way for on 26 June he made it clear to Lady Campbell and Ena, whom he found reading sermons, that he had marriage in mind. 'This visit may decide my future', he wrote, 'we shall meet next at Orchard Leigh . . . walked across the Park considerably excited, but at the same time relieved to have made so decided a move'. On 27 July, Ena and her mother duly arrived at Orchardleigh and Duckworth had a 'tête a tête with her after early tea' and 'contrived' to sit next to her at dinner. Two days later he was satisfied that 'Ena will not refuse me I think' and on 31st he proposed to her after morning service between the church and the old house: 'startled my little bird but caught her' he noted with some pleasure. She gave no decided answer until she had consulted her mother 'then all safe . . . two more solo walks with Ena and occupation of the wooden seat for two in avenue'. The upshot was that they married at All Saints, Ennismore Gardens, on 4 October, 1859 and spent their honeymoon at Orchardleigh where the couple were received with bouquets and given a meat tea spending 'a happy evening in mamma's boudoir'. The next day they went 'down to the old house: saw decorations of last nights tenants ball A.D. E.D. Long Life & Happiness in laurel. There were 76 present in full dress.'

Edina Duckworth was born in 1838, the youngest daughter of Lord Campbell, the Lord Chancellor and his wife who was Baroness Stratheden in her own right. Her long life was devoted to unobtrusive and unselfish good works. Sir George Duckworth wrote of her that she 'was the only person he had ever met who never said an unkind word of any one'. She was deeply religious and it is the memory of her formidable piety which lives on. Her grandchildren remember even today her habit of taking them aside to say a little prayer whenever she met them and the consequent necessity of taking evasive action. Her husband was a much more worldly churchman and early in their marriage she broke into tears when he told her of his inclination to laugh and scoff in church at anything ridiculous and absurd. He notes that

she was a little disappointed 'at my lack of readiness for midday prayer and at my caring little to observe eves, saints' days and fasts. I am less churchy than she expected'. Edina read only improving books and was horrified when her husband read *Curious Crimes* on a train journey.

Despite a marked difference in the seriousness of their outlooks on life, their marriage was a happy one. Her husband found her 'deliciously simple and good' and at their golden wedding celebrations in 1909 Arthur Duckworth remarked that although he was the head of the family, she was the crown. They had seven children of whom two were sons, Arthur Campbell Duckworth (1870-1948) who eventually succeeded to the Orchardleigh estate and was the father of Arthur Duckworth, the present owner, and Herbert Stratheden (1871-1918) who was retarded. Of their daughters, of whom the father was very possessive, we need only mention Margaret (1867-1960) whose marriage in 1889 to Henry (later Sir Henry) Newbolt (1862-1938) was to bring Orchardleigh a footnote in literary history. Edina's father-in-law thought her 'the best mother he ever saw'.

As a young unmarried curate, Duckworth had difficulty in finding a living. The family living of Lullington and Orchardleigh was held by the Revd. W.M.H. Williams, the former headmaster of the so-called grammar school (in reality a private establishment) at Frome who emerges from the pages of the diary as rather a dreadful old man past his work. However, he resisted all pressure to get him to vacate the living. In 1859, Duckworth considered Chantry 'pretty little church—if it be desirable for me to live near Orchardleigh it may do—Revd. Squire Fussell, late School Inspector, the patron'. He took the trouble to call on Fussell but nothing came of it. He refused St. Edmund's, Vobster, but was keen on Kilmersdon. On 11 July, 1859, he records: 'My father dreamt last night that Kilmersdon was given to another' and so it proved. He did, however, see the Vicarage which he thought was small and had no garden. They were amazed to hear the patron, the Revd. T.R. Jolliffe, Rector of Babington, say 'the deuce he was' although whether on grounds of its profanity or antiqueness, is not clear. Having the Lord Chancellor, the dispenser of much patronage, as father-in-law quickly brought the Duckworths' search to a positive conclusion and in November, 1859, Duckworth was offered the Rectory of Puttenham, near Guildford in Surrey which despite pros and cons ('house good, garden very good, church vile, village untidy') he decided to accept. This one was a great success. The Duckworths were happy at Puttenham and amongst other achievements restored the church with the help of the eminent church architect, Henry Woodyer. When Lullington finally fell vacant in 1870, Duckworth refused it. A move became inevitable



W.A. Duckworth aged 45, a photograph taken on 19th March, 1874.

in 1876 when Arthur Duckworth's father died and he became owner of Orchardleigh. The following year on 30 April they moved into the great mansion, which had always been intended as 'Arthur's house', and remained there for the rest of their lives. Arthur commented: 'Strange to find ourselves in a new home'.



