A QUINCENTENARY: THE BATTLE OF NORTHAMPTON, 1460

(Edward's father) was killed at Wakefield at the very end of the year, the Queen then marched on London, defeating Warwick at St. Albans on February 17th, 1461. Had she exploited her victory by a prompt attack on London, she might have regained political ascendancy, at least for a time, but the opportunity was missed, and the Lancastrian army plundered its way northwards again. Edward, now heir to York's claims, seized his chance and was crowned on March 4th, 1461. The decisive victory of Towton at the end of the month consolidated his usurpation, although a decade passed before the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury conclusively removed the menace of Queen Margaret. In the meanwhile, in May 1464 Northamptonshire, where the future Richard III had been born in 1452, had given England a queen, Elizabeth, daughter of Richard Woodville of Grafton Regis, Lord Rivers, and widow of Sir John Grey, Lord Edmund's cousin, who had been killed at St. Albans in 1461.

R. IAN JACK.

BOOK REVIEWS

PRINCE CHARLES'S PURITAN CHAPLAIN
by IRVONWY MORGAN
(George Allen & Unwin, 1957. Price 21s.)

The story of John Preston (1587-1628) should be of special interest to Northamptonshire readers since he is a local 'worthy'. Mr. Morgan has written a useful account of his career, first as Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, later as Master of Emmanuel. A clear picture emerges of Preston as an influential teacher, versed in the Schoolmen as well as Calvin, and a popular 'Spiritual' preacher both at Cambridge and in London: of his entry into the world of affairs as an opponent of the Spanish Match for Prince Charles, whose chaplain he surprisingly became, through the backing of the Marquess (later Duke) of Buckingham, who was cleverly worked upon by the Puritans. Although the association of Puritanism with the Court was brief, Mr. Morgan's biggest claim for Preston is his importance for the movement in the political sphere.

Preston is unlikely to find another biographer, and it is therefore the more regrettable that Mr. Morgan has missed the opportunity of adding to our knowledge of his subject's family, Preston's life was first written by a former pupil, Thomas Ball, himself of local concern for he was vicar of All Saints', Northampton, from 1629 to 1659. Mr. Morgan has naturally relied greatly upon Ball's work (sometimes too implicitly), although he strangely ignores the complete text edited by E. W. Harcourt in 1885. Ball gives the essential particulars of Preston's parentage, which have been amplified for his mother by the Revd. H. I. Longden. His father, Thomas Preston (of Lancashire descent), was a farmer in the part of Upper Heyford included in the parish of Bugbrooke, where John was baptised on 27th October 1587 — a fact omitted by Mr. Morgan. His mother was Alice, daughter of Lawrence Marsh of Northampton: soon after her husband's death in 1599 she married Thomas Almey of Badby, where she survived until 1638. Mr. Morgan attaches no importance to Badby (which he calls 'Badney'), but in view of her son's intimacy with Sir Richard Knightley and John Dod, it is surely significant that the parish borders on Fawsley and that the manor was owned by the Knightleys. At Fawsley, incidentally, Preston died, and he is buried there.

John had an early benefactor, who educated him, first at Northampton Free School. Ball sufficiently identifies this person, Alice Preston's rich and childless 'Unkle by the mother's side whose name was Craswell, a man of good estate & Esteeme in Northampton, where he lived and had been several tymes Mayor'. From a V.C.H. reference which he cites, Mr. Morgan must know that the uncle's Christian name was...
Thomas, but he is content to write of him (misleadingly) as ‘Mr Creswell’, failing to specify his years as mayor (1577, 1588, 1596 and 1604) and to make more than a cursory mention, based on Ball, of his will. By this document, which was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury in 1607 and describes Craswell as a tanner, Ball says that Preston received property: it therefore deserved quotation.

