

# Round About

## Somerset

FROM SOURCE TO  
SEA—THE YEO

### COMPTON MARTIN'S LINK WITH HUNTSMAN WHO BECAME A SAINT

WHILE the source of the River Axe is linked with the legend of the Witch of Wookey, that of the River Yeo at Compton Martin is concerned with a saint! He was Saint Wulfric, and the legend is that he was born in a cave half-way up thecombe from which Compton (combe town) probably gets its name.

With its cottages on either side, thiscombe has much of an old-worldly look to-day, but it is very much twentieth century at the top, where mechanical monsters twist and turn, grab, lift, and drop at the busy limestone quarries.

There seem to be two or three versions of the story of St. Wulfric. The legend that he was born in a cave at Compton Martin has to be set against another version that his parents were fairly well off, although of humble origin.

As a youth Wulfric was apparently a wayward type and abandoned himself to a purely pleasure-seeking existence, in which the thrills of the chase in the royal

sponsibility in the calling, and devoted most of his time to hunting, hawking, and other sports. One day when he was out hunting he was stopped by a needy-looking old man who asked for alms, especially requesting a "new piece of money." New coinage had been issued about that time, but it had not circulated much. Wulfric replied that he did not think he had any new coins on



to shorten it with a pair of shears. His patron must have looked at him in amusement for making such an odd request. Shears could not cut through mail. But Wulfric signalled him to try, and when he did so the shears went through the mail as if it had been cloth.

When Wulfric died in 1154 at the age of 90, Robert, Bishop of Bath and Wells was at his side. He was buried in his cell, which for many years remained a place of pilgrimage.

There was a time when the monks of Montacute, jealous of the interest taken in Wulfric's tomb, tried to get it removed to their own monastery. They were prevented by the Bishop who, it is said, had Wulfric's remains re-interred at Haselbury church for

and which looks in danger of falling down. When there was danger of collapse, the builders abandoned their project.

### 'ONE OF THE SIGHTS OF SOMERSET'

But they did something else that was extremely fascinating. They got to work on the Norman pillar nearest the chancel arch and twisted it.

"It is one of the sights of Somerset and one of the architectural curiosities of England," says Arthur Mee. "It has ropework carved around it spirally with hundreds of beads running through the rope, and the illusion of twisting is complete. It is the unique possession of the church."

Curiously enough it is possible



The delightful church doorway, with its rambler roses, ferns, and flowers.

greater safety. The church still has what is known as Wulfric's aisle.

### CHURCH BUILT IN WULFRIC'S TIME

Compton Martin church was built in Wulfric's time, but has no link with him except that it is proud of the village's association with the hermit, and sets out his story for all to read on its literature table, and even includes a picture of Haselbury Plucknett church.

Nikolaus Pevsner in "The Buildings of England" in the Penguin series says that Compton Martin has "perhaps the best Norman parish church in Somerset." This is praise indeed from so noted an authority, and it is justified.

Sometimes motorists passing through Compton Martin stop to watch the ducks sailing on the village pond, but few turn off on to the little stretch of old road to visit the church, which is certainly one of

that generations of people worshipped at Compton church without ever seeing the twisted pillar, since "the twist" was plastered over, and was not revealed until 1851.

There is the likeness of Durham Cathedral here, and wherever one looks in this church there are engaging points of interest.

### BLACK OAK SCREEN

The Bickfield chapel is now used as an organ chamber and vestry. It is enclosed with fine carved, rich, black oak, which information in notes available to visitors says was formerly the church's Jacobean screen of 1639, but which Arthur Mee says came from one of Compton Martin's most interesting old homes, Moat House or Bickfield Farm, which is, in fact, a house surrounded by a former moat, and which Pevsner says is of pre-Reformation date.

In the church's north aisle is a recess that was once an Easter sepulchre, and here too is the