The Revd. and Mrs. Arthur Duckworth on their Golden Wedding Day, 4th October, 1909. Photograph by Wheeler of Frome.

William Arthur Duckworth's diaries start in 1846 when he was at Eton. The entries are mostly very brief. Then there is a gap until 1850 when he kept a small pocket diary (Lett's No. 20). This is barely more than a recital of bald facts, although more detailed than in 1846. In 1852 at the age of 23 he began a diary which he was to keep faithfully and consecutively for the next 65 years. The

entries in his own hand continue up to 29 November, 1917—a week before his death and he seems to have dictated the entries up to 2 December. The diary for 1852 sets the tone for the succeeding 65 years. It is a Lett's No. 9, 5 x 7½ inches, which he changed to No. 10 in 1853 and kept to for the rest of his life. In this first volume he began a lifelong custom of entering at the back the place where he slept each night. Later he added details of the weather and would record any particularly interesting items of table talk, striking quotations, or good jokes which he had heard. In the later period he would also list the books he had read and the guests who had stayed at Orchardleigh during the year. These might number 220 to 260. Sir Henry Newbolt, in his *Later Life and Letters*, has left a nice portrait of his father-in-law 'sitting at the head of his luncheon table, and in his urbane but frank and almost boyish manner discoursing on the duties of a parish clergyman.' In his last years, Duckworth recorded the births, marriages and deaths of his friends and acquaintances, the last a long column as he himself reached the 80s. The diary is occasionally enlivened by sketches and press cuttings.

The diary is terse and factual but occasionally illuminating. Duckworth was a meticulous observer of life with a highly developed sense of the ridiculous. This is well illustrated by a conversation he had in September, 1898 with Mr. Marshall, the Rector of Lullington, on Marshall's 'ritual observances, bowing to the Table, crossing himself, kneeling on all fours, & lighting candles in broad daylight all which I point out needlessly offend the British farmer & prevent him from coming to Holy Communion, which both I and Mr. M. wish him to do. Mr. M. will I think in future avoid the posture of an Eton boy going to be swished'. He was a moderate churchman with a robust belief in the middle way and Edina's piety was unable to convert him to extremes. He was very much in the tradition of the 18th-century squirson, although without coarseness.

Physically he was short and slight. At the age of 30 he weighed only 9 stone 12 lbs. and a young lady in whom he was interested spoke of him as 'a nice little man'. He dropped her. Duckworth had a charming ability to see the funny side of events coupled with a penetrating shrewdness and an enjoyment of the good things of life (in February, 1860 he sampled four different Ports at dessert 'the 1847 vintage preferred'). He was a man of his word, or as an old inhabitant on the estate told his grandson, Mr. Arthur Duckworth: 'what he did say, that he did mean'. Although occasionally depressed or 'low', by and large he possessed great serenity and was not troubled by profound soul-searchings. He was a great reader, and much enjoyed social life as well as several sports and pastimes. He was a keen shot, liked skating (he went skating, supported by a wooden cage, in

December 1916, aged 88) and swimming as well as riding, croquet, tennis, and billiards. He hunted occasionally and in the evenings liked whist or *Beggar my Neighbour*. Duckworth was interested in all new kinds of scientific invention throughout his life and as early as 1854 took and developed his own photographs with varying results. An instance of this curiosity is recorded in 1863 when John Sinkins, the Frome clothier, came to lunch 'and made an experiment upon a felled tree. Soft wood made to last 30 years by impregnating the newly felled trunk with sulphurate of copper . . .' As a landlord he was fair and as a parish priest conscientious. He travelled extensively. A trip to Paris, partly to perfect his French, is recorded in 1846 and a visit to Italy in 1852. His accounts of his trips are full of pertinent comments. He was an exacting guest, careful with money, and comments on the qualities of hotels and their charges. In 1857 he visited Jerusalem, but perhaps some comments in 1852 best give the flavour:

30 April (in Naples): Dr. and Mrs. Strange . . . told us the King of Naples prohibited the use of ether and Chloroform considering it impious to take away pain sent from God . . .