Preston, we know, owed his advancement to Buckingham. Ball relates that the intermediary was Sir Ralph Freeman, a Master of Requests, who ‘had married a kinswoman of ye Duke of Buckingham’s, & was a kinsman unto Mr Preston’. Mr. Morgan dismisses this as a ‘dim family connection’, probably on the mother’s side. But small ingenuity is needed to discover that the paternal grandmother of Freeman (who was of Northamptonshire extraction) was a Marsh and that his wife was of the Bretts of Rotherby in Leicestershire, who had intermarried with the Beaumonts, the family of Buckingham’s mother.

These criticisms may sound captious, but they are made in order to stress the necessity of following up ‘dim family connections’ when studying an age in which the ability to claim cousinhood, however distant, with some established or rising personage, might shape, and may explain to posterity, the whole course of a man’s career. MARGARET TOYNBEE.

THE PICTORIAL HISTORY OF PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL
by CANON J. L. CARTWRIGHT, M.A., F.S.A.
Price 2/6. 35 cents Canada & U.S.A., plus 15 cents postage)

This history of Peterborough Cathedral is one of a series which the publishers are issuing of Cathedrals, Churches, Palaces and stately homes. It is distinguished by a wealth of excellent photographs, both of the interior and the exterior of the Cathedral, and some of its more impressive detail and monuments.

The publishers are fortunate in having secured Canon Cartwright to write briefly the history of the Cathedral. It has been well said that it takes an expert to write briefly, although anyone can write a long account. Canon Cartwright has left out nothing essential and contrived to give, at the same time, some of the legends that give the history character.

The Norman building itself is said to owe its construction to the fire which destroyed its predecessor early in the 12th century: a fire, incidentally, due to the bad temper of an abbot, and the consequent remark of a servant “Devil take the fire”. That rebuilding in the 12th century has remained, despite subsequent work, as the great monument of late Norman architecture: to some it may lack the richness of other Norman work, but it has a stateliness and solidity unequalled elsewhere. Later work has nowhere at Peterborough detracted from this magnificence: the Early English west front and the sumptuous “new building” of Abbot Kirton both add to, rather than detract from, the glories of Peterborough. Indeed, it is remarkable that buildings so different in style and spirit should appear in keeping with the original conception. Peterborough is essentially a Benedictine church: a place for the Opus Dei, the practice of the rule of St. Benedict, and this purpose has not been obscured in the centuries since the Monastery was suppressed. There is, of course, cause for regret in the disappearance of the 13th century Lady Chapel, as well as many of the monastic buildings, but at Peterborough the wonder is the preservation of the 12th century grandeur, and the Benedictine character of the building.

Canon Cartwright relates the unhappy destruction of organ, panelling, carved stone work, tombs, stained glass and books by Colonel Cromwell’s regiment of horse, and the history of subsequent restorations. On the whole, the Victorians did well at Peterborough, the later generation relieving the Cathedral of some of Dean Monk’s questionable “gothic” ornament.

He is also at pains to emphasise that in such a building as the Cathedral the task of reparation is a never ending one. “The contaminated atmosphere of an industrial neighbourhood” makes this task a heavier one than it might otherwise have been.

As a quick, accurate guide and a pleasurable book to take home and read, the present Pictorial History could not be bettered.
BOOK REVIEWS

DEATH OF A THEATRE
by Lou Warwick
(11 Earl Street, Northampton. Price 25/-)

This book is both an essay in social history and an exercise in charity. The story of the birth, life and death of a provincial theatre, in the span of the last forty-eight years, might rightly be described as social history. The fact that the author, when dramatic critic of the Chronicle and Echo was barred from the theatre by the management in its last days, shows him to be of a forgiving nature. Mr. Warwick tells us that he could not bear to think that the "dear old place" could be allowed to go "without at least having its story written". He is lucky to have had editorial assistance from Miss Meg Toyer, his predecessor in the Critic's Chair, who managed to retain her seat without being thrown out! Miss Toyer was fortunate, in that in her day the New Theatre presented interesting, and sometimes distinguished entertainment, whereas Mr. Warwick had to witness the "Newd" Theatre of the Butterworth regime, which, we suspect, may have made his exclusion a welcome relief.

Mr. Warwick has told the story in the manner and style of a journalist, and quite properly so, since it is a style well suited to the story he tells. Although the book will mainly appeal to Northampton play-goers, for whom memories will be revived, yet it is in little the story of the English Theatre in the Provinces.

In order to publish the book Mr. Warwick has revived the Eighteenth Century custom of enlisting subscribers, whose names are printed in the volume. He calls them patrons after the more snobbish fashion of the present, but whatever the name, the method is to be commended. It may well be "the means by which works of local interest may again be produced, in the face of to-day's heavy printing costs. The book is not a dear one, and the great number of well chosen illustrations alone makes it well worth the money.

G.I.

INDEX TO WILLS PROVED IN THE PECULIAR COURT OF BANBURY 1542-1858
Edited by J. S. W. Gibson
(Joint publication of the Banbury Historical Society and the Oxfordshire Record Society, 1959)

This publication contains a good deal of Northamptonshire material, for the parishes of Kings Sutton and Newbottle were part of the group of parishes exempt from episcopal jurisdiction which formed the Peculiar of Banbury. This Peculiar had its own ecclesiastical court, in which among other business local wills were proved. The wills and/or copies thereof were transferred in 1959 to the Bodleian Library, and students interested in them and living at a distance will find this list, which is in alphabetical order, extremely useful. There is an index of places and an interesting index of trades (including a mole-catcher, a peruke-maker, a bobbin-maker and a bone-setter).

The Banbury Historical Society now enterprisingly publishes a quarterly magazine, neatly reproduced in typescript, entitled "Cake and Cockhorse". We wish a very prosperous career to the Society.

J.W.

PETERBOROUGH CATHEDRAL. THE CHOIR FACING WEST
THE INHUMAN TASKMASTER : A STORY OF WEE DON BEC

If a list could be compiled of Northamptonshire villages in order of historical interest, Weedon Bec would certainly occupy a place near the top. It has so much to offer: Watling Street; St. Werburga; a monastic cell of the Abbey of Bec; longstanding nonconformist traditions; the Grand Junction Canal; the great Ordnance Depot; the London and Birmingham Railway; a Court Baron which lasted into the twenties of the present century. Two hundred years ago it also had a silkweaving industry, background to the subject of this paper.

Unlike the weaving of wool, silkweaving was never widespread throughout Northamptonshire, although branches of the industry flourished in several towns and villages during the 18th and early 19th Centuries. Kettering, Rothwell, Desborough, Daventry, Towcester, Maidford and Middleton Cheney at some time or another were all dependent in part upon silk for their livelihood. Hence we need not be surprised to find silkweaving at Weedon, especially as Watling Street gave the village excellent communications with the outside world. When and by whom it was introduced is unknown, but it had certainly arrived by 1734 in which year Thomas Lee, silk stockinger of Weedon, offered a reward of £2 for the apprehension of a journeyman and three apprentices who had illegally withdrawn themselves from his employment, taking with them several skeins of silk wound on bobbins.¹ Thirteen years later his widow, Elizabeth Lee, advertised the business for sale, including “all sorts of stocking Frames [looms] in the silk trade, and all other utensils thereunto belonging . . .”.² She was also prepared to “let or sell the shop to anybody who shall buy the frames, the whole being a very convenient place for business”.³

No more is heard about silk at Weedon until 1768 when the following advertisement appeared in the issue of the Northampton Mercury for December 26th:

Weedon, Dec. 20th, 1768.

This is to give NOTICE,

To all Parishes which have got poor Boys and Girls, about thirteen or fourteen years of age, and want to ease their Parishes.

That there is now an opportunity of setting them, as yearly Servants, to the SILK MANUFACTORY at Weedon, Northamptonshire, to the Amount of Four-score or an Hundred. Likewise are wanted, at the same place, ten or twelve Men, such as have served the King, either as Soldiers or Sailors, it matters not how large their families are, as none will be accepted, but such as the Parish-Officers cannot remove, meaning the Men and their Families. Let those apply to the Place above-mentioned.