22 April: (Rome, visited Villa Ludovisi): 'Statues spoilt by the false modesty of zinc vine leaves'.

27 April: 'Wakened by fleas to witness a splendid sunrise at 5 a.m.'

2 May (Shown the jewels of St. Januarius at Naples): 'Went away wondering how Kings could spend their money on a dead saint.'

His comment on the Hotel Europa in Rome was: 'comfortable but expensive. Even the use of a piano belonging to the hotel was charged in the bill'. On 13 November, 1852, he tried to see the lying in state of the Duke of Wellington at Chelsea Hospital: '2½ hours getting 50 yds in a crush . . . many women fainting, self gave it up for this time—foreigners will have reason to growl at such mismanagement. Perfectly drenched in the foul steam of human perspiration'. Nevertheless, he and his friend Vivian bought guinea tickets for the funeral: '. . . the sun came out, and the whole procession of the Duke's funeral passed before us punctually to its time by the Electric clock—the car a splendid instance of English bad taste'.

William Arthur Duckworth welcomed the purchase of Orchardleigh and entered enthusiastically into plans for building a new mansion house. His sister, Min (as he noted on the 12 June, 1855) was 'pleased with all but (dirty) Frome & the country about—just what George would have liked—lonely without seclusion . . . site for the house on the plateau, not on the slope'. A Mr. Page, who had laid out paths at Beechwood in 1853, was



The Hon. Edina Campbell, wife of the Revd. W.A. Duckworth, c.1860. (Maull & Fox).

consulted. Arthur described his plans in his diary for 19 June, 1855 as 'not very promising—a grand terrace before a mean & uncomfortable looking house.' The terrace was accepted, the house declined. A Mr. Fripp was also called in but on 1 January, 1856 his plans 'rejected with scorn'. In the meantime his father had gone off to see Mr. Strutt's new house near Kegworth 'to gain hints for building at Orchard-leigh'. A conclusion was at hand for on 6 December, 1855 Duckworth mentions the arrival of 'Mr. Digby Wyatt's plans for Orchard-leigh sent by Minna—luxurious late Elizabethan in style'. The plans were in fact by Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt's brother, Thomas Henry Wyatt (1807-1880) one of a dynasty of noted architects and a designer of numerous churches, country houses and lunatic asylums. In February, 1856, Wyatt stayed with the Duckworths at Beechwood to discuss the design of the new house. The cost was then estimated at £16,000. This was increased by the fact that there was 'rock 3 ft. 6 in. below surface on site of house at Orchardleigh—no sand or gravel, but a quarry good enough for walls'. (These were faced with Bradford stone and Bath stone used for the dressings). Duckworth had misgivings about a proposed tower but Wyatt told him it was 'quite in keeping with foreign chateaux'. On 14 April, 1856 he was able to write 'contract signed for building of Orchardleigh—base walls £9,000 & odd—estimate for whole house, unfurnished and without conservatory £17,800. Probable cost furnished, gardens & stables & c. 35,000 or even £40,000'.

The rise of Orchardleigh House is recorded in W.A. Duckworth's diary which itself complements a series of photographs, probably by Duckworth himself, of the building. These and his other impressions of the locality are best given in his own words. He saw Orchardleigh for the first time on 8 March 1855:

... Down to Frome at 1. Met by Mr. Webster in fly to the George—met here by Mr. Bird Orchardleigh Agent—drive over—weather fine and cold—beautiful situation for a new house—old house hideous tumbledown whitewash. Church an ivy grown chapel. Lullington in a poor state—Mr. Williams, rector, 63 and drinks? Gloucester Lodge ivy grown, too grand for the house'.

Duckworth stayed at the George Hotel in Frome which he describes as fair. Gloucester Lodge which still stands (dated 1434) was built in the Gothic castellated style by Sir Thomas Champneys about 1815 in anticipation of a visit by the Duke of Gloucester. The Duckworths wanted (strange as it sounds looking at Orchardleigh today) a cheerful and comfortable home rather than 'a highly ornamental and pretentious building'. Above all, comfort was not to be sacrificed to grandeur. A neo-Elizabethan design was favoured on to which were grafted elements of French



Building begins: (*Above*) The entrance front and (*below*) the whole expanse of Orchardleigh House rising from its foundations. Taken by Revd. W.A. Duckworth in September 1856.



renaissance architecture in the interests of a varied skyline. When the house came to be built it was the château rather than the 'Old English' motifs which tended to dominate.