Somebody was proposing to introduce silkweaving on a large scale (which branch of the industry is not stated, but a subsequent reference, which will be quoted, suggests that ribbon weaving was intended). The parish officers were hostile to the project, and had obviously threatened to remove as a potential pauper anybody who tried to settle in Weedon and work at the factory. Hence the appeal for ex-servicemen because only they could be employed in defiance of the churchwardens and the overseers of the poor. By an Act of 1762, passed towards the close of the ¹ Northampton Mercury, 2-12-1734.
² Ibid., 1-6-1747. Mrs. Lee must have been managing the business for over ten years on her own account as the Weedon Parish Registers show that Thomas Lee was buried, 10-1-1735/36.
Seven Years War, discharged soldiers and sailors who obtained regular employment were not liable to be removed to their legal place of settlement unless they had actually applied for poor relief.\(^3\) The children were needed to perform the numerous subsidiary operations connected with weaving such as winding the silk on to the bobbins. Here was a tempting offer to overseers of the poor who found themselves responsible for the upkeep of pauper boys and girls: send them to the silk manufactory and ease the burden on the parish. The character of the person who had inserted the advertisement was no concern of the ratepayers.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) 3 Geo. 3, Cap.8.

\(^4\) The Director of the City of Coventry Libraries, Art Gallery and Museums Department, has expressed surprise at the large number of children employed in proportion to men at the Weedon silk manufactory according to the advertisement of 26-12-1768. (Letter to the author, 5-5-1960). Coventry was a centre of ribbon-weaving during the 18th Century.

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Parochial objections notwithstanding, workpeople were certainly forthcoming for the manufactory. The Weedon militia list for 1771 includes James England, “silkweaver”, and seven “journeymen silkweavers”.\(^5\) As the militia was concerned only with able-bodied men between 18 and 45, it may reasonably be assumed that the labour force would also include several adults either over age or physically defective (a sedentary trade, weaving, like shoemaking, tended to attract men constitutionally unfitted for more strenuous occupations). The Weedon parish

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registers at this time carry the names of two men who were engaged in silk but not included in the militia list.

In the same year that the militia list was compiled, James England apparently suffered a tragic bereavement. An advertisement inserted in the *Northampton Mercury* of August 12th made known publicly that his fourteen year old son William had set out homeward from London on the 1st and disappeared. The lad was wearing a blue great-coat, riding a bay mare, and carrying £25 upon his person in cash; it was feared that he had been robbed and murdered on the road. A reward of two guineas was offered for any information which would lead to the finding of William England, alive or dead.

What happened next is best told in the words of yet another advertisement in the *Northampton Mercury*, this time in the issue of April 6th, 1772 (note the reference to James England as a “ribbon-weaver”):—

*Saturday, March 28th, 1772.*

Whereas James England, of Weedon-Beck, in the County of Northampton, Ribbon-Weaver, who stands charged with stealing Silks to the Amount of One Thousand pounds and upwards, and with many other atrocious Felonies, made his Escape early this Morning from a Constable at the Saracen’s Head at Daventry, in the same County.

Any Person who will give information of him to Mr. Robert Clarke, at the Saracen’s Head aforesaid, or to Sir John Fielding, Knt. or to David Wilmot Esq., or any other of his Majesty’s Justices of the Peace for the County of Middlesex, so that he may be retaken, shall receive TEN GUINEAS over and above the Reward allowed on Conviction by Act of Parliament. And any Person who will discover where the said Silks are so that they may be recovered, shall receive a proper and adequate Reward for his Trouble. The said James England is about forty-seven years of age, five Feet five or six Inches high, has full hazel Eyes, thick-set and square, has a Sea-faring and Weather-beaten appearance, has many Wounds upon his Head and in different Parts of his Body, wears a Wig, and the general Turn of his Conversation is directed to Travelling, Voyages, Mechanics, and discovering Mines, and the North-West Passage, and he has declared (for some Time past) an Intention of going to North-America.

But James England was not recaptured. Irresistibly a suspicion will arise in the mind of every perceptive reader: did the ribbon weaver of Weedon Bec have an accomplice in his crimes? Had William England really been murdered in August 1771? or had he slipped away to an agreed hiding-place, perhaps taking with him very much more than £25, there to await the arrival of his father in due course? The records are silent on this tantalising point.

The evil memory of James England lingered on at Weedon. The contemporary schoolmaster of the village, Benjamin West, was also somewhat of a poet, and in 1780 published a book of verse. The contents are mostly fustian, but one poem differs totally from the rest by reason of the subject matter. It is entitled “On the DEPARTURE of an inhuman TASKMASTER”, and it tells us something about the fate of any child who was unfortunate enough to be sent to the silk manufactory. It runs thus:—

> *Miscellaneous Poems, Translations and Imitations.*

In his opening poem, entitled “A Morning Invitation”, West writes that:

> Philomel her fate deploring
> Charms the dear Weedonian plains” (!)
Ye helpless widows! Dry your weeping eyes,
Your pray'rs are heard—the desperado flies:
No more your sons in loathsome prisons moan,
Or bow'd beneath a tyrant's scourges, groan;
With cold and hunger pinch'd, no longer toil,
But bless'd with health and native—freedom, smile.

E . . . . . d in England shews his face no more;
From justice fled, he seeks some distant shore,
But where, ah! where can such a wretch retire,
To shun the worm that never will expire?
If to a barbarous region he is gone,
Where ne'er the glorious gospel-beams have shone:—
Where savage cannibals may blush to find
A monster—worse than any of their kind;
Yet, let him know, (what guilt may dread to hear)
The eye of heav'n will surely find him there;
That all-discerning eye, which sees aright,
The dark designs of each vile hypocrite;
Yes! let the miscreant know, howe'er secure,
Vengeance, tho' sometimes slow, is always sure;
Nor place can screen,—nor time his guilt excuse,
Whose steps the justice of a God pursues.

Somehow the conclusion that divine retribution would ultimately overtake the “desperado” seems to carry with it a note of regret that he had succeeded in making his escape. No doubt most Weedon people would have preferred the certain knowledge of James England’s execution at Northampton to the lurking suspicion that he might be living in comfort somewhere on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Being of a mechanical turn of mind and ruthless in forwarding his own interests, he would certainly have made a mark in any community throughout the English speaking world.

What may have been a part of the silk-manufactory was demolished in May 1960, a three-storied row of four tenements, each with three main rooms, Nos. 7-13 New Street, Weedon. Along the outer wall of each of the upper stories blank recesses alternated with the windows; the recesses on the first floor appeared to be part of the original design, but on the top floor they were obviously windows which had subsequently been blocked with bricks of a different colour from those used in the rest of the building. To judge from the roughly cemented north wall and the jagged brickwork at the north corners, the row had once extended over the site now occupied by Late-Victorian Nos. 15 and 17. Internally, the considerable height of the rooms in comparison with the average village tenement, the substantial nature of the joists and floor boards, and the blocked windows on the top floor, all suggested that Nos. 7-13 had not been intended at first as just dwelling places. Ribbon frames were tall heavy machines which vibrated when in use; moreover, any form of weaving on a handloom requires good lighting arrangements if the operator is to produce accurate work. As domestic manufacture was common practice in all branches of the weaving industry throughout the 18th Century, the original occupier of each tenement may have been a weaver who used the topmost room as a workshop and lived with his family downstairs. High over each of the surviving front doors was an inscribed stone; one stone had weathered, but the lettering on the other three was still legible in 1960. Except for the original numbering of each tenement—running northward (illegible, presumably 6), 5, 4, 3 (another indication that the row once extended further than it did at the time of demolition)—the inscriptions were identical: J. E. 1771.\(^7\)