The new house was to stand on top of the down to the south of Orchardleigh church and the old manor house. It commanded a splendid view over the lake to the ridge which cut off this rustic retreat from industrial Frome with its poachers and liberal politics. It would also look well in the landscape as Newbolt (who disguises Orchardleigh rather thinly as Gardenleigh in his novel *The Old Country*) described: 'Beneath them lay the lakes and the church on its island, and far away, from the opposite side of the valley, Gardenleigh looked across to them, its gray stone gables and mullions all yellow in the light of the westering sun'.

The Duckworths retained Beechwood until 1858 while Orchardleigh was being built and it was from there that Arthur Duckworth paid his second visit to Orchardleigh on 15 January, 1856 sleeping at the George and walking out along the new drive to the site of the proposed house. He recorded the next day:

Mr. Wyatt off early to mark trees in Orchardleigh Park. We called on Mr. Wickham, Lawyer, about the purchase of the only cottage in Lullington which does not belong to the estate . . . walk in slippery wet to the proposed site. There met Mr. T.H. Wyatt, architect, and soon fixed unanimously the centre of dining room window looking down the avenue (East). Dine and discuss Mr. Wyatt's altered plans—very satisfactory.

Presumably it was Mr. Page, the landscape gardener, who was off to mark trees, and not Wyatt, for on 17 January, Duckworth notes:

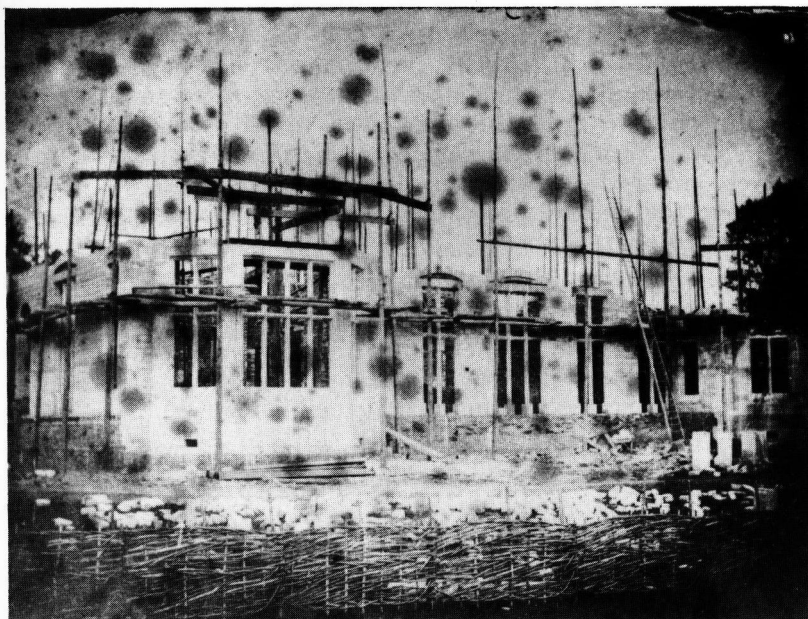
Mr. Page off before breakfast as before. Mr. Wyatt, Mr. Duckworth and self later to stake out the proposed site. Inspect Churches of Orchardleigh, Lullington, see if any stone quarry was near at hand. Evening after dinner at the George discussed Mr. Wyatt's new plans.

The next day Duckworth left Frome 'after breakfast with Mr. Page who thought Wyatt's plans would cost between £30,000 & £40,000'. He again visited Frome on 8 May, 1856, by which time work on the house was well underway. Duckworth also met the famous ritualist Vicar of Frome, the Revd. W.J.E. Bennett.

'Mr. Bennett showed me his schools—disappointed in the man, not saintly enough for a martyr: little black eye & no bump of veneration on top of his head . . . Mr. Hewitt Clerk of the Works & 40 men at work on the new house—foundations 3 ft. high. Orchard Leigh & Lullington Churches may be made remarkable . . . 600 acres park—choked at present by timber'.



Two views of the progress of the house later in 1856. (*Above*) The entrance front and (*below*) the south front.



A feature of Orchardleigh was its fireproof frame of wrought-iron girders and joints. On 10 June Duckworth went with Wyatt 'Down to Butterley Works to see some iron girders for Orchardleigh tested by hydraulic pressure. Mr. Barratt, contractor, noting down deflexions. Three furnaces at work night & day, plates of iron welted together by steam'.

On 28 July he was back in Somerset: 'fly thro' Frome to Orchardleigh—new house building up 8 ft. high on the average—billiard room promises well; Mrs. Duckworth's morning room—trees shut out too much view'.

He did not come again until the Autumn, arriving at Frome on 12 September:

Wren and pony carriage to meet us. To our great surprise found 200 people waiting to receive us at the dressed in green Murtry Lodge. Mr. Bird (steward) and Mr. Hewitt (Clerk of the Works) had promised to let them drag the carriage up—50 before, and 20 men behind. Women and children with flags escorted us to the old house and danced afterwards and consumed 54 gallons of beer. The new house promises very well.

September 13: . . . the old house rather bare of furniture but beautifully clean, the floors especially white . . . two men lying dead drunk near the new house from the beer distributed yesterday and today.

September 14: (Lullington Church): '. . . dirty old pew, thin congregation. 2 Miss Williams sang well. Mr. Williams (the rector) read badly, preached extempore good sermon . . . He is very grey, but promises to live some years: not a gentleman but no partizan. His daughters came to luncheon and behaved very well. Preached at Orchardleigh, little church very crowded . . . Beautiful view of the new house will be seen from the public path (thro' the avenue) to Frome (i.e. Orchardleigh Church to Spring Gardens).

September 15: Mr. Bennett called (the Revd. W.J.E., Vicar of Frome); finds Frome dull after Belgravia.

September 18: Up to the new house talking over alterations with Mr. Hewitt . . . promised the Illustrated London News for the men at their dinner hour.

19: Relaying the stakes to mark the new road which has been sadly mismanaged . . . Mr. Wyatt, architect, arrived. Considering plans for the garden and terraces in front of the new house all evening.

- 20: Staking out the terraces and investigating the cause of the leak at the end of the lake. The 'pent-stock' (flood-gates) out of order. The whole lake ought to be cleaned out and the bank lined with chalk and concrete, the mud used for rearing rhododendrons. Mr. Page and Mr. Wyatt both departed. Drove Mamma and Min (his sister) to Frome—upset a pair of potato scales in the Market Place.
- 21: Read prayers (first time) at Orchardleigh — torn and dirty surplice. Bible with long S's . . . (Lullington) pupit stairs and door very narrow, congregation good: Men only in the gallery. Ten servants came into prayers at 9½ (half past nine).
- 22: With my father and old Bird to Parrots Farm and deserted Fussell's cloth mill. Also stayed some time at Hopkins Flour Mill—the son a scamp. He as sexton admitted Mr. Bennett into Frome Church when he was first appointed against the wishes of the low clergymen who tried to persuade him not to give up the keys . . . (this was George Hopkins, Sexton of Frome, 1833-76. The Champneys had the hereditary right of appointing the sexton to which Mr. Duckworth succeeded).

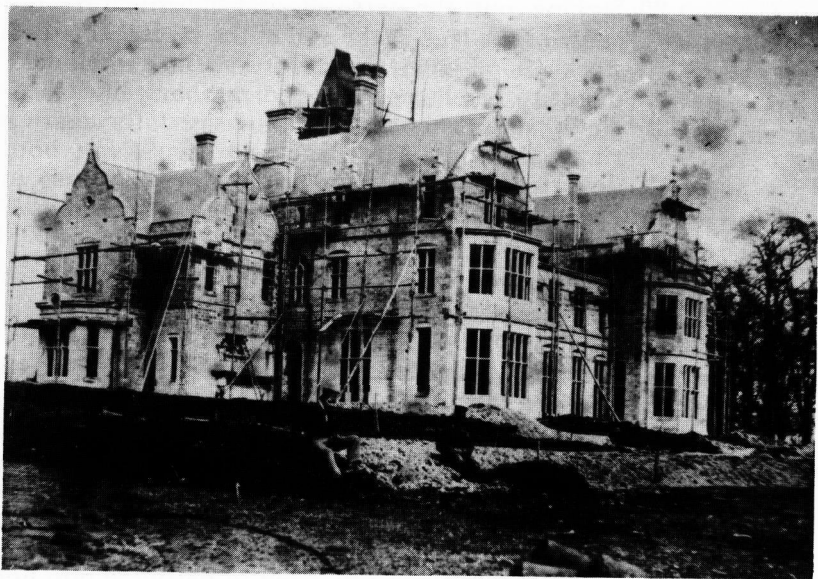
On 6 January, 1857 he was back again.