If James England could repeat his initials at least three times on the facade of one building, this suggests that he must have been the owner and not just a salaried manager appointed by absentee proprietors. His family certainly seems to have acquired a title to property in the village. The *Northampton Mercury* of June 28th, 1784, carried an advertisement offering for sale at Weedon several tenements (among them Nos. 7—13 New Street?) and a public house called the Harp, enquiries either to Mr. Oakden, a Daventry attorney, or to John Harris of Weedon. Next week a second advertisement warned prospective buyers not to treat with John Harris holding 16 frames (*Northampton Mercury*, December 26th, 1818). James England may have had a similar workshop at Weedon, but examination of the party walls at Nos. 7-13 New Street did not suggest that the topmost floor had ever been such a place (i.e. one long room). It will be remembered that Mrs. Lee was advertising a “shop” in 1747.

One of the inscribed stones has been placed in the Northampton Museum, and it is hoped to incorporate another in some part of the primary school at Weedon.

\(^7\) I am grateful to George Wallis, Esq., of Weedon Bec for drawing my attention to Nos. 7-13 New Street. Mr. Wallis, a native of the village and bailiff since 1920 of the Court Baron (the office has never been formally abrogated although the Court no longer meets), is a mine of information about old Weedon and has generously helped me over several points in this paper. Mrs. Wallis informs me that her grandmother, who died in 1926 aged 93, once told her that Nos. 7-13 New Street had been a “factory”. In 1818 the estate of a Middleton Cheney silk-weaving proprietor included a workshop capable of
because Sarah and George England, "wife or widow and eldest son of James England, who left Weedon-Beck . . about twelve years ago, and is now supposed to be dead, having never been seen or heard of by any of his family," asserted their right both to the tenements and to the Harp. Possibly an unsatisfied creditor of the manufactory was attempting to recoup his losses by depriving Mrs. England of a regular source of income. She had made a permanent connection with the village when Elizabeth England, presumably a daughter, married William Green of Weedon on December 1st, 1772. According to the advertisements of 1784, a William Green occupied one of the tenements and a Thomas Green was the licensee of the Harp. Green was not an uncommon surname in Weedon during the 19th and early 20th Centuries.

The story of the manufactory closes on a note of mystery. No more is heard of silk-weaving in the village, but according to the will of William Green, carpenter of Weedon, proved on August 22nd, 1800, part of the deceased's estate consisted of four copyhold cottages, in one of which lived "James England." A terse entry in the parish registers records that "James England" was buried on September 3rd, 1802. Who can this person have been? Was he a stranger with a coincidence of name? a son or a grandson? or the old sinner himself, back again, a patriarch full of years but not of honour? It seems very unlikely that James England, a reputed felon, would ever have dared to return to Weedon Bec. Nevertheless it is an intriguing thought that his bones may be lying in the same churchyard as those of Benjamin West and many others of the generation who remembered him as the "Inhuman Taskmaster", a weather-beaten, hazel-eyed, pitiless man whose favourite conversation turned upon "Travelling, Voyages, Mechanics and discovering Mines, and the North-West Passage".

VICTOR A. HATLEY.

Documents and a map relating to the Weedon Tithe Award of 1845 (Northamptonshire Record Office, T. M. 202) reveal that at the time of the enclosure of the open fields in 1777, Nos. 7-13 New Street were in the occupation of "England" (Mrs. England?). "England" also occupied three other houses in the village, one of which may have been the Harp, but unfortunately the identification of this property is impossible from the documents. The map also appears to confirm that Nos. 7-13 once extended over the site now occupied by Nos. 15 and 17.

I have been unable to inspect the title deeds of Nos. 7-13 New Street, Weedon.

Weedon Parish Registers. These registers have been thoroughly searched between 1750 and 1820 for information about the England family. Mary, daughter of James and Sarah England, was baptised in 1768, and Thomas, a son, in 1770. There is no record of the burial of Mrs. England.

Kelly's Directories of Northamptonshire, 1847-1940.

Northamptonshire Record Office, Arch. Northampton Wills. The identity of these cottages is unproven but once again it would seem likely that the row in New Street was the property in question.

The Christian name of William Green's widow was Elizabeth.
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