'The new house gables just appearing in wood. Will look very well. Trees on the embankment at the lake end all cut down to stop the leak. Mrs. Ayres, head gardeners' wife, made us very comfortable at the old house'.

During the night Duckworth found 'rats & mice noisy in the wainscoat' but the next day:

'walk along new drive much improved, but the hill not sufficiently capped yet nor the hollow filled up to my fancy. Up to the top alongside the dining room chimney—grand view—broad corridors from staircase landing very good. The billiard room wing looked short. Back fly to Warminster. Gave a rabbit to engine driver at Salisbury for having gained 15 minutes & brought us in time to catch the SWR train to Romsey'.

On 12 May Mr. Wyatt lunched with the Duckworths in London and discussed 'gas, hotwater pipes, shutters & c for Orchard Leigh—with him to see Belgian marble chimney pieces . . .' Duckworth was at Orchardleigh again on 22 May: 'sun shining and fresh green leaves very charming—dined at the Old house. With Mr. Ayres, Hewitt, & Jones (contractor) over the new



Orchardleigh House in March 1857, west and south aspects (*above*) and in June (*below*) showing the entrance front with the 'saddleback roof tower' which the Revd. W.A. Duckworth found 'decidedly objectionable at first'.



building—the tower not ugly nor top heavy as I had expected, but really good tho' odd to English eyes, the terraces forming . . . plaistering first coat'. On 1 July he received from his father a 'good account of progress at Orchardleigh'. However, Mr. Ayres got above himself and had to be told 'to keep to his place, which was that of head-gardener, & remember he was a servant not master'.

By the Summer of 1857 the new house was well advanced. Duckworth visited it on August 14:

. . . fly to the new house Orchardleigh— took 3½ hours going over it. The saddleback roof tower decidedly objectionable at first, tho' the impression may wear off when we live there. Dairy roof very nice—altogether it promises very well—terraces nearly in shape. Slept at the old house.

The next day he was up at half past five: 'Delicious day after yesterday's rain. The new garden walks before 6½ breakfast . . .'

After this Duckworth set off on a four month trip to Jerusalem. On his return he was much preoccupied in finding a wife and it was not until 17 June, 1858, that he again returned to Orchardleigh. He wrote:



Thomas Henry Wyatt, architect of Orchardleigh, with groom, probably Wren, and labourers during a visit in September, 1856. Behind him is probably the Clerk of the Works, Mr. Hewitt.

'The Conservatory nearly completed, looks like an additional after thought, & rather spoils the west side of the building. Terraces successful, landings & staircase very nice. Stables good. Lullington school enormous; will hold more than 100 children with ease . . . good air & a capital house at Orchard Leigh in exchange for a beautiful garden & forest drives at Beechwood'.

Two days later he left Beechwood for the last time. It was sold to a Mrs. Malcolm for £14,000. By August, 1858, Orchardleigh was ready for occupation and Duckworth arrived from Beechwood at Frome on 30 August:

Wickerigg driven by Wren in the dark raining to Orchardleigh—new house and home—entered by the 'back door', front gates not up yet. In the dining room (very nice) Mr. and Mrs. Duckworth, Min (only got into the house this afternoon) and Mr. Purchass, young man pupil of Mr. Wyatt's, architect superintending workmen and drawing plans of the 2 churches.

31: Slept well in the East Room upper storey; bathroom, W.C. en suite; very comfortable. I hope that we may not be spoilt by the luxury of such a home. The terraces brilliant with flowers, and the conservatory, only ten days old, quite cheerful with creepers, etc. Drawing room and library carpenters' workshops at present; shutters putting up. All promises well . . . Music room might have been built on the west side matching the billiard room projection at a loss of more than half the present conservatory, but we can do very well without it.

On 2 September, his friend Vivian came down and was 'much pleased with Orchardleigh; the foundations were only digging when he saw it last in 1856. Walk with Vivian and Min all round the house and grounds. A third storey added between the two south gables would possibly be an improvement; they would hide the base of the chimney, but they are not wanted at present.

5 September: Attended service in our square box 'impounded' (as Miss Courtenay termed it) at Lullington. Mr. Williams preached for 50 minutes on a 'single-eye' = conscience, rather too coarse in parts . . . There is room in Lullington Churchyard for throwing out a North transept. To Orchardleigh Church afternoon. Mr. Williams yawned awfully and most irreverently in the middle of the prayers, and lolled back sitting with his arms out and head in a most ungentlemanly and indecorous way during the hymns; the result of his not having married a *lady*, who would never have allowed him to get into such bad habits. In good hands and good society he might have done well . . .



Orchardleigh: The old house and the new in 1858.

September 6: Drew an imaginary third storey for the South front of the house and extra transomes for the bow windows turning it into real Elizabethan instead of the magnificent modern villa it now is—but we must not complain it is a glorious home indeed.

Sept. 8. Lord Dungarvan, now Earl of Cork, came to luncheon. He stayed two hours and a half, going over the house and giving Herbert directions about the Yeomanry dress . . .

Sept. 9. Called on the Williams'. He very patronizing and pompous; wants the Lullington School to be made over to trustees for ever: i.e. a hand in its administration which my father wisely refuses.

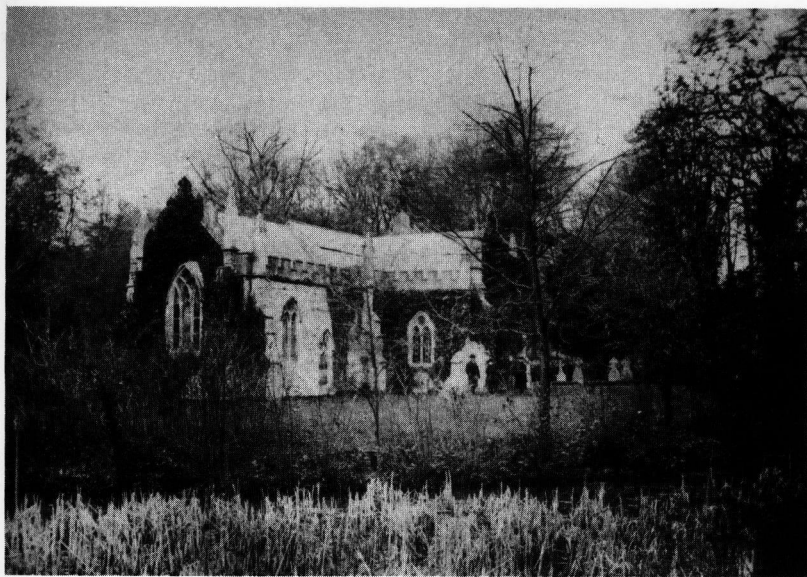
Sept. 11. First entry into the Court up to the front door on wheels: not easy to drive close up to the steps.

Sept. 13. Opening of Lullington School (built by William Duckworth) . . . Mr. Williams preached in very bad taste, assuming that the inhabitants were all going to oppose Mamma in her wishes to improve them . . . Maypole with coloured ribbons . . .

Dec. 23 (Orchardleigh) drawing room window fittings all in, curtains hanging. Morant's [decorator] painting and gilding very well done. Billiard table just arrived . . . the school at Lullington in working order: 42 children on the books—new walk made from the house to the school.

- Dec. 24 . . . The drawing-room temporarily furnished and inhabited for the first time this evening—the library still bare . . .
- Dec. 25 Afternoon to Orchardleigh—no congregation at all (except the Duckworth family and two Miss Williams) not even a servant from the house. How disgraceful.
- Dec. 26 Frome Parish Church singing poor and organ wretched. Excellent sermon from Mr. Bennett . . . three curates take part in lessons and litany (Lullington Church in the afternoon) Mr. Williams cleaning his spectacles and holding them up to the light during the exhortation—a rambling extempore sermon . . .
- 1 January 1859: (Called) on Mr. Bennett at Frome Vicarage, my first interview with the great Highman: he very cautious in his remarks . . .
- 2 January: Extraordinary sermon from Mr. Williams at Lullington patronizing our guests for coming to church instead of guzzling at home . . .

Orchardleigh House being more or less complete Arthur Duckworth records little more about it. In January 1859 he helped mark out an alteration of the road approach round the stables. In July, Mr. D. Jones, the Bradford-on-Avon builder who had erected the house, came to lunch and told the guests that he thought Ezekiel prophesied that Louis Napoleon, then Emperor of the French, would invade England. In July, 1864, Duckworth admired 'the new stencilling and colouring of the corridors by Crace (D.J. Crace, interior designer) very effective'. This essay in Victorian interior decoration has not survived. The old Manor house was taken down in 1860 and in August, 1861, Duckworth records that the 'materials from the old house have been very useful for gas house, Mrs. Millets farmhouse (Gloucester Farm, Lullington), and the family vault and repairs all about the place . . .' Lullington Church was restored in 1862 by T.H. Wyatt. Duckworth notes on 30 August: 'The North wall rebuilt and lengthened—old Norman door preserved stone for stone'. On 2 August, Wyatt arrived 'discovered an old doorway leading from the porch into the transept, just what we wanted.' After service the next day when Mr. Williams had been 'very wild on Melchizedek', which upset Ena and disgusted Wyatt, Duckworth saw 'an ancient tombstone dug out of the foundation for a vestry, a hand blessing a crosier'. William Duckworth being unwilling to pay Mr. Williams an annuity of £300 the family had to put up with him, getting odder and odder, the hero or anti-hero of the early part of the diary.



Orchardleigh Church before the rebuilding of 1879 showing details of the Georgian Gothic restoration by Thomas Swymer Champneys, c. 1800 (*above*) and (*below*) in 1888. (This photograph by Arthur Campbell Duckworth).





Lullington Church before Wyatt's restoration from a sketch at Orchardleigh dated 26th September, 1856.

In January, 1861, Mr. Williams was 'dreadful . . . yawning in the prayers and almost mad in the sermon' and in July 'preached a violet sermon to show that he was still 'thank God' up to his work. Ena fortunately absent, or baby's food would have been turned . . .' In July, 1865 'Mr. Williams thumped the Bible so suddenly in his sermon as to startle a sleeping boy out of his seat and Sir Richard (Musgrave) $\frac{1}{2}$ asleep fancied he was croquéd . . .' The services at Lullington were even more enlivened in 1868 when 'Mr. Williams' son (cracked) read the lessons like a schoolboy, he can't see nor can he pronounce an h or an s'. Duckworth found the neighbouring clergy hardly less eccentric. He was surprised to be offered merely a glass of wine and a biscuit when he called on the Revd. T.R. Jolliffe at Ammerdown, but astonished when Jolliffe visited Orchardleigh in a 'chariot' drawn by four greys and wearing a 'flaxen-haired curly wig, enormous spotted necktie fastened by pearl brooch, Maltese gold cross in shirt front, watered silk lavender waist coat, long blue coat with innumerable buttons, white duck trousers and gaiters, high heeled shoes, lavender silk gloves, white beaver hat of peculiar cut—courteous manner.' This survival of Georgian flamboyance (he was born in 1781) was innocent enough compared with the Rector of Wanstrow in 1866: 'Revd. Cicero Rabbits with a woman cohabits and is only in residence during the shooting season'. In 1868 Duckworth attended St. John's, Frome: 'Mr.

Bennett in gold embroidered cope, his curate preached miserably. I felt quite wretched to have seen such folly'. When Williams finally died in 1870, the living was offered to the Revd. A. Drummond Wilkins, who being shown over the estate by Duckworth was 'very much pleased, called it fairy land'.

Orchardleigh had fallen into good hands. William Duckworth spared no expense to improve the estate, practically rebuilding Lullington village as well as restoring the church. The Rectory, Park Farm, and various cottages were designed by George Devey. Duckworth drained the land so that what had been choked with weeds became good pasture. His sons were sufficiently interested to go and see for themselves the tile draining at Lullington and Russell took up farming at Murtry Hill House, although his father considered that he had thereby thrown himself away and lowered himself in the social scale. The estate was increased to 1900 acres by the purchase of Whatcombe Farm and what were known as the Cromlech lands in Buckland Dinham, although some of this was 'little better than a bed of wet moss'. William Duckworth set his mark on Orchardleigh and the legacy persists to this day, his family taking its place amongst those which may not have attained high rank or lasting fame, but, as Newbolt wrote, 'filled a definite place in English life, and a still more definite place in the history of the land of England'.